

"as a nurse cherisheth her children"

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[0:00] 1 Thessalonians chapter 2, we read at verse 7, But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children.

Even as a nurse cherisheth her children. Now, obviously, despite the fact Paul is writing this as an apostle, and Silvanus, and Timothy as well, and these are men that are writing.

This is feminine imagery that is being used here. It's that of not so much a nursing mother, but that of a nurse who looks after a child on behalf of a mother, who would feed it, who would care for it, who would bring it up or take care of its immediate needs on behalf of its biological mother.

As we say, this is feminine imagery here, despite the fact it is masculine people being used of the Lord to write it. We put further feminine imagery as well, a little further down at verse 9.

You remember, brethren, our labour and travail. And again, this is the imagery of childbirth, travailing in pain until the children be brought forth. And again, this is not unusual in Scripture, to use these feminine terms of bringing a child into the world, of caring for it, looking for it, looking after it.

[1:15] This is not unusual in Scripture. And that should not surprise us, because remember that God made man in his own image, male and female. And however we understand that, it must be clear at least, that both the masculine and the feminine aspects of humanity are part of the reality, the personhood of God.

Therefore, when he makes man, male and female, he makes them both complementary in his image. And therefore, both aspects must reflect elements of the Godhead.

So, when the Lord inspires his apostles to write, it's not to be wondered at that he sometimes uses this feminine imagery, because it is the Lord who inspires this to be written.

Likewise, he then goes on to use masculine imagery a few verses on. Verse 11, So, we've got both a kind of mothering image, and also a fathering image here.

And if Paul is describing himself and his colleagues in this sort of parental role, then who are the children? Well, obviously, the Thessalonians to whom he is writing are in the role of being children of God.

[2:40] Are they that young in the faith? Well, it would appear so. Thessalonians is reckoned by some commentators to be the earliest of Paul's letters. I wouldn't personally agree.

I think Galatians is the earliest, but Thessalonians is certainly up there with them. And some people reckon it is the earliest letter that he wrote. And one reason we can see this is if we go back to the Acts of the Apostles, we see, I'll just read a few verses, from the end of chapter 16, after Paul leaves Philippi, after they were scourged, remember, by the magistrates in verse 37, that Paul said unto them, They have beaten us openly uncondemned.

Be in Romans, and have cast us into prison. And now, do they thrust us out privily? Nay, verily, but let them come themselves and fetch us out. And the sergeants told these words unto the magistrates, and they feared when they heard that they were Romans.

And they came and besought them, and brought them out, and desired them to depart out of the city. And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia. And when they had seen a brethren, they comforted them and departed.

That's them leaving Philippi. Now, so remember what he says, verse 2 of this chapter, chapter 2, verse Thessalonians, Even after we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, where they were scourged.

[4:00] This is what it's referring to. But chapter 17 of Acts, Now when they had passed through Amphipolis, and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was the synagogue of the Jews. And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three Sabbath days, reasoned with them out of

the Scriptures, opening and alleging that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead, and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.

And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas, and of the devout Greeks, a great multitude, and of the chief women, not a few. But the Jews, which believed not, moved with envy, he took unto them certain new fellows of the base of sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, saying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also, whom Jason hath received.

And these all do, contrary to the decrees of Caesar, say that there is another king, one Jesus. And they troubled the people, and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things. And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go.

And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night, unto Berea. So that's their first encounter in Thessalonica. Three Sabbath days, reasonably in the synagogue, and then the Jews that don't believe, some of them do believe, but those that don't believe, they stir up the mob, basically, and drag out Jason and other brethren, and take them to the governors.

[5 : 37] Obviously, they can't find Paul, but here's the charge. These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also. Clearly, the gospel is spreading in such a way, people are hearing about it.

Some are afraid of it. Some are embracing it enthusiastically. But then Paul has to leave Thessalonica, and it is reckoned that this letter is written quite soon afterwards. In order, despite the fact he's had to leave them in such a hurry, to show them that he's keeping in touch, that he's not forgotten them, that he is so pleased that the growth and development of those who have believed that they're coming on in the faith, they're going to need attention.

They're going to need support, and this is what he is seeking to do. That's what his reference is there at verse 2. After we had suffered before and were shamefully entreated, as you know it, Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention. Plenty of opposition there. Our exhortation was not of deceit. We weren't trying to fool anyone. Not trying to lie. Not of uncleanness. We weren't trying to carry favor by telling smutty stories or trying to make people laugh or whatever.

Not of uncleanness. Nor in guile. Not trying to gain something out of you. But as we were allowed of God, to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God which trieth our hearts.

