

This Week at the Creek

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Here's the text from the pastor's Sunday message:

Faith of Our Mothers

Philippians 1:3-11

May 11, 2008

All Mr. Dale wanted was to pay for some batteries, but none of the clerks in the electronics store seemed interested in helping him. "I've got an idea," his wife, Tasia, said. She pulled a tape measure out of her purse, stepped over to one of the giant plasma-screen TVs, and started to measure it. Faster than you can say "high definition," a young man came running over. "May I help you?" he asked breathlessly. "Yes," she said. "I'd like to buy these batteries." Sometimes a mother's experience and know-how works absolute wonders!

The opening words of the apostle Paul's letter remind us that the church at Philippi was in many ways like a good mother to the him. It was supportive when he was downcast – like a good mother. It was helpful when he was needy – like a good mother. It was encouraging when he was browbeaten – like a good mother. It was loving when he felt unloved – like a good mother. This church was caring, humble, and joyful; it focused on service, sacrifice, and giving. So is it any wonder that Paul would say to them, "Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God"?

Paul wrote that the Philippians were partners with him in spreading the good news. And how had they done so? By passing off to him their constant verbal encouragement, by contributing practical help in numerous ways, and by offering their financial support when he was imprisoned. So the basis of his prayerful thanksgiving isn't only the church's reception of the Gospel but also their active support of his ministry. Indeed, the apostle was confident not only of what God had done for them in forgiving their sins, but also of what He had done and was doing within them. Neither Paul's imprisonment nor their persecution could change the love they had for each other. They had become family – like a mother and her child.

These Philippians were willing to be used by God for whatever He wanted them to do, which also reminds me of a mother's love — or at least what a mother's love ought to be. And maybe all of us should test ourselves by asking: *When others think about me, what comes to their minds? Am I remembered with joy by them? Do my acts of kindness lift up others?* In fact, let's look at some ways, mothers especially, that we can go about earning the love-indebtedness of our children — and of all of society for that matter. Let's try to answer the question: What does God really expect of you?

First, don't just teach godliness; live it. And if you're going to do this, realize right off the bat that you'll be attempting to be godly at a time when godliness isn't necessarily fashionable. In fact, for starters you'll need to determine whether you're a mostly godly woman or a mostly fashionable woman? When Robert Ingersoll, the notorious skeptic, was in his heyday, two college students went to hear him lecture. As they walked down the street after the lecture, one said to the other, "Well, I guess he knocked the props out from under Christianity, didn't he?" The other said, "No, I don't think so. Ingersoll didn't explain my mother's life, and until he can explain my mother's life, I'll stand by my mother's God." What Abraham Lincoln said is true: "No man is poor who has had a godly mother."

The fact of the matter is that as Christians, God began a good work within us, and He continues it throughout our lifetime and will finish it when we meet Him face to face. God's work for us began when Jesus died on the cross in our place; it began when we first believed. Now the Holy Spirit lives in us, enabling us to be more and more like Christ every day. It is a process! We're growing and maturing every day and will be until we pass into the next life or when Jesus returns.

Second, don't sacrifice your children; sacrifice for them. Mothers, by the way you choose to live your life, you will do one of two things: You'll either sacrifice your children or you'll sacrifice for your children. In ancient days, children were sacrificed in fires to appease angry gods. Today, children are sacrificed to abortion to appease a woman's lifestyle. But your children are also being sacrificed in other ways. Many sacrifice their children by adopting worldly philosophies and ideas. Others sacrifice their children for the sake of a job or a wardrobe or an affair or social status. A good mother sacrifices time, effort, and finances for her children by guiding them and listening to them and teaching them in the ways of the Lord.

Now the apostle knew that the Philippian church wasn't perfect and that it was still growing. So he prayed that the believers there would have the ability to differentiate between right and wrong, good and bad, vital and trivial. Moms and dads, I hope you're praying for the same values for your children, no matter what their age. And all of us ought to pray for moral discernment so we can not only maintain but also strengthen our morals and values and character.

