

## A THEOLOGY OF MOTHERHOOD

GENESIS 3:15-16

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**M**other's Day is a time when mothers receive presents or get taken out to eat by their husbands and children. It's a way for husbands and children to say thank-you for all you have done. Many mothers deserve such thanks and look forward to the day. Other mothers do not look forward to the day, because they will not receive appreciation from family members even though they deserve it. They will see other mothers receiving such appreciation, and this will make them feel lonely, like the only person who didn't receive a present at Christmastime.

In the church, we usually do our best to make the mom's feel good about themselves on Mother's Day. Children sing words of praise for mothers. And the testimonies emphasize the positive impact mothers have had on their children. In most churches I have been to, mothers feel at least a little bit pampered on Mother's Day.

Today, along with the traditional honoring of mothers that we have already witnessed, I would like to take a few minutes to honor the ideal of motherhood as presented to us in God's Word. I don't think there has ever been a mother who has perfectly lived up to the biblical ideal, and I don't think there ever will be. Although some would argue that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was perfect, I personally do not believe it is possible for anyone other than Jesus Christ Himself to reach perfection before they die. The biblical ideals presented in the Bible are recorded for us to use as goals. Therefore, my purpose in presenting the biblical ideal for motherhood is to give every mother a meaningful goal possible to work toward through the grace of God. And I also hope to help husbands and children of all ages to better understand how to pray for their mothers.

So what is the picture of motherhood presented in the Bible? Probably the passage most often quoted is PROVERBS 31:10-31. There we read these words:

- <sup>10</sup> A wife of noble character who can find?  
She is worth far more than rubies.
- <sup>11</sup> Her husband has full confidence in her  
and lacks nothing of value.
- <sup>12</sup> She brings him good, not harm,  
all the days of her life.
- <sup>13</sup> She selects wool and flax

- and works with eager hands.
- <sup>14</sup> She is like the merchant ships,  
bringing her food from afar.
- <sup>15</sup> She gets up while it is still dark;  
she provides food for her family  
and portions for her servant girls.
- <sup>16</sup> She considers a field and buys it;  
out of her earnings she plants a vineyard.
- <sup>17</sup> She sets about her work vigorously;  
her arms are strong for her tasks.
- <sup>18</sup> She sees that her trading is profitable,  
and her lamp does not go out at night.
- <sup>19</sup> In her hand she holds the distaff  
and grasps the spindle with her fingers.
- <sup>20</sup> She opens her arms to the poor  
and extends her hands to the needy.
- <sup>21</sup> When it snows, she has no fear for her household;  
for all of them are clothed in scarlet.
- <sup>22</sup> She makes coverings for her bed;  
she is clothed in fine linen and purple.
- <sup>23</sup> Her husband is respected at the city gate,  
where he takes his seat among the elders of the land.
- <sup>24</sup> She makes linen garments and sells them,  
and supplies the merchants with sashes.
- <sup>25</sup> She is clothed with strength and dignity;  
she can laugh at the days to come.
- <sup>26</sup> She speaks with wisdom,  
and faithful instruction is on her tongue.
- <sup>27</sup> She watches over the affairs of her household  
and does not eat the bread of idleness.
- <sup>28</sup> Her children arise and call her blessed;  
her husband also, and he praises her:
- <sup>29</sup> "Many women do noble things,  
but you surpass them all."
- <sup>30</sup> Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting;  
but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.
- <sup>31</sup> Give her the reward she has earned,  
and let her works bring her praise at the city gate.

Last week I called a sister in the Lord and asked her what she thought was the biblical ideal of motherhood. I was a little surprised at her response. She was a bit defensive. She said that many women do not want to be a PROVERBS 31 woman, and she suggested that it is unfair to present the PROVERBS 31 woman as the biblical ideal of motherhood.

After the phone conversation, I read over PROVERBS 31 and I could see what she meant. Verses 10 and 11 present this woman as having flawless character

evoking full confidence from her husband. Verse 12 presents her as being completely unselfish and loyal. Verse 13 presents her as being very skillful and hardworking. In verses 14 and 15 we find that she gets up before the sun to provide for her family. And in verse 18 we find that she continues working late into the night. Verse 16 tells us that she is a good business person. Verse 17 describes her as physically strong. According to verse 18, she is good as accounting. And in verses 21-22 we find that she contributes to the material needs of the family by doing all the sewing herself. She is an excellent teacher, and she is light-hearted, able to laugh at the days to come.

Now, after that short summary of PROVERBS 31:10-29, I would like a show of hands to see how many PROVERBS 31 women we have attending our service today. If you are a PROVERBS 31 woman, then I think you deserve another flower. PROVERBS 31:10 begins with the question, "A wife of noble character, who can find?" If a woman has to meet all the qualifications listed in PROVERBS 31 to be a woman of noble character, then I can understand why the sister I talked to last week reacted the way she did.

All the things listed in PROVERBS 31 are good things, but it is virtually impossible for anyone to live up to all those standards. And I would even go so far to say that it is not wrong for a woman to not to aspire to live up to a particular standard mentioned in PROVERBS 31. For instance, a woman whose body requires a normal amount of sleep each night should not feel guilty if she fails to get up before the sun, especially if she works late at night. Mothers should not feel guilty if they have little interest in business and accounting. Some mothers will never have that kind of skill.

