

WHY MOMS NEED THE HOLY SPIRIT

JOHN 20:19-23

Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace be with you."

Now when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Once, a pastor started his sermon with a statement he hoped would grab his congregation's attention.

He said, "Some of the best years of my life were spent in the arms of a woman who was not my wife."

His opening worked! Everyone was shocked, until he added, "That other woman was my mother."

Well, a Bible College student was in the crowd that day, and he thought, "*what a catchy opening line for a sermon.*" He vowed to do the same his first sermon.

A few months later the rookie pastor had his big opportunity. His knees were knocking when he stood behind the pulpit, and began his very first sermon.

He said, “Some of the best years of my life were spent in the arms of a woman who was not my wife.”

That’s when stage fright got the best of him. He froze. He lost his train of thought. Finally he mumbled, “*And for the life of me, I can’t remember who she was.*”

Well, I think most of us could say, “I’ve spent some of the best years of my life in the arms of my mother.”

Today is Mother’s Day, and I want to thank all the moms here today for the love, and nurture, and training, and discipline you have provided your kids.

And I also hope to offer you some encouragement.

Moms today, need all the help they can get. They need someone who understands the demands they face - who can lend a hand, and provide some support.

And I’m not talking about *a nanny - or a maid - or a grandma - or a caring friend - or even a helpful husband...* I’m sure, all that backing would be nice. No mother in her right mind would turn it down. But even if a mom had all that assistance, it wouldn’t be enough.

For every mom needs help from the person Jesus called our “Comforter” - our “Helper” - the One Jesus promised would take up where He had left off. The title of today’s message, “Why Moms need the Holy Spirit.”

Let me say, that being a mother is a tough job... It’s 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

There’re no vacations, no sick days, no comp time, no lunch hours, no coffee breaks. A mom is saddled with constant

concerns. She's always on the clock. She's always on call. Her shift is never over. A mother's days are long, and her job demands are relentless.

It's been said, "There is nothing easy about good mothering. It can be back-breaking, heart-wrenching, and anxiety-producing. And that's just the morning."

And even after a job well done, a mom doesn't always get the appreciation she deserves. There are days when being a mother is a terribly thankless task.

It reminds me of the speaker at the women's conference. Her talk was on "a woman of excellence," and she concluded her remarks by quoting Proverbs 31, "Her children shall rise up and call her blessed."

One tired, exasperated, young mother turned to her friend, and confessed, "So far my children just rise up and call me." Hey, being a mom is a very tough job!

Here's one mom's confession. She's titled it, "**I Want To Be A Bear.**" "Bears get to hibernate. You do nothing for six months, but sleep. I could deal with that. Before you hibernate, you're supposed to eat yourself silly. I could deal with that, too. If you're a bear, your children are born the size of a walnut - and you birth them while you're sleeping. You awake to partially grown, cute, cuddly cubs. I could definitely deal with that.

If you're a mama bear, everyone knows you mean business. You swat anyone who bothers your cubs. If your cubs get out of line, you swat them too. I could deal with that... If you're a mama bear, your mate EXPECTS you to wake up growling.

He also expects that you'll have hairy legs and excess body fat. Yep, I'd like to be a bear." Evidently, *our moms* have a tougher job than *mama bears*. Mothers definitely need help.

Once a mom was sick in bed. Her daughter was determined to care for her ailing mom, and bring her a cup of hot tea. The little girl had seen her mom make tea for dad. She knew how. The girl was so proud to walk into the bedroom with cup and saucer in hand...

She told her mom what she'd done... She'd boiled the water, and dumped in the leaves - *but she couldn't find her mother's strainer.* She confessed, "Mom, I couldn't find the strainer so I used your flyswatter." The mother spit a mouthful of tea half-way across the room.

The little girl finished, "But don't worry mom, I didn't use the new flyswatter, I used the old flyswatter."

