

## The Family Model of a Leader

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**Strength in Weakness: Lessons from the Life of Paul**  
**1 Thessalonians 2:1-12**

Kim Jong-il was the leader of North Korea from 1994 until his death a few years ago.

Photo of Kim Jong-il

It was against the law to name Kim Jong-il in the North Korean media simply by his name the way that a newspaper in the United States might simply call the President, Barack Obama, or the former President, George Bush. In North Korea the Communist Party came up with at least 52 different titles for Kim Jong-il to go along with his formal title of Eternal General Secretary of the Korean Workers Party. Here are some of the titles they came up with:

- Dear Leader
- Respected Leader
- Wise Leader
- Brilliant Leader
- Supreme Leader
- Unique Leader
- Great Leader
- Peerless Leader

Having run out of adjectives to accompany the word “leader”, they turned to the heavens naming him in the newspaper as:

- The Guiding Sun Ray
- The Great Sun of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century
- The Guiding Star of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

And then there are these modest titles:

- The Fate of the Nation
- The Ever-Victorious Iron-Willed Commander
- The World Leader of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century
- The Great Man Who is Also a Man of Deeds
- The Glorious General Who Descended from Heaven

And perhaps my favorite of his 52 titles:

The Dear Leader Who is the Perfect Incarnation of the Appearance a Leader  
Should Have  
Photo of Kim Jong-il

Every institution distinguishes its officials by some titles. Corporations have CEO's, CFO's, COO's, CIO's, Presidents, Vice Presidents, Directors, Managers and Administrators. Universities have Adjunct Professors, Assistant Professors, Associate Professors, Full Professors, Department Chairs, Deans, Provosts, Vice Presidents and Presidents. The Army not only distinguishes people by title, but also by insignia. If you are an enlisted soldier, you begin as a Private with no insignia.

And you can move up to Command Sergeant.

Insignia for Command Sergeant Major

And if you are an Officer, you can move from 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant,

Insignia for 2<sup>nd</sup> LT

To a 4-Star General,

Insignia for a 4-Star General

I've been doing a series on Christian leadership from the life of the Apostle Paul. When Paul wrote a letter to a church in Thessalonica which is in Macedonia right next to Greece, and when he wanted to communicate to this church his own theory of leadership, Paul did not borrow images from the world of dictators or politics. He didn't describe Christian leadership in terms of corporate officers, or business titles. He didn't use the university or the military for his model. What Paul did do was borrow his leadership model from the family. I've called today's talk "The Family Model of a Leader." Let's pray.

1 Thessalonians 2:1-3 (NIV)

2 You know, brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not without results.  
2 We had previously suffered and been treated outrageously in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in the face of strong opposition. 3 For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you.

Let me give you a brief historical backdrop to 1 Thessalonians. We read in the Book of Acts that Paul's mission to Thessalonica was short-lived. It seemed to have lasted at most 3-4 weeks, according to Acts 17, when a riot started. Paul's preaching often

started riots. I'm not sure that Paul took a seeker-sensitive approach to his preaching. But there was a violent outbreak after one of his messages and there were legal charges against Paul and his companions. Things got so hot that some of the believers persuaded Paul to leave the city by night.

Paul's critics took full advantage of his sudden disappearance in order to undermine his credibility. They launched a smear campaign against him. They said Paul ran away; he's only in the ministry for what he can get out of it – money, prestige, popularity. Maybe he's one of those traveling preachers that hits on women. Paul doesn't care about you Thessalonians. He is trying to take advantage of you. And so Paul, in his letter to the Thessalonians, spends two chapters – chapters 2 and 3 of 1 Thessalonians, defending why he was forced to leave the city, and then, why it has been so hard for him to return.

