



Isaiah 66

Mother's Day may be another one of those materialistically crass holidays where the retailers convince us to spend too much money. Nevertheless, it is a good opportunity to recognize and honor our mothers. If you are like me then you learned a great deal from your mom. Here is a short list of what she taught me when I was young.

My mother taught me RELIGION: When I spilled grape juice on the carpet, she instructed, "You better pray the stain will come out of the carpet."

My mother taught me LOGIC: From her decisive words, "Because I said so, that's why."

My mother taught me FORESIGHT: "Make sure you wear clean underwear, in case you're in an accident."

My mother taught me IRONY: "Keep laughing, and I'll give you something to cry about."

My mother taught me about STAMINA: "You'll sit there 'til all that spinach is finished."

My mother taught me about WEATHER: "It looks as if a tornado swept through your room."

My mother taught me THE CIRCLE OF LIFE: "I brought you into this world, and I can take you out."

For this Mother's Day I am taking a different approach. Instead of preaching on the Proverbs 31 woman or some famous mother in Scripture, this Mother's Day message is from Isaiah 66. This chapter does not have any particular mother described here but it does have what we might call the "mother heart of God." Now lest you freak out on me and think I am referring to God as female or as the divine mother, perish the thought immediately. I am not transitioning Grace church to the pagan practice of the divine feminine, but God does represent himself with the language and qualities of a mother, verse thirteen being the key verse. *As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.*

Not only is there the language and qualities of a mother, in this chapter conception, birth, infancy and toddlerhood are all described in detail and all coming from the heart and divine initiative of God. Chapter 66 is Isaiah's final chapter of his book and it clearly describes the Last Days. It is not a chapter about motherhood per se, but the image of motherhood permeates the chapter. Our plan is to see in what ways God cares for us like a mother and then apply these principles to our own families.

1. Mothers should have hearts that are contrite in Spirit and tremble at God's word.

Thus says the LORD: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? 2 All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the LORD. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word. 3 "He who slaughters an ox is like one who kills a man; he who sacrifices a lamb, like one who breaks a dog's neck; he who presents a grain offering, like one who offers pig's blood; he who makes a memorial offering of frankincense, like one who blesses an idol. These have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations; 4 I also will choose harsh treatment for them and bring their fears upon them, because when I called, no one answered, when I spoke, they did not listen; but they did what was evil in my eyes and chose that in which I did not delight."

Much of the book of Isaiah presents what is a driving force throughout Scripture: God is chiefly concerned with the heart. God does not care about the outward trappings of religion but of what is happening inside our hearts. If our hearts are not right, even prescribed sacrifices become an abomination to the Lord. Verse three reads, "*He who slaughters an ox is like one who kills a man*"; This means that an Israelite could be in God's temple offering the sacrifices that God requires but in so doing, the sacrifice of an ox would be equivalent to murdering a man. The point is that a heartless sacrifice is just empty meaningless worship and if it is meaningless, then the taking of the life of an ox is like murder. Similarly, *he who presents a grain offering, like one who offers pig's blood*. A grain offering, which God commanded, if not accompanied by a humble and contrite heart, is the same thing as offering pig's blood to the Lord. Pigs were unclean animals and only pagans would have offered pig's blood as a sacrifice to the gods. Therefore, worship without the proper heart attitude is like murder and paganism.

Moreover, God does not really "need" these sacrifices. Listen again how he described himself. *Thus says the LORD: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? 2 All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the LORD.* We know that Moses, at God's direct leading laid down hundreds of laws and specific sacrifices and types of offerings. But if you are not careful you could fall into the trap of thinking that God "needs" ox blood and burnt offering to survive. If Heaven is the throne of God and earth is his footstool, then tell me, what does God need? He needs nothing for all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things and in him all things hold together. God needs nothing!

Yet he does seek out a certain kind of person. *But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.* Speaking of motherhood, I believe that

pride is the mother of all sins therefore humility is the mother of all righteousness. First of all, humility is necessary to have saving faith in Christ.

