

# Shifting Gears on Idling

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[ 0 : 00 ] and please take out your Bible or your app or whatever you're going to use to follow along today.

Maybe it's a Kindle. I don't know. And you can get on over to 2 Thessalonians. We are going to finish the book of 2 Thessalonians today. It always feels exciting, at least for me, but maybe that's just a me thing, to get to the end and to have worked our way through an entire book of Scripture. How exciting. How good for us, you know? And we've covered a fair amount of ground in the last nine weeks. That has also been very good for us, even if we sometimes don't always know that we need it just yet.

But the Lord knows what we need, and the Spirit is with us. And so, Emily, would you please come and serve us by reading this morning? We're going to start at chapter 3, and we're going to start at verse number 11, down through the end of 2 Thessalonians.

2 Thessalonians chapter 3, verse number 11, down through the end. For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busy bodies.

[ 1 : 24 ] Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good. If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed.

Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother. Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all. I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand.

This is the sign of genuineness in every letter of mine, as it is the way I write. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Would you please keep us faithful, in particular during this time?

Would you please keep me faithful? Would you help me to walk in my mind and in my heart through this text in a way that honors the text, that honors you as the giver of this text, that honors your people in where you have them and where we are today.

We so want to be reminded and pointed to our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. And we also want to be mindful this morning of those who are not with us.

[ 2 : 38 ] Watch over them, protect them, guide them, refresh them. In particular, would you be with our dear friends, the Hansons? Keep them safe while they travel and head overseas.

Please grant them a blessed time together with family and in your sweet kindness and mercy to them and to us. Please return them to us so that we may continue to worship together.

We ask these things, good Father, mindful of our great need and of your grace that fills in all of the gaps. Please help us as we continue in this time.

In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Well, it was after a worship gathering. The children were dismissed from the sanctuary.

I was old enough to remember this event, but I was also young enough to wonder at why I was permitted to stay in the room.

[ 3 : 48 ] One of the elders of the church spoke. I don't remember his words, but I remember what happened next.

A man that I knew well rose up from his chair and he blurted out, all I can say is I'm guilty.

And then he made his way to the door and left the room sobbing. This was my first experience with church discipline.

And this sober moment of guilt and shame is seared in my memory. I wonder if you have an experience of church discipline.

And I wonder if that experience went well. Here's what I mean by that. At the end of 2 Thessalonians, Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy teach this church, the Thessalonians, about what we now call church discipline.

[ 5 : 06 ] You'll notice those words are not in the text. When church discipline is done well, when it is executed well, when there is grace and love and patience and kindness and deference and unity, when church discipline is done well, in God's kindness, the individual who has sinned in a public, overt, unrepentant way is called back to repentance.

When church discipline is done well, the remainder of the church, the rest of the church, is unified. And not just unified, but warned themselves against future sin like that that would be public and overt and unrepentant that would lead to this type of a sober moment that would be seared in people's memories.

When church discipline is done well, the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is honored. And when church discipline is done well, the glory of God is emphasized.

But when church discipline is not done well, when there is not patience and grace and deference, then it is very true that church discipline, as we know and understand it, can be very damaging to the individual, to the church, to the message of the gospel going forward, and also can mar the glory of our great God.

Paul wants the gospel to speed ahead and be honored. This is his number one prayer request that he gives to the Thessalonians. Pray for us that the gospel may speed ahead like a runner and that it may be honored.

[ 7 : 17 ] But sadly, disorder and disruption threaten the peace of this precious church. Look down in your Bibles at verse number 11.

For we hear that there are some among you who are idle. They are not busy, but busy bodies.

Do you remember the words, friends? Some within the church are idle. That's the word that we get in our Bibles. But we noticed last week, it's not a great translation.

The word underneath this is ataktos. And it has this idea of not just being lazy, but being disorderly. Not just not staying busy, but being a busy body.

Some within the church, they are not minding their own business. Instead, they are meddling in the business of others. I call these folks the do-nothing disruptors.

[ 8 : 22 ] In their doing nothing, they are disruptive. Their troubling behavior is burdening the church and hindering her ministry. Notice Paul's direction again, which we explored last week in verse number 6.