I'm calling this section:

#### The leader and their opponents

...because what we see in the life of Paul you will find in the life of every person who aspires to Christian leadership. I know of no person at any level of Christian leadership who does not have their critics. If you aspire to be a leader, if you are a leader, you will be criticized by someone. And the higher you move up in Christian leadership, if you aspire to pastor a large church, you want to lead a large ministry, you regularly want to make a difference for Christ in a big way in your generation, there is always going to be some smear campaign against you. Some gossip will spread a false rumor about you. There will be radio talking heads attacking you, books written about you, blogs, websites, and magazine articles. And in some places at certain times it can escalate to threats of violence, economic pressures, lawsuits, physical assaults. Many of my Christian friends around the world have faced all of these things. It is impossible to be a Christian leader and not have critics and people who spend their time smearing other Christians' reputations.

Billy Graham Crusades were picketed for decades. I remember going to the Billy Graham Crusade here in Columbus about 20 years ago and there were fundamentalist Christians picketing outside the crusade calling Billy a "gospel compromiser" because he had Roman Catholic Bishops and Mainline Protestant pastors on the platform when he spoke. Because Billy embraced the whole spectrum of Christian denominations, he was a compromiser, preaching a watered-down gospel.

If you google Rick Warren, you will see blog after blog attacking Rick in the most hateful ways including unbelievably cruel tweets and blogs slamming him and his wife, Kay, after their son, Matt, who struggled for years with depression and mental illness, committed suicide. Some hyper-charismatics said that if Rick and his wife had simply believed in healing, Matt would have been freed from his mental illness. Some gay activists said that if Rick and his wife had supported gay marriage, instead of opposing it,

his son wouldn't have killed himself because he was probably closeted. But as one blog put it, "Karma finally caught up with Rick Warren." The rants against Rick Warren on Christian radio are too many and too vile to mention.

The same is true of virtually every well-known Christian you've ever heard of – Bill Hybels, the amazing founder of the famous Willow Creek movement, John Wimber, the founder of our own movement, and even someone as small potatoes as me. There are an amazing number of blogs written attacking me – one written by a local Nazi claiming that I am injecting Jew theology into the church, accusing me of being guilty of race-mixing. I picture these 40-year old guys living in their parent's basement, sitting in their Star Wars pajamas with Cheetoes crumbs on their dirty white t-shirts with nothing to do in their sad lives other than to flame Christian leaders.

If you find yourself unfairly criticized because you are just trying to lead – you are leading a small group, or trying to lead a ministry, or you are engaged in some sort of kingdom activity which is making a difference in the lives of others; you are doing a Bible study at work, you've got a vibrant witness in your company, or in your neighborhood, someone is going to gossip about you. Having been the subject of this kind of thing for almost 30 years, here is what I've found helpful. You may want to jot a few of these thoughts down.

First, I've found great comfort in the fact that infinitely better women and men than me have been misrepresented and maliciously attacked. Of course, we have the ultimate example in Jesus Christ, our Lord, who was called a glutton and a drunk, a bastard, demonized, a law-breaker, and a traitor. In John 9 Jesus was repeatedly accused of being insane.

I could go through the list of attacks on my favorite Christian author, CS Lewis, and on my Christian heroes – John Stott, William Wilberforce, John Wesley, and Martin Luther King, Jr. So comfort yourself with the thought that you are in great company, if the Devil thinks that you are worth smearing.

Here is the second thought. It was underlined by Gary Thomas, a Christian author, who led a wonderful retreat for our pastors this past week. He was preaching on Romans 8:31:

Romans 8:31 (NIV)

31 What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

Whenever you are slandered, whenever you are misrepresented, whenever your positions are mischaracterized, when your words are twisted, when your character is attacked, when you are threatened with financial, emotional, or physical harm, remember this: You are not alone! God the Ruler of the universe is for you, and God the

Ruler of the universe loves you. He loves you so much that any unpopularity, or any smear that you experience can be overwhelmed and overcome by God's passionate infinite love for you.

So Paul has to throughout Thessalonians and many of his other letters defend his ministry from his accusers and attackers. That's what he does throughout chapter 2. But as I said in my opening, Paul draws his model of leadership from the world of the family. Let's look at this together.

