

Team Ministry

1 Thessalonians 1:1

Disclaimer: The following are Dr. Jeff Stott's sermon notes and manuscript. They have not been carefully proofed for spelling or grammar. All Scripture quotes are from the New International Version unless noted.

Take your Bibles and turn to 1 Thessalonians 1. Today we begin a study of 1 Thessalonians. In this book, God tells us what a model church and model believer look like, how to face suffering and difficult times, what to do until the Lord returns, how to live holy in an unholy world, and practical guidance for everyday living.

To get us started on our journey through 1 Thessalonians let's begin with **verse 1**. The Bible says, "Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you." In the New Testament times the people writing the letter would sign their name at the top of the letter rather than at the end of a letter, like we do today. This identifies who wrote the letter and who it is written to, but it is so much more than that. In 2 Timothy 3:16 we are told, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness." All Scripture is useful for teaching us how to live, rebuking us when we live wrong, correcting us so we can live right and training us so we can stay living right. If all Scripture is useful, then my question is what is useful about 1 Thessalonians 1:1? What is God telling us that will help teach us, rebuke us, correct us, and train us to be a better witness for Him?

I believe we see several truths about team ministry. When I say "team ministry" I mean a group of Christians coming together for the purpose of blessing others. That group of people or that team here in 1 Thessalonians is "Paul, Silas and Timothy." Those three helped to start, establish, and strengthened the believers at Thessalonica. From their example we can see some principles of team ministry that you can apply to your family, to friends at school, to your coworkers, and to those you minister alongside at church.

Your ministry team could be a committee or team at the church. Your team could be you and your wife. Your team might be you, your spouse, and your children. Your team could be your Sunday School class, it could be those other Christian kids at school, it could be those other Christians at work.

What team ministry are you a part of? Whatever team ministry you are a part of, these principles apply to you and your team for effective ministry. To have an effective team ministry you need to know the following.

1. Team ministry is about equality, not superiority.

Number one, team ministry is about equality, not superiority. Paul begins this letter differently than others. He usually begins a letter identifying himself as an apostle (Col. 1:1) or a servant of Christ (Philip. 1:1). But he does not do that here. Instead, he simply writes, “Paul, Silas and Timothy.” No titles and no descriptions. Why?

For one reason, he wanted to point out they were all equal. They all had an equal part in the ministry and they all had an equal part in writing this letter and instruction to the body of believers. These three men understood equality. They understood they were different but equal. One man was not better than the other. One man was not more valuable than the other. They were equal.

Philippians 2:3 says, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. (4) Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.” Now listen carefully, if I ever allow myself to think that I am better than you, the possibility of a genuine relationship is gone. If you ever allow yourself to think you are better than me, the possibility of a deeper relationship is gone. I’m not saying that you can’t do something better than me or I can’t do something better than you. That’s not what I’m saying. If you start thinking you are a better person than me because you pray more, witness more, give more, lead better, or know more than me then “vain conceit” has entered into our relationship as brothers and sisters in Christ and affects our ministry together.

If you think you are better, more important, and more valuable than your spouse then you working as a team just got harder. The same is true for ministerial staff, committees, families, sports teams, and offices. This truth of team ministry is true anywhere. Team ministry is about equality, not superiority.

2. Team ministry is about uniqueness, not conformity.

So. Number one, team ministry is about equality, not superiority. **Number two, team ministry is about uniqueness, not conformity.** When you look at these three names each brings something different to the table. Paul is an older man, Timothy a young man. Paul is an apostle. Timothy is a pastor. “Paul, Silas, and Timothy” had three different backgrounds. Their testimony of how they were saved is different. Their giftedness is different. Each one would have a different impact on the Thessalonian church.

“Paul, Silas, and Timothy” are uniquely designed and so were you. Your uniqueness can be seen in your DESIGN for ministry.

- **God has given you a unique desire for ministry.** As you have studied God’s Word and talked to Him over the years He has shaped your heart to have certain desires for ministry that He wants you to have. **Psalm 37:4** says, “Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart.” You will begin to want what God wants. When Jesus says, “Follow Me,” you will have the desire to follow Him into that ministry, even if that ministry is difficult.
- **God has given you unique experiences for ministry.** All those good, bad, and ugly experiences you went through helped prepare you for ministry. That’s what **2 Corinthians 1:3** says, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, (4) who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.” That comfort you received when you went through your crisis is the same kind of comfort God wants you to share with someone else going through a similar crisis.

