



# Honoring the Biblical Call of Motherhood

Dr. John Piper

*You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.*

*But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:10–17 ESV).*

My aim in this sermon is to honor motherhood and in this way glorify Jesus Christ who designed it, created it, and blessed it by his incarnation in Mary's womb and by his words from the cross to John, in one of the most beautiful acts of final care for Mary: "[John], Behold your mother" ([John 19:27](#)).

What I want to honor in this message is the biblical calling on a woman's life to weave a fabric of family life out of commitment to a husband and his calling, and commitment to her children and their training, and commitment to Christ and his glory. In other words, I want to honor the biblical calling that makes marriage, motherhood, and home-management, in the context of radical Christian discipleship, the central, core, dominant commitments of a woman's life.

There are millions of single women, and many will stay single. There is a grace from God for that—a very special grace and for some even a calling. There are women who are single mothers and the marriage element in the calling I just described is painfully missing. Jesus Christ has a grace for that. There are women who are married and cannot, or, with their husbands, choose not, to have children. Jesus has a grace for that.

And there are mothers who weave together their mothering and their marriage and home management with part-time or full-time employment outside the home—some because they may have to (like single moms), others because they see it as part of their calling and have found creative ways to interlace schedules so as not to compromise their core commitments at home, and others, sadly, because they don't have core commitments to supporting the husband's calling, and pouring their lives into their children, and managing a home for the glory of Christ. They've simply absorbed the values of the world from television, media, friends with no biblical framework.

## The Aim of This Sermon

My aim is not to address all of those circumstances. My aim to encourage the women—and there are millions of you—who believe that God's call on your life is marriage, the joyful support of a husband and his calling as you display what the relationship between Christ and the church looks like, and motherhood, the transmission of a God-centered, Christ-treasuring vision of life to your children, and home-management, the creation of a beautiful and simple place and a living organism called a home which becomes, not only for the family, but also for the community a refuge of Christ's peace and launching pad for God's righteousness.

Those of you women who feel this calling are the ones I want to encourage with this message, and your role is the one I want to honor especially today, because you are probably not going to get the encouragement or the honor from the secular world. They don't know what I am talking about. Marriage is a parable of Christ and his church? Motherhood as the life on life transmission of a God-centered, Christ-treasuring worldview? Home management as the creation of a living organism that nurtures the peace of Christ and the righteousness of God? The world does not understand these things.

This is a very high and holy and crucial calling that many of you embrace, with little understanding or encouragement from the world. You are the ones who have heard [Titus 2:4-5](#) not as oppressive but as liberating. Paul said to Titus that the older women should "train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled." You have heard that calling as rich and deep and precious and high and holy and confirming your heart's longings, and as absolutely essential for the shaping of a God-centered, Christ-exalting church and culture.

To you I direct this message as a word of honor and encouragement. And to do that I want to spend part of my time in [1 Timothy 3](#) and part of my time, by way of illustrating the scripture, paying tribute to my own mother who lived out this calling so faithfully.

First, look with me at [2 Timothy 3:14-15](#):

But as for you [Timothy], continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it [mark those words] <sup>15</sup> and how from childhood [this signals to us who it was that taught him these things] you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

## 1. From Whom Did Timothy Learn the Word?

I want you to see two things. First, who is Paul talking about in verse 14 when he says, “. . . knowing from whom you learned it”? He is talking about Eunice and Lois, Timothy’s mother and grandmother. There are three clues that lead us to this conclusion. First, Paul refers (in v. 15) to this learning as happening “from childhood.” Second, we see in [2 Timothy 1:5](#) these words, “I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well.” So Paul has already connected Timothy’s faith with what he got from his mother and grandmother.

The third clue is the answer to the question why Paul did not refer to Timothy’s father. The answer is found in [Acts 16:1](#) where Luke tells us about how Paul chose Timothy in the first place as missionary partner. “Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek.” So Timothy is the product of a home with a believing mother and an unbelieving father. That’s why Paul did not say that Timothy learned the scriptures from his father. He didn’t. His father didn’t believe them. But his mother and grandmother did. That is who Paul is referring to in [2 Timothy 3:14](#).

## 2. Remembering the Character of Your Godly Mother Is a Great Incentive to Holding Fast the Scriptures She Taught You

Now the second thing to see in this verse is that remembering the character of your godly mother is a great incentive to holding fast to the scriptures she taught you. Let’s read it again so you can see this. Verse 14: “But as for you [Timothy], continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed”—that is, don’t give up your faith, don’t give up the scriptures, don’t give up your salvation. Then comes these crucial words referring back to Eunice and Lois: “knowing from whom you learned it.”

In other words, Timothy, one of the ways—not the only way—one of the ways to strengthen your faith and persevere through hard times and not give up on the scriptures is to remember who introduced you to word of God and the way of salvation. Remember your mother, and your grandmother.

So let’s make very clear: the apostle of Jesus Christ in this text bestows on motherhood and grandmotherhood a great honor. You have a calling that can become the long-remembered ground of faith, not just for your children—mark this—but for the untold numbers who will be affected by your children. And that’s in addition to all the other thousands of ripple effects of faith in your life.

## A Tribute to Ruth Piper

Now I turn to illustrate this honor by paying tribute to my mother, Ruth Piper. I have two documents. One that I wrote about my mother and one that my father wrote, both of them written thirty years ago. I'll read some quotes from my memories to illustrate some of mother's virtues and commitments as she lived out this calling of wife and mother and home-manager.

