

## THE MEANING OF M.O.T.H.E.R.

Mother's Day

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An Expository Sermon

Written By

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**D**avid Letterman, the late night talk show host, developed a segment in his show where he presented his big top ten of various things. If you like his brand of humor, he really devised good material. As you might guess, this whole approach to comedy spawned others to devise their own top ten lists, like the guy who came up with what he calls, *Top 10 Sayings Of Biblical Mothers*. Talk about funny ...

1. Samson! Get your hand out of that lion. You don't know where it's been! (Judges 14:5-8).
2. David! I told you not to play in the house with that sling! Go practice your harp. We pay good money for those lessons!
3. Abraham! Stop wandering around the countryside and get home for supper!
4. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego! Leave those clothes outside, you smell like a dirty ol' furnace!
5. Cain! Get off your brother! You're going to kill him some day!
6. Noah! No, you can't keep them! I told you, don't bring home any more strays!
7. Gideon! Have you been hiding in that wine press again? Look at your clothes! (Judges 6:11).
8. James and John! No more burping contests at the dinner table, please. People are going to call you the sons of thunder! (Mark 3:17).
9. Judas! Have you been in my purse again?!

10. Jesus! What do you think, you were born in a barn?

Isn't that good? Can't you just hear mothers from the Bible saying things like this? I can. Regardless of the age or who the person eventually becomes, mothers have a way of getting their attention, don't they? I know mine did on more than one occasion.

Reading through a list like this is fun, but it is also instructive in so far that it gives us a small glimpse at what a mother is and what she does. It tells us something about her job description carefully designed by the Creator. Yet, it is somewhat limited because it only pictures her as one who watches out for the general welfare of her children. As we all know, a mother, a really good, biblical, godly mother, is so much more than that. Just what or who is she?

To answer this all important question, I think it would be helpful to turn her name into an acrostic. What is an acrostic? An acrostic is a literary device where the letters of a known word are each given meaning to teach you something about the word in question. A few examples will suffice.

- **F**urious frogs
- **R**ibbit, ribbit in a lovely way
- **O**bserving prey
- **G**oggle eyes watching a buzzing fly
- **S**limy sloth waiting for that fly.

Get the picture? Now, apply this same principle to MOTHER and see what you come up with. Here's one person's idea of what this word could represent.

- **M** is for the million things she gave me.
- **O** is for the fact she's getting old.
- **T** is for the tears she shed to raise me.
- **H** is for her heart of gold.
- **E** is for the love that's always in her eyes.
- **R** is for the fact that she's always right. (Well, isn't she?).

I like this, but I, personally, would give the letters slightly different meanings, meanings which teach what I think God is looking for when He thinks of the key ingredients of what makes a mother a great mother in His eyes. Here is my Mother's Day acrostic, and I pray and hope it will not only be a tribute to you mothers, but will challenge you to strive to be all God would have you to be to your families.

## **M** is for Multi-faceted

Admit it men. Women are just wired differently than you. Try as you may, you just can't keep pace with them, can you? If you're the typical man and father, it has come to your attention, or soon will, that like a laser guided missile you tend to lock on one function at a time. If you're changing the oil in the car, it's a given you're probably not talking on the phone and also talking to your good buddy in your garage all at the same time. No way. You're changing the oil and there's no way you're going to add anything to your plate to distract you, right? Take my life as a living

example. When I'm playing the piano at home is when my wife, and my children's mother, will stand next to the instrument and want to have a deep conversation. Typically, I stop playing and say something profound like, "Honey, I can't play and talk to you at the same time. So I either play and you listen, or I'll talk to you and not play. What would you like me to do?"

Trust me on this one. This is not the case with women, or mother's especially. They can drive the car in heavy traffic, switch lanes with no issues, silence and unruly child in a car seat, text a message to a friend, and change the CD track almost simultaneously. Jaw-dropping, isn't it?

Zero your sights in for a second on just what a mother really is. The list is endless, is it not? In case you've not thought about her job description lately, let me remind you. She's a ...