- **God has given you a unique spiritual gift for ministry.** Speaking about giftedness **1 Peter 4:10** says, “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others....” As a follower of Christ, you have a gift that was given to you by the Holy Spirit when you were born again. What makes your gift unique is the desire God has given you for ministry, the experiences God has brought you through, your personality, and your current level of maturity. Even if you have the gift of mercy and the person sitting next to you has that gift, you both will use that gift completely different in the same situation because your divine design is unique.
- **God has given you a unique individual style for ministry.** You have a unique personality. Listen to me, **Psalm 139** says God “created your inmost being.” He made you the way you are. That’s why you like high risk rather low risk, outside rather than inside, people projects rather than paper projects, to lead rather than follow, working with a team rather than solo. That’s your personality. You are unique.
- **God has given you unique growth for ministry.** **1 Peter 2:2** says we are to “grow up in [our] salvation.” God is growing you. Where you are emotionally, mentally, socially, and spiritually will determine what doors God opens for you and which ones He does not. He knows which ministries you are ready for and which ones you are not.
- **God has given you unique natural abilities for ministry.** Just as God did Bezalel (BEHZ-uh-lehl) and “filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts” (Exodus 31:3). You are going to have skills, abilities, and knowledge of things that you can use in the ministry.

God designed you differently than me. You are unique and you will approach the same ministries I approach differently. You don’t have to be like me and I don’t have to be like you. Successful team ministries understand it is about uniqueness, not conformity. The way you would tell that person about Christ would be different than how I would. How you would lead that team would be different than how another believer would.

3. Team ministry is about acknowledging, not ignoring.

We are talking about principles of team ministry. Number one, it is about equality, not superiority. It is about uniqueness, not conformity. **Number three, team ministry is about acknowledging, not ignoring.** When Paul began this letter by saying “Paul, Silas, and Timothy” he was acknowledging Timothy and Silas’ part in the ministry. Timothy was acknowledging Paul and Silas’ part. Silas was acknowledging Timothy and Paul’s part. They were all recognizing each other’s role in this ministry.

In **1 Corinthians 3:5** Paul is reminding some believers about this principles. He says, “The Lord has assigned to each his task. (6) I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.” There are some things that you need to do in the ministry and there are some things that others need to do. You do your part, they do theirs, and I do mine and we’ll watch God make it grow. This is team ministry.

I don’t know who it is, but I thank God for this little “church mouse” that’s in our church. Over the past twelve months I have received a couple of “church mouse” letters and others have received letters as well. This anonymous person known as the “church mouse” writes words of encouragement and acknowledges what they have seen someone else do for the kingdom of God. That “church mouse” is applying this principle. When another believer has a part in the ministry, acknowledge them and their work.

4. Team ministry is about faithfulness, not disloyalty.

We are talking about principles of team ministry. Number one, it is about equality, not superiority. It is about uniqueness, not conformity. It is about acknowledging, not ignoring. **Number four, team ministry is about faithfulness, not disloyalty.** These three people, “Paul, Silas, and Timothy,” had been the three who had founded and ministered to the Thessalonica church throughout the early years of its ministry. The point is this: the Thessalonica church was strong because its leadership had remained faithful to the church. From every indication they had continued to stay in touch with the church and to exhort the believers through visits and letters as long as they were living and able to minister.

- Paul visited the church when he returned to the area on his third missionary journey (Acts 20:1-2).
- Timothy made a special visit to the church for the very purpose of helping the church through a difficult time and to establish and comfort the believers in their faith (1 Thess. 3:1-6).
- All three men wrote the church at least two times, this letter of 1 Thessalonians and 2 Thessalonians (1:1).

Even though God moved Paul, Timothy, and Silas on to other ministries they were faithful to pray for this group of believers, stay in contact with them and encourage them.

It is important to stay in contact with those you have ministered to and alongside in the past. Write a letter to them, call them, and see how they are doing. Those kids you taught a few years ago, how are they doing now in their walk with God? Find out. Follow up. Stay in touch. You were a part of their spiritual growth, stay a part of it.

5. Team ministry is about community, not isolation.

We are talking about principles of team ministry. It is about equality, not superiority. It is about uniqueness, not conformity. It is about acknowledging, not ignoring. It is about faithfulness, not disloyalty. **Number five, team ministry is about community, not isolation.** Notice **verse 1** goes on to say, “To the church of the Thessalonians....” The “church” was a group of believers, a community of Christians who lived in a city called Thessalonica. They needed each other.