Third, don't resist God's design for your life; work with it. God made you who you are, so celebrate it! Be a woman. Be a helpmate and servant and partner to your husband. Be a mother to your children. Realize that this is a role that only you can fulfill in your home, and then seek to fulfill it with all of your body, mind, heart, and soul. A growing problem we have in our culture is women who want to be men and men who want to be women. And I simply can't understand why any of us doesn't want to live out the life God has given us! If God makes you a man, then be a man and enjoy it! If God makes you a woman, then be a woman and enjoy it! And don't say Paul or any other Bible writer diminishes your role. Paul thanked Phoebe who served with him as a deaconess in Corinth. He recognized Priscilla who laid the groundwork for his ministry in Ephesus. Women were prominent in the early church. Some were single, some were wives, some were mothers – all of them were commended for performing valuable service for the Lord.

And I realize that sometimes it feels as though we aren't making any progress in our spiritual life. But when you feel that way, be reminded that when God starts a project, He completes it! Like He did for the Philippians, God will help us grow in grace until He has completed His work in our lives. When you're discouraged, remember that God won't give up on you. He promises to finish the work He has begun. When you feel incomplete or unfinished or distressed by your shortcomings, remember God's promise and provision. Don't let your present condition rob you of the joy of knowing Christ or keep you from growing closer to Him.

Fourth, don't dwell on external vanity; focus instead on internal goodness. When I look out over the congregation, I'm grateful for so many well-clothed women and men! But never let your outward appearance take the place of your inner goodness. Do those things that reflect a Christ-centered heart, that reflect goodness and godliness. Be better groomed on the inside than on the outside. Don't spend so much of your time on your hair that you neglect prayer and Bible-reading. Don't be outwardly beautiful but inwardly useless. Don't allow your beauty to be skin deep – and fleeting. See to your inner person – to your spiritual growth.

You all know that a good way to judge character in people is by observing how they treat those who can do them absolutely no good. So if you want to see character, watch a loving mother with her newborn. The newborn can do the mother absolutely no good. The newborn can't even remember the care and concern offered him by his mother. The mother knows this, and yet still showers the baby with warmth. Why? Because love is the foundation of character! Former UCLA basketball coach John Wooden advised his players: "Be more concerned with your character than your reputation, because your character is what you really are, while your reputation is merely what others think you are."

Fifth, don't waste time on the urgent; use time for the important – training your children. Half of everything an individual learns, he learns in the first four

years of his life. Four out of five Christians accept the Lord between the ages of five and ten. Both statistics point to the vitality of the role of the mother.

Just as the Philippian church was like a mother to Paul, so Paul was like a mother toward that church. Moms, have your children ever been away from you for so long that you ached to have them home again? The apostle had such a longing to see the Philippians. They had shared lessons and advice, instruction and kindness, love and affection, and memories – which is exactly how the Christian family ought to operate. All believers are part of God's family and share in the transforming power of His love. Do you feel a deep love for other Christians? Let the love of Jesus **motivate** you to love other believers and to **express** that love in your actions toward them. In a lot of ways, we serve as mothers to each other. We're family!

Mothers, are you a living example of godliness in your home? Are you earning the love-indebtedness of your children? As for the rest of us, are we honoring our mothers for the right traits – for leading and guiding us in the ways of the Lord and for teaching and showing us how to focus on internal goodness?

Dr. G. Campbell Morgan had four sons, all of whom were preachers. Someone once came into the drawing room when all the family was there. They thought they would see what Howard, one of the sons, was made of so they asked him this question: "Who is the greatest preacher in your family?" Howard had a great admiration for his father and he looked straight across at him. And then without a moment's hesitation he answered, "Mother." Now that is a debt of love!

Let us pray: Thank You, Lord, for our mothers, for their compassion, concern, care, and character. Thank You for the instruction and example they have given us. Help us to honor them in the way that we believe and talk and act and live. And most of all, may each of our lives be pleasing and acceptable to You as we strive to follow the leading of Your Holy Spirit. In Your Son's name, we pray.

Sources

Bits and Pieces (Economics Press)

Tasia Dale in *Reader's Digest*

Life Application Study Bible: New Living Translation (Tyndale)

The NIV Study Bible (Zondervan)

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