

“I Choose You”

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Sometimes I think about Mother’s Day and think that while we are celebrating all moms, not all moms were created equal. Many people had just wonderful lives like I did, with mothers who were very caring.

Then it hit me one day. I was reading an article in *Psychology Today* magazine, April 30, 2013. They were talking about Mother’s Day that was coming up. They said there are millions of people for whom Mother’s Day is a painful day, because their mothers were not great. I thought how painful that must be. It makes one appreciate their own mothers - if they were caring - and they gave examples about some of the struggles that some children had with their mothers.

One of the examples was called Munchausen’s disease by proxy. Jill and I knew someone who suffered from this. What Munchausen’s disease by proxy is, is that a mother - in their need to get attention or sympathy - will hurt their own child, somehow. Then everyone will pray for the mother and be concerned about her, giving all of this attention to the mother. This is why prayer chains need to be careful - they almost encourage that kind of attitude around people.

This mother that Jill and I knew took her child, from the time she was very young, and she [the mother] had enough of a medical background to be very persuasive. She came up with all of these illnesses that her child had - none of which were real. They were all fictional. She would get doctors to run tests and any number of things. They would do MRIs, CT scans and blood tests. I think this poor child even had a spinal tap at one time. This went all the way to the point where she fled and married someone at a very young age. By the time this child reached adolescence, the poor thing had liver issues, kidney issues and probably will have cancer young, from all of the tests.

Part of me got bitter over that, and I thought, “Why are we celebrating Mother’s Day like every mother is equal?” Then I changed that to think inside myself about it [Mother’s Day] as an opportunity to celebrate the good moms and to lift up Mother’s Day for what it ought to be: a celebration and a goal for the best of what mothers are.

Mother’s Day is a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the love and commitment and care that mothers’ provide. I believe it is truly biblical in Proverbs 30, where it talks about the definition of the good wife, to the descriptions of love that come forth. Over and over again you see that love and commitment taking place.

I want to describe what John describes. In English there is one word for love: love. But in the ancient Greek - that the New Testament was written in, the Gospel of John was written in - there are at least four different definitions of love. I love the Greek language for that reason. The first of those definitions is “eros.” It is the passionate form of love. This is what got you in trouble and made you mothers in the first place. The next definition of love is “epithumia,” which is a description of the love of things. The best possible definition - it is the kind of love that allows a mother to embrace her motherhood, the thing of being a mother and how meaningful that is.

In a negative way, that love of things can impede one's ability to be a mother, because when you are a mom you sacrifice. So if your love is of things - like time - you are going to lose that. You are going to wish you had that, and it can get in the way, because you become frustrated by never having enough time.

It can be a love of things – monetarily - because these children cost a lot of money. I remember when Hannah was born. (I think I have told this.) I used to get *Money* magazine. It had interesting stories in it. The same week Hannah was born I got my *Money* magazine, opened it up, and right there on the front cover was “If Your Child Is Born today...” and I thought this is a God-moment. “By the time your child is 22 years old that child will have cost you one million dollars.” I tried to give Hannah back and no one would buy her.

If things became so important that they diminish your love for your child because of the other things that get in the way that you desire even more. So we always have to put that in perspective of what is truly important in our lives, even when they are being a pain - and as we all know, moms and dads can be pains. And, of course, one day we were the pain - and it makes us appreciate our moms even more.

Those two first definitions of love: eros and the desire of things are defined, not because they are selfless, but because they require a desire - a need that fulfills you as a person.

But in the Greek the next two definitions of love are more selfless. The first one is “philia.” That is the love between friends. The Bible treats friendships with much more awe, love and respect than most people do in their friendships today. The Bible is very clear about loving friends. Giving your life for your friends is described over and over in the Bible. Those friendships are so profound that we must treat them with respect.

Now, if you have young children you may not know yet what I'm talking about. But if you are old - like Jill and me - and your children are gone out of the house, you know what I'm talking about with the love of friends. When your children are young the love is very tangible. They are there. You control their entire life when they are little. You take care of them. That love is emanating. You are instructing them and teaching them; you are inspiring them.

But when they have left the nest, the transition takes place from being the one to instruct and discipline and care for them, to being a mom in a new way. Now, when your kids have left the nest, it's more of a friendship. Now you have to learn to instruct less or you are going to be in your child's dog house. It requires a little more friendship. You love them by watching them make their own decisions while you bite your lip until it bleeds. You know what I'm talking about.

Then there is the fourth definition of love, and this is the most biblical: “Agape” love, a love that transcends any need on our own part. This is the love that allowed Jesus to die on the cross for the sins of the world. Mothers die on crosses all of the time, in their worry, in helping their child pick up the pieces - whether it's a puzzle, or when they are 14 and their entire world has fallen apart, or watching throughout their lives.

