

## **Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church**

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Sermon manuscript

### **A MOTHER'S DAY MESSAGE**

#### **Mom Power**

(Mostly from Proverbs)

#### **Introduction: Moms' day...**

So, good morning - and happy Mother's Day!

We always honor moms on Mother's Day here at Northwest. But most years we don't devote an entire Sunday morning to doing so.

That is what we're doing this year, though. And my hope is that this morning will be an encouragement to everyone - mothers and non-mothers alike.

I thought I would start out by giving a little bit of history about this special holiday.

The American incarnation of Mother's Day was dreamed up by a woman named Anna Jarvis.

Miss Jarvis - who was childless and never married - wanted Mother's Day set aside to honor the sacrifices mothers made for their children.

Essentially, she wanted to create a day on which mothers were honored by their families after attending church together. Simple. Sweet.

For years, she lobbied across the United States to nationalize the holiday.

Her persistence paid off when, in 1914, President Woodrow Wilson signed a declaration establishing the second Sunday in May as Mother's Day.

Of course, once Mother's Day became a national holiday, it was not long before florists, card companies, and other merchants capitalized on its popularity.

It finally became so commercialized, that Miss Jarvis denounced the whole thing and spent the last years of her life trying to remove Mother's Day from the calendar.<sup>1</sup>

Thankfully, we're past all that commercialization today.

Mother's Day is the pristine, pure celebration of mothering that Anna Jarvis had created it to be, thanks to Hallmark Cards, chocolatiers, florists, jewelers, and cellphone companies, who report more traffic on phone lines on Mother's Day than on any other day of the year.

Today, we're taking the opportunity provided by Mother's Day to celebrate the *mothering* role carried out by women who build into those who are coming after them, whether they are mothers or not.

*In searching of creativity (or not)...*

As Mother's Day began to loom close, I started to feel some pressure to get creative in the message I would bring today.

I wondered over the last several weeks if I could highlight mothering differently than I have done in the past when preaching a specific sermon on Mother's Day.

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<sup>1</sup> Jarvis eventually resorted to an open campaign against Mother's Day profiteers, speaking out against confectioners, florists and even charities. She also launched countless lawsuits against groups that had used the name "Mother's Day," eventually spending most of her personal wealth in legal fees. By the time of her death in 1948 Jarvis had disowned the holiday altogether, and even actively lobbied the government to see it removed from the American calendar.

So, I had this great idea. I would center all my remarks around the theme, “Bad Mothers of the Bible”, and I would urge all the moms, “*Don’t do this!*” or “*Don’t do that!*”

We would look at Rebekah, Isaac’s wife, who schemed to get her favorite son, Jacob, blessed ahead of his older brother, Esau.

Rebekah did a world of damage by her trickery, and mothers could learn a lot about what not to do from Rebekah.

We would look at the story of King Ahaziah of the Old Testament (1 Kings 22), one of the worst kings Israel ever had.

The Bible tells us, ***[1 Kings 22:52] He did evil in the sight of the LORD and walked in the way of his father and in the way of his mother and in the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who misled Israel into sin.***

Now there’s a verse you’ve never heard on Mother’s Day.

And I could speak about Mother Jezebel and Athaliah, the grandmother nobody wants to be.

Then, I wondered that I had never heard anybody deliver a “Bad Moms” message on Mother’s Day. I wondered if it was such a good idea...and saw the wisdom of not going there.

So, today, I have chosen a more typical, standard-style Mother’s Day message - with a twist or two - that I am praying will provide helpful guidance to everyone here who has a mother or a mother-figure in their life, and that it will be an encouragement to those who are fulfilling a mothering role.

We’ll break down our time today into two parts, first, looking at the calling of God on kids to their moms.

The Bible gives children - of all ages - one glaring command when it comes to how they should relate to their moms.

We find it first in Exodus 20, where it is listed as the 5<sup>th</sup> of the Ten Commandments. It is repeated numerous times in both the Old and the New Testaments.

