

The Sacrifice & Significance of Mothers



There aren't a lot of Biblical texts easily suited for Mother's Day sermons. I didn't want to preach another sermon on Proverbs 31. So I take as our starting point a verse that actually doesn't speak of mothers, but wives. And it is not actually addressed to women, but to men. That's good. I don't want any of you men drifting off to day-dream-land, assuming the Mother's Day message is about, and therefore, for women. This verse speaks directly to you men, or rather "you husbands." Even though it is addressed to husbands about wives, it could well apply to how men should respect women in general. It is found in 1 Peter 3:7. "*You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel.*"

Now, before a bunch of you women rush the platform to challenge me to an arm-wrestling contest, let me assure you I do not believe Peter, nor the Holy Spirit who inspired Peter's writings, considers women to be weaker in the sense of less valuable, less useful or even less muscular. What does weaker mean? The word *asthenes* is a common word used in the N.T. and covers a broad spectrum of meanings. But here, joined with the analogy of a vessel or container, it means more delicate.

Generally speaking, men, this is the kind of vessel we are: [Hold up a steel thermos] We are steel thermoses. Fill us up with boiling liquid, throw us in the back of the pickup, dent us, and use us. You've got to be blunt with us, and we're not easily offended. Innuendo and body language doesn't register. You've got to get our attention, look us in the eye, and tell us the truth.

Women, this vessel represents you [Hold up a crystal goblet]. You are a crystal goblet. You are treasured. Delicate crystal, you deserve to be carefully handled. We need to be sensitive to your feeling, relate to you "in an understanding way" since you are the more delicate vessel. Women are easily damaged. Emotions can be hurt just by innuendo or body language. This goblet, in fact, has a crack along its lip. I grieve if it represents the time I yelled at Miriam in anger.

All women deserve to be treated with respect and honor every day. All women have abilities and perspectives that must be utilized fully for the kingdom of God. But today we want to honor a

particular ministry reserved for woman: motherhood. Today we want to honor the sacrifice and significance of mothers.

Now I know that Mother's Day brings up a host of conflicting emotions and memories for many of us here. Some men and women have had mothers that were absent or far from ideal. Some are grieving the death of their mom in recent years. Some women have themselves longed for motherhood, aching with empty arms, while they wait to get married or to conceive. Such emotions and longings are real and valid. But I hope these situations of grief over your own mother or pain over your own situation will not deter you from being an encouragement to those who deserve to be honored and recognized today in their sacrificial and significant role as mothers.

It is my prayer this sermon will be an encouragement to those women who by sacrifice are achieving significance. As Dr. Laura Schlessinger wisely observes, "We have two opportunities for a quality parent-child relationship. The first we don't choose. The second we create. God bless the second chance."

1. The Sacrifice of Mothers.

The sacrifice in carrying a child.

First, it is a sacrifice to carry a child within your body, to go through the process of prenatal development. No drinking, no smoking. My daughter Melody, while expecting her son Soren, suffered through a season of hay fever, refusing to put allergy medicine into her bloodstream. And then there is the sacrifice of carrying a child—of going through morning sickness that isn't necessarily confined to the morning or to the first trimester, and of seeing your 110-pound body with flat tummy balloon into an oval shape you hardly recognize.

How Successive Births Change Mothers – Part 1

- 1st Baby: Expectant mother wears maternity clothes as soon as her pregnancy is confirmed.
- 2nd Baby: Mother wears regular clothes for as long as possible.
- 3rd Baby: Mother's maternity clothes are her regular clothes.

Men, let's thank our moms for carrying us. Let's thank our wives for carrying the children we are blessed to have as sons and daughters.

The sacrifice of giving birth.

Genesis 35:16-18 ¹⁶ Then they (Jacob's family) moved on from Bethel. While they were still some distance from Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem), Rachel began to give birth and had great difficulty. ¹⁷ And as she was having great difficulty in childbirth, the midwife said to her, "Don't be afraid, for you have another son." ¹⁸ As she breathed her last—for she was dying—she named her son Ben-Oni. (i.e., son of my trouble) But his father named him Benjamin (i.e., son of my right hand).

