

Motherly Ministry—1st Thessalonians 2:7-9—5/11/2025
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It's always a joy to honor motherhood & biblical femininity each year on this holiday called Mother's Day & it's always vital to do so.

I've noted through the years how the attack on gender & the family may one day seek to erase such a holiday.

We've seen that kind of attack in attempts to erase gendered terms like 'mother' & 'woman' during the irrational chaos of the past five years.

I'm thankful that we're seeing some changes & yet the attacks on motherhood never stop from various angles.

Whether by romanticizing homemaking as if it's easy or by berating marriage as if it's slavery, the attacks can be deceptive or direct.

They may be from diverse sources, but the attacks never stop.

That should not surprise us because the devil is a liar & the father of lies & he has been a murderer from the beginning.

Satan's war against all that is good stays focused on the truth of God's good created order for the propagation & nurture of life.

So we labor to protect & proclaim & honor & celebrate God's design so that His glory & goodness might be known.

In our day, that includes recognizing basic traits of motherhood that should be obvious as part of God's common grace.

So, for example, we affirm nursing motherhood as an obvious picture of the treasured nurture that is unique to a woman—and not a man.

It seems crazy to have to clarify that because it is a basic biological reality that is generally valued in every culture.

But gender-neutral activists have even tried to remove womanhood from the honor of pregnancy, birth, & necessary infant care.

So today we're going to let the Bible remind us of the beauty & virtue of a nursing mother tenderly caring for her own child.

We'll do so from a text that exalts such a woman as an example.

As we do so, we'll recall that some virtues of a godly mother are valuable for all of us in serving any person of any age.

Of course, the Bible teaches role distinctions of men & women, but the Spirit's good fruit in a faithful mom is valuable in various ministries.

So today as a celebration of Mother's Day, we turn to a text that honors motherhood by using it as a model for ministry.

Turn to 1st Thessalonians 2 where I'll summarize 3 observations about godly motherhood that apply to all our lives no matter what our role is.

Listen men—if you think you are too tough to be tender or if you think you are above certain sacrifices or if you think it's weak to show emotion, you are not thinking biblically.

The Apostle Paul is one of the manliest men in the Bible, yet he compared his demeanor & dealings to a nursing mother with her child.

That was not a full description of his ministry—he also compared himself to a faithful father in this chapter.

But he did not shy away from honoring the virtues of devoted mothering & applying them to spiritual ministry as a man.

So we have two paths of application today as we meditate on our passage—one about motherhood & one about all ministry.

As we walk through 3 descriptions of motherly ministry, we recall what a faithful mom is and does.

And we also note how that faithfulness applies to each of us.

Kids—this passage can help you be thankful for the ways that your mom is a living the wise, beautiful way God wants her to live.

And it can also teach how to follow a good mom's example.

We can all be reminded what to value & appreciate in godly mothers.

Then we can all be challenged by applying those descriptions to the opportunities we have to serve others in various ways.

So look with me at 1st Thessalonians 2 and let's read verses 1-20 just to see the whole chapter in context—1st Thessalonians 2:1-20. [READ]

Paul was defending his genuine concern for the Thessalonians and contrasting himself with selfishly driven false teachers.

Paul was not like hucksters, peddling their teaching in emptiness, error, impurity, deceit, manipulation, control, and greed.

Paul was sent with authority from God and a boldness and integrity that attested to his honest and sincere motives.

Paul modeled the motivation & methodology God uses for His glory.

Today we focus on the part of his example that he likens to a nursing mother caring for her child in verses 7-9 before he transitioned to a comparison with fathers in verses 10-12.

He gave other comparisons & contrasts of verses 1-8 about his integrity & then he got personal with these parental comparisons.

Consider 1st that motherhood—especially with small children—requires a woman to be tenderly gentle.

That's point #1—motherly ministry includes tender gentleness.

Since gentleness & kindness are fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23, we know these apply to all of us.

With each point, we'll note what godly moms ought to be like & also note that we can all serve like godly moms in similar ways.

