

Spiritual Fathers

by Jim Cymbala

The sermon emphasizes the importance of living a life worthy of God's calling and the role of spiritual fathers in helping us grow in maturity.

Duration: 32:42

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 2:5-6, 1 Thessalonians 2:10-12

Topics: "Spiritual Father"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses how Satan tries to attack believers and how we can learn from this to help ourselves and others. The preacher emphasizes the importance of maturity and caring for others. He shares that when he was with the congregation, he encouraged, comforted, and challenged them, explaining that this is how we grow and become what God wants us to be. The preacher also shares personal experiences of pain and discouragement, highlighting the need for support and encouragement in difficult times.

Transcript

We continue on our study in the book of 1st Thessalonians, the letter of 1st Thessalonians. I thought we'd go much faster, but as I read it, and pray over it, meditate over it, it seems like things come popping into my heart and mind that I say, you know what? The congregation needs to hear this, and I need to be reminded, and this portion of the scripture here that we're going to read today is chock full of some good things for us. Just to pick up for those who are visiting, Paul is writing a church that he founded.

He's writing to it. It's in Greece. He brought the gospel to Greece, and now he's writing to the church that he founded.

He was the first one to preach there. He founded the church. They're his converts, and he moved on, and he's now in southern Greece in a place called Corinth as he writes this letter.

At this juncture of the letter, he's kind of defending himself and reminding them of how he was when he was with them. Why? Because after he left, and this happened a number of times, people came in after the apostle left and acted like they were ministers, but they were throwing him under the bus. They said negative things about him.

They slandered him, and in a lot of his letters, he's in a polite way defending himself so that his precious converts don't get steered and go the wrong way and follow charlatans who are not concerned about them. They're after their money. This comes up over and over again in this first and second chapters.

He's warning them. Remember when I was with you. I was in love with you.

I cared about your welfare. I wasn't after your money because even as today, there's charlatans all over the religious landscape who are con artists and swindlers, but using Jesus, the Holy Spirit, using Bible verses to lift money out of people's pockets and not really have them grow spiritually, not think of the big picture. They're hedonistic, thinking of themselves.

So it was back then. So Paul is writing now. We're gonna give a little introductory few verses so you can hear the flow of it, and then we have just one verse really to look at.

Let's look at that together. You know, he's talking now. You know.

Remember when we were there. You know, we never used flattery and then butter you up, nor did we put on a mask to cover up. See, there it goes again, to cover up greed.

God is our witness. 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. Once again, notice, we didn't use flattery to win you over.

That's a cheap way to win people's favor is to flatter them and not tell the truth. We didn't put a mask on to cover up greed, and we weren't looking for praise. See, that's a trap for ministers, for all of us, but especially if you hold a microphone and you speak, it's you don't speak as God is listening.

You're watching the people and you're trying to say things to make yourself popular. That is a huge trap. You're not telling them the truth.

You're not speaking as before God. You're trying to gauge their reaction. What do they want to hear so that I can be popular with them and they'll applaud me and buy my book or whatever.

So Paul said, we never did any of that. Instead, we were like young children among you, just as a nursing mother cares for her children, 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.

We covered those passages. What did he mean by that? Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship. We work night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preach the gospel of God to you.

So what he's referring to now is that all Jewish teachers, rabbis in training were taught in Jewish culture another trade so that in case they were in a situation where their pupils couldn't support them, they would have a trade, a skill to fall back on. Rabbis said that if you didn't teach your son a trade, you were worse than like being a non-believer in God. You had to do that.

So Paul learned to be a tent maker and several times in the New Testament, we see references that he worked as a tent maker to make money to pay his bills because everyone has bills. You got to eat, you got to clothe yourself, you got to stay somewhere. Notice he says here, I could have asked you to do it because those who preach the gospel are supposed to live from the gospel.

But for some reason, he didn't do that. He didn't enforce what he could have. He said, I worked with my own hands day and night.

So imagine he's preaching his heart out. He's ministering to the people. He's counseling them.

