

Mom in the Mirror: The Reflected Glory of God in Motherhood

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In case you missed it, today is Mother's Day. It has been a while since I have taken the opportunity to speak specifically on motherhood and I am happy to do so today. The danger in churches and sermons given all across the country today is that they will focus on motherhood for motherhood's sake. They'll focus on sweet stories about children and the funny things they say and heartwarming stories of what moms mean to us. They'll be cute and cuddly messages that sound more like a Hallmark card than anything else. I really hate cute and cuddly messages, even about mothers.

This is the church of Jesus Christ and there is nothing sentimental about why we are here. We here believe in God's truth which is life-transforming, not cuddly. In Scripture we are told in the second commandment that we are not to make an idol out of anything and in the fifth commandment we're told to honor our mothers. So apparently there is a way to honor mothers without idolizing them. We need to have a Mother's Day that doesn't compete with today as the Lord's Day. How do we do that?

We do that by realizing that all the things we love about our moms are, in reality, what is admirable about God. Moms are like mirrors. Their glory, the things we really admire about them, is a reflected glory, and God designed moms to be like this from the beginning. There is more to learn about God in a biblical mom than in any sermon you will ever hear, including this one.

We don't normally see things this way though, do we? We are too busy just trying to survive life. How many moms stop in the midst of the chaos and say, "I am a reflection of the character of God!" Probably not many. That's because we don't appreciate that God's truth is very comfortable and evident right in the midst of smelly diapers and kitchen tables. We know because God Himself wore diapers and ate many a meal at the family table. Moms are mirrors. Don't make the mistake of thinking the mom in the mirror is the glory itself.

Movie producers love to use this mirroring effect. They will put their camera on an image and something bad is about to happen to the image, but wait! The image is actually a mirror reflection, not the person themselves. I think of one particularly scary scene in the movie *Jurassic Park* where the dinosaur lunges with fangs wide open to eat the poor little girl, but he smashes into the shiny aluminum reflection of the girl. And mankind smashes its head on reflections of God all the time. We don't realize that He has put in this world reflections of what He is like. The reflections are so beautiful that we worship the reflection rather than worshipping the one the reflection merely looks like, God Himself.

Common Grace

Moms are one of those divine reflections. Theologians call this God's Common Grace. Common grace is similar to saving grace in that both come from the same source, God. Common grace is grace God gives benevolently to all mankind. Saving grace is only for the redeemed. Common grace would include the natural world. *He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous* (Matthew 5:45). It doesn't just rain on Christian yards and Christian fields; God sends rain even to those who are in open rebellion against Him. He feeds us. He provides oxygen and He causes the sun

to rise in the morning and all mankind benefits from it. The pleasures in this world are common grace like blueberries and hot showers. God works in this world through providence to heal, meet needs, and keep human society alive. Why does He do this? Because God cares for His creation and cares for us as His image-bearers AND because by doing so, He is communicating to us what He is like.

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. (Romans 1:18-20)

Common grace is one aspect of creation that tells us enough about God that men are without excuse. Nobody can say, *God, you didn't tell me*. Everything around us that God made preaches to us about God. One of those common graces is the family. *For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.* (Genesis 2:24) After the Fall, Adam and Eve stayed married and had children, and their children married and had children, and all over the world, people are married with children and the family unit is a huge blessing. That is God's common grace.

Today, we want to focus on one key member of the unit that all families have. They all have a Mommy to start with. I say to start with because while there is common grace, since the Fall, the pattern of common grace often isn't what it's supposed to be. So that Mommies sometimes die or leave or Mommy has to be Mommy without Daddy or women who want to be Mommies can't for any number of reasons and these situations are very hard and God calls the church to exert tremendous compassion for every circumstance where the divine pattern isn't what it ought to be. This is why we have ministries for widows and divorcees and women in various stages of need. They are objects of God's special love and care and must be for us, too. So I can say today, if you are a woman and Mother's Day is not a happy day but a day of sadness, rest easy here because we are a church that is okay with the messy and hard things in life.

Proverbs 31 contains the famous description of the excellent wife. It was composed by a woman and written down by her son Lemuel (Proverbs 31:1). There are 22 statements, one for each of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet:

A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies. Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value. She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life. She selects wool and flax and works with eager hands. She is like the merchant ships, bringing her food from afar. She gets up while it is still dark; she provides food for her family and portions for her servant girls. She considers a field and buys it; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard. She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks. She sees that her trading is profitable, and her lamp does not go out at night. In her hand she holds the distaff and grasps the spindle with her fingers. She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy. When it snows, she has no fear for her household; for all of them are clothed in scarlet. She makes coverings for her bed; she is clothed in fine linen and purple. Her husband is respected at the city gate, where he takes his seat among the elders of the land. She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies the merchants with sashes. She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come. She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue. She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: "Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all." (Proverbs 31:10-29)

For centuries, women have read this and been challenged and discouraged. Who can live up to this? No one. Not since the Fall. But take comfort. The Proverbs 31 woman isn't an actual person, but a portrait of what is most admirable about a wife and mother. This is the model which we need if we are going to strive for the way things ought to be as God sees it.

