

MOTHERS
5/14/95
Dr. Jerry Nelson
www.soundliving.org

In Proverbs 31 there is one sentence that drives this sermon today:
"And her children will arise and call her blessed!"

Mothers come in great variety.

They come in a variety of hair color and skin color.

They have different backgrounds, different personalities, and different interests.

Some are formally educated and others informally educated.

Some are rich, some are poor, and many are neither.

Mothers can be very different from each other and still be excellent moms but there is at least one thing in which they must be alike or the children, their children's families, the nation and the kingdom of God will suffer -

And that one thing in which they must be alike is that **they must "be there!"**

A while ago, the producer of National Public Radio's "Talk of the Nation" program invited a Christian, Katherine Kersten, to join Marie Wilson the director of the Ms Foundation to join the show's producer in a discussion of "Take our daughters to Work day"

Katherin Kersten had been invited because she was a lawyer with an MBA who had chosen to become a "stay-at-home" mother.

During the program Katherine said she thought the "Take our daughters to work day" was a good idea in-so-far as it taught our daughters to work hard, aim high, and strive for excellence" but it didn't address the major concern of most women.

Mothers from all walks of life will voice the same concern: "I'm scared for my children and for their future."

Women as well as men are troubled by the world into which we are sending our children.

One of our local television stations did a program called:
"Raising G rated children in an X rated world"

During the Public Radio program Katherine asked, "Who speaks for women like me, women who - whether they work or not - believe their primary duty is to their children?"

Clearly, society's most pressing need at the moment is not more lawyers or accountants.

What we need, she said, is more decent people, of the kind only strong families and dedicated parents can produce.

We need people of character - self-controlled people who know right from wrong and are committed to the common good. The women I know want their daughters to become such people."

She said, "I think Marie Wilson (of the Ms Foundation) was perplexed by my choice to put my children first, and by my concept of motherhood as involving moral duties that simply cannot be passed off to others."

(CT June 20, 1994 p20)

Katherine Kersten's concern and the concern of the women she knows is **not only their** concern.

It is also the concern of a nation - even our current congress.

Our children need parents who are there.

Dr. Selma Freiberg in her book entitled Every Child's Birthright called for an informed citizenry to protect and advance the rights of every child by considering each one worthy of mothering.

"The time has come to celebrate motherhood and to recreate an ethic that recognizes the worth and dignity of mothering within our society.

We can't afford not to any longer." (from Evans Heart and Home p xv)

Susan was two years old and her sister, Sandy, two months old when their father drowned. ((from Brenda Hunter Where have all the mothers gone? chap2 - GLN changed the names)

Susan's mother was left with \$500 from an insurance policy.

Believing that she could not rear two small children and work full-time she left Susan with her grandparents and moved to a nearby town with the Sandy, the baby.

By the time Susan was three and had transferred her attachment to her grandparents, her mother reappeared and asked to switch children leaving one year old Sandy and taking Susan.

Her mother's rationale was that Sandy was too young to be left with sitters all day - after one day discovering that Sandy had been burned. So she traded children believing at least the three year old could tell what was going on at the sitters.

Susan says, "Thus my sister and I were traded and I was raised as a lonely only child in a small southern town."

Susan's mother tried to find sitters to stay with Susan while she worked but from the age of seven, Susan often came home to an empty apartment.

Even now, Susan says, I can remember distinctly the cold fear that enveloped me when I unlocked the front door and entered the darkened apartment.

I would check every room and every closet to make certain no one was there before I would begin to slowly relax.

But even when I wasn't afraid, I didn't like going into that gloomy atmosphere.

No voice rang out to dispel the gloom, assuring me that it was safe to enter.

No mother's arms reached out to give me a welcoming hug.

And when I had been wounded by a teacher or another child, and came home needing attention - no one was there to buttress my sagging self-esteem.

And when I came home with good news, there was no one to hear it.

When mother worked evenings I would turn on every light in the place and position myself in the living room so I could keep an eye on both the front and back doors afraid of burglars.

When mother worked days in the summer, I became a street child because companionship was out there never at home.

Like millions of other children, I had accepted the fact that my mother worked.

"How else," she often said, "could we possibly live?"

The brightest spots in my week were when one of my friends invited me home after school to their house.

And I always accepted when it was a house where a mom was there.

Those stay-at-home mothers profoundly influenced my young life.

One pregnant with her third child allowed me to touch her swollen abdomen and taught me the joys of childbirth.

When I became an adolescent, another neighbor introduced me to Jesus - a Jesus so real that he paid her rent and food bills when her alcoholic husband disappeared for weeks at a time.

