

Encouragement for Mothers

It's Mother's Day, so happy MD to all moms.

In previous years when I've done a MD message, I've often focused on the challenges facing mothers. Our culture today is increasingly hostile toward the biblical, traditional model of motherhood. In fact, culture today tells us that there is no correct model of motherhood. A mother can be and do virtually anything. A man can pretend to be a mother these days. From the culture's perspective, motherhood is a real mess; nobody knows what it is. Our culture does not respect women who choose to be mothers and homemakers. And that's a great tragedy.

Because Christians operate from a biblical perspective, we recognize the value of motherhood. We ought to exalt and uplift mothers. In contrast to our ungodly culture that pressures women to avoid motherhood, Christians ought to uphold, support, and promote mothers and motherhood.

Illus.: Perhaps you heard the recent news that the US birthrate declined by 4% in 2020, creating the 2nd lowest birthrate on record since the 18th century. 25 states had more deaths than births last year. One doctor said, "The birthrate is the lowest it's ever been."¹ That tells us something about how our culture feels about motherhood.

The Bible teaches us to avoid following the ungodly pattern of this world (Rom 12:2). Our society is increasingly hostile to biblical ideas about the home and family. As Christians, we must retain and strengthen our commitment to biblical ideals and expectations, no matter what the world is saying. We must intentionally reject the world's point of view when it contradicts what the Bible clearly teaches. And that is especially important as we consider the roles of men and women in the family.

CS Lewis once said, "Homemaking is surely ... the most important work in the world." I would agree with that viewpoint. We should all have great respect and appreciation for our mothers and for all women who raise children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. On Mother's Day especially, and on every day, we should honor mothers and promote motherhood.

I want this message to be encouraging to mothers. I want mothers to be strengthened to persevere in their work of motherhood. I want young women to see the value of marriage and motherhood. We should all be committed to following biblical principles of motherhood.

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/05/us/us-birthrate-falls-covid.html>

So let's consider several biblical truths that should encourage mothers in their role and their duties as a mother.

I. Motherhood is part of the created order.

- A. Motherhood is "baked" into creation. From the very beginning of life on earth, we find mothers. Mothers are necessary for humanity to survive.

Gen 3:20 Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living.

- B. Other than Adam and Eve, everyone who has ever lived has had a mother. Billions of women have served as mothers. A large percentage of people over the course of human history have been mothers. None of us would be here if not for our mothers.
- C. What that tells us is that motherhood has worked for thousands of years, and it can still work today. It's natural.
- D. Our current historical moment is not all that different from other places and times. Other mothers have endured the difficulties of their times, and modern mothers can endure as well.
- E. In fact, if you know your history, you realize that in many ways, mothers have it far easier today than mothers did in previous generations. In some ways, mothers today have greater resources, conveniences, and privileges than previous generations of mothers had.

Illus.: I was just reading about the case of a family many years ago who had 7 children, but only two of them lived past infancy. Generations ago, that was fairly common. Modern technology and medicine have made it quite uncommon for mothers to lose 5 out of 7 children. Mothers should be thankful for modern health services.

Trans: Motherhood is part of the created order. Women have been serving as mothers from the very beginning of creation. For most of human history, motherhood has been far more difficult than it is today. Although modern motherhood has its own set of challenges, women today can be successful mothers just like previous generations of mothers were.

II. Motherhood is a biblical role.

- A. We know what the biblical role of mother is; we don't have to make it up or figure out how to do it. The Bible tells us the role and responsibilities of the mother.

- B. Society today is very confused regarding motherhood. People today no longer believe in norms or standards. The influence of Christianity, the church, and the Bible in our culture has greatly diminished in nearly every area of life. Without God's Word for guidance, people resort to personal opinions. Without God, all we have is human speculation.
- C. The result is that many people are confused as to what is expected of mothers. What is their role and responsibilities? Modern society has no answer to that question. Really, they have rejected the biblical answer to that question and substituted human speculation.
- D. But we need have no confusion about this issue. We can be quite certain about the roles and responsibilities of the mother in the household. We have an unchanging authority that tells us and shows us what it means to be a mother. Christians have the infallible, authoritative Word of God to provide guidance and standards for motherhood. Christians willingly submit themselves to the Scripture in all areas of life, especially when it gives us direction for family life.
- E. What are some of the biblical roles/responsibilities for mothers? Let's consider just a few passages that teach general guidelines for mothers.
1. From Prov 31—describing the “virtuous woman” or the “excellent wife.”

We know this woman is an ideal that few if any can fully live up to. But we see some responsibilities here that mothers should aspire to. Note several of them that pertain specifically to being a mother:

- a) .14 she brings food into the home; food is a big part of family life, and the mother often takes care of food.
.15 she rises early and prepares food for her family—provision and preparation of the meals is a part of her responsibility.
- b) .21 she provides quality clothing for her household; in vs. 19, she is making the clothing
- c) .26 she speaks wisely and with kindness, two qualities all mothers need
- d) .27 she looks to the ways of her household; i.e., she supervises and manages her household.

