



Text: 1 Timothy 5:1-16¹
Series: Living the Gospel
Title: Living the Gospel in Our Families
Date: May 9, 2010
Place: First Baptist Church, Olds, AB

Today, of course, is Mothers Day. We've honoured our new moms with roses and there are carnations waiting at the exit doors for all the moms here this morning. Moms, please make sure you collect your flower as you leave.

I was reading a discussion this week in a Christian periodical about whether or not the church should celebrate Mothers Day. Some writers noted that "honour your father and mother" is a Biblical command and this day, together with Fathers Day, give us an opportunity to reflect on that truth. Some writers pointed out the dangers of sentimentality and commercialism that need to be avoided if the church is to honour mothers in a truly Biblical manner. Several pointed out that, as with Fathers Day, many people come to worship with a mixed experience that often brings them pain as they recall mistreatment from their mothers or as they reflect on their own disappointing practice as mothers. In other words, Mothers Day means many things to people. And many of you here this morning will represent many of those possible approaches to Mothers Day.

I think there is no better way to acknowledge those "many things" than to bring them to God's Word and to allow the Word of God and the Holy Spirit to speak into our own personal experience. Over the years I've found that God's Spirit has a wonderful way of speaking very personally in the middle of a group setting. He can speak to your thankfulness at the same moment He's speaking to another person's pain; he can minister encouragement to you at the same moment he's speaking healing to another.

I believe that our text this Mothers Day allows the Holy Spirit a great range of ministry among us. It takes motherhood and places it in the context of the family as a whole and out of that broader context the Holy Spirit can work to touch our lives in many ways. As I read our text this morning I want you to take note of the incredible variety of "family" words it contains. Listen for them as I read. If you're in the habit of making notes in your Bible, you might underline them as you encounter them in our reading.

I invite you to listen with attentive minds and open hearts to God's Word for us today. I'm reading from Paul's First Letter to Timothy, chapter 5, verses 1 to 16. This is the Word of God ...

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1 Timothy 5:1 Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers,² older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity.

1 Timothy 5:3 Honor widows who are truly widows.⁴ But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God.⁵ She who is truly a widow, left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day,⁶ but she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives.⁷ Command these things as well, so that they may be without reproach.⁸ But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

1 Timothy 5:9 Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband,¹⁰ and having a reputation for good works: if she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work.

1 Timothy 5:11 But refuse to enroll younger widows, for when their passions draw them away from Christ, they desire to marry¹² and so incur condemnation for having abandoned their former faith.¹³ Besides that, they learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not.¹⁴ So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, manage their households, and give the adversary no occasion for slander.¹⁵ For some have already strayed after Satan.¹⁶ If any believing woman has relatives who are widows, let her care for them. Let the church not be burdened, so that it may care for those who are truly widows.

Did you catch the “family content” of the passage: “father,” “brothers,” “mothers,” “sisters,” “widows” (8 times), “children” (3 times), “grandchildren,” “household” (3 times), “parents,” “relatives,” “wife,” “husband,” and “marry” (2 times)? The passage is loaded with “family” words.

Remember that Paul’s purpose in writing this letter to Timothy is to tell people who believe in Jesus...

“how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.” 1 Timothy 3:15

In this portion of his letter to Timothy, Paul is telling us quite simply that...



If we are believers in Jesus Christ, our families are to reflect God's Family priorities

The passage covers a broad range of topics but there are three words that I want us to key on this morning that will help us to navigate through Paul's instruction to us. These three words help us to identify God's priorities for His Family which must also become the priorities for our families. **The first word** I want us to think about this morning is the word...

"Encourage" 1 Timothy 5:1

Paul's word to Timothy establishes the truth that...

God's Family is to be a community that exemplifies appropriate communication for our families

Paul's instructed Timothy...

1 Timothy 5:1 Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, ² older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity.

Communication in the church was to be marked primarily by encouragement. Even though there were serious problems of doctrine and behaviour in the church, Timothy was not to "rebuke" people, but rather "encourage" them.

Notice a couple of things with me. **First** of all, the word translated as "rebuke" is one that appears only once in the Bible. It is related to a word that appears back in chapter 3, verse 3, among the list of qualities for elders where it says that an elder is to be someone who is...

