

**Let Your Healing Flow**  
*The Nurturing Nature of God and His People*  
**II Thessalonians 3:6, 13**

My father grew up in an alcoholic home, and his dad was abusive. Christmastime was really the worst time of the year. I can remember my father saying—ever since I was a boy— that the holidays really brought him no joy because of the pain of Christmases past.

I remember a few years ago I was called out to a traffic accident in Tulsa on 81<sup>st</sup> street. A single mother in her thirties had just gotten off her shift working as a waitress at an IHOP. She was killed in a head-on accident. My job as chaplain for the Tulsa Police Department was to get identification for her and go notify next of kin.

I'll never forget that Christmas Eve twenty-five years ago, when the door opened and a little twelve year old girl, just barely old enough to stay the night by herself greeted me. She was a little timid, a little scared. I told her who I was and I had to come in and explain that her mom had died.

I have often wondered over these past twenty-five years where that little girl has gone. She's now probably thirty-six, thirty-seven years old, but I'm sure she's a lot like my dad. Every time Christmas rolls around, she thinks of her mom and it's almost like a renewed pain.

Anybody that has experienced a holiday season where there's been pain, sometimes you come to a service like this and you hear songs and you want to sing but you know, frankly, you don't feel like it. There's nothing wrong with that, but if you're like that this morning and this holiday season has brought you little joy, I want to help you find some healing in your relationship with God.

For the past few weeks we've been in a series entitled "Knowing God", where I've tried to show you what the Scripture says about God; who He is; how we can know Him and there's been some things that have been said that has caused a few of you to struggle because you're not sure that what I am saying is true.

I remind you that our standard— the Word of God— not the traditions of men, not even any kind of religion. It's the inspired word to which we look and according to the Bible, God is spirit and not gendered. What that means is: God is formless.

He can be everywhere at once because He has no body; He is spirit and He is without end. The Lord is here in this room as much as He is across the oceans in Africa and China with our friends who know Christ there. He can be everywhere at once because He is Spirit.

Now we've also seen in our study that the Bible reveals that God has both masculine and feminine attributes. What that means is ... when the Bible says in the Psalms, "We have been saved and upheld by the right hand of God by His hand of strength and power", I remind you God does not have

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an actual right hand; He is Spirit. That is a metaphor to help us understand the character of God and throughout Scripture we see metaphors that portray God in a masculine way.

Now last Sunday, I showed you, that there are occasions in the Bible where God is revealed to us with feminine attributes. For example, when God appears to Abraham in Genesis 17; He calls Himself *El Shaddai* and I showed you that that is a very feminine name. It literally means the *God with breasts*, but just like God doesn't have an actual right hand, God is Spirit and He doesn't have actual breasts.

But why would He say, to Abraham, "I am *El Shaddai*"? Because Abraham was in trouble and God was revealing Himself to Abraham saying, "Abraham, don't be anxious, don't worry, I am to you like the most caring, nurturing, loving mother is to her child."

Now for those of you who have never thought of God in terms of feminine attributes you struggle when you see these metaphors in Scripture. It's hard for you to understand, as did John Calvin, that sometimes God will represent Himself as a female. In Isaiah 46, it says we are "the fruit of His womb", but again God doesn't have an actual womb. It's a metaphor to help us understand the invisible, immortal, all-powerful God who created us.

Metaphors are common in language. They are literary devices that help us understand a subject with something in comparison to that subject.

For example, if I were to say to you "Oh, don't go outside it's raining cats and dogs." I'm using a metaphor. Surely you don't go outside and look up into the skies and expect literal, actual dogs and cats to fall. But if you've ever heard a group of dogs fight with a group of cats – oh, the fury, the power, the fierceness, is like the storm outside. That's a metaphor.

This series has been designed to show you that the only way that you can fully understand God is to realize that the full-orbed image of God is only seen in both men and women.

Please ladies, don't ever fall into that ugly fish trap that is set by some, who say men are created in the image of God and women were created for men to be their servants and their helpers. No. God created men and women in His image when He made Adam (mankind). He made both the male and the female.

So when you look at the most powerful and strongest man you've ever known; you have an image of the powerful almighty God. When you look at the kindest, most tender and loving woman you've ever met; you're looking at an image of God.

