

Becoming a Disciple-Making Church 2 - Spiritual Parenting

1 Thessalonians 2:1-14 For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain. ² But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict. ³ For our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit. ⁴ But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. ⁵ For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness -- God is witness. ⁶ Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. ⁷ But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. ⁸ 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. ⁹ ¶ 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. ¹⁰ You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; ¹¹ as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, ¹² that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory. ¹³ ¶ 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. ¹⁴ For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans,

All of us grew up in families. Some of those families were single-parent, some were both. Some were raised partly by another relative. Some families were happy, safe places. Some were harsh and unkind. Some were a mixture. A lot of who you are today was shaped by your years in your family.

The same is true as Christians. Throughout the New Testament, the church is described as a family. We know that much, on nearly every page, fellow-Christians are called brethren – brothers and sisters. Paul often calls us the household of God

Ephesians 2:19 ¹⁹ Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

Galatians 6:10 ¹⁰ Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

So much of what we turn out to be as Christians is determined by the spiritual health of our church family. A healthy church is a church which takes the call to discipleship seriously, and realises that part of being a family is being spiritual parents to those younger than us in the faith. But not only is God our Father, and we brothers and sisters, but within the church, the relationship of discipleship means we act like parents to those we disciple.

3 John 1:3-4 ³ For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth. ⁴ I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.

Galatians 4:19 ¹⁹ My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you,

1 Corinthians 4:14-15 ¹⁴ ¶ I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you. ¹⁵ 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.

Philemon 1:10 ¹⁰ I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains,

^{KJ} 1 Timothy 1:2 ¶ To Timothy, a true son in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

^{NKJ} Titus 1:4 ¶ To Titus, a true son in our common faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior.

When a church takes up its role as a disciple-making church, you have relationships like this

occurring, where one takes up the role of spiritually parenting another. You see this in this passage where Paul describes how his actions, and those of his fellow-workers, were like those of a parent when they were among them. In some ways, he was like a mother. In some ways, he was like a father. But the results were that the Thessalonians were a church full of disciples, who themselves became disciplers.

*1 Thessalonians 1:5-10 For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake. ⁶ **And you became followers of us and of the Lord**, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, ⁷ so that you **became examples** to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. ⁸ For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything. ⁹ For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, ¹⁰ and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.*

They first became followers of the Lord, and followers of Paul and his fellow-workers. Then, as they grew, they became examples to others. The Christians in their province looked over at them and said, look at the Thessalonians. They used to be idol-worshippers, now they serve the Lord. We can see it in their lives!

1 Thessalonians 2:14 ¹⁴ For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans,

So this is in some ways a model church. God has recorded this for us as an example of what we ought to include in our body life to be a healthy, and indeed, exemplary church. I want us to see five things about this church's experience, and the work of Paul and his companions among them.

I. The Word Was Preached With Authority and Received With Humility

1 Thessalonians 1:5 For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.

When Paul says that the gospel did not come in word only, he is implying that it is possible for that to occur. It is possible for the truth of the Bible to come in word only. The truth could be given like static, plain information that does not grip anyone, challenge anyone, encourage anyone, or edify anyone. Instead, Paul says, the knowledge came with power and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance. As Paul preached and taught, there was a spiritual enablement. Paul had been spiritually gifted. And as he was yielded to the Holy Spirit, the Word came not in a dry, abstract, faraway way, but with the blessing of the Spirit.

We have evidence from another passage that Paul wasn't the best of public speakers. He wasn't an orator. He was undoubtedly an excellent writer, as we can tell from his epistles. But perhaps he was simply an average speaker. And yet in spite of that averageness, he was so surrendered to the power of the Spirit, so filled with loving desire for his listeners, that the Spirit blessed it. The Word came in power also.

A church needs to pray for its preachers. And one of the things you pray for your preachers is that they will be Spirit-filled men, so that when they preach, it will not be in word only. You pray for holiness of life in them. You pray for piety and consecration. You pray for compassion and soft, breaking hearts within them. I wonder what would happen to a church, if its people began with one voice, calling on God to let the preachers be full of the Spirit.

But it wasn't only their preachers who were Spirit-filled.

1 Thessalonians 2:13 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.

They themselves not only had Spirit-filled preachers, but they had a submissive, humble attitude towards the Word preached. They looked past Paul and his weaknesses. They looked past his inabilities. They looked at what he was preaching, and what did they do? They welcomed the Word as God's Word.

Think about that image. The Word of God came knocking at their hearts' door. They answered, "Who is it?"

"It's Paul, preaching the Bible."

"Oh, come on in, Lord." They didn't think Paul was a god, they regarded the words he spoke as representing God's Word. God's powerful Word which creates change, and affects people and transforms them in ways they don't understand. Just one verse, one truth from Scripture will be taken by the Spirit to powerfully change you. Haven't you noticed that sometimes what changes you is single sentences in a sermon? You might agree with all of it, but you don't walk away remembering everything. It's usually one sentence, that the Holy Spirit uses in a powerful way to often shape you in amazing ways.

