

When my son David first started eating solids and finger food, we would place bits of food from our plate onto his for him to have a chew on. Anyway the first time I gave him broccoli he would pick it up – hold it in the air – and laugh. He seemed to think it was absolutely hysterical that we were feeding him trees for dinner. I tried to coax him to eat it – he wouldn't have a bar of it – it went straight onto the ground. So one night when we sat down for dinner I said to my family – we are going to all eat our broccoli and show David how good it is. So we did. We sat down and all at the same time ate our broccoli making appropriate 'yum yum' noises. David watched us for a bit – then he picked up his broccoli and put it in his mouth. He didn't eat it all – but he didn't spit it out either. He did look at us as though we were a bit mad – but ate it he did.

Why am I telling you this? Well, its Mother's day, and Roly has asked me to share with you some reflections on having a mother and being a mother. But I think it's important that I stress that although I had a wonderful mother and she's here today, that – just as it took more than myself to coax my son to eat his broccoli - it took more than just my Mother's input to bring me to where I am in my walk as a Christian today.

So, what is a mother?

The English language is really interesting. Take a word in its noun form – mother, for example, and it describes somebody who has given birth

A Mother (noun): A woman in relation to a child or children to whom she has given birth.

Q: Who here fits this description? Certainly I do and my mother before me and her mother before her; Trudy and Julie and many more people in this congregation. However – take that very same word and look at it as a verb – and we get quite a different picture.

B Mother (verb): (a) bring up (a child) with care and affection; (b) look after (someone) kindly and protectively.

Now who does this describe? In fact it could very well describe Robyn who cares for our young people – and as far as I'm aware they are not her children. It could describe Elizabeth who kindly and protectively cares for Jolene – I don't think they are biologically connected? And Diane Baldwin – godmother to my daughter Ngaire – she cherishes Ngaire in ways I'm still learning how to. So with this idea of Mothering in the verb sense rather than the noun sense – let's go on.

About a month ago Roly talked about spiritual renewal being a bit like a doctor's check-up. He talked about 5 aspects of a check-up and how we can as Christians can examine ourselves for signs of spiritual renewal. I'm going to be piggy backing a wee bit on this but in a way that reflects how these aspects of spiritual renewal have been demonstrated in my life, and how this has impacted on how I Mother (in the verb sense).

A Pulse rate – not too fast or too slow – in sync with Jesus

Ezekiel 36: 26 *'I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh'*.

I've always been aware of Jesus. I remember having conversations with him in the playground at school. But being aware of who Jesus is – giving all the right answers in Sunday school is quite different from deciding to be his follower and inviting Jesus into your heart. The person who first made this distinction for me – I only know her as Pip.

When I was 12 I was a bit too old for Sunday school, a bit too young to lead it, and church was a bit beyond me to sit in it. So she would take me out most Sundays – if it was nice we would go outside – and she would

lead me in a devotional time. I'm not sure how it came up but she used lots of different examples to illustrate what Jesus had done for me on the cross – my favourite involved setting a teabag on fire. But most importantly she showed me that doing good stuff and being nice wasn't going to get me a ticket to heaven. She showed me that there was sin in my heart and I needed to accept that Jesus died in my place so that my sin could be forgiven and I could become alright with God. She helped me understand that I still needed to give my heart to Jesus and invite him to be Lord of my life. She gave me a wee booklet and prayed for me. I still to this day remember going home one evening, reading that booklet and giving my life to Christ.

I will be honest – even without her input I think I would have eventually given my life over to Christ – but she took the time to be with me, to get to know me and lead me towards the cross. She wasn't a mother – she was probably only in her twenties and quite single. Yet her act of mothering me – of caring for me and loving me lead me to make my commitment to Jesus under her guidance.

