

Mothers' Day 2023

*“Yet she will be saved through childbearing —
if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.”
(1 Timothy 2:15 ESV)*

Saved Through Childbearing

May 14th, 2023

1 Timothy 2:8-15

Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Good morning everyone! And Happy Mothers' Day! If you have your Bible with you, I would love for you to open it now to 1 Timothy chapter 2 verse 8; that's on page 991 in your pew Bibles. We are taking a one week break from our series in the Book of Acts because I think it is important for us to talk about motherhood. We don't always do this – in fact we haven't done this in several years – but I think it is important for us to do it today, because motherhood, in this culture, has fallen into disrepute. To celebrate MOTHERS in this day and age is to risk being labelled as sexist. It is to risk being criticised for excluding single people – as if every service and every sermon has to be tailored to our particular life situation to have value.

But that's not true.

There is great benefit for younger people in listening to a sermon that is directed toward older people, just like there is great benefit for older people in listening to a sermon directed toward younger people. Just like there is benefit for church members in listening to a sermon about church leaders or church leaders in listening to a sermon about church members. We all need to understand each other and we all need to honour each other. The Bible says:

“Outdo one another in showing honor.” (Romans 12:10 ESV)

So we're going to honour moms this morning. **Not because** we think that women only have value if they are parents and **not because** being a mom is the ONLY way to worship God or contribute to the Great Commission. We're going to honour moms because it is BIBLICAL and we are going to do it because it is NECESSARY. Motherhood NEEDS to be honoured for the health and flourishing of human beings.

Now before we do this – a few disclaimers and qualifications **are necessary**. First of all, to the single person, we want to acknowledge that the Bible does indeed HONOUR those who are called to singleness. Jesus was single. John the Baptist was single. Jeremiah was single. There are NUMEROUS examples of single people in the Bible who were WHOLE HUMAN BEINGS and who served God in spectacular ways. To honour mothers is not to dishonour you. Honour is not a zero-sum game.

And then secondly, to the bereaved – to those who have lost children, either in infancy or in the womb, I want to say this: you are still a mother. You are always a mother and you will be a mother in eternity. Charles Spurgeon said:

"I rejoice to know that the souls of all infants, as soon as they die, speed their way to paradise. Think what a multitude there is of them!"¹

Christian moms let me assure you: your babies are waiting for you on the other side. So we're honouring you today as well.

And then thirdly to those dear sisters who are eager to be mothers – who are trying to be mothers – but thus far, for whatever reason, have not been able to be mothers – let me encourage you: it is a noble thing you seek and in the Bible we learn that faith is often formed and refined in pursuit of it.

¹ C.H. Spurgeon in his sermon *Heavenly Worship*, December 28th, 1856. <https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/heavenly-worship/#flipbook/>

With all of that being said, I would like to read to you now from 1 Timothy 2:8-15; hopefully you have that passage open in front of you. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling;⁹ likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire,¹⁰ but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works.¹¹ Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness.¹² I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve;¹⁴ and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.¹⁵ Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control. (1 Timothy 2:8–15 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

Did you struggle to say those words in our little liturgy?

For those who are new to church, Christians often are invited to respond to the reading of God's Word which we receive as a gift; even when it confronts our personal and cultural assumptions, as this passage does. The reader usually says at the end of the reading: this is the Word of the Lord. And the congregation responds by saying: thanks be to God.

Did those words catch in your mouth this morning?

If I were to make a list of the three most despised passages in the Bible in 2023 this passage would rank #1 and #2. And possibly #3.

We don't like verse 9 because it sounds like we are expressing an opinion about how women should dress – which is a complete no no in our culture. Despite that the bible does say an awful lot about modesty and about which of our attributes we LEAD WITH. I'll leave it at that.

We certainly don't like verses 11-14 because there it sounds like the Bible is saying that women are being excluded from the delivery and discernment of official church doctrine.

And then of course we really don't like verse 15 because it sounds there like unless a woman is raising children she isn't doing what God wants her to do.