And without a doubt the best part of my year was when I could visit my grandparents.

Compared to the food I normally got for myself - Grandma's cooking was extraordinary.

But far better than the food was the fact that my grandparents were always there.

Granny could be found somewhere in the house or the garden and Granddaddy could be found in the barn or the field.

And the security I felt released me to enjoy my time there like nowhere else on earth.

When I look back on the years in my mother's care, it would be dishonest to imply that all my sad and empty feelings stemmed from the fact that my mother worked.

Perhaps if she and I had been truly together during the first five or six years I could have handled the absence later.

But when I began to do research on bonding and a mother's strategic importance to her young child I began to understand the origin of some of my own feelings of lostness and unlove. Isn't it amazing that our legislators are looking for ways to enable families to send their children to day care RATHER than looking for ways to enable mothers to stay at home with their children?

Tatyana Zaslavskaya, president of the former Soviet Sociologist Association just prior to disintegration of the USSR is quoted in a TASS interview as expressing deep concern for all the ill effects on children of "the high rate of employment among working-age women."

She pleaded for mothers to make children their prime mission, calling on the Communist Part to discuss ways to reduce the employment rate among mothers.

She added that the problem that is often glamorized in the United States as the "Superwoman" phenomenon (the woman who is faster than a speeding two year old, able to leap tall laundry piles in a single bound, and possessed of more power than three teenaged boys and still able to go out and save the world in the midst of all) has been known in the Soviet Union for years as "the problem of two jobs.'...

In the last years of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev said that Russia was looking for ways to make it possible for women to return 'to their womanly mission.'" -372 BMW

Aren't those amazing words coming from a society that for 70 years prized collective everything, including child care?

A study of primarily middle-class children was conducted by University of Texas at Dallas researcher Deborah Lowe Vandell and Mary Ann Corasaniti.

This study indicated that when a child was cared for full-time **by someone other than his mother** that child had poorer study skills, lower grades, diminished self-esteem, and inadequate social interaction.

Those who were away from their mothers full-time even after the first year of their lives did not develop as well socially, emotionally, and intellectually as those whose mothers stayed with them.

And if we are concerned about a child's educational and emotional development surely we are also concerned about a child's values and character - which are determined very early in life.

"Which will influence a child's values more? Forty or fifty hours a week in a day care center or a work-worn mother? (in Patterson BMW)

The question is "Who is rearing our children?"

Good lives don't just grow accidentally; they are built by people who care.
(Patterson BMW p372)

Please don't misunderstand: I am not suggesting that caregivers other than the mothers are negligent, negative influences on children.

There are many excellent child caregivers.

Nor am I suggesting that every mother who works outside the home is a poor mother - that is obviously not true.

And some mothers truly have no choice.

Nor am I suggesting that every mother is the best caregiver for her own children - there clearly are unfit mothers.

What I am pleading, is for mothers to stop so easily giving away the most important calling in their lives - to be mother and to be there!

Debra Evans in her book Heart and Home has written (p90-91)

"Those of us who have continued to highly value our roles as wives and mothers are an endangered minority.

In 1970 52% of one thousand women polled said motherhood was the most enjoyable aspect of being a woman. By 1983 only 26% mentioned motherhood as the most enjoyable aspect of being a woman.

Evans wrote, "The worth of our work has been eclipsed by the opinion-shapers on Madison Avenue.

Private enterprise gains much from the earning of working women.

Needing a second car in order to get to work? That suits Ford Motor Company and Toyota just fine, ladies.

And how about dining out more often because there's little time left to cook dinner after getting home at 5?

Great! Most restaurants planning on your arrival, offer special prices on kids' meals to make it easier for you.

A better wardrobe? Improved image? Step right up to your closest department store, which counts on your regular patronage.

Few families want to give up a second income, considering all of the possible amenities now available to the modern American family.

Evans goes on to write, "For those of us who have resisted the pressure to relinquish our beliefs about marriage and the family, what has caused us to remain committed to a dying ideal?

Why aren't we willing to just up and leave our neighborhoods like everyone else?

What is keeping us so close to home? Ignorance? Laziness? Our husbands salaries? Fear of the "real" world? Hardly!

For most of us, I suggest, it is due to the fact that we accept a different value system.

Simply put, our husbands and our children are the most important people in our lives, and we refuse to compromise their well-being (and our own) by exhausting ourselves for the sake of money or an enlarged identity.

"By not having it all, I've settled for something infinitely more precious than paychecks.

I've become the guardian of new life, a builder of memories, a source of

inspiration, and a central figure in my family's history.

