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Developing Family Ministry

**Growing Godly Families Series
Manual 3**

by
Duane L. Anderson



Serve and Equip
sveq.org

Developing Family Ministry

1 & 2 Thessalonians

**Growing Godly Families Series
Manual 3**

Growing Godly Families Series

The “Growing Godly Families Series” is the result of weekly topics which were prepared and e-mailed over a period of years. This series is especially designed for those who are already Christian leaders; to give them Biblical principles for the development of additional godly spiritual leaders. Because they give Biblical principles for growth in spiritual leadership, they are also helpful for Christians that want to grow and become godly spiritual leaders.

Mark 10:43-45 says, “Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” In these verses, Christ taught that godly spiritual leaders do not have the attitudes of leaders in the world. Worldly leadership is based on power and authority and is designed to benefit the leader and place him above others. In contrast, godly spiritual leadership is designed to help every Christian reach their full potential in Christ. The following three statements give a summary of three styles of leadership.

If we drive people, we will drive them until they can get out of our way.

If we lead people, we will be able to lead them as far as we have gone ourselves.

If we serve people, we will help each person develop their full God-given potential and equip each person for the ministry that Christ has prepared for every Christian.

In the world, people often measure success by the amount of things that they accumulate before they die. However, they are unable to take any of those things with them when they die. Mark 8:36-37 says, “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” Success produces rewards until we die, but it produces nothing for eternity.

In contrast, God measures effectiveness by our faithfulness and obedience. Matthew 6:19-21 says, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Effectiveness produces eternal rewards. Mark 10:29-30 says, “So Jesus answered and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time--houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions--and in the age to come, eternal life.’” 1 Corinthians 10:31 says, “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” The Growing Godly Families Series is designed to make your life count for eternity by bringing glory to God.

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1.

Helping Our Children Become Mature Disciples

Today, we are beginning a new series of topics. In this series, we will be learning how to help our physical and spiritual children become true disciples of Christ. One of the greatest privileges in our lives is to see our children grow and mature and become adult sons and daughters. This privilege will bring even greater joy to our lives as we see our children become mature disciples of Christ.

This is true both for our physical children and also our spiritual children. Spiritual children are those we have led to Christ and helped grow to spiritual maturity or new or struggling Christians that we have spiritually adopted and helped grow to spiritual maturity. Paul describes how he did this in 1 Corinthians 4:15-16 where he said, "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. Therefore I urge you, imitate me." An instructor was a person that gave others rules to follow and backed up those rules with severe discipline. In contrast, Paul said that a father invites children to grow to spiritual maturity by imitating the father. This means that we are developing our lives so that they are worthy of imitation.

Since we want to help our children become true disciples of Christ, we need to understand the Biblical definition of a disciple. Matthew 13:52 says, "Then He said to them, 'Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old.'" The word that is translated "instructed" in this verse is the same word that is translated "Make Disciples" in Matthew 28:19-20. In this verse, in Matthew 13:52, we see the following characteristics of a disciple:

- He or she has been instructed in the Word of God
- He or she has become the head of a spiritual household (has one or more spiritual children)
- He or she has a treasure – the Word of God
- He or she is able to bring out of that treasure things that are new – the person is continuing to learn new things from the Word of God
- He or she is able to bring out of that treasure things that are old – the person is able to teach the basics of Christianity

Then, Matthew 28:19-20 tells how we "Make Disciples" of our physical and spiritual children. Those verses say, "...Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.' Amen." There is one command in these verses, "Make Disciples". There are three action words that tell us how to carry out this command: going, baptizing and teaching them (showing them by example) how to obey those commands. We are not to wait until our children come to us and ask how to become Christians. Instead, we are to take the leadership and go to them and share the Gospel with them repeatedly.

The "going" process is illustrated by the parable of the lost sheep. Luke 15:4-7 says, "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance." In this passage, we see four things to do in the going process:

1. Go after the one that is lost.
2. Keep going until we find the lost one.
3. Bring the one we have found to the fold with rejoicing.
4. Invite others to rejoice with us over the salvation of the one that was lost.

However, this is just the first stage of helping our children become disciples. The second action word is “baptizing”. Once a physical or spiritual child has placed his or her trust in Christ, we want to help them identify themselves with Christ and His church. Romans 6:3-4 says, “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” Here, we see that baptism is more than just an event where the person is baptized. There is identification with Christ in His death and the understanding that their new identity in Christ means that they are now able to walk in newness of life.

The third action word is “teaching” them to observe (obey) all that Christ has commanded. This means that as physical or spiritual parents we show them how to obey what Christ taught through our example. The teaching and the example must go together if we are going to see our children become mature disciples of Christ. This involves an extended period of time of walking alongside our children and showing them how to put the Word of God into practice in their daily lives. Deuteronomy 6:5-9 gives us the process for showing children how to obey when it says, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” Here, we see that the process of teaching physical or spiritual children how to obey includes the following things:

1. Loving the Lord with our whole heart, mind, soul and strength.
2. Having the Word of God in our hearts so that it determines our thoughts, words and actions.
3. Teaching and showing our children how to obey the commands of Christ throughout the day.
4. Showing that the Word of God controls our actions and our thoughts by what we say and do.
5. Writing the commands of Christ where they will be seen throughout the day to remind both us and our children of what Christ commands us to do.

Paul, Silvanus and Timothy did certain things to help the new Christians in Thessalonica grow and become disciples. 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.” We see that they showed the care of a nursing mother by:

- Gentleness
- Greatly loving (cherishing)
- Sharing their lives
- Being available night and day

Paul, Silvanus and Timothy also showed the example that is provided by a godly father. In 1 Thessalonians 2:10-12, we read, “You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.” We see that they showed the example of a godly father by:

- Providing a holy, just and blameless example
- Encouraging
- Comforting
- Urging them to live lives worthy of God

Because Paul, Silvanus and Timothy had provided the care of a nursing mother and the example of a godly father, we see the way that the Thessalonians had received the Word of God. 1 Thessalonians 2:13 says, “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.” The Thessalonians had seen that the words of Paul, Silvanus and Timothy were in agreement with the example that they were showing by their actions. As a result, they recognized that the Gospel and the Word of God were able to change and transform their lives. Now they were seeing the Word of God working in their own lives and transforming them as they were becoming obedient to the Word.

One of the greatest privileges that we have as Christians is to help our physical and spiritual children grow and become mature disciples of Christ. That happens as we provide a godly example for them to follow. Paul said to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 11:1, “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.” We can only help our physical and spiritual children grow and become mature disciples of Christ as we give them a godly example to follow. If we are making it our goal to imitate Christ, they will have an example to follow as they learn to imitate Christ. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your physical and spiritual children how to imitate Christ by your example.

Helping Our Children Become Reproducing Disciples

In our last topic, we gave a summary of the process of how to help our physical and spiritual children become mature disciples. We began by looking at the Biblical definition of a disciple. We saw that to develop such disciples we follow the process given in Matthew 28:19-20 to make disciples. Then we saw from 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12 the characteristics that must be present in our lives if we are going to give our physical and spiritual children an example to imitate. In this topic, we are going to give a summary of the process to help our children become reproducing disciples.

In 1 Thessalonians 1:5-10, we read, “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. And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. 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. 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, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.” In these verses, we are given a summary of the process for developing reproducing disciples.

In these verses, we see that God wants people to grow and become reproducing disciples. At the time Paul wrote this letter to the Christians in the city of Thessalonica, they had only been Christians for a few months. However, we see from this first chapter that their lives were being transformed and they were already beginning to have an impact throughout the entire surrounding area. It should also be our desire to see our children become reproducing Christians that begin to have an eternal impact in the lives of those to whom they minister. We will see in these verses what God wants all Christians to become.

First, we see that God wants people to make true decisions for Christ. Verse five tells us how that happens. That verse says, “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.” In this verse, we see that people will make true decisions for Christ when:

1. The Word of God is proclaimed in power.
2. The Word of God is accompanied by the ministry of the Holy Spirit.
3. Those who share the Gospel have full assurance that the Holy Spirit will work in the lives of those who are hearing the Gospel.

Second, we see that God wants people to become disciples. Verse six says, “And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit.” In this verse, we see that people grow and become disciples as they:

1. Follow the example of godly leaders.
2. Follow the example of the Lord by following the Lord’s people.
3. Receive or take hold of the Word of God by learning and obeying the Word.
4. Learn to experience the joy of the Holy Spirit.

Third, we see that God wants people to learn to become examples to others. Verse seven says, “So that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe.” Here, we see that

the Christians in the city of Thessalonica were so changed and transformed that people throughout Macedonia (Northern Greece) and Achaia (Southern Greece) saw their example of the way that Christ transforms the lives of those who become obedient to Christ. In 1 Timothy 4:12, we see a list of some of the areas that we want to be examples so that others can learn from our example and become an example themselves. That verse says, “Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” In this verse, we see that we want to provide an example that will help our physical and spiritual children:

1. Learn to become examples in word.
2. Learn to become examples in conduct.
3. Learn to become examples in love.
4. Learn to become examples in spirit.
5. Learn to become examples in faith.
6. Learn to become examples in purity.

Fourth, we see that God wants people to learn to become reproducing disciples. Verse eight says, “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.” Here, we see that the Thessalonians were sharing their faith wherever they traveled throughout both northern and southern Greece. Acts 20:20-21 tells us how we help our physical and spiritual children become reproducing Christians. Those verses say, “How I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” In these verses, we see that we want to provide an example that will help our physical and spiritual children:

1. Become equipped to teach all that is helpful.
2. Become equipped to show others how to serve the Lord.
3. Become equipped to teach others how to serve the Lord.
4. Become equipped to do these things publicly through on-the-job training.
5. Become equipped to train others to do these things from house to house through on-the job-training.
6. Become equipped to share the Gospel with people of different cultures.
7. Become equipped to explain the meaning of repentance toward God.
8. Become equipped to explain the meaning of faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

Fifth, we see that God wants people to make a true commitment when they repent and place their faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Verses nine and ten say, “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, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.” We see that when people make a true commitment they:

1. Turn to God and come to Him through Christ.
2. Turn from idols (any, person, idea, object, etc. that is more important to them than God).
3. Begin to serve God and not just make a profession of faith.
4. Have an eager expectation of the return of Christ.

Because Paul, Silvanus and Timothy had helped the Thessalonian Christians become reproducing disciples, they were able to give a prayer of thanksgiving, a prayer of remembrance and a prayer of assurance as they prayed for these Christians. In 1 Thessalonians 1:2-4, we read, “We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father, knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God.” We see in verse two that these men were continually thanking the Lord for what He

had done in the lives of the Thessalonians that had become Christians. We see in verse four that these men knew that the Lord was transforming the Thessalonians because they had been chosen by God.

However, it is in verse three that we see the three reasons why these men could give such thanks to God. 1 Corinthians 13:13 says, “And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” The three characteristics of a maturing Christian are a strong faith, a strong hope and a strong love. We see that these men could give thanks as they saw all three present in the lives of the Thessalonians.

First, they thanked God for their work of faith. Their faith is described in 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12 where we read, “Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power, that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.” In this second letter, Paul, Silvanus and Timothy prayed that they would continue to work out their work of faith through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Second, they thanked God for their labor of love. 1 Thessalonians 4:9 says, “But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another.” These men went on to pray that their love would continue to increase as they ministered to others.

Third, they thanked God for patience of hope. That patience of hope is described in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 where we read, “Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.” The Thessalonians had patience as they waited for Christ to return.

It is a great joy to help our physical and spiritual children become reproducing disciples of Christ. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to become mature, reproducing disciples of Christ.

Helping Our Children Work With the Holy Spirit in Evangelism

In our last topic, we gave a summary of the process of how to help our physical and spiritual children become reproducing Christians. Today, we are going to begin to expand on that summary. In 1 Thessalonians 1:5, we read, “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.” The first two things that we see in this verse is that we want to help our children learn to proclaim the Gospel in power and accompanied by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. That will be the focus of our topic today.

In Luke 24:49, we read, “Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.” Acts 1:8 says, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Then, in Acts 2:1-4 we see that the Holy Spirit came and filled the Christians and the following verses go on to show us that they went out to share the Gospel with boldness in many different languages. Later, in Acts 4:31, we read, “And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.” Throughout the book of Acts, we see that the Christians prayed that they would be able to speak the Word of God with boldness.

As a result, the first thing that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn about becoming reproducing Christians is that they can only witness with boldness as they learn to pray for boldness and yield their lives to the Holy Spirit so that He gives them boldness. Paul told the Ephesians what to pray for him in Ephesians 6:19 when he said, after telling them to pray always, “And for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel.” We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to pray for boldness as they share the Gospel with others. We also want to model that for them by praying the same thing for our own lives.

However, as they pray for boldness, we also want to show them how to work with the Holy Spirit in evangelism. John 16:8-11 says, “And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.” In these verses, we learn to show our physical and spiritual children how to work with the Holy Spirit in evangelism. Only as they learn how to work with the Holy Spirit will they become effective in sharing the Gospel with others.

First, we see that the Holy Spirit convicts the person that is not a Christian of sin. Notice that verse 8 does not say sins. Many Christians think it is their responsibility to convince people who are not Christians that they have committed many sins. The result is that they try to do this through their own efforts, because they are not working with the Holy Spirit. In the process of talking about sins, they usually totally ignore the one sin that keeps people from receiving eternal life. That one sin is defined in verse nine, where we see that the Holy Spirit convicts and convinces the person that is not a Christian of the sin of not believing in Christ.

When Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden, God only gave them one sin that they could commit. Genesis 2:16-17 says, “And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.’” In Genesis 3:1-6, we see that they

committed that one sin. They immediately experienced spiritual death even though physical death did not happen to Adam until more than 900 years later. Genesis 3:7-8 says, "Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings. And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden." Spiritual death is separation from God. As soon as they committed that one sin, they immediately hid themselves from God.

Their relationship with God was totally changed. Christ told the disciples the night before He was crucified that there was only one way that people could now come to the Father. John 14:6 says, "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.'" Mankind will continue to be separated from God until a person individually comes to God through Christ. That is why the one sin that keeps people out of heaven is failure to come to the Father through Christ. This means that a person can only come to the Father by repenting of their sin of unbelief in Christ. The theme of every evangelistic message in the book of Acts is the message of the death and resurrection of Christ.

When Paul gave his final instructions to the elders in Ephesus, he summarized the evangelistic message that he had shared with them and had shown them how to share that message with others. Acts 20:20-21 says, "How I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." Paul said that he had shown these leaders both publicly and from house to house how to work with the Holy Spirit in sharing the Gospel. They had been shown how to work with the Holy Spirit by sharing the message of sin rather than sins. That message included repentance toward God (turning from their sin of unbelief and turning to God) and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. We equip our children to learn to work with the Holy Spirit by helping them learn to share verses that speak about the sin of unbelief.

