

## Our Crown of Boasting

Scripture Reading: 1 Thes. 2:1-2, 7-8, 11, 19-20; Phil. 4:1; 2 Thes. 1:4; Col. 1:28-29; Acts 20:20, 31

### I. Having a heart to love and care for people: (Day 1)

- A. We have tried many ways to gain the increase, but little has worked.
- B. There is no way that works if we do not have a care for and interest in people; however, if we do have a care and interest, the care itself will open up the way.
- C. It is not that we are short of ways; it is that we are short of heart.
- D. We need to have a praying spirit and a heart to love and care for people; if we have this kind of heart and an intensified care for people, the way will be opened.
- E. To be useful is to pick up a burden for souls; a certain older brother who is now with the Lord was a good example to us:
  - 1. He was neither an elder, nor a co-worker, or any kind of leader, but he was used much by the Lord.
  - 2. He had a heart for the young people, the new ones, and the new beginners; almost every new one was invited to dinner by him.
  - 3. If we would all be like this, the church life would be marvelous; our whole church life would be revolutionized.
- F. We need to pick up a genuine heart to love the sinners and a genuine burden to take care of the younger ones; if we have a will to do this, we will surely be able.
- G. Everyone can take care of three or four younger Christians.
- H. Our success depends not on our knowledge, way, or skill but on our heart; we need to pray for this and take this word for ourselves.
- I. Since we love the Lord and His recovery, we need to bring this matter to the Lord and pray for a burden.

### II. Considering the ones saved and nurtured by us as: (Day 2)

- A. Our HOPE—Paul seemed to be saying, “If we do not have you, we do not have anything, you are our hope, even as your hope is the Lord’s coming back”—1 Thes. 2:19a.
- B. Our JOY—“Without you, at the Lord’s coming back we shall be short of joy and glory. We need you!”—1 Thes. 2:19b, 20b; Phil. 4:1; cf. John 15:11.
- C. Our CROWN—“You are our hope, our joy, our crown, and our glory before the Lord Jesus at His coming”; Paul expressed deep emotion in caring for his children—1 Thes. 2:19; Phil. 4:1b; cf. Prov. 17:6.
- D. Our GLORY—Since the apostles were the believers’ nursing mother and exhorting father (1 Thes. 2:7, 11), the believers, as their children, were their glory and joy; apart from them, the apostles had no hope, glory, or crown of boasting—v. 20.

### III. Boasting only in the work of gaining, perfecting, and building up people—v. 19: (Day 3)

- A. Boasting in their FAITH—faith is the sum total of our experience, enjoyment, and gain of Christ; Paul regards the believers’ faith as a sacrifice offered to God—2 Thes. 1:4.

- B. Boasting in their TESTIMONY—if the saints hold forth the word of life, apply it by living out Christ, Paul will have something of which to boast in the day of Christ—Phil. 2:16a.
- C. Boasting in their ZEAL—this zeal, this burning, must be Christ Himself; open to Him and let Him come in, He is the burning One; the real zeal comes from the spirit; we can be burning in spirit by opening to the Lord from the depth of our being, from our spirit, and let the Lord fill us from within—2 Cor. 9:2; Rom. 12:11.
- D. Boasting in their PERSON—the Corinthian believers were the fruit of the apostle’s labor, a labor in which he risked his life; in them the apostle could boast of this—2 Cor. 1:14a; 1 Cor. 15:31.
- E. In the day of the Lord—the apostle would be able to boast, glory, and rejoice in the believers in the day of Christ, in the day of Christ’s second coming, when He will judge all His believers—2 Cor. 1:14; Phil. 2:16b; Rom. 14:10b; 2 Cor. 5:10.