Now we command you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to keep away from every brother or sister who is idle and does not live according to the tradition received from us. What is Paul's concern? Paul's concern is that familiarity and proximity with these folks will lead to imitation.

That those who are nearer to these who are idle, these ataktos, the disorderly do-nothing disruptors, that if you are close to them and you are familiar with them, that you will begin to follow and imitate their ways.

And so he issues this command in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, keep away from these folks, avoid them. Now, wouldn't it be lovely, wouldn't it be lovely if these meddlers felt the distance that Paul is asking the church to put in place?

[ 9 : 54 ] Wouldn't it be lovely if they felt that distance and they made the connection that this distance is as a result of my bad behavior? I've been meddling.

I've been a busybody. I've been a do-nothing disruptor. Wouldn't it be lovely if as a result of feeling this distance and understanding why this distance exists between them and the rest of the church, they would examine their hearts and they would repent and they would be reconciled to the church? Wouldn't it be lovely if they realigned their lives with the teachings that comes to us as the traditions, the things passed down from Jesus and now being taught and written down by Paul and the other apostles?

Wouldn't it be lovely? But it seems they have not repented. They have not felt the distance. They have not sensed their sin. At least, not yet. And so, Paul restates his expectations expectations.

[ 11 : 12 ] And notice again in verse number 12, he restates them again, directing his attention to those who are hearing this letter read. And yet, Paul speaks to them in the third person.

So interesting. They're hearing this letter read and Paul addresses these words to them. Verse number 12, again, with the divine authority of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We command and exhort such people. Not only a command, but a strong urging.

That's the idea with exhortation. I'm motivating you in a particular direction. I'm exhorting you. You know the command.

And now I am preaching this to get you to obey. We command and exhort such people by the Lord Jesus Christ to work quietly and provide for themselves.

[12:22] You're creating turbulence like a thunderstorm. You need to calm down. You are being too loud. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Christ, you need to stop.

Stop meddling and start minding your own business. Stop disrupting and start working to provide for yourselves. Stop doing what causes you to be a busy body and instead join with the unity of the church and be committed to that mission.

Paul is restating here what he told the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 and 11 and 12. This is nothing new. He's asking these do-nothing disruptors to remember what he taught them the first time and what he has modeled for them while he was with them.

I think it would be appropriate to ask ourselves what causes me to be a busy body rather than promoting peace?

[13:45] Hmm? What do I do that causes turbulence within the body? what do I do that causes turbulence in my relationships?

What ways do I meddle? After addressing the do-nothing disruptors Paul again speaks to the church verse number 13 but as for you brothers and sisters verse 14 if anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter take note of that person don't associate with him so that he may be ashamed yet don't consider him as an enemy but warn him as a brother don't associate Paul says with this chronically disobedient person who refuses to repent don't associate with him don't mingle with the meddlers this is an echo for us of what he said in verse number six he has already told the church to avoid them to keep their distance from them he does not want the church to be familiar with them in such a way that they begin to imitate their bad behaviors and so he's just restating it he's echoing it here don't associate with this chronically disobedient person but notice that his command has a special emphasis it's more intense this second time that he gives it first up in verse number six and again here in verse number 14 did you notice that right in the middle of verse 14 he says take note of that person

I think it's the new American standard and the NIV say take special note of that person how is it that the command in verse number six is made more intense well this is public now this is not a private one-on-one conversation Paul expects that the entire church is now aware brothers and sisters why because the church needs to be vigilant and because these busy bodies who are persisting in their sin need to be ashamed and yet after Paul gives this command don't associate with them take special note of them mark them if you will

Paul adds this nuance that can feel like such a wrestle for us he says in verse 15 yet don't consider him as an enemy but regard him sorry but warn him as a brother don't consider him as an enemy but warn him as a brother do you feel the tension here because you should you should so let let me help you feel the tension that I have been feeling this week and that all of the commentators feel when they try to sort this text out here's the tension mark them and don't associate with them but don't regard them as an enemy either this is the tension don't associate but don't regard them as an enemy do you feel the tension now do you know what this tension does do you know what tensions do in scripture tensions in scripture keep us from swinging the pendulum too far to one direction when you see a tension like this in scripture don't get all panicky this this is just this is just some free counsel don't get all panicky and worried that somehow scripture is contradicting itself it's not contradicting itself this is to help us from swinging the pendulum in one direction or another that's the that would be the tendency here right when

