

**Game Plan**  
**1 Thessalonians 2:9-12**  
**October 26, 2008**  
**FBC Waynesboro**

I love coaches. We probably have as many coaches in this congregation per capita as any place I have ever served. We have Fales and Fulcher and Wheeler. We have Flowers and Dye. We have Wiggins who left the sideline for the big time in broadcasting. We have Adkins who went soft and entered into administration. We have Scott who has invested so much in the lives of so many. And I understand that Coach Sorrow has been among our guests in worship. What bothers me even now is that I have left somebody out not to mention all of us who want to be and really think we are coaches. So many of these men that I have named are not seen a lot during the Fall. Most of them gather on Sundays right after lunch to review the film of the previous week, to watch the film of the upcoming opponent and to put together before practice begins on Monday a game plan. Now it would seem to me though I have never been privy to any of these meetings that there are at least three components in every game plan. First, and most importantly is the goal of the game plan which, of course, overall is to win the game. But in that context there must be something that the coaches are after in this particular game with this particular game plan. Second, I think that a game plan would include the strategies for accomplishing that goal and third some tools of assessing whether or not the goal was accomplished.

The second chapter of First Thessalonians is all about our being witnesses to the Gospel. The first chapter communicates the truth of what happened when Paul brought the Gospel into Thessalonica. People under the power of the Holy Spirit heard the proclamation of the Gospel and received it as the absolute truth of God. Their lives were forever changed. They became by God's grace those new creations that God always produces when we rightly respond to the Gospel. Do you know that there is never a real response to the Gospel where there is not concomitant very real and very radical change of life in relationship to the people of God, the praise of God and the purpose of God? God never saves a soul and not change a life. Those who would believe such a lie are deeply deceived and badly betrayed. The second chapter of First Thessalonians is about the central work of those who have been changed by the glorious Gospel of the Grace of God. We have a message to give to the nations. We have a word that has created in us a way of life that we are compelled to share with others. It is the message of the Gospel. And we have deep and abiding motivations for sharing this word. And in this passage which begins in verse 9 and goes through verse 16 we are shown the methods by which we give the Gospel to others AND measure the effectiveness of its reception among those who have heard. We have here in these verses the game plan.

Look with me first at verse 12. Here is the goal. It is found in the final words of this verse: “. . . urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you

into His Kingdom and His Glory.” Literally it reads this way: “. . . walk about or live a life or conduct yourselves worthily of the God who is calling you into His Kingdom which is glorious.” Here is the goal of every Gospel witness. We want to make the Gospel plain and watch the Gospel work. And its work is to produce people whose primary priority is to live in such a way that they bring pleasure to the God whose call and claim upon their lives has so consumed them that their lives show forth His presence and His power which is His glory which testifies to our being in His Kingdom. John Lillie a great scholar and Scot says about this goal of Paul proclaimed in this verse that what he is after here is “the one grand burden and aim of all of his addresses.” And it is that for those to whom he gives the Gospel because it is that for himself, Philippians 3:7-14, 2 Corinthians 5:6-10. Is it clear to you and me that this goal that is the only goal for witnessing to the Gospel will not be our goal for others until it is the goal for ourselves? I want to know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings. I want to please Him. For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Look closely with me at this goal. It consists of four fundamental elements that embrace the internal and the external, our heart and our way of life. The goal ultimately has to do with our conduct. The phrase “to live lives” is one word in the Greek after which a whole philosophical movement in the Greco-Roman world was named: the peripatetics; those whose conversations were conducted as they walked about with their walking about or lifestyle revealing their loyalties. You could know what they loved by looking at how they lived. That is what the Gospel does when it enters our hearts. It changes our lives. Our lifestyles are forever different. People can walk around with us and see how we walk about and they can see that we live a different way than we lived before. And that will never happen in those to whom we are called and commanded to be witnesses until it happens us who are being witnesses. I have just completed a book that hurt me, caused me to holler back at its pages, disturbed me and did little to delight me because its thesis is that we are living in the midst of a generation of younger people who are attracted to Jesus but not to the church because what they see too often in the church is not at all what they see in Jesus. I want to shout, “wrong, wrong, wrong;” but is it? Our conduct emerges out of our character. That is the second word. “Worthy of God” can mislead if we do not understand that “worth” is an adverb and “God” is the subject who alone creates in us the condition that would make us worthy. The whole idea here is that God works in us and through us to bring forth often in spite of us both in and through our lives that which shows forth His great glory and grace. If others see Jesus in us, it is not because of us; it is because of Jesus in us who is making known the great glory of God in us and through us. When the glory of God shines in our face and the goodness of God is declared through our lips it is because the great grace of God has truly changed our hearts. Our conduct communicates our character and this is our goal in the witness of the Gospel. We want to see lives changed but what we want in others must first exist in ourselves.

