

# The Mantle of Motherhood

By Al Felder

*“And Adam called his wife’s name Eve; because she was the mother of all living.”* (Genesis 3:20)

This is the first time that the word mother is used in the Bible. God made Adam, and then He took a rib from his side and made Eve. Since that time every man or woman has been brought into this world because of a mother. Throughout the Bible we read of mothers, both good and bad. A mother may choose to be many things, but there are none as great as a godly mother.

As is the case with the man, the woman’s role is defined by creation. God formed man, and then we read something very interesting in the Bible. *“And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him.”* (Genesis 2:18) God looked at the man He created, and determined something more was needed. It was not good for man to be alone, thus, he needed a companion. God made woman to be a helper who is meet for man.

Well, what exactly does that mean and what does it have to do with being a mother? A helper who is meet means that the woman is appropriate for or suitable for man. The woman corresponds to or complements the man in every way. She completes him. God created the woman because man needed her help. She was created as a suitable helper to stand with him in life and help him in every way.

The woman as a helper is a key component that has been lost in the majority of modern marriages. Through such things as the feminist movement, many women do not think of themselves as a helper to man. Instead, they view themselves as the ones who are to be helped. The modern woman thinks of herself as someone who stands in exactly the same place as her husband within the home. The modern woman considers herself to be liberated, however, no one can be liberated apart from God’s purpose. Only in understanding and living according to her correct role before God can a woman truly be liberated.

As a helper, the woman completes the man. The two become one flesh. Together they form a complete unit. The two become one physically, intellectually, and emotionally, and find a wholeness that did not exist before. Both man and woman bring different things to the relationship. In regards to the home and child raising, each possesses viewpoints and qualities that when merged together make a perfect whole providing the child with the balance that he or she needs.

Before we begin to discuss further what it means to be a godly mother, there is something else that I find intriguing about mothers as we read the book of Genesis. We are all familiar with the fact that the woman was deceived and was in the transgression. What a sad

state for the woman that God created for man, bearing the shame of being tempted and committing the first sin.

It is difficult to deal with our own actions many times. As we realize the hurt we may have caused others, or the stumbling blocks we may have placed in their way, the guilt and shame we feel can be overwhelming. I can only image how Eve felt about her actions as the reality of her sin and its consequences set in. It is at this point in the Bible that we read of God's great love and mercy.

The woman is known as being the one who was deceived, but God in His great love and mercy allowed her to be known for something else as well. *"And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."* (Genesis 3:15) It is in this passage that we find the first promise of the Savior. Satan deceived the woman, but it would be her seed (Christ) who would bruise his head delivering the crushing blow and providing victory over death and sin for those who obey Him. Thus, the woman is known as the mother of the Savior.

Within the genealogy of Christ we read of many amazing women who were mothers. Their stories provide an example for mothers today. Then of course, we read of Mary. What exemplary character this woman possessed for the Creator to choose her to be the mother of Christ.

As we begin to discuss the importance of mothers, we must first give further meaning to the role that she is to have within the home. *"I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully."* (1 Timothy 5:14) Within the instructions given by Paul to Titus, we read that the older women are to teach the younger women to be "keepers at home." (Titus 2:5) What do these two passages command that women should do or be in regards to their role?

In the first passage we read that the woman is to guide the house. It literally means that she is to have management or direction over household affairs.<sup>1</sup> The second passage states that she is to be a keeper at home. This phrase is actually the combination of the Greek word for "home" and the word for "to work." Together these words describe someone who guards or is a keeper of the household.<sup>2</sup>

Now the Bible does not say that the woman is not allowed to work outside of the four walls of her house; nor does it forbid her to receive wages for her work. Consider the virtuous woman discussed in the book of Proverbs. *"Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far*

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<sup>1</sup> Vine, W. E. 1996. *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. Nashville, TN : Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1996. p. 285.

<sup>2</sup> —. 1996. *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. Nashville, TN : Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1996. p. 309.

