

GET OFF MOTHER'S BACK!
MAY 11, 1986

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I rise to the defense of mother! Our society has placed and is still placing a heavy load on mother's back, a tremendous load of responsibility. Do you recall the saying, "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world?" What a heavy responsibility to lay on mother! My plea this morning is that we get off mother's back. Let's be a little more realistic in our expectations of motherhood. It's not easy to be a mother, especially in our society. Let's get off her case and on her bandwagon!

Have you played the game, "Let's Blame Mother?" It goes something like this: "Doctor, I have this complex that is preventing me from living my life to the fullest and it all started with my mother." Or, "I'm uptight and anxious because my mother was too strict." Or, "I'm an irresponsible mess because my mother was too permissive." Mothers have enough stress without being blamed for the problems of their children.

As if it is not enough to blame mother for her children's problems, we tend to blame her for the problems of the world as well. Ruth Spangenberg called my attention to Philip Wylie who, in 1942, wrote a book called Generation of Vipers in which he coined the phrase, "Momism" and proceeded to blame Mom for the problems of society. He wrote, "Mom is the American Pope...In the hierarchy of miscellaneous articles she is next to the Bible and the Flag, trying to get on top of both. Mom is a jerk!"

He was about 27 years old at the time he wrote the diatribe against Mom, and 30 years later he wrote a sequel called, Sons and Daughters of MOM, in which he was still angry, but this time angry at the youth who were rebelling against those over 30, which included him! In that sequel, he mellowed and qualified his previous attack. He wrote, "Actual 'moms,' the conspicuous seducers and destroyers, gooey or Hitlerian, amounted and may still amount only to about one American mother in ten."

Let's get off mother's back! Our society has unrealistic expectations of mother. We expect mothers to produce wonderful children, as if mothers have the sole determinative affect on their children. We blame mother if her kid turns out badly, and we praise mother if the kid turns out well. Mothers, especially employed mothers, are easy targets on which to blame juvenile delinquency, crime and lapses in morality, and many mothers accept this blame! Don't you do it! Too many mothers feel as if they are judged by how their kids look, act and behave! Too many mothers feel that their sense of worth is determined by how the neighbors judge their kids!

As a result, we have mothers who try too hard! We have too many mothers who are guilt-ridden, burdened and zealously trying to be good, perfect mothers. A "good mother" is one who is so conscious of what others are going to think about her darling that she overprotects, indulges and does for the child what the child can easily do for him/herself. I remember sitting in a park a few years ago when a "good mother" came with her pre-school age son. The boy was dressed in play clothes, but they were immaculate. His hair was neatly combed. His face and hands were clean. Mother proceeded to give her little boy a good time. She helped him into the swing, gently pushed him, and then helped him out. She guided him up the ladder of the slide and guided him down so he wouldn't go too fast and end up on the ground. When they left, the boy was still dressed immaculately, with his hair neatly combed, and his face clean. When they left, the boy was not smiling, but the "good" mother was

exhausted! I suppose she told her husband about her hard day at the park. I predict that the little boy will either someday explode in a revolution that will shake that house, or he will surrender and become a passive follower, a devotee of mother. He will be a "good boy" and mother will be judged a "good mother."

I am also reminded of one mother who failed miserably to live up to her standards. She couldn't understand her son. She had little control over him. He talked back to her. He preferred his friends to his family. He did not enter the family business, but went on the road and lived off the land and contributions. He did not heed his mother's advice. And, his outcome? His name was Jesus.

Mary had quite a time trying to be Jesus' mother. When he was twelve, he remained in Jerusalem, while the rest of the family returned home. At the end of the first day, his family realized he was not with the caravan. Notice that Mary did not expect Jesus to report in every hour! Three days later they found him in the temple talking to the teachers, apparently oblivious to the trouble he had caused. When Mary let him have it, Jesus replied, "Didn't you realize I would be in the temple?" Did Jesus expect Mary to be a mind reader, which is another expectation we often lay on mother?

When Jesus began to travel, teach and heal, Mary became quite upset. Can't you see her at the neighbor's house drinking coffee and moaning, "I just don't understand him. I don't know what to do." Jesus did not quite turn out according to Mary's expectations. Do you suppose Mary blamed herself and considered herself a poor mother?

Mothers (and fathers), you are not responsible for the kind of adult your child becomes! You are not the only influence upon a child. Children are influenced by heredity, environment, friends, culture system, teachers, the church, and the Holy Spirit. Children have minds, desires, and ambitions of their own. Children make their own choices. Mother cannot make choices for her children. Oh, some mothers are very domineering and try to make choices for their children. But, if the child lets mother make his/her choices, that is still the child's choice!

In other words, each person is responsible for his/her own life. You are responsible for your choices. Get off mother's back! The success of your life, or the lack of success of your life, is your doing. The relationship you have with God, or the lack of it, is your choice. Each person stands before God. Each person is judged for his/her actions. You can't send in your mother. Mothers are not stand-ins at the judgment! Your salvation is a free gift from God through Jesus Christ. Your salvation is not in your mother's name, or through your mother, although she may have had a great deal of influence. You relate to God directly. You live your life. You are responsible for your life.

As I reflect on my childhood, I am thankful to my parents for sharing responsibility with me. In no way did my mother ever try to live my life. She neither dominated or manipulated. She did not try to live her life through me, but was secure in her own sense of worth. She lives her life to the best of her ability and she lives her life responsibly and morally with high ethical standards. She and my father allowed me the privilege and the

opportunity to make my own choices, to assume responsibility for my school work, my activities, my commitments, and my fun.