"not violent" 1 Timothy 3:3

The KJV translates the word as "**not a striker**" and that it very close to the essential meaning of the word. When Paul instructs Timothy not to "rebuke an older man" he doesn't mean that Timothy should never correct an older man or properly rebuke him. He means that Timothy shouldn't use "violent" words to do so. He wasn't to "strike" the man with words. The NASB translates the phrase as, "**Do not sharply rebuke...**" and the NRSV translates it as "**Do not speak harshly....**" In other words, Paul is saying: "Don't use words as if they were daggers. Don't chew someone's head off. Don't beat them with words."

There are times when rebuke is absolutely necessary and right. In the very next section of teaching, Paul counsels Timothy...



“Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear.” 1 Timothy 5:19-20

And in his Second Letter to Timothy, Paul encourages him to...

“preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.” 2 Timothy 4:2

In both of these situations, the word “rebuke” is different from the one used in our text. To properly rebuke someone is to identify their deviation from God’s will in either their personal conduct or their doctrine and to call them to repentance and correction. Although a rebuke situation is emotionally charged, a rebuke should always be done with patience and teaching and never with violent, abusive words.

That same is true in our families. Parents are called on to rebuke and correct their children, but never with words that strike and bruise. Husbands and wives are called to rebuke and correct each other, but again, never with words that cut like knives or smash like hammers.

That brings me to **the second thing** I want you to notice. Paul begins with a concern that Timothy communicate appropriately with elderly men, but his view quickly expands to include the entire church family. In his communication within the church community, Timothy is to remember an essential truth of the Christian faith: the church is “God’s household.” We are members together of God’s family. We aren’t adversaries: we’re family. We aren’t business associates: we’re family. We aren’t members of a club: we’re family.

How we talk with one another is to be marked by a family dynamic, not by the hostility of enemies, nor the formality of business, nor the selectiveness of a club. The primary style of communication that Paul identifies with a family dynamic is the mode of encouragement.

The Bible word “encourage” comes in two essential colours. The first colour is **the colour of “exhortation.”** To exhort someone is to say: “Here is God’s objective for us; let’s get there! Here is what God’s Word says; let’s believe it! Here is how God wants us to live; let’s live it!” It’s more than cheerleading; it’s urging someone forward to believe and do what God wants them to believe and do.

Let me give you an example.

Dr. Larry Crabb recalls an incident in the church he attended as a young man. It was customary in this church that young men were encouraged to participate in the communion services by praying out loud. Feeling the pressure of expectation,



the young Crabb (who had a problem with stuttering) stood to pray. In a terribly confused prayer, he recalls "thanking the Father for hanging on the cross and praising Christ for triumphantly bringing the Spirit from the grave."

When he was finished, he vowed he would never again speak or pray out loud in front of a group.

At the end of the service, not wanting to meet any of the church elders who might feel constrained to correct his theology, Crabb made for the door. Before he could get out, an older man named Jim Dunbar caught him.

Having prepared himself for the anticipated correction, Crabb instead found himself listening to these words: "Larry, there's one thing I want you to know. Whatever you do for the Lord, I'm behind you one thousand percent."

Crabb reflects in his book: "Even as I write these words, my eyes fill with tears. I have yet to tell that story to an audience without at least mildly choking. Those words were life words. They had power. They reached deep into my being."²

That is the encouragement of exhortation. Let's speak "life words" like that in our church and in our families.

The second colour of the word "encourage" is **the colour of comfort**. To comfort someone in this way is to say: "I know you're discouraged; here is some truth from God's Word to strengthen your heart. You've been going through a hard time; here is how God helped me through a difficult time in my life. Let me bless you with God's grace." Biblical comfort is more than commiserating with someone; it's directing someone to find comfort for their heart in God's grace.

Let me give you an example. John Townsend wrote...

I went through college in the [the southern United States] in the early seventies. Like some of my friends, I'd grown a pretty lengthy head of hair, for various reasons: peer relationships, rebelliousness, experimenting with adult decision-making, and so forth.

Back then, the South wasn't particularly fond of long-haired kids. Though I'm sure I asked for it, I was hurt by the reactions of some people.

One weekend home from college I paid a visit to my grandmother, who lived in a tiny rural town. Granny was petite, not much over five feet tall and in her seventies. She wasn't well-educated by today's standards. She'd farmed all her

² © 2010 PreachingToday.com Larry Crabb, Encouragement: The Key to Caring (Zondervan, 1984); submitted by Alan Wilson, Nyon, Switzerland



life. She'd raised six children. Granny was culturally the opposite of the open-minded, issue-sensitive adult.

