

The Christian Woman As a Mother

Of all the jobs women do, probably the most important is being a mother. After all, almost anything that a woman can do, a man can do too—but a man cannot give birth to a child. Even when a man must try to be both mother and father to his children, he cannot satisfactorily be all that a “mother” is. Motherhood is both a unique role and the most important job God has given to woman. How can the Christian woman best fulfill this role?

Obviously, I do not know everything about being a parent, much less everything about being a mother. Still, we can think together through some biblical principles which will help Christian mothers as they rear their children.

NEVER UNDERESTIMATE THE IMPORTANCE OF YOUR ROLE AS A MOTHER

The saying “The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world” contains some truth. Even those who rule the world become, to a great extent, what their mothers influenced them to be. In this way, mothers largely determine the course of history.

Feminists have devalued the importance of the personal involvement of a mother in the rearing of her children. The biological fact is that women have children. The societal fact is that women generally look after the children. Since this can keep women from achieving as much as men, feminists have a vested interest in saying that it does not matter whether the mother

looks after her own children or a day care center does.

Do not be taken in by this propaganda. Sometimes mothers have to work outside the home, and they may be able to make satisfactory arrangements for their children’s care. However, you should never assume that someone else can take your place as a mother!

Some mothers who are well-educated and quite capable of holding down jobs voluntarily choose to stay home and be full-time mothers. Feminists would call that a backward step. Perhaps we should encourage more Christian mothers to make that choice.

GIVE YOUR CHILD THE GIFT OF LOVE

The best gift you can give your child is love. You are blessed if you are able to give your children a neat house, nice clothes, and tasty meals. However, making those provisions is not nearly as important as giving your child love—unconditional love, undeserved love, the kind of love God showed when He gave His Son for a sinful world (John 3:16; Romans 5:8, 9), the kind of love He exhibits by causing the rain to fall on both the righteous and the unrighteous (Matthew 5:44–48). Older women are to teach younger women to love their children (Titus 2:4), presumably with that kind of love.

An unloved child, or a child who thinks that he must win love, is a child who does not value himself. If he does not value himself, he is not

likely to value others. The unloved children of today become the criminals—the thieves and rapists and murderers—of tomorrow.

Mothers have a unique opportunity to love their children unconditionally. Furthermore, they often have a unique talent for loving their children in that way. I will always be grateful to my mother for giving me that kind of love. I can remember thinking, "I don't care what you say about me; my mother loves me. She thinks I'm all right."

Loving your child, of course, does not mean excusing his or her misbehavior, but it does mean continuing to love in spite of that misbehavior. Even when the misbehavior results in the child's being disciplined, punishment can be administered lovingly.

SET A CHRISTIAN EXAMPLE

The second most important gift you can give your children is a Christian example. Teaching your child what he or she should be and do is important—but not as important as providing a Christian example. Teaching that is not reinforced by a Christian example will likely not be heeded. If you do not "practice what you preach," your child will probably not learn from your "preaching."

In what should you set an example? Several areas could be mentioned. (1) Set an example in how seriously you take your religion. If your faith is important enough to cause you to go to worship services even in difficult circumstances, your children will realize that you are serious about Christianity. (2) Set an example in how you treat others. Do you treat others kindly, for example, or do you often exhibit a mean, uncaring attitude in the way you deal with people? (3) Be a good example in what you do for the poor and the "outsiders." Your children will learn about being hospitable if you show hospitality to strangers. I know of one family who made up holiday baskets to take to older people so the children could learn to be benevolent. (4) Set an example in how you react to your own mistakes. Parents are not perfect, nor should they pretend to be. When you do something wrong, you should model before your children what to do when they do wrong. Say frankly to them, as I have heard my wife say to our young children, "I said [or did] something wrong, and

I'm sorry. I won't do it again. Let's pray to God that Mommy can be forgiven."

TEACH YOUR CHILDREN WHAT IS RIGHT

The third most important gift you can give your children is teaching concerning what is right. While this instruction is specified as the father's responsibility in Ephesians 6:4, that does not mean that the mother has no responsibility to teach the children right from wrong. Mothers were expected to teach in Old Testament times. Proverbs 1:8 says, "Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and do not forsake your mother's teaching." Proverbs 31:26 describes the worthy woman by saying, "She opens her mouth in wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue." Surely, no less is expected of Christian mothers today.

In fact, mothers usually spend more time with their children than fathers do (although that should not necessarily be true). This gives mothers special opportunities to teach their children from the time the children are born.

DISCIPLINE YOUR CHILDREN

The fourth most important gift you can give your children is discipline: Require them to do what is right. While this is the task of fathers, it should not be considered the father's responsibility alone. In too many homes, the mother—instead of disciplining children herself—tells them, "Wait till your father gets home." Then she lets the father deal with the problem when he arrives. This is a bad idea for several reasons. (1) The father's arrival is made into an event to be feared, rather than the happy family reunion it should be. (2) The father becomes a figure to be feared, rather than someone to be loved. (3) Most important, bad behavior should be dealt with immediately. As a rule, to postpone the consequences of misbehavior for hours is to lose the good effects of discipline. A young child, in particular, may have difficulty connecting a spanking in the evening with a misdeed he committed that morning. The closer the "punishment" is to the "crime," the more meaningful the lesson will be.

Refusing to discipline a child does not prove that you love the child. It may, in fact, suggest the opposite: that you do not love the child

enough or care enough to require the child to behave properly.