First, God's honor was paramount for my mother. I wrote:

*I never got spanked for makin' mess in my pants,  
but I did for skippin' church;  
which goes to show mama cared more about keeping; God's name  
and my soul clean  
than she did her own hands.*

Second, she was never cynical about my weaknesses but always tenderly empathetic. I wrote:

*When I had to give my first "part" in Training Union,  
right after promotion day when everybody is older,  
she showed me how to write the main points on a card  
and listened just before supper while I practiced on her;  
she never let on it wasn't life and death.*

Third, she had a Bible-saturated concern for my heart. I wrote:

*Mama knew the Good Book—especially the Proverbs;  
years later when I was three thousand miles away  
she kept on quotin' Proverbs in her salutations.  
The message was always the same—the pulse beat of her heart—  
Be wise son, be truly wise:  
Fear God and keep your heart warm.*

Fourth, mingled with fiercely earnest faith in the realities in heaven and hell and the seriousness of the Christian life, my mother had an utterly uninhibited sense of humor. I wrote:

*Maybe Paul couldn't imitate baby-chatter  
or Mrs. Loren Jones or all the characters in a church play;  
but mama could—and then how she would laugh!  
Why I've seen her and Grandma Mohn—  
one hundred-thirty years worth of German sobriety—  
guffaw till their tears wet the table cloth.  
It would start with a short soprano burst  
that could split the eardrums;*

*her silver head would toss backward  
and her long white teeth would flash under her sharp nose,  
and her tanned neck would redden as the tendons flinched.  
She was a vision of health and joy;  
and I never felt better than when mama laughed.*

Fifth, she took right and wrong very seriously and held me accountable to the highest standards so that I knew in all the conflict I mattered a lot to my mother. I wrote:

*And I seldom felt worse than when mama cried:  
I got a speedin' ticket one night  
and mama wept like I'd shot somebody.  
All the way to the station at midnight she cried  
and made me pay it off right then and there.  
One thing was for sure:  
I mattered a lot to mama.*

What I owe my mother for my soul and my love to Christ and my role as a husband and father and pastor is incalculable.

Now I close by reading my father's tribute. Keep in mind my purpose—to honor and to encourage women who embrace the biblical calling of marriage, motherhood, and home management for Christ and his kingdom. I see what I am doing here in the same genre as [Proverbs 31](#). I am celebrating a beautiful God-designed calling with the life of one woman who lived it.

## A Memorial to Ruth, My Wife

by Bill Piper

She was a priceless gem, rarer by far than sapphire, ruby or diamond. Her radiance depended not on some earthly or external beam. Her glow was from within, shining from genuineness of character and purity of soul.

The dancing sparkle of her life resulted not from material stimuli. It came from a heart that gave and gave and gave again with never a thought of receiving. It reflected a life that loved and loved until there was just no more love.

Her beauty was that of expanded unselfishness. Her whole life was others, her loved ones, her friends, her neighbors and her church. She knew no resting place. The needs were endless and her devotion always equaled the demands. Deep weariness of mind and body never deterred her.

The enormous wealth of her character showed most in her unstinting kindness. All who knew her felt it, witnessed it, experienced and believed in it. Everyone coming within the warm glow of her influence was cheered, encouraged, lifted and blessed.

Her beauty knew no vanity. She disdained the cheap, the tawdry, the make-believe. She loathed everything farcical and hypocritical. Her genuineness was transparent. She radiated reality. Life to her was neither a mummery nor a charade but a daily expression of untainted sincerity.

Her glory sprang from a love of life. Her activities never ceased and her energy seemed boundless. Her spontaneous laughter and contagious smile delighted all who met her. She enjoyed being alive and her life had beauty and purpose.

She epitomized the virtuous woman. She was clothed with strength and honor. My heart safely trusted in her. She looked well to the affairs of her household. She burned the midnight oil. Her hands were never idle. Her mouth was full of wisdom and on her tongue was the law of kindness. Her children have risen to praise her.

She was modest, almost to a fault. Always the lady. Always the queen. She carried herself with poise and great dignity without pomp, piety or ceremony. Modern trends in styles were ignored if they offended her sensitivities or violated her convictions. She never sought praise or popularity, contented always to serve in a spirit of congeniality and selflessness.

She was the practical woman. Never lavish. Never wasteful. I was the dreamer. She shunned the unnecessary and the excessive. Satisfied with simple things, she avoided that which was foolish and vain. Sound judgments preceded her decisions. Never one to parade, she abstained from the superficial, pretentious, needless and impractical.

Above all was the totality of her dedication. Devoted to her husband, her family, her friends and her church, she was supremely committed to her Lord. Her faith in Christ never wavered. Having trusted him as a child, she loved him more with every passing year. Her convictions held firm in the face of a changing world. The vicissitudes of life's vicissitudes never altered her course. She remained steadfast, immovable, abounding always in the work of the Lord. She was a rock. She was found faithful. She walked with God and God loved her and took her. She now rests with him whom she loved and served.

The light from her devotion and the aroma from her character lives on to bless perpetually the lives of all who loved her. Her testimony will not be lost. Her commitment to Christ has not been in vain. Her husband, her children and all her descendants will rise to call her blessed.

This sermon is a fulfillment of that prophecy, and, I pray, is an honor and an encouragement to all of you women who embrace the biblical calling of marriage, the joyful support of a husband and his calling as you display the relationship between Christ and the church, and motherhood, the transmission of a God-centered, Christ-treasuring vision of life to your children, and home-management, the creation of a beautiful and simple place and living organism which becomes a refuge of Christ's peace and launching pad for God's righteousness.