

1 Thessalonians 2:7-12

Intro: May 20, 2007 Parental Pastoring

If you've been thinking of a career change, here's a job description which many of you do fill. Before you apply, be aware – there are a lot of the hurdles.

POSITION: Mother or Father, Mom or Dad

JOB DESCRIPTION: Long term, team players needed, for challenging work in a chaotic environment.

Candidates must possess excellent communication and organizational skills and be willing to work variable hours, including evenings and weekends, frequent 24 hour shifts on call. Some overnight travel required, including trips to primitive camping sites on rainy weekends and endless sports tournaments. Travel expenses not reimbursed. Extensive courier duties also required.

RESPONSIBILITIES: Must be willing to be hated, at least temporarily, until someone needs \$5. Must be willing to bite tongue, repeatedly. Also, must possess the physical stamina of a pack mule and be able to go from zero to 60 mph in three seconds flat in case the screams from the backyard are not someone just crying wolf. Must face stimulating technical challenges, such as small gadget repair, mysteriously sluggish toilets and stuck zippers. Must screen phone calls, maintain calendars and coordinate production of multiple homework projects. Must have ability to plan and organize social gatherings for clients of all ages and mental outlooks. Must be indispensable one minute, an embarrassment the next. Must handle assembly and product safety testing of a half million cheap, plastic toys, and battery operated devices. Must assume final, complete accountability for the quality of the end product!

POSSIBILITY FOR ADVANCEMENT & PROMOTION: None. Job remains in same position for years, without complaining, constantly retraining and updating your skills, so that those in your charge can ultimately surpass you

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE: None required. On-the-job training offered on continually exhausting basis.

WAGES AND COMPENSATION: None. You pay them! Offering frequent raises and bonuses. A balloon payment is due when they turn 18 assuming college will help them become financially independent. When you die, you give them whatever is left. The oddest thing about this reverse-salary scheme is that you actually enjoy it and wish you could only do more.

BENEFITS: While no health or dental insurance, no pension, no tuition reimbursement, no paid holidays and no stock options are offered; this job supplies limitless opportunities for personal growth and free hugs for life if you play your cards right.

Ah, the joys of parenting. It is a job like none other. Many a person has turned to their spouse at those trying parental moments and in exasperation uttered, "What were we thinking?" The response is not repeatable from the pulpit. Parenting is that joyous trial, that aggravating pleasure that God gives us to continue His work of sanctification in each of our lives ... and we wouldn't give it up for the world. Now, with Mother's Day behind us and Father's Day next month, why bring this up now?

In our passage for this morning, Paul, in 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12 describes his work as a pastor in parenting terms. That should not come as a surprise, for the family is God's picture describing our relationship with him and with each other. We are not a voluntary gathering of like-minded individuals, but a family brought together by God's grace. While we may not culturally adopt the old tradition of calling one another brother and sister, our membership vows call us to recognize our familial unity.

But this passage goes a bit further than just a reminder that we are a family. This passage describes a specific aspect of the church family that for me to preach on it today may appear self-serving and is not easy for me to express. As Paul is often forced to do, he defends his work as a pastor to those whom he has served. It may have been that he, after leaving Thessalonica, came under criticism by some in the church, so he reminds them of what they have seen and should not forget.

Because the church is a family, I have the dubious distinction to fill the parental role, to be, to each and every one of you, a parent. Like it or not! You may think Billy's pastor is much nicer, but this is the family God has given you. So this morning I am going to, reveal a bit of myself to you, gently reminding you of who I am as your pastor and how I view my calling here to Cornerstone.

It may be as embarrassing as watching your parents being amorous in the kitchen ... and you're 35! But while it may be awkward, it is important for all us to function as a family and to have this little chat. If you are a visitor, this should be a good insight into our little family here. READ 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12. This passage pictures pastoral parenting with motherly tenderness and fatherly guidance.

THE PASTOR PARENTS WITH MOTHERLY TENDERNESS

2:7-10

Motherly tenderness gives of oneself v7-9

Giving should be affectionate

Paul is not too masculine to paint himself as a gentle mother.

He is gentle; a word that often was used in conjunction with that of a nurse corralling crying children or a teacher with stubborn students, or a medicine which soothes an ache, but most often of a parent with their children. This is made more specific as he refers to himself as a nursing mother.

In the ancient world, it was thought that nursing a child could put the mother at risk, so often women would hire a wet nurse to care for her baby. Such a person was seen as willing to put her life on the line for the child. But the image here is not just of a hireling, for this nurse cares for her *own* children.

The care given is not providing three meals and a roof over their heads, but the word means to heat or keep warm. It was used of birds sheltering their young with their feathers. The picture is very maternal as the mother holds her little one close to the warmth of her breast, wrapping her arms securely around her baby.