**IV. Fostering the young and new believers—1 Thes. 2:7, 11: (Day 4)**

- A. As a nursing mother cherishing her own children—v. 7:
  - 1. Even though Paul was a brother, he considered himself a nursing mother; he had no thought of position, dignity, or authority; a nursing mother’s dignity consists in nourishing and cherishing her children, in taking care of them in a tender way.
  - 2. The word cherish is a word of utmost tenderness; Paul regarded himself as a cherishing one, not merely as one who serves; his care for the believers was full of tenderness.
  - 3. The word yearning in 1 Thessalonians 2:8 indicates being affectionately fond of, affectionately desirous of, like a nursing mother affectionately interested in her child whom she nourishes and cherishes; this was what the apostles did with the new believers.
- B. As a father exhorting his own children—v. 11; 1 Cor. 4:13a, 14-16; cf. Philem. 10
  - 1. In cherishing the believers as their own children, the apostles considered themselves nursing mother; in exhorting the believers, a father.
  - 2. Paul was a father exhorting his children; as such an exhorting father, Paul seemed to be saying, “Children, we are here only for you. Without you, life is meaningless. If it were not for you, we would not want even to live.”
- C. Travailing in birth until Christ is formed in them—Gal. 4:19:
  - 1. Travail refers to painful toil in childbirth; in this metaphor in Galatians 4:19 Paul likened himself to a mother who gives birth to a child.
  - 2. Paul had labored in this way to regenerate the Galatians when he first preached the gospel to them; because they had deviated from the gospel that he had preached to them, he was toiling again in travail until Christ would be formed in them:
    - a. To have Christ formed in the believers is to have Christ fully grown in them.
    - b. First, Christ was born into us at the time we repented and believed in Him, then He lives in us in our Christian life, and, finally, He will be formed in us at our maturity.

**V. Contacting sinners, seekers, and saints out of love and burden, not as a duty or necessity—1 Thes. 1:3: (Day 5)**

- A. Writing down their names:
  - 1. We need to review all our acquaintances and make a list of them.
  - 2. Our acquaintances include our relatives, neighbors, friends, schoolmates, and colleagues.

- B. Praying for their spiritual welfare constantly—Rom. 1:9; Col. 4:12; 1 Thes. 1:2:
  - 1. We need to pray over the name list and seek the Lord's leading concerning who should be the first for us to take care of.
  - 2. If we pray in this way, the Lord will lead us and we will have the burden to contact specific people.
  - 3. We should also keep ourselves open to the Lord for His new leading to visit new people.
- C. Visiting them regularly for shepherding—Acts 20:20:
  - 1. We can visit people by making appointments with them; we must do this not only continually but also continuously, day by day.
  - 2. We need to have the practice and a habit of inviting people to have dinner with us.
  - 3. Going out to visit people should be a part of our daily Christian life; we should budget our time for going out to visit people, setting definite goals and bearing remaining fruit—John 15:5, 16.
- D. Bringing them to home meetings:
  - 1. We must have proper home meetings in order for our fruit to remain.
  - 2. We must learn to skillfully grasp the time to speak something of the Word—concerning Christ, concerning God, and concerning God's salvation—even if only for a few minutes.
  - 3. We should always keep in mind that if someone is a new believer, our primary purpose in the home meetings is to feed them.
- E. Establishing them in the church life—Col. 2:7; 1 Thes. 3:2:
  - 1. We should not forget that the goal of gaining people is to bring them into the proper church life for the increase of Christ to build up the Body of Christ.
  - 2. We should not wait too long before bringing the new believers into the practice of the church life.
  - 3. We should help them to realize that Christians are like sheep of a flock—John 10:11, 16.
  - 4. We should also train our new ones to prophesy; the church will be built up step-by-step as we and our new ones prophesy in the meetings—1 Cor. 14:31, 26, 12, 4.

**VI. Taking the way of persistence and endeavor, undeterred by obstacles, not disappointed by setbacks, and not expecting quick results: (Day 6)**

- A. According to the divine operation in us—Col. 1:29:
  - 1. The God-ordained way is a laboring way; to labor is more than to work; without our laboring there can be no practice of the God-ordained way—v. 29; 1 Cor. 15:10, 58.
  - 2. Paul did not labor according to His own ability or strength but according to Christ's operation, which operated in him in power.
- B. One person at a time—Col. 1:28:
  - 1. The most effective way to contact people is one by one.
  - 2. The best way to conduct a gospel dialogue is with one person at a time.
  - 3. Whenever someone speaks, you discern what kind of person he is and where he is coming from—cf. John 3:1-21; 4:4-42.
- C. By admonishing, teaching, and presenting:
  - 1. Paul taught, admonished, and warned the saints face to face; by his teaching from house to house, Paul ministered Christ to the saints to cause them to grow in life—Acts 20:20, 31.
  - 2. By growing in Christ, eventually we will arrive at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, which is the Body of Christ, the expression of Christ—Eph. 4:13; 1:22-23.