*above rubies.*" (Proverbs 31:10) The remainder of the chapter describes to us a woman who helped her husband; cared for her children; completed chores; supervised servants; oversaw land; invested money; bought, sold, and traded goods. Her world revolved around her home, and she experienced satisfaction in a job well done.

A woman who is willing to place the home above any personal desires or ambitions she may have is a rarity in our society today. In fact the idea is so repulsive to many that those women who do decide to devote their talents strictly to the home are looked at as inferior. Dorothy Paterson characterizes the modern mindset in this way:

*Much of the world would agree that being a housekeeper is acceptable as long as you are not caring for your own home; treating men with attentive devotion would also be right as long as the man is the boss in the office and not your husband; caring for children would even be deemed heroic service for which presidential awards could be given as long as the children are someone else's and not your own.*<sup>3</sup>

We are now seeing in our society the results of disdain for the Biblical role of a mother being built into generations of women. More could be said about this sad progression in our society, but we must move on in discussing God's plan for a mother.

As we turn once again to scripture we find the importance of the relationships that mothers have with their children. *"<sup>4</sup>That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, <sup>5</sup>to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed."* (Titus a: 4, 5) These instructions are given so that the older generation may teach the younger how they are to conduct themselves within their God given role. As I think of this command, I cannot envision a better fulfillment of it than for a mother to teach her daughter.

The relationship that exists between a mother and her daughter is a special one. Mothers and daughters have genetic, hormonal, and psychological bonds that cannot be broken. They possess the feminine bond. The daughter can grow up and become another's, but she and her mother can stay connected even while life changes the circumstances around them. A daughter will always need her mother.

As can be seen from the passage in Titus, younger women need the advice, guidance, and direction that older women can provide. Who better to provide this to a woman than her mother? Girls will go through things a father will not understand, but her mother will. A mother knows the changes a girl will experience physically, emotionally, and mentally as she becomes a woman.

A mother also understands the joy her daughter will experience on her wedding day, and her early experience as a wife. She knows as well that eventually there will be heartache.

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<sup>3</sup> Mahaney, Carolyn. 2004. *Feminine Appeal*. Wheaton, IL : Crossway, 2004. p. 102.

The husband may not show her the proper appreciation she deserves. He may fail to realize the hard work and effort she has put into a task leaving her with a feeling of frustration. It is for this reason that the aged women are commanded to teach the young women to love their husbands.

Then, the day finally comes when the daughter has a child of her own. Her mother will know the overwhelming joy and amazement she will feel as a new life is placed in her arms. The world stands still for a moment during this time of intimate bonding of mother and child. Yet, in the days, weeks, months, and years to come things begin to change. The young mother faces the persistent crying of a newborn, the temper tantrums of a two-year-old, the whining of a four-year-old, the disrespect of a ten-year-old, and the selfishness of a teenager. She discovers that the affection she felt for her child at birth is not always easy to sustain. This too, her mother knows and it is for that reason that the aged women are commanded to teach the young women to love their children.

The kind of love that the aged women are to teach the younger women to have towards their husbands and children is a passionate, tender, and affectionate kind of love.<sup>4</sup> It is the Greek word *phileo* that is used here and not *agape*. *Agape* is a sacrificial love. It is the love that a husband is commanded to have for his wife. *Phileo*, however, is something other than sacrificial love. Women are good at that. They can sacrifice for their husbands and children in order to fulfill their duties without enjoying or finding pleasure in them. *Phileo* love requires that she cherish her husband and children above all else.

It is a love that stands out. In a society in which it is common to see strife and discord among families, *phileo* love draws attention to the transforming power of the gospel. It is through this love that women can “adorn the doctrine of God.” (Titus 2:10) This simply means that the gospel is put on display. People don’t necessarily want to know what you believe about the Bible. They want to see if what you believe makes a difference in your life. Your actions can either bring honor or shame to God.