He's under threat from the authorities of persecution, which he went through all the time. And then on top of that at night, he's making tents. Why? So that he won't be a burden to them.

What a challenge to me and every other minister. We're not supposed to take from the people as much as we can. We're supposed to give to the people.

The minister isn't there to be living a lavish lifestyle. The minister is there. He has to have his needs met, but he's supposed to be thinking of the people like a mother would think about her children.

What mother would nurse her baby and say, Hey, what are you going to give me later for doing this? This mother's milk is expensive. What are you going to pay me now for this? No, not at all. It's give, give, give.

That's what love does. You are witnesses. Here we go.

And so is God of how holy, righteous, and blameless we were among you who believe. By the way, what a challenge to all pastors. Any pastors here today watching on the webcast or just what a challenge that he could say, You know when we were with you.

You know how holy, that means pious, devout, godly, righteous. That means straight in our actions and blameless we were among you. Just thinking of an example.

He was writing to them and he was saying to them, Hey, you know, did I ever meet with any of you privately and lift your money? Did I ever lie to any of you? Did I ever cheat any of you? Did I ever lift up myself instead of Jesus? Did I ever con you? Did I ever play a game on you? Did I ever do anything like that? Did I ever not care about your problems? No, you know how I lived among you. What a challenge to Pastor Simba. What a challenge to every minister that you could write back to a church and say, Name one time where I played you.

Name one. They couldn't. But we need to pray for all ministers.

Amen. That we do the work of the Lord the right way. For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting, and urging you to live lives worthy of God who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

Verse 11 there. Look, for you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting, and urging you to live lives worthy of God who calls you into his kingdom and glory. That word worthy there means of weight.

I'm not going to talk about it today. Maybe next week or maybe we'll just bypass it and just refer to it. But it means the whole goal was now that you're Christians you got to live lives worthy of being a Christian.

Not in order to be a Christian but you are a Christian. Like when I went to the Naval Academy a long time ago recruited as a basketball player and went to Annapolis. So you put on that uniform.

I was there to play basketball but they didn't have that in their minds. The coach did. The athletic department did.

But the Naval Academy doesn't care about basketball. They care about hey pal, you're a midshipman. There's only 3,800 of us in the world.

Largest dining hall in the world. 3,800. We all ate together.

You put that uniform on. You have those shoes shining. You are now a midshipman.

You're training to become an officer in the Navy. Be an ensign when you graduate unless you go in the Marine Corps. You learn now and the drilling came every day just 24-7.

Just drilling. You don't get in fights. You don't use profanity.

You take the chair out for the lady. You open the door for her. You don't slouch around and sit any way you want.

Hey, you're a midshipman. Don't you get it? This is not some college. This is the United States Naval Academy.

Now act worthy of the uniform. Don't dishonor the uniform. We see that also in families.

You love your mom or dad. They raise you. They're great people.

You don't want to live in a way that would dishonor your mother and your father because that would be a stain on them. In other words, live worthy of your mom and your dad and what they trained you. That's the thought that Paul has here.

Not about us, but about living worthy. Not live so that you can go to heaven. No, you're going to heaven.

You believe in Jesus. But now live worthy of it. Is that conversation worthy of who you are? To go to that place.

Is that worthy? Would he go with you to that place? Does that bring honor to him? To watch that. Is that worthy of what he did on the cross? That's the whole thought of godly living. This is what Paul's goal was.

Now that you're Christians, I want you to live worthy of the calling that you have. You're Christians now. You belong to the family of God.

Don't go off the reservation. Act worthy. Live worthy.

Talk. Walk in the Bible. Means that's the way you carry on your life.

Walk worthy of who you are. In other words, be who you are. If you're a saint, means holy one.

Don't be unholy. That's the goal. But how to get there? This is the part we want to learn.

So now Paul says, you remember how I was with you? I was like a father with his children. Well now we see a different metaphor. Before he said, I was like a mother.