Teacher, Guide, Counselor, Prison Warden, Lover, Maid, Gardener, Chef, Friend, Therapist, Taxi Driver, Telephone Operator (Boy is she), Shopper (She probably uses that card so often the numbers are worn off, right?), Doctor (Despite the fact she never been to medical school, she just innately knows how to save your life, how to stop bleeding, how to get splinters out of your skin, or how to set bones), Vet (Seems like they always know when Fido is under the weather), Bounty Hunter (She always knows how to track and hunt down those guilty of criminal behavior), Cheerleader (Who else is your greatest fan at your Little League games?) Activist, Paramedic, Dishwasher, Waitress (Ever heard those familiar words, "Honey, what can I get you for breakfast?" or "Here, would you like me to get you seconds? I'm up," Story-teller, Singer (My mom's favorite number at night was "My Little Buckaroo."), Prayer Warrior (Who hasn't had ol' mom in their room at night leading you in the famous, Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep, if I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take), Entertainer ... and so on and so forth.

Yes, a mother wears all of these hats, and the most amazing thing in all of the world is she can and does wear many of them all at the same time, doesn't she? Who else can bandage a wound, talk to her best friend on the phone, and fill out a school form all while cooking dinner? Tell me, who?



Surely, not a father. God made him with different strengths.

A mother is a most wonderful thing, for while the father tends to give his full attention to the wrench in his hand, the mother picks up the slack and keeps life flowing by doing multiple things. Men, please realize the priceless gift you possess. She's a lot like the **Leatherman Rebar** tool you own. I have a couple of them because they are so useful. Why is this tool so amazing? It has everything you need:

- Needle Nose Pliers
- Regular Pliers
- Premium Replaceable Wire Cutters

- Electrical Crimper
- Wire Stripper
- 420HC Knife
- 420 HC Serrated Knife
- Saw
- Awl with Thread Loop
- Rule (8 inches)
- Can Opener
- Bottle Opener
- Wood/Metal File
- Phillips Screwdriver
- Large Screwdriver
- Small Screwdriver

But she's far more valuable than this tool because she can multi-task. Really, if this novel tool was called a **Leatherwoman Rebar** it would be capable of utilizing some of its wonderful features at the same time. Men, sons, daughters I have a simple question: Do you realize what an addition and asset your mother is to the family? No wonder the writer of Proverbs 31:10 said in amazement thousands of years ago:

“An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels.”

Thank God for creating someone as priceless as this. Better yet, make it a point to let her know today how thankful you are for her priceless abilities. **M** is for what? **Multi-faceted**. Boy, is that the truth, yet there is more.

## ○ is for On the Job.

I thank the Lord my mother was always there for me, and now I'm equally thankful he has given me a wife who possess the same godly traits. Some mothers desert their children, others ignore them, some hire others to take care of the little ones, but the godly mother is one who is always there for them. Think about her job description.

Wanted: A woman who is willing to work 24/7/365, whose ear is always tuned to a cry, whose hands are always ready to help, whose ears are always ready to listen, whose feet are always ready to check out the commotion down the hall, whose ... well, you fill in the rest. And the pay? It's great. You impact a child for God. You teach a child how to live, work, and walk in this world. You prepare a child to make their mark on this ol' world long after you're gone. Perks are plentiful too. Plenty of smiles, funny stories that will turn into funny memories, precious times words can't even begin to describe.

Got any takers?

Everybody likes to rest, but that word just isn't in the vocabulary of the godly mother. She knows her job is never over. She never punches out. She never takes a vacation. She never gets a total break. No, she like an Energizer Bunny keeps on going, and going, and going. Again, you hear about her from the pen of the writer of Proverbs 31:

<sup>15</sup> She rises also while it is still night, and gives food to her household, and portions to her maidens.<sup>16</sup> She considers a field and buys it; from her earnings she plants a vineyard. <sup>17</sup> She girds herself with strength, and makes her arms strong. <sup>18</sup> She senses that her gain is good; her lamp does not go out at night.

See what I mean? The godly mother is one who is always working for the benefit of the family, plus she's always there for them. How about your mother? Was she there for you? Mine was.

- When I saw how close I could come to a trash can in the garage before stopping, and wound up in it with a hurt back, she was there.
- When I needed rides to baseball practices, she was there.
- When I got food poisoning at my grandmother's house, she was there with me at the hospital.
- When I stepped bare-footed on a 2 x 4 and impaled my foot on a nail driven into the wood for a chicken coop my dad was building us, she was there.
- When I ran over the cord on the electric mower, she was there.
- When I beat down the door of my best friend's new army for because he wouldn't let me in, she was there.
- When I kissed my first girl (on the nose!), she was there.
- When my first real love broke up with me after for years of dating her, she was there to tell me, "Marty, God can take the ashes of your life and build something beautiful."
- When I'd wake her up late at night with a question from Ezekiel 38, she was there to answer my questions.
- When one of my best friends, Robert Romero died right after high school, she was there.
- When I got my Varsity letter, she was there.
- When I fell in love with the next door neighbor named Liz Saly, she was there.
- When my sister, Marla, died from ovarian cancer she was there for her through the seven-month painful process.
- When I left my sister a couple of weeks ago, knowing it would be last time I'd see her on this ol' earth, we hugged and cried before Liz and I headed to the car, and after I left Marla sat on the bed in the living room and cried. That's when my mother sat next to her and consoled her, "Honey, this is just all part of the process we must go through to see Jesus and to see dad. God is with you."
- When my sister died six weeks ago, it was my mother who called me to give me the sad news, and she was there to console me because I, the pastor, could barely talk. Yes, she was there. She's always there.

