



# Sermon Growth Guide

**August 31, 2025**

**Find Your Place**

**1 Thessalonians 2:7-13**

**Key Verse:** 1 Thessalonians 2:8 – “Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.”

**Big Idea:** God has given every believer a place to serve, not out of guilt or duty, but out of love—so that His church may grow and the world may know Christ!

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## Foundations

Paul paints a picture of ministry not rooted in power or prestige but in gentleness, integrity, and deep abiding love. Like a parent with their children, Paul reminds the Thessalonians that the gospel is not just spoken but embodied.

Every believer has a role in God’s family. Scripture teaches that the Holy Spirit gives each of us gifts (Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12) to build up the body of Christ. Finding your place in God’s mission means discovering how your unique gifts, passions, and life story can bless others.

Too often, people serve out of guilt, fear, or obligation. But Paul shows us a better way: service that flows from love, integrity, and the desire to see others grow in Christ. When we each “find our place,” the church becomes a living witness of God’s kingdom.

## Understanding God’s Word

What do you notice about the way Paul and his companions ministered among the Thessalonians? How does Paul’s imagery of being like a mother (v.7) and like a father (v.11) shape our understanding of spiritual leadership and service? Paul says he shared not just the gospel but his very life (v.8). What might that look like in our relationships today? In verses 10–12, Paul highlights integrity and encouragement. Why are these vital in serving others?

## Applying God’s Word

What motivates you most when you serve? Do you see any “bad motivators” in your own heart that you want God to transform? Where do you currently feel most “in your place” in serving God and others? What areas of church or community life stir your passion but remain unexplored? How might you take a next step toward serving out of love rather than obligation?

## Witnessing God’s Word

Imagine what our church would look like if every member joyfully used their Spirit-given gifts. How would that change our impact in the community? Think of someone in your life who hasn’t yet “found their place.” How could you encourage them this week?

Happy Labor Day weekend. It's the fall in COS, and that means folks everywhere are walking into new environments. Students – young and old – are walking into new schools, new grades, new classrooms, with new teachers and new seating assignments. I spoke with a young man who had been home schooled from kindergarten all through junior high, but was now heading into public high school. But heading into new environments isn't only for students. Just last week I spoke with an 87-year-old man who is in the process of selling his home of 40 years and moving with his wife into a retirement community – new relationships, a new environment. I met a 23-year-old woman about to begin her first post-college job in a different state. And some good friends of mine, a married couple, are about to move from the familiar environment of couplehood into the overwhelming but joy-filled world of caring for a newborn.

Whether it's a new school, a new job, a new living situation, or even just a new phase of life, we enter into these places with certain questions on our mind: "Do I belong here? Is this a place for me? If so, where do I fit?" What about church? Do questions like these rise within these walls? You bet they do. Many of you are asking these questions right now – especially if you're new to First Pres. Or maybe you've been here for years and still those questions surface: "Do I belong here? Is this a place for me? If so, where do I fit?" In a big church like ours, it can happen.

That's why we've wanted to look at what it means to Belong. We apprehend a sense of belonging first and foremost to the Lord, as we Find Our Pattern in worshipping Him regularly. When we behold God in worship, we behold our belonging to Him. Last week, we learned that a vital part of belonging comes when

we Find Our People – Christian brothers and sisters to walk with, grow with, and do life with. And finally, today we're exploring what it means to belong as we Find Our Place to serve.

Now for just a few seconds, I wanna put this QR code in front of you. If you scan this with your camera (and yes, I'm asking you to do this right now!) it will take you to the "Find Your Place" page on our website. There you'll find an array of serving opportunities here at First Pres. I just want you to see this now so that (1) you might have an awareness of it, and (2) later you might prayerfully consider where the Holy Spirit might be leading you to serve. If you don't find anything in that list, fill out the form at the bottom and let us know where you feel the Lord nudging you. We want to know and we want to pray for you.

Today is a day of invitation: I want to invite you to find your place – not just in this church (that would be too small), but in the larger mission of God's work in the world. Each of you has gifts. Each of you has something to offer. God wants to use you to make a difference as you serve Him. Serve the Lord. It's a theme all throughout Scripture: Psalm 100 says, "Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth! Serve the Lord with gladness!" (100:2). Deuteronomy says, "What does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul" (10:12). Joshua 24:15 declares, "But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!" And in today's passage, Paul's words to the Thessalonians encourage us toward serving the Lord. Paul, Silas, and Timothy truly found their place. They knew their gifts, they knew their calling, and they used both to serve the Lord.

