

Mother's Day Heartaches

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Today is Mother's Day, a day set aside to honor moms in general, and our own mom in particular. More than a month ago I began asking the Lord to direct me to His message for today – and several weeks ago, seemingly out of the blue, but undoubtedly from God, He directed me to a focus I have never taken before on Mother's Day. Immediately, I sensed in my spirit, that as unconventional as it seemed, that it was God's direction for today. Over the years, I have realized that while Mother's Day is special for most moms, that, that isn't the case for all moms, nor for some women. I have met a number of women who view Mother's Day as the worst day of the year. And so today, I am going to talk about ***Mother's Day Heartaches***.

Let me begin by pointing out some Mother's Day Heartaches – some of you might find yourself identifying with some of them, and at the very least, this may help you in caring for someone who finds Mother's Days difficult. Some of you may shed some tears as I touch on these heartaches – I certainly did as I prepared this message and saw the faces of people who experienced these heartaches. And men don't feel left out – at the very least, much of what I will say has some application to you as well. Let me begin with

I. Causes of Heartaches on Mother's Day

There are some rather obvious reasons why some women don't look forward to Mother's Day – perhaps at the forefront is:

1. Those Who Are Not a Mom, But Wish They Were

This is huge for those who fall into this category, but it is one many miss its gravity. It is true that to be childless in Biblical times carried with it much greater stigma and public disapproval, and therefore personal disappointment, than it does today; but that doesn't reduce the depth of disappointment for a woman who desperately wants to be a mom, but isn't able to – the pain of disappointment is enormous. I have met many women who could not face a Mother's Day service because it celebrated what they wanted – but did not have.

The pain only intensifies as they see other women surrounded by children and grandchildren and with the passing of years, instead of the pain dissipating, it remains. Often it is a couple who appears to be best suited to be parents who remains childless.

I have appealed to parents and grandparents who share subtle hints, and often hints that aren't subtle at all, with children and grandchildren, "*Isn't it time to have a baby?*" to forgo their hints – for some, it only adds to the pain!

And within the group of women who long to have a child, but have not, are women who long first for a husband. Unfortunately, one can't find a husband by going to the supermarket. And while online dating is an option, it is not without its shortcomings. Single men who walk with the Lord and have acceptable qualities are not easy to find. For women who want a husband, but haven't yet found him, Mother's Day is a reminder they haven't.

Another group who find Mother's Day difficult are:

2. Moms Who Have Had a Child Die

The death of a child is one of the most painful experiences people face. Children are not supposed to die before their parents – when it happens, it leaves an enormous void. Sometimes it happens silently, and very few know it has – it occurs as a miscarriage – long before viability to live. Sometimes, there may be several miscarriages - and the grief accumulates. Some dismiss the gravity and pain of loss associated with a miscarriage, but women who have had one know otherwise – even more so, if they never have a baby that lives.

I think the saddest event I have encountered as a pastor was a baby stillborn to a couple in one of our Churches. The mom was a delivery room nurse and had just had her final checkup before the anticipated delivery the following week. A day or two later, she couldn't feel the baby move. Another checkup confirmed the suspected and unbearable news – the baby had died. Several days later, Beverley and I went to the hospital just minutes after the baby was delivered. The pain and grief borne by the mom and dad, but especially the mom, was heartbreaking and overwhelming as she cradled her baby boy. Mother's Days would never be the same!

I am reminded of another couple, when after sharing this account as I am doing today, who came to me afterwards and said, "*That was us!*" And even though it had happened decades earlier, they vividly remembered the pain.

And then there are the deaths of children, youth, and young adults. They too are heartbreaking and leave an enormous void – a deep sense of loss – life will never be the same again! There will always be that empty chair! I am reminded of a couple whose son, their only child, just before he was to get married learned he had cancer. He and fiancé nevertheless went ahead with their marriage, but it was not long before cancer won. The parents, the young man, and his wife, were all committed followers of Christ. But future Mother's Days would forever be marred with heartache. Those of you who have lost a

son/daughter/grandchild know more about what I am saying, than I do; you know how it has affected Mother's Days.