Yes, my mother, like any godly mother was always right there for me and for my two sisters each step of the way. At times she had to bandage my wounds, at other times she had to paddle my posterior, but in the final analysis, I am who I am because she was always on the job ... and still is. Question is, are you on the job? If so, know what a blessing you are to your children and husband. Know also the power of your continued influence.

Ever paid attention to those massive cables on the Bay Bridge in San Francisco? Think of the weight they support. Think of how strong they are. No matter what the weight load, they bear it. No matter what the weather conditions, bright and sunny or windy and rainy, they do their job 100%. Isn't that just like a mother? Through her continued presence, she keeps the roads in her family open. Thank the Lord for her.

It's test time: **M** is for *Multi-faceted*. **O** is for *On the Job*.

## **T** is for Tender

Be honest. There is just nothing like the touch of your mother, is there? Her skin is so soft, in fact, I'd dare say it is but a reflection of her heart. And what's that heart like? Well, in a godly mother, it's a heart full of ingredients like love, compassion, forgiveness, and mercy.

In a metaphorical way, the mother is very much like a butterfly. This beautiful insect has a keen sensitivity. It is sensitive even to the slightest breeze. It flutters around and intrinsically knows of the rapidly changing nature of its environment, and it is able to react quickly. This is why it is hard to catch one! Plus, it is oh, so soft and beautiful, isn't it? It can land on a wonderful rose and barely move a petal when it flies away.

Again, I ask you, "Is this not like a mother?" She flutters quietly around your life and tenderly sets down at the most intimate, crucial moments. When I was dating the wrong kind of girl in college, it was my mother who eventually told me, "Honey, I think your girlfriend has some issues you need to think hard about." I listened and my life was forever changed by her tender insight. When we moved when I was nine and I had a hard time leaving my childhood friend, Kenny, it was my mom who tenderly told me, "It will be all right. You'll still see him, plus you'll make new friends at your new school." Again, she her soothing words were right on target.

Some mother's yell. Some taunt. Some cuss. Some degrade. Some show little or no compassion. I'm thankful to God I didn't have one of those. I had one who fulfilled the essence of Ephesians 4:32 which says,

"And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you."

Tender-hearted, not hard-hearted, that's what my mother was to me because she was, and is, a godly woman. And because her tender-heart was balanced with a forgiving heart, there was always plenty of room for grace.

- When I threw a baseball through her front bedroom window, there was tender-hearted grace.
- When I turned her pineapple upside down cake right side up as I walked across the

street to deliver it to my best friend's mom, there was tender-hearted grace.

- When I opened the door to our home when I was home alone to a hobo who wanted a cup of sugar, there was tender-hearted grace.
- When I rebelled against the Faith in High School, she gave me Christian literature to read to answer my questions. When I threw the books across the living room and told her emphatically "I don't want to read that junk," there was tender-hearted grace that eventually wooed me back to the Faith.

Tenderness from a mother goes a long way in this decadent and decaying world. In fact, I think we can safely say if more mother's lived with tenderness, there would be fewer troubled children, fewer runaways, fewer arguments, fewer mental disorders, fewer gangs (because the kids would feel loved), fewer bad grades (because the child would perform because they'd feel unconditional love). Yes, life would be so much richer if more mothers would ask the Lord Jesus for the unconditional tenderness which can only come from His hand.

We stand in awe of those godly women who know and live out their calling. Thank you. Thank you for being Jesus as you raise a family. Thank you for living life on another plane altogether. Thank you for showing us how to really live as God's designed.

M is for multi-faceted. O is for On the Job. T is for Tenderness.

