

May 16, 2017



feeding...gathering...carrying...leading. (Isiah 40:11)

Dear Church Family,

One of the essential characteristics of motherhood is love that is sacrificial and costly. We have all benefited from this love of our mothers. We in fact owe our very lives to what they did for us. And for a good deal of the time that we were receiving this life-giving love, we were unaware and incapable of offering any sense of gratitude or appreciation. So, on Mother's Day, we are able to express appreciation for what our mothers did for us early in our lives. One of the things that makes motherhood particularly challenging is that mothers are doing a difficult job which often requires a lot of sacrifice, but the ones they are sacrificing for (infants and small children) are incapable of expressing gratitude or appreciation. This is why others, (especially fathers) play an important role in recognizing and appreciating the role that mothers are playing. It is important to be encouragers to mothers as they battle feeling that their sacrifice is unappreciated. When we spend time considering motherhood, it becomes pretty clear that a one day a year time set aside to appreciate these sacrifices is woefully inadequate. Mother's Day should serve as a reminder that these sacrifices need to be appreciated more throughout the year.

Yet, even having said that, the nature of motherhood will always have the element of unappreciated sacrifice. That is part of what makes it sacrificial. To look for or expect to get the appreciation that is commensurate with the sacrifice is a recipe for disappointment and bitterness. The reality is that it is not possible to esteem or express appreciation for motherhood enough to eliminate its sacrificial nature. We can lessen it, but we will never eliminate it. So, mothers need to learn how to navigate the self-sacrifice that is an unavoidable aspect of motherhood.

But this is true of all disciples of Christ, not just mothers. A mother's concern for the welfare of her child is one of the strongest human motivations toward self-sacrifice. But the ultimate act of sacrificial love was on the part of Jesus. While a woman has to give her body for the growth of a child within her, consider what Jesus says in communion, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." Our being born again is absolutely dependent on what Jesus did with His body for us. He paid the debt or the price that allows us to become children of God. And He then calls us to a love for one another that is sacrificial. From the John 15:12-13 "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

And the problem is that we do not do sacrificial well. Influenced by our culture, we are naturally inclined to pursue what we experience as fulfilling, not what is sacrificial. I wanted to use this Mother's Day, to look at how we can all do sacrificial better in our lives. And I drew upon my own experiences as a "Mr. Mom," and the years I was a single dad after the death of Sharon, Megan and Sam's mother.

It was in the season of single dad parenting that I experienced a sacrificial calling on my life. I loved my children, but the role of being a single dad to a 6 year old girl and a 4 year old boy was not fulfilling to me and it was a struggle. I was not used to having a life where there was so little of what I felt I needed. I had to learn how to live sacrificially, to live through a time when my needs were not being met. Part of that was learning to trust God for my care. I reviewed some scripture passages that spoke to me during this season of sacrifice.

Luke 9:23-24 *And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.* It felt like I was experiencing this verse in regards to my life as a single dad. When I focused on what I thought I needed for my life, it all just got worse for me. But when I accepted the sacrificial nature of my life, was willing to endure the loss of life it represented for me, I found I was able to handle it better. And I found that I did receive the grace I needed, whether it was in the form of a needed break or new strength

to endure. Part of what happened in this dynamic is that when I was focused on my needs and unfulfilled desires, my focus was on my flesh. Rom 8:6 *For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.* My focus on my own unmet needs and desires was my attempt to get more life, but I just ended up with more death. And a telltale sign of this is that I lacked the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control).

In Luke 17:7-10 Jesus addresses his disciples with a story about a servant that is a teaching against entitlement. The story emphasizes two things. One, servants should focus on doing what they are asked or expected to do rather than expecting anything from their master. In being a single dad, I struggled when I started to focus on what I needed. And this focus easily became directed at God. He was not providing what I needed. I did better when I stayed focus on the task at hand which was to care for Megan and Sam. Two, Jesus is teaching against any sense of entitlement in a disciple, any sense that through obedience one has earned some sort of reward. "*When you have done all that you were commanded, say "We are unworthy servants." We have only done what was our duty.*" Influenced by a culture that expects life to be fulfilling, I easily developed an attitude that God owed me since my life was so hard. We are far better prepared to navigate seasons of sacrifice when we are focused on all that God has sacrificed for us instead of focusing on what He should be doing for us.

1 Peter 5:6-11. This passage begins with *Humble yourselves.* There is a humility that comes from placing our needs and desires lower than someone else's. From Philippians 2:3, *in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you not only look to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.* And Christ is our example. I was drawn to this passage by verse 7 *casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.* It is important that we are able to trust that God cares for us, that He sees our lives and can be trusted to help us. When we trust in this, we do not have to worry about caring for ourselves, we do not have to be anxious about our own welfare. Instead we can endure the time of sacrificial suffering for the needs of another. Our welfare is in God's hands and He will provide us what we need.

On Mother's Day, we are called to appreciate the sacrificial love of mothers, to encourage them by recognizing and honoring them. And part of this day of recognition is realizing how challenging motherhood can be and how much of a struggle it can be for all of us to embrace a call to sacrificial love. In that recognition, we all need to consider where we are facing that kind of call in our lives and how we are handling it, not just mothers. And it may well be that God is calling you to help a mother. You may be the one who God wants to work through in order to express His care and give His provision to a struggling mother. And your obedience to that calling will not only provide a needed relief or boost to a mom, it will also encourage her that she can trust herself to God who cares for her.

Pastorally Yours,
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