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## **The Power of Godly Parents**

### **1 Thessalonians 2: 6 – 12**

How many of you have magazine subscriptions? We used to get at least two in our household: Better Homes and Gardens and Parenting. The first is a gift from my mom.

As far as the second one goes, I don't know who sent it to us originally. My guess is that the publication collects the names and addresses of anyone who happens to get within 100 feet of the baby section at Walmart! And once you're in their system, there's no escaping. I suspect we'll get Parenting magazine well into our retirement years.

I always chuckle when I receive notices in the mail that inform me that our subscription is about to run out. You know the kind that come in the bright red envelope with the words Final Notice stamped across it.

Oh, how I wish it were true, but after a couple of months and a couple more red envelopes, the magazine mysteriously starts reappearing in our mail again. Oh well, I can always hope.

This reoccurrence happens because the editors of the magazine know at least one important truth about parenting: Once a parent, always a parent. Once you've crossed that bridge known as parenting, there's no going back.

Young people, if you want to know just how true this is, try this experiment: Go to college for a few years. When you've finished, move back in with your parents. (9 out of 10 parents will let you do this since in the years you were absent, they only remembered the happy times they had with you.)

They have forgotten all the conflicts. When you do this, see if anything has changed since your high school years.

I actually tried this experiment twice! Once after college and then again after seminary! What is that saying about making the same mistake twice?

I should have known better than to move back in with my parents. After all, I was a biology major and I studied animal behavior. In many animal species the adults actually chase junior away when he tries to return home after a season.

Take for example the tiny barn swallow – I studied them quite extensively because they were so abundant on our farm.

Did you know that after junior makes the incredibly long migratory flight all the way from South America that he is rejected by his own parents when he attempts to reenter the only nest he has ever known? When he comes near his old nest, he is promptly chased away by mom and dad. Talk about a homecoming!

My parents didn't chase me away when I wound up on their door steps again. Surprisingly, they were happy to have me – Once a parent always a parent.

But back to my Parenting Magazine subscription for a moment: truth be told, I never read it! And it's not because I'm above learning new parenting skills. Lord knows I need them! Just ask Julie!

The reason I don't read it is that I like to get my instruction straight from the horse's mouth, not through some unknown middleman.

And in my view, the ultimate source for parental instruction is the Bible itself. It shares with us valuable information about the do's and don'ts of parenting.

Take for example the book of Proverbs that constantly warn parents that to be loving parents, we need to discipline our children: Proverbs 13:24: *"He who spares the rod hates his son."*

As I think back about the lessons my parents taught me, three stand out above all the rest.

First: Work hard.

My mom jokes that I spent the first year and a half of my life swinging in a swing in the barn. I was there because mom helped with the outside chores besides doing all the housework. She also planted a huge vegetable garden, took care of a flock of chickens, and prepared three square meals a day. How she did it all, I have no idea.

Second: Don't complain.

To be honest, when your profession is farming, there's always something to complain about. The ground's too wet, it's too dry, weather's, too hot, too cold, too muggy. The price of corn, hay and milk is always too low if you're trying to sell it and too high if you have to buy it.

But despite all the temptation to cry foul, I never really heard them complain, which when thinking back on it is no small miracle. I guess they felt that his was the life they chose and complaining wouldn't help anyway.

Third: Make life better for those around you.

This was especially true of my mom, but my dad was generous too. Neither of them grew up in a wealthy family. My mom's dad was a forest ranger and her mother cleaned cabins for vacationers in the north woods.

So when she had a family of her own, she did everything in her power to give us the things that she felt would help us in our lives.

She let us travel overseas when we were in high school so we could experience other cultures.

Dad and mom essentially paid for our college educations which neither of them had.

Both mom and dad put their dreams on the back burner to help their children achieve their goals. They lived unselfish lifestyles for the sake of their children.

I'm sure some of you are thinking, "What's the big deal? That's what parenting is all about. Giving of yourself and your resources sacrificially to see your children prosper.

And you'd be correct, but saying it and doing it are two different things. In this day and age, it is so tempting to live for the luxuries and comforts the present age has to offer while neglecting the needs of our children's future.

This is what's so fascinating about what's going on in First Thessalonians chapter 2. It's one thing to give sacrificially to see your own flesh and blood flourish, but Paul reminds the Thessalonians that he, Silas and Timothy invested their very lives into the Thessalonians –

as good parents would – so that they could have the opportunity to receive God’s word and become children of the living God.

So Paul, after leaving Thessalonica for a time, writes this letter to his spiritual children to encourage them to keep the faith.

Once a parent, always a parent.

Back on the farm, I had a neighbor who did an extraordinary thing.

