

CONTAGIOUS CHRISTIANITY

A STUDY OF 1 THESSALONIANS

STUDY TWO

A Leadership Style That Works . . . Guaranteed!

1 Thessalonians 2:1–12

Whether it's business or religion or industry or athletics, whether it's the military or the home—the secret of success, the secret of progress rests with those in charge. It rests with the leaders.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

It's been two years, but you vividly recall your last experience at the pristine Schnutter's Café. Your mouth waters as you recall the aroma of served-to-order fluffy eggs, crispy bacon, gently seasoned hashbrowns, cranberry-citrus English muffins, a tall glass of freshly squeezed orange juice, and endless refills of that dark-roasted, Sumatran coffee. Oh, and it's all served by those well-trained, down-home, hard-to-beat, friendly staffers.

When you arrive this time, you face a shocking and disappointing reality. No host. Dirty floor. Sticky menu. Rude server. Cold eggs, overcooked. Slimy bacon, undercooked. Unmelted butter pats sitting atop stale white toast. Tepid, bitter, astringent coffee. Oh, no hashbrowns—out of potatoes. No orange juice—too expensive to supply.

As you exit Schnutter's Café, you shake your head and wonder, *What happened in two years?*

One word: leadership. The problem with Schnutter's lay in its poor leadership. Bad, authoritarian management. Lack of inspiring influence. Lack of care. Lack of accountability. Deceptive marketing. Financial greed over service. Low morale. You name it.

However, there is an antidote. In 1 Thessalonians, Paul models a leadership style that is guaranteed to work, whether in a café or church, school or sport team, homestead or hospital. This *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study examines Paul's traits as a leader and reveals principles you can follow.



INSIGHT FOR LIVING



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The Bible-Teaching Ministry of Chuck Swindoll
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SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES
BIBLE STUDIES

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Paul's leadership style with the Thessalonians worked effectively because it was marked by service to others, much like the example Jesus modeled for His disciples. Read [John 13:12–17](#), allowing Jesus' example of servant leadership to orient your heart and frame your prayer. Then, record your prayer to the Lord in the space below.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

While on his second missionary journey, Paul proclaimed the gospel in Philippi, but he was convicted on trumped-up charges, severely beaten, and thrown into prison, even though he was a Roman citizen. Battered and bruised, Paul limped on to Thessalonica, where he planted a church. Later, while in Corinth, he wrote his first letter to that church, 1 Thessalonians. For a refresher on the location of these cities, consult the Bible map, [Paul's Missionary Journeys](#) at insight.org/maps.

First Thessalonians is like a photo album of treasured memories of Paul and the Thessalonian believers. Seven times, Paul reminded his readers how well they knew each other: “you know” (1 Thessalonians 1:5); “you yourselves know” (2:1); “you know” (2:2); “as you well know” (2:5); “don't you remember” (2:9); “you yourselves are our witnesses” (2:10); and “you know” (2:11).

These references reveal a foundational key to Paul's leadership style. What do you see in his relationship with his readers?

Let's rejoin our study in 1 Thessalonians and discover more qualities of godly leadership.

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Observation: Paul . . . The Qualities of a Leader

Defining *leadership* can be tricky. We know what leaders *do* or should do, but we aren't as clear about what leaders *are*. Pastor Chuck defines leadership *as influence*, and, more specifically, *inspiring influence*.

Leaders come in all different temperaments. You will find them with all different styles of approach, but there is an ingredient that's true of all of them: they're able to get along with people. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Through careful reading and observation, identify in the following verses four negative traits of leadership to *avoid* and four positive traits to *adopt*.¹

Four Negative Traits to Avoid—1 *Thessalonians* 2:1–6

In *1 Thessalonians* 2:1–2, Paul recalled God's empowerment, despite the hardship the apostle endured in Philippi. Then he reassured his readers that he didn't come to take advantage of them. What harmful intentions did *not* motivate his leadership, according to 2:3? How would false pretenses undermine leadership?

What was Paul's purpose as a leader, and what was *not* his purpose, according to 2:4? Why is this quality so vital yet so difficult for many leaders?

What negative characteristic did Paul adamantly reject in 2:5? What makes this vice so dangerous in leaders?

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What did Paul not seek, according to *1 Thessalonians 2:6*? How does avoiding this negative characteristic build trust?

When you come to the place where the Word of God, the goals of God, and the principles of God are the most important ingredients of your mission, you begin to stop pleasing people. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Four Positive Traits to Adopt—1 Thessalonians 2:7–11

As a servant-leader, Paul modeled four positive traits of effective leadership. What essential quality marked his leadership in *1 Thessalonians 2:7*? How does this quality build trust among followers?

Instead of maintaining “professional distance” from the Thessalonians, what did Paul do, according to *2:8*? Why is this essential for leaders who represent Christ?

What two words sum up the character qualities Paul listed in *2:9–10*?

