

MOTHER'S DAY
HOW TO BE A WONDERFUL MOTHER:
A WOMAN OF EXCELLENCE
PROVERBS 31:10-31

Today is Mother's Day. For Christianity, the concept seems to date back to establishment of England's "Mothering Sunday," gifts were to be offered to worshippers' mothers. Here in the U. S. the first general observance of the occasion was in the churches of Philadelphia after Miss Anne Jarvis campaigned for a holiday for mothers just after the turn of the 20th century.

So this morning we join our nation as together we honor our mothers. Mothers are quite a precious commodity, aren't they? Each of us owes our very existence to our Mom! And in the flurry of phone calls, cards, dinners, flowers, and gifts we express our love. Why? Because it is Biblical. Turn with me to Proverbs 31 and for a moment follow along with me as I read verse 28 "Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her"

The Bible says that one who lives a life for God lives on far beyond their earthly days because their life keeps testifying about God's grace.

Today before you get to the car if your mom is with you, think of a way she has touched your life.

- ✓ Maybe it is her loving smile, her gentle voice, maybe it is the soft yet strong touch of her hands.
- ✓ Can you let her know how her prayers or phone calls or letters have touched you?
- ✓ How about her cooking great meals, sewing those buttons, cleaning your room or always having a loving shoulder to cry on?

Surely this is only the start. Not just today should you call and tell her, do it all throughout the year. Rise up and call her blessed! There are so many ways we could honor our mothers, perhaps just remembering of how vital her role is to each of us. Here is the way some have expressed all our sentiments:

"She cooks, she cleans, she comforts, she corrects. She has six pairs of hands and eyes in the back of her head. Mother¹. For some, this word conjures up images of June Cleaver, complete with lace apron and pearls -- singing lullabies, baking brownies, kissing away a child's hot tears. Others envision the Erma Bombeck model, who drives a wood-paneled station wagon and whose hobby is dusting. Whatever the type, no one has more influence than a mother. For better or worse, she will forever impact the life of her child. Tough and tender, wise and warm, a mother must be all things to all her family ... at all times. That's quite a job description, and anyone who is a mother or has watched one in action knows there's no career more demanding or more endangered in today's society."

So one of the best ways to honor our moms would be to LET THEM KNOW HOW THEY TOUCHED OUR LIVES. So one facet of today is expressing what we know is true, how precious our moms are to each of us.

Jimmy Dean², country and western singer of some renown, released an album back when I was in college in the late seventies. One of the songs on that album is unique since Dean doesn't sing it, he says it. It's titled, "I Owe You." He's at a nostalgic place in his life. While thumbing through the things in his wallet, he inadvertently comes across a number of longstanding "I owe you's" to his mother, which he names one after another. By the time he is through, there's a big knot in your throat.

Borrowing that idea, lets make up another list of "I owe you's" which apply to all of our mothers all over this city, state, and country, all of which are long overdue. Let's stop after each one and consider the priceless value of the one who made your life possible – your mother,

Dear Mom:

As I walk through my museum of memories,
I owe you...for your TIME. You gave me constantly Day and night.
I owe you...for your EXAMPLE. You lived a life that was Consistent and dependable.
I owe you...for your SUPPORT. You always were there encouraging and challenging.
I owe you...for your HUMOR. It was perfectly quick and lifting the moment.
I owe you...for your COUNSEL. It was so Wise and quiet.
I owe you...for your HUMILITY. You were always Genuine and gracious.
I owe you...for your HOSPITALITY. Your home and table were Smiling and warm.
I owe you...for your INSIGHT. Your thoughts were so Keen and honest.
I owe you...for your FLEXIBILITY. Your life was always Patient and joyful.
I owe you...for your SACRIFICES. The countless times you gave of yourself that were so quickly forgotten.
I owe you...for your FAITH. Your relationship to the Lord was so Solid and sure.
I owe you...for your HOPE. You always radiated a Ceaseless and indestructible confidence.
I owe you...for your LOVE. It was so Devoted and deep.