Pride and motherhood do not generally seem to go together. We think of moms as being inherently humble and dads as being the proud ones but mom's can be just as prideful as the dads. I don't think that women are more prideful than men but neither do I think they are any less prideful. Women are naturally competitive. Women compete for the attention of men. They wear clothes and makeup and beautify themselves in such a way as to attract guys. In nature, it's almost always the males that are more attractive. All you need to do is look outside at your bird feeder. The female cardinal is a nice looking bird with beautiful streaks of red flowing through her brown feathers but then you see the male cardinal and he is stunning. His whole bird body screams, "Look at me. I am red! Have you ever seen such a beautiful shade of red? Come on ladies, you know you like me."



Guys also do silly things to compete with other men for the affection of the ladies but in the human world, they don't beautify themselves like the cardinal. They guys buy big trucks and fast cars and attempt to get big muscles. Maybe this is why guys buy RED sports cars!

But competition among women does not stop after marriage. Mothers are some of the most competitive creatures on our blue and green planet. They love their children so a natural feeling that either drives them or at least sits in the back of their minds is: my kid is better than your kid. Much of a mother's identity is wrapped up in their children therefore they want their kids to succeed.

This competitive nature of women starts as young girls. There is a certain jealousy about little girls where they seem to be competitive about their friends. Girls seem to want to have best friends and if another little girl comes along and threatens to take away whom they perceive is *their* best friend, all I can say is, "Watch out!" Moms and dads, please be on guard against this in your young girls.

All this is to say that women and mothers not only have issues of pride that everyone struggles with but they also have issues unique to being women and mothers. Yet the Creator and Sustainer of the universe says, *But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.* God is looking for and seeking out the humble in

heart. Do you know how you can tell if you are humble in heart? “The one who trembles at his word” This is obviously more than just reading the word. A mother who trembles at the word takes in the word of God in such a way as to allow the Holy Spirit to transform them. Ladies, do you tremble at God’s word? Do you have a regular habit of taking in the word of God or does your Bible gather dust from Sunday to Sunday?

Men, what are you doing to help your wife to tremble at God’s word? For many years I have made breakfast for the family so that Karen could have a quiet time in the morning before her day got too crazy. My schedule allows for this and though it may not work for everyone, wouldn’t it be a wonderful Mother’s day present to commit to helping your wife have her daily quiet time?

2. Mother’s endure persecution and suffering.

5 Hear the word of the LORD, you who tremble at his word: “Your brothers who hate you and cast you out for my name’s sake have said, ‘Let the LORD be glorified, that we may see your joy’; but it is they who shall be put to shame. 6 “The sound of an uproar from the city! A sound from the temple! The sound of the LORD, rendering recompense to his enemies!

The sad irony of this passage is that the ones who are persecuting the Jews were fellow Jews. The ones who are doing the persecution are using their own righteousness as the basis of the persecution. They cast people out for the Lord’s sake. Like the Pharisees in Jesus’ day, they falsely believe that they are the righteous remnant sent to protect the Lord’s reputation and good name, but as the Lord said, “It is they who shall be put to shame.” I call this taking the spiritual high ground in a disagreement. Some people are really good at using Scripture to sound very holy and to make their side of the story sound particularly righteous. In any battle, if you have the high ground, you have a natural advantage over your opponent and if you can gain a spiritual high ground, whether or not you are right, you have a natural advantage.

The mothers who are among us may not be suffering direct persecution at the hands of their fellow believers but I guarantee you that moms are suffering in various ways. John Piper entitled one of his sermons: Motherhood, a call to suffering. Mother’s continually make sacrifices for their children and families. They are expected to be full of nurturing love even when their love tanks and not being filled by anyone else. They naturally give up things that they want to do in order to meet the needs of everyone else.

Fathers and children, we need to go out of our way to acknowledge these daily sacrifices. Your mother is modeling suffering and sacrifice to you and at the least we should let her know that we see and feel her sacrifice.

I found a powerful story about mothers and suffering. Many of you are familiar with the ministry, Voice of the Martyrs which was started by Richard and Sabina Wurmbrand. How many of you have read *Tortured for Christ*? If you haven’t, you should. Richard was imprisoned by the communists in Romania for fourteen long years and as the name of the book implies, he was tortured on many occasions while in prison. The family member I was not familiar with was their son, Michael. He was only seven years old when his father was thrown in prison and worse still,

when he was nine, his mother was also put in prison. Listen as one biographer recounts Michal's brief visit to see his mother.

