



# 2023 Weekly Devotions

Week of: May 15<sup>th</sup> - 21<sup>st</sup>

Sermon: May 14<sup>th</sup>



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH  
building community • equipping believers • serving Jesus



May 15

**1 Corinthians 7:8-9, 32-34**

This may not be necessary but I want to begin this week of celebrating mothers by writing a devotion for those women who are not mothers. We do not need to apologize for a special day set aside for mothers and we don't need to redefine Mother's Day either. Mother's Day was established back in 1908 by a lady named Anna Jarvis and was officially recognized as a U.S. holiday in 1914. Her motivation was to honor the role and importance of mothers across the land. We need not feel bad about honoring those who are moms because some women are not.

Now, having said that, I want to take the time today to encourage those women who are either called by God to singleness or who have not been able to have children for various reasons. My hope is that no woman out there who is not a mother for these reasons would never feel less than whole, purposeful, and valuable as a daughter of King Jesus.

The Scriptures make it clear that some people who are unmarried would be wise to remain in that state if they have the gift of celibacy (1 Cor. 7:8-9). Paul himself was an unmarried man and remained single. He stated in verse 7 that he wished others could remain as he was (single) but realized that not everyone had the gift to do so. I have always chuckled just a bit when thinking of celibacy as a gift. I have often said, "That is a gift that I do not want." Of course, we must understand that Paul is writing from a kingdom minded focus. What do I mean by that?

In 1 Cor. 7:32-34 he writes, "But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he/she may please the Lord; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he/she may please their spouse, and their interests are divided." I simply want women who have been called of God to singleness, it too is a gift and a calling for what will ultimately be for His glory and for your joy as you walk faithfully with the Lord in your calling. For those who have remained barren to date, know that it is God's plan for your life and He can give you the grace to live well and find joy even as you deal with it. Like Hannah, you can still be a sweet vessel in the Potter's hands. Paul's admonition is that you might use your "undivided" time well for the glory of the Lord and your pursuit of holiness as His daughter.

Dear ladies, motherhood is without a doubt an honorable and high calling of God on a woman's life. Your value however is not tied up in "what" He calls you to do but the fact that He calls you His own - period. You have value because you were created in His image with a purpose and a plan. The point of 1 Corinthians 7 is to find contentment and peace in the station to which God has providentially called each one of us. As we celebrate mom's this week, know that you are not overlooked, forgotten, seen as less important, or insignificant in any way.

In many ways, motherhood is the means by which God shapes the world so powerfully. A pastor by the name of W.L. Caldwell once said long ago, "No nation is ever greater than its mothers, for they are the makers of its men." I will write more on that subject throughout the week but for today, those of you who haven't been called of God to motherhood can still help shape this world with your Christlike behavior and witness. As a child of God, do your part in bearing witness and sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ and you will be a world changer too.

May 16

**1 Samuel 3:1**

The days in which young Samuel was born were spiritually dry, and godly men were few and far between. The sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were good examples of poor leadership. It is important for us to always remember that God knows our circumstances and the condition of the world in which we live. His plan to intervene often unfolds over long periods of time. Noah worked on the ark for decades because the rain was coming. Moses lived on the backside of the mountain for 40 years because God was listening to the cry of His people. Jesus was born in a manger in Bethlehem because three decades later He would be offered as the Lamb of God sent to take away our sins. Into the ungodliness of Israel during the time of the judges, a little boy named Samuel was born.

A major thesis of my sermon Sunday was that God uses mothers to shape children to be mighty warriors in His hands. There are undoubtedly periods in the history of the world in which God had a plan that involved a young mother giving birth to and raising a child that would change the world for Christ glory. We can consider Elizabeth giving birth to John the Baptist as a good example of this. Mothers should know that it is their hands that in many ways are directly responsible for changing the world. They are shaping the arrows that are sent into the world for God's glory. How exciting a mom and dad should feel when they are blessed by God with a child. One never knows when the Lord may be entrusting parents with a tool that He will ultimately use to alter the landscape and direction of a society. That is precisely what He did when He gave Hannah the gift of a baby boy she went on to name Samuel.