1 Thessalonians 2:6–12 (NIV)

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.

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. 10 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.

And so Paul speaks about the leader as a spiritual parent.

The leader as a spiritual parent

Paul uses the simile of a mother and a father to describe his relationship to the churches. In v. 7:

1 Thessalonians 2:7 (NIV)

7 ...Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, so we cared for you.

1 Thessalonians 2:11 (NIV)

11 For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children,

Now, we immediately need to be careful to not misunderstand those attributes of parenting that a Christian leader ought to imitate and those attributes of parenting which a Christian leader ought not to imitate.

Let me start negatively. Consider what Paul doesn't intend.

What Paul doesn't intend

Because there are aspects of parenting that a Christian pastor, a Christian small group leader, a Christian counselor, a Christian discipler ought not to imitate. First, I think that a Christian leader ought not to imitate a parent's authority.

#### A parent's authority

Jesus says in Matthew 23:8-12:

Matthew 23:8–12 (NIV)

8 “But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers. 9 And do not call anyone on earth ‘father,’ for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. 10 Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one Instructor, the Messiah. 11 The greatest among you will be your servant. 12 For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

Jesus reminds us that whenever we talk about leadership and we use a family model of leadership, the most basic relationship that a leader has with those she or he leads is not that of mother to child, or father to child, but sister to brother, sister to sister, brother to brother. He says in v. 8:

Matthew 23:8 (NIV)

8 “But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers.

In other words, any concept of spiritual parenting must be void of the kind of obedience that a mother or a father would want to require from a small child. That's not what we ought to see in the church. We have one master in the church, namely, God. And our most basic relationship with one another is not hierarchical, it is a sibling relationship. Paul echoes this in 1 Thess 2:9.

1 Thessalonians 2:9 (NIV)

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.

Certainly, there are different offices in the church; we have different ministries, we have different roles. But that doesn't change the foundational equality that exists between every Christian in the church. We're all brothers and sisters. The toddlers in the nursery and the theology professor, the newest Christian who is fresh out of the world and just turned to Christ and the 80-year old saint, the most famous Christian athlete and the shy Christian teenager – we're all brothers and sisters.

But there is another danger in talking about spiritual parenting – being a spiritual mother or a spiritual father. There is something else that Paul does not intend:

A child's dependency

I think this is hinted at in Jesus' statement in Matthew 23:9,

Matthew 23:9 (NIV)

9 And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven.

Spiritual dependence always ought to be on God, who is our heavenly Father. God is our Creator, physically and spiritually. God is our Redeemer. We depend on his grace for our salvation. We do not ever hook our ultimate dependency on any other human being, no matter how wonderful that person is. Some godly person may have brought us to Christ, or counseled us through a devastating crisis, or stood by us through our divorce, through our loss, or taught us the scripture. But when we talk about spiritual parenting, we must never imply a child's dependency upon his or her parent. Because the desire of every Christian leader ought to be as Paul puts in Colossians 1:28,

Colossians 1:28 (NIV)

28 He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ.

In dysfunctional church families, church members are kept dependent on the pastor or the leader. There is a time to cut the apron strings. God's purpose is always to have us look to him to meet our needs, not some other person. And so the first step in Christian discipleship is to teach a young Christian how to feed themselves from God's Word, and how to talk and listen to God in prayer. Of course Christians care for each other. Of course we support one another and love one another and teach one another. But we must not create the kind of unhealthy spiritual dependency that you see in really dysfunctional churches.

Well, what does Paul intend?

What Paul does intend

First of all, Paul describes a Christian leader as a mother.

The leader as a mother

Here is what we read in 1 Thess 2:7-8

1 Thessalonians 2:7–8 (NIV)

7 Instead, we were like young children among you.

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.

