

Text: Isaiah 66:13

Title: "Lessons about the comfort of a godly mother"

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Introduction: Research shows that God's design for the family creates the best outcomes for children. On average, kids grow up to enjoy greater economic stability, better emotional health and social skills, and higher academic achievement when they come from a home where their biological dad and mom are married for life. The Bible teaches that children have a God-given natural right to be raised by both their father and their mother, united as one flesh in holy matrimony. That this provision of the Lord for their well being corresponds to their need has been confirmed by scientific research.

The complementary difference between a dad and a mom is one of these benefits of God's design for the family, which prepares the child for life. When it comes to emotional support, fathers often provide more structure and discipline, whereas mothers are generally more emotionally available and nurturing. Fathers interact with their children with play and physical activity, whereas mothers engage in caregiving.

Dads direct with their words and try to let their example do most of the talking, whereas moms are more verbal, will ask more questions, and will provide more thorough explanations. Children are encouraged to be independent and take risks by their fathers, and they are comforted with a sense of security and support from their mothers.

Our text recognizes the importance of the mother's comfort in the home. It teaches simply that God's comfort of His people is like a godly mother's comfort of her children. In other words, a loving mother's comfort of a needy child points to something that is true about our Lord's comfort of us who are His people.

Illustration: Last Sunday, Brandon's family joined us for dinner, and my three-year-old grandson, Cason, enjoyed playing in our parking lot. He brought his electric golf cart to drive around, and he also rode the tricycle Grandpa and Mima keep handy.

When the playing was to be done, and it came time to go home, Brandon asked Cason to get off of the tricycle and fetch his golf cart to be loaded into the car. Cason did so, somewhat sad that it was time to leave, but then tripped and faceplanted on the parking lot. He cried out in pain, and Brandon offered to help, but my afflicted grandson immediately turned for the arms of his mother instead. Carrie offered a level of nurture and comfort that Cason believed was preferable under these circumstances to anything that Dad might have to offer.

Sinful man has many beliefs about what God is like and about what He has to offer. It seems that the picture drawn by Isaiah 66:13 is often missing in man's misunderstanding of His Creator. God not only pities His children as a Father (Ps. 103:13), but also He comforts them like a mother.

In our text and elsewhere in the Old Testament, the word for *comfort* is the Hebrew word *naḥam*. The word can be used in both a negative and a positive sense. It can mean *to experience regret* in one form [niph'al theme], and *to experience comfort* in other forms [the piel and pual themes]. The common denominator in these opposite meanings seems to be that they both express the expectation of a heart of concern. When that heart of concern is disappointed, the emotion is regret. But when its expectation is met, comfort results.

And so in Genesis 6:7, the Lord saw that the sin of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thought of his heart was only evil continually, so He *regretted* that He had made man. That is the negative form of this word. God's expectation for His creatures was disappointed by their evil

and sin, so He regretted making them. Our world is full of this same evil, but thankfully the rainbow assures us that the global flood was a one-time judgment.

On the other hand, in Ruth 2:13 young Ruth's expectation is not only met, but also exceeded by Boaz. She had hoped to obtain a few gleanings from Boaz's reaped field to put some scraps on her destitute table, but instead she was met with the love and admiration of the owner of the field, who made sure she had enough for that day and every day thereafter.

She thanks Boaz this way: "Let me find favour in thy sight, my lord; for thou hast *comforted* me, and for thou hast spoken friendly unto thine handmaid, though I be not like unto one of thine handmaids." Ruth's low expectations were caused by her identity as a Gentile Moabite, but Boaz comforted her with his love and provision as her kinsman-redeemer.

One of the reasons Boaz greatly loved and respected Ruth was the way that she cared for her mother-in-law. Ruth was a young widow, but instead of seeking another husband among her own people in Moab, Ruth accompanied Naomi back to Israel to care for her. It turns out that this Old Testament word for *comfort* is often linked in some way to a mother's love for her child, and a child's love for a mother. In Genesis 24:67, after mourning over the death of his mother Sarah, Isaac was comforted by his marriage to Rebekkah.

On Mother's Day some of us miss our mothers, both those who gave birth to us and those of the household of faith who cared for us as faithful church members here. We miss their comfort, but like my dad told me once about my mom: "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them" (Rev. 14:13). We miss them this morning, but we do not mourn for them because they are blessed in the presence of our Savior this Mother's Day.

Our text in Isaiah 66:13 is not about a literal mother like Naomi or Sarah. It is about the nature of all good mothers and the way that nature points to something very wonderful about God and His people. Throughout Scripture its authors use the nature of good mothers to teach us truths about our God and about ourselves as His people. On this Mother's Day morning, I would like us to see two simple lessons from the comfort of godly mothers.

I. God's comfort is like a godly mother's comfort (Isa. 66:13).

Illustration: I have five grandchildren with one on the way in September. None are older than the age of three. As I watch these young families care for their little ones, I am struck by how much better equipped mothers are to care for young children than are dads. The younger the children, the more this is true. The bond between a nursing infant and his mother is one of the truly magnificent bonds of human creation. As dad goes off to work, these little ones depend on mom for everything. The selfless love of moms is such a wonderful blessing to me as a grandfather. It makes my wife and I rejoice in the Lord that Carrie, Kara, and Caroline are our daughters.

Application: When the Lord says that His loving comfort for Jerusalem is like a mother and her children, He speaks especially of very young children (vv. 10-14; see also Isa. 49:13-15). Isaiah 66 describes the promised future blessing of Jerusalem in the plan of God. The Jerusalem of today is not this Jerusalem yet. Instead, the Jerusalem of today is still the one over which Jesus laments in Matthew 23:37-39, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." That kind of Jerusalem is the one we have today.

