

How She's Made
Proverbs 31:10-31
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Bubble gum. Stuffed olives. Accordions. Disposable diapers. Microchips. Have you ever wondered how such things are made? Perhaps the prospect of learning how everyday items are put together isn't all that exciting to you in which case, you've probably never seen *How It's Made*, the TV series that prides itself on showing the world how everyday items are assembled. And although it might sound boring, the show has proven to be a big hit.

It began in 2001 as a documentary for Canadian television. But, it soon gained a worldwide following on cable networks like the Discovery and Science channels. Now in its 17th year, it is broadcast in more than 30 countries. Each week it teaches people around the globe a very simple lesson: even the most overlooked of items is intricately and wonderfully made. And when you know how much effort goes into making something, you're able to appreciate it that much more.

Today, of course, is Mother's Day, and Proverbs 31 gives us a glimpse of Mom at her finest. She not only has stolen the heart of her husband and earned the respect of her peers, she's an entrepreneur, a purveyor of wisdom and on top of it all, she raises boys and girls who call her "blessed."

The Bible goes to great lengths to show us just how God made this incredible, indispensable, yet often overlooked aspect of everyday life known as "Mom." And, looking at how Mom is made also teaches us some profound things about God.

In the first chapter of Genesis, we see God forming all creation, the land, the animals, the sun and stars. Finally, God turns to handcrafting what would later be called the masterpiece of creation, humankind: "Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.' So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply.'" (1:26-28a)

In drawing up the design for Adam, Eve and all of humanity, God says something about us that wasn't said when making the mountains, the stars, the cows or the killer whale. God proclaims that humans are made in the *imago Dei*, the very image of God. That is, as human beings we reflect, we represent, we give off hints of God that nothing else does. Our abilities to create, emote, think, love, build things, change things and heal things all point back to God.

But it goes further. Wanting to display the full height and breadth of who he is, God not only created humanity but created humans distinctly male and female. God gave us slightly different wiring, different shapes and textures. And, we also received different callings and vocations which can include husband, wife, father, mother. These unique roles make the most of our different wiring and shapes and allow us as men and women to uniquely bless others and uniquely proclaim something about who God is to the world.

This morning, because it's Mother's Day, we're going to focus on the unique ways women are designed to express the image of God. I want to acknowledge at the outset that preaching about moms on Mother's Day is a perilous proposition. A lot of mothers don't come anywhere close to being the ideal described in Proverbs 31, so Mother's Day can be painful, as it also is for those of us whose moms are gone. We need to be sensitive to the array of emotions that this day can elicit. But, we all do have some woman or women in our lives who have been profoundly important to us—a teacher or an aunt, a next door neighbor or a grandmother—someone who loved us, encouraged us and helped or cared for us. So, I invite us to think about Proverbs 31 in a broader context than wife and mother, to think in terms of how any woman can be used by God for good in our lives and to remember those women who have done just that.

So, how are these women made? First, Proverbs 31 reminds us that the comfort we enjoy from Mom or that special woman in our lives is a reflection of the comfort God gives. Being able to calm, nurture and support other people is a gift, a gift that we all need, and we are the better and healthier for having people who share these gifts readily and generously with us. Whoever gives that to us is, in a very real sense, "mothering" us. In Isaiah 66, God says, "As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted." How great is that? God is saying, "Do you remember how Mom made you feel? Remember how her presence made you more peaceful? Remember how she would draw you close? Well, she learned that from me, and that my child, is how I care for you."

Second, Moms are meant to mold and shape us as God molds and shapes us. One of the recurring themes in the Bible is something theologians call “sanctification.” It’s a word that literally means, “the process of becoming holy,” or being trained in the ways of God. Scripture tells us that God puts his Spirit inside us and begins a lifelong process of changing us to more accurately reflect the divine image. God’s hands, if you will, are wrapped around the lives of those who love him, slowly and lovingly molding and shaping our behaviors, attitudes and thoughts. Out of love, God is working in us to transform what is broken and sinful, those parts of us that hold us back and lessen our humanity into instead, what is most beautiful and authentic.

