

## 8. Helping Our Children Develop the Care of a Nursing Mother

In our last topic, we discussed helping our children learn to work with the Holy Spirit by helping others develop a true commitment to Christ. Today, we will be discussing the topic of how we help our physical and spiritual children learn to work with the Holy Spirit by learning to develop the care of a nursing mother. This means that we will show our children how to develop a great love for those that they lead to Christ and for those who are struggling Christians.

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.” Paul, Silas and Timothy show us the attitudes that we want to help our physical and spiritual children develop in their lives in order to be effective in helping new Christians begin to grow.

First, we see that we want to show our children how to be gentle with new or struggling Christians. The word that is translated “gentle” is only used two times in the New Testament. The other place this word is used is in 2 Timothy 2:24-25 where we read, “And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth.” In this verse, we see that the servant of the Lord is to be gentle. We also see that this gentle attitude is to be toward all people including those that are in opposition.

These verses in 2 Timothy also point out several other characteristics that will be shown by a person that is gentle. Such a person will not quarrel. The person is able to teach. The person is patient. The person corrects with humility. As you can see, these are all important characteristics that we want to help our children develop in their lives if they are going to provide the care of a nursing mother to a new Christian. Paul showed how he modeled this attitude when he said in Galatians 4:19, “My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you.” This shows us from the example of Paul that we are to model these attitudes for our children as we work with them and with other people. As they see us model these characteristics in our own lives, they will learn from our example.

Second, we see that we want to show our children how to cherish new Christians as a nursing mother cherishes her children. The word that is translated “cherish” is used one other place in the New Testament. That is Ephesians 5:29 where we read, “For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.” The basic word means *to keep warm*. In this verse, we see that we all take care of our own bodies. We feed ourselves and we keep ourselves warm. The word can also mean *to cherish with tender love*. Ephesians 5:29 shows us that Christ is our model as He cherishes the church with tender love. We show our children how to cherish new Christians with tender love by the way that we cherish them with our tender love.

Third, we see that we want to show our children how to have the concern that comes from a genuine

love for new Christians. 1 Thessalonians 2:8 says, “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.” Paul and the rest of the team had such an affection for the Thessalonians that they were willing to sacrifice their lives for them. In fact, Acts 17:1-10 show us that the team was in such danger that the new Christians helped Paul and Silas escape from Thessalonica in the middle of the night so that they would not be injured or killed.

The last phrase of the verse tells why Paul and the team were willing to sacrifice their lives for the Thessalonians. They said that the Christians in Thessalonica had become very dear to them. We have mentioned in an earlier topic that the Greeks had different words for different kinds of love. The Greek word “agapao” is the verb form of the word that Christ used when He gave us the new commandment to love one another as He has loved us. The word that is translated “dear” in 1 Thessalonians 2:8 is “agapetos” and means *dearly beloved or worthy of love*. As we take root in the love of Christ, then His love will flow through our lives to others. That is why it is so important to pray that our children will take root in the love of Christ (see Paul’s prayer in Ephesians 3:14-21).

Paul and the team that ministered with him developed this same concern for the Christians in all of the cities that they visited. Some years later, as Paul was traveling toward Jerusalem, he was warned that he would be bound and imprisoned by the Jews. The other Christians begged Paul not to go to Jerusalem. We see the response of Paul in Acts 21:13 where we read, “Then Paul answered, ‘What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.’” Here, we see the attitude that we want to show our children by our example if we want them to develop the same attitude. We need to show that we are willing to make whatever sacrifices are necessary in order to help our physical and spiritual children in their spiritual growth and development. That way we show them by our own example how to make the sacrifices needed to help others grow and mature in their spiritual lives.

Fourth, we see that we want to show our children how to share their lives with new Christians because of the love that they have for those new Christians. 1 Thessalonians 2:9 says, “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.” When a physical child is born, the parents provide the needed care for that child night and day. In the same way, we want to show our children how to share our lives and be available to new Christians when they need help whether that happens during the day or in the middle of the night. Christians, especially new Christians who have come out of a difficult background or had previously been involved in demonic activity before becoming Christians, may experience great fears in the middle of the night and need someone to minister to them during those difficult times. We help our children learn how to share their lives with people when encouragement is needed by our example.

Fifth, we see that we want to show our children that love gives us the strength for the labor and toil that is a part of helping new Christians grow. Paul and the team with him encouraged the Thessalonians to remember their labor and toil. These words used together speak of experiencing

difficult labor, hardship and distress in order to help others in their spiritual growth. The new Christians in Thessalonica had seen that Paul and the team had experienced difficult labor, hardship and toil while they were at the city of Thessalonica. They had seen that the Lord had given them strength so that they were able to help the new Christians grow.

In the same way, we model for our children that the Lord is the source of our strength. We encourage them to memorize verses like Isaiah 40:31 which says, “But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.” We regularly share with them how Christ spent time with the Father as we share verses like Mark 1:35 which says, “Now in the morning, having raised a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.” Christ modeled the importance of time spent with the Father in prayer. Our children will see that time with the Lord is important to us as they observe at least a part of our prayer life.

Sixth, we see that we want to show our children how to avoid being a burden to new Christians as they help those new Christians grow. Paul and the team with him worked hard so that they would not be a burden to any of the new Christians. Here, we see that Paul and the team chose to serve the new Christians rather than expect the new Christians to serve them. Paul and the others modeled what Christ taught in Matthew 20:25-28 where we read, “But Jesus called them to Himself and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you let him be your slave--just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.’” In the same way, we show our children how to serve others as we serve them and as we take them to serve with us as we serve others.

Our children will learn to become effective as they make disciples as we show them how to show the care of a nursing mother to new or struggling Christians. They will learn to show that care as we show that care to them as they grow in their spiritual lives. We will also be able to show them how to show that care as we take them with us as we minister to new or struggling Christians. We follow the instructions that Paul gave in 1 Corinthians 11:1 when he said, “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.” The care of a nursing mother can only be learned by example. It can never be learned in a classroom. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your physical and spiritual children learn to show the care of a nursing mother as they help others begin to grow in their spiritual lives.