The 1st area Paul lifts up for us to admire is tender gentleness—point #1—motherly ministry requires tender gentleness.

Read verse 7 again to see Paul highlight this virtue. [READ]

Paul did not approach ministry with authoritarian demands wanting to shake people into faith and faithfulness.

His methodology was not to rattle their cages to instill fear and manipulate people into decisions or obedience.

Think of the picture Paul is painting—he said he was gentle.

Any sane or normal mother does not pick up her crying baby and shake it and scream at it or jerk it around and roar against it.

No, a good mother—especially a nursing mother—is gentle.

If we love babies, what do most of us do when we pick up a baby?

We coo & hum & speak soft & sweet—I've been practicing.

Paul appeals to that picture of tender gentleness as fitting for mothers & also as fruitful for all ministry.

So in our parenting, for example, we must exercise God-given authority over kids & uphold God's Word & not be passive.

But we must also pray that our demeanor & care in doing so has the appropriate tenderness for each moment or situation.

Paul was saying this as a spiritual leader just as he had done the only other time this word for *gentle* occurs in the NT.

2nd Timothy 2:24-25 says, “*The Lord’s bondservant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth.*”

Verse 25 uses another word for gentleness that’s also translated “*meekness*,” which can be defined as “power under control.”

Servants of God must speak truth in love but make it seem like the truth is coming at people like it’s filled with hate.

And we must also speak as servants who are humbly under God’s truth & in need of His grace just like everyone else.

Verse 7 says they were gentle AMONG YOU, or *in the midst of you*.

The way Paul phrased this points to Paul, Silas, and Timothy mixing as equals in the middle of the Thessalonian believers.

Then the word for Paul’s *tender care* was used to describe nurture & warming with body heat, like a mother bird sitting on her eggs as it’s used in Deuteronomy 22:6 in the Greek translation of the OT.

There is a sense of protection and nourishing for others’ good.

Moms & Dads—kids can typically tell if that’s our motive & method.

They often know if we are speaking out of selfishness or impatience or annoyance or anger or some other sinful motive.

And in contrast, they can also often tell when we genuinely care about what is best for them because we love them.

Abrasive outbursts or manipulative whining were not what Paul had in mind when he thought of godly mothers.

He had in mind a heart with concern for others that flowed out in carefully measured wisdom and grace.

So moms—as you celebrate Mothers’ Day and as you live each day, treasure your children & show them tender gentleness.

And let’s all praise God for gentle, caring mothers in our lives.

And kids and men and ladies without kids, note how tender gentleness is exalted as a valuable way to care for others.

When a mother picks up her baby, she doesn’t hold it at arm’s length.

No, a caring mother holds her child close & we need to analogously hold other believers close, especially new believers, as we share the nourishment of God’s Word.

The most masculine men, the serious problem solvers, the busy men of great discipline, the rational geniuses, & even the Apostle Paul need a bit of motherhood to make us useful in ministry.

Ministry & relationships are not just duties to be fulfilled or jobs to be done or responsibilities to be handled.

Life is about people—& believers are God’s people, God’s children!

We dare not approach serving dear souls that Christ has died to redeem with a disinterested, distant cold, performance mindset.

Read verse 8 next to see how Paul’s affections were not detached from his ministry—how his investment was not just facts without feelings.

Read 1st Thessalonians 2:8 as it builds on verse 7. [READ]

Paul had a fondness for this young church such that he longed to see them personally as we read earlier in verses 17-20 of chapter 2.

When he was not sure how they were doing spiritually, chapter 3, verses 1&5 say he could not endure it.

Verse 8 of chapter 3 says when he heard of their spiritual health, then he could really live.

The gentleness of verse 7 and the giving of verse 8 in chapter 2 both came from a heart of affection toward the Thessalonians.

He had a heart of love that fueled the fountain of serving.

So let's make that a 2nd point today—motherly ministry involves **sacrificial love**.

Serving like a godly mom involves sacrificial love.

1st, we said motherly ministry includes **tender gentleness**.