Paul says don't associate and mark these people we're going to swing the pendulum way over here and just shun them forever and yet Paul says don't treat them like an enemy now we would tend to swing the pendulum way over here to this side and we're just like well we're not supposed to treat them like an enemy so I just don't know what we're supposed to do here's what we're supposed to do ask God for godly wisdom and ask the Holy Spirit to help us and to keep us from swinging the pendulum in either of these two directions we need God's wisdom that may mean we need patience it will certainly mean we need grace it will absolutely mean we need humility we should ask

ourselves this is what

[ 20 : 05 ] Paul describes here what we have come to understand and what the church would call excommunication is this person supposed to be formally removed from membership well maybe I say maybe because of this if you look back at 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 and verse 14 I don't think I put this on the screen I'll read it for you if you look back at 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 and verse 14 Paul writes this we exhort you brothers and sisters warn those who are idle so we can regard 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 verse number 14 as the first warning that these do-nothing disruptors are receiving and then we can recognize chapter 3 of our text chapter 3 and verse number 6 where

Paul says you need to avoid them you need to keep your distance from them I don't want you to imitate them we can see that as the second warning that these do-nothing disruptors are receiving in which case it would make sense to see Paul's command here of not associating with these people as being a third and final step if that's true that this is intended to represent formal removal from church membership then this idea of don't treat them like an unbeliever I think is intended to direct the hearts of the church what is our heart posture towards this person because if we're removing them from the membership that's what we're saying we're saying you are not a Christian your ongoing public overt unrepentant sin puts you in a category that requires us to say you are not a

Christian in which case don't treat him like an unbeliever is about our heart's posture and perhaps a warning for that person if you continue to persist after the church discipline you will prove that you were never a Christian at all is this formal excommunication as we understand or as the church formally understands that word maybe but I do think it's better to see this as the next step in a discipling discipline process rather than the last step in other words I think what Paul is talking about here in our text is the second to last step before formally removing from church discipline I think that chapter three and verse six is that one on one private type of conversation brothers and sisters going to that person and

I think verse number 14 is that next step when we are telling the church and we are urging the church you all need to know what's been happening you need to know about this public overt unrepentant sin and the church needs to have a unanimous perspective on this so that the individual feels the weight of the authority of the Lord Jesus given to the church so that they humble their hearts and repent and can be reconciled that would be my take on this that this is not formal excommunication because I think it's a little bit hard to sort out from that how we treat him as a brother if it's formally church removing him from church membership but I do think that this is the next step and that formal removal would be next but we can disagree on that and that will be just fine here's what we can be sure about this much of

Paul's exhortation is very clear the church is to create some distance between themselves and this person while still treating them like a brother or sister!

[ 25 : 27 ] !

particular text would have led to different outcomes scripture is not ambiguous don't associate with those who refuse to obey the teachings don't associate with those who disrupt the church's peace the church's unity the church's gospel ministry let's make three brief observations about church discipline first church discipline is a community project both times here in our text verse number six and again in verse number 14 or sorry verse number 13 Paul addresses the brothers and the sisters this is not because they don't have leaders they may not have yet because as you recall this is early in church history they may not yet have formally what we understand now as elders but Paul does not address this to the brothers and sisters because they don't have leaders we know this because back in chapter 5 of 1st Thessalonians 1st Thessalonians 5 verse number 12 it says this we ask you brothers and sisters give recognition to those who labor among you and lead you in the Lord and admonish you and regard them very highly in love because of their work you see that it's not that they don't have leaders it's that church discipline is a community project these commands are for the whole church certainly certainly the church will be shepherded and guided by her leaders but the church does not get to abandon its responsibility and just turn over responsibility to the leadership and say this is too scary it's too uncomfortable

