

Honoring the Biblical Calling of Motherhood, a Tribute to Ruth Piper

by John Piper

The biblical calling of motherhood is to weave a fabric of family life out of commitment to husband and his calling, commitment to children and their training, and commitment to Christ and his glory.

Duration: 39:57

Scripture: 1 Timothy 3:14

Topics: "Motherhood", "Faith Formation"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on his mother's influence on his faith and character. He highlights four key aspects of her impact. Firstly, she taught him the importance of taking the word of God seriously, using the example of her own Bible-saturated concern. Secondly, she encouraged him to be wise and make wise choices in life. Thirdly, she had a strong sense of humor, which brought joy and laughter to their family. Lastly, she demonstrated unwavering kindness and love towards others. The speaker also references 1 Timothy 3:14-15, which encourages believers to continue in what they have learned and to be acquainted with the sacred writings.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God is available at www.DesiringGod.org. Our scripture reading for this evening is found in 2 Timothy 3, verses 10 through 17. If you're following along in one of the pew Bibles, it's on page 996.

You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions, and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra, which persecutions I endured, but from them all the Lord rescued me. Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and imposters will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you have learned it, and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

All scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work. Let's pray. Your Word is very powerful, it's very precious, it's holy, it's not to be trifled with.

And so I pray that in the first half of this message, where I focus on it, I would be faithful, humble, submissive. And I ask, Lord, that you would be at work in those who hear me, Northwestern College Auditorium, and in this room. I pray, O God, that hearts would be made ready to be changed by the Word of God in all the ways that you design for the Word to work.

These are not my words that Mike has just read here and have just been read there. These are your words with your design. And so work, Holy Spirit, now.

Guide me, strengthen me, help me. Through Christ, I pray. Amen.

This is Mother's Day weekend. My aim is to honor and encourage motherhood. And in this way, to glorify Jesus Christ, who designed it and created it.

And then, in more ways than you know, blessed it. For example, by becoming incarnate in Mary's womb as the very Son of God. And then, at the end of his life, as though to complete the parenthesis, spoke the most caring, loving words that have ever been spoken in suffering, looking down upon the beloved disciple John, saying, Behold your mother.

So in magnifying motherhood, I mean to magnify Jesus, who designed it, created it, got inside of it, blessed it in pain. And I want mothers to be honored, and I want them to honor Jesus, as we all do both. I want to honor in this message the biblical calling on a woman's life to weave a fabric of family life out of commitment to husband and his calling and a commitment to children and their training, and a commitment to Christ and his glory.

Three strands with which to weave. In other words, I want to honor the biblical calling that makes marriage, motherhood, and home management, in the context of radical Christian discipleship, the central, core, dominant commitments of a woman's life. There are millions of single women.

Many will stay single. Some, by calling, choice. Either way, there's a grace for that.

A Jesus grace. There are women who are single mothers, for whom the marriage component or thread in that weaving is painfully missing. There's a grace for that.

A Jesus grace for that. There are women who are married and cannot have children, or with their husbands, for kingdom reasons, choose not to have children. And there's a grace for that.

A Jesus grace for that. And there are mothers who weave together mothering and marriage and home management with a part-time or full-time employment outside the home. Some because they may have to, like those single moms, and others because they sense that it's part of their calling, and they have found creative ways to interlace this with their lives without compromise to their core commitments.

And others, sadly, who don't have any core commitments, supporting their husband in his calling, pouring their lives into their children, managing the home to the glory of Christ, they have simply absorbed the views of the world. From television, media, friends who have no biblical framework, and they are adrift in their vaunted career. My aim is not to address all those circumstances.

My aim is to encourage millions of women who believe that they have heard God's calling on their lives in marriage. The joyful support of a man and his calling as they together display the meaning of Christ and his church to the world. And motherhood, the transmission of God-centered, Christ-treasuring vision of life

to the next generation.

And home management, the creation of a beautiful, simple place or a living organism called a home, which becomes not only to the family but to the community a refuge of Christ's peace and a launching pad of God's righteousness. That's their calling. That's what they believe at the bottom of their soul.

They should give themselves to. I'm talking about those women this morning. And I am eager to encourage you.

Because you're not going to get much encouragement from the world. And there's a reason for that. They don't have a clue what I am talking about.

Marriage as a parable of Christ and his church. Motherhood as a life-on-life transmission of a God-centered worldview. Home management as a creation of a living organism that nurtures the peace of Christ and the righteousness of God.

They don't have a clue. Therefore, if you absorb from the media the vision of womanhood, you will land where they land. And it isn't in God's will.