All moms need help, but they need the right kind of help. They need a heavenly brand of assistance - help of a spiritual sort - **every mom needs the Holy Spirit.**

It may surprise you, but the Holy Spirit knows exactly what a mom needs! One of the idioms used in the Bible for the Spirit is a dove. At Jesus' baptism the Holy Spirit descended from heaven in the form of a dove.

But this wasn't the first time God used this idiom for the Holy Spirit. In Genesis 1:2, at the beginning of God's creation, the Holy Spirit is seen "brooding over the waters." It seems the Holy Spirit birthed the creation of the earth. The image is that of a mother hen incubating her eggs and hovering over her chicks.

It's interesting, the dove speaks of motherhood, and many of the biblical terms associated with God's Spirit are idioms relating to mothering and child bearing.

In **John 3** it's through the Holy Spirit that we experience the new birth... **Hebrews 5** talks about new believers receiving the milk of the Word... The concern for other people the Holy Spirit puts in our hearts is referred to in **Galatians 4:19** as a mom's labor pains.

Please, don't misunderstand my point. God is a "he," not a "she." Whenever God speaks of Himself in the Bible He does so in masculine terms. He is our Father.

God is Israel's Husband. Jesus is the Bridegroom of the Church. Jesus is God's Son. The Bible refers to the Godhead with the personal pronouns - He, Him, His.

God reveals Himself in the role of a male to illustrate His interaction with us... God is to us, as a husband is to his wife. Like a male, God plants the seed of His Word in our hearts. And like the female we receive that seed, and nurture it, and ultimately bear fruit.

This is why "gender-neutral" language in referring to God is not only unbiblical, it poses a serious threat to sound doctrine. To pray, "Our Parent who is in Heaven" rather than, "Our Father..." - or to call Jesus "the Child of God" instead of "Son of God" - strips the Bible of the meaning God intends to convey through gender roles.

In Scripture God speaks through the differences of male and female. It's part of His revelation to mankind. Let me repeat: **God the Holy Spirit is a he, not a she.**

But having said that, the Holy Spirit reveals to us the tender, and sensitive, and compassionate, and comforting, and **motherly side** of our Father's nature.

Genesis 1:27 says, "God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." Notice both male and female are made in God's image. It's the man's maleness or *strength*, and the woman's femaleness or *sensitivity*, that together reflect God's image and likeness.

You could say **God is a father with a mother's kindness**. He's tough *and* tender - gritty *and* gentle.

One of my favorite passages is Isaiah 49. I want to read verse 15 now, and I'll read verse 16 a little later...

In Isaiah 49:15 the Lord assures His people, "Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you." God illustrates His feelings toward Israel as a nursing mom's care for her child. Her own body forces her to think about her baby.

As soon as a mother nurses her infant, her breasts begin to fill back up with milk. Her body is getting ready for the child's next meal. Her own physiology makes it impossible for a nursing mom to ever forget her child.

But according to Isaiah, a nursing mom would sooner neglect *her* feeding child than for God to neglect His people. God is always thinking about us!

In essence, Isaiah is telling us that even though God is a Father, **God is a father with a mother's heart!**

I suppose you could say God is the perfect single parent. He combines the *strength* of a Father, and the *sensitivity* of a mother. And this was the heart of Jesus.

In Matthew 23 our Lord spoke of His compassion for Israel in motherly terms, “**How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings**” Jesus also *broods* over His people.

When Jesus said the Spirit would be another Helper of *the same kind - similar to Himself* - I'm sure He was thinking of *the tenderness* that He shares with the Holy Spirit. Indeed, God is a **He**... but that doesn't mean God the Holy Spirit can't love us with a motherly love.

AB Simpson writes, “**Human fatherhood expresses a need which is met in God the Father. Human brotherhood, and the closer fellowship of husband and bride; are met in Christ, the Son of God. But human motherhood has its origin in the Holy Spirit.**” Here's my point... the Holy Spirit understands a mother's needs.