As a pastor, you get an intimate view into people's worlds. They invite you in. It's an honor. I have heard moms so often say to me, "You're never done raising your children." I always responded with, "Oh, no, you mean I have to keep up with this?"

It is true. You are always the one balancing the friendship, but not being the buddy, especially when they are young. They have enough buddies. They need a mom or a dad. They need you to be the strong one - the one who will instruct and guide and discipline; when you are the one sacrificing even when it hurts and even when it seems inappropriate.

You're the one who hurts when they are an adolescent, and everyone else in the world is more important than you are, and yet you keep doing it. You are the one when you are too tired to have eros anywhere around - because they require so much - and yet you continue to sacrifice.

I think, it is only when you get to the place where you are done and they are out of the house, and then you can go, "Ahhhhh!" You really realize how profoundly caring your mother was: the sacrifices. You begin to accept their imperfections because they were trying as hard as they could. Some could do it a little better than others, but they tried. When your kids are out of the house and you look back and you think, "I wish I had done that differently," you realize that you have to forgive yourself because none of us are perfect. We have all done it right; we have all done it wrong and, yet, we keep on trying. That is the gift of love that keeps on going.

We all saw this in the past few weeks. We saw a mother's love. It wasn't perfect but we saw it at work. We saw it with that mother in Baltimore. She was all over the place. We saw her slapping her son on TV. Now, the first time I saw it I thought, "I hate to see her slapping him up side of the head." Then I heard a couple of people talk about child abuse, and I got to thinking about it, and I go, "No, I don't like hitting."

But you know, here was a mom who was sitting in her living room watching the local news of the riots in Baltimore. Then she realized that her 16-year-old son was not home when he should have been. She raised him to not go to those riots, but she was also smart enough and realistic enough to know that was where he was. So what did she do, without any worry about her own safety? She went over to the riots and, amidst this huge group of humanity, she notices one set of sweat pants on a boy wearing a black hoodie and a mask over his face, and still knew it was her son. That is being a mother. You can spot your child out of all of them based on the sweat pants you have washed too many times.

She grabbed him by his hoodie, yanked him around and slapped him along side of the head. Now, my first thought was that I didn't like the slapping. But then I thought, "Let's put this in context: a. He was not 3 - he was 16, and he was towering over her; b. I don't think it would have worked to have said, "Honey, put down the brick you are about to throw at the policeman and let's go home."

She didn't use a closed fist and she didn't hit his face. (Ears, I guess, are OK.) She got him home. The next thing about it that was so profound was he didn't yell back at her, and he went home. So there was some level of respect that she must have developed in him along the way.

What was most amazing was the next day, I was sitting here - and I'm a grown boy - and thought, "If my mother had done that to me, I would have been so humiliated! And, on national television! I think I would want to die. Yet, he gets up there and it gets on the news and the first thing out of his mouth was: "I'm holding the brick and about to throw it, and I heard through this massive noise of a riot, my mother."

Now, that is a good sign when you can hear your mother. You know she has trained him well and he knew he was in trouble. I love that!

I get so sick of mothers, in this day and age, who want to be their children's buddy. You don't need a buddy when you are holding a brick and going to throw it at the police; you need a disciplinarian. I'm glad that a 16-year-old, 6-foot boy was scared of his little mother. She drug him on home. He was so guilty and knew he had done wrong that - even the next day - he had to be embarrassed. But he admitted he was wrong. What made it even better when she got him home was that she made it a teachable moment, because the next day he said, "If I ever get involved in something again, it will be in an organized situation and non-violent."

I went, "You got it, son. I'm so happy that your mom not necessarily boxed you on the ears, but I'm so glad she sat down with you and made it a teachable moment." Here is a mom who said, by her own accord, "I was so mad that I just lost it." But she loved her son more than her need for anger or fear, and pulled him out of the riot when she could have been hit by a brick herself. The mob could have turned on her. She took her son home and then calmed down enough (moms are allowed to get angry), to teach the one she loved how to love and respect other people. Isn't that what all parents want to do? Isn't that what mothers are called to do and be?

We are called on this day to celebrate mothers in their love - and love isn't schmaltzy, it's not sentimental, it's not a Hallmark card. Love is hard, it is difficult, and it is sacrificial. You don't get points for it very often - every once in a while you might. Hold on to that when they actually recognize you.

But, most of the time you are that unsung hero, like Jesus when he hung on that cross. People either laughed or fled. There are a lot of days when mothers feel like that and, yet not in any one moment as much as over a life time, you change and transform your children's lives. You've made them with God's Holy Spirit, assisting, guiding and leading. You've guided your children to be moral, ethical; to be faithful - to be good. Any love that they share, any compassion they have is a gift from their mothers - a little bit of fathers - and the Holy Spirit, together teaming up to change their lives. For every good mother out there, the reason we have Mother's Day is to thank you, because society would not be as good and the world would not be as compassionate without your example and your sacrifice. Thank you. Amen