

Mother's Day

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[0 : 00] Hundreds of verses from the Old and New Testament that refer to the strategic value and nature of our mothers. And indeed, a great deal is said right here and much more could be said.

But as we went through these verses, several thoughts came to my mind and I simply want to pass them on to you. Mothers occupy such a special place in the heart of everyone who has one. And it is one of the most awesome undertakings and responsibilities that God has ever bestowed upon humankind. And that is the ability and the responsibility of mothering a human being. I did a series of radio programs for WEEC and the program was called Marriage on the Rock. And one of the programs, we talked about mother. And I asked the question, this is just a little two-minute program. I asked the question, what comes to mind most when you hear the word mother?

[1 : 15] And because I couldn't take a poll, I just tried to look back over my own childhood because I was blessed with a very dear and caring and providing mother for many, many years.

She's with the Lord now. But as I look back over my childhood and growing up years and all the rest, the one thing really struck me and stood out so much about my mother was she was always there.

If you want to sum it up into one word, available. Mothers are available.

Perhaps nothing so describes motherhood more than that. Somebody who is always there. Every now and then we hear someone lamenting a sad tale to the effect that you were never there for me. And that's really sad to hear those words. Because I'm convinced that based on the biblical model, mothers were intended, expected, encouraged to be there.

[2 : 34] Our culture has undergone some major shifts and there isn't nearly as much emphasis placed upon that today. And I know that there are family extenuating circumstances sometimes that simply do not allow mothers to be there because of the nature of the situation in which they live.

But by and large, it is to be preferred above all other arrangements. And that's for mother to be there. There is no child care facility.

I don't care how well appointed it is or how pretty the pictures are on the wall or how sweet and nice the caregivers are. They cannot take the place of a mother.

There is absolutely no one who can. Because the mother and the child have a certain bonding, a certain connection that cannot be replaced by anybody else.

It is the absolute ultimate. Mothers are available. And as you read through all of these references here, perhaps you will be struck by another thing as I was.

[3 : 49] And that is the frequency of mother and father being mentioned in the same verse, almost in the same breath. And that too, to me, is a biblical indication of the great importance that God places upon both of these persons, the mother and the father.

We have been undergoing an enormous transformation, in some ways negative, in our nation, where parenthood, motherhood, fatherhood is de-emphasized.

And we are paying an incredibly tragic price for it. Many today see the great threat to the stability of our nation being economic, loss of jobs, employments, being the environment, loss of things that we think we need so desperately, like fuel for our automobiles at a price that we can afford and all the rest.

And these are frequently seen as America's greatest challenges. But to me, and I realize I'm coming from a preacher's standpoint, and I'm somewhat biased, but I cannot escape the idea in my own mind and heart that the greatest threat that this nation is now facing is the disintegration of the American family and the rupturing of relationships, the splitting up of unions, the people living together without the commitment that is traditionally required in marriage.

It is the injured relationships that represent the greatest threat to our nation. And families, children need a mother and a father.

[5 : 47] And I realize that because of death and illness and employment and other things like that, that isn't always possible. But by far and away, that is God's intended norm for a mother and a father to beget children and to rear them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

And they need to recognize that when you are rearing your children, you are making an enormous contribution toward the rearing of your grandchildren at the same time.

That ought to be a sobering thing to keep in mind. So, in this very first reference here, we have something that is to be true of a mother.

Here, she is to be left. She is to be left in the right way at the right time. And that is when a man takes a wife, he is to leave his father and his mother and cleave unto his wife and they shall be one flesh.

He never loses his love for his mother or his father or his loyalty to them. But now, his mother and father have reared him for the years they have had him in their home.

[7 : 08] They have reared him for this time of leaving. Leaving them and cleaving to a wife. And that too is to be standard operating procedure.

In the next verse, we see Isaac and Esau, Jacob, and the situation that developed there. And it is interesting to note that Jacob obeyed his father and his mother and had gone to Adam-Aram.

