

## WOW! No Charge

I want to let you in on a secret. Now listen close because some people may not want this to get out. Now you've got to promise you'll keep it a secret. Mother's Day was not invented by Hallmark or FTD.

The woman credited with founding Mothers Day is Anna Jarvis. In 1907, she persuaded her mother's church to celebrate Mother's Day on the second anniversary of her mother's death, the 2nd Sunday of May. The idea was so successful that by 1911 Mother's Day was celebrated in almost every state. Finally, on May 9, 1914, by an act of Congress, President Woodrow Wilson proclaimed the second Sunday in May as Mother's Day. He established the day as a time for "public expression of our love and reverence for the mothers of our country." And it has been so, not only here in the US - but in many other countries as well.

The Methodist Church in Grafton, WV Anna Jarvis attended is now called "the Mothers Day Church".

There are few things in life more painful than seeing someone or something that should be respected, valued and prized receive dishonor instead of receiving honor. Receive disrespect instead of receiving respect. Few things more painful than that.

When I was seventeen, my mother sat us kids down at the kitchen table one night and told us that Dad would not be coming home anymore and that he wanted a divorce. For the next year I said and did things to my mother that I am definitely not proud of. But she never held that against me, in fact, she was always there when I needed her. But even so, I carried a lot of guilt and shame over what I had done to her.

Somehow Mom was able to put two of my sisters thru college; she helped bring up a grandson so one of my sisters could pursue a music career. All of this she did on a bookkeeper's salary; she could squeeze 26 cents out of a quarter. Mom was always there when any of us needed her; and she never asked for anything in return.

Later in her life she had health problems, lots of them. She'd get sick but somehow would recover. She was a battleship that just could not be sunk. We just came to expect she would get better. And she usually did.

One day I got this feeling that I should go see her. Just had this compelling feeling. I know now that it was the Holy Spirit and he was saying "You're Mom's heavenly Father is getting ready to call her home, do what you have to while you've got time." So Joan and I went back to New York to see my mother. I needed to get rid of the shame and guilt I had felt for such a long time. When we got there, I made some private time with Mom so I could talk to her. I told her I was sorry for all the hurt and pain I had caused her and asked for her forgiveness.

I learned a lot that day about being a forgiver and being forgiven. I learned a lot about her wisdom that us kids had just taken for granted.

That was the last time I got to hug my mother and tell her I loved her.

I also learned that to take something or someone, which ought to be cherished and esteemed, and to dishonor it, is just brutal. You just don't bring dishonor on that which ought to be treated with reverence and awe. You just don't do it.

We're talking today about something that is so important, that is so valuable, that the Bible itself says you dare not dishonor it. In fact the Bible puts it positively; the Bible says honor your mother. Fathers are thrown in there to, it's one of the Ten Commandments, but for today we're focusing on moms. The Bible says that motherhood is worthy of honor. Far greater honor than it generally receives in our day. Because the truth is, motherhood is not too high on the status totem pole as things stack up in our society. You don't get your face on magazine covers for being a great mom. You don't get asked to sit on corporate boards, you don't draw huge bonuses, you just hold the fate of the world in your hands.

Too many times women are made to feel they should apologize for being mothers and homemakers. A Baptist minister, Tony Campola, wrote about this some time ago. He said "I love the way my wife expresses it. I love it at a party when someone comes up to her like some lawyer and says in a real condescending voice, "And what do you do my dear?" A kind of disguised putdown of homemakers by those who think that the only significant work in society is done by somebody in some professional vocation. And Campola says this is what his wife says, "I'm socializing two homo sapiens into the dominant values of the Judeo-Christian tradition so they can become agents of the transformation of the social order into the kind of eschatological utopia God has intended from the beginning of creation. And what do you do?"

"Ah - I'm a lawyer"; they usually say something like that.

Honor you're mother the Bible says.

Now I want to talk today about some ways we can honor our mom's and the mom's around us. A couple of ways all of us can carry out this commandment, to Honor our mom's and motherhood in general.

Just before I get into that, I just want to say a couple of words about what the Bible does not say. Just too kind of clarify things. The Bible does not say honor your mother if, honor your mother if she was a well adjusted skilled nurturer, honor your mother if she deserved it, honor your mother to the degree she honors merit, honor her if her boundaries were intact and yet flexible. It doesn't say that. It just says honor.

Now this may be harder for some of us than for others. For some it will take work on how to do this because there is a relationship there that has some mixed feelings or emotions to it or maybe lots of pain.

Now the Bible doesn't say enjoy your mom, it's nice if that happens, but you can have a hard time enjoying your parents, you're still called to honor them. It doesn't say live for your parent's approval, it doesn't say consider everything your mom tells you to do. It just says honor her.

How do you do that? Well, here are a couple of ways.