And the picture there, you remember, was a woman just giving birth, pulling down her dress, taking the baby to her breast, and feeding the baby. Now he says, I was also in another way like a father when I was with you. Now you might say, I don't want to know about the ministry.

I'm not a minister. But there's a lot to learn. Not just for me, but for you, and in our dealings with people who we care about.

First of all, here he says, I was like a father with you. Mother is tender. Now the father cares about the growth of the child.

Notice, mothers give birth. That's life. But life isn't enough.

You have to grow. If you have life, and the baby doesn't grow, there's something very, very sad about that, isn't it? You ever see a child with some disease, and they don't grow properly? So the Christian ministry is about not just getting people to be born again. You put your faith in Jesus.

Now the Holy Spirit comes to live in you, and you have life. You have a new way of living. How many have been born again here? Lift up a hand.

So we have a new life. That's the Holy Spirit living inside of us. We're a new creation.

It's a different Jim Cymbala. But now the question is, do you grow? Do you grow? Because life just isn't the end. There's a little baby.

But now will the baby grow? Will the baby be healthy? Will the baby get longer, gain weight? Will the baby have muscles that function? Paul is saying, I brought the gospel to you. I told you to repent of your sins, confess them, put your faith in Christ. If you then have life, Paul says, I didn't stop there.

I wanted to make sure that you would grow, and that you would be healthy. So that's the question for all of us here. Since you became a Christian, what kind of growth has there been in your life? Not, are you a Christian? He's going past that.

He's saying now, has there been growth? Have you become mature? You know, it's possible to be a Christian and be perpetually immature. You can be a Christian and still playing with a rattle. And you know, a crib, and give me my blankie.

And go like that. Even though you're 10, 20 years in the Lord. Oh, is that not true? Haven't you met people who are Christians? They've never grown.

They're still thinking about themselves. Others? Minister to others? No, it's all about them. They're babies.

That's what babies are. Babies only think of one thing when they're little. How they're being affected by their environment.

They're hungry. They're thirsty. They're tired.

They're babies. That's all they know. But Paul says, no, I was like a dad now.

I wanted to bring you into maturity. I wanted to see you grow. But in the middle of all of this is the fact that we're involved in spiritual warfare.

That while God wants us to grow, there's someone else fighting every one of us. The speaker, to the top of the balcony, to the choir member. Every one of us is in a fight.

God wants us to grow. And Satan, he's upset and doesn't like that we're Christians. But now, what he wants us to do is never grow.

It's bad enough you're a Christian, but if he can keep you a perpetual baby, if he can keep me in the nursery for the rest of my life, then at least I won't damage his kingdom too much. He doesn't like that we come to church, but if that's all we're gonna do is Sunday, sit, go home, never think about Jesus much during the rest of the week, that's cool. Just do that.

Just stay where you are. Paul says, no, I wanted to see you grow. I want you to see you get strong.

I want to see God's purpose for your life worked out. I want you to get off of the me, myself, and I cycle. And I want you to start thinking about others and the glory of God.

I want you to start to see that all things work together for good. That even though it looks negative, doesn't mean it's negative. But when you're immature, if it's negative, what am I gonna do? But when you get more mature, no, it doesn't look good, but God's working something out in here.

Right? How many wanna grow to that kind of maturity where we don't just react? Paul says, I was like a dad with you. He said, not only I was like a father, in another way, he was their father, their spiritual father. Let's think about that for a second.

In a couple places in the New Testament, like when he talks about Timothy, Timothy was a young minister who worked with him, and he said, you know, Timothy worked with me like a son with his father. And it seems every indication that Paul led Timothy to Christ, and thus was his spiritual father. What's a spiritual father? A spiritual father is the one, could be a woman too, fatheress, or whatever, mother, spiritual mother, who brought you into the kingdom, brought the gospel to you.

Did you know some people are Christians, they can't even give the exact moment they became Christians. That's true. Some people read a book and opened their heart to the Lord, read the Bible in a hotel room.