Verse 8 – he was affectionately desirous of them, a rare phrase that was found only in the parenting context, such as on a funerary inscription for a young child, whose parents grieved their separation from him by his early demise. These are very demonstrative terms, expressing the deepest compassion

In opposition to the negative caricature in the previous verses of those who flatter, are greedy or seek their own glory (v6), Paul came to them as one who was very affectionate.

He was a loving mother who cared for her children. It takes time and energy to care for children. Paul did not turn his converts over to baby-sitters; he made sacrifices and cared for them himself. He did not tell them to “read a book” as a substitute for his own service.

As everything can be purchased now on eBay, it was only a matter of time that someone thought of selling a mother’s touch. Dan Baber honored his mother by posting an auction on eBay titled, “Best Mother in the World.” The winning bidder would receive an e-mail from his mom that Baber promised would “make you feel like you are the most special person on the Earth.”

How did people respond to Baber’s offer? “During the auction’s seven-day run, 42,711 people—enough to fill most baseball stadiums—took a look. Ninety-two bid, pushing the price from a \$1 opening to a \$610 closing.”¹ What so many long for is to be found in your pastor. Yes, it is a scary thought. Come to Mama!

Interestingly, Paul begins not with his theological credentials, not with his vision of the risen Christ, not with authority or power, but with tenderness, a mother’s touch.

The truth is people don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.

Paul reminds his readers of what they experienced – his affectionate giving.

Giving without being a burden

Paul’s imagery of the nursery at feeding time reminds them that unlike many charlatans, he didn’t feed on them; he fed them. A nursing mother imparts her own life to the child. A nursing mother cannot turn her baby over to someone else, but must be in her arms, next to her heart. The nursing mother eats the food and transforms it into milk for the baby.

Likewise the pastor feeds on the Word of God and then shares its nourishment with the congregation so they can grow. Otherwise, the child will be malnourished.

Paul describes the constancy of the pastor’s work. It is labor, meaning to *blow* or *cut down*. Toil refers to overcoming difficulties. These words imply wear and tear, of going to exhaustion.

In Paul specific situation, as he was beginning this church, he worked night and day, a phrase which means from before the sunrises to sunset, so that they would not have the financial burden of his support. It was common in Paul’s day for traveling philosophers to sponge off their recent converts; Paul wanted to give without demanding payment. He was entitled to it, though, as 1 Corinthians 9:7-12 states.

The picture here is of sacrifice. There is a painting in the Art Institute in Chicago called *Charity*; it is a classical allegory, depicting loving devotion in human form. It is a mother, with one child at her breast and another tugging her hair. Her face, however, exudes

serenity (remember, it's a painting, not a photograph, its fictional). In the lower portion of the picture is a pelican with a hatchling by its side. The pelican is pecking at her breast, drawing blood for her young one to drink, using the ancient picture of self sacrifice, bathing her hatchlings in her own blood so they will live.

There is no sense of detached professionalism here, a problem with contemporary clerical concepts, where the pastor is a CEO, not a shepherd. Tenderness squeezed out of many pastors, as they seek success through technique rather than self-giving love for the people. My job here is not just to share with you some thoughts I have about God. Day in and day out, I am called upon to celebrate with your good times and mourn with your losses. You are not clients or customers, you are not just students who come and go. I give you not my paltry knowledge or just my time. I joyfully give you my life. For that reason I ache when you struggling at home with your teen, I sense the turmoil of the wayward spouse, the struggles for meaning and purpose in life hit me very personally.

When you leave this family, it is like I am sending another child off to college. When you depart without a word, it is like I have a teen that's run away from home. I am not a detached specialist who marks his time and bills accordingly. Like a parent churning at 2am as to his child's choices, I ruminate over what lies ahead for each of you. I have 270 kids to fret over.

I say this not to elicit pity. I would be angry if you took this to mean you should leave me alone and not disturb me. I am not a china doll that needs to be kept in a locked case. You need to know that there is a cost to what I do and it is eternally worth it.

This past year has been hard for all of us. We did not just lose an associate. Families were ripped apart, lives shattered, friendships ruptured. While it may be tempting to play the *what-if* game, it produces nothing but more anguish. For all our sorrows, there is joy as we have a new home, but that does not mean the stress of the past is gone, we've only added new stresses to our family.

I do not know what the statistics are, but I know the anecdotal wisdom is that a pastor who goes through a staff upheaval is greatly weakened and when it is a seismic quake as we have had, it leaves lasting scars. The other event in a pastor's life that often causes them to collapse is ... moving into a new building. We've done both in six months.

I remind you what you already know (that is what Paul is saying here (1,2,5,9,10,11)).

I am very tired. I have joyously given what I thought best. At times I have failed tremendously, but as is often the case with my personality – I am often wrong but never in doubt. But at the end of the day I am running on empty. So now I have the opportunity to proclaim to you the gospel of God, not just in words, but in my life, in how I respond and live it out before you, showing you how God is sufficient for all things.