Four Words that Describe Mom in the Mirror

Service

This portrait is of an industrious and practical woman who loves her family by striving to meet their needs.

- She *"works with eager hands"* (Verse 13)
- She brings food (Verse 14)
- She *"gets up while it is still dark"* (Verse 15)
- She clothes her family (Verse 21)
- She *"watches over the affairs of her household"* (Verse 27)

The portrait is one of selflessness. It requires selflessness to put the needs of your family ahead of your own. Moms do this every day! I would imagine all of us are humbled when we consider the sacrifices that our moms made for us growing up. The thing about it is that you don't necessarily think about it as a child because she has always been this way. As a child, you easily expect it. That is the danger in it. We fail to see these qualities in all of their glory.

Let's take a normal day in "Mommyland." The kids are hungry and Mom puts together a lunch of hot cheese sandwiches, chips, fruit, and pudding. The child takes these from her hand and eats them and walks away and fails to realize that he has just had a divine encounter with reflected glory. He has been served by one who loves Him. Similarly, the mother who views serving her family as a drag and feels that it is beneath her is also failing to realize that service is a high calling because it is the very nature of God to serve.

You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:42-45)

Does Christ place a high value on service to others? He gave His life on that principle and that tells us that God is Himself a full-service God.

So what does it mean in our culture when the service tasks of motherhood are demeaned or looked down on? In some contexts, mothers are embarrassed to say they give themselves full-time to homemaking. Women are encouraged to find their purpose in their career paths and to not let inconveniences like meeting the needs of their families get in the way.

This is plain old Gentile thinking of Mark 10:42 that values people for where they are on the organization chart of life. If you are served, than you are higher on the organization chart of worth. If you serve, than you are lower on the organization chart of worth. If you serve children, you're at the bottom. What is really going on? It is human pride and its unfortunate application to the worth of a woman in the home and many Christian women have bought the lie. This creates dissatisfaction with the opportunity for divine reflection

and misses the glorious and divine opportunity that service provides. Is Christ in heaven reflecting on the mundane task of serving us, interceding for us, meeting our needs and thinking to Himself, *It's just not that fulfilling? I wonder if Wal-mart is hiring.* Service is greatness in the kingdom because the King was the servant of all.

Wisdom

She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue. (Proverbs 31:26)

One of the great roles that moms play is that they are shapers of thinking about the world around us and how to live in it with wisdom. I have never seen a book on why mothers should tell their kids what to do. Have you? It is a universally true fact of life that mothers automatically tell you what to do. Even as an adult I find that my mom thinks nothing of telling me what to do. It is in the motherly DNA. A biblical mother is conscious about the need to instruct her children with God's wisdom and to impart God's Word into their hearts and minds. This very passage is a son's transcribing of his mother's wisdom. She taught Lemuel truth.

- *I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.* (2 Timothy 1:5)
- *But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.* (2 Timothy 3:14-15)

A sacred task that mothers have is to impart God's wisdom into their kids. That presupposes a mother has it in her heart in the first place, which is why moms need to be in God's Word themselves. You can't teach what you don't know. We have many ministries here at Bethel that strive to equip moms with God's wisdom so they can instruct their children. Our Mothers of Preschoolers ministry; parenting classes; in some ways, our Building Blocks Ministry is doing that. We also have many Women's Bible studies and ministries. All of them in some way are trying to get God's wisdom into mom's minds so they can pass God's wisdom into their child's heart. Where is God in this reflection? God is Himself all-wise and has passed His wisdom on to us through the Scriptures. It's a sacred calling to train up a child in the way he should go.

Faithfulness

All of these characteristics are described in the present tense. The excellent mom doesn't just do these things once, but she continues to do them. She always cares. She always has her family on her mind. Is there any faithfulness on earth like a mother to her children?

We see this in the relationship between Jesus and His mother Mary. God called Mary to the high and holy calling of mothering the Savior of the world. You think mothering your kids is scary? Imagine being the mother to the Son of God. But she did it well and she did it to the end. She is there at the cross when Jesus died. While he hung there, Jesus saw His mother and the apostle John and said, *"Dear woman, here is your son,"* and to the disciple, *"Here is your mother."* (John 19:26-27) Even in His agony, there was a special relationship there. She was faithful to Him and He was faithful to her.

Motherhood tests that faithfulness because children don't always live like their moms want and that relationship can be strained, but it can never be broken because a mother is

faithful to her children. She is God's reflected glory. Like a mom, God is faithful to us. He is the one who runs to the prodigal son, who rejoices when a sinner is saved, and who adopts us as His own children in an eternal relationship that not even death can stop. God is *always* faithful to us. Like a mom, only better.

Love

The passage doesn't specifically say it, but it is a plain truth. There is no love like a mother's love. Nothing can break it. Can you remember that warm feeling of being sick and your mom taking care of you? Snuggling with you? What love a mother has and what love a mother needs! That little baby is so helpless and such high maintenance that were it not for motherly love, none of us would make it to age two. There is a certainty to her love; a solidity to it that children young and old deeply want. We want to be loved by someone who loves us without condition. That is motherly love. It is such a special part of common grace that fills this world with beauty.