## Day 1

**1 Thes. 2:7-8**

**7 But we were gentle in your midst, as a nursing mother would cherish her own children.**

**8 Yearning in this way over you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own souls, because you became beloved to us.**

We have tried many ways to gain the increase, but little has worked. Recently, we changed from preaching the gospel in the meeting every week so that the saints could do the preaching in their homes. However, almost no saints opened their home for the gospel. This caused me to have much concern before the Lord. There is no way that works if we do not have a care for and interest in people. However, if we do have a care and interest, the care itself will open up a way. We should not say that we have no way or that no one will accept the gospel. Even the closed doors of China were eventually opened, and thousands were saved. The work in China was very difficult at the beginning. At first when one missionary went to visit the villages, no one would open the door. The children would even throw stones and mud at him. Still, he would not run away. He would stop, turn around, and say, "Thank you. That is enough." The love and endurance that this brother had for the sake of the people eventually touched their heart. The way of the gospel in every Chinese village was difficult. If we had thought that there was no need to go to places like that, then we would have had no way there.

If we had a burden, a care, and an interest for people, we could have brought in a hundred people in the last few months. Because some said that it was too difficult for the saints to bring people to the gospel meeting, we tried letting the saints preach in their homes. Eventually, however, there was no preaching in the homes. It is not that we are short of ways; it is that we are short of heart.

When the missionaries came to my province, the clans in each village would not allow anyone to rent a house to the "foreign devils." Because of this, some of the missionaries were forced to live under bridges and underpasses. In addition, no one was allowed to sell them food. It seems that they had no way to live, but the Lord had a way. One family of missionaries who lived in an underpass observed a peddler of soy bean cakes who passed by early each morning. One morning while the peddler left his cakes unattended, the missionary took a piece and put some money in its place, several times more than what the cake was worth. When the peddler returned, he found that a piece was gone but that the money had been left in its place. This went on morning after morning for a long time. Finally the peddler waited to see who was buying his cakes. He and the missionary made contact, and the peddler was saved. Under no situation should we say that there is no way. It altogether depends upon the kind of heart we have. In principle, the situation in the United States, the most modern nation on the earth, is the same today as it was in old China. The devil at that time was the ancient serpent, but today he is more modern. The same serpent uses different ways to keep people from the Lord. Therefore, we need a praying spirit and a heart to love and care for people. If we have this kind of heart and an intensified care for people, the way will be opened.

*(The Normal Way of Fruit-bearing and Shepherding for the Building Up of the Church, Chapter 2, Section 3)*

## Day 2

### 1 Thes. 2:19-20

**19 For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at His coming? Are not even you?**

**20 For you are our glory and joy.**

In verses 19 and 20 Paul concludes, “For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting? Are not even you, before our Lord Jesus at His coming? For you are our glory and joy.” The Greek word rendered coming in verse 19 is *parousia*, a word that means presence. The Lord’s coming is His presence with us. In this light these two earlier Epistles were written. Every chapter of the first Epistle ends with the Lord’s coming back.

Verse 20 indicates that since the apostles were the believers’ nursing mother and exhorting father (vv. 7, 11), the believers, as their children, were their glory and joy. Apart from them, the apostles had no hope, glory, or crown of boasting.

Here Paul seems to be saying, “You are our hope, our joy, and our crown of boasting. Brothers, we are here only for you; we are not here for anything else. If we do not have you, we do not have anything. You are our hope, even as your hope is the Lord’s coming back. Without you, at the Lord’s coming back we shall be short of joy and glory. We need you! You are our hope, our joy, our crown, and our glory before the Lord Jesus at His coming.” Once again Paul expressed deep emotion in caring for his children. He certainly was a father exhorting his children. As such an exhorting father, it seems as if Paul was saying, “Children, we are here only for you. Without you, life is meaningless. If it were not for you, we would not want even to live.” Such a word from parents is deeply touching; it touches the heart of the children.

