

A Mother's Day Reflection
Deuteronomy 5:16
May 9, 2021

Today is Mother's Day and I wonder how you define the word "mother." Does the word "mother" simply mean any female who gives birth to a child? Or does it mean something more than that?

Let's start with the Bible. According to the Bible, the very first mother in human history was "Eve." Eve's Hebrew name is "Chavah", which mean "to breathe," "to live" or to give life." "Chavah" means a life giver.

So, when God created a woman, he intended her to be someone who gives birth to a child. The Holman Bible Dictionary defines a mother as: a female parent who carries, gives birth to, and cares for a child. According to this dictionary being a mother is more than just giving birth to a child. Perhaps this definition needs to be expanded. It should include loving, caring, comforting, protecting, teaching and modeling moral character, and sacrificing herself for the benefit of the child.

We all know that there are some unfit parents in this world, both mothers and fathers. Some of them abandon, abuse, and corrupt their children. Some of them consider their children as a way to get social benefits from the government. More children, greater benefits. However, I want to believe that most parents are not like that, especially mothers.

Decent mothers provide a home, food, love, and moral examples as best as they can. They are there for their children in good times and bad. They are there in times of sickness, loneliness, and troubles. They laugh with their children and they cry with them. Also, there are women who did not give birth to their children but still provide all of these things to them. They could be grandmothers, aunts, and even strangers who foster or adopt them. To these women and the mothers who try their best to provide what they need, we salute. They are true heroes of the children they take care of.

Even when the children go astray and the whole world is against them, often their mothers never abandon them. They love them no matter what.

In the Old Testament, there is a story about a woman named Rizpah. She was King Saul's concubine. Unlike King Solomon who had 700 wives and 300

concubines, King Saul had one wife, Ahinoam, and one concubine, Rizpah. King Saul was the first King of Israel and King David was the second.

In the days of King David, there was a famine in Israel for three consecutive years. Famine in Palestine was not uncommon. They had famines quite often but three consecutive years of famine was unusual. So, King David asked the Lord what the cause was for the famine, and the Lord answered him saying it was because of the brutality of King Saul and his household against the Gibeonites.¹ They killed the Gibeonites and tried to eliminate them. The Gibeonites were not Israelites. They were the natives of the land of Canaan. When the Israelites took the land of Canaan, Joshua made a treaty with the Gibeonites in the name of the Lord. They would be allowed to continue to live in their land but they would be woodcutters and water carriers for the Israelites.² However, King Saul later broke the treaty and tried to eliminate them.

When David learned of this, he wanted to appease the Gibeonites and put an end to the famine. So, David asked the Gibeonites what they wanted for their compensation. They wanted 7 descendants of Saul to be given to them so that they may kill them and hang their bodies on a hill. David agreed, and he handed over two sons of Rizpah, Saul's concubine, and five grandsons of Saul. They were five sons of Merab, Saul's daughter.³

The Gibeonites killed them and hung their bodies on a hill for all to see. It was a gruesome display. Can you imagine the agony of Rizpah when she learned that both of her sons were executed and their bodies were disgraced in a public display? What about Merab whose five sons were killed and hung the same way?

Both of these women lost their entire family. Some to a war and the rest in this horrifying way. I am not sure if Merab had ever gone to the execution site but Rizpah did. No one can really envisage or visualize or describe the agony of Rizpah as she journeyed to the execution site. When she arrived there and saw her sons' bodies, I am sure she just collapsed. What was even more excruciating was that she was allowed to take down the bodies and give them a burial.

Rizpah stayed there day and night to protect the bodies of her sons and perhaps that of Merab's sons from vultures and jackals. She stayed there for five

¹ 2 Samuel 21:1

² Joshua 9.

³ 2 Samuel 21:2-8

months doing that as she was watching her sons' bodies decay. Can you imagine the agony of this woman?

When David heard of her tenacity, he was deeply moved to compassion. He went to the execution site and had all the bodies (bones) removed and given a decent burial. After that, the Lord listened to the prayers of the Israelites. The famine stopped.⁴ Rizpah's resolute vigil demonstrates the love of all mothers.

Mother's love is like that. It is resilient and steadfast.

Mothers share their children's pains and sufferings and often internalize them in their own hearts.

"A Baptist pastor in Austin, Texas, received a telephone call one day from a parishioner who had become a new father. The man wanted the pastor to be present when he told his wife, the new mother, that she had given birth to a beautiful baby – healthy and normal in every way except one – the baby had no ears. The baby had auditory openings and his hearings on both sides were fine. But he had no fleshy outside part that we common call ears. The doctor assured the parents the problem could be corrected when the boy became an adult and a donor could be found.

Well, it was hard for this little guy when he started school. Many times, he came home crying. Other kids called him 'a freak.' They stared at him, whispered behind him, and often taunted him. He grew up learning to cope with it, supported by the love of his parents. He became an excellent student in school, graduated from high school at the top of his class and went to college to study geology.

One day he received a call from his father who told him a donor had been found and that the operation would occur soon. Following the successful operation, the young man was very pleased with his new set of ears, and his parents were very happy for him. The young man found a whole new dimension of happiness in his life. He now felt whole, normal and complete. He graduated with honors from college, got a job in a distant state, and enrolled for some classes in graduate school.

One day another telephone call came from his father with the news that his mother had a serious heart attack. He rushed home, but arrived a little too late. She had died right before he arrived. Later at the mortuary, his father called him to

⁴ 2 Samuel 21:9-14

the mother's casket and pushed back her hair to show the son that his mother had no ears. She was the donor of his ears.

The father said, "She made me promise never to tell you."⁵ From the day of his birth his mother was waiting for the day when he was old enough to have a new set of ears. His pains and suffering and all the tears were her agony. When he was old enough, she was more than happy to give him her own ears. Such is mother's love.

Another thing I want to share with you is that often mothers turn their tragedies into something positive, either turning it into some sort of philanthropy, or a support group.

Margaret Wheatley tells of a story of a woman in Rwanda. She was a mother of six children and pregnant with her seventh child. At that time Rwanda had a civil war and over 500,000 people were killed. It happened in 1994. This woman's village was destroyed by a massacre. Almost everyone in the village were killed. She was shot first, and was buried under the bodies of her own six children. They were all shot and killed. The killers thought that she was dead. After the killing spree had passed, she dug herself out, and buried her children. Soon after that she gave birth to her new child. In that village, there were children whose parents were killed in the massacre. So, she adopted five of those children. She said she believed that her life had been spared so that she might care for those orphaned children.

As Wheatley shared this story she commented saying:

"This young African mother teaches me what it means to have a vocation to be fully human. I believe we become more fully human with any gesture of generosity, any time we reach out to another rather than withdraw into our individual suffering. To become fully human, we need to keep opening our hearts, no matter what. At this time when suffering and anxiety continue to increase, when there is always reason to weep for some unbearable tragedy inflicted by one human on another, I try to remember to keep my heart open."⁶

On this Mother's Day, let us not only remember and honor our mothers but also reflect on how we can be more compassionate.

⁵ From Leonard Sweet's sermon "Who Put It There?", www.esermons.com

⁶ Ibid.