

How Motherhood Comes About as Close to Christlikeness as You Can Get

For all mothers everywhere – we celebrate you this Sunday.

It seems relatively common these days for mothers to publicly share their “birth” stories, often complete with photos and even videos. Yet in the not-so-distant past, birth happened privately, and the focus really was not on the birth *process* but on the *person* who had just been born. I think this shift in focus is telling.

We concern ourselves with loss rather than gain. Motherhood is filled with both.

Consider this. As a mother navigates through each of the phases of life, there are subsequent losses and gains. When she loses the baby on her lap, she gains the curious toddler. Years go by and the simplistic rhythm of early childhood is lost to the blurred activities of the school-aged years.

Yet the opportunities for mentoring and teaching her children through the mundane busyness may be counted as gains of eternal weight as the mother pours out herself and fills into their lives. Later, when her children leave her home to create their own families, she loses her nuclear family but gains an extended family of children, spouses and grandchildren. Herein lie abundant opportunities for continued sacrificial giving, laying down of self, and pouring out her love on those entrusted to her.

Looking back on my childhood, it’s easy to see all that I gained, all the ways my mother poured out herself for me. My mother taught me to be a respectful and thoughtful human being, which included (but is not limited to) how to be polite

in the presence of elders, how to set a table, how to walk with good posture (yes, I practiced walking while balancing a book on my head), how to pose for a pretty picture and how to take care of myself. I learned how to sew, cook and knit from my mother, who showed me the basics, taught me to follow the instructions, and then let me experiment on my own. I have a strong innate sense of order that I attribute to my mom, who is a meticulous record keeper and maker of lists. Even today, when I sit down to work, I place a spiral notebook next to my computer to make the day's list and jot notes.

Her nurse's training coupled with a deep concern for others evidenced itself every time I was sick or injured. From watching her tend to others' needs, I learned how to provide care for people too. Once when I asked her, she showed me how – and then *allowed* me – to give her an injection. Years later as a wife and mother myself, that experience enabled me to nurse my husband back to health from an incident involving a ladder, a two-story roof and many broken bones. When the doctor told me I had to give my husband blood-thinner injections, I knew exactly what to do, thanks to my mom. In fact, the list could go on detailing the practical life skills I have gained from her.

However, more important than these is the spiritual training I received from my mother at a young age. That training was often prefaced with a reference to her mother, my grandmother, whom I have never met this side of eternity. Mom always said she wanted us both to have a strong faith as her mother did. This evidenced itself in the Bible story read to us every night and the memorized prayer I said at supper for “grace.”

And before bedtime, with Mom kneeling alongside me at my bed, we recited, “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. ... God bless Mommy and Daddy and ...” The list would go for quite some time.

In my early years, we attended Sunday school and church with my grandparents. Afterward, Sunday dinner was often at our house.

It was the ritual of the seemingly mundane yet consistent sharing of faith that bent my heart toward the gospel, and later, when God sovereignly called me to Him, these and many other memories washed over me.

Now, as a mother, grandmother and “spiritual mother,” more than ever I see the importance of training and teaching our children, grandchildren and “children in the faith” through the activities of the mundane, the consistent living out of truth *every day*. When we pour ourselves out so that others may gain, there is a necessary loss to self. This truth, so expressly manifested in my childhood memories, demonstrates the sacrificial nature of motherhood.

Yet this sacrifice of service isn’t meant to be showcased. The losses of motherhood are made sweeter when humbly offered as worship to our Savior – the One who knows sacrifice more intimately than we can imagine. It is in grieving our losses quietly *in personal devotion to our Savior* that He can redeem them, bringing joy and directing us to see what it is that we *gain from our loss*.

I may rue my missed opportunities, *my losses*, but my focus must quickly turn to considering the gains I have because of the losses. While I am still on this side of heaven, the Father will use me if I empty myself of self and join Him wholeheartedly in His work, for *His glory and my gain*.

“For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matt. 16:25, ESV).

More and more I am convinced that this mindful, redemptive calling of motherhood is more than just teaching our children necessary life skills, although it certainly encompasses that. Redemptive motherhood embraces all phases and circumstances as

gifts, as *gains*, so that we may take the form of a servant and become Christ to those closest to us. (See Philippians 2:5-8.)

Emptying ourselves of self, we humbly change diapers, bandage scrapes, prepare meals, wash dirty clothes and provide necessary physical and spiritual care to those who need our help and who have been entrusted to us. I have been pondering motherhood from this juxtaposition of loss and gain – the loss of the person that I was, but now the gain of a redeemed life and the hope for a brighter future in my becoming more Christlike. I must keep my focus on what I am *gaining* rather than on what I am *losing*.

I will never know how much my mom gave up for me, or *all* of the sacrifices she made, or her losses great and small, but I do know the influence she has had on my life. I know that I would not be the person I am today without her. She not only gave me physical life but also laid the foundation for a redeemed life with God forever. And in that knowledge rests my greatest hope, peace and comfort.

So, to my mom and to all redeemed mothers everywhere, on behalf of your children, I say, “*Thank you.*”

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