After a few minutes in her home, Granny motioned to me. "Come outside, come outside," she commanded. Perplexed, I followed her into the front yard, where she had me stand still. Then, looking up at me, she smiled and said, "I just wanted to see your hair in the sunlight. The color comes out so pretty in the sunlight."

I can remember crying all the way back on my drive to the campus. A part of me that had brought me a lot of pain had been cherished by someone. Something that had been broken in me began healing.³

That's what comforting words do; by God's grace they heal us deep inside. The words exchanged in the family of God and in the families of godly people are to be marked by **the two colours of encouragement**, exhortation and comfort.

The second word I want us to think about this morning is the word...

"Honor" 1 Timothy 5:3

Paul wrote...

"Honor widows who are truly widows." 1 Timothy 5:3

Paul's word to Timothy establishes the truth that...

God's Family is to be a community that teaches true values for our families

As we noted at the beginning of the message, God commands us to...

"Honor your father and your mother" Exodus 20:12

And above all, of course, we are to honor God. Paul closes this letter to Timothy by directing honor to God...

"To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen." 1 Timothy 6:16

But we are also to honour our parents (Ephesians 6:2), we are to honour those in civic leadership (1 Peter 2:17), husbands are to honour their wives (1 Peter 3:7). In fact, Paul expanded the circle of honour to include the entire family of God when he wrote...

³ John Townsend, *Hiding From Love*, (NavPress, 1991), p. 98-99



“Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.” Romans 12:10

What does it mean to “honour” someone? The word translated as “honor” has the root idea of “to fix the value” of something or someone. It means to deem someone worthy of esteem. Honour involves giving someone the respect they deserve because of their God-given role in our lives. Honour involves speaking appropriately about and to someone in view of their God-given identity. Honour includes appreciating the contribution someone makes to the community in which we live.

But beyond granting honour to someone because we value their contribution, Paul’s challenge to “out do one another in showing honor” is based on God’s grace that has been poured out upon us as God’s children. For believers, honour is an expression of the privilege we’ve been given in becoming members of God’s family. As believers, we are surrounded by blood-bought members of God’s eternal family. They are our brothers and sisters in Christ, chosen before the foundation of the world, heirs of a heavenly inheritance, in whom dwells the Spirit of the living God! **What’s not to honour?!** Our relative degree of giftedness is irrelevant; our contribution to the kingdom is immaterial; we are surrounded by children of the King of kings! **What’s not to honour?!**

That is the foundation for Paul’s challenge to Timothy to show honour to those widows in his church who are “**truly widows**” (v.3). He calls this particular group of widows “true” widows because they are completely destitute. They are “left all alone;” (v.5) they have no family on whom they can depend for support. They are believers in Jesus Christ who have placed their “hope on God” and who have demonstrated their faith by a life of active prayer support for the work of Christ (v.5), but they are alone! No they are not! They are members of the family of God and they are not alone! Paul’s challenge to Timothy is to demonstrate to these dear saints in some practical way that they are not alone!

The Bible is full of God’s heart for those are without human support. The Old Testament Law declares...

“For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing.” Deuteronomy 10:17-18

When Paul tells Timothy to “honor” the true widows, he means more than say nice things about them. He means that the church should provide them with “food and clothing,” because that is what God would do for them. He means that the church should care for them the way that family cares for its own.

The Psalms proclaim God as...



“Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation. God settles the solitary in a home....” Psalm 68:5-6

God provides food and clothing for widows, but he also enfolds them into his family. He puts these dear, solitary believers into the family of his church so that they are no longer alone!

Care for widows was built into the DNA of the church. Do you know that the very first organized ministry of the church was the care of the widows in the church in Jerusalem (Acts 6:1-6)? Before Sunday schools, before elders boards, before pastors were appointed, the church was organized by the apostles to make sure that the widows had adequate food. Pastor Norm oversees a two-thousand year-old ministry to many of our seniors, many of whom are widows. It goes by the glorious name of “the Soup Run.” It’s a ministry that actually began in the church in Jerusalem two-thousand years ago and I know that God is pleased with that ministry. How do I know that? Because those dear people who it serves are close to His heart! Their names might be unknown to you and me, but to God they are honoured members of his forever family.

James, the brother of Jesus, placed the care of widows at the heart of what it meant to be a follower of Christ when he wrote...

“Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.” James 1:27

That is why Paul told Timothy that while the church should look after widows who are “left all alone,” widows who have “children or grandchildren” should be cared for by their own families (v.4). Its part of the essence of what it means to follow Jesus. That is why Paul said that failure to care for the needy in our extended families was the same as denying our faith (v.8). Its part of the essence of what it means to know God. Caring for our own mothers and grandmothers, fathers and grandfathers, sisters and brothers, is “pleasing in the sight of God” (v.4) ... and believe me, God is watching! God honours these dear people and he is watching to make sure that we, his family on earth, do to!

Mothers Day is a kind of reminder note from God that invites us to ask ourselves: Am I honouring the members of my family as God would honour them and as God wants me to honour them? Are there needs in their lives that I should be helping to meet? Is there honour that needs to be given?

The third word I invite you think about this morning is the word...

“Enroll” 1 Timothy 5:9



Paul wrote...

“Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband, and having a reputation for good works...” 1 Timothy 5:9-10

There is a debate among Bible students as to what Paul means by the word “enroll.” The word literally means, “to write down” or “to add to a list.” What “list” is Paul talking about?

When I first read this passage, I understood Paul to simply be referring to the “true widows” of verses 3 to 8 being “enrolled” on a list of those who were to receive care from the church. But as I thought about the criteria that Paul lists for being “enrolled,” I came across two items on the list that created problems with that view.

First of all, he says that to be enrolled, these widows are to be at least “sixty years of age....” Does that mean that a destitute, fifty year old widow would have to wait ten years to receive help from the church? That just doesn’t seem right. Those who are truly destitute need help now, not years from now.

Secondly, among the “good works” that would qualify widows to be enrolled, one of the good works Paul lists is bringing up children (v.10). But Paul has just said that if a widow has children or grandchildren, they are supposed to look after her, not the church. The church is only required to care for those who are “left all alone.”

So, if this list isn’t a list of those who receive care from the church, what is it? There isn’t a lot of New Testament evidence to answer this question but there is something interesting in the Book of Acts that might point us in the direction of an answer. Luke tells the story of a woman by the name of Dorcas who was known for her good works. When she became ill and died, the church in Joppa, her home town, called the Apostle Peter to come. When he arrived, Luke tells us...

“All the widows stood beside him weeping and showing tunics and other garments that Dorcas made while she was with them.” Acts 9:39

Notice the phrase, “while she was with them.” Peter sent everyone out of the room, he knelt and prayed for Dorcas and then raised her back to life.

“Then calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive.” Acts 9:41

Notice the distinction: “the saints and widows...” These slight verbal clues suggest that it is possible that in the church in Joppa there was a ministry group of widows, of which Dorcas had been a part. What Paul might be referring to in his letter to Timothy are the criteria for becoming a part of such a “widows



ministry group.” What we do know is that in the period just after the New Testament was written, such groups of widows did exist as ministry teams in churches and so what we have here in First Timothy could be a very early form of that ministry. English Bible scholar, John Stott, notes that by the end of the second century AD, **“the registered widows gave themselves to prayer, nursed the sick, cared for the orphans, visited Christians in prison, evangelized pagan women, and taught female converts in preparation for their baptism.”**⁴

If Paul is referring to these “registered widows,” then his word to Timothy establishes the truth that...

God’s Family is to be a community that models care-giving for our families

Paul was encouraging Timothy to recruit experienced care-givers to provide ministry within the family of God. These widows had a proven track record of care:

- They were of an age when their children were grown and they could devote themselves to the needs of others outside of their family circle.
- They had been faithful wives. (v.9) I’ve talked about this before in our study of Timothy and I won’t repeat the argument I made earlier. The focus of Paul’s words is on marital faithfulness, not on having been married only once.
- They had a reputation for good works:
 - They had brought up children (v.10). Two thousand years later, experienced help in raising children is still a crying need of the church of Jesus Christ. We are constantly on the lookout for people who will give care to children in the ministries of the church and young mothers are always looking for help in the raising of their children at home.

⁴ John Stott judiciously states: “Writing to Timothy, Paul’s references to a register, and to conditions for registration, certainly suggest the beginnings of a defined group, but it is an exaggeration to say that ‘at Ephesus there is now an officially recognised order of widows’. At the beginning of the second century Ignatius sent a greeting ‘to the virgins who are called widows’ in Smyrna, and Polycarp wrote to the Philippians that ‘the widows must think soberly about the faith of the Lord and pray unceasingly for everyone’ and stay away from all evil. It is not until the end of the second century, however, that Tertullian gives us unequivocal evidence that an order of widows existed. In his time and in the third century the registered widows gave themselves to prayer, nursed the sick, cared for the orphans, visited Christians in prison, evangelized pagan women, and taught female converts in preparation for their baptism.” John R. W. Stott, *Guard the Truth : The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, Includes Study Guide: P. [215]-232., The Bible speaks today (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 132.