And so of course, this morning we read all those verses: Happy Mothers' Day!

But actually, the fact that this passage offends us says more about us than it does about this passage. To get the full picture of what the Bible is saying here we have to zoom out so as to see the story of humanity as a whole. The Apostle Paul roots this teaching in the first two chapters of Genesis; the place where we find God saying things like:

26 “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:26–27 ESV)

In that passage we learn that BOTH men and women are made in the image and likeness of God – they are thus creatures of ENORMOUS dignity and worth. They are GOD-LIKE. They represent God. They resemble God.

That isn't something the Bible says just about men – it is something the Bible says about HUMAN BEINGS – MALE AND FEMALE.

That phrase “image and likeness” was originally borrowed from the Egyptian context, and it was applied there only to the person of the Pharaoh. Pharaoh was said to be *tseh'lem* and *dem-ooth'* – image and likeness – of God. But the people who first heard these words in Genesis 1:26 were not Pharaohs – they were recently liberated slaves. And God is saying to them – you are all image and likeness. Male and female. You are all SONS and DAUGHTERS of God!!

So – to be clear – the Bible does not demean women. If anything, the Bible runs the risk of deifying women. It comes within a whiff of blasphemy saying that women – like men – are IMAGE and LIKENESS of God.

And they are rulers!

God said: Let us make man in our image, after our likeness and let **THEM** have dominion. The word “man” there means HUMAN – it is the Hebrew word ‘adam which can refer to a particular person – the guy in this story named Adam – but here it means human beings. Male and female – as God makes explicit in this text. The word “dominion” as we know as Canadians, means RULE, so according to the Bible, BOTH men and WOMEN are ruling creatures. But RULING is a BIGGER THING than most people today seem to realize. In the church today, influenced as we have been by secular culture, we tend to think that rulership is about POWER and PLATFORM. We think it is about who gets to stand up here. When in fact it is so much more than that.

Do you know what the Bible says IMMEDIATELY after the verse we just read about male and female being image and likeness of God? It says this:

And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28 ESV)

Chapter One in the “How To Exercise Dominion” playbook is “Have and raise lots of babies!” How about that? And previous generations used to understand that. Do you remember the old saying: “The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world”?

Parenting – MOTHERING – is an act of dominion.

It is the FIRST act of dominion.

It is LEADERSHIP.

In a Christian context, we would say, it is disciple making. And remind me again, what the mission of the church is? Jesus said: GO AND MAKE DISCIPLES. So let me ask you a question: Are women in ministry?

Of course they are!

They are maximally engaged in ministry. The problem is that we have developed TOO NARROW a definition of ministry.

What the Apostle Paul says in 1 Timothy 2 reflects a biblical mindset. Paul understands men and women as IMAGE AND LIKENESS OF GOD. They are creatures of incredible dignity and worth. They are EQUAL – but they are DIFFERENT and they have been assigned front seat in the two main tasks associated with exercising dominion. Exercising dominion – to a Bible reader like Paul – means stewarding the Word of God and raising up worshippers of God.

Two tasks.

Two people.

Each person assigned priority responsibility in one task.

That's why Paul says in 1 Timothy 2:11-12 that a woman should remain silent during the public teaching time in the worship service. The word used there, *hesuchia*, means “to step back” or to “stand down”. Paul isn't telling women to be absolutely silent, in fact he assumes that they are praying and prophesying in the church back in 1 Corinthians 11, but when it is time for the official, elder discerned and approved teaching, the women should stand down. It is the time for the men in the church to step up and to perform their part of the task. The reason this passage is so offensive to us today, is that we have bought into the lie that we are only EQUAL if we are the SAME and a woman only has value when she does things traditionally associated with men.

That's a lie.

And Paul is saying that women will be **SAVED FROM THAT LIE** – and from the harm and destruction that lie leads to – when they embrace - **in faith** - the dignity, identity and calling that was uniquely assigned to them by their Creator.