I don't like the way it makes me feel you all need to go and deal with this church discipline is a community project and this is one reason why at steadfast we land at this idea of elder led congregationalism because we believe that it is the church that has received the authority of Jesus not the elders of the church the church the body of believers that Jesus gave the authority to assess

and evaluate and determine the what and the who of the gospel that's why when in the will of the Lord we add members to steadfast!

church it will be the church that gives affirmation what are we affirming! We're affirming that person's testimony as a follower of Jesus we're recognizing and agreeing together yes that person has the Holy Spirit inside of them as far as we can tell and they are endeavoring to follow after the Lord Jesus we want you to follow him with us and we want to follow Jesus with you this is why brothers and sisters when we gather in the in the circle to celebrate the Lord's supper and I know it's awkward but I invite you to look around and make eye contact with one another why do we do that because every Sunday we have the privilege of confessing to one another when I take this bread and take this cup with you I'm affirming that your testimony as a follower of Jesus is still intact you are living by faith you are walking out the gospel in everyday life we look around the circle and we make eye contact because we have the privilege of testifying to one another and to the Lord yes [ 31 : 56 ] I believe Mike's faith and Tim's faith and Emily's faith and I believe your faith Jenny's faith is credible before the Lord so we come we celebrate the Lord's supper as a body church discipline is a community project secondly church discipline must never be a hasty reaction regardless of whether you see this text as formal excommunication or whether you see this text as a step in the process before formal excommunication as you read through first and second Thessalonians you can't miss this this is not some kind of a hasty reaction they have been warned time has passed they continue to live in an unrepentant way they continue to be do nothing disruptors within the group church discipline is always a patient deliberate response to unrepentant sin it is never never never merely punitive it is always always redemptive it is never merely for the sake of punishing someone that's punitive it is always for the sake of the gospel and for their redemption to the truths that they claim to know and love and believe church discipline is never a hasty reaction third church discipline is hard it is always easier in theory than in practice do you know what we are doing today we're learning theory that's what we're doing today we're learning the theory of church discipline this is the easy part practicing church discipline is the hard part rarely will you have all of the information and all of the evidence that you want sometimes for the sake of the gospel and out of love you will need to make a judgment call that's hard the person under discipline may question your love they may question your friendship they may question your leadership they may question your decision they may never forgive you and they may have good points church discipline can become so messy within the body because often times all of the details can't be shared it just wouldn't be prudent to share everything it's easy to say

I'll do this I'll do this I'll practice this I'm committed to this and then let me tell you in the days and weeks and months after you practice church discipline you will wonder did we make the right decision did we do what was wise did we respond with grace did we give enough time were we patient did we care about the individual did we care about the church were we somehow puffing ourselves up and making ourselves look better sometimes by the work of the Holy Spirit and God's abundant sufficient grace the individual will repent that happened in the story that I shared at the beginning but sometimes there will not be repentance repent and sometimes there is an individual who desires to repent but there are leaders with such exacting standards of repentance devoid of grace.

And they behave more like the prodigal son brother rather than the father. What is Paul's goal with this text?

Paul's goal is restoring peace and unity within the church. And the means by which peace and unity is going to be restored is by their obedience to these hard commands.

But here is your eternal encouragement. Remember that text from a couple weeks ago? Here is your assurance for the long haul. Jesus gives you this promise.

[ 37 : 38 ] It's in verse number 16. Jesus promises you consistent and comprehensive peace. Look at verse 16. May the Lord of peace himself give you peace always in every way.

Do you notice that? This is consistent and comprehensive peace. We have peace with God through the life and death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But, excuse me, this is so much more than that. This is consistent and comprehensive peace for those moments when we don't know for sure if we're doing the right thing.

For those moments when we're not sure if we need to collect more evidence or if now is the time to make a decision. For those moments when the devil is hounding us and we're wondering, You blew it.

You failed. This is what we need. We need this peace from Jesus that is consistent and comprehensive. I love this always and in every way.

[ 38 : 54 ] In what way is Jesus not offering you peace, church? At what time? Under what circumstance? In what experience is Jesus not offering you peace?

Where do you need peace right now? Where do you have turbulence in your life?

Ask Jesus to give you peace. For the Thessalonians, as Paul brings this letter to what feels like a bit of an abrupt end, specifically for the Thessalonians, look at verse number 17.

