



DOES MOTHERING MATTER?

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(Luke 1:26, 27)

Does mothering matter? Sometimes mothers wonder. Even when they know that God values their commitment to mothering their children, negative feelings can pierce their confidence and accuse them of insignificance. Some mothers comment, for example:

"I feel that what I do as a mother isn't very important."

"I feel like I never finish anything!"

"I feel so exhausted all the time!"

"I feel so out of control!"

Society says that what people do equals their value. Therefore, a woman's worth is thought to be determined by the value of her work, the amount she accomplishes, and the size of her paycheck. If a mother's work is constantly unfinished or coming undone, is exhausting or without monetary reward, she may question her worth.

WHAT THEY SAY ABOUT MOTHERING

Mothers face the challenge of investing their time and energy in the lives of their children. The culture, however, confronts them with two messages:

First, *they say*, "Mothering is not a job." A few years ago, California officially informed one mother who wanted to run for Congress that motherhood didn't count as a job. Because mothers don't receive pay for their work, mothering is not recognized as an occupation. Instead, it is viewed as no more than a biological status. If a woman mothers, and only mothers, society says she is not working. And even if she mothers while being a lawyer, hanging wallpaper, or running a service from her home, the mothering part of her day isn't valued as work. The culture says that mothering is insignificant, so it undervalues the task (the "job") of mothering. It can be difficult for women to value their major invest-

ment in life—mothering—when their culture judges that investment as having no value.

Second, *they say*, "Mothering is not a skill." Mothering skills, where time and energy are invested in the lives of those who can't do for themselves, are undervalued. All around are blatant messages that mothering is no more than an expensive hobby. Little praise or encouragement is given to those who invest their lives in the lives of their children, perhaps trading personal fulfillment and a paycheck for the well-being of future adults.

WHAT GOD SAYS ABOUT MOTHERING

Mothers need to understand the value of their mothering from God's perspective. When mothers see themselves as God sees them—as His beloved children—they are free to drop their burdens of worry or guilt about the time they spend mothering. They can focus on being the best moms they can be.

Mothering is highly esteemed in God's Word. Children are declared to be precious gifts from God (Ps. 127:3). Throughout the Book of Proverbs, exhortation is given to the "son" to listen to his father's and mother's instruction and guidance: "My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother; for they will be a graceful ornament on your head, and chains about your neck" (Prov. 1:8, 9). Proverbs 31, the chapter describing the "virtuous woman," pictures a moth-

er who diligently cares for her household: She "works with her hands . . . rises while it is yet night, and provides food for her household. . . . She watches over the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness" (Prov. 31:13, 15, 27). She has a great reward for her toil, for "her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her" (Prov. 31:28).

THE DIFFERENCE THAT MOTHERING MAKES

With God's truth in place, the value of mothering can be redefined. Mothering cannot be defined by a paycheck or a promotion, but in the peace of mind that comes from being there for children. Mothering makes a difference in several areas.

Mothers make a critical difference in a child's early physical development. Recent scientific studies show that a child's environment from birth to age three influences his or her brain structure and ability to learn. A 1994 Carnegie Corporation report says that brain development before age one is more rapid, extensive, vulnerable to environmental influences, and longer lasting than previously realized. The study further states that a child's environment affects the number of brain cells, the connections among them, and the way the connections are "wired."

Mothers also make a critical difference in a child's emotional development. A mother's nurturing love builds the foundation of her child's ability to love others, to learn, and to adjust to his or her environment. Child development experts say that a secure attachment to one's mother forms the foundation for a child's entire self-structure and identity. Together they work to create an individual who can look in a mirror and squeal with delight, "That's me!"

In addition, mothering makes a differ-

ence in the life of the mother. As women adjust to becoming mothers, they often don't understand the difference their efforts make in their own lives. When a child is born, a mother is born, and she thoughtfully invests herself in her children during their formative years. She reaps the benefits in the joy of living with secure and independent children.

Mothering ultimately makes a difference in the world. The organization called "Mothers of Preschoolers" (MOPS International) has the motto that mothering matters, because "today makes a difference tomorrow." Mothering matters not only to the child and to the mother, but also to the world in which they live.

FURTHER MEDITATION:

Other passages to study about the issue of motherhood include:

- > Genesis 17:15-19, 21:1-7
- > Exodus 2:1-10
- > 1 Samuel 1:1-28; 2:18-21
- > Proverbs 31
- > Luke 1

To Learn More: Turn to the key passage note on motherhood at 2 Timothy 1:5 on page 1605. See also the personality profile of Mary on page 1315.

CIRCUMCISION OF JESUS

²¹And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child,^a His name was called JESUS, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.