This is a very high, holy, crucial calling that many of you women embrace. In it, after it, and before it. You are the women who have read Titus 2, 4, and 5 and have heard liberating words, not oppressive words.

Paul to Titus. The older women should train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the Word of God may not be reviled. You have read that and said, Yes! With liberty and joy and profound, deep, heartfelt sense of mega-significance.

In spite of the worlds, To you, I direct this message, a word of honor, a word of encouragement. Here's the way I want to do it. I want to spend the first part of the message talking about 2 Timothy 3, and the second part of the message talking about my mother.

Because I believe it is biblical to illustrate the Bible with living examples. I believe I'm in the mode of Proverbs 31 when I get to that part. So if you're the kind of exegetical purist who wishes both parts were exegesis, you may leave after the exegesis.

But I promise you, you'll regret it. I really enjoyed getting ready for this message. Let's go to the text.

You've got your Bible open. 1 Timothy 3. Let's focus on verses 14 and 15. Women, tune in.

This is for you. This is an encouragement. This is a massive celebration of something.

Verses 14 and 15. 1 Timothy 3. But as for you, Timothy. Continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed.

Knowing from whom you learned it. Mark that will come back and ask who that is. Verse 15.

And how from childhood. That's a clue. You have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

Just two observations is all we have time for. Number one, who does he mean in verse 14 when he says. Timothy, remember from whom you learned the word of God.

And the answer is his mother, Eunice, and his grandmother, Lois. And there are three clues for why we know that. Number one.

The word from childhood in verse 15 signals he's thinking about somebody. He learned it from from childhood. That's the first clue.

Second clue. Chapter one, verse five. He has already drawn attention to how he got his faith from his mother.

Chapter one, verse five. Second, Timothy. I am reminded of your sincere faith.

A faith that first dwelt in your grandmother, Lois, and your mother, Eunice. And now, I am sure, dwells in you as well. So there's the second clue that Paul has his mother and grandmother in mind.

Third clue is why doesn't he mention the dad? I would mention the dad if I were talking about my family. And there is a reason very clearly given in Scripture why. In Acts, chapter 16, when Paul chooses Timothy to go with him in his mission, it says this in verse one, Acts 16.

Paul came to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. It's a real simple reason why Timothy learned the Bible and the wisdom that leads to salvation from his mother.

Reason? She's a believer and his dad is not. And there are lots of you in that situation one way or the other. Take heart.

The Bible is very aware of that and not the least blown away by it. And has good and helpful things to say to you, how to live in that situation where a marriage is not together in the faith or children are not together or the home you grew up in was not together, still not together. The Bible is not surprised by that.

So, first observation, the persons who Timothy should remember is Eunice and Lois, his mother and his grandmother. Here's the second observation. Remembering the character of your godly mother is a great incentive to hold on to the scriptures and not to throw away your commitment to Christ.

Let's read verse 14 again and you see if you hear that. As for you, Timothy, continue. Now, this is Paul's burden.

He's looking at a relatively young man, he's young in relation to Paul, and he's looking at him and he's saying, Don't go astray. Stay on the narrow road. Hold fast to what you've learned.

Don't make shipwreck of your faith. Keep on. Hold on.

Now he wants to motivate that. How does he do it? But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed. And then he says, as an incentive, Knowing from whom you learned it.

In other words, Timothy, one way, it's not the only way, but it's one way, one way to strengthen your faith and to persevere through hard times and not to give up the word of God that you learned as a boy. One way, one way is to remember what your mom was like and your grandmother. Now, I'm not addressing the situation where you grew up and you had an unbelieving mom or an abusive mom.

I'm addressing women who are mothers and committed to it, who were mothers and still are committed to it, and who might become mothers and want to be committed to it to encourage you this is the way it could be. This is the height and depth of the calling to have a child who, like me right now, 50 years later is remembering with tears. I got myself all cried out yesterday so I wouldn't have to now in the next 10 minutes.

So I hope it worked. So that's my exposition of the text. Paul celebrates motherhood and grandmotherhood by saying the way they were, Timothy, is a reason not to throw away the faith.

Make that come true. Now, I want to illustrate this by paying tribute to Ruth Piper. And I have two documents.

I didn't bring them, I just excerpted from them. Went digging back through my files. A document from my father, three pages.

I'm going to read it to you at the end. And a document that I wrote 30 years ago. And what I'll do is, with regard to my document, tell you something about my mother and then read you what I wrote 30 years ago to illustrate it.

