

# Thank God for Mothers!

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

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The highest calling and the greatest privilege on earth is that of motherhood. There is truth in the adage, "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world." A mother's influence for good, through training, discipline and prayer cannot be measured.

A mother's prayers were behind the successes of Moses, Samuel, Daniel, Timothy and other Bible heroes. Without question the prayers of Mary ascended in behalf of her miracle Child, Jesus. I know that my mother's prayers arose often for me. I agree with the statement attributed to President Abraham Lincoln, "All I am I owe to the prayers of my mother."

In many ancient cultures, honor was given to mothers on specific days. More recently in England, there was a holiday called "Mothering Sunday." In America, according to the website "mothers-day," the giving of honor to mothers was begun about 150 years ago when Anna Jarvis, a homemaker who lived in Appalachia, organized a day of awareness for those experiencing poor health conditions, a day which she believed would be best advocated by mothers. It was called, "Mother's Work Day."

Later, Julia Ward Howe, best known as author of the lyrics of "Battle Hymn of the Republic," organized a day encouraging mothers to rally for peace. In 1905, when Anna Jarvis died, her daughter, who was also named Anna, began a more formalized campaign for a Mother's Day. She began to persuade prominent businessmen and politicians, such as presidents Taft and Theodore Roosevelt, to support her efforts to set aside a special day to honor mothers. In her church in West Virginia in 1908, at one of the first services to honor her mother, Anna handed out her mother's favorite flower, the white carnation.

Five years later, the House of Representatives adopted a resolution calling for employees of the federal government to wear white carnations on Mother's Day. In 1914 all of Anna's hard work paid off when President Woodrow Wilson signed a bill establishing Mother's Day. It is reported that now on Mother's Day, the telephone lines receive more traffic, and more people dine out than on any other day. Today we wish God's blessings on all mothers, recognizing that their job requires the wisdom of Solomon, the courage of Moses and the faithfulness of Daniel, but has the capacity for rich reward as they seek to bend young minds in heaven's direction.

The Lord created motherhood by giving to mankind the capacity of procreativity. In this the human family shared, to a lesser degree, an attribute of divinity. I remind you that the Bible states, "So God created man (mankind) in His own image, in the image of God He created Him;

male and female He created them.” Genesis 1:26. In other words, an important component of the creation of mankind in God’s image was the inclusion of the female of the human species. As a couple, male and female, Adam and the woman, better reflected the likeness of God than if they had been created one without the other. The proverb, “The whole is greater than the sum of its parts” could be applied to the mystery of the creation of husband and wife as they together reflected the divine likeness. And the privilege of procreation was obviously in God’s mind because the next verse reads, “Then God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it.’” Genesis 1:27.

Just after sin entered the picture and our first parents heard the solemn pronouncements of judgment as a result of their transgression, Adam, rather than bemoaning the tragedy, did something. What was the name of Adam’s wife, up to this point? She had been called, “woman.” “Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of man.’” Genesis 2:22, 23.

Adam, after naming all the animals and having been anesthetized for the removal of a rib for the creation of his wife, gave her a name at that time. Adam named her “woman.” But when sin entered, through the deception of the serpent, through the woman offering the fruit to Adam, God declared to them their sad fate, “in the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return.” Genesis 3:19. In the face of learning that the grave was their destination, it is interesting to note that Adam did something. The next verse of the narrative reads, “And Adam called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all living.” Genesis 3:20. He had already given her the name “woman;” he now gave her the name “Eve,” the mother of all the living.

With the prospect of death looming large, and noting that transgression had taken place through the agency of the woman, Adam might have named her, “mother of sin,” the “mother of the dead,” or the “mother of the lost.” Instead, clinging to the promise of hope embedded in the Lord’s conversation, he chose to name her “Eve,” which is translated the “mother of all living.”