Would you not be touched deeply if your parents wrote such a word to you? Would you not be touched if they said that without you life is meaningless, that they are living on earth only for you? No doubt, when you heard or read such a word, your tears would flow. This kind of speaking fosters children and helps them to grow.

As a good father, Paul knew how to touch the heart of his children. If you are able to touch the heart of others, you will be successful in fostering their growth. The best way to foster others is to touch their heart deeply.

*(Life-Study of 1 & 2 Thessalonians, Chapter 13, Section 4)*

In verses 19 and 20 Paul indicates that those who work with the Lord in fostering the believers to walk worthily of God will receive a reward. This reward will be the believers we have fostered becoming our crown, glory, and joy. What a glory it would be to any Christian worker for the ones he has fostered to be matured at the Lord's coming back! What a crown and joy this would be to him! But on the contrary what a shame it would be if none of the believers had grown and matured.

Many of us are working with young saints. The result of our work should be the maturing of these believers. If they mature properly, they will be in the kingdom participating in God's glory. This maturity will then become our crown, joy, and boast before the Lord Jesus at His coming. Suppose, however, that we work continually with new believers, but to no avail. If this is the situation, at the Lord's coming back there will be no result of our work. What a shame that would be! When the Lord Jesus comes, the result of our work will be manifested. That result will also be our reward, our crown, our joy.

*(Life-Study of 1 & 2 Thessalonians, Chapter 13, Section 5)*

### Day 3

#### **Phil. 2:16-17**

**16 Holding forth the word of life, so that I may have a boast in the day of Christ that I did not run in vain nor labor in vain.**

**17 But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice, and I rejoice together with you all.**

Philippians 2:16 and 17 should be taken together. According to grammar, these verses are joined by the conjunction “but.” This indicates that the faith in verse 17 is related to the holding forth of the word of life in verse 16. In other words, the holding forth of the word of life is related experientially to the sacrifice of faith. Paul's concept in these verses is that if the saints hold forth the word of life, he will have something of which to boast in the day of Christ. The present age is the day of man (1 Cor. 4:3), and the coming age will be the day of Christ. The one whose day it is, is the one to exercise authority. Because now is the day of man, man has authority on earth. But in the day of Christ, He will have authority. If in the day of man the believers hold forth the word of life, Paul will be able to boast concerning them in the day of Christ that he had not run in vain or labored in vain.

After speaking of the believers' holding forth the word of life and of his being able to boast in the day of Christ, Paul goes on to say in verse 17, “But if even I am poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and priestly service of your faith, I rejoice and rejoice together with you all.” Even now, in the day of man, Paul could be poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice produced by the believers' holding forth of the word of life. This means that when the believers hold forth the word of life, Paul has a basic sacrifice on which to pour out himself as a drink offering.

As we consider these verses carefully, we see that whatever we experience of Christ issues out of our faith. Our faith is the sum total of our experience of Christ. The holding forth of the word in verse 16 is the very faith mentioned in verse 17. The conjunction “but” joining these verses indicates this fact. On the day of Christ, Paul desired to boast that the believers held forth the word of life. However, even at present, in the day of man, Paul could have the sacrifice of faith as a basic sacrifice upon which to be poured out. This sacrifice of faith is identical to the saints' holding forth of the word of life.

In verse 16 Paul speaks of boasting, and in verse 17, of rejoicing. In these verses the words boast and rejoice may be regarded as synonyms. Paul could boast in the believers' holding forth of the word of life and rejoice in the sacrifice of their faith. In verse 16 we have the boasting related to the holding forth of the word, and in verse 17 we have the rejoicing related to the sacrifice of the believers' faith. The rejoicing in verse 17 is synonymous with the boasting in verse 16, just as the sacrifice of faith is identical to the holding forth of the word of life. Once again we see that faith here is the sum total of our experience, enjoyment, and gain of Christ.

