

Today is a special Sunday as we celebrate Mother's Day. On this day, we honor those who have given birth, become a stepmother, or adopted a child, and we acknowledge all women who have loved, nurtured, guided, and sacrificed for others. As we celebrate this day, we do so with a deep sense of understanding and sensitivity. We recognize that while Mother's Day holds joy for many, it also brings a measure of pain for some. Some among us remember mothers no longer with us, others grapple with difficult memories, and some are reminded of unfulfilled motherhood dreams. Yet, in our collective gathering today, we acknowledge these experiences, and in doing so, we share in our human story of love, loss, resilience, and hope.

Before I get to the message, I must confess that it has always been challenging for me to preach on Mother's Day. Not because I do not have something to say, but because it feels it should be women talking about motherhood and not a man. So, with your permission, I will share my experience of motherhood with you.

What's a woman? What's a mother? Biology would tell us that a woman is a human being with two X chromosomes, one who possesses reproductive organs that allow for motherhood (pregnancy, childbirth, and lactation). Poetry would say that a woman is often portrayed as a source of inspiration, love, strength, and mystery, that she is the muse who ignites the poet's imagination and the moon that lights up the night sky. It may describe motherhood as a journey of profound love, sacrifice, joy, and sometimes pain or fear. But what does the Bible say about womanhood and motherhood?

Here is Proverbs 31:10-31,

"A woman of strength who can find?  
She is far more precious than jewels.  
The heart of her husband trusts in her,  
and he will have no lack of gain.  
She does him good and not harm  
all the days of her life.  
She seeks wool and flax  
and works with willing hands.  
She is like the ships of the merchant;  
she brings her food from far away.  
She rises while it is still night  
and provides food for her household  
and tasks for her female servants.  
She considers a field and buys it;  
with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.  
She girds herself with strength  
and makes her arms strong.  
She perceives that her merchandise is profitable.  
Her lamp does not go out at night.  
She puts her hands to the distaff,  
and her hands hold the spindle.

She opens her hand to the poor  
and reaches out her hands to the needy.  
She is not afraid for her household when it snows,  
for all her household are clothed in crimson.  
She makes herself coverings;  
her clothing is fine linen and purple.  
Her husband is known in the city gates,  
taking his seat among the elders of the land.  
She makes linen garments and sells them;  
she supplies the merchant with sashes.  
Strength and dignity are her clothing,  
and she laughs at the time to come.  
She opens her mouth with wisdom,  
and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.  
She looks well to the ways of her household  
and does not eat the bread of idleness.  
Her children rise up and call her happy;  
her husband, too, and he praises her:  
“Many women have done excellently,  
but you surpass them all.”  
Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain,  
but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.  
Give her a share in the fruit of her hands,  
and let her works praise her in the city gates.”

This passage describes a woman of noble character as being more precious than rubies. It also speaks of her as a hard worker, skillful in business, and dedicated to the well-being of her family while also extending her hand to the poor and needy, demonstrating her compassion for others. It speaks of womanhood as a source of strength, clothed in dignity and honor, that faces the future with courage, not fear, emphasizing her resilient nature. But perhaps her most cherished virtue is her faith. As the passage concludes, it states that though charm may be deceptive and beauty fleeting, a woman who fears God is to be praised.

This flawless portrait might cause feelings of discouragement or set unrealistic expectations among both women and men. Perhaps it would be more helpful to learn about womanhood from the experiences of women in the Bible rather than the idealistic portrait from the Book of Proverbs.

For example, consider how Esther risked her life for her people; we learn from her that women are courageous. From Ruth, who chose loyalty and love over comfort, we learn that women are determined. What about Mary, mother of Jesus, who bore the Savior of the world with grace and humility, through whom the Bible paints a picture of vibrant, diverse, and powerful womanhood? Women are the embodiment of these noble and exceptional qualities.

But being a woman or a mother is also very challenging in ways men would never understand. The Bible also presents us with women who faced trials, made difficult decisions, and demonstrated incredible strength. For example, Eve, the first mother, faced the heart-wrenching reality of losing a child at the hands of another. Rebekah, the mother of Jacob and Esau, grappled with favoritism, a struggle that echoes in many homes today. Jochebed, Moses's mother, made the agonizing decision to give up her son to ensure his survival.

While Proverbs gives us an ideal of womanhood and motherhood, these stories of remarkable women also remind us that womanhood and motherhood, in reality, is a journey marked not just by joy but also by trials and heartache. And I am confident you may see yourself in them, too.

So, for all of these reasons, being a woman is something no man will ever fully understand. Now you can see why I feel inadequate to stand before you preaching about this subject. God has given you all women so much strength and love that you are special. So much so that even though God is often presented in the Bible as a father figure, God is also characterized as a mother, which describes the nature of God's tender love and power. As such, the character of womanhood and motherhood truly is rooted in the God who created you in God's own likeness as the book of Genesis, chapter 1, verse 27 says, "So God created humans in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."

Dear mothers, you embody God's strength, grace, and love. Through your womanhood and motherhood, you glorify God. But you are also warriors, and the battles you fight often go unseen, battles of sleepless nights, worry for your children, and the silent sacrifices you make every day. But know this: you are seen, cherished, and honored today and always because God honors you, too. And to every woman who has comforted a crying child, nurtured a dream, or given of herself so that others may flourish, we see you too and honor you today.

So, to every woman here today, whether you are a mother or not, remember that you are valued, loved, and strong. You are made in the image of God, and within you lies the capacity for great love and great strength. Whether you have children or not, you can nurture, guide, love, and impact the world around you. And to all of us, let today serve as a reminder of the strength and love that women bring into our lives. Let us honor the women in our lives: our mothers, grandmothers, aunts, sisters, and friends. Let us celebrate the strength and beauty of their womanhood. Let us remember the sacrifices they have made and the love they have freely given. Let us be a community that uplifts, encourages, and supports each other, mirroring the motherly love and grace of our God.

Let us pray,

Dear Heavenly Father and Mother, today, we thank you for every woman, every mother. We thank you for their strength, love, wisdom, and courage. We ask for your blessings upon them so that they may feel your love and peace. We also pray for those for whom today is a day of pain or longing. May they find comfort in your love and our community. In all things, we trust in your goodness and love. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.