The virtuous woman has a lot going on, but these responsibilities center on the home and the family. She's truly a home-maker.

Prov 14:1 *The wise woman **builds her house**,...*

2. 1 Tim 5:14 *I will therefore that the younger women **marry**, bear children, **guide the house** (οἰκοδεσποτέω), give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully.*

Marrying and bearing children is a good and godly goal to pursue. In my estimation, this is a higher goal than career and financial achievement.

We should realize that it's been only in the last 80 years or so that women have been striving to enter the workforce. For roughly 6000 years of human history, women primarily served as homemakers. It's only since the feminist revolution of the 1960s and 70s that society has pushed women to exchange motherhood for a job/career. And many women who achieve success in a career still want marriage and motherhood. So choosing to get married and have children is a very good choice, even if that means that you have to give up working in the marketplace.

1 Tim 5:14 "Guide the house" (οἰκοδεσποτέω) is one word in the original language, and it means "rule the house." Part of the root here is "despot," one who rules with great authority. That doesn't take away the husband's authority; it simply shows that the mother has her own sphere of authority. And the mother's sphere of authority where she rules is "the house."

Quote: [Ruling the house] goes beyond raising the children to include all aspects of managing the household. The man provides the resources through his labor, and the woman manages them for the care of her husband and children.²

This responsibility is significant and meaningful. In my thinking, homemaking is a very good choice. Being a wife and mother is a high calling.

² John F. MacArthur Jr., *1 Timothy*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 213.

3. Titus 2:4–5 *teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, **to love their children**, To be discreet, chaste, **keepers at home**, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed..*

A couple of principles from this text:

- a) Mothers must love their children.
- (1) It would seem to go without saying that mothers would love their children. There is hardly a stronger emotional bond than that between a child and its mother.
 - (2) Unfortunately, many women today are “without natural affection” (Rom 1:31; 2 Tim 3:3). They don’t love their children. Women today often think of children as an inconvenience to avoid, a parasite, blob of tissue to be removed. For many women today, children stand in the way of personal achievement and pleasure, so they must be avoided or discarded or postponed. It’s a reversal of natural affection. That’s common in our culture.
 - (3) Motherly love should be the most natural of affections. I hope that your home is filled with motherly love. I trust that all mothers express warm affection for their children—lots of hugs and kisses, lots of tender times together. Children need large doses of love and affection from both mother and father.
- b) Mothers must be “homemakers” (KJV “keepers at home” οἰκουρούς)—the original word means “one who guards the house.” Some MSS have a slightly different word (οικουργους) meaning “workers at home.” Clearly, managing the household should be a high priority for mothers.

By the way, that's a good reason for women to seek education. To manage the home is a significant responsibility. "I don't need further education because all I want to be is a wife and mother" – that's not a good attitude to have. Being a wife and mother is difficult, and you would be wise to prepare for that task. A mother could use classes in business, education, economics, and management.

If you are going to do home schooling, it would be wise to get some training in education. I'm glad I married a woman who has a master's degree in teaching/education. That has been very beneficial to our girls.

Remember that the "virtuous woman/wife" from Prov 31 is involved in a home business. Taking business or accounting classes would be beneficial even if you never work outside the home.

So even if your ultimate goal is to get married and have a bunch of kids, you still need to be well educated and prepared to do that job.

Trans: Motherhood is a biblical role, and Christian mothers should do their best to fulfill their biblical responsibilities—primarily, to love their kids and manage the household. We need not be confused regarding the role and responsibilities of mothers.

III. Motherhood is one side of a partnership.

- A. One of the great catastrophes of modern western culture is that single motherhood is now so common. Today, nearly half of all children are born to women who are not married. In some minority communities, over $\frac{3}{4}$ of the children are born to unmarried women. And that typically means that there is no father in the household. And that, in turn, leads to the kinds of social decay and family breakdown that we see all around us.
- B. We know the proper pattern for families. One man and one woman become lifelong partners in marriage, and from that union children are produced. That's the proper biblical arrangement. Mothers are married to fathers. Children result from a committed, covenantal partnership of a husband and a wife. You should not be a mother if you are not already a wife. "First comes love, then comes marriage..."