And the way you should listen to this is, okay, John had a mother who was like what he just described. And maybe if I listen, as a mother, or a would-be mother, or a man who would like to pray for a wife who would be this kind of mother, or for my wife who's not a believer to become this kind of mother. In other words, every way this can be related will touch somebody in this room.

Number one, God's honor was paramount for my mother. I wrote, I never got spanked for making a mess in my pants, but I did for skipping church. Which goes to show, mama cared more about keeping God's name in my soul clean than she did her own hands.

Number two, she was never cynical about my weaknesses. I'm concerned here, so I'm using this one. I'm concerned here.

We live in a day in which children are sassy and parents comply. And they pick this up from their peers and sometimes from you. Because if you start bantering with your child the way you do an adult in terms of cynicism, it won't work in the long run.

So, as I look back and think about it, she never did that. She never came down to my immature level. She was always mother, not sister, bantering cynically about my weaknesses.

So I wrote, you won't understand this language because you're not Southern Baptist. Southern Baptist had a Sunday evening event called Training Union. And it trained young people to be able to speak in front of a group, and they had to give parts.

They called them parts. And so you gave it the best you could, and it might take a minute. And they trained you that way.

Well, that was, takes your breath away. When I had to give my first part in Training Union, right after promotion day when everybody's older, she showed me how to write the main points on a card and listen just before supper while I practiced on her. She never let on it wasn't life and death.

That's what I mean. How quickly we look at our little ones and we belittle it. We mock it because it's so out of proportion.

Don't do that. Be like that. Third, she had a Bible-saturated concern for my heart.

Mama knew the good book, especially the Proverbs. Years later when I was 3,000 miles away, she kept on quoting Proverbs in her salutations. The message was always the same, the pulse beat of her heart, Be wise, son.

Be truly wise. Fear God and keep your heart warm in Germany. Fourth, mingled with fiercely earnest faith about the realities of heaven and hell and the seriousness of the Christian life, my mother had an utterly uninhibited sense of humor.

I wrote, maybe Paul couldn't imitate Baby Chatter or Mrs. Lauren Jones or all the characters in a church play, but Mama could. And then how she would laugh. While I've seen her and Grandma Moan 130 years worth of German sobriety, guffaw till the tears wet the tablecloth.

It would start with a short soprano burst that could split the eardrums. Her silver head would toss backward. Her long white teeth would flash under her sharp nose and her tanned neck would redden as the tendons flinched.

She was a vision of health and joy and I never felt better than when Mama. Fifth, she took right and wrong very seriously and held me accountable to the highest standards so that I knew in all the conflict that we had, I really mattered. So I wrote.

And I seldom felt worse than when my Mama cried. I got a speeding ticket one night and Mama wept like I'd shot somebody all the way to the station at midnight, she cried, and made me pay it off right then and there. One thing was for sure, I mattered a lot.

So I owe this son, this 59-year-old son, I owe in my soul and in my fathering and my role as a husband and my role as a pastor, I owe this woman an incalculable debt. And I want to honor her. And I want you women to feel honored as you invest.

Now, my dad's a very good writer, a little bit flowery. You could excuse him, she had recently died. A memorial to Ruth, my wife, by Bill Piper.

This is three pages long. It will take me about six or seven minutes to read it. And then we're done.

She was a priceless gem, rarer by far than sapphire, ruby, or diamond. Her radiance depended not on some earthly or external beam. Her glow was from within, shining from genuineness of character and purity of soul.

The dancing sparkle of her life resulted not from material stimuli. It came from a heart that gave and gave again with never a thought of receiving. It reflected a life that loved and loved until there was just no more to love.

Her beauty was that of expanded unselfishness. Her whole life was others. Her loved ones, her friends, her neighbors, and her church.

She knew no resting place. The needs were endless and her devotion always equaled the demands. Deep weariness of mind and body never deterred her.

Let me fill in a parenthesis here. I'm kind of operating like family tonight, and a lot of you are not. My dad was an evangelist, an itinerant evangelist, which means he was away from home two-thirds of the year.

Be gone for two weeks, home for four days. Gone for three weeks, home for four days. Gone for five weeks, home for four days.

Gone for a week, home for four days. That was our life. So when you hear this, understand my dad is trying to be a dad by telephone most of the year.

And this five-foot-two woman whose son outgrew her at age 13 was trying to manage his unruliness. That little phrase, deep weariness, struck me. The enormous wealth of her character showed most in her unstinting kindness.

All who knew her felt it, witnessed it, experienced and believed in it. Everyone coming within the warm glow of her influence was cheered, encouraged, lifted, and blessed. Her beauty knew no vanity.