He is saying to women in the church – women who have been RECONCILED to their Creator through Christ - you have worth and value here as women. You don't have to do this job over here in order to be honoured and valued as disciple makers and dominion exercisers; you are honoured in this place as women and mothers. What you are doing IS IMPORTANT. What you are doing is PRIMARY. What you are doing IS THE MISSION.

Our job as men – our job as elders – my job as a board appointed, board supervised preacher – is just to put tools in your hands. You are the front-line worker. You are the artisan. You are the hero. You are the moulder and shaper of human beings.

Sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ: Embrace that calling. Celebrate that calling. Retrieve that calling.

I wasn't planning on preaching this sermon. Pastor Rob had already planned an excellent service reflecting the message I was supposed to deliver on Acts 12:20-25; you'll get that next Sunday. I'm actually really excited about that message, but on Tuesday morning, the Lord laid it on my heart to preach this message. In part, I believe, because motherhood has never been LESS VALUED and LESS ESTEEMED than it is currently in this culture. Jean Twenge, a professor of psychology at San Diego State University, who tracks changes in behaviours and attitudes across generations says:

"By 2020, the birth rate for both teens and for women in their early 20s was the lowest it had ever been since records were first kept in 1918 – about half of what it was in 1990... Gen Z is marrying and having children later than any previous generation in American history. Far from

resembling the Silent generation, they have followed the slower strategy of taking their time to grow to adulthood, and it seems likely more will not marry or have children at all.”²

The decline in the fertility rate looks like the drop on a roller coaster ride. (show slide)

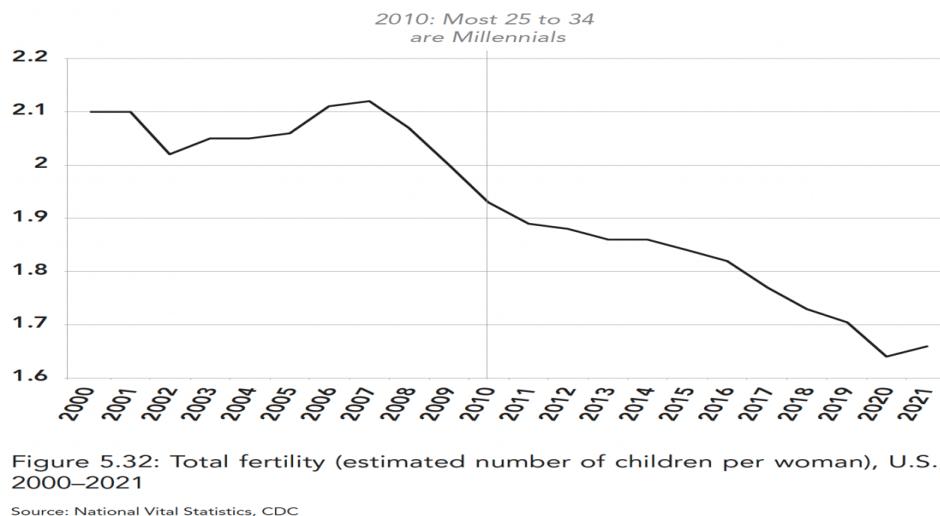


Figure 5.32: Total fertility (estimated number of children per woman), U.S., 2000–2021

Source: National Vital Statistics, CDC

We are facing an existential crisis as a culture. What happens to human beings when motherhood is no longer an honoured calling? There are only a few options and none of them are good, so there is an urgent need – a desperate need to retrieve and rehabilitate the honour, dignity and nobility of motherhood as a calling.

An Appeal To Retrieve And Revalue The Calling Of Motherhood:

Motherhood matters and in the time we have left I want to talk about why that is. Motherhood matters first of all because this is who WE are.