So who was their spiritual father? Maybe the person who put the Bible in there is part of that equation. But then, beside the actual spiritual father, then there's people that God has put in our lives who have had huge stamp on our life. We're who we are in God because of those people.

An aunt, an uncle, maybe a biological mother or father, a pastor, an evangelist, a writer, a friend who took an interest in you. God sent them into your life to help nurture you, help nurture me, and grow us so we can be what God wants us to be. Remember, whenever you fight this process of being what God wants you to be, you're headed toward all kinds of unhappiness, frustration, lack of fulfillment because you're fighting against the purposes of God.

His way is the best way. Amen? And when he causes us to have life, praise God. Then he says, I want you to grow.

When you say, I don't want to grow, that does not work out well for any of us. A lot of Christians are walking around depressed. They want to get prayed for by everybody.

They're looking for some quick formula. But the problem is they're 12 years in Christ and they're acting like they're three months old. They've never grown.

And that just throws them totally off. God wants us to grow. So, who is your spiritual father or my spiritual father? Or who are the people who God has used to really help us? We should honor those people.

We should respect those people. I'm thinking of three people in my own life right now. I thought of them last night.

I thank God for them. Two are gone. One is still alive.

I just went up to see him with my wife because he recently had a stroke. Big impact in my life. Do you have anybody in your life? How many have someone in your life that God said they really helped you? Come on, lift your hand up high.

Right? Because none of us are here just because we're here, right? We find out that spiritual fathers, mothers, they're important. And maybe you're a spiritual father. Maybe you're a spiritual mother.

Have you thought about that? Maybe, do you have anyone in your life that you've so invested in that they kind of look to you for encouragement and help? That should be. That's a sign of maturity when you just don't think about your own development but now you're thinking about who can I help? I wonder what she's going through. I wonder what she battles with at night.

I wonder how Satan comes to her and tries to attack her. When you mature, you start to care about other people, amen? So now, how did he do that so we can learn for ourselves and we can learn how to help others? Paul says, I did three things when I was with you. I encouraged you.

I comforted you. And I urged or challenged you. This is the way we grow.

This is how we get the strength to go on and be what God wants us to be. Listen again. I encouraged you.

I comforted you. And I also urged you, challenged you. Now notice he says, I did this.

You remember, individually in the Greek the connotation is. He didn't do this just in mass meetings like we're doing now. But he did it individually.

He took time with the people. He would get discernment from God what they were going through. He would ask them questions.

And then he would be able to minister to them. That's why we all have to be doing this because look at all the people that'll be in and out of here today. Rain or no rain.

Think of all the people that'll be in here today. They're all going through something. How in the world could a few of us handle all the people? That's why the body of Christ, not just deacons and deaconesses, but all of us, we have to be on the lookout who we can help.

So Paul wasn't some remote minister who was so important that he never got to meet anybody. I just heard recently about a minister in another state. He hasn't talked to any of his members in over two years.

None of them. In fact, barely his own staff. I don't know what he's doing, but that's not biblical.

And no matter what excuse, you know, preparing sermons or what else, a pastor's not supposed to be a CEO. He's supposed to be a man of God, a man of the people. All Christians are supposed to be flowing together, helping.

So Paul says this. You remember that I encouraged you, individually and in mass. Why would he say that? Because we get discouraged.

We get discouraged. Cancer is the big C, but in spiritual life, discouragement is the big D. Discouragement takes you away from faith, and the just shall live by faith. So if Satan can get you discouraged, he's got you on a good path.

You know what discouragement leads to? You have it enough, long enough. It gets increased. You stir it gently.

Now you're into depression. Did you know that there's a huge rise now in America in suicide among adults, especially in white middle-class women in America? Did you know more people commit suicide than are murdered in America? We talk about guns in Chicago and this and cops shooting ill-advisedly and wrongly and gang drive-bys and all of that. But put all that together.

More people commit suicide than get murdered. How did that begin? Where does the first root is? Discouragement. I can't do this.

Then I can't take it. You have no idea. I have no idea with the discouragements, the battles of discouragement that are going on right in that choir.