## H is for Heroine

What is a hero? A hero is the person who roots for you. They are the person who is always there for you when others aren't. They are the one who believes in you and lets you know it. They, like an old oak tree, aren't going to be moved by the winds of your liabilities. No. They'll always be focusing on your assets. They'll be the person whispering in your ear, "Honey, you can do it," "I'm behind you 100%," "I support you," "I believe in you, honey." "I have faith in you. Go for it."

Have you got a hero? Don't you know Jesus did . . . as did Abraham, Moses, Daniel, Esther, and Timothy. They had godly mothers who were there for them, rooting them on the path of life. Abraham Lincoln did. Regarding his dear mother, he once said, "All that I am, or hope to be, I owe to my angel mother." Napoleon Bonaparte echoed this when he remarked one day, "The future destiny of the child is always the work of the mother." No doubt this is true because she is the heroine behind the person who becomes the hero.

Forgive me for being highly personal, but again, my mother was my heroine many more times than I can count.

- Like when I tried out for Little League.
- Like when I played at my first piano recital.
- Like when I ran for 8<sup>th</sup> grade class treasurer and didn't get elected.
- Like when I tried out for a lead part in an 8<sup>th</sup> grade play called "Dracula Baby."
- Like when I played Brutus in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade play of the life of Julius Caesar.
- Like when I preached my first sermon.
- Like when I applied to college, wondering how they'd ever accept me.
- Like when I graduated from the doctoral program last week. Even though she couldn't be there, so wrote me, plus we talked on the phone.

Let me tell you, because I had someone behind me shouting, “Honey, you can do it,” it motivated me to do great things, especially for God.

In 1965, May 24 to be exact, a 13 ½ foot boat slipped quietly out of the marina at Falmouth, Massachusetts. Its destination? England. Its name? Tinkerbelle. Its pilot? One Robert Manry, an unknown editor of the Cleveland Plain Dealer. His goal? To set a goal by crossing the Atlantic solo in the smallest vessel.

He didn’t tell co-workers why he was taking time off because he was afraid they’d ridicule and make fun of him, after all, why would he dare think he could make the journey? He was just an editor, with ten years behind a desk under his belt. He did tell a few close relatives ... I guess so they could pray! He also made real sure his lovely wife, Virginia, knew where he was going. What was her response? Absolute excitement from the beginning.

Seventy-eight long, lonely, sea-tossing days later, Robert sailed into a port on the coast of England. Who met him? Three hundred vessels with horns blaring and water spouts bursting shots of water, and forty thousand people crowding the docks, cheering for the brave, adventuresome hero. And, oh yes, there was also another very special person on the dock that day. Her name was Virginia. Remember her? She was the woman who whispered in his ear from the beginning, “Honey, I believe in you. You can do it. Go for it.” That’s some kind of woman. That’s some kind of mother.

Once more, we must stop this day and thank the good Lord for women like Virginia who drip with enthusiasm, who look at obstacles and call them opportunities, who don’t see the glass as half empty but half full, who don’t worry about what you can’t do but are wildly enthusiastic about what you can do. I’m thankful I’ve got one of those kind of mothers. I’m extra thankful my children do as well. May you change the landscape of your family, mothers, by choosing today to be their heroine.

It’s review time: **M** is for *Multi-faceted*. **O** is for *On the Job*. **T** is for *Tenderness*. **H** is for *Heroine*.

## **E** is for Educator

In your life you’ll have many teachers. I had twenty years of them. But let me tell you, none of them came close the impact of the teaching of my godly mother. She taught me what I needed to know most, as I’m sure your mother did or is doing. Just what was her course content?

- Don’t throw food at the table.
- Don’t hit your sister.
- Don’t smack when you’re eating.
- Don’t interrupt adults when they are speaking.
- Don’t touch the top of the stove. I didn’t listen to this one and learned the hard way.
- Never answer the door when your parents are not home.
- Never talk to strangers.
- Never take anything from strangers.
- Remember to brush your teeth after meals.
- Put your toys away.



- Share your toys.
- Put your dishes in the dishwasher.
- Don't cross your eyes, they may stay that way.
- Don't make fun of disabled people.
- Don't talk back.
- Don't bathe the cat.
- Don't throw the ball in the house.
- Don't even think about it (This covers everything).
- Remember to wash behind your ears.
- Don't run with scissors.
- Wait at least one hour after you eat before you jump into the pool. I never quite understood that rule.
- Don't run around the pool.
- Keep your arms inside the car while it's moving.
- Don't talk with your mouth full.
- Don't walk away from me when I'm talking to you.

As you know, this course content is endless. That's why mothers have you for a good solid eighteen years. It takes about that long for some of this stuff to penetrate your thick skull.