[6 : 59] Neither any time used with flattering words, as you know. Not a cloak of covetousness. God is witness. And obviously, those Thessalonians who had believed had themselves suffered.

Because we read here, you know, verse 14, ye brethren, became followers of the churches of God, which in Judea and in Christ Jesus. For ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews.

Wherever the gospel is being lived at, there's going to be opposition. And Paul is seeking to strengthen and to support the Thessalonian believers here. That's why he's writing.

We were gentle among you, he says, even as a nurse cherisheth her children. Despite the opposition, despite the hassle of the unbelievers, Paul's attempt to bring on those who will believe is not with kind of hectoring, authoritarian stance.

It's with gentleness. So that it's not him and his personality that comes through. It's not guile or deceit or pride. It's gentleness that comes through.

[8 : 05] Now remember that gentleness is part of the fruit of the Spirit. As you know, it's to the Galatians, that other very early letter, fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, gentleness.

We were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children. Now, obviously, when we think in terms of a nurse, it conjures up other images.

I'm old enough to remember when nurses wore proper uniforms. When I was a wee boy in hospital, they always seemed brisk and efficient, kindly, but also a wee bit scary and starched aprons and proper stiff hats and they always seemed to know exactly what they were doing.

They always somehow seemed in a hurry and yet, you know, always so good at their jobs. Nice, but a wee bit scary. Nowadays, of course, everybody just wears overalls and you can't tell who's a

doctor and who's an auxiliary and who's a nurse or whatever, but that's not the kind of nurse that's meant here.

The nursing that is meant here means the care of the feeding of an infant, of a child. And obviously, that one who is nursing a child, in this sense, it's not the mother.

[9:13] As a nurse cherishes her children, it would just say, as a mother cherishes her children. Nurse here means somebody else is caring for a child that is not their own. And this was very common in olden times.

In fact, for most of history, it was very common. Until the development of, you know, bottle feeding and baby's formula that you could make up, feed other times, all children had to be fed naturally from either their own mother or somebody else who would be the nurse, sometimes referred to as the wet nurse.

And this would usually be a woman who obviously had children herself, but maybe her children were getting older now, but somebody else who either, they were the rich who didn't want to be bothered with not just the feeding, but, you know, baby changing, you know, broken nights and all of it.

Broken nights were no more fashionable in olden times than they are now. So if you could pay somebody to deal with that side of things, you did it. So the rich would hire a nurse. Another reason somebody might get a nurse is if there was perhaps medical difficulties themselves.

And they couldn't feed their own child, so they might bring in a nurse who looked after the child.

This was very, very common. And some people hired themselves out in this way in order to help.

[10:28] This is precisely what, for example, Miriam, young Miriam, is saying to Pharaoh's daughter in Exodus 2. When, you know, the princess takes the baby out of the water, when she opened it, the basket, she saw the child and behold, the babe wept.

And she had compassion on him and said, this is one of the Hebrews' children. Then said his sister to Pharaoh's daughter, Shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew woman that she may nurse the child for thee?

And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, Go. And the maid went and called the child's mother. And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, Take this child away and nurse it for me. And I will give thee thy wages.

And the woman took the child and nursed it. So this is what a nurse would do. Feed the child on behalf of either its biological mother. If either she was rich or nobility or medical problems or whatever, she would do it on behalf of somebody else.

Now, as you will know, it is difficult to nurse a child without physically, actually, cradling it in one's arms as well. There has to be a certain tenderness.

[11:37] Otherwise, the child won't feed. There has to be protectiveness. Otherwise, it won't feel secure and comfort. You have to hold it close. And this is partly what is being said here when Paul writes, We were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherishes her children.

But it's not as a mother cherishing her children because these are not his biological children. You see, this is part of the thing with the Church of Jesus Christ. We don't belong to the Church of Jesus Christ because it's in our blood or because, well, my father and mother were believers, so I automatically inherit what they got.

Well, you don't inherit a thing. Each individual person who is saved is saved because Christ has personally intervened in their lives and in their hearts. And you may indeed have had the advantage of a Christian upbringing to give you the tools that you may apply and the environment in which you may be more receptive to the work of God.

but all of that is simply clearing the ground, gathering out the stones, taking out the weeds, turning the soil, preparing the soil so that when the seed goes in, it may spread, but it is God who gives the Eucharist.

We all know plenty of cases of people who have become believers in Christ who have no Christian background whatsoever and yet the Lord have intervened in their lives.

[13:03] and tragically we also know the converse. Plenty of us have known people who have godly parents or grandparents, Christian upbringing and all the outward advantages and yet have rejected it.