Well, we are supposed to obey our mother and our father until when?

Well, until we become of age. Then we may not be under their authority insofar as obedience is concerned.

But if we were reared with the right kind of nurture and admonition, even though we are not responsible to obey them because we are now under our own volition and our own roof and our own family, we still ought never to take ourselves out from under the influence of our mother and our father.

[8 : 26] That doesn't mean they call the shots for you. That doesn't mean your mom and dad give you permission to buy this house or this car or whatever. You are to be independent and on your own. But there is godly counsel that is available in an ongoing source.

And if the relationship was what it ought to have been when you were reared, you will seek out that godly counsel. You will value their advice even though you are not obligated necessarily to take it because you too will live with the consequences.

So it is interesting to me that Jacob obeyed his father and his mother. And I can assure you he was well beyond the age of what we would consider adult.

And I know there are cultural considerations that do not exist in our society today that did exist in biblical days. But the thing that impresses me here is attitude, is a spirit of subservience and respect that Jacob had for his mother and his father.

Esau didn't have that. Esau was a rebel. Esau was not going to tell me who I can marry. Not going to tell me where I can live. That was Esau.

[9 : 38] Esau was a man completely of the world. Esau was a man completely of the world. And he lived that way. And it is reflected in the scriptures. So, honor your father and your mother that your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you.

How does that work? When you honor someone, you simply give them their due. You respect their position and their authority.

You acknowledge it. You defer to it. That is how you honor them. Paul said in one of his epistles that we are to honor one another by preferring others ahead of ourselves.

How do you honor other people? By putting them first, ahead of yourself. That may not be natural in the world we live in, but it is biblical.

And it's the way believers are supposed to operate. We are to be servants of all. When you honor your father and your mother, you give them the rightful position in your life.

[10 : 47] In the same way that we honor God. And then the text says that your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you.

Well, how in the world does that work? And some are of the opinion, maybe it just worked for the Hebrews back then, that it doesn't necessarily work that way now. Well, they were under a special covenantal relationship that God had established with the nation of Israel.

So there may be some truth to that. But it's interesting to note that the consequences of honoring your father and mother are extraordinary. That your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you.

What does honoring your mother and father have to do with days in the land being prolonged? What's the possible connection?

Just this. When mothers and fathers are honored by their children on a large scale, as should be the case, it impacts the whole of culture and the whole of society.

[11 : 56] It creates an atmosphere that would otherwise not be created. And it makes for much more conducive living for everybody.

A more peaceable society. A more productive society. A safer society. A more to be desired society. Just because attitudes between these generations of parent and children are what they are supposed to be.

You all know, as well as I, of the horror stories and the conflicts that we see right now in our own culture. Sometimes generational.

The crime. The drugs. All of these things. They are all a reflection of a disintegration of the family unit, the neighborhood, and the society.

And it's a price that we are all paying. Every one of you shall reverence his mother and his father. You shall keep my Sabbaths.

[13 : 00] I am the Lord your God. I went about as though it were my friend or brother. I bowed down mourning as one who sorrows for a mother.

I could see hearts breaking of my two children.

One's still here. Dawn Elizabeth is already gone. She left us in 1995 at the age of 30. But when we were sequestered in that intensive care room, Riverside Methodist Hospital, and had taken Barbara off the ventilator at about 5 o'clock in the afternoon, and a doctor said that she may breathe on her own for just a few minutes and then expire, or she may go on for several hours.

And she did. It was several hours from 5 o'clock in the afternoon when the ventilator was disconnected until 3.30 the next morning.

And Tim and Lori were there in the room, and Lynette and Bill. And Dawn, as I said, was already gone. And our dear friends with whom we go back to the 1960s, Barbara and Daryl Henderson were there.

[14 : 34] And as I looked over at Tim and Lynette, I could see this as one who sorrows for a mother.

And these kids just had broken hearts as they sat there and knew that their mother was about to leave them.

