

Shared
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1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

What are the qualities of a good parent in how they interact with their children?

We sometimes hear someone say, *“I love that kid like they are my own kid”* or *“that person was like a second Mom (or Dad) to me.”* We can have a “parenting influence” even on those who are not our actual children.

Based on scripture, we have no indication that the Apostle Paul had any biological children. It IS clear he had MANY “spiritual children” including the believers in this little “church plant” in Thessalonica. In this passage Paul described how a pastor is like a parent to their congregation. It’s a text every pastor should take to heart and a wonderful “measuring stick” for a congregation that is seeking a pastor. I believe it also applies to every follower of Christ in how we share the gospel and disciple others even if we are not pastors.

Here’s the truth that should change us from this text: Christ-pleasing pastors will be like loving parents to the “spiritual children” they lead, but “spiritual parenting” applies to every follower of Christ as we reach and disciple others for Him.

Let’s go verse by verse and identify the characteristics of a “spiritual parent.”

1 For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain.

- Paul’s relationship with them had been productive and healthy. We read last week in chapter one that these “spiritual children” were thriving.

2 But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict.

- “Paul and Silas had been beaten and humiliated at Philippi; yet they came to Thessalonica and preached.”¹ They didn’t quit when things were rough.
- When things are rough, dedicated parents keep going for the sake of their children. The same applies to “spiritual parents.” Persevering in the face of opposition and rejection is a part of the job description for pastors. Laypeople who share our faith and disciple others can’t be quitters either.
- Paul had “boldness” in sharing the gospel and making disciples.
- A loving parent will be “bold” when it comes to what is best for their child (even if it’s embarrassing for the child!) [i.e. “A hockey Mom and a pitbull.”]
- A loving “spiritual parent” is equally bold when it comes to sharing the gospel and discipling their “spiritual kids.”

3 For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, **4** but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.

- A dedicated parent places what is best for their child ahead of everything and that is especially true of what they feed that child.
- A “spiritual parent” must be equally committed to “feeding” biblical truth.
- “Error” means teaching/sharing anything that is contrary to scripture.
- “Impurity” means adding your own “spin” to deceive the flock.
- Pastors must be determined to please God not people by teaching biblical truth and they can’t “fake” before God because He sees beyond appearances to the motives of the heart.

5 For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness. **6** Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ.

- Sadly, some look at their kids as “trophies” to enhance their own image.
- A dedicated parent wants what’s best for the child not what’s in it for them.
- Even back in Paul’s day there were hucksters and con artists masquerading as pastors. When we look at a pastor, we should seek to discern any signs of greed or a desire for fame or “glory from people.”
- Paul’s actions during his visit proved he wasn’t in it for the cash. Verse nine indicates that Paul paid his own way by doing “tent making” rather than asking for a love offering to cover his expenses. That doesn’t mean pastors shouldn’t be paid a salary (see 1 Tim. 5:17-18.) In this case, this congregation was poor (2 Cor. 8:2) so he paid his own way while there.
- Parents should be self-sacrificing, so should a “spiritual parent.”
- A parent also shouldn’t be a “pleaser” to be the child’s “buddy.”
- Pastors shouldn’t preach “flattery” just to be popular with the congregation. That applies to us “non-vocational” ministers too. Give it to them “straight.”

7 But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. **8** So, being affectionately desirous of you, 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.

- A “nursing mother” gives of her “own self” when she is feeding her child. That baby can do nothing for the mother, it’s all about the baby.
- “Spiritual parents” must show this same tenderness to “baby Christians.”
- Warren Wiersbe: *“The nursing mother eats the food and transforms it into milk for the baby. The mature Christian feeds on the Word of God and then shares its nourishment with the younger believers so they can grow (1 Peter 2:1–3). A nursing child can become ill through reaction to something the mother has eaten. The Christian who is feeding others must be careful not to feed on the wrong things himself.”*ⁱⁱ
- “Baby Christians” should be “fed” with the gentleness of a nursing mom.

- Here, Paul shifts gears. No one says to a nursing baby, “Go to your room and think about what you’ve done!” At about age two that has to change.
- Gentle compassion for “baby Christians” must be balanced with a firm, fatherly example about Christian conduct. Look at verses 10-12:

10 You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. **11** For you know how, like a father with his children, **12** we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

- How does “righteous, blameless” (not perfect) conduct apply to parenting?
- It’s hard to call out bad behavior in your children if they know it’s “do as I say and not as I do.” For a pastor or lay leader take that up about 10X!
- Every follower of Christ should strive to live a righteous life, and leaders will be held to a higher standard of conduct. That might make it feel impossible to be a “spiritual parent.” Who can live up to that standard?
- We need some balance in applying this text. There are no perfect parents or pastors because there are no perfect people.
- Paul just said he had been “holy, righteous, and blameless” yet in Romans 7:22-25 he said: ²² *I love God’s law with all my heart.* ²³ *But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me.* ²⁴ *Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death?* ²⁵ *Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord. So you see how it is: In my mind I really want to obey God’s law, but because of my sinful nature I am a slave to sin.*ⁱⁱⁱ Is this the same Paul? Some have speculated Paul was describing himself before salvation. I believe he was being transparent about the fact that even after we are saved we still struggle with our sin nature and Christ is the answer to overcoming that tendency.
- No human can be perfect or we wouldn’t need Christ. “Blameless” doesn’t mean sinless, it means “above reproach.” (1 Tim. 3:2) “Above reproach” means striving to live above criticism not achieving sinless perfection.
- We may have the best relationship with our parents humanly possible but no one ever says their parents are perfect. Instead we might say, *“They aren’t perfect but they strive to ‘walk in a manner worthy of God.’”*
- They do their best and Christ does the rest. I believe Paul was saying that in verse 10: *“I did my best and counted on Christ for the rest.”* Then in verses 11 and 12: *“Speaking as your ‘spiritual father’ I’m asking you to live that same way: do your best and count on Christ for the rest.”*
- None of us should use verses like this as a club to beat up the pastor. Pastors and parents shouldn’t drive themselves into an early grave because they are human. We’ll never be sinless but we can be blameless.

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- Christ-pleasing pastors will be like loving parents to the “spiritual children” they lead, but “spiritual parenting” applies to every follower of Christ as we reach and disciple others for Him. We may not be called to fulltime ministry but we are all called to be “spiritual parents” to someone.
- What do good parents and good “spiritual parents” have in common?
 - They don’t quit when times get tough they hang in there.
 - They are committed to what is best for the “child” and willing to be as BOLD as needed to deliver what’s best.
 - They only feed their “child” the “pure milk” of God’s word.
 - They are self-sacrificing and not in it for themselves.
 - They are not “pleasers” that compromise what is best for the “child.”
 - They nurture “baby Christians” with gentleness.
 - They strive to be an example that is “above reproach” and like a firm, loving father they “exhort” their “spiritual children” to also live in a manner worthy of Christ.
- That is a terrific standard to measure a good pastor. It should also be the standard we strive for in our own role of sharing the gospel and discipling others as the Great Commission has called us to do.

ⁱ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [*The Bible exposition commentary*](#) (Vol. 2, p. 164). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

ⁱⁱ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [*The Bible exposition commentary*](#) (Vol. 2, p. 165). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

ⁱⁱⁱ Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [*Holy Bible: New Living Translation*](#) (Ro 7:22–25). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.