This is why this series is important at Christmas time. Some of us need some healing.

I want to answer the question: Why does God reveal Himself to us in the word with both masculine and feminine attributes?

We began this series in Daniel 11:32 where the Bible says, "The people who know their God shall be strong and take action." In your mind you've always thought of God as a big powerful male with

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a long, flowing, white beard holding a lightning bolt in His hand like the pagan God Zeus in Greek mythology. That's been your image of God.

The Scripture says, "The invisible, immortal, eternal Creator, God is everywhere at once, and if you wish to know Him you have to see His image in men and women." Why does He reveal Himself to us this way?

Our text is II Thessalonians, chapter 3, verse 5: "May the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God."

I couldn't think of a better Christmas message than one based on this verse.

This morning, I would like the Lord to direct your heart into His love. Some of you have experienced a great deal of pain, because of your past, because of hurts that have been perpetrated against you. You're here this morning and there's a rawness in your soul; there is almost like a piercing emotional feeling. You are hurting. And you're not really sure about God. How could God be in charge, and you be hurt so badly.

I want to help you this morning. I want you to see first of all, that in order to be directed into the love of God you've got to understand that the attributes of power and strength which are God's, are *always* wrapped in love.

Meaning, if your image of God is that He is King of Kings and He is Lord of Lords and He is sitting on His throne and He is sovereign over all – which, by the way, He is, but you have neglected to see that He is revealed in Scripture in very feminine ways. He is revealed as a nurturing mother who cares for her children, who nurtures, and suckles us from His breast. If you don't see God, like that, then when things happen to you that hurt, you might think to yourself, 'Wow, God is mean.' But He is not.

This series is designed to help you see that God never moves in power or sovereignty in your life, but His actions toward you are like a mother's actions toward her newborn child. He is tender and kind and compassionate toward you.

This is hard for the world to understand. In fact, the world uses imperial forms of authority to govern. What that means is: Any type of governance in the world happens because of power and strength. This is the word politics, by the way. People love politics because they love the power that comes with it; the ability to control people through strong-arming them.

For example, did you know... that we used to have *peace* officers, but now we changed the name to *police* officers? The word police comes from politics. Peace officers were designed originally to keep the peace, but because the world only understands imperial forms of power and governing, then the world passes laws and police enforce them.

That's all the world knows, is strength and power and nothing else, but when God became flesh at Christmas and Jesus came, listen to what He said to His disciples: "Those who are recognized as rulers

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of the Gentiles lord their power and authority over them and their great men exercise this authority over others, but it is not to be this way among you.”

In other words, if you ever go to a church where the preacher or anybody in that church tries to rule you, control you, to oppress you through strength and power or authority; the image of God has been shattered in that church. It's gone.

Jesus taught us, that we, as Christians, are to be *known* for our love and our service. Meaning: that everything we do in this life we do because we reflect Him. The masculine attributes of God cannot be separated from His feminine attributes. Or, let me say it like this: Where there is a true knowledge of God, there is always a place of healing. Always.

If you find a church that understands the strength and power of God, is equal to His tender loving mercy, you'll find a church where there is healing. One that will never give up on a drug addict – no matter how bad they've been because they know God is all powerful and they also know God never gives up on His kids. He's like a mother who loves her kids.

Is that our church? I'm biased. I think it is. By the way, if it's not, we need some correction because any time God's people gather in assembly *we should be a place where healing takes place.*

Remember Daniel 11, verse 32, “The people who know their God will be strong and take action.”

What is your image of God? How do you know Him? Do you know Him the way Scripture reveals Him? Or is your image of God like Greek Mythology: *Zeus; Thor; power; control and authority?* Is that your image? Or have you looked at Scripture and seen how He reveals Himself?

The kind of action you take in this life depends upon your view of God. Christians who only see God as King; with power and authority who forces people into submission; are going to demand submission of people around them. But those who know God as Scripture reveals Him to be *always bring healing to others.*

I'm going to give you an illustration. I want you to listen to these two verses and then I want you to think about them in your own mind and ask yourself the question: How do these two verses lead me to view God? And I want you to ask yourself if maybe your image of God needs to be strengthened through this series because you've been a little bit “off base.”

