

SLIDE 1

Motherhood: Worthy of Highest Honor

Mother's Day 2010

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Introduction

Have you ever wondered when Americans started celebrating Mother's Day? The holiday was born out of one woman's desire to honor her mother's life of sacrifice and grace.

Born in 1864 in Grafton, West Virginia, Anna Jarvis witnessed the aftermath of the Civil War through a child's eyes. Her mother, Anna Maria Reeves-Jarvis, had spent the war organizing women to nurse wounded soldiers from both the North and South, and generally attempting to hold her border-state community together. After the war, Anna Maria started "Mothers' Friendship Days" to reconcile families that had been divided by the conflict.

Throughout her life, Anna Maria modeled the ideals of Victorian motherhood. She gave up her dreams of college in order to tend to an older husband and four children. She bore the loss of seven other children with grace. She taught Sunday school in the local Methodist church for 20 years and stayed active in benevolent work.

Anna Maria's death in 1905 devastated her daughter. Two years later, Anna got the idea to found a holiday remembering her mother, and all mothers, whom she felt could never be thanked enough.

Mother's Day was first celebrated in 1908 in Grafton (where Anna grew up) and Philadelphia (where she lived as an adult). Later, in a resolution passed May 8, 1914, the U.S. Congress officially established the second Sunday in May as Mother's Day.

One person can change a nation. It is a beautiful story. But her story is not the reason we are keen in the church set aside a day to honor Mothers. This is our reason:

SLIDE 2

The Real Reason we honor our Mother's on Mother's Day

The reason we are so keen to honor mother's in the church is because in the Bible it is clear that we should.

SLIDE 3

Exodus 20:12 (NIV)

¹² **"Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.**

Deuteronomy 5:16 (NIV)

¹⁶ **"Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live long and that it may go well with you in the land the Lord your God is giving you.**

Matthew 15:4 (NIV)

⁴ **For God said, 'Honor your father and mother' and 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.'**

SLIDE 4

Matthew 19:19 (NIV)

¹⁹ **honor your father and mother,' and 'love your neighbor as yourself.'"**

Luke 18:20 (NIV)

²⁰ **You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.'"**

Ephesians 6:2 (NIV)

² **"Honor your father and mother"—which is the first commandment with a promise—**

Did you notice something?

SLIDE 5

That motherhood is worthy of highest honor.

God put it right in the Big 10,

Naming it first after honoring God, his name and his day above everything. Putting as the number 5 in the Big 10,

SLIDE 6**Exodus 20:12 (NIV)**

¹² "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.

in superior order to not committing murder, adultery, theft, lying or coveting

God put it right in the Big 10, the Ten Commandments.

SLIDE 7

Live the 10!

Then Jesus the son of God repeated it more than several times in his teaching in the New Testament. The the Holy Spirit added the exclamation point by including its importance in the Ephesians.

So the reason we honor motherhood is because God says motherhood is worthy of the highest honor.

SLIDE 8**Deuteronomy 5:16 (NIV)**

¹⁶ "Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live long and that it may go well with you in the land the Lord your God is giving you.

But did you notice what God left out?

God left out detailed instructions on how to honor mom. He left that to our imagination and initiative.. Literally the sky is the limit, the point is that we do it.

Now where does this leave us.

Well for some it leaves us in a difficult position.

Some of us don't even know who are birth mother's are? Or maybe our real mom's did not live with much honor themselves, falling victim to alcoholism, drug addiction, love addition, security addiction. Maybe our own mothers found themselves abandoned by your father, or in need of leaving your father to protect the lives of themselves or you. Maybe our mom's didn't remarry well leaving us in the homes of men who did not want us, or worse, abused us.

It can be complicated honor mother.

But I am confident of this:

SLIDE 9

God never commands us to do something he doesn't empower us to do.

Because even the most excellent mom, is far from perfect. She is driven by her motherhood instinct to do things that seem most irrational at times

SLIDE 10

—rather like the she bear that attacks a much larger male bear just to protect her young.

Perhaps your mom has been too protective, too smothering...

Sometimes the most important conclusions we can reach about life comes from what God leaves out.

SLIDE 11

God does not put an "if" clause in the command to honor.

He doesn't say honor your mother if she got it all right. Did it right ever time.

In the 5th commandment, he simply says, honor your father and your mother that it may go well with you in the land the Lord your God is giving you.

How can God give us this carte blanc instruction?

He knows what our mother was like! She is just like you and me. The verse applies to here also: for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

But God loves us in our sin

Honor my Mother?

As our Bible study group began focusing on the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20, I felt pretty smug. After all, I didn't worship more than one God, steal, commit adultery or murder, lie about my neighbors, or plot to cheat them out of what was rightfully theirs. But one evening we came to the command to honor our father and mother (v. 12). Against my will, I thought of my mother, who'd passed away ten years earlier. Honor her, when I felt more relief than sorrow at her death? The tears I cried at her funeral were those of an adult daughter who had never heard the words I most needed from her: "I'm proud of you."

My birth was Mother's "midlife surprise." When my father died less than four years later, I gave her a reason to go on. But in many ways my mother treated me like a small adult, and our relationship developed into an unhealthy codependency. Her attempts to shelter me

from the world's influences only fueled my insecurities; I grew from a spoiled child into an anxious, introverted adolescent.

Complicating matters, Mother battled deteriorating health and depression, but because of the rigid faith-healing religion she adhered to, she shunned medical intervention.