The Apostle Paul mentions it in his letter to the Christians in the church at Ephesus. Here’s the WHAT that children are to do for their mothers.

### **To Those Who Have Mothers**

#### **The WHAT: Honor Your Mother**

***[Ephesians 6:1] Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. [2] HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER (which is the first commandment with a promise), [3] SO THAT IT MAY TURN OUT WELL FOR YOU, AND THAT YOU MAY LIVE LONG ON THE EARTH.***<sup>2</sup>

The Old Testament was serious about this command, as is clear from the punishments that were inflicted on those who did NOT honor their father and mother.<sup>3</sup>

And it’s a serious New Testament command, too, surfacing in several passages in the Gospels and in the letters.

Obedience to and giving honor to dads and moms was a command of the first order both in the Old and in the New Testaments.

That’s the WHAT. Now, channeling our inner two-year-old, we wonder, “*WHY?*” Why does God put such a premium on children learning to obey and to honor moms and dads?

#### **The WHY: Training for Life Under Authority**

I’m sure that there are lots of reasons, but one big reason for the command is that obeying and honoring parents is great training for responding to authorities we will meet later in life, where the stakes are much, much higher.

<sup>2</sup> See also Exodus 20:12, Deuteronomy 5:16, Matthew 15:4, 6; 19:19, Mark 7:10, 10:19, Luke 18:20.

<sup>3</sup> See Exodus 21:15, 17.

All of us who have or who have had mothers, have something in common. All our moms were flawed. No mother, no matter how great, perfectly fulfills her calling. Every mom falls short of the ideal.

*A word to a few...*

Some people have had or have moms who have done them more harm than good.

If that's you, today is a challenge. For many people of all ages - men and women - Mother's Day is a mixed bag because it's painful to think about Mom.

You hear "***honor your mother***" and you want to do that, but it's tough. Rather than being a delight, honoring your mother is a step into radical discipleship.<sup>4</sup>

If that's you, I want you to know that I have prayed for you before this morning.

I have asked God to give you comfort and peace today as you strive to honor your mother. And I've asked God to provide loving, positive mother-figures in your life.

*A word to all...*

But, again, none of us have or had perfect mothers. And God knew that your mother wasn't perfect when He put her in your life and commanded you to honor and obey her.

When I tell kids that they are to obey their mom, it isn't because I think their mom is perfect. I have known lots of moms and I know that they have almost as many faults as dads do.

But there is something about honoring and obeying your mom that will both bless her AND that will work for your own growth - especially when you honor and obey her when you disagree with her.

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<sup>4</sup> As biblical counselor Larry Crabb wrote, "*To love someone who could have given us water, but didn't, is not just good. It is Christian.*"

It will prepare you for a harder obedience later in life. For instance, to God. Here's how I think it works.

As you grow older, it may at times seem that God doesn't know what He is doing with your life. You will be tempted to question His dealings with you.

You might wonder about His love for you because you don't understand how life is ever going to come together for you.

Those who have learned to accept the discipline of a mother WHO MAKES MISTAKES, will be better equipped to obey a loving, all-wise God who doesn't make mistakes, but whose ways are not always easy to discern.

Honoring our mothers and the mother-figures in our lives is great spiritual training.

So, we've seen the WHAT - the command. And we've seen the WHY. The HOW breaks down into a couple of specifics.

### **The How: \$\$\$ and Respect**

#### *Financial support*

This may surprise you, but the first thing implied by this command to "***honor***" moms is that grown children are to be prepared to make the sacrifices necessary to financially take care of their mothers in their old age.

In Jesus' day, the religious leaders taught the Jews to give lots of money to support the temple instead of supplying the needs of their aged moms and dads.

Jesus saw this as a direct violation of the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment, and He called them out for it.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See Mark 7:10-13.

To honor elderly moms requires that when they are no longer able to provide for themselves, the adult child steps in and makes sure that his or her mom is taken care of.<sup>6</sup>

Honoring our mothers involves seeing to it that their needs are met in their golden and in their declining years.