JESUS PRESENTED IN THE TEMPLE

²²Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord ²³(as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the LORD"),^a ²⁴and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, "A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."^a

SIMEON SEES GOD'S SALVATION

²⁵And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of

Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.

²⁶And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. ²⁷So he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, ²⁸he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said:

²⁹ "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace,

According to Your word;

³⁰ For my eyes have seen Your salvation

³¹ Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples,

³² A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles,

And the glory of Your people Israel."

2:21 ^aNU-Text reads for His circumcision.

2:23 ^aExodus 13:2, 12, 15 **2:24** ^aLeviticus 12:8

PERSONALITY PROFILE



Motherhood

MARY: A MOTHER'S LOVE

(LUKE 2:5)

When God became a man, He didn't arrive on earth full-grown; He came, instead, as a baby born to a woman specially chosen to be His mother. Mary was a young woman of Nazareth, recently engaged to a carpenter named Joseph. She anticipated a fairly normal life—until the angel Gabriel visited her with astounding news that would turn her world upside down. A miracle would occur in her womb and allow a Baby to grow there. That Baby would be the promised Messiah. Mary was the young virgin Isaiah the prophet had foretold (Is. 7:14).

Mary accepted the angel's words: "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38), but her motherhood was already off to a rocky start—telling her fiancé would be the first difficult step. But through it all, Mary obeyed God, even traveling to Bethlehem on a donkey when she was almost ready to deliver, realizing that the Scriptures were being fulfilled in Caesar's demand for a census.

In many ways, Mary was probably a typical mother. She protected, nurtured, raised, and worried about her Son. She took Him to school and continued to guide Him until He left home for His ministry at age 30. Jesus was not a typical child, however. He had been born as a human to die as a human for all humanity. And Mary, His mother, stood at the foot of His cross and watched her precious Son die as her Savior.

Being a mother means more than just bearing or adopting a child. Being a mother takes courage, responsibility, loyalty, love, hard work, patience, consistency, and finally a willingness to let go. Tenderness and strength come together in a unique package called a "mother."

Mothers are vital to the upbringing of the next generation. Mothering is a call of God upon a woman's life, and she should see it as an awesome privilege.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about motherhood on pages 1312, 1313. See also the key passage note at 2 Timothy 1:5 on page 1605.

which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁴That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.

¹⁵This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me, among whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes. ¹⁶The Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain; ¹⁷but when he arrived in Rome, he sought me out very zealously and found me. ¹⁸The Lord grant to him that he may find mercy from the Lord in that Day—and you know very well how many ways he ministered to me^a at Ephesus.

things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

³You therefore must endure^a hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. ⁴No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of *this* life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier. ⁵And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. ⁶The hardworking farmer must be first to partake of the crops. ⁷Consider what I say, and may^a the Lord give you understanding in all things.

⁸Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of

BE STRONG IN GRACE

2 You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. ²And the

1:18 ^aTo me is from the Vulgate and a few Greek manuscripts. **2:3** ^aNU-Text reads *You must share*. **2:7** ^aNU-Text reads *the Lord will give you*.

KEY PASSAGE



Motherhood

MORE THAN FULL TIME

(1:5)

When God had told the first couple, Adam and Eve, to “fill the earth” (Gen. 1:28), He had created woman with the capacity to carry and give birth to

another living being. Nowhere else in the animal kingdom are mothers so vital to their children for such a long time. No other animals have the same emotional ties that humans carry throughout their lifetimes. Nowhere else are mothers and grandmothers so honored.

Being a mother is a high calling and must be entered into with thought and preparation. Young women should wait until they are married to take on this huge responsibility. Women who have experienced divorce or widowhood need special support as they continue to mother alone. Most important, every mother needs a personal relationship with her heavenly Father to guide her in her most important occupation—being a mom.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about motherhood on pages 1312, 1313. See also the personality profile of Mary the mother of Jesus on page 1315.

SOUL NOTE



Worry Replacers (1:7) Those who worry are not trusting God. Worry can be a natural first reaction to an uncertain situation, but to persist in worry reveals a lack of trust that God is in charge. Besides, God has not given believers “a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.” Power helps us have strength of character and confidence in any situation. Love helps us graciously deal with difficult people. A sound mind helps us remain self-controlled and self-disciplined no matter what happens. We can set aside our worry and replace it with these gifts from God.

Topic: Worry

HANNAH'S PRAYER

2 And Hannah prayed and said:

"My heart rejoices in the LORD;
My horn^a is exalted in the LORD.
I smile at my enemies,
Because I rejoice in Your salvation.

"No one is holy like the LORD,
For *there is* none besides You,
Nor *is there* any rock like our God.

3 "Talk no more so very proudly;
Let no arrogance come from your mouth,
For the LORD *is* the God of knowledge;
And by Him actions are weighed.

"The bows of the mighty men *are* broken,
And those who stumbled are girded with
strength.