Second, John 16:10 says that we work with the Holy Spirit as we share the message of righteousness. That verse says, "Of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more." 1 Peter 2:21-24 says, "For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: 'Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth'; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness--by whose stripes you were healed." The Holy Spirit convinces the person that is not a Christian that Christ is the Righteous One that can pay the penalty for sin by His death and resurrection. We help our children learn to work with the Holy Spirit by equipping them to share verses that talk about the fact that Christ was without sin and could pay the penalty for their sin by His death and resurrection.

Third, John 16:11 says, "Of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged." God promised Adam and Eve immediately after they sinned that a descendent would come from Adam and Eve that would crush the head of Satan. Genesis 3:15 says, "And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel." When Christ said on the cross in John 19:30, "It is finished", the judgment of Satan was completed. The Father also showed that He was satisfied with the payment for sin by raising Christ from the dead. Peter began his sermon on the day of Pentecost by saying in Acts 2:23-24, "Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it." We equip our children to work with the Holy Spirit by sharing verses

that show that Satan was judged by the death and resurrection of Christ and that those who continue to follow Satan will share in his judgment.

As we equip our children to work with the Holy Spirit by helping them to learn and share verses about sin, righteousness and judgment, the Holy Spirit will use those verses to convict those who are not Christians of these things. Then the Father will speak through the Word that our children have shared to draw the person that is not a Christian to Christ. In John 6:44, Christ said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day."

Our physical and spiritual children will learn to work effectively with the Trinity as they share verses that convict of sin, righteousness and judgment. The Word of God allows the Holy Spirit to convince people of their sin of unbelief and of their need to repent of that sin. As they share verses about the death and resurrection of Christ, the Father will draw people to true faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord promises in Hebrews 4:12, "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

As we equip our children to share the Word of God, instead of their own words, the Lord will use His Word to penetrate the heart, instead of just the mind of people who are not yet Christians. In 1 Corinthians 14:24-25, we read, "But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you." May the Lord richly bless you as you equip your physical and spiritual children to work with the Holy Spirit in evangelism.

Helping Our Children Work With the Holy Spirit by Making Disciples

In our last topic, we discussed helping our children learn to work with the Holy Spirit in evangelism. Evangelism is the first step in helping people become disciples. Matthew 28:19-20 says, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen.” Evangelism happens as we are going. Then we complete the process of making disciples as we help them to identify with Christ and His body and then teach them to obey all that Christ commanded. That will be the focus of our topic today.

In 1 Thessalonians 1:6, we read, “And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit.” In this verse, we see that the Thessalonians became true disciples of Christ. We see that this process happened in their lives because Paul, Silvanus and Timothy were concerned to help them become mature Christians and not just make decisions for Christ. In Matthew 28:19-20, we have one command, “Make Disciples” and three action words that tell how to carry out that command: going; baptizing; and teaching them to obey all that Christ commanded. That is exactly what these men did to help the new Christians in Thessalonica grow spiritually.

First, we see that those three men provided an example for the new Christians to follow. New Christians do not know how to follow the Lord in many areas of their lives. Paul and the other New Testament Christians realized that they must provide an example for new Christians to follow, especially as they took the Gospel to areas where many of those becoming new Christians did not have a Jewish background where they were familiar with the Old Testament. In addition, whether the new Christians were Jews or Gentiles, none of them were familiar with the teachings of Christ.

As a result, they had to take these new Christians with them and show them how to live as well as teach them what Christ taught. Acts 17:3-4 tells about the ministry of Paul and the team in Thessalonica. In those verses, we read that Paul was, “Explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, ‘This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.’ And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas.” We will see in more detail in two later topics from 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12 that Paul, Silas and Timothy provided the love of a nursing mother and the example of a godly father to help these new Christians grow.

Christ took the disciples through a five-stage process to help them grow, mature and become disciples. This five-stage process included, Four Calls and a Commission. We will give a summary of that process here since Christ told the disciples in John 13:34-35, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” This commandment was only given after Christ had spent more than three years showing them by His example how He loved them. We see that Christ prepared them for the time when He would return to heaven by giving the following calls and commission:

Call One – Come and See – John 1:39-46

Christ invited the men that would later become His disciples to just go places with Him and see how He lived and what He taught (this period lasted for almost one year). During this period, Christ just invited the future disciples to observe Him as He led them by love. Christ

ministered in love as the disciples observed.

Call Two – Come and Grow – Mark 1:16-20

Christ invited the disciples to a new level of commitment as He invited them to go with Him so that He could show them how to become fishers of men (this period lasted for about nine months). During this period, Christ gave the disciples the opportunity to begin to participate in ministry with Him. Christ ministered in love as the disciples both observed and participated.

Call Three – Come and Serve – Mark 3:13-14

Christ invited the disciples to a new level of commitment as He invited them to come and be with Him and also sent them out to preach (this period lasted for the final twenty-one months before the death and resurrection of Christ). During this period, Christ sent out the twelve and later the seventy for tours of ministry. During this period, in addition to ministering in love as the disciples both observed and participated, Christ also gave the disciples the opportunity to do while He observed and encouraged.

Call Four – Come and Shepherd – John 21:15-17

Christ had already told the disciples that He was returning to heaven and had made them full partners in ministry with Him. Here, Christ told them that as full partners in ministry, they were to feed His sheep and shepherd His flock. Christ said that they would now provide an example to others, as He had done for them, and that He would continue to serve them from heaven.

The Commission – As you are going Make Disciples – John 20:21, Matthew 28:19-20

Christ sent them out to reproduce their lives in others in the same way that Christ had reproduced His life in them. They were now equipped to become the heads of spiritual households (definition of a disciple in Matthew 13:52) and reproduce other heads of spiritual households (definition of a reproducing disciple - 2 Timothy 2:2).

Paul, Silas and Timothy had followed this same process in Thessalonica. Even though they were forced to leave Thessalonica because of persecution, Paul and the team had done the same things that Christ had done in equipping the Thessalonian Christians to become disciples. They had shown these Christians by example how to live as Christ lived and love as Christ loved. In fact, Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10, “But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more.” These new disciples had learned to love as Christ loved them from example.

Second, we see that the new disciples in Thessalonica had become followers of the Lord. Just as Christ had helped the original disciples learn to follow Him, Paul and the team had helped these new disciples learn to follow Christ. Even though the team had been forced to leave because of persecution, the Thessalonian disciples knew how to follow the Lord. As we will see in our next topic, they were now helping others learn to follow the Lord as they became reproducing Christians.

Third, we see that the Thessalonians also suffered much affliction as they learned to follow and serve the Lord. 2 Thessalonians 1:5-6 says, “Which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer; since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you.” Because Paul knew that was true he prepared Christians in every place for persecution. Acts 14:22 says, “...strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, ‘We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.’” The reason that

Paul and those who traveled with him prepared every Christian for tribulation and persecution was due to the fact that they wanted them to see that the Lord would go with them through those times. This is an essential lesson that all Christians need to learn if they are going to be effective as they serve the Lord and not give up when opposition comes.

Fourth, we see that the Thessalonian Christians had also learned that the Lord had given them the privilege to minister to others and shepherd them. We see this ministry of shepherding other Christians in 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10 where we read, “But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more.” Here, we see that the Thessalonian Christians had been taught by God to love others. As a result, they had learned to minister in love to other Christians throughout the region of Macedonia.

Fifth, we see in the verses just quoted that the Thessalonian Christians also realized that the Lord had commissioned them to make disciples in other areas. We see that they were already reaching out to others throughout the entire region of Macedonia. At the same time, we see that Paul and the team were encouraging them to reach out even more as they shared the love of Christ with others. In addition to loving those who had already placed their trust in Christ, they were also encouraged to continue to share their faith wherever they went. 1 Thessalonians 1:8 says, “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.” The Thessalonians were making a real impact for Christ wherever they went.

Just as Paul understood the process that Christ had used to make disciples and had followed that same process with the Thessalonians and others, we also want to help our children learn to work with the Holy Spirit to make disciples. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to work with the Holy Spirit to “Make Disciples”.

Helping Our Children Work With the Holy Spirit by Becoming Examples

In our last topic, we discussed helping our children learn to work with the Holy Spirit as they make disciples. Today, we will be discussing the topic of how we help our physical and spiritual children learn to work with the Holy Spirit by becoming examples that others can follow. Here, we see that we want to help our children learn to become an example of the transformation that Christ makes in a person as He transforms our lives.

In 1 Thessalonians 1:7, we read, “So that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe.” Paul and the team with him had shown the Thessalonian Christians how to become examples to others. They also continued to encourage them to grow and become even more effective examples to others. 1 Thessalonians 3:12-13 says, “And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you, so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.” In these verses, we see that the Thessalonians were encouraged to grow and become even stronger examples by continuing to imitate Paul and the team.

We help our physical and spiritual children learn to become examples by showing them how to transform their thinking through the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 12:1-2 tells how the Lord transforms our thinking through the Word. Those verses say, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

It is reasonable to present our lives to Christ as a sacrifice, because He gave His life as a sacrifice for us. Christ died as our sacrifice for our sin. However, Christ calls us to be a living sacrifice by living a life that is holy and acceptable to God. We see that becoming a living sacrifice includes having our minds transformed so that we become conformed to the will of God instead of being conformed to the world.

Joshua gave the people of Israel a five-part process that would transform their lives and make it possible for them to become obedient to the will of God. Joshua 22:5 says, “But take careful heed to do the commandment and the law which Moses the servant of the Lord commanded you, to love the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, to keep His commandments, to hold fast to Him, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul.” Here, we see the five-part process that helps to make it possible for us to transform our thinking and help our children transform their thinking so that we all become obedient to the Word of God.

First, we are to love the Lord our God. We will only show our children how to love the Lord our God as we first love the Lord our God ourselves. Moses had told the people of Israel how to teach their children. Deuteronomy 6:4-8 says, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.” Here, we see that we will only lead our children by example as we love the Lord with our whole heart (character), soul (thoughts) and strength (actions). They will learn to love the Lord as they see our love for the

Lord.

Second, we are to walk in all of His ways. Here, we see that we are to walk in the ways of the Lord instead of walking in our own ways or the ways of the world. This happens as we learn to yield to the Lord. Romans 6:12-13 says, "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God." Here, we see that presenting ourselves to God includes yielding our members as instruments of righteousness to God. Only as we yield to God are we able to walk in all of His ways.

Third, we are to keep His commandments. Joshua could write in Joshua 22:5 what he had learned in his own life from the Lord about the importance of being obedient to the commandments of the Lord. The Lord had told Joshua in Joshua 1:8, "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success." Joshua had been told that the thing that would make it possible for him to be obedient to the commandments of the Lord was to meditate on the commandments of the Lord day and night. Then he was to do all that was written in those commandments. In the same way, we are to obey all of the commandments that Christ has given us.

Fourth, we are to hold fast to Him. The word that is translated "hold fast" or "cleave" to Him is the same word that is used in Genesis 2:24. In that verse, we read, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." In this verse, we see that a man is to "be joined" or "to cleave" to his wife. Job said in Job 19:20, "My bone clings to my skin and to my flesh, And I have escaped by the skin of my teeth." We see that we are to hold fast to the Lord just as our bones and skin are joined together. The word has the thought of being joined together or welded together. We are to be joined together with the Lord if our lives are going to be transformed.

Fifth, we are to serve Him with all our heart and with all our souls. Jeremiah described the heart of a person that has not turned to the Lord. Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?" Here, we see that the heart without Christ is controlled by evil. In contrast, Matthew 12:35 says, "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things." As we compare these verses and others, we see that the heart is the spirit of a man. The human spirit without Christ is controlled by evil. The human spirit that is yielded to the Holy Spirit will bring forth good things.

Joshua told the people they were to serve the Lord with all of their heart. To serve the Lord with our whole heart means that we must yield our human spirit to the Holy Spirit so that the power of the Holy Spirit can flow through our lives. One of the evidences of the fact that we are yielding our human spirit to the Holy Spirit is the fact that we will speak the Word of God with boldness. Acts 4:31 says, "And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the Word of God with boldness." This helps us to realize that to serve the Lord with our whole heart means to serve the Lord in the power of the Holy Spirit and not in our own strength.

We see that we are also to serve the Lord with all of our soul. Our soul is our mind, emotions and will. To serve the Lord with our whole mind requires the renewing of our mind. Romans 12:2 says, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." We learn

to renew our mind by learning to replace our thoughts with the thoughts of God. Isaiah 55:8-9 says, “‘For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,’ says the Lord. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.’” As we learn to think God’s thoughts, instead of our own thoughts, we learn to think and act Biblically instead of in a worldly fashion.

To serve the Lord with our entire emotions will only happen as we learn to be led by the love of Christ instead of driven by the fear of man. 1 John 4:18 says, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.” Then, 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 says, “For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.” As we consider these verses, we see that as we yield to Christ, we will be led by His love instead of driven by our own fear. That is what makes it possible for us to love one another as Christ has loved us. It also means that our service will be service that is the result of living for Him instead of either duty or fear.

To serve the Lord with our entire will means that we will submit our will to the will of God so that we can carry out the will of the Father instead of our own will. Christ gave the perfect example for us when He prayed in Matthew 26:39, “He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, ‘O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.’” Hebrews 10:9-10 adds to this thought when Christ spoke, “Then He said, ‘Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God.’ He takes away the first that He may establish the second. By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” Christ did the will of the Father and gave us His example to follow.

It is a great joy to see the Lord work through the lives of our physical and spiritual children. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to work with the Holy Spirit by becoming examples.

Helping Our Children Work With the Holy Spirit by Becoming Reproducers

In our last topic, we discussed helping our children learn to work with the Holy Spirit by becoming examples. Today, we will be discussing the topic of how we help our physical and spiritual children learn to work with the Holy Spirit by becoming reproducing Christians. This means that we need to take the time to show our children how we lead others to Christ and then help them grow. That only happens as we take our physical and spiritual children along with us in ministry.

In 1 Thessalonians 1:8, we read, “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.” Although the Thessalonians had been Christians for only a few months, people were already talking about their faith throughout Northern Greece (Macedonia) and Southern Greece (Achaia). The fact that the word of the Lord was sounding forth from them throughout Greece shows that the Thessalonian Christians were sharing the Gospel wherever they went. If they traveled to Southern Greece, they shared the Gospel there. If they traveled to other parts of Macedonia, they shared the Gospel in the various places they traveled in Macedonia.