1. Because this is who we are

I've used the first person plural here on purpose, even though I am not a mother, and WE are not all mothers, but nevertheless, I am saying that MOTHERHOOD is essential to who WE ARE as human beings. The Christian ethicist Oliver O'Donovan puts it this way, he says:

² Jean Twenge, *Generations: The Real Difference Between Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X, Boomers, and Silents – and What They Mean for America's Future*, (New York: Atria Books, 2023), 377-378.

"It is because we stand over against one another, as men and women, as equal but complementary members of one human race, that we can, as a race, be fruitful. ... To this given connection in our nature between male-female relationship and procreation it is possible to respond in only two ways. We can welcome it, or we may resent it."³

Let me repeat that last line: we can welcome it, or we may resent it.

Might I suggest that THIS is THE challenge for people of faith – for WOMEN OF FAITH in our day.

This is exactly what Paul is saying in 1 Timothy 2:15! To RESENT motherhood – to hate our bodies, to cut off our breasts - which young girls in this culture are doing at an astonishing rate – is to reject our HUMANITY. It is to say: we are not image and likeness of God. We are not going to be fruitful and multiply. We are not going to be UNDER GOD and OVER everything else. We are going to be GODS UNTO OURSELVES. We are going to decide right and wrong BY ourselves and ultimately FOR OURSELVES.

And that is the very essence of idolatry. That is to make a god of the self. It is to reject WHO we are and WHOSE we are and therefore to RE-embrace motherhood, to RE-value procreation and to re-estimate child nurturing is an act of repentance. If it is done knowingly, willingly and intentionally – it is nothing less than an act of faith. Now, hearing all of that – processing all of that – hear again these words from the Apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 2:15:

"Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control." (1 Timothy 2:15 ESV)

What could he possibly mean there?

He means that for many women – recognizing this reality and if they are called - embracing this reality – will be for them the gateway to living faith.

³ Oliver O'Donovan, *Begotten Or Made*, (Landrum: Davenant Press, 2022), 18-19.

What else could he possibly mean here?

I suppose grammatically you could try to argue that he is saying – crassly and ridiculously – that a woman will be SAVED simply by having a baby – but that would be entirely contradictory to what Paul says in Ephesians 2:8-9:

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” (Ephesians 2:8–9 ESV)

So there is not way that Paul would here put forth some PHYSICAL ACTION that could guarantee a person’s salvation. If he means that then the whole Bible is a tangled mess of contradictions and you should throw the whole thing in the trash. He doesn’t mean that.

So what does he mean by that?

What he seems to be saying is that women will be saved by embracing who they are as human beings. They will be saved by bowing to God’s authority – even over their bodies! They will be saved by saying a hard fought – heart felt – AMEN to the goodness and wisdom of his DESIGN. He is saying that by embracing the call to motherhood women will be saved from the lie that they must be like men in order to have value in this world. He is saying that women will be saved if – by grace through faith – they are reconciled to God and to themselves and that is the very definition of what it means – for anyone - to be saved.

This is how faith works. Faith is often found, forged and refined in a difficult decision. We think of Abraham walking up Mount Moriah contemplating the call to sacrifice his son Isaac on the altar – we think of Rahab making the dangerous decision to side with the people of Israel in hiding the spies.

Faith is forged in the crisis of decision – and in our culture, no decision, for women, is more difficult than this.

God help!

So motherhood is important because it is connected to our identity, purpose and calling AS HUMAN BEINGS – whether you personally are a mother or not. Honouring the institution matters. Honouring the function matters. Honouring the calling matters. It is part of who we are as human beings.

Secondly, I would argue that motherhood matters – and will matter even more in the years and decades ahead because it is an important part of how we witness to the world.

2. Because this is how we witness

Friends, do you want to stand out in this dark and dying world? Do you want to shine your light? Then HAVE, RAISE and VALUE BABIES! Listen again to what your friends value. Twenge – who is not a Christian – says:

“When younger adults who don’t want children are asked why, the majority in national polls name not financial issues or climate change but reasons centered on individualism, such as the desire for more leisure time, wanting more personal independence, and the choice-based, matter-of-fact “I just don’t want them.””⁴

So, younger sisters in Christ, that’s what your peer group values. That’s what our culture values. Leisure time. Personal independence. Choice. Self.