Point #2—motherly ministry includes **sacrificial love**.

The crucial action word in verse 8 is the word *impart* or *share*.

It's not the normal, plain word for give—it involves giving some part of yourself, giving of something that you have some part in.

And the phrase *we were well-pleased* means we thought it good, or we delighted—to impart to you.

This sharing was enjoyable, but not in a mindless way.

It flowed from calculating & considering & deeming it good.

As Paul continually pondered the investment he was making in the Thessalonian church, he was judging it agreeable in his evaluation.

He was constantly glad as he kept up his work there.

He didn't grumble & murmur & complain & roll his eyes & sigh.

He was happy to give of himself & that made him useful.

Colossians 1:19 used this same word for the Father's *good pleasure* for all the fullness of deity to dwell in Christ.

God thought it good to give of Himself to dwell among men.

And we follow Him when we think it good—when we are well-pleased—to give of ourselves to others.

As Paul put it in 2 Corinthians 12:15: "*I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls.*"

Paul illustrated this with a nursing mother, but the standard of sacrificial love is for all believers.

This is especially the standard for men who are called to love your wife like Christ loved the church & gave Himself for her.

Men are to be the protectors & providers who give & serve as leaders.

So guys please get out of your head that you are in any way above serving your wife or family or others in any way.

And let's all consider how this is distinct from getting emotionally involved with someone or something without careful thought.

In contrast to romantic enticement or caving to emotional blackmail or guilt trips under the guise of compassion, Paul highlighted a thought process that evaluates any commitment.

We need to make calculations & weigh our investments to see if they are biblical so we can be well-pleased & glad to give of ourselves.

To do so, we must be sure that we are imparting the gospel of God as Paul emphasized first in what he gave in verse 8.

The whole point of Paul going to Thessalonica was to give them God's Gospel, the Good News whose source is God & whose subject is God.

Offering money to solve problems or help people may seem like sacrificial love, but without truth it won't help them.

It's much more sacrificial to take the time to explain the Gospel to people & to confront sins against God that are destroying their lives.

That's not always easy to do & it's not always appreciated, but the truths of sin & salvation are the greatest gifts we can give.

As most of you know, that term *gospel of God* refers to the Good News that God loves sinful humans enough to offer us forgiveness.

If you entrust your soul now and forever to God as He reveals Himself in His Word, He will forgive your sins against Him.

God can do so because He accomplished all that is required to forgive sinners by coming to earth as God the Son in Jesus Christ.

And Jesus lived the perfect life that none of us could ever live.

He gives the merits of His own righteousness to all who trust Him.

And Jesus also died a sacrificial death to pay the eternal penalty for sin for all who trust Him.

He accomplished complete atonement for sin in His death on the cross and then He rose again to prove He had conquered sin and death.

That's a quick summary of the Gospel of God that Paul said he came to Thessalonica to give to these people.

And why did Paul want to do this?

Because he had received grace from God through all that Jesus had done and his heart was changed.

Paul loved these people and had a passion to invest long-term to anchor them in the truths of the Gospel.

If you trust Christ, God changes your heart to love others & you want to give them His Gospel.

But you don't want to just spew Gospel facts on them and leave.

Paul added in verse 8 that they imparted their own lives—or literally, their own souls, the entirety of their being.

If you love others like a godly mother does, you are willing to pour out your life for their spiritual good.

Like a nursing mother gets up at night & is available all day every day for feedings, motherly ministry by both men & women in various ways requires giving our lives.

So listen—if you have a mom who sacrifices to love you—or you had a mom who did—praise God for such an example of the love of God!

Praise God & thank your mom & honor her.

And look around you at godly women who are spiritual mothers—we have many in this church—who quietly serve out of love for Christ & His people & are glad to do so whether you notice or not.

Thank those spiritual mothers today too & let's all take note of models like Paul was honoring & follow their example.

And realize the love of a mother for her child can make sacrifice a joy.

A heart of gratitude and affection can transform toil into joy.

And that kind of special relationship is the picture of the last phrase of verse 8 as Paul explained that they *had become very dear to us*.