And it's a special kind of mourning that we have for a mother. 1995, when Barbara and I were in Asheville, North Carolina, we were visiting my mom.

She was in a nursing home at the time because my sister, to whom she had moved because she could no longer live alone, and mothers and daughters have very special kinds of relationships, and she was no longer able to care for her at home because of her physical and medical needs.

So she was in a nursing facility just about 10 minutes away from where my sister and her husband live. And she had a serious stroke, and we were notified and called down.

[15 : 49] And the doctor said that it probably wouldn't be very long. And I went in to see my mom and spent a few hours with her, and I knew and Barbara knew that this would be last time that I would be seeing her.

Next time I saw her would be in a casket. And I don't know if she knew that or not because she was very unresponsive. But I don't mind telling you one of the toughest things I ever had to do was walk away from her bedside in that room, knowing what I knew, that I'd not be seeing her again in this world.

This was the woman that birthed me and nurtured me and loved me, put up with all my shenanigans and nonsense, and wrote me faithfully letters while I was in the army.

And had no idea that she was keeping all those letters. Why in the world would you do that? And my sister says, you'll want these. And I said, what are they?

She says, these are all the letters that mom kept that you wrote while you were in the army. I said, you've got it. It was a stack like that. She kept these? And my sister, bless her heart, said, well, I knew she would.

[17 : 19] Because she's a mother too. And mothers have things like that, you know. So there is a special mourning for mothers. And many of you here today know what it means to mourn for a mother.

And there's nothing quite like it. Observe the commandment of your father and do not forsake the teaching of your mother. I think one of the most blessed men in all of scripture is young Timothy, to whom Paul wrote his second letter, when he reminded Timothy of the faith that he had and from whom he had gotten it.

He had received teaching and instruction from his mother and his grandmother, Eunice and Lois. These were two godly women that obviously had a great impact on this young man's life.

And women, mothers have ways of teaching things to their children that we dads just don't. And I think the big difference is that so many of us dads, we don't have the patience that is required to get down on the level of a child and teach them and communicate things to them that they need to know.

And I think this is one reason why there are so few men who are teaching in elementary schools. They're usually teaching in junior high or high school or college.

[18 : 48] But you do find some male teachers in elementary grades, but they are vastly outnumbered by the females. And I think it's because femininity has a patience and a determination for young minds that a lot of us men just don't have the patience for and won't take the time for.

But there's something about a mother and a mother's heart that just rises to meet that need. And nobody can function like a mother because nobody was designed to function like God designed a mother to function.

And it's just marvelous. Do not despise your mother when she is old. It means don't look down on her. Don't ignore her needs when she is old.

Every now and then we read sad, sad stories about parental abuse where elderly suffer abuse from their own children.

It's heartbreaking. And I know that when dementia sets in, they can be very uncontrollable and do very unpredictable things and just become a real problem.

[20 : 18] Let's face it. Just become really difficult. And it's tough to cope with. But you know what? It goes with the territory called life.

We live in a fallen world. And sometimes it gets really difficult, ugly, inconvenient, and all the rest. They care for the needs of the elderly.

And it's easy to just kind of shuffle them off someplace and forget all about them. And that is often what is done in many of our nursing homes. There are people there who have not had calls or visits from even their own children for ages.

And it's very sad because out of sight, out of mind, people just tend to write them off and forget. Oh, people are busy. Oh, sure, we're busy. But sometimes we're not busy about the right things.

As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you. I don't ever recall my dad. Actually, it would have been my stepdad anyway, but I didn't know that.

[21 : 26] I thought he was my dad until I was 16 years old. But I don't ever remember my stepdad coming to me and say, come here, come here, boy.

Let me kiss it and it'll be all better. That's just not a guy thing, I guess. But you know what? My mom had the charms to do that, whether it was a boo-boo on my thumb or whatever.