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Finally, no leader can be effective without this quality in *1 Thessalonians 2:11* (NASB). What is it?

Paul's leadership style among the young Thessalonian church was never self-serving but always others-focused. What was his ultimate objective for them, according to *2:12*?

Christian people need affirmation. We have been beaten black and blue. We have been told we are sinners until we can spell the word backward. We need to know that we are in Christ and therefore as righteous as Christ Himself, that there is hope for sinners, that there is a future for failures, that there is forgiveness for the saints. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Paul . . . Apostle of Christ

Interpretation builds on our observations to understand what the passage means. Let's consider what Paul meant when he wrote: "As apostles of Christ we certainly had a right to make some demands of you" (*1 Thessalonians 2:7*). What special authority did Paul have? Let's look at his credentials.

After his dramatic spiritual conversion on the road to Damascus, Paul was no longer a Pharisee but an "apostle of Christ," a title he said God gave him. "God has appointed me as the apostle to the Gentiles," Paul wrote (*Romans 11:13*).

Apostle refers to one who is sent as a messenger, but in the New Testament, it refers to those appointed by Christ for a unique function in the church. In *Acts 1:21–22*, what was an important criteria for being an apostle?

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Consult the online article, [Apostle](#), in *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* at [studylight.org](#). Read the sections toward the conclusion of this article, “Paul the Apostle” and “Apostolic Authority,” and record what you learn. What authority were apostles given?

Paul witnessed the resurrected Christ, and Christ called Paul as an apostle. Paul used his authority to teach, to perform “signs and wonders and miracles” (2 Corinthians 12:12), and to pen the inspired Word of God. And yet, Paul never bullied people with his authority. Instead, he “proved to be gentle” toward others, “as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children” (1 Thessalonians 2:7 NASB).

What leadership principle can you draw from Paul's example? What heart attitude must Christian leaders exhibit in their relationships to be effective? How can leaders know when to employ their authority and when to restrain it?

Spiritual leaders can assert an enormous amount of authority and get away with it. But they have to live with themselves. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Paul . . . From People-Pleaser to God-Pleaser

Paul's ability to consistently proclaim the gospel and lead in a God-honoring way, even in the face of continual adversity, was hewn from his unwavering gaze and singular concern—he lived for an audience of One.

Before his conversion to Christ, Saul of Tarsus, the Pharisee, was consumed with winning accolades. What did Paul say about people-pleasing in [Galatians 1:10](#)?

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In *Ephesians 6:5–7*, Paul taught that believers are to obey their earthly bosses. As we serve others and those in authority, what must we always keep in mind, according to 6:6–7?

In *2 Corinthians 5:9–11*, Paul addressed his motivation for pleasing his Lord. What drove him to live a life pleasing to God?

First Thessalonians 2:12 captures Paul's leadership goal. His desire? That his followers walk in a manner worthy of God! The reward? God's calling them into His kingdom and glory.

It is our great temptation to think leaders arrive somehow unscarred, as if given to humankind, almost angelic. That's not true. The best leaders come from a scarred past. They understand suffering. They understand mistreatment. They've earned the right to be respected because they have labored against much opposition. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Emulating Paul's Leadership Qualities

Among all of Paul's leadership qualities, "enthusiastic encourager" stands out. Paul's encouragement inspired others to follow him. He was riveted on the eternal rather than the temporal, and his desire was that his followers focus on the same.

Which of Paul's leadership qualities do you most admire? His commitment to Christ? His humility? His servant mind-set? His courage? Why? How can you model that trait and strengthen your walk with Christ?

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Reflect on the characteristics to avoid. In your life, do you find any deception? People-pleasing? Greed? Self-serving? If so, which? Take a moment to jot a brief prayer asking the Lord to help you in this area.

Reflect on the list of characteristics to adopt. In your life, can you identify sensitivity to others' needs? Affection toward people? Authenticity of life? Enthusiastic affirmation of others? Where do you find the Lord blessing you and using you in these areas of leadership? Take a moment to write a brief prayer of thanksgiving to Jesus.

Paul's example of leadership boils down to three essential qualities in the heart of every leader: *inner security*, *commitment to excellence*, and *deliberate faith in God*. The leader's heart is what matters more than his or her personality, IQ, or education. Share your heart, remain real and vulnerable, don't be afraid to laugh and weep with others, and you'll be a leader people follow.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, may my life reflect the heart, the attitude, and the actions so clearly displayed in the life of the apostle Paul. May I be a person—a leader—of deliberate and practical faith, marked by a commitment to excellence in accordance with Your Word, and possessing an inner security which forsakes people-pleasing, flattery, and manipulation. May my mission reflect a passion to impart both Your Word and also my life for the benefit of those You've called me to serve. For Jesus' sake and glory, I pray. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](#)"

For the 2026 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Marshall F. Davis in collaboration with Aaron Massey, senior vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, and Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 1984, 2026 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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