But I do believe that anyone who follows any of the standards listed in PROVERBS 31 will discover the benefit of following those standards. Mothers who work hard at doing the things listed in this Proverb will prosper and cause their family to prosper as well. But just like much of the advice we read in the book of Ecclesiastes, prosperity does not guarantee a meaningful life. The standard we use to measure the value of motherhood has to go beyond the things listed in verses 10 through 29 of PROVERBS 31. Ideal motherhood must begin in the heart.

Without a proper motivation from the heart, it is impossible for a woman to experience ideal motherhood. This proper motivation from the heart is none other than the fear of God. It is the kind of fear that we talked about last week, that is the kind which is born out of a love relationship with God. PROVERBS 31:30 says, "Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised."

This kind of fear is always more concerned with pleasing God than it is with avoiding suffering. In fact, when it comes to motherhood, suffering is guaranteed. But the woman who fears the Lord is more than willing to put up with the suffering if that is what it means to please God.

The first biblical proclamation of motherhood is found in the third chapter of Genesis, after Adam and Eve disobeyed God. There, in verse 15-16 God proclaims two things about motherhood. First of all, in GENESIS 3:15, God proclaims that evil will be defeated through the offspring of the woman. This is a proclamation of hope, and it should be the hope of every mother. Even though the prophecy of the serpent's head being crushed by the woman's offspring has its ultimate fulfillment in Christ, every child born of every woman has the potential of becoming an instrument that God can use to destroy evil and build His kingdom. The second proclamation concerning motherhood is found in verse 16, and it is a proclamation of suffering. This suffering not only includes the physical pain that comes with childbearing, but it also includes the physical and emotional pain that goes along with raising children.

Thus, I believe the biblical picture of motherhood can be summed up with two words: suffering and hope. The mother who has a love relationship with God is a mother who is willing to endure the suffering in order to see the hope fulfilled in her children. Her fear of God will drive her to suffer in order to fulfill the hope.

Practically speaking, this means that she will make every sacrifice needed in order to create an environment where the child can grow into a personal love relationship with God. It means praying for the child and exposing the child to the truth of God's word through example and through teaching. That means spending a lot of time with the child, even at the expense of sacrificing a career and bringing home a salary. And I am not saying it is wrong for a woman to choose a career and be a mother at the same time. Motherhood demands the best effort be put forward to create the best environment for a child to grow in God's grace. What is best effort for one mother and what is best effort for another mother may differ. There are some mothers who don't have to work full time at a career and who would help their children much more by sacrificing the family income to spend more time with their children. There are other mothers who have no choice. They must work full time to provide food, clothing and modest shelter.

The story of the Magic Cavern tells about a mother who lived in a little hut near a mountain on which was a wide forest. She had one little child whom she loved dearly.

Now, in that forest grew many strawberries very large and juicy, and one

midsummer day the woman took the child to pick some. They climbed the mountainside, and presently came upon vines that were covered with berries larger, redder, and more luscious than any they had ever seen before.

These they picked. But no sooner had the woman put them in her basket than she saw the door of a large cavern open before her. Great heaps of gold lay glittering on the floor, while three white maidens sat there guarding the treasure.

“Come in, good woman,” called the white maidens. “Take as much gold as you can grasp at once.”

The woman, holding her child by the hand, entered eagerly. She stooped and grasped a handful of gold and put it in her apron. But the touch of it filled her with greed, and, forgetting her child, she gathered up two more handfuls. Then she turned and ran out of the cave.

Instantly a loud rumbling sounded behind her, and a voice cried out: “Unhappy woman! You have lost your little one until next midsummer day.”

The door of the cavern closed, and the child was shut inside.

Well, the poor woman wrung her hands and wept, but it was of no use, and she had to go home without her child. And though after that she often visited the place where the cavern had opened, she never could find the door.

Early on the next midsummer day she hurried to the spot; and what should she see but the door wide open! The great heaps of gold lay glittering on the floor, while the three white maidens sat there guarding the treasure. And near them stood her little child holding a big red apple.

“Come in, good woman,” called the white maidens. “Take as much gold as you can grasp at once.”

At that the woman ran eagerly in. She forgot all about the gold, and clasped her dear child in her arms.

“Good woman,” said the white maidens, “take the little one home. We give her back to you, for now your love is greater than your greed.” So the woman took her child home with her, and loved her more than gold all the days of her life.

God has ordained mothers to sacrifice and suffer so that their offspring, their children, can grow up to fulfill a hope. It is the hope of destroying evil. It is

the hope of building God’s kingdom. Living out this ideal of motherhood only means doing one’s best to create an environment for children to grow in the grace and knowledge of God.

Living out the ideal of motherhood does not depend on outcomes. There have been mothers who have made all the sacrifices to help their children enter into a personal relationship with God; however, in the end, their children or some of their children have chosen to side with evil. This, too, causes pain. And for the mother whose hope is strong, the pain is great.

But the woman who is living out the true ideal of motherhood does not allow the pain to stop her from doing all that is in her power to continue helping her child know God better. It is a lifelong duty. Mothers (and fathers alike) are obliged to pray for their children until the day they die. True success of motherhood depends on the mother’s determination to never give up doing her duty. It does not depend on outcomes. Outcomes are not for us to control.

On this Mother’s Day, let us give our moms more than food and material presents. Let’s offer up prayers for them. Some of them do not understand the biblical ideal for mothers presented in God’s Word. As children who do understand, we need to do all we can to help them fulfill their God-given roles as mothers. Let’s take time today and every day to honor the biblical ideal of motherhood.

**Application: What did your mother do to help you know and understand truth? If your mother is still living, in what way can you help her realize the biblical ideal of motherhood?**