Many of you here, now, have a mother who is in need. And if you aren't now, you may well be in the years ahead. Your instruction from Jesus is to support mothers or mothers-in-law or even mother-figures who are in need.

Of course, that support might come in a variety of ways. It could mean providing them with a place to live (even with you). It might mean putting them in a suitable living situation elsewhere.

It might mean sacrificially giving of your financial, time, or energy resources to help them.

But, honoring our mothers has a second meaning, and that meaning is especially seen in the Old Testament book of Proverbs.

*R-E-S-P-E-C-T*

***[Proverbs 15:20] A wise son makes a father glad, But a foolish man despises his mother.***<sup>7</sup>

Children of mothers and those who are being mothered by others than their mothers have a chance to honor these women by the way they honorably live.

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<sup>6</sup> In fact, that's exactly what Jesus did for His mom. The Lord was dying on the cross, as His mother and the Apostle John looked on. We read, *[John 19:26] So when Jesus saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" [27] Then He said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her into his own household.* Here is Jesus honoring His mother, taking care of her, and making certain that her needs were met after He was gone by commending her to the care of His good friend, John. Evidently, Joseph, Mary's husband, had by this time pass away.

<sup>7</sup> Solomon's Proverbs are replete with couplets that talk about the child or adult who does not honor his parents. In none of these verses is the mother omitted.

No matter your age, if you want to "***honor your mother***", live with integrity and wisdom and courage.

Know, too, that if your mother raised you to love Jesus, nothing thrills her heart more than to know that you are walking with Him.

No matter your age, talk with her about what you are learning from Jesus. Pray with and for her. To honor her greatly, press Jesus into your relationship with your mom and with your mother-figures.

So, to this point, I've spoken to the children of mothers and the beneficiaries of mother-figures. From here on, I'll speak more directly to the stars of today's show: to moms and mother-figures.

My prayer is that what I - a non-mother - am going to present in the next few minutes will be biblical - and therefore true and helpful to you women who mother those coming after you.

It is common to celebrate the softer sides of mothering on Mother's Day, highlighting traits like nurture and tenderness and empathy and compassion.

I celebrate those, affirm them, and am grateful to have seen those at work in the lives of women I know who have mothered well.

I am reminded of how central these traits are to mothering when I read the words of the Apostle Paul to the Thessalonians.

Here's what he said when he wanted to impress upon them how much he cares for them - ***[1 Thessalonians 2:7] But we proved to be gentle among you. As a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children [8] in the same way we had a fond affection for you.***<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The Bible highlights the softer side of mothering in 1 Kings 3, with the story of the two prostitutes who both had baby boys. One of the boys died, but there was a dispute over who was the mother of the living child. Wise King Solomon suggested cutting the living child in two and giving half to each mother. The woman who was willing to let the child live was clearly the real mother.

So, tenderness and nurture are huge for the mothering role. But in the time remaining for today, we'll focus on a couple of other facets of mothering.

Scripture reveals some very concrete ways in which moms and mother-figures can exert godly influence in their kids' lives. For the first thought, turn to the sixth chapter of Proverbs.

### **The Power of a Mother**

#### **Instructing and Modeling Godliness and Wisdom**

***[Proverbs 6:20] My son, comply with the commandment of your father,  
And do not ignore the teaching of your mother.***

There is no surprise here. One of the best ways to exert a powerful influence for good in a younger person's life is by words that guide and by a life that speaks louder than words.

Many of the mothers mentioned in the Bible had a profound impact on their kids' lives. Like Jochebed, the mother of Moses.

Jochebed was forced to give Moses up as a baby because of Pharaoh's edict to put to death all the Hebrew boys.

She entrusted his life to God, put him in a reed basket, and watched as he floated down the Nile River. She then watched as he was rescued by Pharaoh's daughter.

