

THE CHRISTIAN HOME

by

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CHAPTER FIVE

THE CHRISTIAN MOTHER

Proverbs 31

MOTHER! Sweet, tender, glorious name! A name that never fails to remind us of the faithful and ever enduring mercies of Christ. She is midst all God's creation—His masterpiece! Thompson has described a mother in beautiful words:

Mother! How many delightful associations cluster around that word! The innocent smiles of infancy, the gambols of boyhood, and the happiest hours of riper years! When my heart aches at the world's wickedness, and my limbs are weary and my feet bloody, traveling the thorny path of life, I am accustomed to sit down on some mossy stone, and closing my eyes on real scenes, send my spirit back to the days of early life. I sing my lullaby, or watch my goldfinch, or catch my rabbits, or watch the streets of my native city, or look over the green; I hear the shrill bugle and view the prancing cavalry, or go down to the dockyard, or walk along the seashore, or prattle with my brother, and kiss my sweet sister; I feel afresh my infant joys and sorrows, till my spirit recovers its tone, and is willing to pursue its journey. But in all these reminiscences my mother rises. If I seat myself upon my cushion, it is at her side; if I sing, it is to her ear; if I walk the walls or the meadows, my little hand is in my mother's, and my little feet keep company with hers; if I stand and listen to the piano, it is because my mother's fingers touch the keys; if I survey the wonders of creation, it is my mother who points out the object of my admiring attention; if a hundred cannon pronounce a national salute, I find myself clinging to her knees. When my heart bounds with its best joys, it is because at the performance of some task, or the recitation of some verses, I receive a present from her hand. There is no velvet so soft as a mother's lap, no rose so lovely as her smile, no path so flowery as that 'imprinted with her footsteps.

THE INFLUENCE OF MOTHER

Mothers have tremendous influence. Who can measure the length and breadth of Mother's influence—whether for God or Satan; heaven or hell; joy or sorrow; strength or weakness! Before the child is born he lives by mother's heart, and after he is born he lives by her guiding hand. One old divine, showing the influence of mothers and how they live on in their children, said,

Mothers live in the lives of their children. When John came forth on his great mission, behold how the leading characteristics of his mother developed themselves in him. He stands on the banks of the Jordan, in whose tide he had baptized hundreds of candidates on a profession of their repentance for sin and faith in the coming of the Messiah.

A new Candidate approaches and asks baptism. John recognizes in the new Candidate his Lord and Master, and with deep humility says, "I have need to be baptized of thee, and wherefore comest thou to me?" Of what do these words remind you? Remember what Elisabeth said to Mary before the birth of either of their sons, when she used almost this identical language in her humble exclamation, "**Whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord, should come to me?**" See you not the mother's humility living in her son?

Another trait in Elisabeth's character was the devotedness of her piety. It burned with a quenchless altar flame. She did not, like Sarah, doubt the promise of God, and was it not said of her son that "**he was a bright and a shining light**"?

She also developed great fortitude and moral courage. And did not her son develop all the high elements of moral heroism? Remember his withering denunciations of sin and willful sinners! Remember his scathing rebuke of Herod's wicked life.

O! mothers, learn your duty and privilege!

O say to mothers what a holy charge
Is theirs! With what a queenly power their love
Can rule the fountain of the new-born mind!
Warn them to wake at early dawn and sow
Good seed before the world hath sown her tares:
Not in their toil decline, that angel bands
May put their sickles in and reap for God
And gather in His garner.

MY MOTHER

My mother is my heart's ideal
Of all that's dear and good.
Her life is radiant with love
And gracious womanhood.
She's sympathetic, gentle, kind;
She understands a lad;

And oh, she's just the truest friend
A fellow ever had!

My mother never turns me down
Or fails me when in need.
To sacrifice herself and serve
Her loved ones is her creed.
She practices her faith in God
With joy and eagerness:
Her ministry's a miracle
Of sweet unselfishness.

My mother is my friend of friends;
She's all the world to me!

I owe her everything I am
And all I hope to be.
I want to live a life like hers,
And oh, I want to prove
Myself deserving of her faith
And worthy of her love!

— Author Unknown

The mother's place being of such influence, she is responsible to see that her influence is always at its best for God. Dr. R. A. Torrey says in a powerful sermon on the importance of motherhood:

“There is no nobler occupation upon earth, no higher calling than that of being a mother, a true mother. This Book which I hold in my hand confers great honor upon motherhood. The ideal woman of the Bible is not a woman who goes around making speeches, is not a woman who belongs to clubs, is not a woman that occupies a public position.

The ideal woman of the Bible is the mother. That is the highest position a woman can occupy . . . The most blessed of all women, the Virgin Mary, was a mother. Nobody can tell the amount of good that can be accomplished by a true mother. Nobody can tell the amount of evil that can be accomplished by a bad mother.”

Nothing is more beautiful than a pattern mother; but on the other hand, nothing is more pathetic than a prodigal mother. I always remember a faithful member of the first church at which I was pastor, telling me that his father and mother were drunken wastrels. Even as a boy he used to pray, “O Lord, save me from being like my parents.”