In the US over the last couple of decades not only have we seen a corporate model of Christian leadership, especially in mega-churches with pastors having all the perks of corporate executives – incredible cars, big houses, country club memberships, private planes, and all the rest. Not only have we seen the growth of the corporate model of church leadership, but in the last decade especially we've seen the rise of this gross machismo in the church especially among some younger well-known male pastors. There is this attempt to portray themselves as overloaded with testosterone, boasting about how often they have sex with their flaming hot wives. It makes me want to gag, especially when I hear lots of stereotypes about male and female roles.

Gosh, if anyone could ever have had the title of Man's Man, it would have been Paul. He was beaten and stoned. He escaped from a city being lowered down in a basket. He was thrown in prison. This guy has so much authority that he strikes people blind; he raises the dead. He's like a pirate swinging across the stage with a knife between his teeth. And what's Paul's model for Christian leadership? He said,

“I acted towards you like a nursing mother.”

Take that, macho pastor!

And this isn't the only place in Paul's writings that he uses feminine metaphors regarding himself. In Galatians 4:19 the Apostle Paul says this:

Galatians 4:19 (NIV)

19 My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you,

And in 1 Cor he talks about feeding the Corinthians with milk. Now, he is absolutely speaking about a mother there because whereas today dads can bottle-feed their babies, back in the ancient world, there was only one way to get milk to your child and that was to nurse them.

Where did he get all of this feminine imagery from? Why is it appropriate to use feminine imagery in describing a model Christian leader? Because God uses feminine imagery in describing his own leadership. God in the Old Testament often reveals himself as a mother to the nation of Israel. Here is what we read in Isaiah 42:14:

Isaiah 42:14 (NIV)

14 “For a long time I have kept silent,

I have been quiet and held myself back.  
But now, like a woman in childbirth,  
I cry out, I gasp and pant.

God portrays himself through the prophet as being like a woman in labor. And in Isaiah 49:14-15, like a mother who does not forget the child she nurses.

Isaiah 49:14–15 (NIV)

14 But Zion said, “The LORD has forsaken me,  
the Lord has forgotten me.”

15 “Can a mother forget the baby at her breast  
and have no compassion on the child she has borne?  
Though she may forget,  
I will not forget you!

God is said to have given birth to the Israelites. He is like a mother who carries his children. Lots of feminine images for God in the Old Testament. God is described as being like a seamstress, making clothes for Israel to wear, and as a midwife attending a birth. Jesus calls himself a mother hen, gathering in her chicks.

How would a Christian leader act as a mother? First of all, I think a Christian leader needs to show,

A mother’s simplicity

1 Thessalonians 2:7 (NIV)

7 Instead, we were like young children among you.  
Just as a nursing mother cares for her children,

Paul is mixing metaphors here. First, he says we were like young children, literally like babies among you. And then he says we were as a nursing mother. I think he is talking about a mother’s simplicity. Have you ever seen a mother relate to her baby? She is willing to get down on the floor where the baby is. She’s willing to play. She’s willing to get down to the level of a child. You see moms on the floor with their babies. Mother is on her stomach and the baby is on her stomach, eyeball to eyeball, licking one another. The mother is speaking baby talk to her baby. The baby is making baby noises back. They play roley poley and “this little piggy went to market” together. When the baby becomes a toddler, they tickle one another. That is the picture of a Christian leader who doesn’t try impress his congregation with how much he or she knows or by how big their vocabulary is.

What I’ve said in my preaching mentoring class for 20 years to would-be young preachers is “put your cookies on a low shelf.” Remember Jesus’ instruction. He said,

“Feed my sheep,” not feed my giraffes. Don’t preach other the heads of everyone. Keep it simple. One famous preacher in the past said a preacher ought to sound like they have asthma, using short phrases and short little words.

Not only should a Christian leader have a mother’s simplicity as they lead, but also a mother’s affection.

#### A mother’s affection

1 Thessalonians 2:7–8 (NIV)

7 ...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.