And it wasn't just Pip – it was the cumulative input of everything I had had previously, at home, Sunday school, church that led me to the cross that day. And you know what? There are many young people in this very community who need input into their lives from other followers of Jesus. That's you guys. Sunday school, youth group, there is a vacancy for a Sunday school leader at the moment – just taking the opportunity to plug that - the occasional camp won't cut it. So whether or not you are a mother in the noun sense – you still have an opportunity to be a Mother in the Verb sense - to be a part of the spiritual growth of the young people in this church.

To the youth leaders and Sunday school teachers – never underestimate the impact you have on your young people.

B Blood Pressure

Roly talked about blood pressure and how the many pressures of life – namely stress can cause it to go up. Stress can be caused by many things and for every individual this is going to be different. I find being late stressful – it doesn't stop me being late but I feel stressed when it happens.

What is the opposite of stress? Peace and contentment. Here are a few things the Bible says about peace and contentment.

Philippians 4: 6-7

'Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.'

Philippians 4: 12b-13

'I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13 I can do all this through him who gives me strength.'

1 –Peter 5:7 ***'Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.'***

I have 3 sisters, two whom are younger. So growing up, one on one time with my parents was scarce. And if you wanted it, you had to be a bit sneaky sometimes. I have always been a morning person and so has my Mother. So occasionally I would get up early while the others were in bed, sneak into the kitchen and sit by the fire. The deal was I could sit there as long as I didn't talk if my mother was having her quiet time. And frequently I would come across her reading her Bible. So from a young age, without any words spoken, I knew that if my Mum was reading God's word almost every day – then it must be important. I have learnt through the years just how important it is. But since becoming a mother myself, God's word has taken on another dimension. You see the Bible has promises we can claim. Like those we have just read. I used to suffer a bit of separation anxiety when dropping my daughter off to day-care while I was studying.

I used to fret that she would run out on the road and be killed; I used to worry about her choking or falling and hitting her head. Then one day reading Philippians and then Peter, I came across the verses we have read. It changed my life. I started to claim that promise – and when I started to feel fear or anxiety for my child – I would claim that promise and claim that promise and claim that promise until the fear left and I got that peace of God which transcends all understanding.

And what causes lack of peace for me will be different to you. Perhaps your family is outgrowing your home but you can't afford to move, perhaps you're caring for an aging parent or relative and it seems to be taking over your life. Perhaps you have an illness yourself which is preventing you from doing the things you want to do – or has led to a loss of independence which frustrates you. Perhaps your kids have turned into someone you don't know anymore and you don't know if you will ever get them back. And there are never easy answers – but the Lord has given us a book full of promises which we can claim to get us through this season.

But to claim these promises you first have to read the Bible!

C Breathing:

Easy and relaxed – if not it usually indicates serious trouble:

John 20:21-23

Again Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.' And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.'

This passage shows Jesus passing on the Holy Spirit to his disciples – before Pentecost which is interesting. But how do we connect with the Holy Spirit? Again it's individual – worship – prayer are a couple of ways. My mother prayed over me as a child. My Dad probably did too. In those days cot deaths were quite prevalent – Mum knew of a woman who lived around the corner from us whom had lost a baby to cot death. So my Mum did the only thing a Christian woman could do and that was to give me over to the Lord in prayer. When I had nightmares my parents would pray for me. When I had growing pains in my legs at night my parents would pray for me. Our family would say a prayer at night - we all had to participate – I think God got a lot of thanks for rainbows and the sun– but we all joined in because prayer was important. When my sisters and I started the term off my parents would pray for us, when we moved house my parents would go through each room and pray. Whenever we left for a long road trip – we would pray for safety.

Anyone notice a theme here? Prayer – at an early age it was illustrated to me as being important. King David was known to pray morning, noon and night and the Lord heard him. Psalm 55:17. Again Philippians 4vs 6 says to pray about everything. Put your hand up if you believe in the power of prayer – and that it changes hearts and lives. And interestingly the Bible doesn't say you have to be a Mother to pray; so if you are a member of this church and especially if you are not a mother in the noun sense – then what about identifying somebody to pray for? I had the benefit of praying parents.