Eve is the mother of us all. In a literal, physiological way, each of us trace our roots back to her. We bear her likeness genetically, for she, as given and sustained by God, is the source of the life that we enjoy today. In one feature or another, to one degree or another, we all share her characteristics. One day, by God’s grace, we’ll have a chance to meet Eve. You can have fun in attempting to discover how many links there are between you and her; how many “greats” there have to be before “grandmother” to describe your relationship to her. There will be no accusations, no recriminations in heaven when you meet her; only boundless gratitude for God’s great mercy and love.

It was not only in the feature of procreativity that mothers share in the divine character. Mother’s love is used in the Bible as an illustration of God’s love. I hope that you have or had a mother who accurately portrayed godly love toward you. I know that I did. I am humbled when I think back of

the sacrifice, the devotion, the faithfulness and aspirations that my mother exhibited toward me. Not always, I'm sorry to say, were they appreciated. Many were given with no trumpets sounding. I can think back on the homemade whole wheat bread that was made into the sandwiches in my lunch, the humble but adequate home in which I was brought up, in square footage smaller than my garage. I can recall the sturdy dresses she made for herself, foregoing most store bought clothing, in order to save money for her children to go to church school.

My mother was not "perfect," but she did her best to reflect godliness and affection. She's laid to rest now, and I confidently look forward to the great resurrection when by God's grace she will stand in her lot. Not all mothers live up to the ideal. Some are downright poor examples of God's love. We read, "Zion said, 'The LORD has forsaken me, and my Lord has forgotten me.' 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. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands. Your walls are continually before me." Isaiah 49:14-16.

Mother's love and providing is reflected in one of the names for God in the Old Testament, translated in most Bibles as "Almighty." It is fascinating to note that there is also a term "Almighty" that appears in the New Testament, which is a translation of the Greek *pantokrator*, composed of the root *pan* ("all," as in *pan*-American, *pan*orama or *pan*theism) and *krator* ("one having power," as in *democrat*, *plutocrat*, *aristocrat*). The term *pantokrator* is translated 9 times in the KJV as "Almighty" and once as "omnipotent." Power and majesty are conveyed by this term.

You might think that the same word (in English, at least) "Almighty" in the Old Testament would convey the same meaning of "power and majesty." Not really. Not in the same way, precisely. The term in Hebrew is *El Shaddai* (maybe you've heard that name in a popular Christian song) is composed of the word *El*, which means "power," but it is combined with *shaddai*, which if you do some research you will find, perhaps surprisingly, comes from the root *shad*, meaning "breast." That might shock some people to realize that, but it's there in Scripture.

The meaning becomes clearer when we read passages such as, "When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abraham and said to him, 'I am *Almighty* God; walk before Me and be blameless. And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you exceedingly *fruitful* and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you.'" Genesis 17:1

What do we know of Abram at 99? We know that he and Sarah had waited 24 years to have a child, as promised by God, but were unsuccessful. Now he is one year short of a being a century old; Sarah is but 10 years his junior and has now come to the point of life when child bearing is a thing of the past. It is then that the LORD appears to Abram as God Almighty, *El Shaddai*, the One Who gives and sustains life, and encourages Abram by changing his name to Abraham ("father of a multitude") reflecting the large family that will eventually look to him as their forefather.

This is the first time that the term *El Shaddai* appears in Scripture, and it is usually true that the first time a term is used it guides later interpretation in the Bible. Other passages reflect this meaning, such as Genesis 28:3, Isaac's pronouncement of blessing on the departing Jacob. "May God Almighty (*El Shaddai*) bless you, and make you fruitful and multiply you that you may be an assembly of peoples." See also Genesis 35:11 and Genesis 49:25.

In ancient times most cultures had deities which represented the gift of life and displayed that aspect by constructing their female deities with a multiplicity of breasts, attempting to convey their recognition of that goddess as being the source of life and sustenance. Go to the internet and look up a picture of "Diana of the Ephesians," and in ten seconds you will see this aspect displayed prominently. Most pagan systems of worship had their female fertility deities, whether it was Diana of the Ephesians, Ashtaroah (or Asherah) of the Canaanites, Aphrodite of the Greeks, Venus of the Romans or Freya (also spelled Freyja; given honor by the word "Friday") of the north peoples.