The famous reformer, John Calvin, was explaining a text from the Book of Isaiah which speaks about God as our mother. Calvin said this:

*By an apt comparison he shows how strong is the concern he bears for his own. He compares himself to a mother, whose love for her baby is so engrossed and anxious as to leave a father’s love a long way behind. Thus he was not content with using the example of a father, which he employs frequently elsewhere. To express his burning affection, he preferred to compare himself to a mother, and he does not call them just “children” but his “baby,” since affection for a baby is normally stronger. The affection a mother feels for her baby is amazing. She fondles it in her lap, feeds it at her breast, and watches anxiously over it that she passes sleepless nights, continually wearing herself out and forgetting herself.*

A mother is the model that Paul uses to describe what a Christian leader looks like. It is so different than models drawn from the world of business, or models drawn from the world of politics.

Some of you, who took political science in college, may have read a book by Niccolo Machiavelli called The Prince. Machiavelli lived at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup>, beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. He wrote The Prince which was essentially a basic primer for would-be leaders who were intent on gaining and holding power. Lots of modern business leadership books claim to have derived their lessons from Machiavelli’s The Prince. Here is what he said,

*If you have to make a choice, to be feared is much safer than to be loved. For it is a good general rule about men, that they are ungrateful, fickle, liars and deceivers, fearful of danger and greedy for gain.*

*Those princes have accomplished most who paid little heed to keeping their promises, but who knew how to manipulate the minds of men craftily. In the end, they won out over those who tried to act honestly.*

Compare that to a man who was a near contemporary of Machiavelli back in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. He was the founder of the Jesuit Order in the Roman Catholic Church. His name was Ignatius of Loyola. He said,

*Leaders must act with great affection towards others, an affection that is coupled with a passion to see the other person run at full speed toward perfection.*

He said that leaders have to be characterized by two things: 1) great affection for the person they are leading, and 2) a passion to see that other person run at full speed towards perfection.

Who would you prefer to have as your leader? Machiavelli, who said if you have to choose, motivate by fear rather than love; or Ignatius of Loyola, who said show great affection for people and aim at making people fully thrive.

The difference between a Christian leader and some sort of organizational or corporate leader is that a Christian leader is willing to offer relationship. Paul says: I just don't offer you a service. I just don't have you come in for an hour or 40 minutes of counseling or preaching. I offer you genuine relationship. Now, obviously, people's ability to offer relationship is limited. The span of anyone's capacity to offer true relationship is probably 15-20 people. That is why we can't ever have a situation in which a pastor or even a staff of pastors can be the spiritual mothers 700 people in Joshua House and 7500 people in the Vineyard. That's what we're trying to do with small groups here at the Vineyard – our women's groups and men's groups and coed small groups. We want to multiply spiritual mothers and fathers who offer relationship – who just don't give a teaching, but who are leading a group. Small groups in the Vineyard should be an experience of shared healthy family life. Where a leader loves you like a mother; working and praying for the group.

One of the most significant things in his understanding of Christian leadership is that Christian leaders ought to show great affection for the people they lead.

Christian leaders are not just professionals offering religious services. They are moms and dads, regardless of gender. And Paul describes the Christian leader as a father.

The leader as a father

1 Thessalonians 2:9–12 (NIV)

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. 10 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.

First of all, we see

### A father's hard work

Paul says he was anxious to not be a burden to anyone in Thessalonica. In 2 Thess 3:8 Paul says this:

2 Thess 2:9

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.

2 Thessalonians 3.8 (NIV)

8 nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you.

One of the things that I profoundly respect when I see it in other Christian leaders is someone who is an extraordinarily hard worker. They don't just toss a teaching together in the last moment. That does happen sometimes. Life can be absolutely overwhelming at times; you might be juggling 25 different balls and are asked to lead at the last moment at small group and you just need to throw something together because you have had no warning that you're on. That happens; it has happened to me. But I love when I see Christian leaders bring their A-game in whatever they're doing – teaching children's ministry. They don't just throw something together in a few minutes in the morning. They think about the kids. They're praying for the kids in children's ministry. They bring their A-game to worship and their A-game to ushering, to cleaning the church, to designing the bulletin, to writing Bible study questions, to serving in our food pantry. Whatever they're doing in Christian leadership and service, they're doing it with all their energy, with their whole heart.