SUSANNAH WESLEY, A PRACTICAL INSPIRATION

Susannah Wesley was an ideal mother, who knew how to translate her idealism into daily practical values. Every mother should desire to be the best kind of mother, and it is the desire of every Christian mother to find ways and means to best discharge her responsibilities.

We give here Susannah Wesley's twenty-one principles and rules by which she reared her family. We believe every mother will gain practical help and encouragement from a careful study of her principles.

These were set forth (all but the last one) in a letter to her son John on July 24, 1732. In a previous letter to him she had warned,

“No one can without renouncing the world in the most literal sense, observe my method; and there are few, if any, that would entirely devote above twenty years of the prime of life in hopes to save the souls of their children, which they think may be saved without so much ado; for that was my principal intention, however unskillfully and unsuccessfully managed.”

Her rules and principles are as follows (most of these are just as she wrote them to her son):

1. The children were always put into a regular method of living, in such things as they were capable of, from their birth; as in dressing and undressing, changing their linen, and so on. The first quarter commonly passes in sleep. After that they were, if possible, laid into their cradle awake, and rocked to sleep; and so they were kept rocking till it was time for them to awake. This was done to bring them to a regular course of sleeping, which at first was three hours in the morning and three in the afternoon; afterward two hours, till they needed none at all.

2. When turned a year old (and some before), they were taught to fear the rod and to cry softly; by which means they escaped abundance of correction which they might otherwise have had; and that most odious noise of the crying of children was rarely heard in the house, but the family usually lived in as much quietness as if there had not been a child among them.

3. As soon as they were grown pretty strong, they were confined, to three meals a day. Whatever food they had, they were never permitted, at those meals, to eat of more than one thing, and of that sparingly enough. Drinking or eating between meals was never allowed, unless in case of sickness. They were never permitted to choose their meat but always made to eat such things as were provided for the family.

4. In order to form the minds of children, the first thing to be done is to conquer their will and bring them to an obedient temper. To inform the understanding is a work of time and must with children proceed by slow degrees as they are able to bear it; but the subjecting the will is a thing that must be done at once, and the sooner the better, for by neglecting timely correction they will contract a stubbornness and obstinacy which are hardly ever after conquered; and never, without using such severity as would be as painful to me as to the child. In the esteem of the world they pass for kind and indulgent, whom I call cruel, parents who permit their children to get habits which they know must be afterwards broken.

Whenever a child is corrected, it must be conquered; and this will be no hard matter to do, if it be not grown headstrong by too much indulgence. And when the will of a child is totally subdued and it is brought to revere and stand in awe of the parents, then a great many childish follies and inadvertences may be passed by. Some should be overlooked and taken no notice of, and others mildly reprov'd; but no willful transgression ought ever to be forgiven children without chastisement, less or more, as the nature and circumstances of the case may require.

“I insist on the conquering of the will of children betimes, because this is the only strong and rational foundation of a religious education; without which both precept and example will be ineffectual. But when this is thoroughly done, then a child is capable of being governed by the reason and piety of its parents till its own understanding comes to maturity and the principles of religion have taken root in the mind.

“I cannot yet dismiss the subject. As self-will is the root of all sin and misery, so whatever cherishes this in children insures their own after wretchedness and irreligion; whatever checks and mortifies it promotes their future happiness and piety. This is still more evident if we consider that religion is nothing else than doing the will of God and not our own.”

5. Our children were taught, as soon as they could speak, the Lord's Prayer, which they were made to say at rising and at bedtime constantly; to which, as they grew bigger, were added a short prayer for their parents and some collects; a short catechism and some portion of Scripture, as their memories could bear.

6. They were very early made to distinguish the Sabbath from other days, before they could well speak or go.

7. They were early taught to be still at family prayers and to ask a blessing immediately after, which they used to do by signs, before they could kneel or speak.

8. They were quickly made to understand they might have nothing they cried for and instructed to speak courteously for what they wanted. They were not permitted to ask even the lowest servant for aught without saying, "Pray give me such a thing."

9. Taking God's name in vain, cursing, swearing, profanity, obscenity, rude, ill-bred names were never heard among them. Nor were they ever permitted to call each other by their proper names without the addition of brother or sister.

10. There was no such thing as loud playing or talking allowed.

11. Every child was kept close to his business for the six hours of school each day. It is almost incredible what may be taught a child in a quarter of a year by a vigorous application if it have but a tolerable capacity and good health.

12. After our house was rebuilt [because of fire] we began the system of the children singing psalms at morning and evening. At five in the evening a general retirement was entered upon, when the eldest took the youngest that could speak, and the second the next, to whom they read the Psalms for the day and a chapter in the New Testament; as in the morning they were directed to read the Psalms and a chapter in the Old Testament, after which they went to their private prayers, before they got their breakfast or came into the family.

13. It had been observed that cowardice and fear of punishment often lead children into lying till they get a custom of it which they cannot leave. To prevent this, a law was made that whoever was charged with a fault of which they were guilty, if they would ingenuously confess it and promise to amend, should not be beaten. This rule prevented a great deal of lying.

