

1. Helping Our Children Become Mature Disciples

Today, we are beginning a new series of topics. In this series, we will be learning how to help our physical and spiritual children become true disciples of Christ. One of the greatest privileges in our lives is to see our children grow and mature and become adult sons and daughters. This privilege will bring even greater joy to our lives as we see our children become mature disciples of Christ.

This is true both for our physical children and also our spiritual children. Spiritual children are those we have led to Christ and helped grow to spiritual maturity or new or struggling Christians that we have spiritually adopted and helped grow to spiritual maturity. Paul describes how he did this in 1 Corinthians 4:15-16 where he said, “For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me.” An instructor was a person that gave others rules to follow and backed up those rules with severe discipline. In contrast, Paul said that a father invites children to grow to spiritual maturity by imitating the father. This means that we are developing our lives so that they are worthy of imitation.

Since we want to help our children become true disciples of Christ, we need to understand the Biblical definition of a disciple. Matthew 13:52 says, “Then He said to them, ‘Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old.’” The word that is translated “instructed” in this verse is the same word that is translated “Make Disciples” in Matthew 28:19-20. In this verse, in Matthew 13:52, we see the following characteristics of a disciple:

- He or she has been instructed in the Word of God
- He or she has become the head of a spiritual household (has one or more spiritual children)
- He or she has a treasure – the Word of God
- He or she is able to bring out of that treasure things that are new – the person is continuing to learn new things from the Word of God
- He or she is able to bring out of that treasure things that are old – the person is able to teach the basics of Christianity

Then, Matthew 28:19-20 tells how we “Make Disciples” of our physical and spiritual children. Those verses say, “...Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen.” There is one command in these verses, “Make Disciples”. There are three action words that tell us how to carry out this command: going, baptizing and teaching them (showing them by example) how to obey those commands. We are not to wait until our children come to us and ask how to become Christians. Instead, we are to take the leadership and go to them and share the Gospel with them repeatedly.

The “going” process is illustrated by the parable of the lost sheep. Luke 15:4-7 says, “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the

wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.” In this passage, we see four things to do in the going process:

1. Go after the one that is lost.
2. Keep going until we find the lost one.
3. Bring the one we have found to the fold with rejoicing.
4. Invite others to rejoice with us over the salvation of the one that was lost.

However, this is just the first stage of helping our children become disciples. The second action word is “baptizing”. Once a physical or spiritual child has placed his or her trust in Christ, we want to help them identify themselves with Christ and His church. Romans 6:3-4 says, “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” Here, we see that baptism is more than just an event where the person is baptized. There is identification with Christ in His death and the understanding that their new identity in Christ means that they are now able to walk in newness of life.

The third action word is “teaching” them to observe (obey) all that Christ has commanded. This means that as physical or spiritual parents we show them how to obey what Christ taught through our example. The teaching and the example must go together if we are going to see our children become mature disciples of Christ. This involves an extended period of time of walking alongside our children and showing them how to put the Word of God into practice in their daily lives. Deuteronomy 6:5-9 gives us the process for showing children how to obey when it says, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” Here, we see that the process of teaching physical or spiritual children how to obey includes the following things:

1. Loving the Lord with our whole heart, mind, soul and strength.
2. Having the Word of God in our hearts so that it determines our thoughts, words and actions.
3. Teaching and showing our children how to obey the commands of Christ throughout the day.
4. Showing that the Word of God controls our actions and our thoughts by what we say and do.
5. Writing the commands of Christ where they will be seen throughout the day to remind both us and our children of what Christ commands us to do.

Paul, Silvanus and Timothy did certain things to help the new Christians in Thessalonica grow and become disciples. 1 Thessalonians 2:7-9 says, “But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to

impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us. For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God.” We see that they showed the care of a nursing mother by:

- Gentleness
- Greatly loving (cherishing)
- Sharing their lives
- Being available night and day

Paul, Silvanus and Timothy also showed the example that is provided by a godly father. In 1 Thessalonians 2:10-12, we read, “You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.” We see that they showed the example of a godly father by:

- Providing a holy, just and blameless example
- Encouraging
- Comforting
- Urging them to live lives worthy of God

Because Paul, Silvanus and Timothy had provided the care of a nursing mother and the example of a godly father, we see the way that the Thessalonians had received the Word of God. 1 Thessalonians 2:13 says, “For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.” The Thessalonians had seen that the words of Paul, Silvanus and Timothy were in agreement with the example that they were showing by their actions. As a result, they recognized that the Gospel and the Word of God were able to change and transform their lives. Now they were seeing the Word of God working in their own lives and transforming them as they were becoming obedient to the Word.

One of the greatest privileges that we have as Christians is to help our physical and spiritual children grow and become mature disciples of Christ. That happens as we provide a godly example for them to follow. Paul said to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 11:1, “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.” We can only help our physical and spiritual children grow and become mature disciples of Christ as we give them a godly example to follow. If we are making it our goal to imitate Christ, they will have an example to follow as they learn to imitate Christ. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your physical and spiritual children how to imitate Christ by your example.