Listen to these two verses, Jesus is speaking to the church at Laodicea, “I know your deeds that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish that you were cold or hot. Because you are lukewarm; neither hot nor cold I will spit you out of my mouth.”

I've heard Baptist preachers go to town on that verse. Here's what they say, “You need to be committed to God and frankly, you are not. You are lukewarm. You're not giving as much as you should. You're not visiting as much as you should. You're not bringing people to church as much as you should. You are cold. No, you're lukewarm. That's the problem,” the preacher will say, “You're lukewarm.”

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God says He wishes you were cold. Meaning, the preacher says he wishes you'd just turn your back on Him. Be dead to Him. Be cold. Be evil; be wicked. Don't just be half-way lukewarm. Have you ever had a preacher say that? Oh, man I've heard them wax eloquently. Then they'll go on and finish by saying, "This is God. He wants to spit you out of His mouth." Have you ever met a mother that wants to spit out her child? I haven't.

Let me see if I can't help you understand this verse ... the church at Laodicea, the believers there, met in the city of Laodicea, which was a city in Asia Minor at the crossroads of some aqueducts.

Do you know what aqueducts are? Contrary to today where water is piped into your home through underground pipes and you turn on the sink. Aqueducts were great engineering feats built by the romans in Jesus' day where water was transported at the top of these arches and in genius engineering; basically the water would flow very, very slowly toward its destination.

Now as I said, Laodicea was at a crossroad of aqueducts. This map will show you where Laodicea was. Just to the north of Laodicea was a city called Hierapolis. In Hierapolis there were hot springs; similar to Hot Springs, Arkansas where people who were wounded or hurting would come and would find healing through the hot water of Hierapolis. Now the people of Hierapolis were known for their water so the Romans built aqueducts from Hierapolis to Laodicea.

Likewise, just a little bit to the east, and by the ocean port, was the city of Colossae; where people who had been on a long journey who were tired and worn out and weary could find *cold water*. Colossae was known for its cold water.

Likewise, the Romans, again through great engineering built and aqueduct to Laodicea. Laodicea was at the crossroads. Now what was interesting was this: By the time the hot water from Hierapolis got to Laodicea it was lukewarm. By the time the cold water got from Colossae to Laodicea it was lukewarm. It had been transported on the open troughs of the aqueducts. So the Laodiceans understood lukewarm water.

Here's what God was saying. "Those of you who follow me in Laodicea please understand you need to be the kind of people who are like hot springs. People who have been wounded and hurt in life; they come among you and they find healing. Or you need to be the kind of people who are like the cold water of Colossae, people who are worn out, tired, on their journey of life, can come among you and find refreshment; acceptance; love. But as it is, you're lukewarm. And really you're not good for healing or refreshment."

Do you hear these words? What Jesus is saying at the church at Laodicea is this: If all you're about is programs; if all you're about are ministries; if all you're about are what you *do* and you lose sight of the fact that knowing Me – it's about relationship . I am like a mother to you. I am your Father. Now, the healing that you have from me – give to others. If you can't get there, you're really good for nothing as a church.

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It's because of this that I am adamant that the Scripture teaches those who know the God of Scripture celebrate the gifts and anointing of both men and women. Meaning: When a church begins to understand that men *and* women reflect the image of God then there is no putting aside of women, because we understand that we need their gifts; we need their character qualities; we need their attributes as much as we need those of men. So, those who would say male-only leadership needs to occur need to listen carefully.

Male-only leadership truncates spiritual healing. It is good when you have a place—whether it's a home or a church— where the full-orbed image of God is seen, both in strength, power and control—the masculine attributes; and tenderness, kindness, compassion—the feminine attributes. As we said, because the deity lives within us, because we've come to faith in Christ, we've received what He has done for us at Calvary, God lives within us; we are the temple of the living God.

Those attributes of God can be ours – whether we're men or women. A church that brings healing respects the dignity, respects the uniqueness, and appreciates the glory of women because you reflect God.

Remember that little twelve year old girl that answered the door? I've wondered where she is. My prayer for her today is that she might know God as her Father; who is like a mother; who loves her enough that nothing happens in her life but that the love of God is wrapped around it.

May the Lord direct you into His love, and may you see this Christmas, that the only way you'll fully know Him is to see Him as Scripture reveals Him.