While children are still young, like Grayson and Beryl, parents have the extraordinary responsibility to teach them what is right and wrong, how to speak to and treat others, what constitutes grooming fit for public consumption, what behavior is appropriate in what setting. Like God, the important women in our lives have their hands wrapped around us, rounding off the rough edges, being an agent of transformation so that we grow from 2-year old tyrants to functional and mature human beings.

And this is also why moms and dads are so important to nurturing faith. A parent’s power to mold a child is most often displayed in applying faith to the daily details of family life. On Mother’s Day we are reminded that Mom is a gift from God, and for many of us, our relationship with God was a gift from Mom.

Third, Mom, like God, was made to give life. When God crafted the first woman, Adam took one look and instantly gave her a name that means, “life giver.” Certainly, it takes both male and female to make a baby, but it is the woman’s vocation to carry and birth children. The birth of a child can be a strange moment for a lot of men. On one hand, they are incredibly proud of their wives, but on the other hand, they have never been rendered so helpless. There is not a single thing they can *do* except be present and patient.

This image of being a life-giver is used frequently in scripture to talk about how God saves us. 1 Peter 1:3 says, “By his great mercy he has *given us a new birth* into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” In other words, just as Moms labor to give us physical life, so God labors to bring us to eternal, resurrection life. As we talked about so much during Lent, it is by grace alone, through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the cross, that we are now members of God’s family. God loves you and birthed a saving faith in you. Mom bore you once, but God—through no effort of your own—bore you again.

All of this isn't to say that Moms are somehow sainted and perfect. Mothers and fathers agree that while parenting brings out some of the best in us, it also exposes all that's broken in us. As women and men, we display God to the world but in the process, we're constantly reminded of our own need for God as well.

For many mothers, the words of praise lavished in Proverbs 31 are simultaneously uplifting and convicting. I don't know any woman, myself included, who doesn't own up to having more "un-excellent" days than we care to admit, that we haven't always dressed ourselves "with strength" or had the "teaching of kindness" on our tongues. It's tough to watch your child grow up and to see your sins being replicated in his or her life. It's difficult to admit that no matter how good a parent or nurturer you are, your child will still have a desperate need for the hope, healing, and forgiveness of Jesus, just as we do.

Some of the most beautiful words in scripture come from Isaiah 49 where God says this to his people when they are hurting: "[Some say] 'the Lord has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me.' Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands." (14-16)

Yes, sometimes even moms forget. Sometimes moms fail. But God never will. Those words can comfort those of us who perhaps had a mother that was not the epitome of Proverbs 31. They can also comfort those of us who are guilt-ridden and broken-hearted; for the overwhelmed mom and the one who desperately wants to *be* a mom. God has not forgotten you. God has not forgotten any of us, male or female. God has engraved us on the palm of his hand, and he loves us.

When you look at how something is made, you're able to appreciate it more fully. Given what scripture tells us about how moms are made, there's just one thing we should do to show our appreciation. We should honor her out of obedience to God.

In Leviticus 19, God is giving instructions to Moses about how the Israelites are to live in the Promised Land as holy, obedient children of God. "The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: you shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy. You shall each revere your mother and father, and you shall keep my sabbath: I am the Lord your God.'" (Lev. 19:1-3)

Our holiness is, in part, about honoring our parents and setting aside a day to honor God. It might seem strange for these two to be linked together, but it actually makes perfect sense. So much of who God is and what God does is to be reflected in our moms and dads. If we show no respect for their authority, if there's little appreciation for their love, their care and their role in our lives, how will we learn to respect and appreciate God?

One of the best ways to honor God is to show appreciation for our parents. As they grow older, as our reliance on them fades, as their faults and frailties become increasingly clear, this can be really difficult to do. Yet that's when they need it most. That's when we rise up and call Mom "blessed."

Moms no doubt feel at times as though they're far from "excellent." But we know that moms are intricately and wonderfully made. We take the opportunity today to thank them—and all the women who have nurtured us—for their comfort, their presence, their labor, their love and even their faults, for through it all, they have given us a glimpse of God. Amen.