For a church to become like this, is for it to be willing to receive the Word from men, recognising it as far more than the words of a man.

You can tell, there was a relationship of trust here between the Thessalonians and Paul. They were no doubt discerning, and checked to make sure Paul was being true to the Scriptures, but they also granted him a place in their lives where they trusted Him to rightly divide the Word. No one would have grown under Paul if they had held him in perpetual suspicion. Children cannot thrive if they suspect their parents of being deceitful or against them.

II. Paul Loved Them, He Did Not Seek To Please Them 2:3-6

1 Thessalonians 2:1-6 For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain. ² But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict. ³ For our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit. ⁴ But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. ⁵ For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness -- God is witness. ⁶ Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ.

Paul says that even though they had been abused previously, they did not draw back and say the things which would keep them out of trouble. They remained bold and spoke the gospel to them.

Look at verse 3 again. They taught not from error, nor from a sinful motive, nor in some kind of trickery. Paul was transparent and true. Verse 4 tells you that they had enough integrity to be entrusted with the gospel. God wasn't going to give this gospel to self-seeking men. So he says, we speak, not as pleasing men, but as pleasing God, who tests our hearts.

Paul says, God is our judge, He sees what's in us, and what we did to please God.

Verse 5 develops the thought. They didn't use flattering words, trying to butter them up, so that they

would give them money. Paul was not using entertainment and manipulative technique to fleece the sheep. Nor in verse 6, did he seek glory – fame, and honour and a big ego from his service.

To summarise, Paul is saying, we were not self-serving amongst you. We didn't try to use you, or manipulate you, or get stuff from you, or be famous through you. No, we sought to please God, and told you what you needed to hear.

They loved them, they did not seek to please them. You see, ultimately, a man-pleaser is a self-pleaser. The person who is always trying to please man, says things that will be liked. He wants to be liked. He wants to be admired; he wants favours in return. So he will only treat you well insofar as it will help him. But that is not loving. It seems pleasant; it seems nice to have someone give you the counsel you want to hear. It seems nice to have someone encourage you to keep being disobedient. But such a person is not loving you, they are loving themselves at your expense. Paul wasn't like that. He loved them; he didn't seek to please them.

Any parent knows the difference. A lot of the time, pleasing your child, and being loving are one and the same thing. But there are enough times when what would please your child is not what he or she needs, or deserves, or will be good for them. Very often, what your child wants is downright destructive. And if you are a permissive parent, where you let your child have his own way, because it just cuts down on trouble for you, or because that way he won't make a scene, or because you just hate confronting the will of your child - at those moments, who are you pleasing? And who are you loving the most?

The Bible is clear what kind of love it is to just keep pleasing your child, even when he is wrong.

Proverbs 13:24 ²⁴ He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him promptly. Proverbs 29:15 The rod and rebuke give wisdom, But a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.

So bringing that into the church, a disciple-making church understand this principle. If you are to lead others in the faith, if you are going to help people grow, you need to be willing to tell them what they **need** to hear, not just what they **want** to hear. Because just like children, we want our own way. And when someone in authority, or more mature than us tells us that our own way is wrong, we want to throw a tantrum. Christians who love each other are not going to back away just because there might be some tension or awkwardness or difficulty in telling others what is needful.

To be a spiritual parent, you have to get over the hope that everyone will like you all the time. Parents lose that pretty quickly. You know that you can't be popular with your kids all the time. But the Mom and Dad who keep the standard, and lovingly, consistently keep it and enforce it, will ultimately have the loyal respect and love of mature children.

Now that doesn't mean we're running around seeing who we can poke in the ribs. Because the next thing we learn about in how this church grew was that ...

III. Paul Had the Gentleness and Sacrifice of a Mother

1 Thessalonians 2:7-9 But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children.

⁸ 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. ⁹ ¶ 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 tells you how they spoke the Word to the Thessalonians - gently. As gentle as that nursing mother holding that newborn in her arm, cradling, rocking, hovering, brooding. This is an image of deep, longing love. That's what verse 8 says, "affectionately longing for you. you had become dear to us". Paul was not a knowledge dispenser, or a cool lecturer. He loved these people. He loved them enough that they could break his heart, because he'd let them in.

He had the gentleness of a mother, as well as the sacrifice of a mother. He says, we were pleased to not only impart the gospel to you, but our own lives. For Paul, making disciples was a pouring of himself into the lives of others. He gave of himself, so much so, that he laboured night and day. For this baby church, he supported himself, no doubt working impossible hours so that he could be with them and encourage them to grow.