First, when you dishonor someone; you ignore them. Pretend like they don't exist. To honor someone begins by paying attention to them. Honoring begins by just noticing what they do. Honoring involves knowing, paying attention. To start with, even if your mom was a very imperfect person, you can honor her simply by acknowledging the sheer effort that's involved in being a mom. Because the truth is: whoever was your mother did not have an easy job. Motherhood, I don't mean that individually, I'm just saying that collectively here. Motherhood involves pain, right from the beginning. All of you who are mothers know well that labor is not the last time in motherhood where you face effort and pain.

The truth is, from the day a mom gives birth to a child until the day one of them dies, a mom is faced with decisions. You're mom was faced with a million decisions that she did not know how to handle, any more than you do. She didn't know because there is no school that you go to to get licensed on this kind of thing. When do you comfort, when do you challenge, when do you be tender, when do you be stern, when do you draw boundaries, when do you give permission, when to let you date, who to let you date. She was not perfect, you're mom, and neither was her mother before her. And part of honoring your mother is simply noticing the difficulty of the task she faced and acknowledging the effort she made.

See; when you're a little kid and you look at your parents, because they seem larger than life, kids think that parents just choose the way they are. When you're a kid, you kind of think if you're parents are cranky or strict or cold, it's just because they want to be that way. And the day comes one day when you realize that your moms just an ordinary, fallen, fallible human being. And part of honoring your parents' means giving to them the grace to be human. They had their own parents, they had their own set of fears and hurts and limits.

Part of honoring them means taking the time and the trouble to know them. Just paying attention. It means things like taking an interest in the history of her life, finding out what the details of it were, and honoring those details. Honoring her story. Respecting the fact that you don't know everything there is to know about your mom. There is some mystery there. And revealing yourself, knowing and being known. That's the first part of honoring your mom. Too know when to be known by her.

Then there's the second part.

To dishonor something, or somebody, is to tear down, to belittle, and to devalue. So to honor someone, or something, is to build it up, to magnify, and to create value in something. The word that's used in the Bible to honor has to do with something being weighty or substantial. So to honor someone not only means to know when to be known, to honor means to reflect on and come to appreciate a sense of that person's value. It means to give them a place of honor. We talk about the seat of honor. Too give your mom a place of honor in your life. Too allow her words to have certain weightiness in your life.

The sense of what the Bible talks about when it speaks of honor, I'll give you kind of a picture of it. It's what happens when you look at something and you're struck by the value and the wonder of it and you just go **WOW!** Like when the Vikings start at the 1-inch line, march down the field, actually score a touchdown and a field goal and you go **WOW!** Or when you see a beautiful sunset, and you go **WOW!** Or you're driving down a road and you see a sign that says "MEN AT WORK" and you look down the road and there actually are men at work. And you go **WOW!** And if nothing else, I'd like for us all to take this part of honoring away with us. So I'm going to ask you to say this out loud, let's just say this as an expression of honor and value, **WOW!** When you go see your mom, if you're going to do this today, if your relationship is healthy enough and ok enough that you can do it. Let's try it all together, you're just going to go up, take a good long look at your mom in the face and go **WOW!**

When you honor someone, you give expression to the fact they have value. You go **WOW!** God says when the parent-child thing works right, and of course it doesn't always, sometimes you need to find ways of expressing it appropriately. But when it works right, when a mom has not perfectly, but sincerely tried to pour her life out for her kids, that her kids ought to look at her sometimes and just go **WOW!** Just to tell her she wasn't crazy. You know because we live in a world that says it's crazy to pour your life out on little kids when you could be making money and climbing the ladder. To pour your life out on something that's not going to win you anything from this world's point of view is just kind of crazy. And a mom needs for her children to give back to her sometimes and just go **WOW!**

Sometimes honoring parents' means giving time and giving help in gestures of love. Building a mom up. Honoring your mom means knowing her, paying attention to her, not ignoring her. It means with your word and your deeds, building her up and not tearing her down.

Lastly, to dishonor somebody or something, means to take them for granted. Just take them for granted. Just assume they'll always be there. Like you have a right to it, like you're entitled. That's to dishonor. To honor means to cultivate and express gratitude.

I like to listen to The Morning Show on Minnesota Public Radio. Some time ago I heard a song where a kid gives his mom a bill for all the stuff he's done around the house. He's sick of all the chores he's had to do. He just feels kind of used and abused. So he writes it out, itemizes it and gives his mom a bill in this song. He just goes down the list: for making the bed – and he writes out how much she owes him for that; for mowing the grass – writes out how much she owes him for that; for doing the dishes, for taking out the garbage, Baby-sitting his kid brother while she went shopping and so on. Itemizes it, gives the total and sends his mom a bill for all the stuff he's done around the house. So, this mom writes out a bill that she sends to her son, and this is what it looks like: for falling in love with a man worthy enough to be your father – no charge, for allowing God to use my body so you could come into the world – no charge, for rocking you all night when you were sick – no charge, for wiping your nose and bandaging your knee and kissing your owy's a thousand times – no charge, for scrapping and scrounging and living on dirt all your life so you can have the best, (kind of a guilt thing going on here), - no charge. And then she writes on the bill "PAID IN FULL".