Hannah you recall was barren. She desperately wanted a child so she prayed. I want to note in passing that although she felt the pain of being barren, she still loved God and worshipped Him. She was hurting but she was not bitter. She yearned to be a mother but she was not angry that God had not allowed it so far. I believe part of the reason God answered her prayer affirmatively was because of her sweet, gentle spirit towards Him. Of course, from a Kingdom and eternal perspective, God blessed her with a child because it was time for the man who was needed in Israel. I am reminded of the blessing that Mary experienced as the mother of Jesus. God said, "I need my Son to get to planet earth as a human being and you are the one through whom He will come." God was entrusting His chosen vessel to a mom. He did the same thing when He answered Hannah's prayer.

To highlight the circumstances of the culture at the birth of Samuel we need look no further than 1 Samuel 2:12 where it says, "Now the sons of Eli were worthless men; they did not know the Lord." Worthless men who did not know the Lord and yet they were serving as priests. Into this world was born a little boy who was loved deeply and who was dedicated to the Lord by his mother from the moment he was conceived. It was in her heart to take care of Him and to be sure he would be given over to the Lord for service to God. God knew He could trust a mother with a heart like Hannah. He knew she loved Him and would lead her little boy to love Him too. Along with her husband Elkanah, God knew that His plan to once again impact His chosen people would be carried out. Samuel was destined to become an arrow shot into the world as a warrior for the glory of God. All of that began because of the faithfulness of a young mother who loved God first.

May 17

## 1 Samuel 1

As we continue our journey today, I begin by speaking to the need of the hour for Israel. As mentioned yesterday, the nation was weak, morally corrupt, and powerless. Samson had died and the Philistines were once again oppressing the Israelites. The Bible tells us from 1 Samuel 3:1, "A word from the Lord was rare in those days, and visions were infrequent." It was as if God had nothing else to say to His people because they had ignored so much of what He had already said. The nation needed leadership and God had just the woman to raise just the boy to answer the call. Hannah gave to her nation and to the world the greatest gift that a woman can give, a godly child.

I want you to focus today on the characteristics of Hannah's life that point to the fact that she was a godly woman before she ever had children. Like Mary, the mother of Jesus, she was already fit to bring this boy into the world. God did not choose her and then hope that she would rise up to the calling. She already had a heart for God and in many ways understood the great call of God on a woman to be a mother. It was a mother that she could pour into her son and raise him to become a godly man. In so doing, she would be impacting generations to come long after she was gone which would be the means of bringing glory to the God whom she loved deeply.

Hannah knew where to go with her problems, which would serve her well throughout life and certainly through the demands of motherhood. She was already in a right relationship with God as evidenced through her worship of Him. 1 Samuel 1:10 reveals to us that she was already a praying woman. I think of the apostle Paul when I consider Hannah. I believe in her life there was a measure of contentment with God while at the same time a deep longing for a child. How is that like Paul? In Philippians 4:11, Paul said that he had learned to be content and yet we know that he longed for many things in the churches, in the lives of his friends, in the lives of fellow Jews, and in his relationships. Paul was content but still found himself at times wishing he could see his friends as he wondered about their well-being. You can be content and still yearn for some areas of life to be better. I am content but I sure wish our nations were on a different path and so I pray. Hannah prayed through tears because she knew her loving God cared, and she was comfortable taking her heartache to her heavenly Father.

Notice the beauty and even the essence of what it is to be a godly mother. In 1 Samuel 1:11, she makes a promise to God. Hannah was already a woman of integrity as she was a woman of her word. She made a vow to God to raise her son as a godly man and to give him back to God for His glory. I hope that we will all pause for a moment today and realize that the greatest endeavor a mother can undertake is to desire to give her children back to God. Dear ones, our children need to know the Lord Jesus as Savior and Lord above all else in this world. You may give them riches, comforts, opportunities, a name in their community, and accoladed for their accomplishments, but if you don't help them find Jesus, you have missed on the most important piece to their lives. No, you cannot make them love the Lord or even believe, but you can surely increase the likelihood that they will as you shape them in the ways of the Lord.