Then - miraculously! - Jochebed was tasked with being Moses' nurse. She took advantage of that "job" to tell her son about the true God so that when the time came, he could carry out God's role for him.

Or what about the story of Timothy in the New Testament, one of the Apostle Paul's most trusted fellow-workers in the Gospel.

When Paul wrote to Timothy, he reminded him of his spiritual roots and his godly heritage.

***[2 Timothy 1:5] For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelled in your grandmother Lois, and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well.***

It was the influence of a godly mother and grandmother that drew Timothy to faith in Christ, that shaped his character, and that instructed him in the ways of the Lord.

History is filled with the stories of men and women whose lives have been marked by the influence of godly mothers.

And then I think of the mothers who are a part of our church, and of the women who "mother" their nieces and nephews, kids in Sunday School, and the younger ones they greet in the halls.

These women are all following in the footsteps of Jochebed and Lois and Eunice who taught and modeled following God to their kids.

My sisters, I believe that in the years to come, there will be lots of boys and girls who turn into men and women who love and follow Jesus because of the example you are setting and the teaching you are providing today.

Please know that God wants to use you to point the next generation to Jesus.

Now, of course, the outcome of the next generation isn't, ultimately, all up to you. Each person has a choice to make as to who they trust and how they live.

Others can point the way, but kids will still make their own decisions. So, I don't want you to think that there is a guaranteed outcome if you mother well, or that you are solely responsible for an outcome. You aren't.

What is obvious, though, is that you have been gifted by God with talents, strengths, and resources, life experiences and wisdom to direct the ones coming behind you to your Savior.

And I believe that your wise words and your example and your lifestyle will have impact for God and for good on your kids.

As to the rest of what I have to say this morning, you may be like a certain mother I happen to know better than other mothers here.

In years past, when we had young kids at home, this mom dreaded the thought that I might speak on Mother's Day from Proverbs, chapter 31.

Speaking as a non-wife, I suspect that Proverbs 31's description of the godly wife might be somewhat daunting (although the wife I'm talking about had nothing to fear from Proverbs 31).

But - and, yes, I am turning to Proverbs 31 - the verses we will see here at the end have to do, not with wifing, but with mothering.

And I believe that every woman here today who is giving herself to mother someone will love what Proverbs 31 has to say.

We're listening to the words and the instructions that a certain mother gave to her son, a young king named Lemuel.

In the instructions she gave to her son, she was giving a crash course to the generations of mothers who would follow her in the fine art of mothering.

### **Casting a Vision for Impact (Proverbs 31)**

*Don't waste your limited resources (vv. 1-3)*

***[Proverbs 31:1] The words of King Lemuel, the pronouncement which his mother taught him:***

***[2] "What, my son?***

***And what, son of my womb?***

***And what, son of my vows?***

Mothers can identify with the passion of this mother. She is speaking from the depths of her soul to her son.

She repeats herself, saying **"What!"** three times. She's got to REALLY get his attention because she knows that her kid, the king, needs to listen to her. What she has to say is for his good.

She says, "What? WHAT? **WHAT?**"

Her son is a king. Well, this mom has watched kings come and go. She knows the dangers into which kings can fall, so she warns him to stay away from the way of kings who fail. What is her advice to him?

***[3] Do not give your strength to women, Or your ways to that which destroys kings.***

Her first advice is that he should learn the power of the word, "No." Learn to rein in life's appetites and to steward life's resources.

Kings are in the enviable and dangerous position of being able to have anything and everything they want. Who denies a king what he wants? Nobody.

This wise mom knew that nothing would destroy her son more quickly than if he got whatever he wanted whenever he wanted it.<sup>9</sup>

So, as this model mother urges her son to control his urges, moms today, instill in your sons and daughters, instill in those you are mothering, the lesson of restraint in the pursuit of life's appetites.

Teach them that unrestrained indulgence of their appetites - for food and drink and sleep and sex - does damage to the soul. Teach them that their resources of strength, money, energy, and time - even if they are a king! - are limited and must not be wasted.