The point of the song is that a child owes a debt to a loving mother that can never be repaid. When the parenting deal works right, a child owes a debt to a mom that's unpayable. And when the deal works right, the mother in her grace says "It's all yours – no charge".

Now, how do you respond to that? Well when it works right, the grownup child will make his or her life a kind of an act of gratitude by becoming the person God had intended him or her to be and that wise parents wanted him or her to be. When you were a child you received from the generation before you, a gift you can never repay; the gift of life and love. And the way the deal is supposed to work, and it doesn't always work this way, sometimes relationship adjustment kinds of things need to happen, reconciliation things need to happen, sometimes they become impossible and then you need to find your own ways of honoring. But the way the deal is supposed to work, when it gets right, is that when you grow up, you receive a kind of a gift and then when you become an adult, you in turn give that gift to the generation that comes after you.

We live between give and take. Now sometimes it gets messed up and parents, for whatever reason, end up trying to take from their children and children grow up feeling deprived of their childhood, they feel like they don't really have anything much to give. But the way that it's supposed to work is that you receive as a child so that you in turn can give to the next generation. And a part of honoring your mom, part of the way that it happens, is that you become a servant to God and to people. And as you grow up you cross over the line and you become one of the givers. And you use the gifts, imperfect though they might have been, of love and care that you received, to build into the next generation, whether or not you have kids. And if some of the patterns you grew up with were destructive, part of the honoring process is saying, "I want those patterns to stop, I don't want to pass those along to the next generation. So I'll do whatever I need to do to try to stop those destructive patterns and just pass on the gift".

Some of you are here and you have parents who have aged and declined in health. And your roles have kind of switched; you've gone from being caretakers to caregivers with your parents. And I want to say a word about the value of this, because often there's a kind of pain involved in this kind of caregiving. See, when you care for a child, when your parents cared for you, when you were a little kid, it can be exhausting. But there was a kind of hopefulness to it. That little child is full of potential and you don't know what's going to happen. And there's times when you feel like your going to be changing diapers on this kid for the rest of you're life. But you know you won't. And you wonder; who knows what this little kid will grow up and be. Maybe my care to this little kid will one day be a gift to the whole world.

But when you care for an aging parent it's a different story. Many of you have to watch these days, or the days coming, as the person who once seemed omnipotent to you begins a gradual decent. And what they once did well with ease, they now do laboriously and poorly and eventually they can't do it at all. You have to help them with their finances, or with basic copings in life, or maybe you have to help to feed the one who once fed you. You have to help change the diapers of the one who once changed yours. Only now it's not a hopeful thing anymore. This is not a bundle of potential. Those hands may not remember again how to use a fork and knife. Those eyes may not recognize you anymore. This is a gradual process of lose that's only going to end in death.

And to all of you who are there, or who will one day be there, I just want to say this, you need to know this; none of you're care is in vain. Not a second of it. Not an ounce of effort. All of your care is precious in the eyes of God. It is to Him a thing of beauty and grace; it fulfills the cycle of those who live between give and take. You are giving yourself to the very first commandment that faces a human life the moment it enters the world – honor your father and mother.

God says in the Bible that death is not the end of the story. And that for all those who know Him, who have given their life's to Christ, who have received the forgiveness of God through Jesus' death and resurrection and made Him their teachers and Lord, that death is really just the beginning. The truth is that in Christianity this kind of caring too is a hopeful caring.

Some of you are here and your mom's are no longer alive. And this day is a day of some pain. But the truth is that when you remember your mom, when you thank God for her, when you tell her story, you help keep alive the gift that was given to you. You too honor your mom.

Honor your mother, the Bible says.

We live, each and every one of us, between giving and taking, and your mom was just a flawed, fallible, imperfect human being. I don't know what kind of a relationship you have with your Mom. My prayer for you is that where your relationship is healthy, strong and full of joy, thank God; He is smiling and happy for you. If your relationship needs some work because there are some mixed feelings, emotions to it, or maybe lots of pain;

God is there to help you. All you need to do is ask, He'll help heal the hurt. He'll help ease the pain.

The Bible says that when God thought up motherhood, he thought it was a very honorable thing. And he looked at a mom, he looked at a mom's heart, and He went WOW! And in His grace, God gave us the gift of motherhood, and He said "It's all yours – no charge".

WOW, no charge.

Let's pray.

What an amazing thing God, is mother love. And I pray now for all the moms who are here in this room, and for all the moms that are represented by those here in this room. I pray God for everyone of us, to the extent that it's possible, that you would somehow allow us to find the words and the ways to let those who gave us life know, how deeply they are treasured, and we thank you for the amazing gift of them. And we pray for them in Jesus' name, Amen.