

THE PERFECT MOTHER

May 13, 2007

A little boy forgot his lines in a Sunday school presentation. His mother was in the front row to prompt him. She gestured and formed the words silently with her lips, but it did not help. Her son's memory was blank. Finally, she leaned forward and whispered the cue, "I am the light of the world." The boy beamed and with great feeling and a loud clear voice said, "My mother is the light of the world." And you know, I understand how that little boy felt. In many ways, when I was little, my mother was bigger than life, she was always there to meet my needs, she was the light of the world. She was superhuman!! As I grew older, it only took a few words of encouragement or praise or acceptance from my mother to make things right in *my* world.

As we celebrate Mother's Day, today, several ideas make this a tough day for some of us. Some of us are not mothers. Some of us were raised by someone besides our mother. Some of us had mothers that weren't all that nice. Some of us are reluctant mothers. Some of our mothers are no longer living. It is my prayer that whatever your circumstances this day, this message will reach each one of you, at some point.

As I have thought about what I might say to you on Mother's Day, the first notion that I wish to focus on is the realization that we often give people breaks in our lives...we fill in the gaps for them...we give them an "out", or we provide excuses for them...or give them grace, if you will. But there is one person that I don't think receives that kind of grace. Our mothers. When you get right down to it, I think we really expect them to be perfect, flawless and in reality supernatural. We have expected to be the apple of our mothers' eyes all of the time. We lapped up that unconditional love and food on the table and clean clothes and diapers, and we just never stopped expecting that kind of service. How incredible when you think of it logically. If we are honest, we will confess that we are miffed when we realize that our mothers have other things to think about or worry about besides us....how dare they get sick, or go to the hospital or need something. We truly expect them to constantly provide for us unceasingly. Perhaps it is only when mothers begin to age that we start to realize their humanity. When their frailty becomes apparent, we are stopped in our tracks. The response is two-fold...perhaps now we panic at having to care for them....when we don't really know what to do or how to care for them....they have always cared for us. How do we manage the role reversal? How do we manage life without hearing the words and receiving the comfort and nurturance that has been part of our interactions with our mothers all of our lives?

I recently received a phone call from a friend of mine who is struggling with her relationship with her mother. My friend's mother is angry at her. Their whole relationship has changed. My friend told me that when they used to talk on the phone her mother gave her encouragement, lifted her spirits and filled her with hope. Now, the anger and disappointment of the mother has altered everything. As I struggled to find a way to give my friend hope, I told her to remember as best she could the kinds of phone calls that they used to have and to realize that her mother really wants to have those calls again, she just can't right now. She used to be that mother, and right now, she can't say those kinds of things. For the next several days, that phone call clanged around in my brain. As I dissected what we said to each other, I realized a few truths that ring out regarding that delicate and sometimes difficult relationship that we have with our mothers. First of all, there is that expectation of a perfect mother again. That mom is not supposed to have anger or withhold nurturing or encouragement in the mind of that daughter. Secondly, I believe with all of my heart that that mother would like to be the kind of mother she used to be and say the kinds of things she used to say, but she is aging, and she is changing. There are many things that aging moms no longer say to their children. One day while this particular realization was cooking in my brain, I heard a classic song on the radio, "Sweet Child of Mine", by Guns and Roses. Upon hearing the song that day, I suddenly felt that this song was a song that every mother wishes she could and would sing to her children. She wishes to call each one of her children sweet child of mine.

I believe that there are things that any mother of any age would like to say to you, her child. But for a variety of reasons, she can't or won't. She can't tell you how much she loves you, because she never heard those words when she was a child. She is unable to affirm you because she is struggling to put together a sentence or to remember your name. She can't tell you that you are precious to her, because she becomes tongue-tied around you. She has sensed your disappointment in her, and she has fallen silent when it comes to matters of the heart. She can't tell you how much you mean to her, because she doesn't feel well, and she no longer feels needed or appreciated. She has stopped telling you that she believes in you because she thinks her actions show you how she feels.

When it seems that your mother has ceased to give you the mother love that you need, I encourage you to view God as the answer to your problem. It might sound odd, but I believe that God is the perfect mother. Throughout the Bible God assures us of companionship, nurturing and unfailing love. God is there for us 24 hours a day. God loves us no matter what we have done. For some of us, the best part is that God's memory doesn't fail. There's a verse in Isaiah that says: "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I

will not forget you." Instead of expecting perfection from our mothers, let's rely on the perfection of God to lift us up and to give us hope.

Now let's get back to that notion of filling in the gaps for our mothers. It's one thing to say that we know they aren't perfect, but it's another thing to put it into practice. How do we cut our mothers some slack? Well, for starters, we try to see them as human. They feel, they get tired, they get sick, they get angry and they even get sick and tired of their kids.

Two women were talking one day. One asked the other if she had it to do all over again would she have kids? Sure, said the second woman. But I would want different ones.

Secondly, we need to realize that our mothers are not our maids.

A teacher gave her class of second graders a lesson on the magnet and what it does. The next day in a written test, she included the question: "My full name has six letters. The first one is M. I pick things up. What am I?" When the test papers were turned in, the teacher was astonished to find that almost 50 percent of the students answered the question with the word Mother.

At any age, we can learn to pick up after ourselves and stop expecting Mom to know where everything is located in the house.

Most importantly, I think, is the ability to change our expectations of our mothers. We have them on pedestals. We have such strong need of them that we are so quickly disappointed in their shortcomings. Right now, I'd like us all to take a moment and concentrate on our mothers. Picture them, if you can, as little girls. They weren't always the age they are now, you know. See her as a little girl afraid of the dark. Now see your mother as a teenager. She's breaking the rules of her house and getting into trouble. Now see her as a young woman. She has dreams. You see, she was a person before she had kids. Why don't we let her be a person now?

Now see your mother in the best of all possible light. See her at her best as she cared for you when you were young. Call to your mind a great memory of the lessons she taught you, the times that she helped you and the tears that she wiped away from your face. Remember a time when you were older and it seemed that everyone had turned on you. But your mother got you through it. Think of a time when your mother gave you hope. See your mother as your one true friend.

CLOSE:

There is a Jewish proverb that proclaims: "A mother understands what a child does not say." Perhaps it's time for us to turn that around. Whenever possible, perhaps we can try to understand and give grace for

what our mothers do not say to us. Have a good Sunday, call your Mom, if you can, and go in peace. Amen.