Christ gave us an example of how to help our children become reproducing Christians. We read in Matthew 4:18-20, “And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Then He said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.’ They immediately left their nets and followed Him.” Christ had known these men for about a year. In fact, the first several chapters of the book of John showed that these men had traveled with Christ to many different places during that year. However, Christ now said that He was going to show them how to fish for men and lead others to Christ.

Matthew 4:23 tells what happened next when it says, “And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people.” At the time of Christ, it is reported that there were 203 towns and villages that had a synagogue in the region of Galilee. The Jews would build a synagogue in any village that had ten or more men and so even the small villages had synagogues.

Mark records the same event and tells us that the following Sabbath Christ began this teaching in the synagogue that was in the town where Peter and Andrew as well as James and John lived. This meant that Christ began showing them how to share the Gospel with their own family, friends, co-workers, neighbors and other acquaintances. Later that evening, Christ began sharing the Gospel in the home of Peter. Mark 1:32-33 says, “At evening, when the sun had set, they brought to Him all who were sick and those who were demon-possessed. And the whole city was gathered together at the door.” Here, we see that the first lesson Christ taught the disciples was how to use their own home to share the Gospel with family, relatives, friends, co-workers, neighbors and other acquaintances. The first thing that we want to show our children is how to use our own home to share the Gospel with others.

Early the next morning, Christ went out long before sunrise. Christ went out to spend time alone with the Father in prayer. Peter and the others went and found Christ where He was praying. They said that the people of their town wanted Christ to stay at their town. Christ answered in Mark 1:38, “But He said to them, ‘Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach

there also, because for this purpose I have come forth.” The first thing we see in this verse is that Christ told them He was now going to show them how to share the Gospel in the neighboring towns. Since Christ had promised that He would show them how to become fishers of men as they followed Him, He now said that He was going to show them how to share the Gospel with people in the surrounding towns.

In addition, this verse also shows another key lesson that Christ taught these men. The last phrase says, “for this purpose I have come forth.” Here, we see that Christ wanted the disciples to learn to have a purpose for the things that they did. Christ modeled the importance of being led by our purpose to the disciples as He took them with Him. He showed them that His purpose was to proclaim the good news in other towns as well as the home town of the disciples. Here, we see that Christ was showing the disciples how to become purpose-led and expand their vision to other areas, as well as among the people they already knew.

Then, Mark 1:39 says, “And He was preaching in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and casting out demons.” The synagogues were used for many purposes. The synagogue was the school where the children in that village were taught to read the Old Testament. That was the gathering place where the people gathered for worship on the Sabbath. The synagogue was also used for many other purposes so that it was the center of community life. As a result, Christ knew that the synagogue was the place to meet the Jews of that community. As the disciples came to each village and town, Christ took them to the synagogue where they would meet the people of that community. By doing this, Christ showed them how to share the Gospel with the people in every community throughout the region of Galilee.

Christ took the disciples along with Him for the next nine months and showed them how to present the gospel of the kingdom in synagogues and homes throughout Galilee. About twenty-one months after Christ first met the disciples and about nine months after He said that He would show them how to become fishers of men, Christ entered a new phase of their development to help them become fishers of men. Mark 3:13-14 says, “And He went up on the mountain and called to Him those He Himself wanted. And they came to Him. Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach.” Here, we see that about twenty-one months after Christ began inviting people to follow Him, He selected the twelve. The first reason Christ selected them was so that they might be with Him. For the next twenty-one months, they would spend even more time with Him than they had spent during the previous twenty-one months.

However, Christ also had other reasons why He chose the twelve. We see that the second reason why He chose them was so that He could send them out to preach. Mark 6 tells us about their first preaching tour. Mark 6:7-9 says, “And He called the twelve to Himself, and began to send them out two by two, and gave them power over unclean spirits. He commanded them to take nothing for the journey except a staff--no bag, no bread, no copper in their money belts--but to wear sandals, and not to put on two tunics.” Here, we see that Christ showed them the importance of ministering in teams as He sent them out two by two. Christ also showed them that He would supply their needs by sending them without any extra food, clothing or money. They had to learn to depend on Christ to supply their needs through others.

In Mark 6:12-13, we see what happened as they went out. Those verses say, “So they went out and preached that people should repent. And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick, and healed them.” They went out and preached the same things that they had heard Christ preach. Notice that the focus of their message was that people should repent. This indicates that they had heard Christ tell people many times that they needed to repent of (turn from) their sin and turn to the Lord.

In Mark 6:30, we read, “Then the apostles gathered to Jesus and told Him all things, both what they had done and what they had taught.” Here, we see that Christ had them report back to Him after their ministry tour. The disciples gave Christ a complete report of their ministry tour. They told Him all of the things that they had done. They also told Christ what they had taught in the different towns that they visited.

Later, Christ sent out a total of seventy disciples with similar instructions. For the twelve, this would have been at least their second tour of ministry. Luke 10:1-3 gives a few additional thoughts that Christ gave the seventy as He sent them out. Those verses say, “After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go. Then He said to them, ‘The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest. Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves.’” Christ wanted them to see the harvest and to see the need for more laborers.

Christ also told them that He sent them out as lambs among wolves. A lamb has no defense except the shepherd. If a wolf and a lamb are together alone a wolf has lunch and the lamb is lunch. However, if the lamb follows the shepherd, the shepherd kills the wolf and protects the lamb. The disciples needed to know that Christ was with them and that they needed to depend on Him for protection and not their own ideas. In the same way, that is a key lesson that we need to teach our physical and spiritual children as we begin to send them out in teams to share the Gospel with others. They will only be effective as they depend on the power of the Holy Spirit instead of their own strength.

Acts 20:20-21 shows that Paul used a similar training pattern to equip others to share the Gospel. Those verses say, “How I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” May the Lord also richly bless you as you follow a similar training pattern to equip your children to become reproducing disciples.

Helping Our Children Develop a True Commitment to Christ

In our last topic, we discussed helping our children learn to work with the Holy Spirit by becoming reproducing Christians. Today, we will be discussing the topic of how we help our physical and spiritual children learn to work with the Holy Spirit by helping others develop a true commitment to Christ. This means that we will help our children learn to clearly understand how to explain to others what it means to make a true commitment to Christ.

In 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10, we read, “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, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.” Here, we see that people throughout Macedonia and Achaia were telling Paul, Silas and Timothy about the changes that they saw in the lives of the people in Thessalonica that had become Christians.

First, we see that when people make a true commitment, they turn to God. In order to turn to God, people must realize that they can only come to the Father through Christ. John 14:6 says, “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.’” We want to help our children realize that they need to share verses that make it clear that the only way to come to the Father is through Christ. Peter made this very clear when he was threatened by the Jewish religious leaders. In Acts 4:10-12, we read, “Let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. This is the 'stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.' Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” By the time Peter finished his defense, the Jewish religious leaders knew that there was no other way to come to the Father except through Christ.

Peter had already been repeating that same thought every time that He spoke to the people about salvation. On the day of Pentecost, Peter gave this answer in Acts 2:38 when the people asked what they should do, “Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’” In his very first sermon after Christ returned to heaven, Peter let the people know that they must come to the Father through Jesus Christ because Christ was the only one that made it possible for them to receive forgiveness of sins.

Peter made this same thing clear in his second recorded sermon. Acts 3:14-19 says, “But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses. And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all. Yet now, brethren, I know that you did it in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.” As we see, Peter made it very clear, in this sermon also, that sin can only be removed and blotted out through Christ. People can only come to the Father through Christ.

As Paul talked with the elders at Ephesus and told them how he had trained them to share the Gospel, he said in Acts 20:20-21, “How I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it

to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul made it very clear that he had shown them publicly and from house to house that people could only come to God through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Second, we see that when people make a true commitment, they turn from idols. As you look back at each of the verses mentioned under the first point, you will notice that both Peter and Paul emphasized a second thing in every message. That was the message of repentance. To “repent” means *to turn from sin and to turn to God*. The Thessalonians had developed a true commitment because they had turned from their idols and turned to God. The second time the religious leaders arrested the apostles, Peter spoke for all of the apostles as he said in Acts 5:29-32, “But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: ‘We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him.’” Here, the apostles said that Christ came to give repentance and forgiveness of sins.

Third, we see that when people make a true commitment, they begin to serve the living and true God. The word that is translated “serve” in 1 Thessalonians 1:9 is the word that is used for a “slave”. Titus 3:3 points out the fact that before we came to Christ, we were serving sin as a slave. That verse says, “For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.” A true commitment to Christ will give us this same desire to serve Christ as a slave. Galatians 5:13 says, “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” We want to help our children understand how they can share with others the fact that we have been given liberty by Christ from our bondage to sin and that because of that liberty it is now possible to serve one another in love.

Fourth, we see that when people make a true commitment, they begin to eagerly wait for the return of Christ. Before we became Christians we were in bondage because of our fear of death. Hebrews 2:14-15 says, “Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.” We want to help our children know how to help others understand that a true commitment to Christ fills our lives with joy because we no longer have to fear death. Titus 2:13-14 says, “Looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.” We also want to help our children understand that they can wait with expectant joy for the return of Christ.

One of the results of eagerly waiting for the return of Christ is that it causes us to realize that our service here on the earth, as we wait, has a purpose. 1 Corinthians 15:55-58 says, “‘O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?’ The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” As our children have an eager expectation of the return of Christ, they begin to understand that the Lord has a purpose for their life as they wait for His coming.

Fifth, we see that when people make a true commitment, they focus on the resurrection of

Christ. 1 Corinthians 15:1-6 says, “Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you--unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep.” As we show our children, by our example, that our purpose while we are here on this earth is to help others know how they can also have forgiveness of sin and receive eternal life, we help them to develop the same purpose and to understand that as we share the message of the resurrection, others will also be drawn to place their trust in Christ.

Sixth, we see that when people make a true commitment, they know that they have been delivered from the wrath to come. Before people place their trust in Christ, they have a fear of what faces them after death. When we make a true commitment to Christ, we are delivered from that fear. Romans 8:1 says, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.” We are able to help our children show others how to understand that they no longer need to fear death because they have been set free from the judgment to come. As John 5:24 says, “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.” We help our children to understand how to share three things that Christ promises all those who place their trust in Him: they have everlasting life; they will not have to face the future judgment for sin; they have passed from death to life.

It is a great joy to see our children develop a true commitment to Christ. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your physical and spiritual children develop such a commitment.

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.

Helping Our Children Develop the Example of a Godly Father

In our last topic, we discussed helping our children learn to work with the Holy Spirit by showing them how to provide the care of a nursing mother to new or struggling Christians. Today, we will look at another of the key things that we want to show our children as we help our children learn to provide the example of a godly spiritual father. New or struggling Christians need godly examples that they can follow in their lives. We will study some of the things involved in becoming such examples.

1 Thessalonians 2:10-12 says, “You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.” In these verses, we see three things that we show our physical and spiritual children by our example. Then, we see three ways that we speak to our children based on our example. Finally, we see that our goal is to help our children develop a walk that is worthy of God.

First, we see that we are to be a devout example. The word that is translated “devoutly” or “holily” means *a life that is undefiled by sin*. Here, we see that Paul and the team modeled the way that Christ changes and transforms our lives as we yield the control of our lives to Him. In the same way, our lives are to provide an example of a transformed life to our children so that they can become a similar example to others. Romans 12:2 tells us that transformation begins with the mind. That verse says, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” Here, we see that we make it our goal to show our children how to think Biblically and help them learn to show others how to think Biblically.

Second, we see that we are to be a just example. The word that is translated “justly” speaks of a life that models obedience to the Lord by keeping the commandments of the Lord. This speaks of a person whose thinking, feeling and actions are in agreement with the will of God. James 1:22 says, “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” Then, 1 John 4:18 says, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.” We want to help our children learn to think Biblically, learn to be motivated by the love of Christ and then put into practice in their daily lives obedience to the Word of God. As our children practice obedience to the Word of God, they become an example to others of the way that Christ transforms lives.

Third, we see that we are to be a blameless example. The word that is translated “blamelessly” is only used two times in the New Testament. It means *a life that is free from fault or defect*. The second use of this word is in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 where we read, “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Here, we see that the Lord is working in our lives to help us become more like Christ. As we yield to the Lord moment by moment, our lives are becoming more like the life of Christ and others begin to see the transformation that Christ makes in lives that are yielded to Him. We have the opportunity to provide an example for our children of what it means to grow in the likeness of Christ and as a result they see how the Lord can help them grow and become more like Christ.

Fourth, we see that we are to exhort our children. As we come to 1 Thessalonians 2:11, we see that in addition to providing an example for our children to follow, we explain what makes that

example possible by the way that we teach our children. The word that is translated “exhorted” is used 109 times in the New Testament. The word is most commonly translated by the word “beseech” and means *to strengthen by encouraging and comforting*. In 1 Thessalonians 3:2, we read, “And sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith.” Here, we see that Paul had sent Timothy to the Thessalonians to encourage them to continue to grow in their faith.

When Timothy returned to Paul, he gave a report of what was happening in the lives of the Thessalonians. 1 Thessalonians 3:7 says, “Therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith.” In this verse, the word is translated “comforted”. Paul and Silas were comforted and encouraged when they heard about the faith of the Thessalonians from Timothy. The church at Thessalonica had developed a strong faith, hope and love. As Paul wrote this letter, he used this same word in 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10 where we read, “But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more.” Here, we see that Paul urged and encouraged them to continue to grow in their love toward one another.

Fifth, we see that we are to comfort our children. The word that is translated “comforted” is only used four times in the New Testament. It is used twice in John 11 where it speaks of the Jews comforting Mary and Martha following the death of their brother Lazarus. Then it is used twice in 1 Thessalonians. In 1 Thessalonians 5:14, we read, “Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.” Here, we see that we are to comfort the fainthearted. A fainthearted person is one that is experiencing fears and doubts in his or her life. Here, we see that we want to show our children how to provide comfort to those who are discouraged and experiencing fears and doubts in their lives due to difficult events such as death in their families. This is a reminder that such individuals need comfort and encouragement not condemnation or a critical spirit.

Sixth, we see that we are to charge our children. The word that is translated “charge” is used 86 times in the New Testament. It means *to bear witness, to give testimony or to affirm something that a person has seen, heard or experienced*. Of the New Testament writers, this word was used most commonly by John in the Gospel of John and in the Epistles of John. In many cases, it was used of those who gave testimony or witness about Christ. The word is used four times in John 5:31-32 where we read, “If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true. There is another who bears witness of Me, and I know that the witness which He witnesses of Me is true.” The word is used four more times in the next eight verses as Christ speaks of various witnesses of the fact that He is the Son of God.