I love that when I see it on staff here at Vineyard Columbus. We've been using the acronym W.A.R.M.

W.A.R.M.

...to describe the kind of staff we aspire to be.

W. = Welcoming  
A. = Affectionate  
R. = Responsive  
M. = Motivated

We want the atmosphere here at the church to be warm. People connect here. They feel welcomed. They experience affection. I would like to see us hug one another more. We're responsive. People can get an answer. Emails are answered. Phone calls are answered.

Motivated. We're engaged in the most important stuff that anyone can be engaged in – the eternal destiny of people. How could you not work hard for that?

Paul is talking about a father's hard work. He talks about a father's example.

A father's example

1 Thessalonians 2:10 (NIV)

10 You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed.

Good parents understand that the most important thing is not what you say to them, but what you do. Dad, mom, you say that you want your kids to have a relationship with Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. Do they see you making decisions about your life and your behavior simply because Jesus Christ is your Savior and Lord? You say you want your kids to connect with Christ. Mom, dad, do they see you connecting with Christ? Do your children observe you regularly reading the Bible at home? Do they see you praying when you're upset? Mom, dad, do your kids hear you apologizing, asking their forgiveness, or forgiving your parents and your siblings when you are hurt by your family?

Paul understood the principle of leadership that every mature Christian parent understands. Christian faith is more caught than taught. It absolutely is monkey-see, monkey do. Small group leader, you want folks in your group to pray for the sick? Then pray for the sick. If you want to stamp out gossip in your group, then don't gossip. If you want transparent, open sharing, then be transparent and share openly. Monkey see, monkey do.

Finally, Paul talks about

A father's encouragement

1 Thessalonians 2:11–12 (NIV)

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. (NIV)

That word “encouragement” means to be called along side. What a father does is that he puts his arm around a spiritual child and assists that child to accomplish what God wants for them to do. How many spiritual children are in the church, are out there in the world, who need someone to come along side of them and to put courage in them. For that literally is the meaning of the word “encourage”—it means to put courage into somebody, to embolden.

You know, as I look out at the church, I see a lot of spiritual children hanging back standing on the outside looking in staring at various ministries or involvements, but not jumping in. And it is my belief that many, many spiritual children hang back from full participations in the church, whether we are talking about being involved in a small group or being involved in children’s ministry or being involved in evangelism, being involved with the poor through our Urban and Mercy Ministry, taking VI classes, and training for leadership. I believe that many spiritual children hang back not because of a lack of commitment, but because of a lack of confidence. Generally, people hang back because that’s the safest thing to do. Many, many of us are afraid to move forward in ministry because we are racked by feelings of insecurity and inadequacies. I don’t know enough! I’m not holy enough!

“How could I do this thing? What if I fail? What if they reject me?”

You may have been in spiritual environments where you didn’t meet the expectations of your former spiritual leaders there and they yelled at you. They criticized you. They rejected you. They occasionally were not good spiritual fathers because they didn’t put in you courage to overcome your failures. Rather than embolden you, they shamed you. They didn’t come along side of you and say, “Yes, you can do this. You can be a leader. You can teach the Bible. You can pray for the sick. You can do it. I believe in you despite this setback.” And a spiritual father is somebody who does that consistently with people. I believe you can do it, even if you messed up this time.

They not only encourage, but they comfort. Encouraging and comforting. It is not enough to call people on or just come along side of an individual and tell them that they can do it. A spiritual father is also a comforter, which means a spiritual father is somebody who is not afraid of another person’s pain. To offer comfort means that you are a person who will move toward another individual’s pain rather than away from it. Most people run away from pain, but not spiritual fathers. Spiritual fathers see someone in pain and not only do they put their arms around, walking side by side, but they put both arms around and they embrace.