That word, *very dear* is a form of the word *loved* or *beloved*.

It is used in the Greek translation of the OT in Genesis 22:2 when describing Abraham's only son, his beloved son, Isaac.

It is used by God the Father of Jesus in Matthew 3:17 when He said, *This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased*.

The Thessalonians had become so special to Paul that they were like an only child, a special, beloved, unique son.

That's why Paul, Silas & Timothy had given so sacrificially—because they loved them with this special, sacrificial love.

Think of the vulnerability such ministry risks—if something happened to your only child, it would be devastating—it would hurt deeply.

That vulnerability to being hurt—whether by our own children or by other people—is part of the risk of loving sacrificially.

But that kind of sacrificial love is the model of motherhood the Bible holds up for us to marvel at and appreciate.

And that transformation of heart can happen not only in godly mothers, but also in fathers and kids and in all of us.

Of course, the world may extol other things to love, like beauty or fitness or leisure or fame or money as what is most desirable.

Or pride may tempt us to try to manipulate or control our kids or others to make ourselves look good.

But that's not the biblical model & that's also not how real life works.

The biblical model starts with tender gentleness & sacrificial love flowing from the Gospel rooted in our hearts.

Your children are not about you—they are not for your own glory.

You are to be poured out in love to impart the Gospel to them.

And when we know we fail this standard, we return to the Gospel to restore the joy of our salvation & receive grace to give to others again.

Then we take regular steps toward action.

That's the next point we learn about both motherhood & ministry in every setting as we learn from Paul's analogy today.

Point #3—motherly ministry includes **faithful diligence**.

Serving like a godly mom requires (1) tender gentleness, (2) sacrificial love, and (3) **faithful diligence**.

Read verse 9 again to see this last point. [READ]

As he had done before, Paul appealed to the testimony of the Thessalonians to stand up for his righteous dealings with them.

They would remember that his ministry in Thessalonica was both exhausting and exhaustive.

Those terms—labor & hardship—highlight how exhausting it was.

Labor is work to the point of fatigue and physical weariness.

Hardship denotes the battles against external difficulties & opposition.

The wear & tear of internal & external struggles was exhausting with personal work & people issues.

Yet their perseverance through it all proved their sincerity.

He went the unnecessary extra mile to work in tent-making so they didn't think he came peddling a new idea to make money.

1st Corinthians 8-9 & 2nd Corinthians 11 teach that it is right for one who preaches the Gospel to make his living doing so.

So Paul could have requested & required support in his work & he was often supported by other churches sending him help.

But in Paul's concern not to be like the greedy traveling teachers of the day, Paul did not request support for his teaching.

That's not to say Paul didn't get any support in his ministry.

Philippians 4:16 indicates that he received a gift from Philippian friends to support his work there in the regions of Thessalonica.

And later, Paul received a gift from this same Thessalonian church once it was established.

But when Thessalonica was a new mission field, he did not want to compromise the free offer of the Gospel by asking for money.

So he worked in his spare time to provide.

Paul didn't mean he was with them every minute of the day & night nor that he worked all night long & all day long every day.

It's not that Paul never slept or rested or did anything else.

Paul meant that his work was in parts of the night & parts of the day.

What we'd call his extra time, his leisure time, was purposeful to provide for himself or to foster ministry.

Paul and his companions were habitually productive working in both ministry and in Paul's learned trade of tent-making.

Paul's example teaches us that he did not waste his time just as a devoted mother cannot waste time.

A mother must plan for sacrifice because infant care can be intense.

It can be exhausting & around-the-clock like Paul described of ministry like his at Thessalonica.

That's the faithful diligence Paul was honoring of godly mothers & comparing to devoted ministers.

That reminds us again to praise God for the faithful diligence of loving moms & honor on Mothers' Day & every day.

And it reminds us how that special role also models the faithful diligence we can all aspire toward in ministry to others.

It requires us to approach life as stewards of all God has given because we want to invest it all for His Gospel purposes.