By the time I reached my teens, my mother had sunk into a state of apathy. The more I attempted to earn her praise—with high grades, awards, and interscholastic competitions—the more rejected I felt by her indifference. During my senior year, I earned a major role in a drama production that she never attended. Her only explanation was, "I didn't feel up to it."

The following years were the same. When at age 20 I met the man I'd later marry, my mother openly resented him. Her bigoted remarks about his ancestry horrified us both. During more rational moments, she showed brief motherly interest in our wedding plans, but at the last minute threatened not to attend. I cursed the cruelty of a God who took away my father and left me with an ill, elderly mother who seemed impossible to please.

After my wedding, Mother's downward spiral continued. Our visits usually deteriorated into criticisms about how I raised my children, reproach for my leaving the church in which she'd raised me (my husband had led me to a true faith in Christ), and unfavorable comparisons to other family members who "obviously" loved her more than I did. ...

Mother's health finally worsened to the point she committed herself to a nursing home. I attempted a few family visits, hoping she'd enjoy seeing her granddaughters. But she showed little interest in them and often received me with such hostility that I left in tears. Congestive heart failure finally ended her life; she died a bitter, lonely woman. ...

At my mother's funeral, I studied her features as she lay in the casket. Even in death, her lips seemed pressed into a condemning frown, the same embittered expression that stared back at me from her last professional photograph. Two years after her death, a job-related move took my husband and me to another city. I didn't even unpack the portrait, but hid it away in a box in the attic. ...

Finally, that night at the Bible study, I came face-to-face with my hardened heart. To harbor contempt and anger, to shut someone out of your life and memory because of perceived hurt or injustice—these aren't the heart attitudes of forgiveness. I knew firsthand they punish the "victim" far more than the "villain." I left the Bible class that night convicted to the core. ...

But how was I to honor—to love, respect, and esteem—a parent I held responsible for so much heartache? I began by admitting I needed God's help not only to confront my feelings toward her but also to confess my selfishness and lack of compassion. I acknowledged with gratitude that she gave me life and nurtured me the best she was able. I took into account the factors that had shaped her life, not the least of which were her own dysfunctional parents and later the lure of religious teachings that distorted God's truth.

The fact is, there are no perfect human parents, so I had no right to expect perfection from my mother. Since sin entered the world, every succeeding generation has carried its own "baggage" into parenthood. Hadn't I done so with my children? As desperately as I wanted

not to repeat my mother's mistakes, when I battled recurring bouts of anger, resentment, and depression, my family inevitably suffered.

The next step was to let my mother back into my life, emotionally if not physically.

Resolutely I climbed the attic stairs to retrieve her portrait, carried it to my desk, and stared at it a long time.

I'm sorry, I silently told my mother. I haven't honored you. I've tried to push you from conscious thought. I forgive you, and I pray you've also forgiven me for turning away from you. I want your memory to be a part of my life.

An incredible peace filled me as God enabled me to do what I couldn't do on my own: remember my mother with love. Suddenly I saw her as God created her to be, and was able to forgive—and in a small way forget—the hurtful things that had passed between us. Then an even more amazing thing happened. The bitter, condemning frown I'd always seen in Mom's portrait now appeared as a serene smile. In my mother's eyes I saw the acceptance and approval for which I'd yearned.

Did the picture change? No. Nor were past hurts wiped out. What changed was my perception of the past, which in turn has positively affected my present and future. In forgiving and honoring her, I'm breaking the chains of bitterness in my life.

My greatest regret is that I was unable to reach this place of forgiveness while my mother was still alive. For other adult children of "difficult" parents, there may still be time—even if you see little hope that he or she ever will become the loving, responsive parent for which you long.

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Myra Langley Johnson, "Honor My Mother?" Today's Christian Woman (5-11-07)

SLIDE 12

A mother's Touch

You see our mother's, all of our mothers are just like us. The verse, "for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God applies just as equally to your mom as mine. But God showed us the greatest measure of love. While we were yet sinners he loved us. He died for us.

The greatest thing we can do for our mothers is love her, just as she is, a sinner like us. Show here that love today. And if she is no longer here to wish a happy mother's day to. Then honor her by the way you love and live today. You could give her no greater gift.

Prayer for Mothers Day 2003

Lord, we thank you for the mothers of yesteryear who lived their faith and gave us a richer heritage of the spirit. We rejoice in their "at homeness" with you in the kingdom of heaven.

God, bless the mothers whose children have grown up and gone out on their own. Enable them to let go of their children as their children and let them enjoy a priceless friendship as peers.

God bless all the mothers presently in the throes and joys of motherhood. Give them a double portion of love's patience. Give them a double portion of physical strength. Renew their spirit every hour. Give them the grace to be partner and mother at the same time. Help them know the unsurpassed joys of children at home. Whisper to them every few minutes amidst the frustrations of motherhood: "My grace is sufficient for you."

God, comfort the mothers who have had to give up their children to death before seeing their maturity.

God, bless those stepmothers, mothers of adopted children and foster mothers who give themselves for children others bore.

God, comfort those who long to be mothers but are not.

God, bless those who choose not to be mothers themselves that they may minister to the world's children. . . your own children.

God, bless the young girls who dream of motherhood -in the years ahead. Help them keep themselves, body and soul, as a living sacrifice totally acceptable to you as mothers-to-be.

Thank you, God, for our own mother. Keep her in the hollow of your hand and the fullness of your heart forever.

In the name of the One who said from the Cross: "Behold your mother." Amen