Hannah had a heart for God, and it was only natural that the little boy she was raising would develop one too. I think of all the times, as Johanna and I raised our children, that we were able to point them to Jesus, to exalt the goodness of God, to help them see His hand of protection and provision for our family, and to open their eyes to the beauty and wonder of His love for us. The joy of helping them see their own sinfulness and God's perfect plan of redemption was enough to capture their hearts.

May 18

**1 Samuel 1:5, 8; Ephesians 5:25-27**

Our first point to ponder this week dealt with the reality that some women are called to singleness. That in itself is a calling of God for some women. They are called to some area of service that is better suited for a woman who can devote more attention and time to the Lord without the added duties and responsibilities of being a wife and or mother. But, for the many who are called into motherhood, a godly husband is vitally important. We will see today that, even though Elkanah was not perfect, he loved the Lord and led his family to worship and to serve Him. We see a deep love demonstrated towards Hannah that included patience, understanding, and a willingness to give her freedom to pursue God and to give Him her best. I am sure that Samuel got to see displays of genuine love between his mother and father. It is of the utmost importance that children see what love looks like, what forgiveness looks like, what patience and understanding look like.

I wish I didn't have to mention the glaring sin of polygamy present in his life, but it is there. Hannah's husband was not perfect, and neither will your husband be, dear mother. As always, polygamy brought with it rivalries, jealousy, division, insecurities, and many other negative consequences that this sin created. During this primitive time polygamy was a part of sinful human culture. Please note that it was never a part of God's design for marriage. God always designed marriage to be between one man and one woman for life. From Genesis on we are told that a man should leave his father and mother to become one with his wife. Please remember that Jesus was clear on his teaching about marriage. His love for His one bride, the church, is the picture that marriage is supposed to reflect to our society.

This pervasive sin in the culture back then would take a while to root out. I am reminded of work on the foreign mission field where polygamy is practiced and still present even after people begin to come to the Lord in saving faith. It takes time for this practice to be removed from the norms of a culture rooted in it. The same was true during Hannah's day. Maybe Elkanah married his second wife Peninnah because Hannah was barren, and the culture demanded that he have progeny. It was expected that a man produce children. Regardless, my point today is that even though Elkanah was not a perfect man, he loved the Lord and was a good husband to and influence on Hannah.

What do we know about Elkanah? Well, the Bible tells us that he would go up as the Law instructed to worship God and make his sacrifices yearly (1 Sam. 1:3). This meant he probably went up for the specified three annual ceremonies – The Feast of Unleavened Bread, of Weeks, and of Booths. He was a worshipper, which meant that Hannah was married to a believer. That is important for raising godly children. Within that relationship with God, we can surmise that Hannah had a spiritual leader. He led his family to worship, to sacrifice, and to pursue God. Hannah and Elkanah worshipped God together.

I want you to see how much he loved her too. In verse 5 it says, "He would give Hannah a double portion for he loved Hannah." It is terrible to say on the one hand that Peninnah was there to produce children, but Hannah was the one he really loved. He loved her deeply with honor, sacrifice, kindness, and open expressions. She had a right relationship with her husband as they worshipped together, shared a deep love for one another, and obviously communicated openly and honestly with each other. These characteristics made for good soil for Samuel to grow in and find faith in God. Hannah had a good, loving, believer to make raising Samuel successful.

May 19

## 2 Timothy 3:14-15

Oh, how I wish I didn't feel the need to step lightly on some of the issues surrounding the beautiful calling of motherhood. Please know that part of my hesitation is provoked from a love for our people. I am fully aware that some women, some mothers have chosen to work and put their children in day care and such, and I know the reasons and circumstances will be varied. Some, because of their singleness, had to make such decisions. Some have found creative ways to accomplish many goals and tasks while not losing their ability to love their husbands and nurture their children in a peaceful shelter called home. There are some who simply have been swallowed up in the ways of the world and abdicated much of their God-given responsibility to the world and its ungodly systems.