5 *Those who were* full have hired
themselves out for bread,
And the hungry have ceased to *hunger*.
Even the barren has borne seven,
And she who has many children has
become feeble.

6 "The LORD kills and makes alive;
He brings down to the grave and brings
up.

7 The LORD makes poor and makes rich;
He brings low and lifts up.
He raises the poor from the dust
And lifts the beggar from the ash heap,
To set *them* among princes
And make them inherit the throne of
glory.

2:1 ^aThat is, strength

SOUL NOTE



On Loan (1:27, 28) Children are gifts from God. In ancient Israelite culture, not having children was seen as a great tragedy. Samuel's birth was a blessing to Hannah. To thank God for answering her prayer, Hannah kept her promise and dedicated Samuel to serve the Lord at the tabernacle. Her words to Eli the high priest serve as a model for all parents. Even as parents care for and raise their children, they must remember that each child ultimately belongs to God. Parents give their children back to the Lord when they entrust their children to God and His guidance. **Topic: Motherhood**

KEY PASSAGE



Parenting

A MOST IMPORTANT JOB

(1:27, 28)

Parenting is demanding and rewarding. Many people prepare and study for years to enter a chosen profession, but parenting is usually on-the-job training.

Moreover, it is a job with no retirement plan.

The family unit, created by God, is the basic foundation of every society. God calls children "a reward" (Ps. 127:3). He commands parents to raise their children with loving discipline (Prov. 10:1, 5; 13:1; 15:20), bringing them up "in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). The goal of parenting is to eventually let the children go. Like Hannah, parents begin that letting-go process right away as they understand that their children are God's gifts. They are lent to us for a time, and we give them back to God as we allow them to follow His guidance in their lives.

Turn to the article about parenting on pages 826, 827. See also the personality profile of Abraham on page 26.

SOLOMON'S WISE JUDGMENT

¹⁶Now two women *who were* harlots came to the king, and stood before him. ¹⁷And one woman said, "O my lord, this woman and I dwell in the same house; and I gave birth while she *was* in the house. ¹⁸Then it happened, the third day after I had given birth, that this woman also gave birth. And we *were* together; no one *was* with us in the house, except the two of us in the house. ¹⁹And this woman's son died in the night, because she lay on him. ²⁰So she arose in the middle of the night and took my son from my side, while your maidservant slept, and laid him in her bosom, and laid her dead child in my bosom. ²¹And when I rose in the morning to nurse my son, there he was, dead. But when I had examined him in the morning, indeed, he was not my son whom I had borne."

²²Then the other woman said, "No! But the living one *is* my son, and the dead one *is* your son."

And the first woman said, "No! But the dead one *is* your son, and the living one *is* my son."

Thus they spoke before the king.

²³And the king said, "The one says, 'This *is* my son, who lives, and your son *is* the dead

one'; and the other says, 'No! But your son *is* the dead one, and my son *is* the living one.'

²⁴Then the king said, "Bring me a sword." So they brought a sword before the king. ²⁵And the king said, "Divide the living child in two, and give half to one, and half to the other."

²⁶Then the woman whose son *was* living spoke to the king, for she yearned with compassion for her son; and she said, "O my lord, give her the living child, and by no means kill him!"

But the other said, "Let him be neither mine nor yours, *but* divide *him*."

²⁷So the king answered and said, "Give the first woman the living child, and by no means kill him; she *is* his mother."

²⁸And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had rendered; and they feared the king, for they saw that the wisdom of God *was* in him to administer justice.

SOLOMON'S ADMINISTRATION

4 So King Solomon was king over all Israel. ²And these *were* his officials: Azariah the son of Zadok, the priest; ³Elihoreph and Ahijah, the sons of Shisha, scribes; Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud, the recorder; ⁴Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, over the army; Zadok and

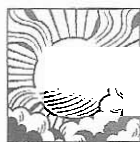
SOUL NOTE



Just Ask (3:5-14) Solomon could have asked for anything, but he knew what he needed most: "an understanding heart to . . . discern between good and evil."

Solomon's position as king would require him to make decisions that would affect all of God's people. He wanted to rule those people well. God says that anyone can ask for wisdom: "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5). Regardless of position in life, every believer should seek God's wisdom. **Topic: Wisdom**

SOUL NOTE



Mother's Love (3:16-27) This story illustrates Solomon's wisdom. Two women had borne children; one child had died and both women claimed the living child. Solomon's proposed solution was to divide the child in half with a sword.

Immediately the real mother cried out, telling the king to give the living child to the other woman rather than kill him. Solomon knew that the woman who responded was the real mother, for she was willing to give up her child to someone else to save his life. Such is the depth of a mother's love—giving of herself for the best of her child.

Topic: Motherhood