A mother’s relationship to her son is important as well. It is different from the relationship that she has with her daughter. From the moment a mother hears her sons first cry, she prepares herself. Now she is needed because he needs her. She will nourish him, protect him, adore him, and nurture him. As he transitions from a boy to a man she continues to prepare herself. Then finally the day comes, her life as a mother will never be the same. She will continue to love her son, but he will belong to another woman. *“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.”* (Genesis 2:24) This is the way that mother and son relationships are meant to be.

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<sup>4</sup> —. 1996. *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. Nashville, TN : Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1996. p. 382.

The affect that mothers can have on their sons can be seen throughout scripture. *“When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also.”* (2 Timothy 1:5) The affect that a godly mother can have on her son is profound. Her godly example can lead him to a life of godliness.

Not only can a mother teach her son God’s ways, her relationship with him can have an impact on his relationship with other women. The love a son receives from his mother will serve as a template for how he will regard love with any woman after her. If his experience with his mother is positive, he will be more trusting in his relationships with his sister’s, girlfriend, female teachers, or any other woman. If, however, his relationship with his mother is unstable his views of other women’s love, whether romantic or platonic, will be without trust.

The mother is also a dispenser of grace within the home. For years people have used phrases such as, “a face only a mother could love.” While intended as a slight, the phrase points out the ability of mothers to forgive, excuse, accept, and love when no one else can. When a mother extends outstretched arms to a child who has been hurt or who has failed in sports, school, or socially, that child begins to understand what love is all about.

The moment a mother extends her grace, the child understands that it isn’t about success or failure. It is about being able to accept that love from another and then return that love. Through the highs and lows of life, a mother’s love can help a child stand a bit taller.

I would like to close with the following poem and a few additional thoughts on motherhood.

*Had I been Joseph’s mother, I’d have prayed, Protection from his brothers. “God, keep him safe. He is so young, so different from the others.” Mercifully, she never knew there would be slavery and prison, too.*

*Had I been Moses’ mother, I’d have wept to keep my little son: praying she might forget the babe drawn from the water of the Nile. Had I not kept him for her nursing him while, was he not mine? --- And she but Pharaoh’s daughter?*

*Had I been Daniel’s mother, I should have pled “Give victory! – This Babylonian horde Godless and cruel – Don’t let him be captive --- better dead, Almighty Lord!”*

*Had I been Mary, Oh, had I been she, I would have cried as never mother cried, “Anything, O God, Anything.....but crucified.”*

As we mentioned at the beginning of our lesson, the Bible gives us examples of many godly mothers. This poem depicts a few of those women, and I would like to discuss three of them just briefly.

The love for her son and faith in God demonstrated by Moses’ mother is astounding. She did all that she could to hide her son from Pharaoh’s men so that he would not be

destroyed along with the other male children. She had the courage and faith in God to place him in the river when it was not possible to hide him anymore. Then, an unlikely mother figure enters the picture. Moses was found by none other than Pharaoh's daughter herself. Although he was not her biological son, when she heard him cry she had compassion on him. The motherly bond was set and despite her father's orders she took the baby Hebrew boy as her own.

Last, but certainly not least we have Mary the mother of Jesus. He was her son and she was His mother just as any other mother-son relationship. She did all of the things for Him that mothers do for their sons. He was and is God, but to experience life as a man He had to grow and develop like all other men. For that He needed a mother.

Mary was told many things about her son by angels and prophets. The Bible tells us that she pondered them in her heart. Like all mothers of boys, she prepared herself. She knew that something would happen, that something must happen. When it did there stood the mother by her son. When others had fled, she remained no doubt as close as she could to her son. Through all of the torture and all of the mocking she endured until finally upon the cross He hanged. She heard his first cry and watched him draw his last breath, always by his side.

The mantle of motherhood is great. No higher or more noble calling could a woman fill, than to be a godly mother.