Before we dive into this passage, let me share my biggest fear in preaching this

sermon on serving God. Two weeks ago, Pastor Greg came across 1 Thessalonians 1:3: “We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope.” Faith, hope, and love — the big three motivators. My fear? That the enemy would hijack you away from those three and substitute this instead: “We remember before our God and Father your work produced by guilt, your labor prompted by legalism, and your endurance inspired by earning God’s approval” (1 Nonsensealoniens 1:3). As we lean into finding our place to serve, let’s pay attention to the right motivators. Thankfully, Paul helps us in verses 7–8: “Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.” Notice the tender tone. Typically, we think of Paul as bold and brash, but here he’s gentle: “Like a mother caring for her kiddos, so we cared for you.” Paul didn’t just preach and walk away; he loved them. He served them like a mother cares for her children.

This is where “finding your place” begins: not with programs, titles, or committees, but with love for people. God calls us to serve not because we have it figured out, but because we’ve been loved by Him and we extend that love to others. Some of you have gifts of teaching, listening, encouraging. Some of you are naturally generous or gifted in quiet, behind-the-scenes work. Whatever your gift, your calling starts here: serve people with gentleness, care, and love. Verse 8 in the KJV says: “Being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear to us.” Isn’t that great? Turn to a neighbor and say, “Ye are dear to me!”

I’m not trying to be warm and fuzzy. This

is serious. Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 13 that if we have eloquence, knowledge, faith, generosity, or even martyrdom, but no love, we have nothing. So, find your place with love for people in mind. Ask: “Who has God put in my life right now that needs care? How might I lovingly serve them with the gifts He’s given me?”

Paul then gets a little defensive: “Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed” (2:9–10). Why does he say this? Because some were accusing Paul, Timothy, and Silas of being like other traveling teachers who sought money, status, or flattery. But Paul reminds them: “We weren’t like that. We worked hard, night and day, so as not to burden you. Our lives backed up our message.” Genuine service, marked by sacrifice, consistency, and integrity.

The world says “make yourself important, even at others’ expense.” But finding your place isn’t about status. It’s about those who haven’t yet tasted the goodness and grace of God, and offering yourself in genuine service to them. When I was younger, I thought finding my place meant waiting for the perfect opportunity to drop from the sky. That led to anxiety. But Paul shows us something better: use what you’ve got, and get started. Don’t wait for the “dream ministry.” God can direct you once you’re moving forward in faith. Start. Move. See what God might do with you.

Are you good with your hands? Use your skills. A teacher? Teach someone. Compassionate? Volunteer. Gifted in hospitality? Invite someone in. Your gifts are no good if unused. Finding your place means stepping forward in faith, offering

your gifts for God's glory and your heart for others. Remember: God isn't playing hide-and-seek with your purpose.

Ephesians 2:10 says, "We are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." God is way ahead of us. We don't have to fear missing a divine placement.

In verse 11 Paul shifts to the image of a father: "We dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory." Like a father, Paul exhorts, encourages, and challenges his children to grow. He wanted the Thessalonians to mature, to walk worthy of God, to make an impact with their lives. That's how we find our place too — not just by doing work, but by letting God work through us. Every small act of faithfulness, every use of your gift, ripples outward into eternity.

So how do you find your place? Start with prayer. Ask God to open your eyes to needs around you and show you how He has gifted you. Pay attention to your passions and burdens — what you love and what breaks your heart. Where those intersect often points to your place. Look for open doors; don't wait for perfect conditions. Serve where you are. Try something! You never know what might be in store. Trust God for the impact. You may never fully see the difference this side of heaven, but God sees and knows.

As James Dobson wrote near the end of his life: "I will consider my earthly existence to have been wasted unless I can recall a loving family, a consistent investment in the lives of people, and an earnest attempt to serve the God who made me." Friends, the invitation is yours: Find your place. It's not about recognition, ladders, or earning God's approval. He

already loves you. To serve the Lord is to release your life to the One who made you, loves you, died for you, and continues to work His wonders in you for His glory.

Closing Prayer: Lord, we thank You for placing each of us in Your family and for giving us gifts to serve You. By Your Spirit, give us courage and faith to step into the work You've called us to, so that in all we do, Your name would be honored and many would come to know Your goodness and grace. Jesus, we belong to You. Have Your way in each of our lives. Amen.