

Loving Those Who Will Drain You

Steve Burchett

My wife accompanied me one Sunday morning to a church where I was the guest preacher. On the way home, she observed, “That church had some very sharp people up front.” She was right. The leaders, the choir members, the pianist—they all seemed so confident and happy. They weren’t arrogant at all; they just appeared so... flawless.



But the reality in that outwardly sparkling church is the same as in any church: Not everybody has their lives in order, and some have some *major* problems. You know the kind of people I’m talking about—get too close to them and their issues, and they will wear you out. However, someone has to minister to them, right? But who?

Perhaps your immediate answer is, “The pastor!” or “The elders!” Yes, elders are responsible to care for the whole church (Acts 20:28), but notice what Paul says to the Thessalonians: “And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all” (1 Th 5:14). Paul speaks about three potentially wearying types of people in the church, and three ways believers, not just pastors, must serve them:

First, “*admonish the idle.*” The “idle” person is a loafer who neglects his daily responsibilities. In Thessalonica, the idle were living an undisciplined life in regard to work, causing them to be overly dependent on others (4:11-12; see also 2 Th 3:6-15).

How should you deal with an idle person? What is your responsibility to the man in the church who refuses to work hard in order to take care of his family? What should you do for the mother of small children who fills her day with television and the internet to the neglect of her family? They need to be admonished; they need to be warned and corrected with God’s word.

Certainly there are wise approaches to admonishing (such as women typically not admonishing men, and vice versa), and bouts of idleness should be overlooked by others. But when a person becomes characterized by idleness, we must not remain silent. This is a difficult task, especially for certain types of people. But imagine what a powerful impact a typically quiet, reserved person could have if he or she speaks the truth to the idle.

Second, “*encourage the fainthearted.*” The “fainthearted” are losing heart and lacking motivation to keep going for the Lord. Perhaps the fainthearted in Thessalonica were

those who had seen beloved believers die (see 4:13-18), or they were those who were unsettled due to persecution.

Here’s the reality: there are hurting, fainthearted people in your church, and they need your love. They need your shoulder to cry on. They need your warm embrace. They need you to call and check on them. They need that brief email with an encouraging verse from Scripture.

One of my professors in college was diagnosed with cancer. This usually happy believer grew fainthearted. A friend of mine sent her a card in campus mail, and one of the comments he made to her went something like this: “This may not mean much to you, but I was reading in my Bible today and these verses made me think of you...” Then he wrote out the verses. Weeks later my professor shared with the entire student body about her experience with cancer, and she mentioned that card, including the part that said, “This may not mean much to you.” She then declared, “Those verses Jason shared in that card meant *everything* to me that day!”

Third, “*help the weak.*” Thunder makes my youngest child shake from head to toe. When it thunders in the middle of the night, I will grab her little body and bring her into my bed and wrap my arms around her tightly. Initially, she still shakes when it thunders. But as the minutes pass, she gets more and more confidence and eventually she is calm. She comes to me weak, but through my care, she becomes strong.

Believers can be weak in a variety of ways, such as morally, emotionally, and spiritually. Perhaps Paul had in mind those believers in Thessalonica who had a difficult time remaining sexually pure (cf. 4:3-8). The weak need help. Jesus seems so distant to them, but they can see you. So tenderly minister to them in their weakness and through you God will revive them.

Love is Patient

The idle can be so frustrating to those who work hard. The fainthearted can be slower to spiritual vitality than most think is appropriate. The weak can seem so pathetic, especially to believers who are typically strong. However, Paul says, “Be patient with them all.” When you think about how patient God has been with you through Jesus Christ, and how selfless others have been toward you when you were the one with issues, how can you not extend the same grace to others—even to those who will drain you?

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