Paul used the word here in 1 Thessalonians 2:11, to point out the fact that he and the other team members had given witness to the Thessalonians in the same way that a father would give witness to his children about the way that they should walk. Here, we see that Paul focused on the way that a father teaches his children the things that are important for those children to learn so that they can live effective lives. Paul had done this same thing as he wrote to the Corinthians. 1 Corinthians 4:14-16 says, “I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you. 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. Therefore I urge you, imitate me.” Paul gave instruction and then backed up that instruction by inviting the Corinthians to imitate his example. Paul makes it clear that the instructions that the team had given were very important because they told the Thessalonians how the Lord wanted them to walk.

Seventh, we see that our overall goal is to help our children develop a worthy walk. The word that is translated walk “worthy” is used six times in the New Testament. Ephesians 4:1 says, “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called.” Then, Colossians 1:10 says, “That you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.” Philippians 1:27 says, “Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.” As we read these verses, we see that they all have a similar thought.

Our goal as we minister to both our physical and spiritual children is to help them develop a worthy walk that is pleasing to the Lord. These verses show that such a worthy walk will include making it their goal to please the Lord in all that they do. Of course, we can only teach that to our children if the goal of our lives is to please the Lord in all that we do as we go through life. That means that we want to develop both the actions and the words that are pleasing to the Lord so that we can be an example and then teach our physical and spiritual children why we do what we do. As we help our children develop these same attitudes, words and actions, we see that the Lord will work in and through their lives to help them become fruitful in every good work.

As we show our children how to walk worthy of the Lord and help them mature in their spiritual lives so that they become an example to others, the Lord will use their lives to have a powerful impact on the lives of others. Ephesians 3:20-21 says, “Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” May the Lord richly bless you as you help your physical and spiritual children mature and become an example of a godly father to others.

Helping Our Children Develop a Foundation on the Word of God

In our last topic, we discussed helping our children learn to work with the Holy Spirit by showing them how to develop the example of a godly father. Today, we will look at another key topic as we show our physical and spiritual children how to help others develop their foundation for ministry on the Word of God. Most new Christians have a foundation that is based on worldly values. That is why it is important to have someone walk alongside them and show them how to develop their foundation on the Word of God so that they learn to think Biblically instead of continuing to think from a worldly point of view.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:13, we read, “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.” Paul and the team with him helped the new Christians at Thessalonica begin to understand that they were being taught the Word of God. As they learned to become obedient to the Word of God, they saw that the Word of God would work in them effectively to change and transform their lives. This is the ministry that we want to help our children develop as they work with new Christians.

In Isaiah 55:8-9, we read, “‘For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,’ says the Lord. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.’” In these verses, we see that the thoughts and ways of God are much higher than our thoughts and ways. In fact, there is such a difference that the Lord compares that difference to the difference in height between the heavens and the earth. Once Adam and Eve sinned, Genesis 3:7-13 shows that they were driven: by their separation from God and by their fear, guilt and shame within; they learned to handle that fear, guilt and shame by blaming others. From that point in history every person has been driven by those same five things: separation, fear, guilt, shame and blame.

Christ wants every Christian to be set free from their driven life. He wants them to learn to become led by the love of Christ. 1 John 4:18 says, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.” In order for a new Christian to become set free from their driven life, they have to be shown how to be led by the love of Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 says, “For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.” As our children learn to be led by the love of Christ instead of driven by the fear of people, they begin to experience the liberty promised in Galatians 5:1 and 5:13 where we read, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage...For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.”

We want to help physical and spiritual children learn how to help new Christians learn to think Biblically. New Christians either learn to think Biblically or continue to think in a worldly fashion. Biblical thinking will set them free so that they can be led by the love of Christ rather than continue to be driven by that former fear. To do this, we help our children understand five ways that they can help new Christians learn the Word of God.

First, they want to encourage new Christians to hear the Word of God and hear it explained by more mature Christians. Romans 10:17 says, “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by

the Word of God.” If a person that is a new Christian cannot read or understand the Word, that person needs someone to begin to regularly read the Word of God to him or her. The new Christian also needs help understanding what the Word means and that is why it is important to walk alongside new Christians and help them begin to grow in their understanding of the Word of God.

Second, they want to encourage new Christians to begin to read the Word of God for themselves. Revelation 1:3 says, “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.” Those who read and obey the Word of God are promised blessing in their lives. When I lead a person to Christ, I immediately encourage that person to read the book of 1 John every day for a month. I point out that book is only 105 verses long. Most people can read that book in 20 to 30 minutes each day. I tell them that book is written to my little children (spiritual children) to help those new Christians begin to grow and that it will answer many questions that they have about their new life in Christ. The second month, I encourage them to read 1 Thessalonians every day for a month as it is also a book written to new Christians to answer some of their questions.

Third, they want to encourage new Christians to begin to study the Word of God. 2 Timothy 2:15 says, “Study to shew (show) thyself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” (KJV) I suggest that the best way to show the new Christian how to study the Word of God is to get together at least weekly for the first two months with the new Christian and study through the book of 1 John the first month and the book of 1 Thessalonians the second month since those are the two books that have been suggested to read each day.

The purpose the first month is to help the new Christian begin to take root in Christ and His love since Colossians 2:6-7 says, “As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.” Then, Ephesians 3:17-19 says, “That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height--to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” The purpose of the second month of study is to help the new Christian get many of their basic questions answered. We can encourage our children to help the new Christian learn to study by studying those two books with the new Christian and helping them learn to take root in the love of Christ.

Fourth, they want to encourage the new Christians to memorize the Word of God. Psalm 119:11 says, “Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You!” Since our goal is to help new Christians learn to transform their thinking so that they are led by the love of Christ instead of continuing to be driven by the fear of people, this and the fifth thing are the two things that will do the most to transform their thinking. When we have the Word of God memorized so that it is in our thoughts and hearts, it also begins to transform our attitudes and change our actions.

Fifth, they want to encourage the new Christians to begin to meditate on the Word of God as they go through their day. Joshua 1:8 says, “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.” Then, Psalm 1:1-3 says, “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither;

and whatever he does shall prosper.” As we help our children learn to show others how to meditate on the Word of God by thinking about the passage that they have memorized both during the day and at night, the new Christians are learning to transform their thinking.

We also want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to show new Christians how to put into practice in their lives the things that they are learning from the Word of God. James 1:22 says, “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” It is as we learn to obey the Word of God in our lives that we begin to see the Lord really help us grow in our understanding. Since new Christians have been driven by fear up until the time that they became Christians, they need to be shown by a caring Christian how to put what they are learning into practice in their lives. That means that we are actually helping our children learn how to become examples to these new Christians.

Psalm 119:97-100 says, “Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep Your precepts.” In these verses, we see the results when we help our children develop their foundation on the Word of God and then show new Christians how to do the same. As they meditate on the Word of God throughout the day, the Lord gives them wisdom and understanding. In fact, these verses say that even a young person can develop more understanding than people much older. Psalm 119:130 gives another benefit when it says, “The entrance of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.” The foundation of the Word of God gives us light so that we can see where we are going in our lives. That allows us to be led by the purpose that the Lord has for each one of us in our lives. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your physical and spiritual children learn to help others build the foundation for their lives on the Word of God.

Helping Our Children Prepare for Opposition

In our last topic, we discussed helping our physical and spiritual children learn how to help others develop their foundation for ministry on the Word of God. Today, we will be learning how to help our children prepare for opposition. 2 Timothy 3:12 says, “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.” One of the things that we need to help our children understand, is how to prepare for opposition; as they learn to live godly lives, they will experience opposition in their lives.

Paul described the reality of this opposition to the Christians in Thessalonica. In 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16, we read, “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, who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.” Although the Christians in Thessalonica had only been Christians for a few months, they were already experiencing suffering at the hands of their countrymen. We want to help our children understand that opposition will come to them for the same reasons that opposition came to the Thessalonian Christians.

First, opposition will come because we are learning to imitate the early church. Acts 4:1-2 tells us why the early church started to experience opposition from the Jews. Those verses say, “Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.” These verses give us two reasons why the early church faced opposition. First, they faced opposition because they taught the people. Satan wants to keep people in ignorance because it is much easier for him to control ignorant people. People who start to learn about Christ begin to ask questions; that threatens leaders who are trying to control people through ignorance.

We also see that the religious leaders were greatly disturbed because the early church was preaching the resurrection of the dead. The message of the resurrection of Christ is the message that Satan hates more than any other message. As a result, there will always be opposition when we preach and teach about the resurrection of Christ. Throughout the past 2000 years, religious leaders of various religions have opposed the message of the resurrection of Christ. Two statements that Christ made help us to understand the reason for this opposition. John 8:32 says, “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” Then John 8:36 adds, “Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.” Religion holds people in bondage while Christ came to set people free. The message of the Gospel will set people free, but it will be opposed by false religion.

Second, opposition to Christ by non-Christians will cause us to suffer. The Jews had experienced suffering from their countrymen. The Thessalonians were also suffering from their countrymen. Suffering comes because Christ transforms lives which brings opposition from people who benefit financially from sin. Acts 19:25-27 says, “He called them together with the workers of similar occupation, and said: ‘Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade. Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands. So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the

temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship.” When people who benefit from sin and false religion see it affecting their income, they will cause Christians to suffer.

Third, opposition will cause us to experience persecution. We see that suffering will often turn into full persecution against Christ and against Christians. As Paul taught the Christians in the area of Galatia, Acts 14:22 says he was, “Strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, ‘We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.’” Since Paul had been stoned and left for dead in these very cities just a short time earlier, the new Christians realized that they must be ready to experience persecution. Acts 5:41 tells how the early church responded to persecution, “So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.” We want to help our children understand that it is a privilege to suffer and experience persecution for Christ.

Fourth, opposition will come because the world has no desire to please God. Romans 8:7-8 says, “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” Any person without Christ has no desire to please God. In fact, these verses point out that all those without Christ are at enmity against God. In contrast, 1 Thessalonians 2:4 says, “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.” As we show our children how to please God by the way they walk and talk so that they can be an example to others, we also need to help them understand that the mind of the person without Christ is at enmity against God and cannot please God so will automatically oppose the message of the Gospel.

Fifth, opposition will come because people without Christ do not please God and so are contrary to all people who follow Christ. People without Christ are still living to enjoy the pleasures of sin. In Hebrews 11:24-26, we read, “By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.” Moses recognized that there is pleasure in sin. However, the key that he realized is that those were passing pleasures. Those pleasures will only last for a very short time. Those who are still seeking the passing pleasures of sin cannot understand people who recognize that suffering for Christ is of greater value; so they oppose us.

Sixth, opposition will cause people to try to forbid us to speak about Christ. Satan does not want people to hear about the death and resurrection of Christ and so he will encourage people to try and stop any mention of Christ. Peter and John showed how they handled such opposition. Acts 4:18-20 says, “And they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said to them, ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.’” Peter and John said it was impossible for them to keep quiet about Christ.

We see the way that the religious leaders handled the statement of Peter and John. Acts 4:21 says, “So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way of punishing them, because of the people, since they all glorified God for what had been done.” The next time the apostles were brought before the religious leaders, Acts 5:28-29 reads, “Saying, ‘Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!’ But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: ‘We ought to obey God rather than men.’” The apostles did not try

to argue with the religious leaders. They just told them that it was more important to obey God than man and calmly accepted the beating that was given to them in Acts 5:40.

Seventh, opposition will come because Satan does not want to see people saved. The goal of Satan will never change. Christ described that goal when He said in John 10:10, "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." The goal of Satan will always be to steal, to kill and to destroy. He does not want to see any person receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life. He certainly does not want anyone to experience abundant life. As a result, he will always stir up opposition to Christians that are faithfully sharing the Gospel with others.

Eighth, opposition will come because there are many people who want to pile up their sins to the maximum limit. Romans 1:18-31 tells how mankind turned away from God and turned to self-worship and sin. After describing in detail the attitudes that control many people in verses eighteen through thirty one, Romans 1:32 says, "Who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them." Here, we see that many people want to commit the maximum amount of sin possible. They also take pleasure in those who do the same. Such people will always oppose true Christians because they feel that Christians prevent them from committing all of the sins that they desire to commit.

We have just looked at eight reasons from 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16 why Christians will experience opposition. Once our children can help other Christians understand that opposition will certainly come, we want to show them how to prepare to respond to that opposition. We want to model by our example the words of Acts 5:41-42 where we read, "So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ." It is a privilege to be counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Christ. May the Lord richly bless you as you equip your children to understand this great privilege to have the opportunity to suffer shame for the name of Christ.

Helping Our Children Learn to Stand Fast in the Lord

In our last topic, we discussed the topic of helping our physical and spiritual children learn how to help others prepare for opposition. We saw from 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16 eight reasons why that opposition will certainly come. Today, we want to show our children how to help others learn to stand fast in the Lord. 1 Thessalonians 3:8 says, “For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord.” The word that is translated “stand fast” means *to stand firm, to persist or to persevere*. Today, we will be looking at the way to help our physical and spiritual children learn to help others stand fast in the Lord.

First, this verse tells us how it will affect our lives if our children learn to stand fast in the Lord and show others how to stand fast in the Lord. 1 Thessalonians 3:7-9 says, “Therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith. For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord. For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God.” Paul and the team with him were going through a lot of affliction and distress as they were persecuted for Christ. However, they said that the faith of the Thessalonians was providing them with great comfort. Their lives were also being filled with great joy and rejoicing because the Thessalonians had learned to stand fast in the Lord.

Second, we want to help our children learn that as they mature, they become accountable to the Lord instead of to us as parents. Romans 14:4 says, “Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.” In this verse, we see that we are not to judge others. This is a very important lesson as we help our children learn to work with others. The previous verses point out that some Christians are weak and will avoid certain things. As a result, there may be a temptation for stronger Christians to despise these weaker Christians or for the weaker Christians to judge stronger Christians because of their liberty. In verse four, we are reminded that each Christian has become a servant of Christ and is now accountable to Christ because each Christian is a servant of Christ.

We also see that it is good that other Christians are accountable to Christ rather than to us. Because the weaker Christians are accountable to Christ, the Lord is able to make them stand. Our responsibility as Christians is to strengthen them and help them learn to stand. 1 Thessalonians 5:14 says, “Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.” The unruly are the rebellious. However, we see that we are to encourage the fainthearted. We are to hold up the strength-less and we are to be patient with all.

Third, we see that we want to help our children learn how to help others stand fast in the faith. 1 Corinthians 16:13-14 says, “Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong. Let all that you do be done with love.” “The faith” speaks of the teachings about Christ through whom we have obtained eternal salvation. Jude 1:3 says, “Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.”