What I want to honor in this point to ponder is the biblical calling on a woman's life to create a home out of commitment to a husband and his calling, and commitment to her children and their training, and commitment to Christ and his glory (John Piper). In other words, I want to honor the biblical calling that makes marriage, motherhood, and homemaking, in the context of radical Christian discipleship, the central, core, dominant commitments of a woman's life.

I have attempted this week to remind or to restore a biblical understanding and appreciation for motherhood. It may help to think of motherhood as the transmission of a God-centered, Christ-treasuring vision of life to your children, and homemaking as the creation of a beautiful and simple place not only for the family. This "home" can have a great impact on a community that needs a picture of what it looks like to be Kingdom people. I so appreciate Piper's definition of Motherhood as the life-on-life transmission of a God-centered, Christ-treasuring worldview. And homemaking as the creation of a living organism that nurtures the peace of Christ and the righteousness of God. Clearly the world does not understand these things any longer. I just hope the church does!

My passage for today is 2 Timothy 3:14-15. As Paul admonishes Timothy, it helps to understand that the young protégé is experiencing some persecution and challenges to his ministry. As Paul encourages him to remain faithful to the ministry and his calling, he does so by way of reminders. In verse 14, Paul tells Timothy to continue in that which he has learned and remember from whom you learned them. From whom did Timothy learn the Word? The obvious answer is his mother and grandmother (2 Tim. 1:5). Remembering the character of his godly mother is meant to be a great incentive for holding fast the Scriptures she taught him. In other words, Paul pressing him not to give up his faith, not to give up on the scriptures, and not to give up on his salvation. Then comes these crucial words referring back to Eunice and Lois: "knowing from whom you learned it."

In other words, for Timothy, one of the ways, not the only way, to strengthen his faith and persevere through hard times and not give up on the Scriptures is to remember who introduced him to the word of God and the way of salvation. Remember your mother, and your grandmother. So, let's make it very clear: Paul, in this text, bestows on motherhood and grand-motherhood a great honor. You have a calling that can become the long-remembered ground of faith, not just for your children, but for the untold numbers who will be affected by your children. From childhood Timothy knew biblical truth. That truth and the lives of those who taught him, were intended to hold him now as the wind blew hard against him. Moms, give your children strong and deep roots by giving them Jesus and His word.

May 20

**John 19:27**

As pastors, we learned long ago to give more credence to some voices than you do others. What I mean by that is that all comments, criticisms, recommendations, and input that is both solicited and unsolicited do not carry equal weight. It would be foolish for us to worry or get bent out of shape over something an idiot said to us. Comments and statements are made that simply need to be "flushed." On the other hand, there are voices that need to be listened to. The character, wisdom, spiritual maturity, and overall heart of the person giving the advice needs to be weighed and considered. In our congregation there are certainly people who, when they make a suggestion or offer some words of guidance, clarity, or simply information that will help us in leadership, we listen! That is not favoritism, arrogance, or pride. It is simply wisdom.

Now, I offer that tidbit of leadership because I offer an example of a voice today that should be highly valued. This voice adds a value or worth to motherhood that few could add to. While hanging on the cross and nearing death, Jesus looks down at his grieving mother and says to John, "Behold your mother" (John 19:27). With all that was on His plate, the agony, the pain, the impending moment of death, He takes the time to make sure His momma is going to be taken care of. As the oldest son, He was passing those duties to one He knew He could trust with his most precious earthly relationship – His mom! Mothers, you matter greatly to Jesus Christ.