Perhaps the category of ***Mother's Day Heartaches*** that is the most common and affects so many is:

3. Moms Who Feel Like Failures

Among those who struggle with Mother's Day are those who feel they fall dreadfully short of the Proverb's 31 mother and her impeccable qualities. Consequently, I have never had a Mother's Day message on Prov 31 – the guilt some moms feel when they compare themselves with the Prov 31 portrait is too great.

Many moms quickly abandoned the goal of being supermom in the first couple of weeks after their first baby arrived – things weren't unfolding nearly as smoothly as described in the book they had read beforehand. It is easy for moms to feel overwhelmed with the demands of raising children—helping with homework; taking time to read with their child; dealing with illness; handling the logistics of getting to and from school, after-school activities, sports, doctor's appointments, birthday parties, and the list goes on.

And for most, throw in a job – and for many, being a single mom, and the challenge escalates enormously – and with it, often feelings of failure and not measuring up. And that increases when you discover supermom lives down the street, or worse, you are related to her – and through your interaction with her, your heart sinks as your sense of failure rises – and that intensifies when your children aren't doing as well as supermom's.

However, Moms feeling overwhelmed and that they are failures isn't limited to when they are actively in the throes of mothering their young children, but often happens when their children become teenagers or when they are adults and have left home. One individual involved in counselling summed up the assessment many children have of their parents this way, "It's common to hear people complain about how their parents 'messed them up.' Maybe the parents were too hovering or uninvolved, too strict or too permissive, too critical or too unaware, too demanding or not demanding enough. Or maybe the parents just weren't 'there' for them in a way the adult child wished. Adult children sometimes blame their parents for everything negative in their lives: lack of motivation, poor self-confidence, career uncertainty, overwork, fears, anger, loneliness, conflict, relationship break-ups, and more."¹

No wonder an increasing number of moms, and dads too, feel like failures. As I researched this topic I discovered it includes a large percentage of parents of

¹ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/growing-friendships/202109/how-move-past-parental-blame>

adult children. Whether moms, or dads – with little exception, all want their children to turn out well and become productive members of society who walk with the Lord. If that doesn't happen, parents ask themselves, *"What did I do wrong? Where did I fail? What should I have done differently?"* Particularly when teenagers and adult children walk away from the Lord and reject the faith of their parents, or make other very poor choices, parents blame themselves – Mother's Day can bring those thoughts to the forefront. That sense of failure usually intensifies when children choose a path of addiction, which is generally so self-destructive.

The likelihood of parents – moms, and dads, feeling like failures increases exponentially if their children sever their relationship with their parents, and if they do, they usually blame their choice to do so on their parent's shortcomings. Understandably the likelihood of a child severing his/her relationship with a parent is greater in the aftermath of divorce, but as I drew to mind the fractured relationships of people I personally know, in almost all of them, the parent's marriages were intact.

I counted nearly a dozen that I personally know – in all but two, it was a child who withdrew and isolated themselves from his/her parents, and cut off all meaningful interaction with them. In none of the the situations I personally know, were there allegations of child or sexual abuse, or neglect by the parents, or parents who were drug addicts or alcoholics, all of them appeared to be relatively normal relationships – almost all were part of a Church. I can't take the time to share the painful stories of some of them – but most are beyond belief – one is left asking, *"How could this happen?"* You can well imagine that for all those moms, Mother's Day has a lot of heartache associated with it – they are just longing for next week.

Let me turn to

II. Healing Heartaches on Mother's Day

Let me share some ways to address Heartaches on Mother's Day.

1. Hold Tightly to the Outstretched Hand of God

The only way to come to terms with the disappointment of childlessness, and loss, and failure, is to turn to God – to look up – to look beyond the heartaches of earth to heaven above. I don't have all the answers for why things unfold as they do, but one thing I do know with certainty, is that the only way to successfully address heartache begins with turning to God. While the natural inclination is to run from God and hide from Him, and perhaps blame Him, one must resist that temptation, and do just the opposite – draw near to Him – He alone offers you peace!