I look out and I know your lives better than you know mine. I am hard pressed to find one family among us who is not, at this time, going through a lot of pain. There are marriages broken and others shaken, there are little ones draining their parents patience and older ones draining their parents pocketbooks. There are job stresses and personal calamities. What's happening? Life.

When growing up, one's parents rarely pull back the curtain to reveal their own struggles. It is thought they must hold it all together for the kids, and often that is wise. There is still much I hold close that, as your pastor, I reveal only to a few. But on this rare moment of transparency I want you to speak clearly. On Friday evening the Session meet, a group of more supportive men I can not imagine, and we have determined what must happen next.

Later this summer I will be taking a sabbatical from Cornerstone. I characterized the fifteen years here as fun. I am alarmed that the joy is diminished. But what has not dissipated is my love for you. I need a rest. My tiredness, my inattention, my distraction is by no means my lack of care and love for all of you

Motherly tenderness gives an example v10

It is frightening to use the words that Paul does here in v10, as he calls on the church and on God to give witness to his exemplary life. But what he claims is not over the top. This list sets in contrast the flattery, greed and self seeking mentioned in v5.

- The word holy here is not the typical word meaning to being set apart by God. Rather this speaks of a conscientious regard for God's law, of pious conduct.
- Righteous refers to right conduct before others. The two words put together often were used to speak of our standing before God and people as being, not perfect, but commendable. There is a sense of integrity, of an unimpeachable character.
- The third adjective, blameless, again does not refer to one's standing before God, but having an unassailable character. An adverbial form of this word was found by archeologists on Christian tombs in Thessalonica. Before the common term *Christian* was used to describe a believer, *amemptōs* was affixed to the grave to speak of their consciousness lifestyle.

Again I mouth these words cautiously, but can speak with confidence that my life, in word and action has pointed you to Christ. When God has used me, I sought to give him glory, when I failed; I sought your forgiveness and his grace.

Through all this I don't want your condolences. I don't speak of my struggles as though they trump yours. Instead I mention them to remind you of my own very humanness, that as a pastor, as with our parents when we are young, we forget that they too have feet of clay. I speak of this to call you to pray for me, to continue to come along side me. But also to lead by transparency, to be willing to work hard and admit my struggles.

THE PASTOR PARENTS WITH FATHERLY GUIDANCE

Fatherly guidance gives direction

I will move quickly through this, for this is what you most clearly see and experience from me each week from the pulpit, in Bible studies or in counseling. Yet I trust you have also always felt the tenderness as well. While Paul compares himself to a nursing mother when speaking of cherishing his converts, he compares himself to a father when he speaks of instructing them. While some traditions call their pastor's *father*, Paul's gender inclusive language is no reason that you should refer to me as father or mother Chris, despite my androgynous name There are differences between mothers and fathers, be they acculturated or genetically acquired.

Mothers tend to worry about their children's safety and security; fathers focus on their children's success. A mother frets over things like tender loving care while fathers push their children hard because they know we live in a world where failure is easy and success difficult. Both are absolutely necessary in raising children and in serving the Lord.

As a father to his children, so Paul, and in a much more fumbling fashion, I speak. The three verbs are parallel, giving a full picture of what I am called to do with you.

To exhort, *parakaleo*, was used of exhorting troops who are about to go into battle. It most often speaks of enabling a person to meet a difficult situation with confidence.

To encourage denotes the soothing side of exhortation. This word was used of Jesus' speaking to Lazarus' grieving family in John 11. It is a restorative word to the brokenhearted.

My job is not to make you feel better, but do better. I do not administer anesthesia to dull your pain, but the will to see what God will do through you. How is this done? Urge!

To urge has a note of severity in it. It is the more virile, robust, masculine of the terms here.

This is not the case of the mild-mannered preacher getting up before a group of mild-mannered people and urging them to be more mild-mannered.

Fatherly guidance gives purpose

What is the goal of the guidance?

My goal as your pastor has nothing to do with the size of this church, the health of our budget or the extent of our programs. What I am called to do is to exhort, encourage and urge you to lives that please not me or each other, but God.

The past several weeks many of us have been rather task oriented. As my wife reminds me, tasks are good; they make the world a better place. But our purpose here as a family are not tasks, but they are each other, that we walk in a manner worthy of God.

If you live in fear of how that can ever happen, that for all my urging, you will stumble and fall in your walk – here's some good news from a very fallen friend, notice the encouragement in the final phrase – he calls you into his kingdom and glory.

Go ahead and stumble and fall, for our God will lift you up, dust you off and set you on your way. How will he do that? Often simply by my words each week as your parenting pastor.

So for all of you who are mothers and fathers, for all of you who have or have had mothers and/or fathers, I speak to you as your mother and father, as one whom God has given me the privilege to tenderly give you my life, to guide you with my words, all for the great goal, of walking worthily of Christ.

¹ Focus on the Family: Citizen (*July 2002*), p. 12