After he moved away to Louisiana to play basketball with none other than Pete Maravich – you may have heard of him – He wrote his parents a letter every week!

Can you imagine a college student doing that today? A letter with actual paper and ink! Imagine!

Even after his mother died, he continued to write to his father. What a bond he must have shared with his parents!

Paul writes this letter to the Thessalonians because of the spiritual bond he has with them, and he praises them for the holy lives they’re living and the glory God’s receiving because of them.

*1 Thess. 1: 8 – 9: “Your faith in God has become known everywhere... they tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and the true God.”*

Isn’t it true that the best compliment one can ever receive is second hand? When someone else reports to you that they’ve heard good things about you, your character, and your work?

Likewise, nothing brings more joy to a parent than when a child heeds his parent's instruction especially when the parent isn't around to witness it.

For Paul, the spiritual father of the Thessalonians, great joy is his as he continues to learn how his church plant is living for and serving God.

But was the Apostle's secret for his success among the Thessalonians?

What caused the Thessalonians faith to be the type that was being talked about all over the known world? *"Your faith in God has become known everywhere."*

First, they had a faith that was supernatural – It was a God-given faith. Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 1:5, *"Our Gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit, and with deep conviction."*

Let us never forget that the God we hold onto by faith has taken hold of us! That the moment we believe in God's Son, we have put our faith in the same one who made the universe out of nothing, flooded the world in judgment, brought down ten plagues on Egypt, parted the Red Sea, and rose again from the grave!

The Good News of the Bible is that the power that raised Christ from the dead lives inside all who believe. But we rarely believe it. Instead, many of us live lives similar to that old man in the wizard of Oz, fearing the day when someone will pull back the curtain and discover our God isn't all He said He was.

My point is this: Don't project your own personal unbelief onto God. Remember what Paul wrote in Romans: *"Though all be unfaithful, God remains faithful, powerful and true."*

Do you want to know what desperately plagues the 21<sup>st</sup> century church?

Maybe it's that The church continues to do only what it thinks is humanly possible. It has no time for what God thinks is possible.

As long as this is the case, the world will only see a church striving to do ordinary things. They will never see God doing supernatural things through the church.

This is a terrible tragedy, and we the church will be held accountable before God for our lack of stewardship. We have been given the power of the resurrection, but have refused to implement it.

The second reason the Thessalonians' faith was reported all over the world was because it was a faith brought to them at great risk by the messengers.

Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 2:2, *"But with the help of our God, we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition."*

When do people finally take notice of a messenger and his message? Typically not until they see what price the messenger was willing to pay to get his message heard.

If this church wants to have a faith that is noticed by this community, then we must be willing to get out of our comfort zone, because until we get out there, we have to honestly admit that we have yet to hand over the controls of our lives to God.

As long as we are adamant that we'll call the shots instead of God, we will more than likely never witness the power of God.

The power of God is unleashed through us when we finally let God set his agenda for our lives.

Third, the reason why the Thessalonians faith was reported all over the world was because they imitated Paul and the Lord. Listen to 1 Thessalonians 1:6,

*"You became imitators of us and the Lord."*

And in chapter 2, Paul gives us insight into his behavior, character, and motives which are proof of his genuine faith.

Paul says his motives are true and pure. No trickery, no smoke and mirrors, no gimmicks. Why would he need these things anyway?

Paul truly believes what he wrote in Romans: *"I'm not ashamed of the Gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes."*

Sometimes we Christians get overly concerned about how we're presenting and packaging the Gospel. But the fact remains that no matter how we package it, it still has to be received by faith which is ultimately God's job.

So often Christians say that they don't want to offend anyone, which in one way is good. We don't want to be unkind and tactless.

Let God do the offending. The Gospel is offensive. It offends human pride and our achievements, and lays flat the argument that somehow we can be good enough to win God's approval and acceptance into heaven.

God's Gospel must offend in order to do its salvation work.

It must pierce and penetrate the rough, callous exterior of the human soul so it can be planted, take root and grow.

Finally, the Thessalonians faith was a faith of world renown because they were raised by spiritual parents.

Paul writes, *"We were gentle among you like a mother caring for her little children."* And later, *"We dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children."*

In other words, the Thessalonians received the perfect combination of gentle hugs and firm warnings, nourishment and challenge, discipline and mercy.

Above all, they witnessed firsthand godly spiritual role models that loved, worked hard, and delighted in God's ways.

Never underestimate the power of godly parents.

A parent has the power to build up or tear down.

In God's hands, a parent can bring much hope, glory, and honor to the creator's name by raising the next generation of faithful Christ-followers.

God is calling FCC to join Him in his work. It is a work that can only be done with a supernatural and God-sized faith because the goals are God-sized as well.

May God add a blessing to his word. Amen.