This was Paul's MO in following the Lord Jesus. He was a wonderful comforter. Paul learned to be a spiritual father who comforted people in pain, the broken-hearted. He says in 2 Corinthians 1:3,

2 Corinthians 1:3 (NIV)

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort,

Do you realize on any given day, any Sunday, that sitting around you are many, many people who are broken-hearted, who are in pain, who need to know the comfort of the Lord? I have talked with individuals who have said that they feel more comfortable going to secular recovery groups than being in a church because people in churches run from their pain. There is as much need for comfort as there are causes of pain.

There are some parents here, your children have broken your hearts. There are parents here, your children have been arrested for a crime. You need comfort. You need the embrace of a spiritual father. There are some of you whose children are using drugs; whose children are in rebellion; whose children are sleeping around; you need the ministry of comfort. There are some of you who are going through a divorce. There are some of you who have never told anyone that you were raped or sexually abused. There are some of you whose husbands are unemployed. Some of you have recently suffered the loss of a loved one through death. Some of you know the heartache of discovering that you have cancer.

It is not enough to simply put one arm around a person's shoulder in encouragement. As spiritual fathers, both arms need to be around someone in pain in an embrace as we speak to a person words of love and words of affection, words of comfort. We pray together. We read scripture together. We are there for somebody else. A father's embrace.

Last of all, Paul speaks of a father's urging. Verse 12,

1 Thessalonians 2:12 (NIV)

12 encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

We are talking about using our arms in three different ways as a dad. When we encourage, we stand along side someone and we put our arm around their shoulder and we say, "You can do it, go ahead." When we comfort, we wrap both arms around the person and we hold them and we say to them, "It will be OK. I understand your pain." But when we urge someone we take our arms off of them and we point forward and we say, "Here is the direction that God wants to call you to."

“Encouraging, comforting, and urging to live lives worthy of God who calls you into his kingdom and glory.” When we are urging, we are pointing forward as dads. We are pointing into the future.

Now, let me tell you what that means, spiritual fathers. When you point someone into the future, as a spiritual father, one thing that you are saying is, “I will not use you. I will develop you.” Fathers think about a person’s future. Too, too often Christian organizations think about what they can get from a person in the present.

Over the years, I have sat down with literally dozens of Christian men and women who have been used by people who were not spiritual fathers. The leaders saw someone in their early 20’s who could work cheap and they sucked the energy out of that person for their particular goal, their group, and their organization. The person was single, didn’t have many financial needs, and was willing to work for literally nothing to serve God. And then I have watched those people as they become age 27. They get married. Age 30 they have their first kid. Now they are beginning to say, “Gee, you know, I really need to make a little more money.” But the organization has no future for them and the pay is so low that there is no place to move.

Now they are 35 or 40 and they have no health insurance and no place to really grow into and they have developed no career skills, and they are bitter at the Lord and bitter at the church. Because the Christian leaders they met in their 20s were not fathers. A spiritual father cares about a person’s future and wants to develop them. A spiritual father is somebody who will sit down with a person and say, “You know I care about where you are going to be in five years, not just now. In ten years. Here are some of the things I think you need to do to prepare for five or ten years from now.”

Paul draws his model of leadership from the family. Someone who does that is the kind of leader worth following. Let’s pray.

## The Family Model of a Leader

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Rich Nathan

May 18, 2014

Strength in Weaknesses:  
Leadership Lessons from the Life of Paul  
1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

- I. The leader and their opponents
- II. The leader as a spiritual parent
  - A. What Paul does not intend
    - 1. A parent's authority
    - 2. A child's dependency
  - B. What Paul does intend
    - 1. The leaders as a mother
      - a. A mother's simplicity
      - b. A mother's affection
    - 2. The leader as a father
      - a. A father's hard work
      - b. A father's example
      - c. A father's encouragement