You may, however, never receive a satisfactory answer to, “Why?” It is not easy to let go of our dreams and accept loss, or our failure – real or perceived, but making progress necessitates embracing the God of this universe Who loves you.

Isaiah 40:28–29 (ESV) ²⁸Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. ²⁹He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength.

Coupled with **Holding Tightly to the Outstretched Hand of God** is:

2. Foster an Enormous Trust in God

Walk by faith – keeping your eyes fixed on Jesus! Don’t let heartache hinder that! Press on through the pain and disappointment!

Isaiah 41:10 (ESV) ¹⁰fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Whether it is the pain of loss, or feelings of inadequacy, or being plagued by how you failed your children when you raised them – press on in God’s strength! When you look back, you may observe places where you wish you had handled parenting differently, there may be evidences of that in how your children turned out – but you can’t change what you did – no one can! You can’t turn the hands on the clock backwards, no matter how much you want to. God’s will starts where you are, not where you could have been, or should have been, or would have been, but where you are.

In many cases you can still foster and influence the best choices for your children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren – and having done so, claim God’s peace.

Our adversary wants you to turn from God when things haven’t unfolded as you wish, but he is a liar – he is the cause of failure – thus don’t let him divert you from trusting God. Besides, there is no better place to turn.

Enabling you to experience victory is God’s grace – you will never succeed without it!

3. Draw Upon God’s Inexhaustible Supply of Grace

Grace is God’s unmerited favor which He bestows on His children from His inexhaustible supply – His grace which was central to our salvation.

Ephesians 1:7–8 (ESV) ⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸**which he lavished upon us**, in all wisdom and insight

It is His grace that enables hope and trust as you press ahead despite disappointment and heartache.

Ps 34:18 (ESV) ¹⁸The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.

Ps 147:3 (ESV) ³He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

Jesus came to ***bind up the broken-hearted*** as prophesized in **Isaiah 61:1**.

God's Grace provides comfort to the childless woman, the mom who buried a child, or a mom who grieves over her failure in raising her children – whether real or imagined.

Along with **Drawing Upon God's Inexhaustible Supply of Grace**:

4. Address Life Realistically

You're not perfect, and guess what, *"No one else is either."* Seek to do things with excellence – the best you can! But perfection is a lie that enslaves people! Don't beat yourself up when you didn't, and don't, achieve perfection! There are some things you do better, and some – not so much! You may see places where you missed the mark with your children – but there are also some where you hit a homerun and other parents look on with envy.

One observation that I make, especially when I read through the historical accounts in the Old Testament is that while God was very specific and very detailed in what His children were, or were not to do, that oftentimes God blessed them despite their shortcomings. I am not arguing for compromise on God's standards. But it sure looks like God often cuts a little slack for those who love Him and want to please Him, but don't always get it right.

Some moms hold themselves to expectations that are unrealistic; let me add a fifth way to **Heal Heartaches on Mother's Day**

5. Stay Connected with Christ's Church

Resist the temptation to withdraw from the Church – the people of God – you need them! Surround yourself with fellow believers who support and care for you. Do the opposite of what you may be inclined to do – to withdraw and isolate yourself. The support of others is essential in healing the heartaches of Mother's Day!

And let none of us miss the responsibility we have in coming alongside of others.

6. Embrace Forgiveness

It is often, as I mentioned earlier, that moms who have teenage, or grown children, feel like failures. It may be because they watch their children struggle

with some issues and they wonder if, or how, they are to blame. They ask: have I contributed to their struggles or poor choices – if only I had spent more time with them, or given more attention, or wasn't so busy trying to figure out life when my children were young, or had too high expectations? Etc.