¹ Swindoll, You and Your Child, p. 71.

² Quoted from Swindoll, The Strong Family, p. 56-57.

So we remember our moms, because there is no more influential or powerful role on earth than a mother's. Stay at it, dear lady. Never doubt the value of your calling. Without your positive supportive partnership, the family simply could not survive. But beyond all that, what is the spiritual side to this day? Does God's Word speak to the role of motherhood?

But what was the Scripture we just read? The 31st chapter of Proverbs is probably the best known and loved portion of God's Word about a godly woman, mother, and wife. Please stand with me as I read Proverbs 31:10–31.

These 22 verses are a poem that offers "God's beautiful description of the excellent wife as defined by a wife and mother (v. 1). Spiritual and practical wisdom plus moral virtues mark the character of this woman in contrast to the immoral women of v. 3. While the scene here is of a wealthy home and the customs of the ancient Near East, the principles apply to every family. They are set forth as the prayer of every mother for the future wife of her son, and literarily arranged with each of the 22 verses beginning with the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet in consecutive order³". The ancient Jewish rabbis taught that this chapter probably written by Solomon as a reflection upon his great-great grandmother Ruth.

Remember Ruth from that 8th Book of God's Word ? Her distant forefather in Genesis 19 by the name of Lot had sired her race in the midst of a drunken orgy with his own daughters. Yes, Lot who was Abraham's nephew, in his drunkenness, always condemned in God's word and with an unscrupulous daughter, produced a tribe of people under God's judgment.

Here is a woman that because of God's curse always knew that " no Moabite could enter God's assembly to the 10th generation" as Moses recorded those words in Deuteronomy 23:3-4. So, Ruth according to God's Word was despised though personally having done nothing to deserve it! Think of it!

- She is of the wrong race.
- She is out of the wrong family.
- She is tainted by the past.
- She is hounded by someone else's sin.
- She is scarred by a family scandal.
- She is plagued by a dark stain.

And, after a short, sad marriage with her husband dead and famine about her God writes one of the sweetest Old Testament stories of grace. And she is a "Mother of the Promise" to bring Christ to portray grace. And, since ancient times, the Jewish sages have attributed this 31st chapter to a portrait of this woman Ruth.

A close look at the elements God chose to put into His timeless portrait of a Woman of Excellence shows Seven Elements God noted that in part or in total make the key to

³ John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur Study Bible*, (Dallas: Word Publishing) 1997.

describing a woman that is excellent or “powerful” as Proverbs 31:10 translates it in v. 10. Quite a portrait – and when God describes what is important to Him, each element is timeless and powerful, so let’s briefly examine each of these keys to being a godly woman and mother..

