

A Godly Mother

Proverbs 31: 10-31

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Years ago I took my wife, the mother of our rambunctious three year old daughter, out for dinner on Mother's Day. The restaurant was crowded and knowing the owner I asked, "Why such a crowd. There's usually not so many customers?" He replied, "Didn't you know that Mother's Day is the busiest day of the year for restaurants all across America. Everybody wants to take their mother out for dinner on Mother's Day." He was right. Mother's Day, along with cards and candy, is a celebration honored throughout America. But why? How did this celebration of motherhood begin?

Its origin can be traced all the way back to 1907 at the Andrews Methodist Episcopal Church in Grafton, West Virginia. It was organized by Anna Jarvis. Her own mother had been a champion in the community organizing "Mother's Day Work Clubs," where women learned about hygiene and sanitation, including such things as boiling drinking water. Infant and childhood mortality were rampant in that part of West Virginia. Anna's mother had done everything she could to combat this ongoing medical crisis, including delivering medicine and health supplies to families in need. Now, several years after her mother's death, Anna wanted to do something to celebrate the work done by all mothers who improve the lives of others. Of course, she was also thinking of her own mother. That's why Mother's Day has the apostrophe before and not after the "s." Or as Anna stated in her motto for this holiday, "**For the Best Mother Who ever Lived—Your Mother.**"

Celebrated on the second Sunday in May, the closest Sunday to the date of her mother's death, this new holiday gained popularity very quickly. It was adopted by West Virginia as a holiday in 1910 and proclaimed as a national holiday to honor mothers by President Woodrow Wilson in 1914. Not only in America, but in at least 40 countries worldwide. Mother's Day is an opportunity for all of us to honor our mothers. It's also an opportunity to remember and even celebrate what the Bible has to say about mothers, especially that marvelous passage of Scripture in the book of Proverbs that was read a few moments ago. Referred to in many translations as an ode to a wife of noble character, it is really a poetic expression declaring the virtues of a **godly mother**.

So let's take a few moments this morning to discover what the writer of these last verses in the book of Proverbs had to say about mothers, especially those character traits which make her such an admirable woman. Here's the first one. **A godly mother is a skillful homemaker.** The writer of Proverbs declares in verses 13-15, "She selects wool and flax and works

with eager hands. She is like the merchant ships, bringing her food from afar. She gets up while it is still dark and provides food for her family." Then in verse 27 he adds, "She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness." Reflecting upon these verses, especially verse 13, I am reminded of my own mother darning the heels of my father's work socks so that he could get some additional wear out of them. Dad went to work each day and sometimes took on extra work on the weekends. Mom was in charge of the household and she was a skillful homemaker. I imagine you have some similar memories.

Here's a second character trait described in this passage of Scripture.

A godly mother is industrious. She knows how to work hard and how to make a profit. Listen again to verses 16-18, "She considers a field and buys it; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard. She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks. She sees that her trading is profitable, and her lamp does not go out at night." Having gotten to know our church family while serving as our interim pastor, I am aware that many of the mothers in this congregation had profitable careers outside of the home. They managed businesses and worked for corporations right here in Bedford. They did not eat the bread of idleness.

That brings us to the third character trait. **A godly mother is generous.** She cares for the needs of her children and the community. In verses 20-21 the writer of Proverbs states, "She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy. When it snows, she has no fear for her household; for all of them are clothed in scarlet." Have you ever visited one of the charitable organizations in Bedford, like Bedford Christian Ministries, the Pregnancy Center, or the Christmas Station? You will be greeted by a number of mothers who have raised their own children and are now helping to raise some children who are not their own.

Moving on lets identify a fourth character trait. **A godly mother is clothed in strength and dignity.** In fact, these are the very words of the first part of verse 16. They are a reflection of an earlier statement which declares that her husband is respected among the leaders of the community because of the outstanding character strengths of his wife. Here is where this sermon becomes a little more personal in nature. My wife Sherry, the mother of our two children, has always carried herself in such a way that I rejoice to have her at my side. She is the kind of person who instills the kind of hope and grace and inner strength and poise that we so desperately need in our world today.

A godly mother is also a purveyor of wisdom. Verse 26 says, "She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue." Susanna Wesley was just such a woman. The wife of an English clergyman she was the mother of nineteen children. Not only did she successfully rear that huge brood of children, but she was their teacher as well. She instructed them in all of their studies including Greek and Latin and sent several of them off to university when they became young men. Additionally she

conducted a Sunday afternoon Bible study in her home that attracted hundreds of parishioners. One of her children, a little boy named John, came running into her arms after almost being consumed in a fire that destroyed their home. She took him in her arms and said, "You're my little brand plucked from the burning." He grew up to become John Wesley, the great eighteenth century evangelist of England and the founder of the Methodist movement and later denomination.

A sixth character trait has to do with the respect bestowed by those who know a mother better than anyone else, her family. **A godly mother is revered by her husband and children.**

The writer of Proverbs declares in verse 28, "Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her." Why, because a godly mother instills a sense of profound respect within the lives of her children. In one of the churches where I have served there was a godly mother who attended every Sunday. Unfortunately she had a son who rarely if ever came to church. One Mother's Day I looked out over the congregation and there was the mother and son sitting beside one another. After the service I spoke to them. The son said, "Pastor I don't go to church very often and I regret that. But I couldn't let Mother's Day go by without coming and letting her know how much I love and respect her."

Then there's that seventh character trait of a godly mother, the last one and the most important one. **A godly mother loves the Lord.** There have been many godly mothers down through the ages, but this morning I want to mention one who steps out of the pages of the Bible. Her name was Hannah. Unable to conceive, she was the object of ridicule because she had not given birth to any children. So one year during the annual religious festivities at Shiloh, she went into the temple and poured out her heart unto the Lord. She was praying so earnestly that at first, the High Priest Eli thought she was inebriated. But she told him, "I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief." Instead of scolding her he blessed her saying, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of Him." What she had asked for God gave to her, a son named Samuel. Three years after his birth, she brought her son to Shiloh and presented him to the elderly Eli saying, "I prayed for this child, and the LORD granted me what I asked of Him. So now I give him to the LORD" (1 Samuel 1:1-28). Hannah fulfilled her promise to the Lord, the promise that she had made when he was born, that the child would be dedicated to God. That little boy, Samuel, grew up to be the last and greatest of all of Israel's judges, because his mother was a godly woman who loved the Lord.

On this Mother's Day and indeed on every Mother's Day, may we pause to give thanks unto the Lord for mothers and especially for godly mothers. May God richly bless them.