Perhaps you didn't know the Lord back then? Or maybe you did a very poor job of living out your profession of faith? Oh how you wish that was different! Sometimes moms, and dads, can identify places where they made poor parenting choices, or where their behavior affected their children negatively. And usually, moms and dads who are now older, realize how little they knew when they became parents, and how deficient some of their parenting skills were. There are times when a parent needs to embrace forgiveness and acknowledge to their child, their poor choices as a parent, and ask their child for forgiveness. Perhaps that will help their child get through the difficulties they have "*inherited*." And perhaps it will enhance your relationship with your child.

There are times when parents must be willing to forgive their child.

And there are also times when a parent needs to embrace forgiveness by receiving and accepting forgiveness from God. Some parents are plagued by places where they feel they failed – and sometimes they did. We often fail to grasp our relationship as Christians to God. It is common for people to believe God is watching them and waiting to punish them for past, or present sin, or poor choices, or failures. While it is true that God does sometimes punish, or discipline His children, usually that is His last resort. God first comes alongside of His children to pick them up when they stumble and help them succeed. God wants us to trust Him and walk with Him; when we fail – He is waiting to pick us up, encourage us, and help us succeed.

One of the speakers at our ***Worker's Retreat*** in February illustrated that with parents watching their young child learn to walk. You may remember anxiously waiting for your child to take his/her first steps. It may have begun with him/her pulling themselves up and holding on to the edge of the sofa. And then gingerly reaching over to the adjacent coffee table, watching you watch them from a few feet away, and slowly learning to walk around the coffee table. And then one day, your little one decided to courageously venture out – letting go of the table and taking that first step towards you, but quickly discovering it isn't as easy as he/she thought – as he/she went kerplunk on the floor – and broke into tears. What did you do? Reprimand him/her for not keeping their balance, not trying hard enough! Of course not! Nor does God reprimand His children as they try – seeking to please Him, but sometimes failing as they do. He reaches down and picks them up!

Isaiah 40:11 (NIV84) ¹¹He tends his flock like a shepherd: **He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.**

Despite their desire to do otherwise, all parents have made, and make some missteps. Moms, and dads too, lay hold of God's forgiveness, accept it, and forgive yourself. Don't allow the enemy to control you with reminders of your missteps. After you have received the Lord's forgiveness they are washed away! Don't allow them to plague your life.

As I worked on this message I reflected on Paul and his choices in his past. After the Lord miraculously saved him on the Damascus Rd, he must have grieved over so much of his previous life – he certainly acknowledged it

Acts 26:9–11 (ESV) ⁹"I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. ¹¹And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities.

He had been the primary adversary of the infant Church. He gave approval to kill Stephen – the first martyr of the Church. He came face to face with the families of people he persecuted and terrorized. He couldn't change any of that – he could only accept God's forgiveness, seek forgiveness from those he had wronged, care for them where he could, and move on – he couldn't change what he had done. That is all that moms, and dads too, can do where they failed – forgiveness.

The Bible makes it clear our sins are washed away

Psalms 103:10–13 (NIV84) ¹⁰he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. ¹¹For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; ¹²as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. ¹³**As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him.**

Let me also add that there are parents who did most things right, they loved the Lord, modeled what a mature walk with the Lord looked like for their children. They brought their kids to Church, to Sunday School, and youth, and fostered their children walking with the Lord – but their children nevertheless walked away from Him. Unfortunately, you can do all the right things, but when children become adults they become responsible for whether they will walk with the Lord or not – and He gives them the liberty of making that choice and will hold them accountable.

I had two other points on how to **Heal Heartache on Mother's Day**

7. **Reject Anger, Bitterness, and Unbelief**

8. **Walk With God – Hold Fast to Jesus Christ – and Don't let Go!**

Pray, seek His face, seek His care, His direction, and His intervention where needed. Pray to soften the hearts of your children that have walked away from you, or God.

Conclusion

My prayer is that my comments will especially be helpful to those who find **Heartache in Mother's Day**, and will help all of us in caring for one another.