- They were hospitable (v.10). They had opened their homes to travelling believers and those in need of a bed and a meal.
- They had “washed the feet of the saints” (v.10). They had washed the dusty feet of those who gathered for the Sunday fellowship meals, a work that demonstrated a servant’s heart.
- They had cared for the afflicted. John MacArthur points out that the word “afflicted” refers to people under pressure, whether it was physical, mental or emotional pressure while the word “care” could include financial assistance.⁵ These widows were committed people helpers who had helped others from their own resources.
- And they were “devoted ... to every good work.” (v.10) The word “devoted” is a strong word that implies that they had given themselves “energetically and diligently” to the pursuit of good works.⁶

These senior women were experienced and motivated care-givers with a resume to prove it. Paul might have had this group of women in mind when he wrote to Titus about “older women” who were to...

“to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.” Titus 2:3-5

Paul recommended to Timothy that the “younger widows” (v.11) in his church were not to be enrolled but were to follow the example of their seniors and develop a similar resume. They were to “marry, bear children, manage their households and give the adversary no occasion for slander.” (v.14) Paul’s antidote for the contagious disease of idleness and gossip was to recommend a life of devoted care-giving (v.16). They were to make it their aim, one day, to be as qualified as their senior sisters in the godly virtue of giving care. In fact, by “enrolling” these senior women, the church was establishing a recognized mentoring ministry for the younger women of the community. These senior women were mentors and life coaches for the younger women of the congregation.

At sixty years of age, these widows were entering into a whole new ministry venture. What a waste it would have been to say to them: “You’ve done your bit; you can sit on the sidelines now!” All that experience, all that wisdom, all that care-training wasted! I’m so glad that we don’t waste it here! This morning, I want to honor all those women who are sixty year of age and older (Don’t worry, I won’t name names!) who give themselves to care ministry through JOY Fellowship, the Romanian knitters, the Sunday school ministry, the Common

⁵ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Timothy*, (Moody, 1995), p. 209

⁶ Ibid.



Ground ministry, the Soup Run, through visitation at the hospital, the lodge and in homes and in many other ministries of the church. You're probably "enrolled" on one of Pastor Norm's many lists and this morning I honor you!

Let me end with a story told by a Scottish preacher by the name of Ian MacClaren. He had a conversation with a woman in his church one day who began to wipe her eyes as they spoke. MacClaren asked her what was disturbing her.

"Oh," she said, "Sometimes I feel I have done so little and when I think about it it makes my heart heavy, because really I've done so little for Jesus."

"When I was a little girl the Lord spoke to my heart and I surrendered to him. And I wanted to live for him, so much. But I feel I haven't done anything."

"What have you done with your life?" he asked.

"Oh nothing," she said, "just nothing. I've washed dishes, cooked three meals a day, taken care of my children, mopped the floor, mended the clothes, you know, everything a mother does, that's all I've done."

MacClaren sat back in his chair and asked, "Where are your four boys, the ones you named for the Gospel writers?"

"You know where Mark is," she said. "You ordained him. He went to China. He's learned the language and now he is able to minister to the people in the name of the Lord."

"Where's Luke?" MacClaren asked.

"You know where he is, too, because you sent him out to Africa. I had a letter from him the other day telling me that a revival has broken out at his mission station."

"And Matthew?"

"He's with his brother in China. And John, who's nineteen, came to me last night to say that God has laid Africa on his heart."

MacClaren looked at the dear woman and said, "Your life has been a waste, you say?"

"Yes, it has been wasted."



“You have been cooking and mopping and washing,” MacClaren said, “but I would like to see the reward when you’re called home!”⁷

What a privilege it is to have a role in the family of God. May our words encourage, our hearts honour, our hands care and may our lives and our families reflect the priorities of God’s Family, for the glory of Jesus Christ.

Happy Mothers Day!

- **Invitation to Prayer Ministry**
- **Final Song:** The Family of God
- **Benediction**

⁷ Ibid, p. 209-210