It reminds us that God designed work before the fall as a blessing, as a wise investment to provide for our own & to give to others.

So men & boys, young & old, we need to be devoted workers, faithful laborers in jobs & in our families & in ministry.

Again, in his initial ministry, Paul did not want there to be a stumbling block that considered him like other peddlers of ideas seeking money.

So in addition to the support from elsewhere that he received, he & his ministry companions worked to support themselves.

That sensitivity is one reason we support missionaries in their work.

We want the Gospel to go to the world as a free offer.

It's powerful for people to know that we do not send or bring the Gospel as a way to control people for our own gain.

That contrasts with prosperity preachers who prey upon people in ways Paul condemned earlier in chapter 2.

But the true Gospel is proclaimed as a free offer of God's mercy through all He has done in Jesus Christ.

That Gospel of God mentioned again to end verse 9 is a message proclaimed from God from us as His messengers.

This word is the picture of a herald, one sent from the king to deliver a message to the king's subjects.

Such a messenger has no authority in himself, but his message has the authority of the king.

So a good messenger—a good herald—delivers the message of his king clearly and accurately with all the authority of the king.

And that is the job of each one of us in some small way.

We are messengers, heralds, mail carriers, that take the message of the King of the Universe, the Creator God, and deliver it to people.

That includes teaching the Bible to our children & sharing the Gospel with coworkers & speaking truths to neighbors & training other believers in the faith.

But it is delivery of a message from God, contained in His Scriptures.

As Christians we are carriers of the King's words to people.

We don't make up neat stuff about God or new ideas or innovative philosophies of life.

We just deliver the King's ideas and philosophies.

And that stewardship mentality applies in parenting just as it does in ministry because children are a gift & heritage from the Lord.

So seize opportunities with kids because they pass by quickly.

We must devote ourselves to faithful diligence in our homes & in the church for the glory of Christ & the good of generations to come.

And remember—the Gospel is worth it.

The Gospel is the reason and purpose behind it all.

And I'm so grateful to know the heart of love for the Gospel that so many of you show.

It's always a joy to hear of your love for others you serve in children's or youth ministries or in your workplace or extended family or in outreach ministries or elsewhere.

I'm thankful to be in a church family with many examples of these truths of the Gospel in daily life.

We proclaim the Gospel of God so that people can understand the Word of God and come to saving faith and live lives for His glory.

Such ministry investments are not empty & your exhaustion is not worthless whether it is in your home or wherever else.

It is all worth it—so do not grow weary, as Galatians 6 says.

You may not see the fruit for years, but you can trust God to work through the means He has made clear.

And it is so thrilling to have God use us to bless another person's life with transforming truth or undeniable love or unexplainable kindness.

The highest pleasures in life involve relationships & the most lasting involve the salvation & transformation of people.

And nothing is as precious as the fruit & joy of seeing children trained up to trust and follow the Lord.

That's why ministry to kids is such a joy and privilege.

And that's why godly motherhood is so valuable.

Our world says to pursue a million other things because kids are too much work or someone else can deal with them.

But God says children are a gift from God and a stewardship to train up for the next generation.

Kids are the future.

So today we hold up the beauty and treasure of moms who live with tender gentleness, sacrificial love, and faithful diligence.

And ladies without kids who live these virtues, we hold you up as well as models of biblical femininity that we thank God for.

As we behold what God sees as precious, we also see how these virtues have application in all our lives.

We see that even the manly Apostle Paul could describe himself in ministry and relationships like a godly mother.

So we see that each of us can serve like a godly mother in ways that include tender gentleness, sacrificial love, & faithful diligence.

How can you pursue those applications in your life this week?

Whatever you do, start with the Gospel.

And if you have not turned from sin to faith in this glorious Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, then do so today.

We'd love to talk with you further and pray for you.

And let's all be sure today to thank our moms for the ways they model the gentleness, love and faithfulness that Paul described.

Kids—thank God for your mom and thank your mom.

And then pray and seek to live the ways we've seen that you can be serving like a godly mom.

Pray with me as we close.