She disdained the cheap, the tawdry, the make-believe. She loathed everything farcical and hypocritical. Her genuineness was transparent.

She radiated reality. Life to her was neither a mummery... What in the world is a mummery? My dad, what are you saying, mummery? Well, I looked it up. I'll tell you what a mummery is.

A mummery is a pretentious performance by mummers, actors. It's a play, a pretentious play. Okay, start that one over.

Life to her was neither a mummery nor a charade but a daily expression of untainted sincerity. Her glory sprang from a love of life. Her activities never ceased and her energy seemed boundless.

Her spontaneous laughter and contagious smile delighted all who met her. She enjoyed being alive and her life had beauty and purpose. She epitomized the virtuous woman.

She was clothed with strength and honor. My heart safely trusted in her. You know, that didn't hit me until I was way into my teens that my mother and father had a huge trust issue.

When a man is on the road three-fourths of the year, how do you handle your sex? How does a woman handle her loneliness? My heart safely trusted in her. She looked well to the affairs of her household. She burned the midnight oil.

Always went to bed before my mother. She was always up after I was. And I stayed up late as a teenager, lots of nights.

Her hands were never idle. Her mouth was full of wisdom and on her tongue was the law of kindness. Her children have risen to praise her.

I have one sister. I sent her a copy of this yesterday and said, just for Mother's Day, you're a lot like her. Which is true.

She was modest, almost to a fault. That's a very interesting sentence. Always the lady, always the queen.

She carried herself with poise and great dignity without piety or ceremony. Modern trends and styles were ignored if they offended her sensitivities or violated her convictions. I never in my life saw my mother wear slacks.

Be freed, women. Noel does do that. But it says something about my background.

She never sought praise or popularity. Contented always to serve in a spirit of congeniality and selflessness. She was the practical woman.

Never lavish, never wasteful. I was the dreamer. She shunned the unnecessary and the excessive.

Satisfied with simple things. She avoided that which was foolish and vain. Sound judgments preceded her decisions.

Never one to parade, she abstained from the superficial, the pretentious, the needless, the impractical. Above all, and now we get to the essence, above all was the totality of her dedication, devoted to her husband, her family, her friends, her church. She was supremely committed to her Lord.

Her faith in Christ never wavered. Having trusted Him as a child, she loved Him more with every passing year. Her convictions held firm in face of a changing world.

The variances of life's vicissitudes never altered her course. She remained steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. She was a rock.

Any doubt why I married one? She was found faithful. She walked with God and God loved her and took her. She now rests with Him whom she loved and served.

The light of her devotion and the aroma from her character lives on to bless perpetually the lives of all who loved her. Her testimony will not be lost. Her commitment to Christ has not been in vain.

Her husband, her children, and all her descendants will rise to call her blessed. So, this sermon is a fulfillment of that prophecy. And I hope, I hope and pray an honor and an encouragement to all of you women who embrace the biblical calling.

And I'll just sum it up again. The biblical fabric with its three strands. The biblical calling.

It is not the only calling. I'm talking to those of you who embrace this calling. Because the world will not celebrate this for you.

You need to celebrate it here. The calling of marriage. Meaning, the support of a man and his calling.

As you partner side by side to model for the world the meaning of Christ and the church. That's one strand. A second strand is motherhood.

The pouring of your life day in, day out, morning to night. The pouring of your life and a God-centered, Christ-exalting worldview into the next generation. So that 50 years later they do this for you.

Third, the managing of a home. Home management. I'm choosing the word home management intentionally.

There are biblical words in the pastoral epistles that point me that way. And because home making has become so domestic it feels demeaning. I'm talking about a vision to create a simple, beautiful place.

That's a part of it. Mainly, however, to create a living organism that for the sake of family, community, church, and nation. Is a place of refuge in the peace of Christ.

And a place of launching righteousness and justice in the community. I'm addressing women who see those three strands and feel in their souls a deep, resounding yes. For that, I believe, I was made.

If you're one of those women, this sermon was for you to say, that's a good thing. That's a glorious thing. That's an awesome thing.

And don't let anybody tell you, Father in Heaven, I thank you for my mother and my wife. I love these women. I stand in awe of these women.

And the life calling that they have lived. And I love the women of this church. Single.

Divorced. Widows. Happily and unhappily married.

I love them all. I'd like to get my arms around them and preach a sermon for each one. But Lord, for those women who know their calling is marriage, motherhood, and home management.

Would you encourage them? Thank you for them. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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