Paul used the root word for “contend earnestly” five times. Two of these were to Timothy. 1 Timothy 6:12 says, “Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.” The second time was in 2 Timothy 4:7-8 where Paul summarized his ministry by saying, “I have

fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.” From these verses, we see that “contending” speaks of a person that is competing in a race. To win a race a person must keep their eyes focused on the goal. Fighting the good fight of faith means we help our children show others how to keep their eyes focused on Christ until He calls them to heaven.

Fourth, we see that we are to show our children how to help others stand fast in the liberty that we have in Christ. Galatians 5:1 says, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.” Christ set us free from that yoke of bondage to sin at the moment of salvation. We want to help our children learn to explain to others what that liberty means in their lives and how to live in that liberty. Galatians 5:13 says, “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” Here, we see that true Christian liberty sets us free to serve one another in love.

Before we came to Christ, we had neither the power nor the desire to serve others with the love of Christ. As Christians learn to walk in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16), be led by the Spirit (Galatians 5:18), and live in the Spirit (Galatians 5:25), their lives will bear the fruit of the Spirit given in Galatians 5:22-23. Learning to walk in the Spirit, be led by the Spirit and to live in the Spirit gives us the power to serve one another in love. Galatians 5:22-23 says, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.” In these verses, we see that love is part of the fruit we see the Holy Spirit produce in our lives because of the liberty that we have in Christ and is what makes it possible for us to serve one another in love.

Fifth, we see that we are to show our children how to help others learn to work together as they stand fast in the Spirit. Philippians 1:27-28 says, “Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel, and not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God.” We see here that showing our children how to help others develop conduct worthy of the gospel of Christ includes showing them that they are now able to stand fast in one spirit and have unity of thought as they work together for the faith of the Gospel.

As Christians learn to work together as a team and as they stand fast in one spirit with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel, this unity prepares them to minister to one another even in times when they experience opposition and persecution. The next verse, Philippians 1:29 says, “For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.” Christians will suffer as they are serving the Lord. However, as Christians serve together in unity as they suffer, they are able to follow the example of the early church. Acts 5:41-42 says, “So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.” Here, we see that as we stand fast in the Spirit, we will even be able to rejoice together for the privilege of suffering for Christ.

Sixth, we want to show our children how to help others develop an eternal focus. Philippians 3:20-4:1 says, “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself. Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in

the Lord, beloved.” Here, we see that an eternal focus helps Christians to stand fast in the Lord because we are looking forward to the transformation that Christ will make in our lives.

Seventh, we want to show our children how to help others stand fast in the Word of God. 2 Thessalonians 2:13-15 says, “But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.” Paul had taught the new Christians in Thessalonica many things while he was in that city. Later, he had added to the teaching that he gave when he was in the city of Thessalonica by the things that he had written in 1 Thessalonians and was now writing in 2 Thessalonians. Now, Paul was encouraging them to stand fast and depend on the things that they had learned from the Word of God for continued growth in their spiritual lives.

The reason why we want to show our children how to help others stand fast in the Word of God is due to the fact that the Word will transform their lives. Romans 12:2 says, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” Then 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” Our goal is to equip our physical and spiritual children so that they understand the way that the Lord works to transform lives. In these verses, we see that the Lord uses His Word to renew the minds of those who place their trust in Christ. Then Christ also wants to use His Word to bring each Christian to spiritual maturity and equip each Christian for every good work. What a joy it is to show our children how to develop such a ministry in their lives. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your physical and spiritual children how to equip others to stand fast in the Lord.

Helping Our Children Learn to Increase in Love

In our last topic, we discussed helping our physical and spiritual children learn how to help others learn to stand fast in the Lord. We saw in 1 Thessalonians 3:8 that Paul and the team with him said, “For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord.” Today, we want to show our children how to learn to increase in love. 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10 says, “But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more.” Today, we will be looking at the way that we help our physical and spiritual children learn to help others increase in love.

First, we want to help our children see from these verses that Christians are taught by God to love one another. Christ summarized the entire Old Testament when He said in Matthew 22:37-40, “Jesus said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” Then, one of the things that Christ told the disciples the night before He was crucified in John 13:34-35 was, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” Between these two passages, we see that Christ summarized the entire Bible by saying that God has commanded us to love Him and love one another.

However, God did not just teach us to love one another by commanding us to love. The Father also showed us how to love by His own example. John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” In fact, God modeled this love for us while mankind was still separated from Him by sin. Romans 5:8 says, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” We see that the Father showed His love by sending Christ to die for our sin and Christ showed us His love by dying for our sin. Together we see that Christians are taught to love one another by God both by His commandment and by His example.

This teaching is not limited to just the Father and the Son. We also see that the Holy Spirit teaches us to love. John 14:26 says, “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.” Then, 1 Corinthians 2:12-13 adds, “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” The Holy Spirit teaches us to love one another through the Word of God by helping us to understand and apply the Word of God to our lives.

In addition to teaching us to love, we want to help our children understand that the Holy Spirit also gives us the power to love one another. When we depend on our own strength, we cannot love as Christ loved us. Romans 7:19 says, “For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.” Then Romans 6:16 says, “Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?” If we yield to sin, we cannot love.

As we present ourselves to the Lord and yield to the Holy Spirit, the Spirit gives us the power to love. 1 Peter 1:22 says, “Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart.” This verse shows us that it is the Holy Spirit that gives us the power to obey the truth by loving one another fervently with a pure heart. We can love fervently as we are yielding to the Holy Spirit.

Second, we want to help our children understand what happens because God teaches us to love one another. Our verses in 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10 show that the Thessalonians had a love for Christians throughout the entire region of Macedonia. 1 John 4:7-8 says, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.” In these verses, we see that godly love is the evidence of the fact that a person knows God. In fact, these verses point out the fact that the person that does not love does not know God. God is love so those who are born of God will love. Just as the Thessalonians had a love for Christians throughout Macedonia, we want to help our children understand that all those who are born of God will begin to show His love to others.

Christ told the Pharisees in John 8:44, “You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.” Those who are not born of God want to carry out the desires of their father, the devil. In the same way, those who are born of God want to carry out the desires of their heavenly Father. 1 John 4:11-12 says, “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.” Here, we see that as we show our children how to help others in their spiritual growth that the love of God is being perfected in their lives and the lives of others.

Third, 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10 shows us that the Lord wants us to teach both physical and spiritual children to increase more and more in love. That means that we need to understand what hinders their growth in love so that we can remove that hindrance. We read in 1 John 4:18, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.” In this verse, we see that in order to help our children increase more and more in love, we must help them learn to be led by love instead of being driven by fear.

All people are driven by fear before they come to Christ because they have no spiritual life. Ephesians 2:1-3 says, “And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.” It is impossible for a person that is spiritually dead to have the love of Christ take root in his or her life. That is why every person without Christ is driven by fear and walks according to the course of this world by satisfying the lusts of their flesh and mind.

However, when a person experiences spiritual birth, that person is now spiritually alive. This makes it possible for that person to take root in Christ. Colossians 2:6-7 says, “As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.” Then Ephesians 3:17-19 says that we are now able to take root in the love of Christ. Those verses say, “That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and

height--to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” As Christians learn to take root in Christ and His love, that love begins to cast out their fear. This makes it possible for our children to be led by the love of Christ instead of being driven by fear.

1 John 4:17-18 helps us to understand this process of growth when those verses say, “Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.” As the love of Christ is taking root in the life of a Christian, that Christian begins to understand the fact that there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. That means that Christians no longer need to fear eternal judgment.

In addition, as this love is being perfected because we are growing in our understanding of the love of Christ, we see that we become motivated by the love of Christ instead of continuing to be driven by the fear of man. 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 says, “For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.” In addition to boldness in the day of judgment, we also begin to have boldness in our daily lives. Acts 4:31 says, “And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.” Here, we see that the Lord causes our love to increase more and more so that we are even able to share the Gospel with those who are not yet Christians with boldness.

As fear is being replaced by the love of Christ, this also makes it possible to fulfill the new commandment that Christ gave us to love one another as He has loved us. We help our physical and spiritual children learn to walk in the love of Christ. Then they are able to help others grow in their understanding of what it means to be led by the love of Christ instead of being driven by fear. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your physical and spiritual children how to take root in Christ and His love so that they can show others how to continue to increase in love.

Helping Our Children Learn to Walk Properly Toward Others

In our last topic, we discussed helping our physical and spiritual children learn how to help others increase in love. Today, we want to help them learn to walk properly toward others especially toward those who are not yet Christians. 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 says, “That you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing.” Today, we will be looking at the way to help our physical and spiritual children learn how to help others learn to walk properly.

First, in order to walk properly toward others we see that we want to help our children to aspire to lead a quiet life. A quiet life is a life that is not stirring up conflict with others. The early church demonstrated this quietness in Acts 11:18 where we read, “When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, ‘Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.’” The church had heard about the family and friends of Cornelius turning to Christ. When Peter returned to Jerusalem, the leaders contended with him. In order to prevent conflict and division, Peter told exactly what had happened. When the church heard how the Lord had worked among the Gentiles, they became silent and gave glory to God instead of continuing to have conflict. We want to help our children learn to avoid conflicts with others.

Second, we see that we are to help our children learn to mind their own business. Paul wrote about this same topic in his second letter to the Thessalonians. 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12 says, “For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.” Here, we see that a proper walk means that we help our children learn to stay out of the business of others and avoid gossiping about others. This is very important because such activities create barriers between people and make it harder to minister to them.

Third, Paul told the Thessalonians that a proper walk includes working with our own hands. Paul had to speak on this topic again in 2 Thessalonians. In 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9, we read, “For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.” Here, we see that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to provide a good example for others by working to earn their own living, instead of trying to take advantage of others. People are much more willing to listen to people who do not take advantage of them. We want to help our children learn to be an example in all areas of their lives.

Fourth, we see that a key part of helping our children to walk properly is to help them learn to walk properly toward those who are not yet Christians (those who are outside). Here, we see a key principle that we are to teach our children in order to help them become effective in reaching others for Christ. In fact, this summarizes all that has been said previously. Galatians 6:9-10 says, “And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.” Here, we see that a proper walk includes doing good to all including those who are not yet Christians. It is as we choose to do those things that are good in our relationships with non-Christians that we develop opportunities to share the Gospel with

them.

Romans 15:1-3 tells us, “We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification. For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, ‘The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.’” Here, we see that we want to help our children learn to do good to those who are weak Christians. In addition, we are also to help them learn to do good toward those who are neighbors. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Christ defined a neighbor as anyone in need. We equip our physical and spiritual children to do good toward anyone that is in need by providing an example through what we do in our own lives.

One of the key things we want our children to understand is that they were created to do good works. Ephesians 2:10 says, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” Here, we see that it was the plan of God before He ever created the world that Christians would do good works as a part of their ministry both to Christians and to those who are not yet Christians. These good works became possible when we became Christians because we were made new creations in Christ. This means that a part of our purpose in life for every Christian is to do good works. 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 says, “For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.” We do good works because we are motivated by the love that Christ showed to us instead of being driven by the fear that formerly controlled us.

We also see that we want to show our children how to do good works both by their actions and by their words. Ephesians 4:28-29 says, “Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.” We want to show our children how to do good by our actions. We want to show them how to speak words that will build up others. 1 Peter 4:10-11 says, “As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.” In these verses, we see that Christ has even given each Christian a spiritual gift to speak the Word of God and do good works to others through the ability that God supplies.

We also see that we are to pray for our children that the Lord will help them to develop good works. In Colossians 1:9-12, we read, “For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.” Here, we see that as a part of our prayers for our physical and spiritual children that we are to pray that they will become fruitful in every good work.

We also see that we are to be an example to our children of how their life will develop good works. 2 Timothy 2:20-22 says, “But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work. Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” We help our children develop

a life of good works as we show the importance of cleansing his or her life from all things that dishonor through confession of sins. That means that our children will be vessels of honor that are prepared by Christ for every good work. It also means that we help our children learn to flee certain things and follow other things.

Finally we help our children become equipped for every good work as we follow the example of the mother and grandmother of Timothy. 2 Timothy 3:14-17 says, “But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” As we show our children how to grow and mature and become men and women of God, we see that that their lives become equipped for every good work.

We see the reward for helping our children learn to walk properly in James 3:17-18 where we read, “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” We see that as we show our children how to apply the wisdom of God in their lives, they will have lives that become full of mercy and good fruits as they help others learn to experience peace with God. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your physical and spiritual children how to walk properly toward others.

Helping Our Children Learn to Comfort Others

In our last topic, we discussed helping our physical and spiritual children learn how to help new Christians learn to walk properly toward others. Today, we want to help them learn how to comfort others especially those who are in sorrow because they have had a relative that is a Christian die. 1 Thessalonians 4:18 says, “Therefore comfort one another with these words.” Today, we will be learning how to help our physical and spiritual children learn to comfort those who are in sorrow.

Some of the new Christians in the church at Thessalonica had died. This had filled the other new Christians with sorrow, because they did not understand fully what had happened to these new Christians. As a result, Paul wrote some key things to help these Christians that were in sorrow. These are key things that we need to help our physical and spiritual children understand so that they can learn to comfort other Christians that are in sorrow due to the death of Christian family members.

First, we want to help our children understand exactly what happens to a Christian when that person dies. 1 Thessalonians 4:13 says, “But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.” In this verse, we see that the first thing Paul did was use a different word to describe death. He spoke of those who had fallen asleep. We see the reason for this change of words in 2 Corinthians 5:6-8 where we read, “So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.” Here, we see that at the very moment a Christian dies here on earth, that Christian is immediately present with the Lord in heaven. We help our children understand that our soul and spirit leave the body and are immediately present with the Lord.

As our children learn to explain the fact that when the soul and spirit leave the body that they go immediately to be with Christ, just that message gives new Christians great hope because they realize that the person is with the Lord. The people without Christ have no hope because they are uncertain about what happened to their relative. In fact, Hebrews 2:14-15 tells us, “Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.” Christians have been set free from the fear of death while those without Christ are still in bondage.

Second, we want to help our children learn to explain what will happen at the time that Christ returns for the church at the Rapture. 1 Thessalonians 4:14 says, “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.” Here, we see that when Christ returns to take the Christians that are still alive to heaven, He will also bring the souls and the spirits of the Christians that have gone to heaven with Him.

In addition to bringing the souls and spirits of the Christians with Him, 1 Corinthians 15:51-54 also tells us what will happen to those that are still alive when Christ comes for the church. Those verses say, “Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed--in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has

put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory.'" Here, we see that if we are still alive when Christ comes, our bodies will be changed. The new bodies that we will receive at that moment will no longer decay and will never die. In fact, for the Christian, both physical and spiritual death will be defeated at that moment.