One of the myths that the young tend to believe is that their resources are inexhaustible.

This wise mother gives them a reality check and says, "Nope. *Your resources are not inexhaustible. Don't squander them.*"

Mom, lead the way in showing self-restraint and self-discipline for your kids' sake. Don't automatically give in to their requests for what they want - even if you are able to give it.

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<sup>9</sup> The immediate reference here is to sexual pleasure ("***Do not give your strength to women***") and perhaps to the indulgence of appetites for food and drink.

Teach them the value of delayed gratification, of patient waiting, of living graciously with an appetite unfulfilled.

This is crucial. And Lemuel's mother has more to teach today's women who mother.

*Own the idea that you are a person of influence (vv. 4-5)*

***[Proverbs 31:4] "It is not for kings, Lemuel,  
It is not for kings to drink wine,  
Or for rulers to desire intoxicating drink,  
[5] Otherwise, they will drink and forget what is decreed,  
And pervert the rights of all the needy."***

She challenges her child - the king - to aspire to righteous living. Why? Because he is a person of influence and impact.

*"Lemuel, it isn't becoming for people who have something to offer their world to give themselves to strong drink. So, stay sober. Stay sharp. Always be in full control of your faculties. Don't do anything that would compromise your ability to use your influence for good and for God."*

This mother is affirming that Lemuel has something important to give to his world.

And, if he is drunk or in other ways out of control, he'll not be able to bring his much-needed gifts to the table to make a difference for those in need.

You who are mothering, you can likewise equip those in your sphere with the confidence that they have something crucial to offer.

Your child may not be royalty, but he or she is gifted to make a difference for those coming after. You, a mother, play a vital role in helping them embrace that truth.

Be a student of the child in your world.

Watch how she or he interacts with friends. Comment on their good listening skills. Affirm that. Spark a vision for becoming someone who can help others through wise counsel.

Listen as they describe how angry they get at bullies and how offended they are by injustice. Affirm that. Help them channel that heart for biblical justice in God-honoring ways.

Know your kids' giftedness and help them appreciate that giftedness as something to cherish. It is a gift from God. They are to use that giftedness to serve, as Lemuel says, ***[Proverbs 31:5] the needy.***

And THAT, more broadly, is the point of what Lemuel's mom has to say in the remainder of her exhortation to her son.

*Use your strength to serve the weak (vv. 6-9)*

Her son/king is going to be up to his eyeballs in matters of state. He's going to be having power lunches with the world's elite. He'll be privy to the inner workings of government and he has wealth to burn.

Here's her message:

***[Proverbs 31:6] "Give intoxicating drink to one who is perishing,<sup>10</sup>  
And wine to one whose life is bitter.  
[7] Let him drink and forget his poverty,  
And remember his trouble no more.  
[8] Open your mouth for the people who cannot speak,<sup>11</sup>  
For the rights of all the unfortunate.  
[9] Open your mouth, judge righteously,  
And defend the rights of the poor and needy."***

In a word, *"Don't get so caught in your own, grand story that you forget the painful stories of those around you. If you don't speak up for them, who will? Put yourself in their shoes and help when you can. You have been gifted, but not solely for your own enrichment. You have been blessed to be a blessing."*

<sup>10</sup> Reference is probably to giving an analgesic to those on Death Row, like the drink Jesus was offered, but refused.

<sup>11</sup> The dumb may be dumb from physical infirmity - or from fear, or ignorance. Here is someone who cannot speak up for himself.

Moms, by all means, equip your kids and those you are mothering to make their way in the world.

But raise the standard and cast a compelling vision for more than that. Making a good living isn't enough. Challenge them to live well, compassionately, graciously, generously.

**Conclusion:**

Today, we honor women who have mothering roles. The guidance you are giving to the up-and-coming generation into a Jesus-following life and casting vision for impact for God is crucial.

We thank God for you, and we pray for you.