Evidently, God's Spirit can identify with the feelings of a mother. Like a mom, He shares a deep concern for *His* kids. In fact, a mother's maternal instincts originate from God. *This is why moms need the Holy Spirit...*

When Jesus took a deep breath and breathed on His disciples, imparting to them the Spirit, in verse 22 He includes the believing mom, “**Receive the Holy Spirit...**”

But that was just part of what Jesus said. Let me finish His statement, “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” Wow, now that’s a heavy authority! *What are the disciples doing retaining and forgiving sins?...*

Let me explain what’s happening here in our text, and then I’ll apply it to parents, and particularly moms.

In essence, Jesus is assigning to His disciples a parenting function in the early church. **He’s calling them to mother the infant church.** And who better to help them in *their mothering role* than the Holy Spirit?

In breathing on His disciples and imparting to them the Holy Spirit, Jesus was insuring that His initial followers would have what it took to nurture His church.

Here in verse 23 Jesus gives to His men a special authority that the Jews called **binding and loosing**.

Jesus also gave the disciples this same authority a bit earlier in Matthew 18:18, when He said, “Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

Realize, “binding” and “loosing” were rabbinical terms. They were used by the Jewish rabbis. “*To bind*” means “*to prohibit*” - “*to loose*” means “*to approve.*”

Binding and loosing was the authority *to raise or lower a standard - to make or lift a rule* - and in the case of John 20, *to extend or retain forgiveness*. This was the authority needed to lead the newborn Church.

Understand, it was this responsibility to **bind and loose** that authorized the first disciples to establish Christian faith and practice among the first believers.

Remember, in the early days of Christianity lots of thorny issues had to be worked out... *what would be the relationship between law and grace? How do you preserve unity between Jews and Gentiles? What about the times and manner of Christian worship?*

All of these issues were uncharted territory. *Even the precise meaning of communion and baptism had to be clarified... And what did a person have to actually do to know that God had forgiven them of their sins?*

The initial disciples, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, were given the authority to answer those questions, and set precedents for the first Christians.

And it's interesting that the questions and quandaries facing the disciples are many of the same challenges that every new parent, and mom, has to figure out...

How do I set rules and standards for my kids and still show them my love?... How do I teach them to get along with people who are different than them?... What about daily routines, and family traditions?... How are we going to make our times at the dinner table, when we commune together, meaningful?... And when my child disobeys, how and when do I extend forgiveness?

These are all the questions that a mom needs to answer if she's going to keep her family on track.

Like the first disciples, she has also been entrusted with an awesome responsibility, and she needs the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit to carry it out!

When my older kids were still school age we would go to the water park at Lake Lanier. Kathy would lead us to the beach, and find us a place to drop our stuff.

But at that point all four of my kids would turn and look at me with eager anticipation. They were ready to play, but first they needed parameters and boundaries.

Hopefully, my kids knew they were always to do what was right, and avoid what was wrong - but at that moment, in an unfamiliar environment - my children needed a parent to define for them what was right and what was wrong under those specific circumstances.

At home they knew their boundaries and limitations, but the water park was another world - and each kid needed a parent to interpret right and wrong for them in that situation. So *I would start binding and loosing...*

I'd say to the oldest, "**Zack**, you can ride this and go there, but stay on this side of the lake..." I had special considerations for my daughter, "**Natalie**, this is okay, but over there is off-limits, don't dare leave this area..."

Then the adventurous one, "**Nick**, go ahead and get a mat, but when you get to the top of the slide wait on me." And finally to my youngest, who was still a tot, "**Mack**, you're not to leave this beach without mom."

In those first few minutes at the water park I doled out to each of my kids limits and opportunities based on what was

suitable for *their gender, their age, their maturity, their personality, and their swimming ability.*

That's not to say that rules are subjective. To the contrary, there were universal standards that applied to all my kids that day... *The water park had its own set of rules that were for everyone in the park... Our family has rules that are always in-force... Obviously, I expect my children to be moral and show common sense...*

But what I did for my kids in those first few minutes after we arrived at the water park, was to take all the rules and apply them wisely to the situation at hand.