1. In v.10 we find the 1st Key = **HER WORTH TO GOD IS INESTIMABLE** (KJV) And what in God’s sight is this woman worth? She is a woman of inestimable value – Rubies (NIV/KJV) speak of rarity of flawlessness NAS Jewels again – Most valuable ancient commodity! Need we elaborate? This is the value our Lord puts upon: A Virtuous Woman, A Godly Wife, and A Biblical Mother. She is Priceless – Rare – a Treasure! In fact, Proverbs 18: 22 calls her “Grace” from the Lord!
2. In v.11 we find the 2nd Key = **HER HUSBAND BESTOWS UPON HER HIS ABSOLUTE CONFIDENCE**. In v. 10 woman excellence or powerful woman is of inestimable worth. In v. 11 – in her relating to her husband she is a woman of whom he has absolute confidence. “he safely trusts in her”. As the Lord promises in Genesis, she completes her husband.
3. In v. 12 we find the 3rd Key = **HER LIFE IS DEVOTED TO SERVING OTHERS**. She has earned the reality Christ spoke of – servant of all is greatest of all. She devotes self to others.
4. In v. 13-26 we find the 4th Key = **HER BODY IS FOCUSED UPON MINISTRY FOR THE LORD**. Note how differently the Lord Himself describes this priceless woman. There are no descriptions of her hair, skin, weight, clothes, or looks. Starting v.13 and through to v. 26 **there is no physical description of fleeting physical beauty**. Rather there is a beautiful description of her: HANDS GIVEN TO SERVING OTHERS v.13, v.19, v.20, v.31; HER ARMS GIVEN TO SERVING OTHERS v.17; HER MOUTH GIVEN TO SERVING OTHERS v.26; HER TONGUE GIVEN TO SERVING OTHERS V.26. Thus God’s woman is all in God’s control, serving others – not self.
5. In v.15 we find the 5th Key = **HER HOUSEHOLD HAS THE HIGHEST PRIORITY**. God measures her life first and foremost by her ministry to her family, not by her focus upon her self, or her career, or her personal gratification. No the Lord honors her for making her family her priority. Remember the New Testament highlights this perspective of the Lord: 1 Timothy 5:14 *Therefore I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully.* 1 Timothy 2:15 *Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.* Titus 2:4 *that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children,*
6. In v.28 we find the 6th Key = **HER CHILDREN ARE HER SACRED TRUST FROM GOD THAT REAP A HARVEST OF PRAISE AND BLESSING!** That’s God’s plan – how sad to say that those 3.6M kids who started 9th grade last

fall: 1 out of 7 kids of unmarried parents; 40% will be from broken homes before graduating; and 30% are Latchkey kids, which means no one greets them at the door as they arrive home from school. Oh to see children as sacred trust.

7. Finally in v.31 we find the 7th Key = **HER LIFE'S WORK OFFERED IN LOVE PRODUCES THE ENDURING PRAISE OF HER FAMILY**. God says the whole world will take note of this woman of inestimable worth.

This essential ingredient of mothering⁴ is captured in this paraphrase of I Corinthians 13: "If I talk to my children about what is right and what is wrong, but have not love, I am like a ringing doorbell or pots banging in the kitchen. And though I know what stages they will go through, and understand their growing pains, and can answer all their questions about life, and believe myself to be a devoted mother, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give up the fulfillment of a career to make my children's lives better, and stay up all night sewing costumes or baking cookies on short notice, but grumble about lack of sleep, I have not love and accomplish nothing. A loving mother is patient with her children's immaturity and kind even when they are not; a loving mother is not jealous of their youth nor does she hold it over their heads whenever she has sacrificed for them. A loving mother does not push her children into doing things her way. She is not irritable, when the chicken pox have kept her confined with three whining children for two weeks, and does not resent the child who brought the affliction home in the first place. A loving mother is not relieved when her disagreeable child finally disobeys her directly and she can punish him, but rather rejoices with him when he is being more cooperative. A loving mother bears much of the responsibility for her children; she believes in them; she hopes in each one's individual ability to stand out as a light in a dark world; she endures every backache and heartache to accomplish that. A loving mother never really dies.

- ✓ As for home baked bread, it will be consumed and forgotten;
- ✓ as for spotless floors, they will soon gather dust and heel marks.

And as for children, well, right now toys, friends, and food are all-important to them. But when they grow up it will have been how their mother loved them that will determine how they love others. In that way she will live on. So care, training, and a loving mother reside in a home, these three, but the greatest of these is a loving mother."

Why? Because of: Her Absolutely confident husband; Her Life devoted to serving others; Her Body focused on ministry for the Lord; Her Household has the highest priority; Her Children are her sacred trust from God that reap a harvest of praise and blessing; and Her Life's Work offered in love produces the enduring praise of her family. How about it ladies? Are you patterning your life after God's timeless portrait?

⁴ Dianne Lorang in Keep the Fire Glowing By Williams, Williams and Jenkins, Revell, 1986, pp. 152-53.