And motherhood stands in opposition to ALL THOSE THINGS!!! Motherhood is the very opposite of individualism. What is a mom? Do you know what a mom is? The most self-LESS, other-centred creature in the entire universe!

⁴ Ibid., 286.

A MOM is someone who gets up 4 times during the night to nurse a helpless, hungry baby.

A MOM is someone who skips meals, wears out of style clothing so that she can save up her money in a jar so that she can one day take the kids on a vacation.

A MOM is someone who can never be happier than her saddest child.

A MOM is someone who LIVES AND DIES with every report card, every soccer game, every first kiss, every breakup, every milestone, every celebration.

That's A MOM!

A MOM is the very opposite of individualism – and individualism is the GOD of this culture.

So do you want to get noticed sisters? Do you want to stand out for Jesus? Then be a mother. In this culture there is nothing more visible than a mother – especially a mother with 5 kids!!

I think I've told this story before, but about 10 years ago, when my wife was pregnant with our daughter Noa we went on a family vacation together and we took Ainsley Robertson with us, who was friends with our oldest daughter Madison. So we had our 4 plus Ainsley plus "a bun in the oven", as the kids say. Well, one day we were on our way into a restaurant and I held the door for our family and for whatever reason they had lined up in order of height from Peyton, who was shortest, to Madison who was tallest – with Ainsley Robertson wedged somewhere in between. They went by – 1,2,3,4,5 and then Shauna Lee last of all. As I went through the door after them a woman who was coming out and who had apparently been counting whispered to her husband: "Oh my goodness – and she's pregnant again!!!"

MOMS ARE GOING TO GET NOTICED IN THIS CULTURE – and all the more in the years and decades ahead!! So, if you want to shine your light for Jesus, younger sisters in the Lord,

then have, raise, nurture and delight in CHILDREN. And when your neighbours ask you what is going on you tell them. You say, I am an image bearer. I'm a leader. I'm a disciple maker. I am a dominion exerciser. I am building an eternal kingdom over here, one human being at a time.

And you know what? Maybe they'll want to talk to you about that. When they realize they are getting old and they are all alone and their culture is cratering and disappearing before their very eyes – maybe they will want to talk to you about who you are, what you believe and how you've put your life together. Get ready for that conversation friends, because that day is coming.

This is who we are. This is how we witness. And this is how we win.

3. Because this is how we win

I know that we DO WIN because Jesus promised we would. He said:

“I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” (Matthew 16:18 ESV)

So we win. Jesus is going to build his church. Like a mustard seed, it is going to grow and grow and grow until it completely fills and dominates the garden.

That will happen.

The Lord is going to do it – and he's going to do it THROUGH the tasks which we were assigned to do. He is going to do it through the preaching of the Word and through the raising of little boys and girls who love Jesus.

That's the plan and both parts of that plan matter – which is why a little later on in this letter the Apostle Paul says to Timothy, a young man, something very similar to what he said to the young women in 1 Timothy 2:15. He says:

“Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.” (1 Timothy 4:16 ESV)

Now wait a second! Is Paul saying that Timothy can SAVE himself by committing himself to the task of stewarding the apostolic teaching of the church? That would be works based salvation!! Is he saying that?

No.

No more than he was saying that women can be saved just by the mere act of having a baby.

What he is saying is that if Timothy embraces his part of the mandate and if young women embrace their part of the mandate – in faith - then we will save ourselves and our hearers.

A community that believes in the power of the preached word of God and the importance of having and raising little image bearers who love and worship their Creator is going to have life. They are going to grow. They are going to thrive. They are going to increase. They are going to expand – and they are going to win.

That’s the game plan, friends. That’s the future. And whether the culture likes it or not – this is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God!

Let me pray for us.