Every believer needs to be a part of a community of believers to receive ministry from them and to give ministry to them. Team ministry involves mutual edification. Paul pointed this out in **Romans 1:11** when he said, “I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong – that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged, by each other’s faith.” Later on in **Romans 14:19** he says, “Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.” There are going to be times in your life when you need a believer to encourage you, to lift you up, to pray for you, to help you think straight, to help you align your emotions,

and to help give direction in your walk with the Lord. On the other hand there will be those times you need to walk along side others and be their encourager, their support, their strength, and to help them think straight.

Even though we are called Southside Baptist Church, we are a part of a larger group of believers called “the church of the Huntsvillians.” There are believers here you need and who need you. There are believers at work who need you and you need them. There are believers at school who need you and you need them. There are believers in your house who need you and you need them. If you are going to experience true team ministry it will be within a community of believers.

6. Team ministry is about position, not possessions.

We are talking about principles of team ministry. It is about equality, not superiority. It is about uniqueness, not conformity. It is about acknowledging, not ignoring. It is about faithfulness, not disloyalty. It is about community, not isolation. **Number six, team ministry is about position, not possessions.** Notice **verse 1** goes on to say, “To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Do you know what made the Thessalonian church and ministry so effective? It was not how much money they had, it was not in their nice buildings, their location on the highway (even though those things are nice and wonderful). What made their team ministry as a church so effective was their position “in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

The phrase “God the Father” points to God’s sovereignty and it’s a relational title. He is in control. He created everything you see and He runs the house. He is God the Father. He’s the Father, He is your loving, kind, caring, compassionate, merciful, gentle Father who’s going to help you succeed.

The phrase “the Lord Jesus Christ” points to the saving work of Jesus in your life.

- The word “Lord” describes Him as creator and sovereign ruler, the One who made us, bought us, rules us, and to whom we owe full allegiance.

- The name “Jesus” refers to His humanity and reminds us that Jesus conquered everything life can throw at you.
- The name “Christ” points to Jesus being the promised Messiah that would deliver God’s people from sin past, present, and future.

Remember, “God the Father” points to God’s loving relationship with you. The title “the Lord Jesus Christ” points to His saving power over sin in your life.

What does it mean to be “in” God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ? This word “in” means to be “inside” something, to be “within” something, or to be “taking part in” something or to be “participating in” something. When you are “in” God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ you are participating in and experiencing the Heavenly Father’s love, care, compassion, hope, joy, guidance, and protection along with the power of Jesus Christ working in your life redeeming you from sins past, present, and future. Your position “in” Him enables you to make a difference in the person sitting next to you. The person sitting next to you, *their* position “in” Him enables them to make a difference in you. That’s called team ministry. You cannot experience true team ministry until you are “in” Him.

7. Team ministry is about forgiveness, not grudges.

Number seven, team ministry is about forgiveness, not grudges. Notice **verse 1** ends with the greeting of “Grace and peace to you.” Before we get to far into this, you need to know that the only way you can experience true grace and peace is by being in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Before you get to “grace and peace” you have to go through “the Lord Jesus Christ.”

But I want to talk to you about *relational* grace and peace, the kind of grace and peace that is experienced between people.

“Grace” refers to an undeserved blessing. Grace says, “Even though someone is mean , rude, annoying and unkind to me, I’m going to bless them, love them, and help them anyway.” If you bless someone who deserves the blessing, then that’s not grace. Grace is only grace when it blesses someone who does not deserve it. Real team ministry is

always a ministry of grace. In team ministry you bless those on your team when they act selfish. In team ministry you bless those you are serving even when they are unthankful.

Team ministry not only involves grace but it also involves “peace.” There is a peace with God, but I want you to think about peace with people. The word “peace” (eirene) means to be bound, joined, and woven together. With it comes assurance, confidence, and security in relationships. Team ministry promotes peace. **Romans 12:18** says, “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.” I’m sure you would agree that relationships can be a source of stress and grief. For most of us, our biggest problems are people problems: disagreeing with the boss, arguments with the spouse or kids, struggles with your parents, and the list could include problems with people at school, work, and the church. We must deal with conflict, competition, comparison, and criticism from people on a regular basis. As a pastor once said, “If it weren’t for the people, ministry would be great.” Team ministry promotes peace. They want people to feel joined together in an atmosphere of assurance, confidence, and security.

Conclusion

What was the one big thing that grabbed your heart this morning that you need to do regarding team ministry? God wants you to be a part of a team ministry, not a lone ranger ministry. Get connected with a group of believers and help them succeed for the kingdom of God.

Some of you, need to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior and become a part of the kingdom of God. [Explain salvation]