Who were some of the other Great Mother's of God's Word?

1. EVE KEPT HOPING IN GOD'S PLAN Genesis 4:1 *Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, "I have acquired a man from the Lord."*
2. SARAH KEPT BELIEVING GOD'S PROMISES Hebrews 11:11 *By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised.*
3. HANNAH KEPT PRAYING FOR GOD'S WILL 1 Samuel 1:13 *Now Hannah spoke in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard. Therefore Eli thought she was drunk.*
4. RUTH KEPT FOLLOWING GOD'S WAY Ruth 1:16 *But Ruth said: "Entreat me not to leave you, Or to turn back from following after you; For wherever you go, I will go; And wherever you lodge, I will lodge; Your people shall be my people, And your God, my God.*
5. MARY KEPT TREASURING GOD'S WORD Luke 2:19 *But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. (New International Version)*
6. LOIS KEPT TRAINING GOD'S CHILD 2 Timothy 1:5 *when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also. 2 Timothy 3:15 and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

APPENDIX

How can we really love our mothers? Just a few action items to do on the way home today:

1. LET THEM MAKE MISTAKES (Mary at the wedding in Cana; John 2:1-4) Moms aren't perfect, just about though. They fail like we all do. But God is only concerned about two things: your response to His Word and how you finish up. Mary responded wonderfully to God's Word in Luke 1:38. Mary stayed with the Lord to the end Acts 1:14, and church history confirm that..
2. LET THEM WORK THROUGH THEIR GRIEF (Mary sword pierce soul; Luke 2:34-35 Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, 35 so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too." (NIV)
 - Part of life is pain. Part of motherhood is being so knit to your children their lives pierce your like a sword.
 - Things never turn out like we think at first they will. Sometimes they get better, sometimes they worsen. We need to live in the refreshing and liberating reality of God's Word.
 - Let's start with the facts. There was no perfect family mentioned in the Bible. Not Mary and Joseph's. No, their boys wanted Jesus done in. Yes, when the heat was on and the leaders were plotting against Hos life, those brothers sent Him into the fire! John 7:1-5 After this, Jesus went around in Galilee, purposely staying away from Judea because the Jews there were waiting to take his life. 2 But when the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles was near, 3 Jesus'

brothers said to him, "You ought to leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples may see the miracles you do. 4 No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world." 5 For even his own brothers did not believe in him. (NIV). Certainly an imperfect family. We know James and Jude changed, but we are not sure about the others.

- Let's stop expectations of perfection. If all your children follow the Lord you are blessed. If all do not, God understands. He has seen it in the lives of all His children from Eden onward.
- Need I mention the families of Adam, Abraham, Eli, Samuel, David and so on? The only perfect parents in the Bible, had no children that we know of, like Paul and the apostles.

3. LET THEM LIVE ON IN OUR WORDS (Mary Luke 1; tell about them) That is what God does! Look at the Bible. The wonders of Mary, the devotion of Hannah, the care of Jacobed Moses' mom, all remain. Every time I hear about Monica mother of Augustine, or Susanna Wesley mother of John and Charles, and you who faithfully love your children, pray for them and teach them about the Lord . . . the influence of a distant life is touching mine today.
4. LET THEM KNOW HOW THEY TOUCHED OUR LIVES Proverbs 31:28 Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: (NIV) Hannah was in Mary's family tradition and so she spoke of her, keeping her life at work. The Bible says in Hebrews that one who lives a life for God lives on by their life testifying about God's grace. Today before you get to the car if your mom is with you think of a way she has touched your life. Maybe it is her loving smile, her gentle voice, maybe it is the soft yet strong touch of her hands. Can you let her know how her prayers or phone calls or letters have touched you? How about her cooking great meals, sewing those buttons, cleaning your room or always having a loving shoulder to cry on? Surely this is only the start. Not just today should you call and tell her, do it all throughout the year. Rise up and call her blessed!