

1 Thessalonians 2:1-16
(Proverbs 1:7-9&23; Matthew 19:13-15)
“Like a Nursing Mother; Like a Father with His Children”

Introduction

Name any Nobel Laureate, whether in literature or physics, economics or chemistry or peace. If you can name one, how has that person deeply influenced your life? How many past Secretary Generals of the UN can you name, and how have they influenced you? How many Pulitzer Prize winners? How many US presidents? Now, name the schoolteacher who made you want to learn, or the coach who encouraged you and taught you to give your best.

Of course, when we are asked to name those who have most deeply influenced us, who have done the most to shape our lives, the list usually begins with our parents, our mothers and fathers who first loved us and believed in us and taught us to be honest and true, and to try to do our best. What a blessing it was for those of us whose parents tried to live and model for us what they sought to instill in us. Of course they were not perfect, of course they made mistakes, but we saw them try day after day to love us well and teach us how to live this incredible gift of human life.

On this Mother’s Day, I want not only to salute our mothers and thank you for all you have done to show us the mother love of our Father God, but to ask what makes an effective mentor, an effective disciple-maker – because after all that is what a Christian parent is to be, and what every Christian, whether single or married, parent or childless, is supposed to be for those relationships entrusted to us. What might it look like if more of us took up the task of serving as mentors to those who are without mothers and fathers, or who need to develop in areas where their parents can no longer help them grow? I had wonderful parents who got me started in life, but I needed others along the way that took me under their wings and taught me things that I could never have learned from my parents.

We are drawn to truths that are lived out for us with clarity and consistency. We grow more by watching lives than by listening to sermons. In fact, without the lives, we will never believe the words. We need models and mentors if we are to grow in any area of life, especially those areas that matter the most. Often our culture fails to value what is most important. If we truly paid people for their value to us, teachers would be among the highest paid, and parents would be honored above celebrities. Sadly, too many parents – especially mothers – are made to feel that what they are doing, how ever necessary, is rather menial and not something of the highest order of significance. Yet the apostle Paul, in describing the essence of his life and ministry, could find no higher descriptive metaphor than that of parent.

In chapter one of this letter, Paul writes: “You became imitators of us and of the Lord” (1:6), “so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia” (1:7). In our text, Paul fleshes this out and shows us from his own experience what it is to be a faithful mentor.

Body

1. What are the marks of a faithful mentor?

A faithful mentor will nurture you like a mother (2:7).

The emphasis here is on gentle, self-sacrificing affection, providing a safe environment for growth. Paul writes that he did not minister for money or for glory (2:5-6), nor did he make apostolic demands as he might have (2:6), but rather he was “gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her children” (2:7). He writes, “we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us” (2:8). Here is the tender, relational dimension of mentoring.

A faithful mentor will challenge you like a father (2:11).

The emphasis here is on encouragement, challenge, pressing out of the nest and into action. Paul does not only emphasize his nurture of his disciples, but his labors for them and his fatherly challenge to grow up and step out in obedience to the gospel of grace. “For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you to his own kingdom and glory” (2:11-12). As a father, he called his disciples to set out on pilgrimage with a vision of the future, the coming “kingdom and glory” that we begin to taste here and now but that will one day come in power and glory. He not only nurtured, but challenged.

2. What are the aims of a faithful mentor?

You receive the gospel as the very word of God (2:13).

The emphasis is on one’s relationship to the Scripture, and especially to the gospel of grace. Only when the gospel is received as from God himself can it begin to do its transforming work. Perhaps the greatest weakness in the greater part of the church in the west is at this point: a failure to receive the gospel as God’s word, and a view of it as one thread in the religious tapestry of humanity, one story among many that happens to be ours and helps define our view of things. Paul writes, “We also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God ... you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God which is at work in you believers” (2:13). As a mother, Paul nurtured them with the word.

You begin to be transformed by the gospel and take on the family character (2:14).

Transformation is the aim of it all. In chapter one, Paul writes that he knows God is

at work in the lives of his readers precisely because “our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction” (1:5). In fact, the church throughout the Empire has heard of their faith, Paul writes, “how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1:9). As a father, Paul challenged them to live the truth, to press it into action. This is the proof that we are God’s children.

Conclusion

Here is the apostolic pattern of leadership and mentoring: Paul takes the oldest model in the world, the role of a loving parent, and says in effect, “This is how I have sought to help you grow up in the Lord. Now help one another in the same way.” What an honor it is to a parent, entrusted with the shaping of people destined for eternity. What a privilege to be a follower of Jesus, also entrusted with people placed in our lives so that we might show them the nurturing love of a mother and the challenging love of a father.

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