Third, we also want to help our children learn to explain to new Christians what will happen to the bodies of Christians that die. 1 Thessalonians 4:15 says, "For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep." Here, we see that the bodies of Christians will not go to heaven before the bodies of those Christians that have died. Many new Christians and a few that have been Christians for a long time have no idea what will happen to the bodies of Christians that have already died. Here, we see that the bodies of those who are living will not go before the bodies of those who have died.

Fourth, we want to help our children learn to explain to new Christians what the return of Christ for all Christians will be like. 1 Thessalonians 4:16 says, "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first." Here, we see that Christ will give a great shout to us as He calls us to heaven. However, we also see that the bodies of those who have died will be raised from the dead and rejoined with the souls and spirits that went to heaven at the moment of death. As a result, we can help our children learn to explain that after the Rapture all Christians will be in heaven with their bodies, souls and spirits.

Fifth, we want to help our children learn to explain to new Christians that Christians that are alive when Christ returns will have their bodies instantly changed. They will meet the Lord with the same kind of new bodies that those who have died will have when they are raised from the dead. 1 Thessalonians 4:17 says, "Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord." This verse shows that all Christians that are still alive on the earth when Christ comes at the Rapture will be caught up to meet the Lord. If we are still alive when Christ comes, we will meet the Lord in the air. Then, we will always be with the Lord.

Sixth, we want to help our children learn that helping new Christians understand what happens to Christians that die will bring comfort to the new Christians. 1 Thessalonians 4:18 says, "Therefore comfort one another with these words." We help our children to realize that these verses in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 will bring comfort to all those who are Christians. They will realize that they will see their Christian family members that died either at the time they die and are present with the Lord, or at the time the Lord comes for all Christians at the Rapture. These words will bring comfort because they help Christians to realize they are only separated from the ones they love for a short time and then will be with them for all eternity.

However, this message of comfort also produces another result. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God." Here, we see that we can help our children to understand that the comfort Christians receive from the Lord at death is also the same comfort the Lord wants them to have when they experience any kind of trouble. The Lord gives comfort to us at times of death and then uses that same comfort to help us comfort others.

Christians do experience many different kinds of trouble and trials as they go through their lives. We may also experience persecution in our lives. James 1:2-4 says, "My brethren, count

it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.” Because the Lord gives us comfort about both our own death and the death of other Christian family members and friends, we are able to have comfort in any other situation. That is why James tells us here that we can count it all joy.

Happiness depends on what is happening around us. Joy depends on what the Lord is doing within us. Here, in James, we see that when we are tested by any kind of trial, we are now free to ask the Lord to work through those trials to help us experience the joy He wants us to have within our lives as a result of our right relationship with Him. The Lord promises to give us that joy as we yield our lives to Him. That makes it possible for us to look at these trials from the viewpoint of the Lord instead of the natural viewpoint.

Isaiah 55:8-9 tells us what happens as we look at those trials through the viewpoint of the Lord. Those verses say, “‘For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,’ says the Lord. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.’” Instead of those trials being a burden, the Lord gives us His comfort and His joy. James tells us the result of viewing these trials from the viewpoint of the Lord. We see that those trials produce patience in our lives. 1 Corinthians 13:4 begins, “Love is patient, love is kind...” (NASB) As a result, the comfort that the Lord gives us in any trial helps us to grow in love and grow to spiritual maturity and completeness.

As we help our physical and spiritual children learn to comfort others, they will grow in their love and become more spiritually mature. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to comfort others in any trial.

Helping Our Children Learn to Relate Positively to Others

In our last topic, we discussed helping our physical and spiritual children learn to comfort others, especially those who are in sorrow due to the death of a family member. Today, we want to help them learn to relate positively to one another as Christians. 1 Thessalonians 5:15 says, “See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.” Today, we will focus on the topic of how to help our physical and spiritual children learn to relate to other people in ways that help to reach people for Christ and then help them grow spiritually.

This verse begins by telling us what we are not to do if we want to learn to relate in a Biblical way to others. We see that we are not to return evil for evil to anyone whether that person is a Christian or not a Christian. Christ modeled what this means in Matthew 26:49-50 where we read, “Immediately he went up to Jesus and said, ‘Greetings, Rabbi!’ and kissed Him. But Jesus said to him, ‘Friend, why have you come?’ Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and took Him.” Here, we see that Judas had just betrayed Christ with a kiss. In the moments before Christ was arrested, Christ said to Judas, “Friend, why have you come?” At the very moment that Judas was betraying Christ, Christ still treated Judas with respect and treated him as a friend. Because Christ did not sin, we know that those words were genuine and spoken in love.

However, that was not the first time that Christ had treated Judas with respect and had treated him as a friend. Early in His ministry Christ had said in John 6:70-71, “Jesus answered them, ‘Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?’ He spoke of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, for it was he who would betray Him, being one of the twelve.” Christ never told the disciples who it was that would betray Him. The disciples only found out when Judas betrayed Christ with the kiss mentioned above. Christ showed Judas the same love that He showed the other disciples throughout His ministry to the disciples.

John 12:4-6 says, “Then one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, who would betray Him, said, ‘Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?’ This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it.” Christ knew the character of Judas. He knew that Judas was a thief. Yet Christ had given him the responsibility to carry the money box. Christ treated Judas with such great respect that He gave Judas the freedom to carry the money box and steal from it so that he would know the sinfulness of his own heart.

Perhaps the most amazing thing of all was what happened at the Last Supper. In Mark 14:18-19, we read, “Now as they sat and ate, Jesus said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, one of you who eats with Me will betray Me.’ And they began to be sorrowful, and to say to Him one by one, ‘Is it I?’ And another said, ‘Is it I?’” Here, we see that Christ had shown just as much love to Judas as He had shown to each of the other disciples. As a result, none of the disciples suspected that Judas would be the one that would betray Christ. Instead, each one asked about himself and asked if he would do such a thing. These passages all show us that Christ had never returned evil for evil even to Judas, the one that betrayed Him. We want to help our children learn to follow the example of Christ and help them learn to treat every person with respect and not try to return evil for evil.

Instead of returning evil for evil, we see that we want to help our children learn to pursue what is good. The word that is translated “good” in 1 Thessalonians means *that which is good in its character and beneficial in its effects*. This means that things that are good are pleasing to God.

In addition, they also benefit others. Galatians 6:10 says, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.” Here, we see that we are to do the things that are pleasing to God to all people and especially to those who are of the household of faith. In fact, we are to look for opportunities to do good. That means that we want to help our children begin to look for opportunities to do good to both Christians and non-Christians.

In Colossians 1:10, Paul shows that we are to pray that our children will learn how to become fruitful in every good work. Colossians 1:9-12 says, “For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.” In these verses, we see that we are to pray for several things for our physical and spiritual children. However, one of the things that we are to pray is that they will become fruitful in every good work.

We help our children learn to look for opportunities to do good by helping them to realize that is the purpose for which God created them. Ephesians 2:10 says, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” We want to show our children that the very purpose for which they are created in Christ was to do good works. In fact, it is the plan of God that we should help them learn to practice good works as a key part of their lives and ministry.

Ephesians 4:28-29 point out two different ways that we help our children learn to do good. Those verses say, “Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.” In these verses, we see that we are to help our children learn to do good with their hands as they learn to help others. In addition, we are to help them learn to do good by the way that they speak to others so that they will be able to build up others by the things that they say.

In Romans 7:14-25, we see that Christians cannot do good in their own strength. Romans 7:18-19 says, “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.” When we as Christians try to do good in our own strength, we will always fail. In contrast, Romans 8:37 says, “Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.” Here, we see that the Lord can do great things through our lives as we yield the control of our lives to the Holy Spirit. In the first seven chapters of Romans, the Holy Spirit is only mentioned once and we see in Romans 7:14-25 that we fail to do good. However, in Romans 8, the Holy Spirit is mentioned nineteen times. We see that as we yield to the Holy Spirit, He is able to do the will of God through our lives.

Yielding our lives to the Holy Spirit includes the confession of any sin that is in our lives. In 2 Timothy 2:21, we read, “Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.” Here, we see that we help our children learn to cleanse their lives from anything that would bring dishonor. The Lord says that those who are cleansing their lives are useful to the Master. In fact, their lives are prepared for every good work, because their lives are set apart to the Lord and they desire their lives to be holy and useful to the Lord.

Then, 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” Here, we see that the Lord helps us to apply the Scriptures to our lives so that we know what the Word of God teaches, we know when we do wrong, we take steps to correct what we are doing wrong and then we are trained in righteous living. This is what produces Christians that are mature and equipped for every good work. If we are Christians that are equipped for every good work and are practicing good works, we will find that we are able to build healthy relationships with both Christians and non-Christians. This makes it possible for us to reach people and then help them grow spiritually.

The writer of Hebrews had a concern for the people to whom he was writing. We should have that same concern for our physical and spiritual children. Hebrews 13:20-21 says, “Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.” God wants to make every Christian complete in every good work so that every Christian can carry out His will. As we help our children learn to carry out the will of the Lord in their relationships both with non-Christians and Christians, the Lord says the results produced through their lives will be pleasing in His sight.

As Romans 12:21 says, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” As we help our children learn to yield to the Holy Spirit and relate positively with others, we will see the Lord work mightily through their lives because they will be using their lives to carry out good works that are pleasing to the Lord. May the Lord richly bless you as you equip your children to pursue what is good both for themselves and for all people.

Helping Our Children Learn to Minister to the Total Person

In our last topic, we discussed helping our physical and spiritual children learn to relate positively to others in ways that help them to reach others for Christ and then build up other Christians. Today, we want to help them learn to minister to the total person. 1 Thessalonians 5:23 says, “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Today, we see that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to minister to the spirit as well as the soul and the body.

In the verse mentioned above, we see that Paul prayed that the whole spirit, soul and body would be preserved blameless. We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to minister to the total person as they minister to others. Even most non-Christians usually know how to minister to the physical needs of others. If someone is hungry or has another physical need, even most non-Christians will share some food or what is needed to meet the physical need. As Christians we are instructed in Galatians 6:10, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.” Meeting physical needs is a definite part of doing good to all.

However, as Christians we are to learn to minister to more than just physical needs. We also want to help our children learn to minister to the needs of the soul. The soul includes the mind, emotions and will. As a boy, Christ demonstrated how we help our children learn to meet the mental needs of others. Luke 2:46-47 says, “Now so it was that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers.” One of the things we want to help our children learn is to listen carefully and ask questions of others. A person that is a good listener and also asks good questions will cause people to think and grow in their own understanding.

We also want to show our children how to minister to the emotions of others. Romans 12:15 says, “Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.” Here, we see that Scripture helps us to understand how to minister to two different types of emotions. We want to help our children learn to rejoice with others during their times of joy. Many people have no idea how to rejoice with others. When someone shares something exciting that has happened in their lives, many people try to respond by sharing something even more exciting that happened to them. That is not what this verse means. Instead, we are to share the joy of the other person and thank the Lord with them for what the Lord is doing in their lives.

This verse also says that we want to show our children how to weep with those that weep. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.” We share the comfort of the Lord by weeping with those who weep. Christ demonstrated how we are to weep with others in John 11:33-36 where we read, “Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. And He said, ‘Where have you laid him?’ They said to Him, ‘Lord, come and see.’ Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, ‘See how He loved him!’” We want to help our children learn to share the painful emotions of others by learning to weep with them.

We help our children learn to minister to the will of others by our example as we follow the

example of Christ. In Matthew 26:39, we read, “He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, ‘O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.’” Christ also said in John 6:38, “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.” As we model for our children our desire to do the will of God, by our prayers, words and actions, they will learn by example how to help others learn to do the will of the Lord.

However, the total person also includes the human spirit. Those who are not Christians can never minister to the spirit because they do not have the Holy Spirit living within their human spirit to give them the power to minister to the spirit. Our greatest ministry to our children as we help them learn to minister to the total person is to help them learn to minister to the human spirit of others. Only the Scriptures can separate the soul from the spirit according to Hebrews 4:12. Romans 1:19-32 shows us the five parts of the spirit and how mankind began to violate each part of the spirit when man chose to sin. The five parts of the spirit and how man violated each part can be seen in these verses in Romans. We see the following parts of the human spirit:

Natural light – violated by not recognizing the Godhead – Romans 1:19-20

Conscience – violated by becoming futile in their thoughts – Romans 1:21

Wisdom – violated by leaving God out of their thinking – Romans 1:22-23

Sensitivity – violated by becoming sensitive to their own sinful desires – Romans 1:24-28

Creativity – violated by finding sinful ways to satisfy sinful desires – Romans 1:29-32

Our desire is to help our physical and spiritual children learn how minister to each of these parts of the spirit in the lives of those to whom they minister. Natural light is what we can know about God from His creation. We want to help our children learn to appreciate the creation of the Lord and see His glory in it. Psalm 19:1 says, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork.” We help our children learn to see how both the heavens and the earth show the glory of God. As they learn to see the glory of God in His creation, they are being equipped to minister to others by helping others see the glory of God in His creation.

1 Timothy 4:2 says that sinful people sear their conscience. We read that people are, “Speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron.” When non-Christians have committed any sin enough times, they reach a point where they can commit that sin without it even bothering their conscience. At the time a person becomes a Christian, the Holy Spirit renews the conscience of the new Christian. 1 Timothy 1:5 says, “Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith.” We want to help our children learn to show love to other by helping others realize that they can have a clear or good conscience by confessing sin as soon as they recognize that sin in their lives.

James 3 contrasts worldly wisdom with godly wisdom. James 3:14-16 describes worldly wisdom and its results when it says, “But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.” All people without Christ depend on this worldly wisdom. In contrast, James 3:17 says, “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.” Here, we see that godly wisdom helps us to see things from the viewpoint of the Lord and act as He acts. Psalm 111:10 tells us, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His praise endures forever.” Godly wisdom develops as people fear the Lord and learn to obey the commandments of the Lord.

Sensitivity is becoming sensitive to the inner spirit of others. We help our children learn to

become sensitive to the inner spirit of others as we help them to become people of understanding. Proverbs 20:5 says, "Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out." First, we help our children to become people of understanding by helping them learn to draw counsel from others by asking questions that will lead others to share wisdom with them. Then, we help our children learn to listen so that they can draw out the inner thoughts and feelings of others. James 1:19 says, "So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath." As we help our children learn to really listen to others, they learn to become sensitive to the inner spirit of others. Then they can also show others how to become sensitive.