Let's consider a few truths that we can take from this simple statement from the cross. I want to apply this to all of us today, not just moms. I want us to be encouraged as we realize that if Jesus was so eager to care for His mother in her hour of need, how much more is He eager to care for His disciples who hear the Word of God today and do it. Ordinarily one would reason just the opposite: if He loved His disciples who were not His relatives, how much more would He love his own mother. But Jesus didn't view things in an ordinary way. With Him it was strangely true: if He loved His mother with a natural affection, how much more can His obedient disciples bank on his love.

Luke 8:19-21 records a moment when we see how exalted obedience to Christ is viewed in the eyes of God. It means very clearly, those who hear the Word of God and do it have a more ready access to Jesus' fellowship and help than do His own family members. Loving obedience to the Word of God puts us in a relationship to Jesus which is more intimate and more certain to be heard and helped than His nearest family relations.

Another reason that this word to Jesus' mother is an encouragement to our faith is this: if Jesus could provide for the needs of His own in a moment of His deepest weakness and humiliation, how much more can He provide for your need in His present power and exaltation! Not only are you, as an obedient disciple, in a better position than Jesus' own mother to receive blessing at the hand of the Lord, but He is now in a better position to give it to you than He was to her then. He says, "My God shall supply all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19). The risen Christ is so full of glorious riches that He need not turn anyone away. I thank God for the church because within the body of Christ lies a precious family that incorporates all of His children into its loving care.



May 21

**Proverbs 31:28, 30b; 1 Timothy 2:15**

As we wrap up another week of points to ponder, allow me to encourage those of you who are moms with a simple truth – nobody is perfect and every mom blows it sometimes. When Luke recorded what is now referred to as Mary's Magnificat, in it she acknowledges her own need for a Savior and her need to receive God's mercy (Luke 1:47,50). I imagine if the mother of Jesus Christ needed grace, mercy, and salvation because of her own sin, the rest of us will too. All of us will remember times when you feel as though your mom failed you or times when you know as a mother you failed your own children. There is grace and mercy for those times, and it is important that you don't stay bogged down in disappointment, regret, or any measure of bitterness. Give forgiveness and receive forgiveness too. It is liberating and will set you free to live the life God called you into.

The great English Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892) once wrote, "Fathers and mothers are the most natural agents for God to use in the salvation of their children," but in particular he celebrates his mother. "I am sure that, in my early youth, no teaching ever made such an impression upon my mind as the instruction of my mother; neither can I conceive that, to any child, there can be one who will have such influence over the heart as the mother who has so tenderly cared for her offspring. . . Never could it be possible for any man to estimate what he owes to a godly mother. Certainly, I have not the powers of speech with which to set forth my valuation of the choice blessing which the Lord bestowed on me in making me the son of one who prayed for me, and prayed with me." Spurgeon was a master with words.

Dear moms, do not fret today over the areas where you feel you may have failed. Resolve today to bring the Word of God to bear upon your children regardless of their age. You may have grown so much in the Lord at this point in your life, and now realize that you missed opportunities to shape them properly. You may have been a different person back then and only now love the Lord, His Word, and His ways as you should. God's desire is not that you live a life of regret, but that you pick up where you are. Pray hard for His mercy and grace to extend to your children. Pray that God would redeem them and cover the mistakes that you may have made years ago.

Solomon wrote in Proverbs 31:28,30b these words, "Her children rise up and bless her; her husband also, and he praises her...a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised." This level of praise comes as a result of earning the respect of her family. It may be that you feel you did not early on. I would say lay that down and get to work earning their respect now. This may require open, honest confession, repentance, and forgiveness. Don't let what you didn't know keep you from becoming what you know the Lord can help you become as a child of the King, filled and empowered by His Spirit, and a vessel to lead others to see and to know Him through you. Rise up mothers and take the precious mantle that God has given you in motherhood.

Paul wrote that it was the woman who fell in sin first. I would argue that Adam failed in his call to protect her first but regardless, she was deceived by Satan first. It is now as a mother, that women have the opportunity to shape boys and girls into godly worshippers of our God (1 Tim. 2:15). As Eve stepped away from faithfulness to God, now moms can help children step back to God in faithfulness and obedience for His glory and their joy.