This was idolatrous robbery. These goddesses were a blatant attempt to deny the sustaining and nurturing, the life-giving character of our loving God. These female deities were an attempt on the part of the devil to turn people's vision away from the only One Who gives and sustains life, Jesus Christ.

We see a picture of mother's love in the statement made by Jesus, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!" Matthew 23:37. Down the street from our church on Fruitvale Road, we've observed the growth of a large and flightless bird family, possibly emus or rheas. There were four adults, and we enjoyed seeing them as we drove by. Then little chicks were hatched. Sometimes we'd see them out and about, other times we concluded that they were resting under their mom's wings as she sat in the pen. A beautiful picture of God's tender and protective love!

God enjoins the protection and honor of motherhood. Written into the heart of the Ten Commandments, God's rules for Christian living, first among those which govern our relations with mankind, is a precept dedicated to the appreciation of parenthood. "Honor your father and your mother," God wrote with His own finger in stone, "that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you." Exodus 20:12. Today on this Sabbath, we especially give attention to the fourth (the Sabbath) and fifth commandments.

In giving honor to our mothers, we follow in the footsteps of our Lord, Who came to teach us how to live. In all things which did not conflict with His duty to His Father, he lived in compliance to His parents. We read, following His boyhood trip to the temple, "Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them." Luke 2:51. That word, *hypotasso*, in Greek, ("arrange or order under:" notice that many of our English words use the prefix *sub* which means "under") means to be in "obedience to, to be subordinate to." It is used of subjects being subordinate to rulers, devils being subject to the power of God, of the creation being subject to Adam in the

beginning. Using this same word, James counsels us to “submit yourselves to God.” James 4:7. Peter writes, “submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to king as supreme, or to governors.” I Peter 2:13. He continues, “Younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility.” I Peter 5:5.

Jesus, as our Example, was submissive to His earthly parents. “Though He was a Son (of God), He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.” Hebrews 5:8. It is amazing that He, Who gave life to all, including Mary, by the ordinance of God received life from her. He Who rules the universe was subject to His earthly mother. Jesus honored His mother as He began His ministry, His first miracle coming by her request as He changed the water into wine in Cana of Galilee. Jesus honored His mother at the close of His ministry, bequeathing her care into the hands of His disciple John. Did He know then that John would be the last surviving disciple?

It is fitting and appropriate; it is a part of the Christian walk, that we honor and appreciate our mothers. This story is told: “A little boy came up to his mother in the kitchen one evening while she was fixing supper, and handed her a piece of paper that he had been writing on. After his mom dried her hands on an apron, she read it, and this is what it said:

For cutting the grass: **\$5.00**  
For cleaning up my room this week: **\$1.00**  
For going to the store for you: **\$.50**  
Baby-sitting my kid brother while you went shopping: **\$.25**  
Taking out the garbage: **\$1.00**  
For getting a good report card: **\$5.00**  
For cleaning up and raking the yard: **\$2.00**  
Total owed: **\$14.75**

Well, his mother looked at him standing there, and the boy could see the memories flashing through her mind. She picked up the pen, turned over the paper he'd written on, and this is what she wrote:

For the nine months I carried you while you were growing inside me:  
No Charge

For all the nights that I've sat up with you, doctored and prayed for you:  
No Charge

For all the trying times, and all the tears that you've caused through the years:  
No Charge

For all the nights that were filled with dread, and for the worries I knew were ahead:  
No Charge

For the toys, food, clothes, and even wiping your nose:

No Charge

Son, when you add it up, the cost of my love is:

No Charge.

When the boy finished reading what his mother had written, there were big tears in his eyes, and he looked straight at his mother and said, 'Mom, I sure do love you. And then he took the pen and in great big letters he wrote: **'PAID IN FULL.'**'"

We honor and express appreciation for our mothers, and are reminded that they are but a reflection of the divine love which brought life and redemption to us. Gifts we could never pay for; love we can never measure. We thank God for our mothers and remember also that "Jerusalem above, which is free, is the mother of us all." Galatians 4:26.