Yet notice the tenderness of the Lord's love, even in this lament that speaks of their rejection of Him. He is a mother hen; they are His chicks. Throughout their history He sought to gather them under His wings like a hen her chicks, but that expectation went unfulfilled. Instead, Jerusalem killed God's prophets and stoned those sent to her. Today's Jerusalem is still hostile to Jesus Christ, and He still laments over them.

But even in this lament, there is the hope of Isaiah 66 and of God's comfort. Today's Jerusalem is spiritually desolate, but there is coming a day when they will see the Lord Jesus and say, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." That will be a day of great comfort, a day of great salvation. It will be a day when the mother hen gets her chicks.

God's dealings with Jerusalem and Israel are, of course, emblematic of His dealings with every sinner lost in his sin. For us sinners, it is perfectly natural to want to rid ourselves of God's prophets and to reject those whom God has sent to us. That tendency explains the poor local church attendance of our day and age. The Bible is a closed book to most, and when it comes to the Lord's invitation to take refuge in Him, many have told Him they would rather not.

For each of us there must come a day when we see all this differently, a day when we see that Jesus Christ is our Messiah, who did come in the name of the Lord, and who came to bless us with His salvation by dying on the cross for our sins and rising from the dead for our eternal life. This is the motherly comfort of the eternal God offered in the loving gift of His own Son to save sinners. To reject Him is to continue building a life that is spiritually desolate, just like modern Jerusalem. God's comfort of His people is like a godly mother's comfort. May we receive by faith this comfort of salvation from sin.

II. A disciple-maker's comfort must be like a godly mother's comfort (1 Thess. 2:1-7).

Application: As we transition from the Old Testament to the New Testament, we know that we are no longer finding the Hebrew word for *comfort*, but now we must look for the Greek word for *comfort*. A help in knowing which Greek word to look for is to use the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament called the Septuagint. The authors of the New Testament often quote from the Septuagint, especially an author like Luke who did not know Hebrew.

So, when we look at which Greek word the Septuagint used to translate the word *comfort* or in Hebrew *naḥam*, we find that they used the word *paraklēsis*. *Para* means *along side of*, and *klēsis* comes from the Greek verb that means *to call*. So *paraklēsis* means *something or someone called along side of us to bring us comfort and help*. Whereas the Hebrew word emphasizes the subjective expectation or need that is met by comfort received, the Greek word emphasizes the objective proximity of the source of the comfort received. For this reason, Jesus called the Holy Spirit the Paraclete in John 14-16.

Illustration: If we go back to my grandson's fall in the parking lot last week, his painful outcry was a call for comfort and help, and his mother Carrie quickly became his *paraklēsis* – the one called beside him – as she hugged him and provided the comfort that he needed. The Holy Spirit does that with us, and he empowers us to do that for others.

Application: In our passage Paul refers to His gospel ministry among the Thessalonian local church. The Great Commission calls this ministry “making disciples” (Matt. 28:19-20). The word that Paul uses to summarize his ministry among the Thessalonians in verse 3 is the word *paraklēsis* translated *exhortation*. In other words, as one engaged in New Testament gospel ministry, Paul let himself be called along the side of these brothers and sisters to comfort and to help them. In verse 7, he says his ministry to them was very much like a loving nursing mother (“her children” is literally “her own children”; ESV).

So, Paul's example teaches us that our disciple-making ministry to another must be like a godly mother's comfort. We must be willing to give time and energy to be at the side of believers who need help and comfort from us. It must not be done for money, nor for popularity, nor for personal glory (vv. 3-6). Instead, it must be done for the same reason that a nursing mother nurses her own child. It must be done out of love.

Paul not only examples why we make disciples. He also shows us how. We must do it with gentleness (v. 7), with generosity (v. 8), with hard work (v. 9), and with a godly example (v. 10). And so Paul's example is a great challenge to each one of us. His example raises the question to us, "Who is my Thessalonian?" "Who is it that I am comforting the way Paul comforted these needy believers?" We should long for the Lord to use us in someone's life in this powerful way.

Imagine with me a church full of godly, loving believers, whose lives are busy providing this disciple-making comfort to other new and younger believers. Soon those younger believers would become godly loving believers who would reach people in their lives and become busy providing disciple-making comfort to them. It is both a great privilege and an awesome responsibility to lead someone to salvation in Christ. When God allows us to see that miracle of His, He asks us to be a good nursing mother. Of course, it is Jesus who best exemplified what it was to do this for His twelve disciples and others. He made them fishers of men, men who themselves would fish for other men.

Conclusion: As we conclude our thoughts about a godly mother's comfort, I want us to remember the day that a mother's comfort was not available. Psalm 69:20-21 tells us about that day hundreds of years before it happened: "Reproach hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for *comforters*,

but I found none. They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.”

The day described by that Psalm was the day Jesus hung on the cross thirsty, dying for our sins. Earlier in the Psalm, we find this expression of His suffering: “I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto my mother’s children” (v. 8). Jesus’s mother Mary raised a family that rejected Him in unbelief along with the others of their fellow Israelites. His mother was there at the cross, but she could provide Him no relief or comfort. Instead, her suffering Son did so for her, asking John to look after her thereafter.

And so even the comfort of God the Father, whose comfort is like a loving mother, was withheld from our sin-bearer as He was sacrificed in our place so that we could live. Every godly mother’s desire for each of her children is that he might receive in faith the comfort of Jesus’s sacrifice and be saved. Is He your comfort of salvation this morning?

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*