Perhaps it was nothing but the power of suggestion, but it always seemed like it felt better. Once mom caressed me and cradled me and kissed my boo-boos or whatever, it was just almost like a magic potion that only mothers have.

Dad, you can try it, but it probably won't work with you. It just works with mothers. I'm reminded, hearing stories, some of you saw the PBS series that Ken Burns did on the Civil War.

And I know you've seen some of the things from World War II. There's all kinds of footage available and everything. And I've heard this recounted I don't know how many times.

[22 : 40] A boy's wounded out on the battlefield. Lying there dying. Bleeding. Hurting. And do you know who they're crying out for?

Mom. Mother. Never hear them crying for dad. Don't they love their dad?

Oh, sure, they love their dad, but it's different. Mothers hear a child's cry in a different way than a dad does.

And I can't explain it, but I know it's true. It just comes with the territory of mothering. And if you're not a mother, you're not equipped for that. So don't worry. You don't have to provide it. But mothers just have that natural kind of knack that nobody else has. And when boys are in trouble, whether it's in combat or whatever, and they want to cry out for help, it's mom they want.

[23 : 50] And mom they remember. And mothers, in this next verse, Jesus went down with them, came to Nazareth. He continued in subjection to them.

And your mother treasured all these things in her heart. Your mother remembers things about you that vividly impact her mind and psyche, and your dad doesn't even have a clue about them. Just doesn't. Because it's a mother thing. And she's the only one who can stoke up those things and treasure them, hide them in her heart.

Because they are really super special to her. Only mothers. And then in this last one, it ties in with the caring for your mother.

When our Lord was on the cross, he made it clear that he was delegating the apostle John to be a surrogate mother for Mary.

[24 : 56] And that he was to take her into his home and care for her the rest of his life. And I know that tradition sometimes is shaky to build much of a foundation upon.

But when we were in Ephesus less than a year ago, I guess it was, ancient Ephesus in Turkey, there is there the remains of what was reported to have been the house of Mary, the mother of our Lord, who lived there with John, the youngest of all of the apostles.

For some years, he was the bishop of Ephesus, we are told. And then eventually he was exiled to the Isle of Patmos, and that's where he was when he wrote the Revelation, the last book in the Bible.

But tradition goes on to tell us that John cared for Mary, the mother of our Lord, for the rest of her life. And she died at an elderly age there in the city of Ephesus under John's care.

So these are just a few of the verses that are devoted to motherhood and the subject in the Old and New Testament. And there are many more, of course, that could be added to it, but we didn't have time to delve into so many others.

[26 : 18] But we just want to say thank you again to all of the moms for being a mother. Absolutely nobody can take your place. And speaking for one who benefited enormously from a wonderful mother, I'm really glad she was on the job.

And she just did splendidly. I guess a mother, the position that my mother was in when I was conceived, she would have been 18 or 19 years old.

Of course, you've got to remember way back then when I was born before the earth's crust hardened, you weren't of age. You weren't legally of age until you were 21.

None of this 18 stuff, you know, it was 21. And my mom was 18 or 19 when she and my dad's hormones got out of control.

And I was conceived. I guess she would have been a grade A candidate for abortion. And I can't say that she really considered it because I don't think it was nearly considered back then as much as it is today.

[27 : 41] But I do know that they did have them. They did go on. They did have abortions back then. But I sure am glad that my mom did not opt for that. I'm grateful.

I'm grateful. Well, I told you I was going to let you go early. And 60 seconds early, that's still early. So let's stand, please, and we'll be dismissed. Father, there's not much that we can say that would add anything to what the scriptures have already revealed about the value and the beauty and the treasure of our dear mothers.

We are so blessed, so many of us, to have had the mothers that we've had, many times under very difficult circumstances. And yet so many mothers have gone the extra mile so many times and have sacrificed so much, very often completely unaware to us, the prices that they gladly paid for the young charges care that you put under their authority.

And we shall forever be indebted to our mothers. Thank you for each and every one of them. In Christ's wonderful name. Amen.