Creativity is finding ways to minister to the inner spirit of others. Daniel is a person that had great creativity. In Daniel 1:8, we see that Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself. He then suggested, in Daniel 1:11, a creative test for Melzar so that Melzar would not endanger his head with the king. (KJV) Daniel requested that Melzar give him and his three friends a ten-day test where they ate vegetables instead of the king's food and wine. This creative test allowed God to give Daniel and his three friends great knowledge and understanding. Daniel 1:17 says, "As for these four young men, God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams." Daniel continued to show this creativity throughout his life. As we help our children learn to purpose in their hearts to please the Lord in all that they do, the Lord will also give them great creativity and help them find creative ways to minister to the needs of others. Then they will also be able to show others how to develop godly creativity by their example.

The Lord is able to give our physical and spiritual children a great ministry as they learn to minister to the total person including the spirit as well as the soul and the body. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children grow as Christ grew in Luke 2:40 where we read, "And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him."

Helping Our Children Develop Balanced and Mature Christians

In our last topic, we discussed helping our physical and spiritual children learn to minister to the total person. We saw that included learning how to minister to the spirit as well as the body and the soul. Today, we want to help them learn how to develop Christians that are balanced and mature. 1 Thessalonians 1:3 says, “Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father.” In this verse, we see that a balanced and mature Christian has a strong faith, a strong love and a strong hope. Developing this balanced life will be the focus of our topic today.

1 Corinthians 13:13 says, “And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” In this verse, we see that the three attitudes that abide are faith, hope and love. As Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica, we see that the Christians at Thessalonica had developed a strong faith, a strong hope and a strong love. In the letters to some of the churches, sometimes only one or two of these attitudes are mentioned. In 1 Corinthians, Paul did not mention any of the three. Instead, he said in 1 Corinthians 1:4, “I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus.” Since faith, hope and love were all weak in the church at Corinth, Paul was thankful that God had shown His grace to them. In each letter where one or more of the three attitudes were lacking, Paul wrote things to strengthen that area in their lives.

We will help our physical and spiritual children develop balanced and mature Christian lives if we help them develop a strong faith, a strong hope and a strong love. First, we want to help our children develop a mature faith that is demonstrated by its works. In Philippians 2:12-13, Paul wrote, “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” When Christians are allowing the Lord to work within their lives to strengthen their faith, the result will be that their lives are producing actions that are pleasing to the Lord.

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12 says, “Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power, that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.” In these verses, we see that Paul prayed that the Thessalonians would be filled with His goodness and that their lives would demonstrate powerful works of faith.

Such powerful works of faith are the result of yielding our lives to the Holy Spirit so that we act in the power of the Holy Spirit instead of acting in our own strength. One of the last things that Christ told the disciples is recorded in Luke 24:49 where we read, “Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.” The disciples obeyed the instructions of Christ and prayed as they waited for Christ to send the Holy Spirit. Acts 1:14 says, “These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.” Peter had realized the night Christ was crucified that when he depended on his own strength he failed.

In contrast, when they waited until they were filled with the Holy Spirit, we see that Peter and the eleven were able to speak the Word with boldness. Acts 2:14 says, “But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, ‘Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words.’” The results are seen at the end of

the sermon where we read in Acts 2:41-42, “Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” Here, we see that when we yield our lives to the Holy Spirit so that He fills us, we will speak the Word with boldness; the Lord will work in the lives of people; those who trust in Christ will want to learn to grow in Christ. We want to help our children develop a faith that produces powerful works that transform the lives of others.

Second, we help our children develop a balanced life as we help them develop a strong hope. As Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, he thanked God for their patience of hope. Here, we see that hope develops patience. Titus 2:13 says, “Looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.” Here, we see that the return of Christ is our blessed hope. Since we do not know when Christ will return, we develop patience as we keep our eyes fixed on this blessed hope. We want to help our children grow in their understanding of the fact that we are just strangers and pilgrims here on this earth. Our real home is in heaven and we eagerly look forward to that time when Christ will take us to heaven.

This hope also affects what we say and do. 1 Peter 3:15 says, “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.” Here, we see that Peter reminds us that people will question us as they see the hope and confidence that we have in our lives. As a result, this will provide many opportunities to explain the reason for this hope to others. As our children learn to explain the fact that they have a strong hope because of the resurrection of Christ and the fact that they are eagerly waiting for the return of Christ, others will also be drawn to Christ.

Paul showed us how to help our children learn to take advantage of such opportunities when he said in Acts 23:6, “But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, ‘Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!’” Paul pointed out the fact that the basis for his hope was the resurrection of the dead. That is why 1 Corinthians 15:19-20 says, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” We have hope in the resurrection because of the fact that Christ conquered death when He rose from the dead. As a result, we help our children to understand that hope is based on the resurrection of Christ and the return of Christ to take us to be with Him in heaven for all eternity.

Third, we help our children develop a balanced life as we help them develop a strong love. In 1 Thessalonians 1:3, Paul thanked the Lord for the labor of love of the Thessalonians. A strong faith produces works that are pleasing to the Lord. A strong hope produces patience as we wait for the coming of the Lord. Together these two things produce the third as we see that the Thessalonians had developed a labor of love. Hebrews 6:10 describes this labor of love when it says, “For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.” Here, we see that a labor of love is ministry to the saints from a heart that is filled with the love of Christ.

Galatians 5:13 says, “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” As we help our children learn that the Lord has set them free to minister to other Christians in love, they will model for new Christians the love of Christ as that love flows through their lives to the lives of the new Christians. Such love is the result of taking root in the love of Christ. That is why we need to pray for our physical and spiritual children the same prayer that Paul prayed for the Ephesians. In Ephesians 3:16-19, Paul prayed, “That He would grant you, according to the riches of His

glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height--to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” As we pray for our children, the Lord will cause His love to flow through their lives.

We can also share with our children the wonderful promise that their labor of love is not in vain. 1 Corinthians 15:58 says, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” Here, we see that the Lord reminds us that our labor is not in vain. Then, 1 Corinthians 3:8 explain why our labor is not in vain. That verse says, “Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.” In this verse, the Lord promises that each person will be rewarded according to his labor.

In 2 Timothy 3:16-17, we read, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” We want to help our children learn to become men and women of God that are mature and equipped for every good work. Many things do not last. However, there are three things that do last and they help our children to develop mature, balanced lives. 1 Corinthians 13:13 says, “And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” God wants each of us to help our physical and spiritual children develop each of the three attitudes in their lives. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your physical and spiritual children develop spiritual maturity and become balanced Christians that greatly impact the lives of others.

Helping Our Children Learn to Experience Comfort in Persecution

In our topic today, we want to learn how to help our physical and spiritual children learn to experience comfort in times of persecution. Persecution is something that has happened throughout the history of the church and continues to happen in many countries in the world today. We will learn about the persecution that the church at Thessalonica was suffering. Since Satan is in opposition to Christians everywhere, we need to prepare our children so that they will be prepared if or when persecution comes in their lives.

Like 1 Thessalonians, this second letter to the Christians in Thessalonica was written by Paul, Silas and Timothy. The Lord had used them to bring the Gospel to Thessalonica and establish the church in that city. Although persecution forced them to leave, they had a great concern for what was happening to the Christians in that city. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2 says, “Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” These men wanted the Christians in Thessalonica to experience the grace and peace that comes from the Lord.

2 Thessalonians 1:3-4 says, “We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other, so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure.” We see that Paul, Silas and Timothy were continually giving thanks to God for the spiritual growth and development of the new Christians in Thessalonica. In 1 Thessalonians 1:8, we see that people throughout Greece had heard about these Christians. That verse says, “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.” As a result, these three men were continually giving thanks.

Here, we see that the faith and love of these Christians was continuing to grow. In fact, we read that their faith was growing exceedingly. In addition, the entire church showed a strong love for one another. Here, we see an ideal example of the way that the faith and love of new Christians will grow when they are really learning to walk in the Lord and be led by the Holy Spirit. Paul, Silas and Timothy had prayed that these very things would happen in the lives of the Thessalonians. In 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3, we read, “We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father.” The Lord had answered their prayers. In fact, their patience and faith were growing in spite of the fact that they were experiencing tribulation and persecution.

As Paul heard about the growth of the Christians in Thessalonica, he also heard about the persecution that they were suffering. As a result, this letter was written to comfort and encourage them in that persecution. 2 Thessalonians 1:5-8 says, “*Which is* manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer; since *it is* a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to *give* you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The word that is translated “manifest evidence” means *proof or evidence*. Here, we see that their attitude toward suffering was proof of their patience and faith.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:10-12, we read, “You *are* witnesses, and God *also*, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father *does* his own children, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.” These Christians had chosen to walk in a way that was pleasing to God because of their great concern for the kingdom of God. Here, we see an important lesson that we want to help our children understand. It is more important to seek the kingdom of God even when it means suffering than to desire an easy life here on this earth. God is using that suffering to help us grow and mature. At the same time, God saw the suffering of the Christians in Thessalonica for the kingdom of God and so they could be assured that God would be righteous and would judge those who were making them suffer.

In fact, we see that it is a righteous thing for God to repay with tribulation those who persecute Christians and make them suffer. Romans 12:19 says, “Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but *rather* give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord.” Then Galatians 6:7-8 adds, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.” God promised that He will judge those who persecute Christians and make them suffer. As a result, we can leave all judgment to Him.

Paul, Silas and Timothy also offered some words of encouragement to the Christians as they suffered. They told the Christians that were suffering to rest with them. The word that is translated “rest” means *to relax or rest as they waited for the coming of the Lord when they would have a permanent rest from all tribulation*. These three men had experienced much suffering for Christ. As a result, they had learned to experience that rest. After Paul and Silas had been beaten and put in stocks, Acts 16:25 says, “But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.” Paul and Silas were suffering but at the same time they were praying and singing hymns of praise to God.

We can also experience that rest, because we know that God will one day bring eternal judgment on those who reject the payment that Christ made for sin. Here, we see that those who reject Christ will experience that judgment when Christ comes to bring the final judgment. Revelation 20:15 says, “And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.” Here, we see that all those who reject the salvation that Christ has provided will one day be cast into the lake of fire. Those who have persecuted other Christians will experience their own judgment.

2 Thessalonians 1:9-12 says, “These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed. Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of *this* calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of *His* goodness and the work of faith with power, that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Here, we see that those who experience that judgment will find that their judgment is eternal. They will be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord. Luke 3:17 says, “His winnowing fan *is* in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire.” Here, we see that the judgment of those who reject is eternal and they will burn with fire that cannot be put out.

In addition to the physical suffering that those who reject Christ will experience, we see that they will be excluded from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power. Matthew

25:30 says, “And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Here, we see that this eternal judgment will be in outer darkness. Not only will all unbelievers be excluded from the presence of the Lord but they will also be in total darkness. Firemen say that when you are inside a building that is fully on fire that the flames make everything else darkness and you cannot see anything. This means that every person who rejects the payment of salvation provided by Christ will suffer alone for all eternity.

In contrast, all those who have followed Christ and may be suffering for Him can look forward to His coming. Christ will come to be glorified with his saints. We will be able to look at Christ with wonder and admiration. This is the reward to which all those who have heard the Gospel and chosen to believe in Christ can look. In 1 Thessalonians 4:17-18, Paul had promised these Christians, “Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.” This is the confidence that we all have as Christians.

That is why Paul prayed in both verse five and verse eleven of 2 Thessalonians 1 that God would count the Thessalonians worthy of His calling. The word that is translated “worthy” means *to consider worthy or deserving* and has the thought that we will live our lives as Christians in a way that is pleasing to the Lord. As we live lives that are pleasing to God, because they are in agreement with His goodness, we cause the name of Christ to be glorified. In 1 Corinthians 10:31, we read, “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” We want to show our physical and spiritual children how to live their lives in such a way that their lives will always bring glory to Christ. As we show our children how to live such lives by our example, we see that Christ will also be glorified in us. They will see our example and they will also grow in Christ so that their lives also bring glory to Christ. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children to experience comfort in persecution and bring glory to Christ in their lives.

Helping Our Children Learn to Explain the Man of Sin

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to bring glory to Christ even when there are going through times of persecution and suffering. That will happen as they learn to leave all judgment to the Lord and choose to walk in a way that is pleasing to Christ. In our topic today, we are going to see that Paul answered some questions that the Christians in Thessalonica had asked. False teachers had come saying that the persecution the Thessalonians were suffering was because they had missed the return of Christ to take the church to heaven. They said they were now in the period of time known as the Day of the Lord, which begins with the tribulation.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-4 says, “Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for *that Day will not come* unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.” In 1 Thessalonians, Paul had answered the question of the Thessalonian Christians about those who died before Christ came to take the Christians to heaven at the rapture of the church. Now false teachers were troubling the Christians by saying that they had missed the Rapture and the Day of the Lord had come. Here, we see that Paul did not want the Christians to be upset.

Paul did not want the Christians to be shaken in mind or troubled. The word that is translated “shaken” is used of an earthquake or is used in Matthew, Mark and Luke to talk about the time of future judgment. Matthew 24:29 says, “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.” Here, we see that the heavens will be shaken in the tribulation. Apparently false teachers had come who claimed to be speaking for Paul and even had a false letter saying that the persecution that the Christians were suffering meant that the Day of the Lord had come and that was why they were experiencing persecution. Paul did not want to see these Christians upset and worried because of this false teaching.

As a result, Paul told the Christians not to let anyone deceive them. Paul said that two particular things had to happen before the Day of the Lord would come. First, there had to be the falling away. Second, the man of sin had to be revealed. Since these two things are mentioned together, we see that it is talking about the falling away that will come at the time that the man of sin (the antichrist) will be revealed. The man of sin is also called the son of perdition (destruction). We also see the character of the man of sin described. The antichrist will set himself against God. He will exalt himself instead. He will claim to be God. He will require all to worship him. He will sit as God in the temple of God (which will happen at the middle of the tribulation). Mathew 24:15 says, “‘Therefore when you see the “abomination of desolation,” spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place’ (whoever reads, let him understand).” He will try to prove by arguments that he is God.

2 Thessalonians 2:5-8 says, “Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains *will do so* until He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.” Paul had given the new Christians in Thessalonica instructions about the coming antichrist so he

reminded them of that fact.

However, he also reminded them that there is One who is restraining or holding back the antichrist so that he may be revealed at the time when Christ allows the antichrist to come and deceive the nations. The One who restrains is mentioned in both verse six and verse seven. Since the antichrist will be given power by Satan, the One who is restraining the antichrist has to have greater power than Satan. In 1 John 4:1-4, we are told to test the spirits. 1 John 4:3-4 says, “And every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the *spirit* of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world. You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.” In the time that John wrote the book of 1 John, there were already many antichrists so the spirit of antichrist was already in the world. That is why we are promised that the One who is in us (the Holy Spirit) is greater than the one who is in the world.