Eleven-year-old Michael tried to be brave as he followed the guard down the prison hallway. The echo of their footsteps stopped when they reached the large room where several prisoners huddled together. He looked around nervously. Finally his eyes found hers.

"Michael!" cried his mother. Michael felt a lump in his throat when he saw her. Her shabby uniform hung loosely on her thin body. She was so dirty, he could hardly recognize her. Yet when their eyes met, a familiar joy filled them for the first time in two years. Michael took a deep breath, trying to hold back the tears.

"Michael!" She called again across the room. "Believe in Jesus with all your heart!" Before he could respond, the guards were dragging her away from him, angry at her words of faith. Tears rolled down his cheeks, and he sobbed as she disappeared around the concrete wall.

Seeing his mother's unwavering passion for Jesus despite being in prison, the boy made a life-changing decision. It was at that moment that Michael Wurmbrand welcomed Christ into his own heart.¹

The Bible constantly teaches us about the benefit of bearing up under suffering and sacrifice. Sabina Wurmbrand's endurance led to the conversion of her young son. The sacrifice represented by the mother's in this room will bear fruit in time. Sabina did not want to be in prison and away from her son but she rejoiced in the fruit of her suffering. Mom, what are you enduring right now? Some mom's are making sacrifices for their young children. Some moms are making sacrifices for their adult children but regardless, as Romans promises, "endurance produces character and character produces hope and hope does not put us to shame." Your endurance will bear fruit even if you cannot see it from where you are standing.

3. Mother's provide a place of comfort and abiding safety.

This is one of the chief roles of a mother—to be a place of comfort and safety. Let's make sure we understand the context of Isaiah 66 before we make an application to mothers.

7 "Before she was in labor she gave birth; before her pain came upon her she delivered a son.

8 Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things?

Shall a land be born in one day? Shall a nation be brought forth in one moment?

For as soon as Zion was in labor she brought forth her children.

9 Shall I bring to the point of birth and not cause to bring forth?" says the LORD;

"shall I, who cause to bring forth, shut the womb?" says your God.

10 "Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her;

11 that you may nurse and be satisfied from her consoling breast;

that you may drink deeply with delight from her glorious abundance."

12 For thus says the LORD: "Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream; and you shall nurse, you shall be carried upon her hip, and bounced upon her knees.

13 As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.

The thing being born here is not a baby but a nation. Isaiah is describing the birth of Jerusalem, also called Zion. When Isaiah wrote Jerusalem was already a declining city and was soon to fall so Isaiah is describing a future Jerusalem. Some people would like to think that this was the rebirth of Jerusalem and the nation of Israel on May 14, 1948. I understand this to be the new Jerusalem, probably in the one thousand year millennial period where Christ will rule the earth.

Notice that there are several phases of motherhood in this section.

There is a prenatal phase: *Shall I bring to the point of birth and not cause to bring forth?"*

There is a birth: *Before she was in labor she gave birth*

There is infancy: *that you may nurse and be satisfied from her*

There is toddlerhood: *you shall be carried upon her hip, and bounced upon her knees*

In each of these descriptions, it is Jerusalem who is acting as the mother. But in verse thirteen God explicitly says *As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.* Make no mistake—God is not a mother. God is a father but still he possesses self-described mother-like qualities. We all know what it is like to be comforted by our moms in a time of great need. It is the safest and most comforting place we could be.

This is describing a future Jerusalem where God will comfort his people in a special way but don't think of this is merely a future event. This is describing the core of God's character .Jerusalem and Zion is where God's temple dwelt. Jerusalem represents the intimate presence of God. The mother love of God is greater than any earthly mother could ever give us. But as has often been said, Christians are Jesus with skin on. In other words, moms can model the safety and security of God's comforting care. For better or for worse, we learn a lot about God through the way we are parented. A poor relationship with mom or dad can negatively affect our early understanding of God's character but a good relationship can have an even more positive effect upon young hearts and minds. Moms, the next time you comfort your child over a skinned knee or unkind remark from a playmate, remember that you represent Jesus to the child in your arms.