My kids needed a parent to help them sort through the rules and make the most immediate applications.

A parent's job at the water park is to take *the park rules, and the family rules, and the moral rules, and the common sense rules* - then wisely put them together and give specific instructions for each child on that day.

If it had been rainy I would've altered where they could or couldn't go... If the sun were blistering it would've meant more breaks... With the younger kids we had to be a little tighter and *more binding* - with the older kids we could *loosen things up a bit...* A parent loves his or her kids, and instructs them accordingly.

This is the fine art of being a parent. What's appropriate for one child, at one age, and in one environment, may not be appropriate two years later, and in a different situation. Enjoying a day at the water park required that I do some *binding and loosing.*

And this is what a mom does every single day.

A mom is always somewhere in the process of either letting out some rope, and giving her kids opportunities to learn - OR she's pulling in that rope, and tightening the screws on her child, and binding him or her to stricter rules and discipline... This is why parenting - especially being a mother - takes a great sensitivity.

You need spiritual insight into the heart of your child. To be a good mom a woman needs heavenly wisdom.

If you use a litany of rules to control your child - *and never give him or her any freedom - or shelter them from childish mistakes* - then you stifle that child, and keep him or her from turning your values into their own.

On the other hand, if a parent doesn't have the courage to impose their rules, the child will never learn to delay a desire, or say *"no"* to a behavior. A child who doesn't have boundaries is destined for destruction.

A child needs freedom, but within limits. And God's means of teaching a child this balance is a parent.

A mom has to know when to turn their child loose, and when they need to reeled them back in. As country crooner, Kenny Rogers, use to sing, *"You gotta know when to hold'em, and know when to fold'em."*

A popular term today is *"helicopter mom."* This is the mom who's catering, hovering, brooding over her kids. She's always recusing them from their own mistakes.

Since, her success is wrapped up in her kids, she does whatever it takes to help her kids avoid failure. God forbid that they have to go without lunch one day.

Mom, your child won't learn responsibility when your always bailing them out of their own poor choices.

A child doesn't need a helicopter mom, he or she needs a mom empowered by the dove. God's Spirit will hover and brood over your kids. And He'll give a mom wisdom to help her kids make their own decisions. He'll even help that mother forgive her kids when they fail.

Under **the OT** the questions facing the early church would've been easy to answer. The Hebrews lived by the law... *their society was Jews only, forget the Gentiles - exact times for worship were spelled out in advance - Jewish rituals were always by the book - and everyone knew when a person's sins were forgiven, they could see the sacrifice burning on the altar.*

In the OT God answered all His people's questions through a system of rules and rituals. Moses just laid down the law. There was no need for sensitivity. There were no exceptions - just a rigid adherence to what was written in black and white. You lived by the code.

There was no ambiguity under the law - no room for personal discernment - no need for individual sensitivity to the Holy Spirit. Life was one size fits all.

But the problem with the Law of Moses was it didn't produce loyal and loving kids. Under the OT Law the Jews rebelled. The children of Israel were incorrigible kids. They refused to obey their Heavenly Father.

And this is what I find happens when parents only lay down the Law. When they devise a rigid set of rules with little room to adapt those rules to their children's development, the child never gets a taste of freedom.

He or she doesn't know how to make wise decisions on their own. Thus, the first time the child gets out from under mom's apron-strings - *when he or she gets a car, or goes to college* - the kid ends up running wild.

Mom, God has called you to *mother*, not *smother*, your child - and to do that you need discernment, and sensitivity, and flexibility - which all require God's Spirit.

It's interesting that when God started over in the NT rather than lay down the Law, He instituted a different approach. Through His Son Jesus, God breathed on His disciples, and said, "**Receive the Holy Spirit.**"

Rather than write His will down on stone tablets, Jesus wrote His law on the hearts of His disciples.

The Lord put His Spirit and nature within them. The disciples led the Church, as they were led by the Spirit.