- C. The husband and the wife cooperate in raising the children. The husband has certain tasks and the mother has certain tasks in the child-raising process.
- D. We know that God has given headship over the home to the husband/father. He is responsible to raise up his children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. He is responsible to be the spiritual leader in his household. But obviously both mother and father work toward the same goals for their children. The mother is often the one who reads the Bible stories to the children and prays with them at meals and at bedtime. It's often mothers who lead their children to a saving knowledge of Christ. What a great privilege!
- E. In many cases, the mother has the primary responsibility in child care. Husbands often spend the majority of their days working to provide a home, food, clothing, and security for their families. Since the husband is providing those necessities, the wife/mother can focus her efforts on raising their children and managing the house. So it's a cooperative, team effort. And it's a great blessing to have a partnership that works well together.
- F. For those young ladies who are contemplating marriage and motherhood, make sure you find a good partner/teammate. Your success and happiness—or lack thereof—will depend on your choice of partner. Make sure you find a partner who will be a good father for your children and a good leader for your household.
- G. And of course the Bible requires that Christians marry Christians. Don't be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. I would advise Christian girls not to date unbelievers. The most important characteristic in a potential mate is his/her spiritual condition and commitments. Be careful in your selection of a mate. After salvation, it's the most important decision you'll ever make, and it will affect you for the rest of your life.

App: Let me put in another plug for Christian college. If you are from a small town and a small church, where are you going to find a suitable mate? It can be difficult when the number of potential mates is so few. One of the best places to find a godly, Christian mate is at a Christian college. If you want to increase the potential for finding a good partner, consider attending a good Christian college.

Trans: Motherhood is far easier and more enjoyable when you have a partner to support and care for you. Don't enter into motherhood before marrying a suitable partner.

IV. Motherhood is an influential responsibility.

Someone famously said, "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world."

Napoleon Bonaparte: "The future destiny of a child is the work of a mother."³

President Reagan: To our mothers, we owe our highest esteem... A mother's love, nurturing, and beliefs are among the strongest influences molding the development and character of our youngsters. ... "What a mother sings [at] the cradle goes all the way down to the coffin."⁴

Mothers have a huge influence on their children. The Bible gives several examples of influential mothers. In 2 Timothy, we find the example of Eunice and her son Timothy.

2 Timothy 3:14-15 *But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

A. Mothers influence their children toward Scripture.

1. Timothy heard the Scripture from a very young age—"from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures." Since his father was most likely not a believer, Timothy learned from his mother and grandmother.

App: Mothers often take the lead in the religious education of their kids. This is in some respects natural and fine, but the father should take the lead in this area of the home life.

2. In order to teach something to others, you have to know it yourself. Eunice knew the Scriptures well enough to teach Timothy. Eunice apparently learned from her mother Lois—another example of an influential mother.

App: Mothers should strive to influence their children to know and appreciate the Scriptures.

³Tan, P. L. (1996, c1979). *Encyclopedia of 7700 illustrations*

⁴Federer, W. J. (2001). *Great Quotations*

B. Mothers influence their children toward salvation.

1. Eunice, Timothy's mother, was likely the one who influenced Timothy to trust in Christ. This is the greatest influence that a mother can have—to lead her child to a saving knowledge of Christ.

Unfortunately, many parents don't actively pursue the salvation of their kids. They think the church will take care of that. Maybe your child will be saved through the ministry of the church, but it would be better if the child accepted Christ at home, at foot of his mother or father.

The primary influence in a child's life is his/her parents. A godly mother like Eunice can have a tremendous influence on whether or not her children become Christians.

2. Godly mothers pursue the salvation of their children. How?
 - a) Pray for it.
 - b) Prepare the soil – reading Bible stories, go to church, provide a good example.
 - c) Pursue it. Be perceptive of when the child is ready.

Mothers obviously have a huge influence over their children.

Thomas A. Edison said this: “I did not have my mother long, but she cast over me an influence which has lasted all my life. The good effects of her early training I can never lose. ... Her firmness, her sweetness, her goodness, were potent powers to keep me in the right path. My mother was the making of me. The memory of her will always be a blessing to me.”⁵

I trust that every mother would want her children to feel the same way.

Being a wife and mother is a tremendously challenging task; it always has been. But with the breakdown of society that we see happening all around us, it's even more difficult. However, the biblical principles we considered today should uplift and encourage mothers and those who will become mothers at some point in the future.

⁵Tan

Motherhood is a natural part of the creation order. Women have been mothers for as long as women have lived. Every mother is in a long line of mothers who came before her. Being a mother is an absolutely natural role. If your mom did it, so can you.

Motherhood is a biblical role. The Bible tells mothers how to do their job, and if they follow the biblical principles, they'll succeed. Like in every other area of life, faithfulness to God equals success—no matter what the outcome.

Motherhood is one side of a partnership. Motherhood works best when the mother is married to a godly, supportive, productive partner. If a woman wants to enjoy motherhood, the partner she chooses is critical.

Motherhood is an influential responsibility. "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world." Mothers should use their influence to raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

On Mother's Day especially, we should honor those mothers who are striving to love their children and raise them for the glory of God.