

“Saved through Childbearing”

1 Timothy 2:8-15

(A sermon preached on Mother’s Day, 1987, updated in 1998, and repreached in 2014)

⁸ I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling; ⁹ likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, ¹⁰ but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works. ¹¹ Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. ¹² I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. ¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve; ¹⁴ and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. ¹⁵ Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control. (1 Tim 2:8-15)

I broke my leg at the beginning of my tenth grade football season, rather severely. I spent the first five months of the school year in a body cast, most of that time, at home, confined to a hospital bed. Every day I was fed and bathed and clothed and cared for in every way imaginable by my mother. What I needed done, she had to do. What I didn’t have enough appreciation for then was that she was always there and *never once* complained about it. Not once. She never said, “I need a break.” She never said, “I’m exhausted.” When I pouted she never said, “I can’t believe how ungrateful you’re being. Every day I serve you your meals, bathe you, meet your every demand,” and so on. A recent writer recalled from her own childhood, coming home from school, opening the door, calling, “Mom!” She said “I wouldn’t have said I needed her, I only wanted to know that she was there.”

I found my freshman year that the college was a bit more difficult than I had anticipated. After a couple of weeks of German, I dropped it. Then I waited for the first major test in chemistry. The day of reckoning came, the exams were passed out. There was tense silence in the lecture hall. I began to work my way through it, problem after problem, right to the end. Couldn’t solve a single problem. My life passed before me. I realized for sure that I was going to fail the test, drop below the required course load, lose my scholarship, and return home in disgrace, having brought shame to myself and my family. I worked my way back through the test managing to answer a few questions. I went back to my room and called my mother and father and explained the situation to them. I remember my mother answering me, saying, “Well just so you did your best. You can come on home and go to junior college for a while and work your way back,” she said. “Don’t worry about it.” What made an impression on me was the unqualified acceptance and security that I had within my own mother’s love. That is the sort of image I carry with me of motherhood: depth of love, warmth, care, sacrifice, and the heroic devotion that a good mother gives to her children.

When Jesus wanted to indicate the strength of his love for unbelieving Jerusalem, he could find no greater example than maternal love.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem . . . How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! (Lk 13:34b)

A hen towards her chicks, a mother towards her children exercises an unparalleled vehement, protective, nurturing, providing love. Human relationships know of no greater example of sacrificial love. Yet this is a disappearing image in our day and age. In recent decades parenting in general has fallen upon hard times. The “me generation” of the 1960’s had a problem with children, and subsequent generations have absorbed their view. Children are regarded as a nuisance. They are viewed as limiting and confining and restrictive. They interfere with career and projects. They limit the kinds of vacation that one can take. They stifle one’s potential and one’s search for fulfillment. They limit one’s options. Recent generations want life to be burden free and trouble free. We want *what* we want and we want it *when* we want it. Boomers, busters, X-ers, and whatever-ers have taken extraordinary steps to prevent having children. Over one million abortions take place each year. There is widespread use of sterilization and birth control. The fertility rates in this country have gone from 7 per woman of marital age in 1800, to 4.5 in 1900, to 3.7 still in 1957, to 1.8 today. In Western Europe, the rate is 1.3 in both Germany and Denmark. Demographics speak of a de-populating of Western Europe as birth rates have remained below replacement levels for many years now.

Then once the children arrive there is increasing use of surrogate parents, daycare centers, and the electronic babysitters – televisions, I-Pads, computer screens, smart phones. The average man, according to one study in a Midwestern town, spends 37 seconds a day alone with his young child. We have birth control to prevent conception, abortion to deal with and eliminate the conceived, day care to handle the arrived, and electronics to occupy the inconvenient.

What is true of parenting in general seems to have become true of motherhood in particular. Of all the propaganda of the feminist movement, perhaps its denigration of motherhood is the worse and the most destructive of all. The fertility rate of 3.7 of the mothers in the 50’s was truly heroic. Family life was never so secure and stable, never as strong as it was in that decade. In the 1960’s a great shift occurred in the thinking of our country. By the end of that decade, about the worst thing one could say about a woman was that she was “just a mother.” A full-time homemaker was viewed as being insignificant and inconsequential in comparison with the glamor of a career. Those who chose the traditional role were subject to ridicule and scorn. Between 1979 and 1997, 73% of the new jobs in this country went to women. According to the Census Bureau, 55% of new mothers return to the work force *within one year* of giving birth.¹ Five-million children, under the age of 10 years old, come home to an empty house.

Now why is this happening? Well, there are a variety of reasons. Partially, it is an economic necessity. When such is truly the case, one would want to speak with great care and sympathy and understanding because there are difficult choices which are faced today, which many struggle to make. They find themselves, of necessity, forced into the work force, contrary to their desires and what they would most want to be true.