Not all the young people here have praying parents. They need someone to pray for them. And if you agreed with me that prayer has power that it changes hearts and lives. So why not go and see Robyn or one of the Sunday school leaders and ask them for a name for somebody to pray for? We are a church we need to be thinking and praying for the people inside of it specifically.

D Body temperature: Just as our body needs to be at a constant 37C evidence of spiritual renewal shows itself as consistency in a Christian's walk.

Philippians 1:27 ***Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel***

In-laws, who has in-laws? Who loves their in-laws? Yes – even we are asked to love our enemies. Actually I have been very lucky especially with my mother in law. If you have met my husband you will have had an insight into my mother-in-law. She is very laid back, very calm, and emotionally she is on a very even keel. She is the sort of woman who is very busy working part time as an emergency nurse in the Hutt hospital in Wellington. She serves at church – morning tea, communion and playgroup. And in her spare time she childminds my nieces and nephews and still manages to cook, clean and send down her own knitting.

When we have family gatherings at her place she plans who will bring what, prepares it all and then busily serves and cleans up – no mean feat with 10 adults and 10 grandchildren. Often we will be sitting and talking when you notice Natalie has disappeared and is cleaning up. And she never complains. I have never heard a word of complaint come from her mouth. She never complains of being busy, of looking after her grandchildren sometimes on her only day off. She is very much an example of a servant heart.

So what can I learn from my mother in law and take into my parenting? Well I need to be role-modelling this to my children. I have a tendency to complain about housework or my kids having a grumpy day – when actually I am incredibly blessed that my husband has a job that pays the bills and means I don't have to go out and work. If I choose to work it's a choice and not a necessity. In this age my situation is actually really uncommon. I don't have many friends who get to be a full time stay at home Mum. I need to demonstrate to my children gratitude for all that we have – and not complain about something, somebody else would gladly take off my hands.

Which leads nicely into the fifth sign of spiritual renewal?

E Reflex Reactions: At the doctors they will shine a light in your eyes and it dilates – a reflection that your eye is healthy. Our reactions in life reflect our relationship with Jesus – what is my behaviour when no one else is looking? What are my reactions to others in the faith and those outside?

Colossians 4 5-6:

'Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. 6 Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.'

Proverbs 15:4

Kind words heal and help, cutting words wound and maim.

Hands up if you have heard the expression 'If you don't have something nice to say about someone then don't say anything at all' Yup – it's often something we throw to our kids when they are complaining about their sibling. But how many of us examine how we speak about people in our own lives? I'm not talking about Gossip here – I am talking about how we speak about them in general. Are our comments positive or negative?

One comment I often hear about my Father is that 'he never has a bad word to say about anyone'. And it wasn't until my Grandmother's funeral almost 5 years ago that I understood why. At a young age she drilled this idea into her children – you don't gossip about people and if you don't have something nice to say you don't say anything at all. This saying isn't from the Bible but its application is extremely biblical – In the ESV Bible Proverbs 15:4 is translated ***'A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.'*** This is just one of many.

Over the last year this is something that I feel God has been calling me to work on. Not just the absence of gossip in my life, but ensuring every word that comes out of my mouth lifts instead of tearing down – whether or not they are present. This is so important as a Mum – my daughter is going to hear all sorts of things at school that I can't protect her from.

She is going to hear gossip about others, slandering of others – and I need to be able to teach her that it's not ok. But if I am to teach her this – I need to not be doing it myself. And I'm so proud of my father – I am so proud when I hear people talk about him in such a positive way – that they can't find fault with him. It makes me want to be like that too. And it's not just about what we don't say – but it's what we do say – our tongues are trees of life. I love being around Robyn here she just speaks such positivity – The fruit of the spirit Joy just overflows out of her.

