



Sermon Discussion Guide for Groups

The Wisdom and Scandal of Tenderness

Preached by Andrew Arndt

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Summary

Have someone in your group read the following summary aloud.

Out of 1 Thessalonians 2, Pastor Andrew reflects on the remarkable tenderness and humanity that defined the apostle Paul's ministry to the Thessalonians. Paul describes his team not as powerful authority figures, but as nursing mothers warming their children, as fathers encouraging their kids, and even as orphans longing to be reunited with those they loved. This radical tenderness is not a weakness but the very heart of biblical Christianity and the most godlike expression of our humanity.

Pastor Andrew makes the case that the church is most prophetic when it moves toward the pain, vulnerability, and marginalization of the world with compassion and healing. From the early Christians who cared for abandoned children and plague victims, to Jesus touching lepers and restoring a severed ear, to Casper Ten Boom risking His life to shelter Jewish refugees, believers are called to love in ways that are costly and risky. The church, as the bride of Christ, is called to nurture the world with the same infinite tenderness that flows from Jesus Himself.

Key Passages

- 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8
- 1 Thessalonians 2:11-12
- 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20
- James 1:27
- Acts 4:34

Opening Prayer

Open your session in prayer, using the words below or your own

Heavenly Father, we come before you today as a people who want to know you more deeply and love others more fully. As we open your Word together, we ask that you soften our hearts and open our eyes to what you specifically want each of us to receive today. Remove any distractions, any pride, and any walls we have built around ourselves. Let your Spirit move freely among us, and may this time together draw us closer to you and to one another. In Jesus' name, **Amen**.

Getting Going

Allow time for each member to answer the following questions before moving on.

Think of a time when someone showed you unexpected kindness or went out of their way to care for you. What did that feel like, and how did it affect you?

Discussion Questions

Answer as many of these questions as time and interest allow.

1. Pastor Andrew described Paul's ministry as marked by deep tenderness, comparing himself to a nursing mother and a caring Father. How does this image of apostolic ministry challenge or reshape the way you think about Christian leadership?
2. The sermon highlighted how the early church was known for caring for widows, orphans, the sick, and the poor, to the point where pagan emperors took notice. What do you think it would look like for our church community to be known for that same kind of radical care today?
3. Pastor Andrew said that we are at our most human – or our most godlike – when we are most tender with each other. Do you agree with that statement? Why or why not?
4. The sermon pointed to several moments where Jesus chose to touch people He did not have to touch, like lepers and the servant whose ear was cut off. What do you think Jesus communicated through those physical acts of tenderness, and how does that speak to how we should engage with people around us?
5. Pastor Andrew mentioned a movement in the evangelical church that called for the church to 'man up' and become stronger, and he argued that this approach was both theologically inaccurate and practically harmful.

How do you think our culture's definition of strength differs from the kind of strength modeled in 1 Thessalonians 2?

6. Gospel tenderness can provoke persecution, just as Jesus was crucified not only for claiming to be the Son of God but also for including and caring for the wrong people. Have you ever experienced any cost or pushback for loving someone in a way that others found uncomfortable or inconvenient?
7. Casper Ten Boom told the Gestapo that if someone came knocking at his door the next day, he would not turn them away, even knowing it would cost him his life. What do you think gave him the courage to say that, and what would it take for you to love with that kind of costly commitment?
8. Pastor Andrew asked: When was the last time you loved in a way that was risky or costly? Take a moment to reflect. What is an area of your life where the Holy Spirit is calling you to a deeper, more vulnerable love?

Making It Personal

Take the opportunity noted below to apply this week's sermon to your everyday life.

This week, ask the Holy Spirit to show you one person in your life or community who is overlooked, marginalized, or in need of care. Then take one concrete step toward them, whether that is a phone call, a meal, a visit, or simply sitting with them in their pain. Do not wait for a perfect plan. Just move toward them with the tenderness of Jesus, and trust that God will meet you there.

Key Takeaways

Commit to memory one point from the message before dismissing.

- The heart of biblical Christianity is not abstract doctrine or institutional power, but the radical, costly, and deeply human tenderness modeled by Jesus and carried forward by the early church.
- Paul's description of his ministry in 1 Thessalonians 2 uses family metaphors - nursing mother, caring Father, and orphaned friend - to show that genuine gospel ministry means sharing not just a message but your whole life with others.
- The early church was known throughout the Roman world for caring for the poor, the sick, orphans, widows, and the dying. This tangible love was one of the most powerful witnesses to the reality of Jesus.
- We are most fully human, and most fully reflecting the image of God, when we are tender with one another. Tenderness is not weakness; it is the fulfillment of our humanity.
- Gospel tenderness carries a cost. Jesus was crucified in part because He included and cared for people that society wanted to keep out. When the church loves the marginalized and vulnerable, it should expect resistance, but it must love anyway.

Closing Prayer

Have someone from your group close your time in prayer, using the words below or your own.

Lord Jesus, Lord Jesus, thank you for being the most human-human who ever lived, for touching the untouchable, for forgiving the condemned, and for giving your life so that we could be made whole. As we leave, we ask that you would do in us that which we cannot do in ourselves. Give us hearts of flesh where we have hearts of stone. Give us courage to love in ways that are risky and costly. Help us to see the people around us the way you see them, as worthy of tenderness, worthy of time, and worthy of our whole lives. May the streams of your mercy flow through each of us and make glad our city and our world. We ask all of this in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**