¹ *Wall Street Journal*, January 8, 1998.

There is irony in this: ours is the richest country in the world, the richest country in the history of the world, yet our people seem to be saying that they cannot afford to have children. While one wouldn't want to press any particular case, one would have to conclude that the real reason for it is not so much financial (though it is in individual cases), but instead ideological. A shift in ideas and values has taken place. Childbearing and rearing have been devalued relative to career and leisure. Listen to this letter to the editor published just last month:

A few decades back, I gave up my career because I knew I wanted to be home to raise my children, and I didn't care what anyone thought. When I'd go to parties and be asked, "What do you do?" and would respond, "I'm home with the children," people would immediately start looking over my shoulder for someone more interesting to talk with. So as an experiment I started saying "I'm a child advocate specializing in the early childhood years," and the response would be "How fascinating—tell me more!"

It would be nice for everyone to stop judging everyone else, but as a social advocate now specializing in the human adult years, I know that's probably never going to happen.²

Society has placed a lesser value upon childrearing in comparison with other vocations. This has had a destructive effect upon the family in our generation. Ideas have their consequences. We in the Christian community must begin to elevate again the status of motherhood within our society. We may identify three reasons why this is so crucial to the future of our nation and church.

Children are a gift

First, we should honor motherhood because children are a gift of God. There are important inter-related ideas in the Bible. We are made in the image of God (Gen 1:28). The life of image-bearers is sacred in ways that plant and animal life is not. Human life is to be protected by the civil government (Gen 9:6). Murder is prohibited by the 6th of the 10 Commandments. In addition, because life is sacred the act by which life is conceived is sacred and restricted by the 7th of the 10 commandments to the permanent bond between a man and a woman known as marriage. Once conceived that living human fetus is sacred and pregnancy is protected by the *lex talionis* (Ex 21:22-25).

Once children arrive how are they regarded? They are a gift of God to be cherished.

Behold, children are a gift of the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward. (Ps 127:3, NASB)

They are a "gift" or "heritage" (ESV). So much is this the case that the biblical outlook, one might say, is the more the merrier. The psalmist continues,

² *Wall Street Journal*, April 30, 2014, A14.

Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! (Ps 127:4-5a)

A “full quiver” is celebrated. Large families are idealized. Children are not to be avoided but sought. Children are not to be limited but welcomed. In the providence of God some couples are not able to conceive and we grieve with them. We grieve, instinctively and rightly, because children *are* a gift. *Fertility* is a gift, one not to be presumed upon. Camille Paglia, a feminist with impeccable credentials, recently complained in *Time Magazine* (no less),

Fertility is the missing chapter in sex education. Sobering facts about women’s declining fertility after their 20s are being withheld from ambitious young women, who are propelled along a career track devised for men.³

Women have what has been called a “biological clock.” Fertility is concentrated in the younger years. Paglia continues,

Too often, sex education defines pregnancy as a pathology, for which the cure is abortion. Adolescent girls must think deeply about their ultimate aims and desires. If they want both children and a career, they should decide whether to have children early or late. There are pros, cons and trade-offs for each choice.⁴

Delay having children and one may not be able to have them. This would be a tragedy because children are a gift, one to be valued over career and material advancement.

God-ordained calling

Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control. (1 Tim 2:15)

Second, we should honor motherhood because *theirs is a God-ordained calling*. There is no greater “job” that anybody on earth can do than to conceive, bear, nurture, train, and rear another human being. It may be a great thing to contribute to the producing of an item that rolls off an assembly line. It may be wonderful to prepare a legal brief. It may be thrilling to be a part of the glamor and excitement of an office. Yet nothing that anybody does on this earth compares with the conceiving, bearing, nurturing, and raising of another human being. In our passage the Apostle Paul is dealing with gnostic heresies which depreciated marriage. Certain groups were forbidding marriage in the name of spiritual advancement (1 Ti 4:3). They saw marriage as an encumbrance to spiritual development. They were advocating that women adopt a more androgynous role, and more to the point, a masculine role, giving up family and children, devoting themselves as celibates to spiritual ends. Similarly, there were men who, in the name of spiritual devotion, were abandoning work and were idle (2 Thes 3:6-12). The apostle Paul corrects these errors, branding the former as heresy. He encourages them, instead, to concentrate upon Christian graces in verses 9 and 10, and in verses 11-14 forbids that they enter the teaching

³ Camille Paglia, “Put the Sex Back in Sex Ed,” *Time Magazine*, Vol. 183, No. II, March 24, 2014.