And remember Joan Caldwell? – you couldn't have a conversation with her without being blessed. Literally – she blessed you. My mother blesses people with baking – I see Karene Scott be a blessing to the lady's she cleans for with the time she takes to have a conversation with her clients – she cares. And this is a challenge to me – It's not about what I don't say – but it is also about the way I conduct my life – the way I talk to people – with grace and in a way that uplifts, even if I'm not feeling it. And I hope in this way – I can be an example for my children and teach them what it means to love others. Now Roly had 5 vital signs of spiritual renewal - but I have added just one more because I think it's so important.

F Right mindset/Forgiveness: It's useful to go to the doctor when you have an ailment – but you have the right mind-set and be willing to make changes to bring healing. For example, you may need to eat less salt to help lower your blood-pressure. So it is with forgiveness.

Mark 11.25 ***'when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.'***

So it's Mothers' Day, and I'm taking from the perspective of mothering (verb) – but in regards to forgiveness I'm not just talking about doing the forgiving when your child has been rude or disobedient. I'm talking about asking humbling yourself and asking for forgiveness from your children when you have been in the wrong.

One last story

My mother taught me about forgiveness from a young age. She didn't read me Bible verse or demand that I forgive my sister for taking my toys. Quite simply – from time to time if she had 'gone off her nut' so to speak - she would come into my room afterwards sit on my bed and say sorry. I remember this quite clearly. I must have been younger than 5 and I wasn't at school but my older sister must have been. But this act of humility, asking for forgiveness has had an important effect on my own relationship with my daughter. Most of you who have met my daughter know she is full of energy, and life. She is nothing like my husband and I were at kids who would do as they were told and shy away from an argument. No way – if she doesn't like something she will let everyone around, and we do have a battle of wills from time to time or daily.

And I do get angry and yell time to time. And actually – even if I am justified in disciplining my daughter and sending her to her room, anger is still sin **(Or the inappropriate outcome of anger is sin) *****. And sometimes I react in anger. And on those nights where we have had a bit of a spat – God will often put it on my heart to go and say sorry. Sometimes I'm still angry and don't want to. But I remember how it felt to have my Mother apologise to me and so I will sneak in her room, sit down beside her and apologise. And she will forgive me. And we will have a wee chat about what went on – and respect, and why her response made me feel angry, and what we might do next time. Then we will pray.

And again you may not have children to demonstrate forgiveness to. But many people have not had forgiveness role modelled to them in their lives. And it takes us as Christians sometimes to be brave and take that first step. And we need to forgive and let go of past hurts. Perhaps your mother was absent, or abusive or something else entirely. And I don't want to minimise what anyone has gone through but if you are holding onto bitterness and unforgiveness in your heart it's time to make some changes. These are hard words to hear.

But I'm not basing my words on wishful thinking – the Bible is very clear about forgiveness – the above passage talks about us needing to forgive others so God can forgive us. And if I have learnt one thing it's that sometimes forgiveness is a feeling – but more often than not it's a decision. God doesn't tell us to forgive when we feel like we can – he demands that we forgive. But - he gives us the strength and the grace to do it. And sometimes we may need to forgive that same person over and over and over 70x 7. But I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.

And that's all I have to say on forgiveness today.

Finally, **to conclude** – I have fantastic parents to whom I am very grateful – so thanks Mum and Dad. And I have learnt a lot from them which I hope to take into my own Journey as a Mum and teach my children. But just like it took more than myself to get David eating that broccoli – it will take more than just me to teach my children about all aspects of what it is to be a follower of Christ.

It will take more than the knowledge and the wisdom of the Mothers here to bring their children up in Christ.

That's where you the congregation come in. The Sunday school teachers, the youth leaders, those of you who sit near the young people, who walk past them down the aisles, who see them up the front talking about their faith experience at Easter Camp.

The saying it takes a village/community to raise a child is so true It takes a community of mothering – that's the verb – that's you guys- to bring a child up in the ways they should go so that they will not depart from it.

The question is – is the community of Caversham Baptist prepared to take on that role?

*** As an individual was quick to point out – Anger itself is not a sin – it is an emotion. What I should have said was my yelling at my daughter in anger was a sin rather than the anger itself. I apologise if I have offended or mislead anyone.