Let's just take the choir. I know a little bit about some of these people. I could speak about some situations, couldn't I, today, and talk about discouragements that people are going through here.

But I wouldn't want to do that. But I'll tell you about the congregation. It's just, you talk with people.

Am I right, Pastor? All kinds of discouragements. And Paul says, when I was with you, I gave you words of encouragement. I encouraged you.

You know, there's nothing worse than when you're battling discouragement to be around a negative person. Like you want to just end it all. Forget discouragement.

Just hurry-carry. Just ugh and turn it and it's over. Haven't you ever fought with discouragement? Sometimes you don't even know why you're discouraged.

You just wake up discouraged. Right? So Paul says, when I was with you, I encouraged you. I took time with you.

I gave you words of encouragement. Any preacher who doesn't encourage his people, who doesn't give a word and say, come on, we can do this. Come on, we can do this.

Hey, sister, you can do it. I don't know what you're going through, but you can make it. You trust the Lord, you're going to make it.

Don't we need words like that? Sometimes we're so wrapped up with our own lives, we don't even think to give a word of encouragement. I love that name of Barnabas. Barnabas was Paul's associate on his first

missionary journey, not the one we're focusing on now.

And they called him son of encouragement. Wouldn't it be nice if the band and all the people in the church, besides playing keyboards and the bass, wouldn't it be nice if everyone knew him like, oh, there's Phil. Phil is a son of encouragement.

You talk to him, he will encourage you. In fact, if enough people got filled with that spirit, the congregation would be running to them and say, the pastor's busy, I can't get to a deacon, let me just talk to that brother, that sister, because if you talk to them, woo, you just feel all encouraged. Like, yeah, let's go.

Come on, we can do this. Instead of talking with someone who's just so negative, everything's wrong, cynical, and a lot of them grew up in homes like that. That's why they're like that.

They never got any encouragement from their own parents. They grew up in homes filled with discouragement, negativity. Paul says, no, God wants you to be encouraged.

Then he says, comfort, you know, comfort speaks about pain, and even though you're a Christian, things happen in life that hurt you. Did you know that just recently, a woman in our church, her father was mean to her her whole life. Mean her whole life.

Hello, mean her whole life. Okay? She became a Christian. She tried to reach out to him.

So when he got sick, she went and took care of him a lot. Traveled across the city just to be with him. You know, maybe get things hooked up again, you know, healing, re-approachment, all that.

Never appreciated, never said thank you. Like, you're supposed to do this. And then he died.

And I think she had a couple siblings. And he was worth the house, and then that, they found out he was worth \$800,000, \$900,000. So I heard, you better call her, Pastor, call her.

I called her. She's not an overly emotional person. She was broken, crying.

They got the last will he made, and on purpose, just to put the final screw in. He left her and their two siblings \$10 each. Now, you know what? That hurts.

That hurts. You can't even make that up. Okay? What does she need? She needs comfort.

The word comfort there in the Greek means speak tenderly. Some people at certain times in their life, they don't need a hit in the back. And come on, we can do this.

You gotta go very carefully with them because they are damaged goods at that moment in their emotions. Just because you're a Christian doesn't mean you don't cry. How many follow what I'm saying here? And just because you're a Christian rubber band, you stretch it long enough, it'll still snap.

So Paul says, when I was with you, I not only encouraged you, but I comforted you because some people are discouraged. They need encouraging words. Some people are hurt.

They're hurt. They lost someone. Mom died.

Dad died. Husband walked out on them. Child cursed them out and walked out.

Dealing with somebody here in the church, the granddaughter is a drug addict, heroin. She tried to help the daughter, you know, let the granddaughter get in the house. The granddaughter stole three, four thousand dollars worth of stuff from her own grandmother who's trying to help her.

You don't think that hurts? Maybe it hasn't happened to you. How would you like your own granddaughter to be lifting stuff out of your house? Some people just need comfort. Comfort.