⁴ Ibid.

office of the church, and in verse 15 encourages them in a maternal direction. Their primary calling is to continue in the path of motherhood. It is in that calling that they will please God and bless their own souls. In their maternal calling they will find growth and fulfillment.

The Apostle even says they shall be “saved through childbearing.” There aren’t many words in all the Bible more important than the word “saved.” That the Apostle Paul should even associate salvation with the bearing and nurturing of a child is to give it ultimate dignity, value, and importance. Motherhood will not inhibit spiritual growth. Motherhood will not interfere with care for the soul. Quite the opposite. It is as though he were saying there isn’t anything greater anyone can do than to bring into the world another human being. Of course, he is not advocating a new way of salvation – by childbearing. Yet he is underscoring the critical importance of this calling in the life of the people of God. He is also assuring women that their salvation will be fully realized, not by abandoning, but by fulfilling their maternal role.

To those who identify childrearing with menial labor, we might ask, is there any vocation that is more *engaging* of the whole person? In an era of specialization, this is one vocation in which all of the skills and abilities and talents that a person has, are engaged. A mother must be a nurse and a teacher and a counselor and a discipler and a discipliner and a chef and a cleaner and a seamstress and an interior decorator and an entertainer and an economist. All of her intellectual, physical, moral, aesthetic, and creative strengths are engaged, as well our mothers know, as they collapse in their beds at the end of the day, exhausted.

We would also ask of the Christian community, is there any better *school of Christ* in all the world than that of bearing and nurturing a child? Where better to learn to love? To care? To serve? To bear burdens? Where better to learn patience and humility and forbearance? Where better to learn to be kind and tenderhearted and forgiving? Where better to learn to comfort and encourage? Where better to learn to submit to another person’s needs? Where is a person more driven to prayer than in the raising of another human being?

Then we might ask, is there any vocation that is more *fulfilling*? Why was there an Augustine? Because there was his mother, Monica, who prayed for him all of his life. One can’t understand Charles and John Wesley unless you understand their mother, Susanna. Why did Robert Moffet accompany David Livingstone on his missionary journeys in Africa? Moffet said his mother came to him one day and said, “Robert, you are going out into a wicked world, begin every day with God and close every day with God.” Then she kissed him. Moffet said that kiss made him a missionary. Abraham Lincoln said, “All that I am and ever hope to be I owe to my angel mother.”

Years ago Carolyn Lewis, Associate Professor of Journalism at Boston University, wrote an article for the *New York Times*, December 5, 1977, called “A Different Sort of Liberation.” She said the following:

In our eagerness to exact equal treatment, we women seem to be forgetting who we are. We are not men. Men cannot bear children and for a woman the birth of a child is a transforming experience. Of course it is great to write speeches for a Senator or design public policy for an education department or work as an administrative

assistant for a high powered executive. But all of that can pale dramatically before the tender wonder of a new born living creature. Here is a tiny, talcomed ball of potential, the whole luminous future of the universe waiting to be loved and shaped. There is nothing either inconsequential or demeaning about choosing to make this child one's life work. The world outside the home is not the only real world. The rewards worth having are not necessarily the rewards of salary and status. There are the psychic returns of giving and receiving love and molding a child's spirit.

Peter Lynch, former Fidelity Magellan manager, said, "Nobody on his death bed ever said, 'I wish I'd spent more time at the office.'" The *Wall Street Journal* called this "the quote heard around the world." Where are our priorities? What do we value?

The time has come for the Christian church to reaffirm the superiority of domestic values over those which are merely financial or economic or material or sensual. Let us again see the bearing, nurturing, rearing, and training of a child as a God-exalted, holy calling, even in this day and age in which we live; one for which we are in desperate need; one for which the children of our era cry out; and one in which it is hoped that many of our women will sense a call to fulfill once again.

Strategic importance

Third, *we honor motherhood for its strategic importance to the kingdom of God*. I believe that there is a window of opportunity that is open for the kingdom of God, for Christians. The liberal upper class intelligentsia is not reproducing itself. Much of the world seems afraid to bring another human being into existence. Many others are simply too busy trying to "realize their potential." The pagan and lower and middle classes are following in their footsteps as Charles Murray's recent studies have shown.⁵ Years ago a study of the Radcliffe class of '63 found that of four hundred parents only 224 children had been born. This trend has not been reversed. America's elite is a dying race, a dying breed.