No longer would God's people be governed by rules and rituals. From now on they were led by the Holy Spirit through the confirmation of those initial disciples.

The law smothers us - the Holy Spirit mothers us! He births in us a desire to follow God and love others.

In 2 Corinthians 3:17, Paul tells us, "**where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.**" And the Holy Spirit uses that liberty to grow us up and teach us. Rather than one size fits all, the

Spirit leads us intimately and individually. The love Jesus communicates through the touch of His Spirit causes us to love our Father more.

When Jesus breathed on His disciples and imparted to them the Holy Spirit He was weaning them off the Law. He no longer wanted people trapped in legalism.

Rather than a robotic obedience, Jesus' disciples were to listen to Him, and lean on Him, through the person of the Holy Spirit... Then those first disciples were to teach believers in the future to do the same.

And this is the job of a mother in the life of her kids.

Mom, your job is to lead your children by listening to the Holy Spirit's specific prescription for what they need at each turn in their growth and development.

And in the process, teach your child how to listen to the Spirit themselves... Here's the point, [the difference between mothering and smothering is the Holy Spirit.](#)

The responsibility the risen Lord Jesus gave to His eleven disciples in that upper room was strategic.

On the cross Jesus paid the price for mankind's forgiveness, but once that price was paid, it was then up to Jesus' disciples to dispense that forgiveness.

In the beginnings of the Church, new Christians had to be led. Repentant people were convicted of their sin by the Holy Spirit - they were pointed to Jesus, and all that He had done for them... *But what was **their** part?*

What were they to do?... What were they suppose to say, or pray? How do you receive God's forgiveness? It was His disciples' role to sort it out for the Church.

This is why Jesus told them in verse 23, **"If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."** Don't misunderstand, nowhere in the Bible is any human given the authority to forgive sins - *not the priest in the confessional booth - or the pastor in the altar - not even the pope.* Forgiveness comes only from heaven.

But in the process of witnessing to someone, Jesus gives *us, His followers,* the responsibility of setting out the terms of salvation, and providing some closure.

Based on the person's response, it's our job to let them know where they stand afterwards. I can provide assurance, or I can prevent a false sense of security.

I've prayed with people, and sensed their sincerity. After leading them to the Lord, I've prayed, **"God, I thank you that my friend is now forgiven. His sins have been washed away. He now has a home in heaven."**

With those words comes a sigh of relief in the person who's prayed. He's assured the terms have been met.

But there have also been times when I've looked a hypocrite in the face and told him God wouldn't forgive Him unless He repented and was willing to change.

I had the power to confirm the person's forgiveness, or keep them contemplating their still guilty heart.

And as a parent, particularly as a mom, I believe this is the most important task we perform for our children.

When your boy or girl is a little tike, and he or she knows they've done wrong, and they're truly sorry for their sin - mom, don't miss the opportunity to kneel by your child, and with them ask for God's forgiveness.

And once they've prayed sincerely, don't leave them hanging... sweep your little guy up in your arms and celebrate a new start. Rejoice that all is forgiven and forgotten. Assure your child that he or she has been cleansed by God. Let your little one know that they're still loved and valued - by both God, and their mother.

Let me ask you, how can a child believe God has forgiven their sins, if his or her own mom can't or won't communicate her acceptance when the time comes?

Earlier I read Isaiah 49:15, "Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you." But I told you, we'd also read verse 16. It adds, "See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands."

Just as a busy mother might write a To-do list on the back of her hand, or in her palm, as a reminder - God writes our name in His palm to commemorate His love.

And notice in our text, John 20:20, we're told, "Jesus showed them His hands..." He displayed the scars in His hands - *those scars were the proof of His love!*

But I wonder if that was all that they saw. Isaiah says God has inscribes "you on the palms of His hands." To assure His

men they had been forgiven, could it be that the disciples saw their names next to Jesus' scars?

I'm certain of this, the disciples left the upper room that day confident all their sins had been blotted out.