4. A Mother's care brings prosperity.

14 You shall see, and your heart shall rejoice; your bones shall flourish like the grass; and the hand of the LORD shall be known to his servants, and he shall show his indignation against his enemies.

15 "For behold, the LORD will come in fire, and his chariots like the whirlwind, to render his anger in fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire.

16 For by fire will the LORD enter into judgment, and by his sword, with all flesh; and those slain by the LORD shall be many.

Like we have done this morning, we talk a lot about suffering and sin because the Bible speaks about it constantly. However, it is important to also see the prosperity that God has planned for us. This passage speaks of a heart that rejoices and bones which flourish. This is unadulterated prosperity. Again, this is a future event where the holy city will be a place of refreshment and abundance. You know what I think of the false prosperity gospel. I am not in much danger of ever succumbing to that evil teaching.

But the suffering and sacrifice of this life does not mean that God wants us to seek after hard times. God is a God of abundance and flourishing and as moms, it is OK to want the best for your children. It's OK to pray that your boys and girls find wonderful husbands and wives. Don't just pray for a good husband or wife for them. Pray for a crazy, amazing husband or wife for them. Don't be satisfied with average. It's good to want your children to choose a good career, for them to do well in school. You love your children and don't feel guilty about seeking after their success. Now make sure you have a good definition of success and don't ever fall into the worldly definition of success. But your mother's heart wants their best and that's a good thing.

5. Mother's raise children in order to spread the fame of the Lord to the nations

18 "For I know their works and their thoughts, and the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and shall see my glory, 19 and I will set a sign among them. And from them I will send survivors to the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, who draw the bow, to Tubal and Javan, to the coastlands far away, that have not heard my fame or seen my glory. And they shall declare my glory among the nations.

Finally we see the high calling of all child-rearing—to spread the fame of the Lord to all nations. Even though Isaiah wrote to Jews and mostly about Jews, here we see the ultimate plan of God, that all nations would know him. This is Old Testament language for worldwide evangelism. And because this was before the gospel came through Jesus Christ, Isaiah did not say that they were to take the gospel to all nations but rather the fame and glory of God. And ultimately, this is the end result of the gospel. Jesus did not save us just to keep us out of hell. He saved us to turn us into worshippers and the fame and glory of God. As John Piper has said, "Missions exists because worship does not."²

So this chief goal of mothering—spreading the fame and glory of God to all nations—does not mean that your children will end up in a foreign land, though they might. It does not mean that they all must become pastors and missionaries, though we pray that some will. It does not mean that they will have the gift of evangelism—but some most definitely will. It means that you are raising them in the fear and admonition of the Lord, as Ephesians says. It means that you want them to know the full supremacy and majesty of Christ in all things, as Colossians states. May God grant you the strength to work toward this great goal.

Rich Maurer
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I read the following in church this morning as an expression of the many joys, sorrows and varieties of mothers and experiences. ([source](#))

To those who gave birth this year to their first child—we celebrate with you
To those who lost a child this year – we mourn with you
To those who are in the trenches with little ones every day and wear the badge of food stains – we appreciate you
To those who experienced loss this year through miscarriage, failed adoptions, or running away—we mourn with you

To those who walk the hard path of infertility, fraught with pokes, prods, tears, and disappointment – we walk with you. Forgive us when we say foolish things. We don't mean to make this harder than it is.

To those who are foster moms, mentor moms, and spiritual moms – we need you

To those who have warm and close relationships with your children – we celebrate with you

To those who have disappointment, heart ache, and distance with your children – we sit with you

To those who lost their mothers this year – we grieve with you

To those who experienced abuse at the hands of your own mother – we acknowledge your experience

To those who lived through driving tests, medical tests, and the overall testing of motherhood – we are better for having you in our midst

To those who will have emptier nests in the upcoming year – we grieve and rejoice with you

And to those who are pregnant with new life, both expected and surprising –we anticipate with you

This Mother's Day, we walk with you. Mothering is not for the faint of heart and we have real warriors in our midst. We remember you.

¹ <http://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/church-history-for-kids/richard-wurmbrand-the-voice-of-the-martyrs-11636191.html>

² <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/missions-exists-because-worship-doesnt-a-bethlehem-legacy-inherited-and-bequeathed>