

*“The Church: Place of Nurturing People in Faith” Acts 11:19-26 / 1 Tim 1:1-2 / Luke 2:41-52 (2/2/25)*

Since I have the conversion story, many Christians like to hear about my faith story. Also, many Christians ask me how we can help and guide a person to be a Christian. I was a Buddhist before I became a Christian, and even became a pastor. I was not just a non-Christian, but I was an anti-Christian. I had not liked Christians. And I was a person who took out my friends from worship service in a church. My conversion was from very end to end, from a person who persecuted Christian friends to a pastor.

So, I know I am a very good example of how a person can be a Christian. However, if someone asked me how we can help people to be Christian, I used to answer the question, “I have no idea,” because it was very hard to explain how I had faith, how I overcame the family struggle, how my family became Christians. Totally, it was God’s work in my life. Because it was a kind of experience of encountering God in my life, it was impossible to explain “How.” It was not a mathematical problem like  $1+1=2$ . It was difficult to say, “If we do this, the person will be a Christian.”

After I became a father, I could have a clearer answer to the question. God reminded me of what the church family did for me to help me have faith. My

church family in New Zealand nurtured me. So, now I say that the church should have the function of nurturing people in faith to make disciples. But sadly, I see many churches focused on increasing their membership through some programs and events. So, when we talk about revitalizing the church, we need to check if our church has the function of nurturing people in faith.

When I was a new believer in Christ, I received a lot of help from my church family. They were with me from morning to night. They taught me a lot about God, church, and Christian religious practices. In addition to those teachings, I remembered that they were with me 7 days a week. They gave me a ride to attend the early morning prayer service at 5:00 am. They took me to many restaurants and fun places. If I had a question about Christianity and faith, my church teacher talked with me until I could find the answer. Since I had many difficult questions about God, they often stayed with me until midnight. Later, when I shared my experience of encountering Christ, they truly congratulated me, and they were truly happy. They had prayed for me; they had waited for me for about 2 years. Nurturing people in faith takes a lot of time, resources, and energy.

In the Bible, we can see several examples of nurturing in faith. The first example of nurturing in faith that I hope to share is in Luke. This is an idea from

one of the speakers at the Kansas City conference. She said Jesus was not with his parents for 3-4 days, and he was only 12 years old. Then, she asked, “How did Jesus get some food? Where did Jesus sleep during the night?” She said that the whole Jewish community might care for Jesus. Jewish community fed Jesus and provided a place to stay during the night.

Nurturing in faith is a whole church effort; it is not the work of one or two committees. The whole church should have one heart to nurture people in faith. When the church in New Zealand nurtured me, all the church members tried to help me to know about God. From the eldest member to the younger generation, my church friend’s parents, and my small group leader, all the people in the church helped me to learn about God. I remember the eldest member of the church was about 90 years old. His life story with Jesus was so interesting. The person who showed me real happiness from God was 15 years old. My small group leader’s testimony helped me a lot to handle my family’s religious issues. I cannot share every help that I received from the church, but the point is that the whole church was able to nurture me to be a Christian.

The second example of nurturing in faith is in Acts. There were Gentiles who believed and turned to Jesus in Antioch. Then, the Jerusalem church sent

Barnabas to Antioch to take care of the people. Barnabas and Paul taught great numbers of people. Those disciples of Barnabas were called Christians first at Antioch. We should know that Barnabas and Paul taught people. The word “taught” in today’s Acts Scripture was translated from the Greek word “Didasko.” This word has a meaning of passing or passing down knowledge and skill. So, we can understand that Barnabas and Paul passed their knowledge about God to great numbers of people in Antioch.

Nurturing in faith is a work of teaching. It is a work of passing the knowledge about God. However, we can see many Christians are confused between teaching and judging.

When I came back to South Korea to study theology in seminary, there was a person who often came to my parents’ restaurant. She was a person who helped my parents to be Christians. She was so kind and nice to my parents. And she knew that I had come back to South Korea to be a pastor. My parents told me that she was looking forward to seeing me. On the day I met her at my parent's restaurant, she asked me a few weird questions. “How much time do you read the Bible in a day? How many times did you read the whole Bible? I have read the whole Bible more than 20 times. If you want to be a pastor, you should read the

Bible a lot!” Yes, it was judging, was not teaching, Didasko. “Read the Bible a lot” is a kind of good advice. Yes, it was true that Christians should read the Bible a lot, and if I wanted to be a pastor, I should read the Bible a lot more than any other people. However, I was so discouraged by her question. I felt guilty when I heard her question. Not only this woman, I met lots of Christians who like to judge other people. In the church, teaching for the nurturing of faith should be related to passing knowledge about God. We should share who God is and how God worked in our lives with people rather than say, “Do this, Don’t do this.”

The third example of nurturing in faith is in the relationship between Paul and Timothy. I chose the very first Scriptures from 1 Timothy because I cannot talk about the whole letters to Timothy today. Paul called Timothy as “son.” Of course, Paul was not Timothy's physical father. But Paul considered Timothy his son because he nurtured Timothy in faith. We can read Paul’s heart through 1 and 2 Timothy. We can see how Paul thought of Timothy. When Timothy had some challenges in his ministry, Paul kept encouraging Timothy and helped Timothy with his knowledge and theology. After nurturing, Paul did not say the relationship with Timothy was done. Even though they were physically not close to each other, Paul and Timothy were spiritually connected to each other. Paul

continued his relationship with Timothy, and he encouraged and taught him. Nurturing is a kind of spiritual connection to make people family in faith. Nurturing in faith gives a lot of encouragement to people. The church's nurturing is not a program that ends up in 12 weeks or 24 weeks. Through nurturing in faith, we can be tied up together in the Holy Spirit as the church. It is a continuing process until we meet Jesus in his Kingdom.

The church is a place for nurturing people in faith. Nurturing is not the work of just a few people in the church; it is the whole church's work. It needs a lot of time, energy, and resources. The church should devote resources to nurturing people in faith. The church should pass and share knowledge about God with the people. Through this sharing about God, the grace of God will pour over the church. People will learn who God is through the church. The church should continue to nurture people in faith until we see the glory of Jesus. Amen.