That sounds a lot like a mother, doesn't it? What does a mother give up for her children? Everything? What is a mother willing to do for her children? Just about anything. Mothers give of themselves, and give and give, because of that longing for their children. They give up their sleep; they change dirty diapers and wipe up who knows what. They fish things out of toilets, and put plasters on bloody knees, and wipe tears, and share their own ice cream, and drive the children here and there for their extra-murals and friends. Mothers give up their lives for their children. No mother says to her two-year-old, "Today is Tuesday. I don't do Tuesdays. You're just going to have to make a plan today. I need my time." No mother leaves her infant crying at home and goes out for a cup of coffee. No mother has raging arguments with her three -year-old about who gets some me-time.

And so in the church, when we help each other grow, this image of a mother should guide us. We are gentle with each other, and sacrificial. We pour our lives into the Christiahs we are discipling. We give up some of our week nights. We accept that we'll get phone calls at odd times. We're ready to walk them through the same problem again and again. We know we'll be cleaning up the same mess several times. We don't abandon people because they didn't get it in one session. We don't reject people because their growth is slow. We don't spurn people because they make demands on us. We remember that someone did it for us. Instead, we pour ourselves into someone as long as it takes, until they are on their grown-up spiritually and ready to parent someone else.

No doubt there is someone in this church who you could be this way to. Some of you are just starting out and you need a spiritual parent in your life before you can become one. But some of you are on your feet. You've learned to solve your own spiritual problems with Scripture. You've grown to where you understand and are seeking to meet your spiritual responsibilities. And you're ready to pass some of that on to someone else. But it's not just words. It's pouring yourself into them. You need both love and truth. Love without truth is hypocrisy. Truth without love is brutality.

In fact, we see some more of that balance in Paul's next statement in verses:

IV. Paul Had the Firmness and Encouragements of a Father

1 Thessalonians 2:11 ¹¹ as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children,

Paul says we were not only like a mother, we were like a father. We encouraged you, we comforted you and where necessary, we charged you. That word means we urged you, we insisted, we implored. Fathers set the course, and then encourage and comfort. Mothers are known for their gentleness and sacrifice. Fathers are known for setting the goal, pointing the way, and then helping their children along the way. Sometimes, a father will have to take his child, and get face-to-face,

and charge him. “You need to stop doing this. You need to be this way, not that way.: Fathers are just built with a hardness that says, “This is the way. Come on. Don't complain. Let's go.” And if the Dad is Spirit-filled, he encourages his children. He cheers them on. He congratulates them, and when they fall, he comforts them, he picks them up.

A disciple-making church is not so full of sacrificial love that we lose focus on what we're trying to do – which is to glorify God by making disciples. So we are firm and resolute and focused. We know where people need to go, and we are determined to get them there. But as we heard recently, that needs to be done with a lot of encouragement, a lot of comfort, a lot of strengthening. Love with truth, truth with love.

V. Paul Had The Example of a Mature Parent

1 Thessalonians 2:10 ¹⁰ You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe;

That's an amazing statement. We behaved justly, devoutly and blamelessly among you. Our lives were holy, just and without clear issues. People could not point a finger at us and say, but what about this? What about that massive inconsistency? What about how Paul uses his tongue? What about Paul's use of money? What about Paul's complaining, irritable attitude? What about Paul's sloppy and lazy work ethic? No, no one could say that.

And when it comes to parenting, there is a simple principle to helping mature your children: be less childish than they are! If you are more childish than your children, chances are, they won't be very mature, even when they are adults in physique. Sounds like a simple principle, but you'd be surprised. If the problem is that your child is screaming “mine”, it doesn't help to scream 'mine' louder and pull harder. For that matter, it doesn't help to show that attitude in the rest of your life when they are watching. If the problem is throwing tantrums when they don't get their way, you want to show a different attitude when you don't get your way. If the problem is beating up their sibling when they are annoyed, they don't learn anything else if you beat up people around you when you are annoyed, even if its just with your words. In other words, you don't change anything by adding more of the same. You don't mature your kids by displaying your own brand of childishness.

You don't mature Christians by mirroring back to baby Christians their own selfishness and fleshliness. You help them out of that by showing them something different. You show them a different way. The way of pleasing God, walking in the Spirit, being rooted and grounded in the Scriptures. You show them self-denial, not more self-indulgence.

So here's the model that makes for a healthy church family. The Word is preached with authority, and received in humility. We speak the truth to each other, not to please one another, but to love one another. As we do that, we do it with the gentleness and sacrifice of a mother, pouring ourselves into each others' lives. We do it with the firmness and encouragement of a father – charging and comforting. And we live the Christian life out in front of each other with a growing maturity.

- 1) Are you praying for the Word to come in power? Do you receive it as the Word of God?
- 2) Are you willing to give and receive the truth even when it hurts?
- 3) Are you willing to nourish others, sacrificing for them.
- 4) Are you willing to take others under your wing?
- 5) Are you willing to be firm and encouraging?
- 6) How's your example before other believers?