So it does not follow that simply growing up in a Christian environment means you will inherit grace. You can't inherit grace. We are not biologically brothers and sisters.

Some of us may be, but that's not what makes us Christians. It's not because of who my mother was, who my father was, who my sister, my brother is. No, we are each one individually saved, each one individually adopted.

When Paul says that he and the others have become as a nurse cherishing her children, it's not her biological children. A nurse doesn't cherish her biological children.

She cherishes a child that she has been given to care for on behalf of somebody else. If we are to nurse, to encourage, to protect, to nurture younger, in the sense of the faith, brothers and sisters in Christ, but to bring them on in the Lord, it's not because they are biologically connected to us, it's because the Lord has given them into our care.

[14:20] The Lord has placed them in our lives. He, as the one who has fathered them and in a sense mothered them and brought them into the world, into his spiritual grace, he has placed them in our path, he has placed them in our fellowship or in our community or in our care or whatever, that we may nurture and protect and be gentle with them and bring them all.

And obviously such a nurture, in the case of the nurse, this involves a giving of herself. It is a giving of what the Lord has given her to feed the child, to nurture it, to strengthen it.

There is a giving out as the child gives in. Just as I remember Jesus himself said in all the people that virtue had gone out of them when the woman with the issue of blood was healed.

And when he healed the multitude, he was drained by it. And so there is a giving out here. And if we are to nurture others in the faith and each of us is called to encourage and nurture others, it's not just the certain ones that are office bearers or whatever.

We all have responsibility to be brothers and sisters and mothers and fathers to our fellow believers, especially those who may be junior in the faith to us.

[15:39] Then there is a giving out. There is a costliness to those who are not our biological family but whom we seek to nurse, to nurture, to encourage in the Lord in this way.

Now, obviously, there is that beyond which we cannot. We can only give so much and eventually people will get to the stage just as a physical child will get to the stage where it needs to move on and it may accept or reject the care that it's had.

So likewise, there has to come a point where the nurse is no longer connected with the child and he or she child may or may not remember their nurse, may or may not have any affection for their nurse but they will still play a key role in preparing it for its next stage in life.

And if there is one thing, just like your ordinary life, your physical life, you know, there's where you're born, there's where you grew up, where you go to school, where your friends are and some of the friends you had at school you might still have when you're grown up and when you're doing a different job somewhere else, you might have or you might not.

It might be a completely different circle of people that influence your lives. So it is with the spiritual life. There are those at the early infant stage of our faith who have nurtured us, nursed us, brought us on when we needed milk as opposed to strong meat.

[17:07] And there are those who then feed us with a bit more solid food and those whose company or whose wisdom then strengthens us or brings us on. Everybody, each individual stage has a different role to play and each one is so often merely just a stitch in the tapestry.

None of us knows what a word that we say or an encouragement we give or a conversation we have may do. That we were gentle among you, Paul says.

Now I'm trying to plug ourselves. The more we put of ourselves forward, the more we project self and pride in who we are, the less room there is for Christ.

The less room there is for the still small voice to be heard. The less room there is for him to work. It's why we can't be proud and defiant and yes do this because we say sort of thing.

It's got to be gentleness. Let the Lord work. Let the Lord speak. You are gentle among you even as a nurse cherishes her children. So it is not one who is her biological child.

[18:14] It is one given to her to care for. It is something that she does gently and tenderly. You can't do it without protecting, without physically cradling and enfolding the child in one's arms.

It is this kind of gentleness and there is a giving out on behalf of others. It is a protective tenderness.

This gentleness which is as it were of the fruit of the spirit. Now we talked about the mixing of masculine and feminine language.

Sometimes even the language of nursing may be mixed in that sense. Isaiah chapter 60 at verse 16 is another example and you can look for yourselves but usually it's a purely feminine description. here but femininity is part of the image of God. As we mentioned a minute ago there's a time for milk and there's a time for meat. Now Hebrews talks of course about those who went for a time in chapter 5 in Hebrews ye ought to be teachers ye need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God and I become such as have need of milk and not of strong meat for everyone that useth milk is unskillful in the world of righteousness for he is a babe that strongly belong to them that are of full age even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

[19 : 47] there is a time for us to be nursed and there is a time for us to nurse others and both of these times are limited both of these opportunities are limited if a baby does not feed properly it will get sick and it will die and if we do not feed when we are still young in the faith then our faith will get sick it will wither away it will fall away it will perish but likewise we have to develop we have to grow a child may for example be going great a baby was weight keeping up he's getting all nice and clump and so on and then you notice after a wee while yes but at six months he's still the size that you know at twelve months he's still the size he wasn't six months something's wrong why aren't they putting on weight why aren't they growing why aren't they increasing and it's the same spiritually we should be growing we should move past the stage when we just need protecting when we just need nursing we just need milk we need stronger fruit as well but the Thessalonians at this stage obviously when they are new in the faith young in the faith it's milk they need and this is why