This is an opportunity for the kingdom of God because Jesus promised that "the meek will inherit the earth" (Mt 5:5). As Christians begin to have children and commit themselves to having large families and filling the earth with godly children, we will indeed "inherit the earth." As Christians begin to bear children and raise them in the "nurture and admonition of the Lord," children who will love God, serve Christ, respect authority, esteem education, work hard, and whose character is shaped by honesty, industry, service, and other biblical principles, they will rise to the top in a world that is dedicated to self (Eph 6:4). They will rise to positions of leadership within the government and within the media and within the educational institutions and within the church. The key to all this is the willingness of couples of parenting age to have children and to say "no" to the better house and car and the finery of life, and instead to invest in children. The world today does not see the value of children. Again, the Scripture says the "fruit of the womb is his reward" (Ps 127:3). Blessed is the one whose "quiver" is full of them (Ps 127:5). Children are a gift. A strategic opportunity faces us as a Christian church. If we would be willing to bear children and sacrifice to meet the demands that are necessary to bring godly

⁵ Charles Murray, *Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960-2010* (2012; New York: Random House, Inc., 2013).

children into this world, to raise them in the fear and admonition of the Lord, there is a tremendous opportunity for us to see our children and our children's children "inherit the earth." Christians ought to be having quivers full of children. We ought to have children and see if God won't bless us and use them to turn around our church and nation. Again, let us affirm the superiority of domestic values.

Sacrificial love

Finally, we honor motherhood *because of the sacrifices motherhood requires*. This is a *godly* calling. Perhaps in no other calling do we see represented so clearly the characteristics of our Lord. Jesus Christ emptied Himself and took the form of a bond-servant (Phil 2:5ff). We know that there are bad mothers, but it is of interest that even the typical criminals in prison will curse their fathers, yet they will maintain that their mothers were good women. Yes, she had her faults, they will say, but she was a good woman. It seems that every time the broadcasters put a camera in front of young athletes, the first thing they say is "Hi, Mom!" or "I love you, Mom." Most recently the basketball star, Kevin Durant, upon receiving the National Basketball Association's Most Valuable Player award concluded by saying to his mother (who was there in the crowd), "You made us believe. Kept us off the street. Put clothes on our backs, food on the table. When you didn't eat, you made sure we ate. You sacrificed for us. You're the real MVP." These testimonies recur because by and large most of us have received unconditional love from our mothers. Their love is like the love of Christ (which is given apart from what we deserve and what we merited). This is why our mothers hold a unique place in our own hearts.

Even in this day and age of domestically-involved fathers it is mainly our mothers who changed our diapers. It was our mothers, more often than not, who got up early or late and held us and comforted us and fed us. For the most part it was our mothers who cared for us when we were sick, who stayed up and put the damp cloth on our heads, who worried. It was our mothers, mainly, who taught us to walk and to talk and to use our knives and forks, to tie our shoes and blow our noses. It was our mothers who put up with our mischief and with our questions. I was a why child. It was my mother who was tormented day and night by the ceaseless questions: Why this? Why that? It was our mothers who put up with the headache and heartaches of our teenage years, when we went through the insufferable "weird stage" in middle school that every middle school student goes through. By and large it is our mothers who endured us. It was our mothers whose hearts were broken when we went through the "rebellious stage" as teenagers, when we were ashamed to be seen with them in public. It was our mothers who worried. My father worried a little when I was out late. Yet he went on to sleep and mother stayed up. It was my mother who heard every siren and worried about my health and the way I dressed and whether or not I ate enough. My father took some care, but the little detailed things, my mother worried about.

The Bible says we are to regard others as more important than ourselves (Phil 2:4). This is what Jesus did. That is what our mothers did. They regarded us as more important than themselves. So they loved, gave, sacrificed, put others first, and put themselves always last. They would take care of everyone else. Take care of the kids, take care of dad, and mom was always last. That is why we honor them this morning. Who has been more loving and more giving and more sacrificing in all the world than our mothers?

Bathsheba came into the presence of Solomon as he was seated upon his throne. The king arose to meet her, “and he bowed before her” (1 Kings 2:19). Let us bow with Solomon before our mothers in thankfulness to them and in thankfulness to God. It is no small thing that they accomplished in bringing us along from the womb to the place where we are today. Indeed, there is no greater accomplishment, no greater calling and no greater service that any human being can perform than that which is performed by the woman who has said no to herself in order to say yes to her children.

Our Father in heaven, we recognize that You are the One who created the family and the roles within the family. You gave us the mothers that we had and have. We thank You for the blessings we have received through them. We pray for the family life in this congregation and family life throughout the world. We pray that You would strengthen it and cause the households to be strong and stable and secure, and blessed with the love that only a mother can give, and only a mother will give. We offer this prayer in thanksgiving for Your manifold blessings to us. In Jesus’ name. Amen.