Here's the point this morning. We look at these character qualities of a mother and on a day like today, we praise our mothers and show our love for them and tell them how much we appreciate all that they mean to us. That is good and right and the way it should be. Gifts, meals, hugs and kisses. It's a great day.

However, we have to realize that we are seeing mom in the mirror and we can bang our head on the mirror if we don't stand back in amazement that every praiseworthy virtue in a mom is absolutely perfectly found in God. What all of us really want is to be connected to the perfect embodiment of all we love in our mothers. We want an eternal, faithful, wise loving God. It feels like I want my Mommy, but what I really want is God.

Here is the great news! God wants us, too and has made that possible. We can know Him. We can experience His eternal love. We can receive His humble service. We can hear His wisdom. We can connect relationally with God and God has made that possible by sending His Son Jesus to die and to pay the moral and spiritual price our sins demand from a just God. Why did He do this? The same reason a mother reaches out for her rebellious son; she loves him. And God loves us and extends a hand of rescue, but we must receive it. That means that we must put our personal faith in His Son Jesus as our Savior and Lord. We must give up our pursuit of sin and follow Christ as His disciple. When we do, our sins are forgiven and that eternal, faithful, wise love of God becomes a reality in this life and in the eternal life to come. So what we love about our moms can actually lead us to an even greater relationship with the living God. Maybe Mother's Day will lead you to put your faith in Christ.

Let's just finish with the final words of the passage: *A woman who fears the LORD is to be praised. Give her the reward she has earned, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate.* (Proverbs 31:30-31) Let's do that today. We want all our mothers to feel our appreciation. Well done! And let's let it lead us to praise God Himself for giving us mothers and for letting their example speak so eloquently to what our God is like.

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NOTES:

I want my mommy.

Praiseworthy

Honor them.

Obey them.

My aim is to encourage women – and there are millions of you – who believe that God’s call on your life is marriage, the joyful support of a husband and his calling as you display what the relationship between Christ and the church looks like, and motherhood, the transmission of a God-centered, Christ-treasuring vision of life to your children, and home-management, the creation of a beautiful and simple place and a living organism called a home which becomes, not only for the family, but also for the community a refuge of Christ’s peace and launching pad for God’s righteousness. –Piper sermon, Honoring the biblical call of motherhood.

It comprises an acrostic of twenty-two verses beginning with the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, a poetic form which suggests a complete exploration of its subject. The sequence of the statements in the portrait is then formal rather than logical.¹

As the hymn goes, All beauty speaks of thee, the mountains and the rivers.

OUR GOD, TO WHOM WE TURN

All beauty speaks of thee

Common grace

Rom. 1

Honor mom

Why do we honor her? What is honorable is God has placed himself in biblical mothers. I say biblical mothers because clearly, not all mothers fit that description. I recall being in India where mothers will use their children on the street corner to beg. Some of them cutting off limbs of their children to engender more sympathy.

What do we learn about God from Mothers?

Text

¹Carson, D. A. 1994. *New Bible commentary : 21st century edition*. Rev. ed. of: The new Bible commentary. 3rd ed. / edited by D. Guthrie, J.A. Motyer. 1970. (4th ed.) (Pr 31:10). Inter-Varsity Press: Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA

Application

1 Peter 3:1-6

She is worth far more than rubies. Prov. 31:10

Homemaking is not employment for slothful, unimaginative, incapable women. It has as much challenge and opportunity, success and failure, growth and expansion, perks and incentives, as any corporate career. –Dorothy Morrison

The home was once described as "... a place apart, a walled garden, in which certain virtues too easily crushed by modern life could be preserved". –quoted in *Recovering B and F*, p. 366.

Half of Prov. 31 description is occupied with personal and domestic energy.

Mothers have to wait for their reward.

No one can, without renouncing the world, in the most literal sense, observe my meeth; and there are few, if any, that would entirely devote above twenty years of the prime of life in hopes to save the souls of their children, which they think may be saved without so much ado; for that was my principal intention, however unskillfully and unsuccessfully managed. – Susanna Wesley

We must prize a mother's service because this is greatness in the Kingdom of God.

Illustrations

Hannah and Samuel
Mary and Jesus

Why do we appreciate these characteristics? Because this is what God is like.

Mothers as a part of God's common grace

Children's relation to parents – Honor and Obey – Honor is the attitude, obey is the action.

I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also. ²

Jesus care to Mary when he was on the Cross

Jesus designed, created, and blessed motherhood....

A word to single women and women who cannot bear

We need to do this because you probably will not get this encouragement from the secular world.

²*The Holy Bible : New International Version*. 1996, c1984 (2 Ti 1:5). Zondervan: Grand Rapids

Titus 2:4-5 (NIV)

⁴Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, ⁵to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.

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³*The Holy Bible : New International Version*. 1996, c1984. Zondervan: Grand Rapids