Life was not easy for my parents. Because of the Depression and the lack of jobs, my father gave up his vocational choice. He graduated from the University of Minnesota with a degree in business, but he had to go back to the farm when I came along. They even had to move in with my grandparents. It was not easy. When I look at the photos in the family album, I am surprised to see how haggard my mother looked. In fact, she looks younger today than she did in those photos. But, she endured, she accepted her life, kept her values and dignity, took the task of motherhood gladly. She fought a good fight and conquered.

I don't know about you, but I have discovered that life is not easy for most, if not all, people. Scratch beneath the surface of most everyone here this morning, and you will find some turmoil, struggles, pain, worries, questions. Life is not easy, but take responsibility for your life. Don't blame your life on anyone else. Don't try to escape from your life by taking drugs or alcohol. Don't throw your life away by making irresponsible choices. Surrender your life to Christ and let the Holy Spirit work within you. Sing, "Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on." Accept your life, endure, fight and conquer. Easter gives you the assurance of victory, for God raised Jesus from the dead and God can empower you.

Mothers (and fathers), the best gift you can give your children is to set the example. Be a responsible parent by being the best person you can be. Assume responsibility for your own life. Live your own life to the best of your ability. Let the Holy Spirit in the power of the resurrected Lord rule in your life. Let your faith in God be a shining example. This applies to grandparents also. A grandmother in our church recently told me that her 21-year grandson, who is having difficulty getting his life together, said to her, "Grandma, you are a religious person. Would you tell me about it." For two hours she shared her faith journey. Mothers, (fathers and grandparents), Be responsible to the children, not for the children. You are not responsible for their outcome, but you are responsible to be the person and the parent God calls you to be.

What I'm trying to say this morning is "Relax, Mom." You don't have to be perfect. You don't even have to be a "good mother." You are not judged by your children. Relax, enjoy your life, enjoy your children (they can be great fun), and enjoy being what God calls you to be. An excellent description of what God's intention for mothers comes to us from my favorite modern prophet, Erma Bombeck, called, "God's Spec for Mothers."

When the Good Lord was creating Mothers he was into his sixth day of overtime when the angel appeared and said, "You're doing a lot of fiddling around on this one."

And the Lord said, "Have you read the spec on this order? Have 180 movable parts...all replaceable. Run on black coffee and leftovers. Have a lap that disappears when she stands up. A kiss that can cure anything from a broken leg to a disappointed love affair. And six pairs of hands."

The angel slowly shook her head and said, "Six pairs of hands..no way."

"It's not the hands that are causing me problems" said the Lord, "It's the three pairs of eyes that Mothers have to have."

"That's on the standard model?" asked the angel.

The Lord nodded. "One pair that sees through closed doors when she asks, 'What are you kids doing in there?' when she already knows. Another here in the back of her head that sees what she shouldn't but what she has to know, and of course the ones here in front so that she can look at a child when he goofs and say, 'I understand and I love you' without so much as uttering a word."

"Lord," said the angel gently, "Go to bed...tomorrow."

"I can't," said the Lord, "I'm so close to creating something so close to myself. Already I have one who heals herself when she is sick...can feed a family of six on one pound of hamburger...and can get a 9-year-old to stand under a shower."

The angel circled the model of a Mother very slowly, "It's too soft," she sighed.

"But tough!" said the Lord excitedly. "You cannot imagine what this Mother can do or endure."

"Can it think?"

"Not only think, but it can reason and compromise," said the Creator.

Finally, the angel bent over and ran her finger across the cheek. "There's a leak," she pronounced. "I told you you were trying to put too much into this model."

"It's not a leak," said the Lord. "It's a tear...a tear for joy, sadness, disappointment, pain, loneliness and pride."

Today is Mother's Day. Let's get off mother's back and get on her bandwagon!

PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

by Glenn S. Fuller

Our Dear Parent In Heaven,

Who has called each of us into relationship.

Bless your Church, which is the family of God, that we might be bonded together as spiritual brothers and sisters, parents and children: That we might encourage and nurture one another: That we might both warmly accept and wisely discipline one another in love.

Bless the home and family. Grant strength and wisdom, empathy and responsibility, and deep, deep love on the part of parents. Also grant to children responsibility and inward guidance, loyalty and growing maturity, and also deep caring love. Grant to husband and wife listening ears, communicating lips, supportive hands, nurturing hearts, and God-guided spirits. Grant, Dear Father, also those extra gifts of your Holy Spirit to the Christian family: Security, wisdom, love, humor, and oh, yes, grant a special gift of spontaneous and contagious joy. Teach us who live in families a daily forgiveness that we might be open to your gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Bless those who live alone, either through choice, or death, or human frailty. May they come to know the deep assurance and strength of Christ, rich and satisfying friendships, a fulfilling expression of their talents, and a supportive and inclusive church family.

To Beth Kennedy, John Drummond, Charles Scurlock, Alan and Edna Walker, Robert Youngberg bring relief from pain, blessing of family and friends, and a healing touch from the Master. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray together saying,

"Our Father who art in heaven,
Hallowed by thy name.
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done,
 On Earth as it is in Heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
And forgive us our debts,
 As we forgive our debtors:
And lead us not into temptation,
 But deliver us from evil,
For thine is the kingdom, and the power,
 And the glory,
Forever and ever."
Amen.

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LUKE 2:41-52

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