What I have contributed to their lives is invaluable and

irreplaceable."

Brenda Hunter was married and in school herself when her firstborn came. Having read Betty Friedan's The Feminine Mystique when her baby was only 9 months old - Brenda came to understand her own restlessness at home.

She was an educated woman who was virtually wasting her mind and her life as a stay-at-home mom.

That did it - off to work she went.

And it helped that her husband was interning for only \$4000/year. They needed the money.

Each day as she drove 15 miles to college, where she taught, she told herself she was different from those stay-at-home mothers who lost themselves in coffee klatches and silly games with their babies.

She needed to be productive and do something useful with her life.

She knew that raising a child was productive and could give feelings of usefulness but she could get that in the evenings.

And after all she needed intellectual stimulation and the feeling that her life counted for something more.

She enjoyed her work immensely and the salary she earned allowed her to buy lunches out, lovely new clothes, and money for vacations.

And very importantly she had a response when the other wives asked that powerful question: "What do you do?"

But each day as she dropped her daughter Holly off at the sitters she would wonder what Holly's day would be like: would she get the care she needed?

Would she develop properly?

It took great effort each day for Brenda to get Holly out of her mind sufficiently to attend to her work.

And after three different sitters in three months, Brenda became almost fanatical about the kind of caregiver she wanted for Holly.

Consider the irony of all this:

Although she had other tasks that demanded her attention, she wanted to employ someone who would consider the care of Holly as her primary responsibility.

Furthermore she wanted this woman to feel a sense of fulfillment in caring for Holly that Brenda herself didn't feel she could have.

In the area of mothering, she clearly expected more from the caregiver than she expected from herself.

Brenda's husband left her and then in her thinking, working full-time was no longer optional.

But a growing restlessness with her decisions about child-care prompted a change:

Brenda said she can remember too vividly a scene that was repeated too often:

She would drop Holly off at the daycare center and as Brenda would pull away, Holly would run past the other children, out into a playground and would climb as far up the fence as she could and wave until her mother was out of sight.

As Brenda drove off to work she could see Holly's determined little face in her rear view mirror and know that she wanted desperately to be with her mother.

Listen to Brenda's words:

"From years of growing, reading and listening to my daughters (by then I had two) I have come to see just how much I contribute to their feelings of security and well-being.

As I have understood my enormous value in their lives, God has deepened my love and concern for them until I now consider child-rearing the most significant work I do."

Brenda changed her life and became a mother who was there.

I recognize that my remarks today have probably created a lot of tension.

As I said earlier, I know there are women in this room who for good reason have no choice but to be away from their children:

Mothers who would desperately love to be there more than they can.

My criticism is not of those mothers. They are constantly seeking a way to change things to be there.

My plea is to those mothers, and their husbands, who have underestimated the importance of mothering.

Those mothers who are searching for significance in other places.

Those mothers who have bought the selfish goals of a warped culture.

In fact my plea is not just to those mothers but to an entire culture that created the dilemma in which we now live.

A culture in which women feel inferior if they choose mothering over a career.

A culture in which husbands abandon their wives and force them to leave their children.

A culture in which husbands pressure their children's mother

to get a paying job so the house can be enlarged, another car purchased, or a longer vacation taken.

A culture in which mothers are persuaded to largely abandon the most significant task they could ever undertake to get a job so they can purchase carpeting, draperies, or dining room furniture.

A culture that is abandoning its children.

My earliest memories are of a farmhouse in rural Wisconsin -

I was five **and my mother was there!**

Where we lived didn't matter because where my parents were, I was home.

They were there.

My mother worked hard - my parents were farmers.

She gardened seriously for food.

She assisted with the bookkeeping for the business.
but in the midst of all her work - My mother was there!

My mother disciplined seriously but fairly.

We knew the boundaries.

Her discipline never crossed into abuse - because her discipline
was based in love.

We were convinced she had eyes in the back of her head
and that she could read our minds.

She could, because she was there!

Summer or winter - she was there!

Coming home was the best part of the day -

When I came home from school, defeated in schoolwork, feeling
disliked because of some fight I'd had, angry at my brother or
whatever - she was there.

My mother is now nearly 81 years of age.

A few years ago my brother, my two sisters and I with our families were in
my parents' church celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary.

26 children and grandchildren stood before them and sang, "May
those who come behind us find us faithful"

We sang to honor our father and our mother.

Among other reasons, we sang it to honor a mother who had been
there.

As the author of the Proverbs put it:

"Her children will arise and call her blessed."

Women if God blesses you to be a mother - be there.