



360 DISCUSSION 06.18.17

LIKE A FATHER

1 THESSALONIANS 2:3-12



While we tend to reduce the Bible to rules and propositions, Scripture more often conveys deep truths about God through images. In the Old Testament, we come to know God as a powerful creator, a majestic king, an invincible warrior, a righteous judge, a jilted lover, and even a brooding mother hen.

While no single image conveys the complexity of God, there are some images the Bible turns to more often than others. The image of Father is one of these. The Psalmist reminds us, “As a Father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him.” God bares his heart to a nation in exile, when he cries out, “Was I not a father to you?”

Jesus presses the image of God as Father beyond its Old Testament boundaries. We not only come to know God as Father, we are invited to dispense with formality and call him, “Abba”—a term of endearment a small child would use for her father long before her young lips were able to form the word “father.”

Absolutely God is a sovereign king, a mighty warrior and a righteous judge (we ignore those images to our peril) but we are invited to know and experience him as “father”—everything we could possibly want in a father, everything we will ever need from a father, and the kind of father every father should aspire to be.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:3-12, Paul employs the images of a young child, a nursing mother, and a caring father to describe his manner with young believers. As he does so, he not only describes how to lead the family of God, but how each of us (whether we’re a mom or a dad) should lead our families.

THE INNOCENCE OF A SMALL CHILD (vv. 3-7a)

VERSES 3-7a: For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. ⁴ On the contrary, we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts. ⁵ You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness. ⁶ We were not looking for praise from people, not from you or anyone else, even though as apostles of Christ we could have asserted our authority. ⁷ Instead, we were like young children among you.

1. According to Paul, what are some of the impure motives that undermine our leadership in the family of God and our own families?
2. What does Paul offer as the ultimate motivation for leading his family and ours?
3. In what ways were Paul and his companions like young children among the believers at Thessalonica?
4. What are some ways that being like “young children” or being childish can undermine our leadership in the church or our families?

THE TENDER CARE OF A YOUNG MOM (vv. 7b-9)

VERSES 7b-9: Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, ⁸ so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well. ⁹ Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.

1. How would you describe the commitment of a young mom to her children?
2. What are some of the ways that Paul displayed the devotion of a young mom as he ministered in Thessalonica?
3. According to the text, what motivated Paul to make such a huge investment in the lives of young believers?
4. What do you think it means to share “not only the gospel... but our lives as well”?
5. What happens when we share the gospel but fail to share our lives?
6. What happens when we share our lives but fail to share the gospel?

THE CAREFUL INSTRUCTION OF A LOVING FATHER (vv. 10-12)

VERSES 10-12: You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. ¹¹ For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, ¹² encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

1. In the ancient world, the mother nurtured the children while they were young, and the father instructed them as they grew older. According to the text, how does a Father prepare his children for adulthood?
2. What is God’s primary goal for our children (or his church)?
3. What are some ways our goals for our kids compete with and crowd out God’s calling on their lives?
4. How would you describe the difference between encouraging, comforting and urging?
5. When is each of these appropriate?
6. What happens when we “urge” our kids without “comforting them?”
7. What happens when we “comfort” our kids without “urging them?”