*(Life-Study of Philippians, Chapter 50, Section 3)*

## Day 4

**1 Thes. 2:7, 11**

**7 But we were gentle in your midst, as a nursing mother would cherish her own children.**

**11 Just as you know how we were to each one of you, as a father to his own children, exhorting you and consoling you and testifying,**

In verse 7 Paul says, “But we were gentle in your midst, as a nurse would cherish her own children.” The Greek word rendered nurse, *trophos*, sometimes means a mother; hence, it may denote a nursing mother (see Gal. 4:19). Cherishing includes nourishing. Therefore, this word not only includes nourishing but also includes tender care.

Even though Paul was a brother, he considered himself a nursing mother. Surely, he had no thought of position, dignity, or authority. The thought of being a nursing mother is very different from the thought of dignity or position. What position does a nursing mother have? What rank, dignity, or authority belongs to her? Her dignity consists in nourishing and cherishing her children, in taking care of them in a tender way.

The word cherish is lovely, a word of utmost tenderness. Paul regarded himself as a cherishing one, not merely as one who serves. He certainly did not control the believers. Neither did he merely serve them. Rather, he cherished them. His care for them was full of tenderness.

In verse 8 Paul continues, “Thus, yearning over you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own souls, because you became beloved to us.” The word yearning indicates being affectionately fond of, affectionately desirous of, like a nursing mother affectionately interested in her child whom she nourishes and cherishes. This was what the apostles did with the new believers.

The apostles not only imparted the gospel of God to the Thessalonians; they also imparted their own souls. To live a clean and upright life as portrayed in verses 3 through 6 and 10, and to love the new converts, even by giving our own souls to them, as described in verses 7 through 9 and 11, are the prerequisites for infusing others with the salvation conveyed in the gospel we preach.

Paul’s word in verse 8 about imparting their own souls to the Thessalonians can be compared to his word in 2 Corinthians 12 about being spent for the sake of the believers. Paul was willing to spend not only what he had, but was willing to spend himself, his very being. The apostles were willing to impart what they were into the believers. This can be compared to a nursing mother giving herself to her child.

Verse 11 says, “Even as you know how we were to each one of you, as a father his own children, entreating you and consoling and testifying.” The apostle was strong in stressing what or how they were (1:5), for what they were opened the way to bring the new converts into God’s full salvation.

In verse 11 Paul likens himself to a father exhorting his children. In cherishing the believers as their own children, the apostles considered themselves as nourishing mothers. In exhorting them, they considered themselves fathers.

*(Life-Study of 1 & 2 Thessalonians, Chapter 12, Section 4)*

## Day 5

### 1 Thes. 1:2-3

**2 We thank God always concerning all of you, making mention of you in our prayers,  
3 Remembering unceasingly your work of faith and labor of love and endurance of hope  
in our Lord Jesus Christ, before our God and Father;**

Romans 15:16 tells us that the New Testament believers are the New Testament priests and that we, the New Testament priests, are priests of the gospel. Then 1 Peter 2:5, 9 says that we as priests should be built up together to be a priesthood, that is, a priestly body. Thus, if we are going to convert sinners into members of Christ, we must do it in a corporate way. Two or three priests must be built up together as a priesthood. As used in the Bible, the word priesthood bears two denotations. First, it denotes the priestly service, and second, it refers to the priestly body, a group of priests built together to become a priesthood. Merely to go out to preach the gospel by yourself is not adequate. You must be built together with others. However, it would not be effective to call together the entire congregation in your locality to promote the priesthood of the gospel. You should simply contact two or three of the saints and be built together with them as a priestly body.

Then you must go to contact people. You should not excuse yourself by saying that you do not have time to do this. You may feel that you do not have time to contact people for the gospel, but you may have time to speak at length on the telephone or to watch television. If you account for your time, you will see that every day you waste a certain amount of time. Especially in speaking on the telephone, we need to learn to shorten our conversations, speaking only what is necessary, in order to save our time.

Saving money is not as important as saving time. Hence, just as we count our dollars and cents in order to save money, we need to count our hours and minutes in order to save time. From the moment we rise up in the morning, we need to budget our time. Then we will see that we do have time to visit people for the gospel. At least two days a week we will be able to spend two hours a day for gospel preaching. We can write to our friends; we can call our friends; we can go to visit people; or we can invite them to our home, either for tea or for dinner. There are many things that we can do to contact people and bring them to the Lord.