There is hardly anything more tragic than when a mother gives her very life in giving birth to her child. Fortunately, such occurrences are rare. I wonder why the news media makes such a big deal when parents get a late start to the hospital and the mother delivers in the van along the shoulder of I-205. What's the big deal? My daughter Jessica gave birth at home. It was quite the family event. She baked Reid's birthday cake between contractions, and the morning after his night-time birth, we went over and had birthday cake—literally. It's no wonder my daughter has her own business and runs it through a website called joyfulbirths.com

Joyful births? How does that square with the curse of sin pronounced by God in Genesis 3:16, "*To the woman He said, I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth. In pain you shall bring forth children.*" Those of you who have given birth know the truth of this pronouncement. But at least it is productive pain. The body's natural contractions to deliver new life.

My experience of attending the births of my three children spanned nine years, during which time the medical communities' attitude toward the presence of fathers was evolving. When my first-born was delivered at Emanuel Hospital, I was shunted off to the father's waiting room to keep company with *Field and Stream* magazines. By the time my second, Melody, was born, I was allowed in the delivery room but relegated to a corner chair. Finally, by the time my last child Charity came, I was encouraged to be there with Miriam. I'm glad I was. My awareness of what my wife went through to give me the privilege of being a dad was enhanced. My awareness of what my mom went through to give me life was multiplied.

Men, let's thank our moms for giving birth to us. Let's thank our wives for giving birth to the children we are blessed to have as sons and daughters.

The sacrifice of raising children.

As inconvenient as it is to carry a child, and as painful as it is to give birth to a child, these do not demand selflessness like the next phase of sacrifice: raising children. Babies come with a demand switch. God has hardwired babies to cry. It's God's way of teaching women and men who are parents how to be unselfish. Most of us were basically selfish when we got married. But being linked together with another human—through matrimony—begins to make us think of someone other than ourselves in our decisions. Now if you get your undergraduate degree in unselfishness through matrimony, it is through maternity you get your graduate degree. If a man or woman still needs refining in the area of selfishness, God gives a little bundle of joy—a crash course in giving of oneself 24/7.

Mothers, especially those who have persevered or are persevering through the pre-school stages of childrearing have my unending appreciation and respect. We men who get the easier road of commuting to work, would file a complaint with Human Resources if we had our boss wake us up three times at night to nurses and then in the morning demanded to be carried down stairs to breakfast. We may have to clean up our boss' mess at work, but at least it doesn't involve diapers.

How Successive Births Change Mothers – Part 2

- 1st Baby: At the first sign of any distress, mother picks up the baby.
- 2nd Baby: Mother picks up baby only when the wails threaten to wake up the napping firstborn.
- 3rd Baby: Mother teaches firstborn how to wind up the mechanical swing.

Not every mom is able to be a stay-at-home-mom (SAHM). There may be reasons for children needing to be cared for by relatives or day care, so the mother can be a wage earner. But that reason should not be that the husband is shirking his responsibility to provide for his family (see 1 Timothy 5:8). Men—and I'm speaking straight out man-to-man as one thermos to another—don't put pressure on the mother of your children to leave her mothering to carry your wage-earning responsibilities. Now I know there are exceptional cases, and there are temporary situations, but usually fathers should be the financial providers and mothers should be the children's primary nurturers.

If you are a SAHM I freely admit you have a hard job. When my kids were small and I left for my 12-hour schedule away, cobbling together school and two part-time jobs, I knew I had it easier than Miriam with her 12-hour shift of uninterrupted responsibility for the home and three children.

One afternoon a man came home from work to find total mayhem in his house. His three children were outside, still in their pajamas playing in the dirt, with empty food boxes and wrappers strewn all around the front yard. The front door of the house stood open. Proceeding into the entry, he found an even bigger mess. A lamp had been knocked over, and the throw rug was wadded against one wall. The family room was strewn with toys and various items of clothing. In the kitchen, dishes filled the sink, breakfast food was spilled on the counter, dog food was spilled on the floor, an a broken glass lay under the table, and a small pile of sand was spread by the back door. He quickly headed up the stairs, stepping over toys and more piles of clothes, looking for his wife. He was worried she may be ill or that something serious had happened. He found her, lounging in the bedroom, still curled in the bed in her pajamas, reading a novel. She looked up at him, smiled, and asked how his day went. He looked at her bewildered and asked, "What happened here today?" She again smiled and answered, "You know every day when you come home from work and ask me what in the world I did today? Well, today, I didn't do it."

How Successive Births Change Mothers – Part 3

- 1st Baby: Mother pre-washes newborn's clothes, color-coordinates them, and folds them.
- 2nd Baby: Mother makes sure clothes are clean and discards only the items with the darkest stains.
- 3rd Baby: Mother asks, "Boys can wear pink, can't they?"