There is a third word here and is the word calling. The word is a present,

active participle. What you need to know is that the word depicts ongoing and never ending activity. God is always calling us. The God who calls us to Himself to save us from His wrath and judgment is the God is calling us forward in faithfulness as He persistently purges and purifies us to make us more and more like Jesus. And if we are not growing in Christ-likeness as we are formed in faithfulness, it is because we have never been changed by Christ. The one who calls us to Himself is the one who keeps calling us to be more like Himself, and where that call is not constantly present, He is not present. He calls us to praise Him with the people of God in worship. He calls us to be perfected in righteousness through the washing of the water of His word and the cleansing from every defilement of the flesh that we might be increasingly devoted to Him. He calls us to proclaim His glory among the nations and to say that He is indeed the sovereign God. He calls us into Truth that He brings us by His Spirit and through His word and He calls us to testify to that Truth. Please understand that the absence of that felt and heard call in the depths of your being indicates the absence of God.

One more word here in this goal. It is the word commitment. He is calling us somewhere and to something. He is calling us into His Kingdom which is glorious. He is calling us into the ongoing and ever increasing experience of His presence and power that are the manifestations in our lives of His Kingship. The Kingdom to which Paul is referring here is not primarily heaven though that is the settled consequence of the outcome of every child of God. The Kingdom to which Paul is referring is the daily and deep experience of the presence and power of God in our lives here and now. That is what we want for sinners. That is what we want for ourselves. We want to know Him in the depths and to the heights of His making Himself known to us.

So here is the goal of every Gospel Witness. This is what we are after for others because this is what we are after in ourselves. We want to see the kind of conduct of life that shows the change and character that the Gospel has produced that yields a life of growing commitment to His Word and His way that is the evidence of the call and claim of God upon our lives. Now as we sit here today in the coaches meeting, what is the next question? How are we going to go about getting this done? Well, Paul of Tarsus not Paul of Tuscaloosa gives us the answers.

First, we must be willing to work hard, 9. Paul here shows the intensity of the work, the extent of the work, and the intention of the work. This work that Paul is doing along with his colleagues will not be effective for salvation, they are saved as are we by the grace of God. But it is this work that shows forth the reality of their salvation. Faith without works is dead, being alone. John Calvin said that we are saved by faith alone but never by faith which is alone. Genuine saving faith always produces works and those works are always a witness to the Gospel. Not just any works. Not just good works that we choose, but the works that God has for us to do which always have to do with the Gospel. Paul shows us the intensity

of this work: he worked with toil and hardship: kopos and mochthos, toil and moil. The first word means hard, sweaty, exhausting labor. The second word refers to the kind of fatigue that comes when you have given everything you have to give and are given out. Living for the Gospel and living out the Gospel requires and deserves that kind of energy from us. Would it be fair to measure the energy that we invest in the Gospel by the standard of the energy that we invest in the life of the church? What is it in my life and yours that causes us to work so hard that we become exhausted in the process? Is it the Gospel of Jesus that causes us to give ourselves for the glory of God to others so fully that we fall on our beds at night excitedly exhausted because of the energy invested in the gospel? But notice the extent of the labor: night and day. I would prefer day and night but the order indicates someone who is so in love with Jesus and the glory of His Gospel and so desirous of the salvation of sinners that we would invest ourselves in the work of the Gospel until we are spent and then spend the night in prayer. We were in a meeting recently at Guido Gardens about the new Guido Bible Institute and we were discussing how to structure a degree that would be a good, solid, biblically sound degree without costing the students so much in either money, time or energy. Finally after listening to all of us talk for some time, Mr. Mike spoke: “gentlemen, don’t take out the sacrifice. God blesses sacrifice. You will get what you are expecting and if you expect much, it will cost you. Audrey and I started this ministry with nothing because we wanted to obey God. We ate nothing but grits for the first few months; it was all we could afford. We worked hard. I would often work all day, preach at night, come home and spend most of the rest of the night in prayer. I slept very little. It was so hard. But God was so good. Don’t remove the sacrifice.” I couldn’t say anything for a while because of the tears in my eyes and my teeth on the floor. I told him later that he had just kicked me in the teeth but he is so kind, that I had to let it feel good. But notice the intent: we do not want to burden people with heavy loads using them for our own gain; Paul wasn’t after money from them. We are not after decisions so we can count souls. We just want to give the Gospel to sinners because we have seen what God has done through the Gospel in our lives. But I can assure you that not a single, solitary soul in this room will do that with any passion or profit until we are willing to spend our lives for the sake of the Gospel. Make no mistake about it: you are spending your life for something; is it for that which lasts?

That is the first thing that we must do if we are going to accomplish the goal. We will begin right here next Sunday.