I, Paul, am writing this greeting with my own hand, which is an authenticating mark in every letter. This is how I write. What got this church all stirred up in the first place? Someone shows up and says, I heard from Paul that Jesus has already come.

[ 40 : 11 ] I've got this document. It's got Paul's signature on it. This must be authentic. How kind of Paul to tell this church, listen, don't let yourself be deceived.

Here's how I write. Match it up with this one. And you'll know the ones that are authentic. I also love this about Paul. Look at what he says.

In every letter. Now remember, this is early. First and second Thessalonians. Some of the first letters.

And yet Paul is already saying every letter. You know what that tells me? There's churches and brothers and sisters gathering together all over that area. And Paul wrote them letters too.

And by the Holy Spirit's direction in Providence, we just don't have them. And that's okay. We have exactly what we need for life and godliness.

[ 41 : 10 ] The grace, Paul says, of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

Here's our takeaway. Verse number 13.

But as for you, brothers and sisters, do not grow weary in doing good.

What is the implication of this text? Doing good is going to be wearisome.

We're going to want to quit. We're going to want to throw up our arms. We're going to want to bite and devour one another because of our pride and our lack of love sometimes.

[ 42 : 16 ] But doing good is wearisome. You feel weary? Maybe it's because you're doing good. That's good news for us.

And Paul, how kind of the Holy Spirit to give us this good word of exhortation and encouragement. Don't grow weary in doing good.

Oh, it's wearisome. It is wearisome to have to practice church discipline. It is wearisome. But don't quit.

Don't quit today. And don't quit tomorrow. Don't quit, even if there are meddlers who are meddling or a busybody who seems to be gaining a following and getting away with sin.

Don't quit. Don't stop doing what is good. Don't grow weary. Don't tire of doing it.

[ 43 : 19 ] Don't you grow weary when you face persecution. Don't you go weary and stop doing good when another so-called prophet predicts the end of the world and you just shake your head and you wonder.

What a sham. What a shame. Don't you grow weary. You just keep doing good. Don't you go weary when it's time to stand firm and to hold fast to the things that have been taught.

And the world and maybe even the church is telling you you got to walk away from those things.

You can't practice those things. You can't do that church discipline thing. That's never going to work.

Don't you grow weary when it's time to stand firm and to hold fast. Don't you grow weary in prayer. Don't grow weary in prayer. Pray.

If you have nothing else to pray for pray Paul's request that the gospel will speed ahead and be honored. Don't grow weary in your evangelism.

[ 44 : 20 ] Do you grow weary in being alert to deception and disruption and division and the need for faithful patient gracious long suffering godly wisdom directed church discipline.

You keep doing good brothers and sisters. You keep loving. You keep serving. You keep ministering. You keep helping. You keep worshiping. You keep supporting. You keep giving. Be diligent in your obedience and vigilant in your discipleship.

Don't grow weary so that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ as we read at the end of chapter 2 will be glorified by you and you by him.

May the Lord direct your hearts to God's love and Christ's endurance. Let's pray.

Father, we are grateful to receive your word and it is okay for us to be humble and to acknowledge that we wrestle with these commands.

[ 45 : 42 ] we want to believe that in the moment of need we would be ready to obey them and yet we know our tendencies.

Father, I know my tendency and you know my heart better than me. Would you build us up and encourage us in these times of unity and health?

In these times when we are enjoying peace and not turbulence, would you build us up and strengthen us and edify us such that in a moment and a season in an age of turbulence we are equipped and prepared not only to obey these texts but to call one another to hold firm to stand fast.

Father, please give us wisdom in discerning and understanding these texts. Please, Holy Spirit, continue to open our eyes to your word and help us to see things we need to know and as we see those things that we need to know, help it to move from our head down into our hearts so that we believe and after it has moved from our head to our hearts, help it to come out in the way that we do good.

Give us strength so that we don't grow weary in doing good. Oh, good Father, we ask that by the Lord Jesus we would have peace in every way and at all times.

[ 47 : 42 ] Help us, encourage us, equip us, strengthen us for the days ahead. please, direct our hearts again to your love and to the endurance of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's in his name that we pray. Amen.