Tender words. And lastly, some people drift. And Paul says, when I was with you, I also exhorted you.

The word actually means testify. In other words, I said, don't do that. Hey, I'm like a dad.

You know, a dad, when the child starts to go off, he doesn't go always, oh everything's fine. No, you're going wrong. Come on.

Come on. God is good. Don't go that way.

It looks good, but it's going to end up bad. There's a way that seems good to a person, but the end is destruction. Don't do that.

He said, I implored you. I argued with you. Because that's what a father does.

When my girl, all those years ago, teenager, oldest daughter was going away from the Lord, I didn't comfort her. I told her, don't do that. Don't go with him.

I don't care that he says he loves you. Don't go that way. Because that's what a father does.

And we got to have Christian friends who are strong enough in the Lord and mature enough that are not afraid of rejection that you can say to somebody, you know what, don't go that way. Listen, I love you, but you're going the wrong way. You're going the wrong way.

Don't you love me? Yeah, that's why I'm telling you you're going the wrong way. You can't get this idea of love. Love is always just stroking and agreeing.

A person who really loves someone tells them when they're going off. How many are with me? Say aloud, amen. Because how many have found when you start to stray, God who loves us so much, He will convict you quickly.

Lift your hand if you've ever felt His conviction. Yeah, why? Because He loves us. So, Paul said, when I was with you, I wanted you to grow and be the people God wanted you to be.

I encourage you because I know how deadly discouragement could be. Because, you know, I was thrown in prison myself, and you know, I preached some places and they kicked me out of town, and false Christians fought against me, and I was in trouble in the city. I was in trouble in the country.

I spent a day and a night in the sea. I was in trouble with the Romans, trouble with the Jews. Yeah, I know what it means to be discouraged, so I want to tell you something.

I want to encourage you because I know how deadly discouragement can be. And I want to comfort you because, you know, one time they opened up my back and they gave me 39 lashes. They're not allowed to give 40 because some people died even before 40.

And I lay in a prison. I know what it is to feel pain. And it was like that.

He said, when I was with you, I didn't fool around and be after your money. Want your applause? Want to be a big time preacher? Oh, come on. I'm your dad.

I'm your mother. I want to see you grow. I want to see you helped.

And we want to close by helping anyone here who God brought in at this moment because you need that someone to come alongside of you to help you. Could you close your eyes, please? Bow your heads. If you're fighting discouragement because of whatever, I don't care what it is.

Even your own mistakes. Even your own weakness. The biggest discouragement in my life, I have to tell you the truth.

I tell you his name. He's been the biggest discourager in my life. His name is Jim Simbala.

He discourages me. But God comes and encourages me. He says, I'm not done with you.

I'm not done with you. Anyone here battling discouragement, just get up out of your seat quickly. Just walk here to the front.

Someone's going to just stand gently. Hold your arm. Anybody here in pain? You need healing in your heart.

You need God's comfort. The God of all comfort who comforts us in all of our trouble. In the choir, in the balcony, downstairs, just come.

Anybody here just wavering? The enemy is trying to pull you away that you know that is a sewer he's pulling you toward. You want God to strengthen you. Strengthen your will.

Get you firm and strong. Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. We're talking now real life now.

Now Lord, as we get ready to dismiss, encourage my brothers and sisters. I don't need to know what they're going through. You know everything.

Use the choir members, deacons, deaconesses. Use them as they pray. Make us encouragers.

There's so much discouragement around. God, make us not negative but full of your word, full of love, full of encouragement. Comfort those who need comfort today who are hurt.

Their hearts are raw. Their spirits have been wounded. Help them, Jesus.

Help my precious sister who's wounded, Lord. Let your healing virtue flow. Strengthen us all, Lord.

We're not going to go backwards. We're going forward. We're not going sideways to the left or to the right but our eyes are on the prize and we're going to serve you together.

I want us to be able to hug these folks in the front and why don't you just turn, give a hug, ladies with ladies, men with men. Hug a bunch of people. Say something good.

Say something encouraging.

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