There are many antichrists present today also but these verses talk about the final antichrist that will oppose God and exalt himself above God. Since the Holy Spirit indwells each believer, the final antichrist cannot be revealed until the Holy Spirit who indwells each Christian is taken out of the way. The word that is translated “taken out of the way” means in *the middle of or among*. As long as the Christians are here on this earth, the Holy Spirit who indwells each believer is in the middle of the people of the world. Once we are taken to heaven, the Holy Spirit will no longer be in the middle or among the people of the world. As a result, Paul assured the Christians in Thessalonica that the antichrist had not come because he could not be revealed until the Christians are taken to heaven and the Holy Spirit is out of the way.

Once the One who restrains is taken out of the way, then the wicked one will be revealed. Once we as Christians are taken to heaven, then the antichrist will be free to exercise his power in the world and work to deceive the people of the world. As a result, the antichrist will soon begin to work to gain world power once the Christians are taken to heaven. The antichrist will reveal his true character at the middle of the tribulation. Revelation 13:4-5 says, “So they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, ‘Who *is* like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?’ And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months.” Here, we see that once the antichrist has full control in the world that he will exercise that power for forty-two months.

However, at the end of the forty-two months, the power of the antichrist will come to a sudden end. As a result, the antichrist is going to do everything that he can to fight against God because he knows that his time is short. 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10 says, “The coming of the *lawless one* is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.” We see that Satan is going to give the antichrist power to deceive the world. The way that Satan will help the antichrist to deceive the world is giving him power to deceive with all power, signs and lying wonders. Here, we see that Satan will try to imitate the work of the Holy Spirit.

In Hebrews 2:3-4, we see the work of the Holy Spirit. Those verses say, “How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard *Him*, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?” The Holy Spirit confirmed the ministry of the apostles by signs, wonders and various miracles. Here, we see that Satan will imitate the work of the Holy Spirit by giving the antichrist power to deceive the world with all power, signs and lying wonders.

The Lord will allow Satan to give this power to the antichrist to deceive those who rejected the truth. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” Today, many false teachers are already trying to deceive people with works of power, signs and lying wonders in an effort to gain followers for themselves. Such false teachers are working hard to get people to make the choice to reject the truth of the Gospel and follow their teachings instead. These false teachers are preparing people to reject the truth in that day when the antichrist will be given power to deceive people throughout the world. In that day, such people will not turn to Christ for salvation.

2 Thessalonians 2:11-12 says, “And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” Here, we see that people who continue to reject Christ, until Christ comes to take the Christians to heaven, actually will receive strong delusion. “Strong delusion” means these people will continue *to believe what is false*. The result will be that they will choose to believe the lies of the antichrist and choose to follow him.

God will allow this to happen so that those who rejected the truth of the Gospel will not have a second chance during the tribulation to believe the Gospel. Only those who have not heard and rejected will have the opportunity to believe the message of the Gospel that will be preached by the two witnesses that God will send to bring that message. John 3:18 says, “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” Here, we see that those who choose to reject the truth will continue to be condemned with the result that they will experience eternal judgment. We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to understand how the antichrist will be able to deceive during the tribulation those who have heard and rejected. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn warn to people of the results of rejection of Christ.

Helping Our Children Learn to Stand Firm

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain how the man of sin, known as the antichrist, will deceive the people of the world in the future. He will be able to deceive many people because God will allow him to deceive those who have already rejected the Gospel. Paul also wanted to help the Christians in the city of Thessalonica learn to stand firm and not be deceived by false teachers. That will be the focus of our topic today.

In 2 Thessalonians 2:13-15, we read, “But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.” Here, we see that Paul and those who traveled with him were continually giving thanks to God for the way that the people of Thessalonica had responded to the Gospel. This encouragement was needed because verses one and two of chapter two said, “Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come.” Paul wanted them to know he was thankful for them and they did not need to be troubled. This gives us an example for our own lives as we learn to become thankful as we see the Lord working in the lives of others.

This is also a verse where we see the whole Trinity mentioned in one sentence. In this verse, we see that we are beloved by the Lord. We have been chosen for salvation by the Father from the beginning. We have been set apart from sin by the Holy Spirit. We can look forward to enjoying for eternity the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. In addition to telling us what each member of the Trinity does for us, this verse also teaches us about the salvation that the Lord has given us. We are the beloved or those who are greatly loved by the Lord. We were chosen for salvation before the world was ever created. Ephesians 1:4 says, “Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.” We were set apart from sin. We have been called to eternal glory.

These characteristics of all Christians are reasons why we do not need to be troubled or fear that we will ever face judgment like those who follow the antichrist. That is why Paul encouraged the Thessalonians to stand fast and hold to the traditions that they had been taught. The word translated “traditions” means *the things they had been taught by Paul*. Paul had taught the Thessalonians in two different ways. First, he taught them the teachings of Christ when he was with them. Second, he taught them with the written word when he wrote the book of 1 Thessalonians to them. We know that we can depend on the message when it comes from the Word of God instead of the traditions of people.

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 goes on to say, “Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given *us* everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.” Paul wanted the Thessalonians to know that they did not have to fear the antichrist because they would be taken to heaven before the antichrist is revealed. In the same way, we want to help our children understand that they do not need to fear the antichrist or what will happen in the future. Instead, they can rejoice in the fact that they are greatly loved by both Christ and the Father. Christ has also given us everlasting encouragement. He has given us a good hope because He

has risen from the dead and will one day return to take us to be with Him in heaven. As a result, we are secure for the future.

However, we are also given promises for the present. Like Paul, we want to help our children understand that Christ will comfort their hearts. The Lord often provides this comfort through other Christians. Hebrews 3:13 says, “But exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today,’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” The word that is translated “establish” means *to strengthen or to make firm*. 2 Thessalonians 3:3 says, “But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard *you* from the evil one.” As the Lord comforts and establishes us through His Word, we want to help our children understand that the Lord makes it possible for us to carry out every good work. Ephesians 2:10 says, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” God created every Christian for good works.

2 Thessalonians 3:1-2 says, “Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run *swiftly* and be glorified, just as *it is* with you, and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith.” Here, we see that Paul asked the Christians in Thessalonica to pray for him and those with him. In the same way, we need to encourage our children to pray for us as we pray for them. Here, we see that one of the things that we need to encourage our children to do is to pray that the Word of God will spread swiftly. The word that is translated run is used twenty times and often talks about running in a race. Hebrews 12:1 says, “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.” We want our children to pray that we will run with endurance as we spread the Word of God. Paul also prayed that the Word of God would be glorified as it is spread.

Paul then asked them to pray that he and the team with him would be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men. The word that is translated “unreasonable” means *anything that is unrighteous or sinful*. The word that is translated “wicked” is translated “evil” in 2 Timothy 3:13 where we read, “But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.” Paul knew that there were many people who were opposed to the Gospel. He knew that he and those with him were in danger from those who would try to stop the spread of the Gospel. As a result, he asked the Christians in Thessalonica to pray that God would protect them from these evil people.

Paul also explained why these people were filled with evil. He said that all men did not have faith. Some of those who are controlled by evil are in strong opposition to the spread of the Gospel. Paul understood that well because it described his own life before the Lord stopped him on the road to Damascus. Acts 9:1-2 says, “Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.” Until the Lord stopped Paul, he had been controlled by evil and did everything possible to stop the spread of the Gospel.

However, Paul also understood the power of the Lord during those times when people were opposing the spread of the Gospel. 2 Thessalonians 3:3-5 says, “But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard *you* from the evil one. And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, both that you do and will do the things we command you. Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ.” There will also be times when we or our children will face opposition as we faithfully share the Gospel. In such situations, we need to remind our children of the same things that Paul reminded his spiritual children in Thessalonica. The Lord is faithful.

Because the Lord is faithful we know that He will do at least two things to help us when we face opposition and even persecution. First, we see that the Lord will establish us. The word that is translated “establish” means *to strengthen or to make firm*. The Lord used this same word when He said to Peter in Luke 22:31-32, “And the Lord said, ‘Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift *you* as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to *Me*, strengthen your brethren.’” The Lord knew that Peter would deny Him three times. Christ also knew that the faith of Peter would not fail. As a result, the Lord told Peter to establish or strengthen the other disciples when he returned to Christ. Here, we see that some of the most important lessons that we learn are learned in times of testing.

Second, we see that Christ will guard us from the evil one. The word that is translated “guard” means *to obey, to watch, to keep or to guard something or someone*. In 2 Timothy 1:12-14, we see that this word is used twice. Those verses say, “For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day. Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.” Since God keeps us through the power of the Holy Spirit, we know that He will protect us from the evil one. Paul knew that the Christians in Thessalonica would do what he asked because they knew he was concerned for them.

Paul also understood how the Lord would continue to work in their hearts. The Lord would help them to continue to grow in their understanding of the love of God. The Lord would also help them grow in patience as they followed the example of Christ. We know that the Lord will do the same things in the lives of our physical and spiritual children as we help them grow to spiritual maturity. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to stand fast in the Lord.

Helping Our Children Learn to Work As We Wait for the Lord

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to stand fast in the Lord. We know that our children will face opposition as they serve the Lord because Satan and those who are following Him are not happy when they see Christ working in and through the life of any Christian. As a result, we saw that the Lord is the One who is able to establish our children and keep them from the evil one. In our topic today, we are going to see that we want to help our children learn to work as they wait for the coming of the Lord.

In 2 Thessalonians 3:6-10, we read, “But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.” We begin these verses by seeing that Paul gave the Christians in Thessalonica a command. This command was to withdraw from any Christian that was walking in a disorderly manner.

The word that is translated “disorderly” was used in the Greek society to talk about a soldier who was not marching in a proper way or for people who did not show up for work because they were spending their time following sinful pleasures. Paul had both taught the teachings of Christ and had written the book of 1 Thessalonians to this church at an earlier time. In 1 Thessalonians 5:14, we read, “Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.” In this verse, another form of the word disorderly is translated “unruly”. The only other place this word is used is in 2 Thessalonians 3:11, which gives us a description of the disorderly when it says, “For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies.” Here, we see that a disorderly person does not work but spends his or her time inquiring about the business of others.

Paul told the Christians to withdraw from a disorderly Christian. The word that is translated “to withdraw” means *to avoid and not spend time with such people enjoying their fellowship and participating in their activities*. Paul and the team with him gave the Thessalonians a good example by working hard both day and night to give the Thessalonians an example to follow. 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.” Paul and the team with him knew the importance of leading others by their own example. In the same way, as physical or spiritual parents, we are to lead our physical and spiritual children by our example.

In verse ten, we see that Paul said that if any would not work that they should not eat. Paul, Silas and Timothy had given an example by working night and day when they were with the Thessalonians. Apparently, there were a few that were physically able to work that were not working when these men were in Thessalonica. As a result, when Paul was in Thessalonica he said that those who refused to work should not be given food by the other Christians because that would encourage them to be lazy. Here, we see that Paul reminded the Christians of the command that he had given earlier when he was with them in Thessalonica.

We see why Paul gave that reminder in 2 Thessalonians 3:11-12 that says, “For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are

busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.” There were a few who had become Christians that continued to walk in a disorderly manner. They did not work at all. Instead, they spent their time inquiring and gossiping about the business of others. People who are not Christians may do those things, but here we see that Christians are to set an example for others by the way that we work.

Paul used two words as he spoke to the Christians that were busybodies. The first was to command them to begin working. The second word that Paul used is exhort. The word that is translated “to exhort” means *to come to one’s side to encourage, teach, comfort or strengthen*. Here, we see that Paul says that even when it is necessary to give a command to correct a sinful or rebellious Christian, the command should be given in love. Paul illustrated this principle in Philemon 1:8-9 where we read, “Therefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting, *yet* for love’s sake I rather appeal *to you*—being such a one as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ.” Paul could have commanded but he chose instead to appeal in love. We need to follow the example of Paul so that we provide an example for our physical and spiritual children to follow when they have to deal with sin in the lives of others.

Here, we see that Paul appealed to the busybodies to work with quietness so they could provide their own food. The word that is translated “quietness” means that they were *to work without meddling in the affairs of others*. They were to learn to be silent instead of gossiping about what was happening in the lives of other people. In the same way, we want to help our children learn to work to supply their own needs. At the same time, we want to show them by our example the importance of avoiding gossip about other people.

That is why 2 Thessalonians 3:13-15 goes on to say, “But *as for* you, brethren, do not grow weary *in* doing good. And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet do not count *him* as an enemy, but admonish *him* as a brother.” Here, we see how we are to respond even if there are some Christians who are meddling in the affairs of others and gossiping. We are to set an example by not getting tired of doing what is good. Galatians 6:9-10 promises us, “And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.” Here, we see that we will reap a reward according to the timing of God if we make it our goal to look for every opportunity to do those things that are good and pleasing in the sight of God.

We also see how to respond to Christians who are rebellious and do not obey the Word of God. We are to take notice of the fact that a Christian is presently rebellious and not obedient to the Word of God. Then these verses say that we are not to keep company with such a Christian. The word translated “keep company” means that we are not *to spend time in social situations, such as eating, because that will cause the person to think that we approve of their rebellious actions*. Instead, Galatians 6:1 says, “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.” Here, we see that Christians who are spiritually mature are to seek to restore such a person and help them get back into a right relationship with the Lord.

We also see the attitude that we are to have as we seek to restore a rebellious Christian. We are to seek to restore with a spirit of gentleness. That spirit of gentleness is important for our own sake. If we have a wrong attitude, we will also be tempted to sin. Romans 14:13 says, “Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in *our* brother’s way.” If we judge another person, we will cause that

person to stumble. In addition, we are also allowing ourselves to become controlled by pride.

That is why we are told that we are not to treat the Christian in rebellion like an enemy. Instead, we are to admonish that person as a brother. Colossians 3:16 says, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” Here, we see the way to admonish as a brother. We are to have the Word of God in our hearts so that we admonish with the Word of God. We are also to have grace in our hearts because our goal is to restore and not to condemn. When the Word of God and grace are in our hearts, we will admonish as a brother instead of condemn as a judge. In the process, we will also help to restore the brother or sister.

We want to help our children to learn to minister to rebellious Christians. In 2 Thessalonians 3:16-18, we read, “Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way. The Lord *be* with you all. The salutation of Paul with my own hand, which is a sign in every epistle; so I write. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you all. Amen.” Here, we see that as our children learn to restore others that the Lord of peace will also give them peace. Philippians 4:7 says, “And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” The peace of God will guard our hearts and minds, as well as the hearts and minds of our children, as we seek to restore rather than judge.

The Thessalonians had been Christians only a short period of time when the books of 1 and 2 Thessalonians were written to them. However, they were given many instructions that would help them to learn to minister to others. As we teach and model these lessons for our physical and spiritual children, the Lord will also help our children learn to minister effectively to others. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to work and serve the Lord as we wait for His coming.