When you mothers reach the end of your energy and feel like you cannot go on, remember the Spirit-inspired words of Paul, "*I have learned the secret of being content in any and every*

situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through Him who gives me strength.” (Philippians 4:12-13)

[Melody TenKley Testimony]

Ruth Bell Graham’s prayer for young mothers:

“God, bless all young mothers at end of day,
Kneeling wearily with each small one to hear them pray.
Too tired to rise when done, and yet they do;
Longing just to sleep one whole night through.
Too tired to sleep, too tired to pray.
God, bless all young mothers at close of day.”

2. The Significance of Mothers

Well, we’ve talked a lot about the sacrifice of mothers. Let me ask, “Is it worth it?” There is an investment into the lives of children that is incalculable. Without the investment of sacrifice from mothers there would be fewer physically healthy, emotionally stable, spiritually vibrant children, teen, and adults.

Timothy, an important leader in the early church is an example. By piecing together information from the historical record of Acts and the letters written to him (1 & 2 Timothy), we begin to get a portrait of this man Timothy.

2 Timothy 1:5. “For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois, and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well.”

Timothy’s spiritual lineage passed through the maternal side of the family—his grandmother Lois and mother Eunice. They taught Timothy the Hebrew Scriptures from his childhood. 2 Timothy 3:14-15: *“You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them (his mother and grandmother), that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”*

The foundation of faith was laid in knowing the Hebrew Scriptures with the hope of Messiah. When Paul came to Lystra on the first missionary journey, it is likely he first led Lois and Eunice to faith in Christ. Then we are introduced to Timothy in Luke’s historical record in Acts 16:1 describing the second missionary journey. *“And Paul came to Derbe and to Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek.”* The description of his father being a “Greek” indicates more than his racial background. Since it is contrast to his mother who was not only “Jewish” but also “a believer,” we conclude this was a mixed marriage. Mixed not just racially, but also a marriage of mixed spiritual state—a mother who was a believer and a father who was not. Some mothers have that difficult role of raising their children without the spiritual support of their husband. In the case of Timothy,

his mother and grandmother persevered. They taught him the Hebrew Scriptures when he was a child, and they encouraged his faith as a young man.

How significant is the role of mothers? How significant is the role of grandmothers? In the life of Timothy and in the lives of a multitude of people—including most of us here today—the ministry of mothers has positively marked us for time and eternity.

Mothers, if you are investing in the lives of your children, you have significance far beyond any career you might have pursued instead. I am proud that all three of my daughters are giving their full time to the raising of my grandchildren. Jessica left behind her advanced degrees and her position as a high school counselor; Melody left behind her classroom in Lake Oswego; Charity invests in the world of Eden, Gabriela Rose, and her unborn daughter. I am grateful for their choices.

Tony Campolo said when he wife, Peggy, was at home full-time with their children and someone would ask, “And what is it that you do, my dear?” she would respond with a memorized statement: “I am socializing two homo-sapiens into the dominant values of the Judeo-Christian tradition in order that they might be instruments for the transformation of the social order into the kind of eschatological utopia that God willed from the beginning of creation.” And then she would ask, “And what is it you do, dear?”

Thomas Edison was home-schooled by his mother. Home schooling is a parenting option. Families make the choice of public school, private school, or home school based on many factors, including the condition of the public school in their district, the educational ability of the parents, and the temperament of their child. Thomas Edison’s mom decided to home school him after she learned his teachers felt young Thomas had inferior ability. But his mother he saw his mental ability was actually being squandered by the boring teaching methods that left him unchallenged. Thomas Edison later wrote, “My mother was the making of me. She was so true, so sure of me.”

Here’s a letter from a mother who has learned the sacrifices of motherhood are transmuted into the gold significance of motherhood: *“Tonight, as I lay next to my four-year-old daughter, rubbing her back, singing a song, helping her fall asleep, she looked at me with tears in her eyes, grabbed my face with both hands, and said with such love and conviction, “YOU are my lullaby, Mommy.” I cried right then and there, and the tears continued to flow as she slept in my arms. No, I don’t get to have a latte at ten, go to lunch with coworkers, and go out for drinks after work. I am not being overseen by someone who gives me performance-based raises and praise. Instead, I am in the most beautiful and profound position I could ever hold. I am my daughter’s lullaby; the mundane parts of my job are elevated to the loftiest heights when I am held in HER esteem—not MY self-esteem.”*

Men, let us recognize our wives and mothers and daughters are priceless, precious, delicate crystal goblets—who deserve honor and encouragement in proportion to their sacrifice and significance.