Nurses in the Bible — Knowledge with Love in Service

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As a Nurse Would Cherish Her Own Children — 1 Thessalonians 2

Acts 13:18 records Paul's summary of Israel's history in his synagogue address at Antioch: for a time of about forty years He nursed them in the desert. First Thessalonians 2:7 uses the same image to describe Paul's own ministry: we have been gentle in the midst of you, as a nurse would cherish her own children. Thus yearning over you, we have found our delight in having imparted to you not only the glad tidings of God, but our own lives also, because ye have become beloved of us.

A nurse has knowledge — understanding of what is needed, of how to help someone in need of care. But that knowledge does not by itself mean love. A professional nurse may serve competently without cherishing those she serves. What Paul describes is something different: a nurse cherishing her own children. The knowledge and the heart together. He yearned over them; they had become beloved. That is the model for how the things of God are to be brought to bear on one another's lives — not cold or impersonal, not merely accurate, but with the warmth of genuine love for the person. The Scripture brought to bear on a soul in love will do what the Scripture alone, delivered without care, cannot.

Three Nurses in the Bible

Only three nurses are mentioned by name or clear description in the Scripture. Mephibosheth had a nurse who was carrying him to flee from danger when

Jonathan and Saul were killed. She dropped him in her haste, and he was lame in both feet from that day. Her intention was to preserve his life — she was fleeing the very real threat of harm — but in her haste she caused the injury she was trying to prevent. Her care was real, and her failure was part of a larger story.

Joash had a nurse who hid him for six years in the house of the Lord to keep him alive while the wicked Queen Athaliah killed all the king's sons so that she could seize the throne. Six years in hiding — caring for this young king, keeping him alive, waiting for the priest Jehoiada to bring him out and declare him the rightful king of Israel. That is dedication and faithfulness with no visible recognition. The child lived, and in the fullness of time the false queen was removed and the true king was revealed.

The third is the most obscure, and perhaps the most instructive. In Genesis 24:59, when Rebekah agreed to go with Eliezer to become Isaac's wife, they sent away Rebekah their sister and her nurse. The nurse is not named here. In Genesis 35:8, she appears again: and Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried beneath Bethel under the oak, and the name of it was called Allon-bachuth — the Oak of Weeping.

> *The path of the just is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. — Proverbs 4:18*

Deborah — A Life of Service Ending at Bethel

Deborah went with Rebekah when the Holy Spirit's call, through Eliezer, compelled them to leave. Rebekah is a type of the bride called out by the servant sent by Abraham — the Holy Spirit drawing the church to be the bride of Christ. And this nurse, whose name we do not know until the end of the story, accompanied her. She is among the unnamed ones who responded to that same compelling call.

What did she see in that household? She saw Isaac, a man of faith and also of real failure. She saw Rebekah teach her son Jacob to deceive his father. She saw Jacob survive by his wits, a conniver whose cleverness came from his mother, who grew wealthy through his scheming. She was traveling with Jacob's household at the time of her death — the household with two rival wives, Rachel and Leah, constantly competing for Jacob's favour and for sons. Constant tension. Constant flesh. There are no exploits of Deborah recorded in the Scripture. She did not do what Joash's nurse did — keeping a child alive for six years in hiding. There is nothing written of her at all between Genesis 24 and Genesis 35, except that she was there.

And the Oak of Weeping is not incidental. Her life of service was not easy. The household she was in was filled with sorrow and strife and the constant activity of the flesh. That is the honest record. But the place where she died and was buried is Bethel — the house of God. She had followed when Eliezer called. She had stayed where the Lord had her. And the Lord brought her to Bethel in the end. No exploits written. No heroics recorded. Only faithfulness to the call and to the place. If we only obey the Spirit's call and stay where the Lord has us, He will take care of things in the end.

Paul — The Nurse Who Went Through Everything

The Apostle Paul is the greatest human example of what it means to serve as a nurse to God's people. Second Corinthians 11:23–28 lists what he endured: labors more abundant, stripes above measure, prisons more frequent. Five times forty stripes save one. Three times beaten with rods. Once stoned. Three times shipwrecked. A night and a day in the deep. Journeyings in peril of water, robbers, his own countrymen, the heathen, cities, wilderness, sea, and false brethren. Weariness, painfulness, hunger, thirst, cold, nakedness. And besides all of that: the care of all the assemblies daily. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I burn not?

What sustained him? In Acts 22, he recounts his conversion: a great light from heaven shone round about him. In chapter 26, it was a light above the brightness of the sun. The path of the just is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. Paul saw the Lord in glory. That glimpse of Christ in glory at Damascus was what sustained him through everything that followed. Deborah ended her days at Bethel — the house of God. Paul's Bethel grew brighter and brighter as he went on. The nurse cherished, yearned, gave not only the gospel but his own life. And what made it possible was the same thing that will make it possible for us: the Lord in glory seen by the eye of faith, and a love for God's people that is His gift and not our natural disposition.

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