In that upper room Jesus assured His disciples that they'd been forgiven - and then He gave them the responsibility for doing the same for the thousands upon thousands of sinners who would also believe...

A mom tucks her kids into bed at night. She helps them with their homework. She prepares meals. Mom shuttles them to practice. Later, in life she'll help them in a thousand other ways, but a mother's most vital role in her children's lives is to faithfully represent God.

Mom, **"If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."**

A mother's love is unconditional, but she also has the responsibility to let her child know when they are and aren't right with God - if they're forgiven or not.

More than anyone else in our lives our mom has the right to *announce God's forgiveness or warn us of our guilt*. She's the lady who brought us into this world. She knows us better than anyone else. Our mom can speak into our lives in a way that no one else can.

Whenever a person repents you can bet his or her mom will be the first to celebrate their forgiveness, but if they remain in a state of rebellion and don't learn the lesson, a good mom won't let that child off the hook.

A godly mom is willing to exercise some *tough love*.

If you see no repentance, and your child isn't willing to change, then their guilt needs to be *“retained.”*

Mothers shouldn't be push-overs. No one needs a mamby-pamby mom. It's not love to let your kids get away with bloody-murder; then defend them when they're obviously guilty. That's doing them an injustice.

Real love forgives, but it also makes the child pay for the window they broke... *Real love forgives*, but after the child goes next door and apologizes... *Real love forgives*, but it refuses to support a destructive lifestyle.

Real love - *though difficult to do* - **retains a person's sins on earth until those sins are forgiven in heaven.**

It was over 45 years ago, but I still remember the day when I was ten year-old. The neighbor girl, Becky, came to our back door, and told my mom, *“Sandy hit me with his fist.”* *If I recall correctly she deserved it...*

But my mom had a rule, **“Boys don't hit girls.”**

I'll never forget mom making me stand there, with my arms behind my back, while Becky reared back and slapped me across the jaw as hard as she could.

It still stings to this day. *But I've never hit a girl since!*

A mother's love never gives up on her kids... I can disappoint my mom, and bring shame to my mom, and break my mother's heart - but I am certain I will never be able to stop my mother from loving me. And I would imagine you feel the same way about your mom.

Yet, I'm just as certain my mom's love will always tell me the truth. Though she loves me no matter what, I know she'll never agree with me, or approve of me, if I choose to live in blatant sin or embrace a falsehood.

At times it's hard to be a mom. Most moms would rather *comfort their child* than *confront their child*. But a Christian mom stands not only *for love*, but *for truth*.

It reminds me of the courage of Mary Thomas. She was the single mom of nine children living on the rough and tumble West Side of Chicago. One day she opened her front door to find 25 street thugs standing on her porch. They were gang members from the Vice Lord's - they'd come to recruit her boys into their gang.

Mary Thomas told them, "Okay, hold on just a second, I'll be right back..." Then she closed the door.

When it re-opened, Mary was standing in the doorway with a double-barreled shotgun in her arms. Mary told them, "There's only one gang around here, and that's the Thomas gang." Mary eventually walked each of her nine kids to their High School graduation.

In fact, you've heard of her youngest son. Isaiah Thomas enjoyed a Hall of Fame career in the NBA.

This is the courage every mother needs to do her job. A mom is called to represent God in an evil world.

This is why she desperately needs the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus breathes on a mom, and says, "*Receive the Holy Spirit*" He gives to her *the strength of God, the love of God, the courage of God, the compassion of God, the*

wisdom of God, and everything else that mother will need to represent Jesus to her children!

A good mom *mothers* her kids, she doesn't *smother* her kids... and that takes courage, and wisdom, and sensitivity. That's why a mom needs the Holy Spirit.

Mom, this morning I want you to open your heart, and I challenge you to be receptive to the Holy Spirit.

I want to pray that our Lord Jesus will breathe on you, and impart to you a fresh empowerment of His Spirit. *You're needy... He's willing... So let's pray...*