First Peter 2:9 says that the priesthood of the gospel is to declare, or tell out, the virtues of our God. Here Peter does not directly speak of preaching the gospel; rather, he speaks of declaring, proclaiming, or telling out, the virtues of God. The virtues of our God are many. God's love is one of God's virtues. His mercy, His grace, His forgiveness, and His dying on the cross for our sins also are His virtues. You and your companions in the gospel priesthood should study all these things and become familiar with them. Then, whenever you meet someone, you can declare to that one some virtues of God, some virtues of Christ, not in a legal way but in a very particular way according to what the Bible reveals.

If you have the heart to begin to practice the priesthood of the gospel, you must study, budget your time, and go to contact people. You can knock on "cold" doors, and you can also knock on "warm" doors. To knock on people's doors does not necessarily mean that you literally go up to a door and knock on that door. That is not the only meaning of knocking on doors. Your writing a letter to your schoolmate can be considered your knocking on his door. To call people on the telephone also is to knock on doors to contact people

*(The Practice of the Church Life according to the God-ordained Way, Chapter 14, Section 3)*



## Day 6

**Col. 1:28-29**

**28 Whom we announce, admonishing every man and teaching every man in all wisdom that we may present every man full-grown in Christ;**

**29 For which also I labor, struggling according to His operation which operates in me in power.**

We should never attempt to take shortcuts in our labor for the Lord. We do not gain any results by taking shortcuts in an attempt to have an easy time. Our labor is not to have an easy time but to gain results. The more effective a work is, the more difficulty it will bring. For example, a farmer spends a lot of time sowing seeds. The more he labors, the more produce there will be, but the more difficulty he will have. A work that has no difficulties is a work that has no results. This can also be compared to running a business. A person who is good at running a business is always busy. A person who does not know how to run a business always avoids trouble. Eventually, he has no customers and nothing works.

Mankind is reproduced one child at a time. There is no need to call a big meeting and teach people how to reproduce. Revival meetings and meetings for cultivating spirituality are the way of Christianity. We do not depend on that way. Rather, we contact people one by one and save people one by one. After we gain one person, we teach him to contact his close friends. Every one of us has several good friends, who become our contacts for the gospel. Instead of seeking to gain many people in a short time, we should work on one person at a time. This way of laboring seems to be slow, but it is actually rather fast and effective.

We need to gain a person so that he takes this way, before we contact a second person. This is the way we gain one person, a second person, and so on. This may seem slow, but it is steady. There is no need to draw attention to our work. We simply gain people one by one.

*(Crucial Words of Leading in the Lord's Recovery, Book 5: Concerning Various Aspects of Church Service, Chapter 2, Section 1)*

In Acts 20 Paul said that he taught the saints publicly and from house to house (v. 20). He also said that he admonished each one of the saints for three years night and day with tears (v. 31). Paul went to the homes of the saints to teach them and admonish them one by one. I lived in Anaheim for many years, but I went to very few homes of the saints to visit them. I feel very sorry about this. We have been off in our service due to the traditional concept. Paul said that he taught publicly and that he also taught from house to house. "From house to house" in Greek means "according to houses." Paul taught, admonished, and warned the saints face to face. By this teaching from house to house to admonish each one of the saints, Paul ministered Christ to the saints to cause them to grow in life.

In the Old Testament, a full-grown priest had to be thirty years old. A person who was twenty-five years old could only be an apprentice, a learner, in the priesthood. The Lord Jesus began His ministry when He was about thirty years old (Luke 3:23), the full age for God's service (Num. 4:3, 35, 39, 43, 47). We need to labor on others by warning them and teaching them in all wisdom until they are full-grown in Christ. We warn each one and teach each one in many, many ways, that is, in all wisdom. The full-grown, matured saints become the active members of the organic Body of Christ, the parts of Christ. In other words, they all become the corporate Christ. To offer the saints full-grown in Christ is to offer the corporate Christ. In such a condition, they have become parts of Christ in full, the constituents of the corporate Christ.

*(The Advance of the Lord's Recovery Today, Chapter 2, Section 3)*