TEACH YOUR CHILDREN TO LOVE, RESPECT, AND APPRECIATE THEIR FATHER

The fifth most important gift you can give your children is to pass on your love, respect, and appreciation for their father. Children must have two parents to be conceived; they also need two parents to grow up strong and good. Fathers ought to recognize the importance of mothers for the rearing of their children and demonstrate to the children their love for and appreciation for their wives. In the same way, mothers should recognize the importance of fathers to the growth of their children, and they ought to show their children that they love their husbands.

In too many homes, conflicts arise between the father and the mother, and the children are caught in the middle. Each parent tries to convince the children to choose a side, turning them against the other parent. Everyone loses when that happens. Remember the painful results when Isaac and Rebekah were divided in their dealings with their children, Jacob and Esau.

The Christian mother ought to build up her husband in the eyes of the children by respecting him and loving him, in spite of his faults. She can help her husband to be a better father—and her children to become better adults—by doing all she can to make her husband a hero to their children.

MAKE THE HOME A SAFE HAVEN

The sixth most important gift you can give your children is a safe haven. The home should be, to the greatest extent possible, well-ordered, happy, and attractive. At home all their needs (but not all their wants) should be satisfied.

Notice where I have placed this on the list: Comforts at home are not the most important needs of children, nor even the second, third, fourth, or fifth most important. Rather, I have placed this as the sixth item on the Christian mother's list of priorities. I believe that, in the rearing of children, other concerns are far more important than keeping a perfect, beautifully decorated house.

Still, the home place is important. Wives and mothers are to be "keepers at home" and are to

"rule the household." Part of their responsibility is to provide, as best they can, a clean, calm, quiet, and comfortable haven for their children.

GIVE YOUR CHILDREN "WINGS"

Finally, your task is to rear your children so that they can get along without you. Every task has its own temptations. The responsibility to make a living carries with it the temptation to work all the time and forget other duties, as well as the temptation to strive for riches. The task of being a loving mother also has a special temptation: Dutiful Christian mothers are tempted to go beyond "mother love" and engage in "smother love."

Many mothers want to keep their children to themselves for the rest of their lives; they are reluctant to let them leave home to start to school, to begin high school, to go to college, to take a job somewhere else, or to marry. Their children grow up without having spent any time away from them. They smother their children with love and attention, never letting the children do anything for themselves. The result may be that their children grow up to be forever dependent on their mothers, unable to make decisions for themselves or to look after themselves.

As a Christian mother, you must realize that the job of parents is to make themselves unnecessary. You want your children to be able to look after themselves personally—to get work and make a living. You want them to form their own homes, to do a good job of bringing up their own children, and to take their place as responsible, faithful, working members of the Lord's church. If someday your grown children can accomplish all of this without you, then you can believe that you have succeeded as a parent.

Of course, if all of that is to happen, your children must be taught to accomplish goals for themselves from the beginning. They must learn to be responsible and independent.

We tried to teach some of these principles to our children by requiring them to work around the house. All three had specific chores to do. Our youngest, a girl, when she was only about four years old, had the responsibility of cleaning the bathroom each Saturday. One Saturday she asked her mother, "Do I have to clean the bath-

room today?" Her mother replied, "Yes, and you know why, don't you?" She answered, "I know—because I'm so good at it."

After you have done your best to teach your children to be responsible and independent, the time will come for them to "leave the nest." You should be willing to let them go, without making them feel guilty.

CONCLUSION

What kind of mother do you want to be? Here is how one woman answered that question:

I want to be a mother like Hannah, who prayed that God might give her a child and then dedicated that child to God's service.

I want to be a mother like the Shunammite woman, who could truthfully say of her child, "It is well with my child," and who could find such peace in her own heart and in her own home that she could say, "I am content."

I want to be a mother like Jochebed, who by courage and forethought protected her child from evil forces and trained him to love God and God's work above the wealth and power of the king's court.

I want to be a mother like Rachel, whose teen-age son could resist the temptation of an evil woman when he was far away from her guidance or her reproof.

I want to be a mother like Noah's wife, who could so instill in her three boys the principles of God that they could live right when all their companions were evil.

I want to be a mother like the Canaanite mother who cried unto Jesus that he might help her daughter.

¹Helen M. Young, "I Want To Be a Mother Like . . .," *Twentieth Century Christian*, May 1976, 9.

I want to be a mother like Mary, the mother of John Mark, who put the church first in her home.

I want to be a mother like Lois, who taught her child God's Word from infancy, and so molded his life that he became a faithful servant of the Master.

I want to be a mother like Mary, the mother of Jesus, who thought much though she talked little, whose submission to God's will was so perfect and complete, who was ever concerned about Jesus' welfare and did not forsake him when all others did, but followed him in love even to death.¹

What memories will your children have of you? Will they remember only how neatly you kept the house or how well you cooked—or will they have other, more precious memories?

Will they remember that you were the one who undoubtedly loved them even when it seemed that no one else did?

Will they remember that you and your husband loved one another and together did your best, both by teaching and by discipline, to bring up the children in the right way?

Will they remember that your home was a center of spiritual activities? That a Sunday never went by without the family going together to the assembly of the Lord's people? That daily devotionals were part of the family schedule? That your home was a center for hospitality and benevolence?

What kind of memories are you making for your children? ◆

*What mothers write
on the hearts of their children,
the world's rough hand
cannot erase.*