Mothers are the world's best educators, yet the greatest thing they teach you is about the importance of biblical love, the love which moved a Savior to die for the sins of the world. My mother planted many life truths into the soil of my life, but the one which grew to be the greatest plant came from the seed called God's love. In our home she taught us about God's love by word and by deed.

I remember the night in 1964 when the phone rang in the middle of the night. My parents came into the room Marla and I shared and said their best friend's 19-year-old-son, Rick, who was home on leave with the Coast Guard, had died in a car wreck on slippery road. They informed us they needed to go be with Nick and Virginia and that Grandpa and Grandma were coming over to watch us. Is that not what love does? Love goes and comforts friends who had lost their daughter, Nancy at 5, and who had now lost their son, Rick. Believe me, I took note from my mother's example, and even though Virginia is around ninety now and doesn't really know who my mother is because she has Alzheimer's, she still calls her. Her life was/is the epitome of John's words in his First Epistle, "Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth" (1 John 3:18). Oh, might that kind of love been seen in you as a mother.

Someone, I don't know who, put a mother's love in perspective by taking a little liberty with the words of the love chapter of the Bible, 1 Corinthians 13:

If I live in house of spotless beauty with everything in its place, but have not love,  
I am housekeeper-not a homemaker.

If I have time for waxing, polishing, and decorative achievements, but have not  
love, my children learn cleanliness-not godliness.

Love leaves the dust in search of a child's laugh.

Love smiles at the tiny fingerprints on a newly cleaned window.  
Love picks up the child before it picks up the toys.  
Love is present through the trials.  
Love reprimands, reproves, and is responsive.  
Love crawls with the baby, walks with the toddler, runs with the child, then stands aside to let the youth walk into adulthood.  
Love is the key that opens salvation's message to a child's heart.  
Before I became a mother I took glory in my house of perfection.  
Now I glory in God's perfection of my child.  
As a mother, there is much I must teach my child, but the greatest of all is love.

I couldn't agree more. Love is in short supply in our world. Oh, for more godly mothers who will put godly, biblical, unconditional love on the front burner of every teaching opportunity.

You guessed it. It's test time again. **M** is for *Multi-faceted*. **O** is for *On the Job*. **T** is for *Tenderness*. **H** is for *Heroine*. **E** is for *Educator*. Lastly,

## **R** is for Reverential

What do I mean by this? I mean a mother whom the Lord delights in God is one who delights in living to please Him. We read about this, again, in Proverbs 31:

“Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised” (v. 30).

A godless mother is easy to spot.

- She's focused on the external.
- She's concerned with the nails, the hair, the face, the body, the wrinkles, the perfumes, the jewelry, the powders, the eye liner, the earrings, and the ankle bracelets.
- She's the woman who spends more time fixing her outer face, than her inner face.
- She's the woman who spends more money one maintaining her countenance, than she would ever dare give to maintaining His Church.
- She's the woman who won't miss an issue of Glamour Magazine, but wouldn't think twice about passing up a Bible study.
- She lives like this because her life has an improper focus. She's deceived into thinking her way of life is ultimately profitable, but as we learn from Proverbs, she needs to realize that God's face shines upon that woman who puts Him first.

A reverential woman is just the opposite of all of this. Just what is a reverential woman?

- Prayer is more important than powder.
- Relationships are more important than rouge.

- Confession is more important than creams.
- Worship is more important than waxing.
- Bible study is more important than body study.
- Thinking about the Savior is more important than thinking about shopping.

This is a woman who fears the Lord. The Lord is to her life what the hub is to the wheel. It is what gives and keeps order.

Let me tell you, I am who I am today because I was raised by a woman like that, and now am married to a woman who follows suit. In a world caught up with all of the wrong priorities, we desperately need more women who know what it means to be reverential. We've got a bunch who are utterly consumed with looking like a model but not the Messiah. Thank God for those who go against the flow, who are committed to putting Christ first, who are daily working to teach through their example and teaching the importance of putting God's kingdom first above all things. I've got a hunch. If more mothers lived what I'm talking about we be able to trim back the police force and tear down a few prisons here and there. Amen?

What kind of mother are you going to be after this mother's day? Your family waits for you to impact them. How will you go about that? How will you make sure they will live to change the world for the better? You'll go forth today and remember what a godly mother really is.

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For those who already live this traits, we praise you today for a job well done. For those desirous of seeking improvement, we whisper in your ear, "We believe in you. Got for it! You can do it!"