Paul says we're gentle among you even as a nurse cherisheth her children now do you remember what we read in the Acts of the Apostles said that he reasoned three Sabbaths in the synagogue so in other words the gospel came as is right in its proclamation to the Jew first and when he begins in the synagogue and he begins with the Jewish people the Jewish people are like when they're hearing the gospel it's like babies just about to be born now a baby does not begin its life at birth it's already been nine months growing inside its mother and so on that's where life begins God creates life God brings an immortal soul into being and if a child perishes from the womb it is still an immortal soul that has been in existence it is still an immortal soul that dies perhaps without seeing the light of day it is still a baby still a person still a full human being with an immortal soul so the Jewish people in the synagogue there as Paul is reasoning free Sabbaths are like babies who have been in the womb all these thousands of years while the Lord has made himself known through his prophets and through his through the sacraments

Passover and circumcision and the Old Testament scriptures and then as the gospel is given it's like these babies are birthed birthed it's like those who have been kind of steeped in the Jewish faith but still the true God in the Old Testament of course just less clearly revealed then it's like they come out into the light of day and some of them believe some of them see the light and some of the Gentiles see the light as well perhaps who were who never had the benefit of the of the Israelite heritage but they're still grasping this newness of life and this is when they need nursed this is when they need fed in this gentle and intimate way to be strengthened in the things of the Lord this is what Paul says he was amongst the Thessalonians gentle as a nurse cherishing their children this is what he did with them and this is what we are called upon to do likewise with other believers or those who may be caught but not there yet they need nurture they need care they need gentleness they don't need us they need the

Lord but the Lord may work through us we may have something to give which we can give out yes and it will cost something of ourselves but if it feeds and strengthens such babes in Christ then it is blessing to us as well as to them this is what we are called upon to do but it can only ever be for a time just as we ourselves nursed only for a time before we moved on to other food before we moved on started eating with a knife and fought and got bigger in childhood and then youth and then manhood and womanhood and so on we grew up so likewise anything that we can give to those who are down in the faith it will only be for a time our time is so short our opportunities are so few we have to use every opportunity the Lord gives us and I know that most of us are shy I know that most of us are innocent and bad but sometimes the Lord blocks an opportunity right down in front of you as if somebody puts a baby into your hands can you hold the baby for a few minutes and you don't know if you should put it down or pick it up or sit it up or hold it flat or whatever but as long as the child is gurgling away happily or laughing then you're fine you know you hold on to it and sometimes the Lord puts the baby in your arms sometimes the

Lord gives you the opportunity somebody asks an open question or somebody says so you know this stuff you believe in how do you come to do it and you get a chance to witness without forcing it down anyone's throat without sort of door stepping or anything you get the chance the Lord gives you the opportunity and this is what Peter says we've got to be ready for it we've got to be prepared and know the sense in which the Lord gives us this opportunity sanctify the Lord God in your hearts and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks of you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear gentleness meekness you know as a nurse cherisheth her children because at the end of the day it's not about you and me it's about Jesus it's about the Lord we are feeding souls so that they can grow up into the nurtured faith of Christ now Paul could so easily have stamped his authority on the situation sometimes people needed that clearly in [26 : 22] Corinth what they needed was a bit of solid apostolic authority stamping his authority on the situation bringing order out the chaos that's not what Thessalonica needed not at this stage they needed gentleness they needed feeding they needed the milk of human kindness they needed a nurse to cherish your children and that's what Paul did for man and that's what we are likewise called for a time to do for some others and the Lord will sometimes give us opportunities and when he does we have to use him because we don't know how often they'll ever come we don't know how many chances we'll get we don't know how many years we'll be given it is only ever for a time and there comes a time when even the most faithful and diligent nurse in the world can nurse no longer and there comes a time when even the most devout and most faithful and most powerful Christian witness that any of us may have seen there'll come a time when they can't speak anymore when their voice is so faint or their body is so frail when a witness then is physically constrained there comes a point where we can no longer do anything outwardly for the

Lord yes we can still pray yes we can still serve quietly that way but our opportunities of physically witnessing or helping will have passed it is a limited time that we have to nurture strengthen and bring on others just as it was a limited time for which we ourselves were nursed but this is what Paul writes we were gentle among you even as a nurse cherisheth her children may the Lord grant us grace to cherish one another and those who need strengthening of the faith that's God that's for we to remove we don't we know