14. No sinful action, as lying, pilfering . . . disobedience, quarreling, was ever permitted to pass unpunished.

15. No child was ever to be reprimanded or beaten twice for the same fault; and that if they amended, they should never be upbraided with it afterwards.

16. Every signal act of obedience, especially when it crossed upon their own inclinations, should be always commended, and frequently rewarded according to the merits of the case.

17. If any child ever performed an act of obedience or did anything with an intention to please, though the performance was not well, yet the obedience and intention should be kindly accepted; and the child with sweetness directed how to do better for the future.

18. The rights of property must be invariably preserved and none suffered to invade the property of another in the smallest matter, though it were of the value of a farthing or a pin, which they might not take from the owner without, much less against, his consent. This rule can never be too much inculcated on the minds of children; and from the want of parents and governors doing it as they ought proceeds that shameful neglect of justice which we may observe in the world.

19. Promises must be strictly observed; and a gift once bestowed, and so the right passed away from the donor, be not resumed, but left to the disposal of him to whom it was given; unless it were conditional, and the condition of the obligation not performed.

20. No girl must be taught to work till she can read very well; and that she be kept to her work with the same application, and for the same time, that she was held to in reading.

Susannah Wesley gave each child an evening in the week during which time she counseled and encouraged him in the Word of God. John Wesley's evening was Thursday. He later testified how tremendous an influence this evening spent with his mother had on the forming of his mind and judgments. After he was away from her side he asked her to still devote this evening to his interest by praying for him.

John Wesley in his sermons on the religious education of children followed in the footsteps of his devout mother's teachings. Wesley taught there are four diseases to which children, as heirs of fallen Adam, are especially subject: self-will, love of world, pride, and atheism. In connection with each disease he set forth the scriptural antidote.

1. Self-will.

The child's will must be broken and subjected before he reaches the age of two years. He must know by then that his will must yield to the parents' word and authority. To give a child what it cries for is to humor it and is but to reward its will for self-assertion. Mrs. Wesley did not teach that the will must be broken but that self-will must be broken. Her teaching was actually to the end that the will of the child may be freed from the imprisoning slavery of self and selfishness, that it may be free to conform to the commandments of God; these are for the best interests of the child and of those who must live and work with him now and later. Self-will makes the child a law unto himself, thus leading to godlessness, delinquency, criminality, frustrations of all kinds, and general inability to get along with other people. Thus we see why God says that the parent who refuses to chastise his child hates him.

2. Love of the world.

Parents are not to adorn their children with such frills and gew-gaws as other children wear simply that they may look prettier. Parents are not to encourage their children to outdo others in dress or in other ways, and thus build up the strength of envy, jealousy, and hatred in them. It is this that is the very heart of "worldliness."

3. Pride.

Wesley warned against the praise of children for other than religious and spiritual worth. To praise them apart from God is to feed their natural sense of pride. To strike at the root of pride, children are to be taught early that they are fallen spirits, fallen short of that glorious image of God. They are now like Satan in possessing pride, passion, revenge, envy, and jealousy. This self-knowledge, under the Holy Spirit, leads to real conviction for sin and a sense of need for Christ and His salvation. The child will be brought to realize that all his gifts and talents he owes to the grace, mercy, and love of Christ.

4. Atheism.

Atheism is the result of neglect on the part of parents in daily teaching and training the child, a spirit of atheism—observing, treating with, and only thinking about second causes is fostered in the child because he is not deeply taught, both by example and precept, the truth of God, who is the First Cause.

UNSPOKEN PRAYER

Too tired, too worn to pray,
I can but fold my hands;
Entreating in a voiceless way,
Of Him who understands
How flesh and heart succumb—
How will sinks, weary, weak.

Dear Lord, my languid lips are dumb;
See what I cannot speak.
Just as the wearied child,
Through sobbing pain opprest,
Drops, hushing all its wailings wild,
Upon its mother's breast;

So on Thy bosom, I
Would cast my speechless prayer.
Nor doubt that Thou wilt let me lie
In trustful weakness there;
And though no conscious thought
Before me rises clear,

The prayer of wordless language wrought,
Thou yet wilt deign to hear;
For when, at best I plead—
What so my spirit saith—
I only am the bruised reed,
And Thou the breathing breath.

— Margaret J. Preston

A MIDNIGHT HYMN

(The authorship of the following beautiful hymn of trust is unknown. It was found treasured up in a humble cottage in England).

In the mild silence of the voiceless night,
When, chased by airy dreams the slumbers flee,
Whom in the darkness doth my spirit seek,
O God, but Thee?

And if there be a weight upon my breast,
Some vague impression of the day foregone,
Scarce knowing what it is, I fly to Thee
And lay it down.

So if it be the heaviness that comes
In token of anticipated ill,
My bosom takes no heed of what it is.
Since 'tis Thy will.

For oh, in spite of past and present care,
Or anything besides, how joyfully
Passes that almost solitary hour,
My God, with Thee!

More tranquil than the stillness of the night,
More peaceful than the silence of that hour,
More blest than anything my bosom lies
Beneath Thy power.

For what is there on earth that I desire
Of all that it can give or take from me?
Or whom in heaven doth my spirit seek,
O God! but Thee?

~ end of chapter 5 ~

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