

Mothers, Jesus Knows (You Are Doing Better Than You Think)

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When Brother Powell texted me **on Wednesday** and asked me to speak, he said that the Bishop wanted me to speak about the topic “mothers, you are doing better than you think.”

So after Brother Powell texted me, I went back and looked at my notes from the last talk I gave in church, which just happened to be on Mother’s day three years ago.

As it turns out, that was the exact same message I delivered back then—mothers, you are doing better than you think.

So ever since **Wednesday**, when Brother Powell asked me to speak – did I mention that it was just **Wednesday** when Brother Powell asked me to speak? – I’ve been trying to think about what I could say that is different than what I said three years ago.

I really don’t have anything better to say now than what I said then, but since about 50% of the ward has moved out since then, I thought I would just remind you of a few of those messages, elaborate on a few of them, and then share a new idea or two on this subject. Please forgive me and please indulge me.

I don’t profess to understand what it’s like, but being a Mormon Mom can’t be easy ... In fact, I hear it is very difficult.

Mormons, in general, are plagued with guilt due to, among other things, our Phariseetical culture of outward observances, expectations, checklists, programs, rigid rules, and the like ...

But Mormon Mothers play ball in the big leagues of cultural guilt and shaming ...

Mormon Moms have to live with the false ideal embodied in the Mythical Mormon Mom, a false ideal that isn't real and yet has a very real and detrimental impact upon your happiness

My hope today is help you Mormon Mothers feel a little bit better and have a little more hope. But to do this, you're going to have to indulge me and be willing to have a few paradigm shifts. You're going to have to let go of some of your preconceived notions. You're going to have to let me challenge some of what you have undoubtedly been taught to be truth but which, in fact, is only a myth. Please don't judge me too harshly.

First, what is *really* expected of you?

Jesus said that there are really only two commandments

1. Love God and
2. Love thy neighbor as thyself

All the law and all the prophets hang on these two commandments. Literally everything else depends upon them. Literally everything else points to them.

Jesus taught, "as I have loved you, love one another" ... everything else superimposed upon this ... everything else that embellishes upon this ... everything else that claims to somehow be tangentially related to this ... everything else is merely a means to an end. But boy do we ever confuse the means with the ends.

What are the implications of the command to love?

If you are like me, your concept of your final judgment is or was tainted by the myth of the checklist.

If you are like I used to be, you might picture the final judgment as a sort of trial where all sorts of witnesses are called to testify about how you treated them during mortality.

If you are a Mormon mother the thought of witnesses being called to testify about how you treated them during mortality might go something like this, which, for our purposes today, I will call the trial of “Judy Judgment,” who represents all of you mothers out there:

At the trial of the Mythical Mormon Mother there is a prosecutor/temple president-like fellow, who is wearing a starched white shirt, crisp tie, talks with a very soft and seemingly compassionate church voice, and is bedecked with a head of white, perfectly placed hair. He wears white pressed trousers and a white suit jacket. We’ll call him Brother White.

Maybe the first witness called in the trial of Judy Judgment is Nancy Neighbor ...

Brother White calmly asks Nancy Neighbor, “So Sister Nancy Neighbor, tell me about Judy Judgment?”

“Well,” says Nancy Neighbor, “She was very sweet”

“Anything else”

“Well, she was always running late, she always parked too long and didn’t move up when all of us were waiting behind her to drop the kids off at school, she was always on her cell phone, her kids were always roaming the streets like vagrants, and she never weeded the flower beds. She got a little bit carried away at Bobby’s soccer games and let’s just say I heard some pretty interesting things come out of that back yard! And she didn’t really take care of herself ... or her kids ... the things she let those girls wear to school ... or the house ... and she always frumped around in those sweats ... and she never wore make-up ...”

The glowing Brother White, says, “That will do, Nancy Neighbor. You may step down from the witness stand.”

And then Brother White says “I’d like to call my next witness ... Suzy Supervisor.”

“Suzy Supervisor ... you were Nancy Neighbor’s visiting teaching supervisor, were you not?”

“Yes,” replies Suzy Supervisor.

“Sister Supervisor ... was Judy Judgment a good visiting teacher?”

“Well, sort of,” says Sister Supervisor.

“What do you mean, sort of, Sister Supervisor?”

“Well, Judy, bless her heart, was always a 100% visiting teacher on paper ... but let’s just say she took a few liberties with what ‘counted’.”

“Counted?”

“Yes, counted,” said Sister Supervisor. “For example, Judy said that she visited Sister Silverton but then I found out from Ginny, who heard it from Tina that she didn’t *really* go visit Sister Silverton; Judy just ran into Sister Silverton at Wal-Mart and had a 90-second conversation with her ... while she was wearing those sweats, with her hair in a ponytail ... and she said *that* ‘counted’

Oh and did I mention ... she wasn’t even wearing any make up?”

“Thank you Sister Supervisor.”

And then Brother White calls your children and then your husband and then ...after diving into the depths of how many times you went to the temple, whether you were

observed saying your prayers ... whether you were observed reading your scriptures ... what kind of meals you fixed ... how you kept the house ... how the kids did in school ... and then after going over all the bad things your kids did, especially the wayward ones, **then** the drama of your Mythical Mormon Mom judgment takes an even darker turn ...

Brother White calls the star witness ...

THE MOTHER IN LAW ... her name is Marie

“Marie,” says the coiffed, calm, controlled and ever-eloquent Brother White in a warm, pseudo-compassionate voice, “Tell me about your daughter-in-law, Judy Judgment.”

“Well, brother, she’s a really sweet girl, and I really don’t want to say anything bad about her ...”

And then comes the “BUT”

“*Buuuutttt* since you asked ...

You know, my little Jimmy was never overweight until he married Judy and I always told Judy “you use too much butter in your cooking” but do you think Judy listened to me?

And the reason Jimmy and Judy’s little Bobby ran off with Billy and got that sailor tattoo is because Judy just didn’t read to Bobby when he was little ... if Judy had just read to Bobby I think that would have made a big difference

I always thought Jimmy and Judy’s little Janey was such a pretty girl but the way Judy dressed her!!!! Oh the poor dear. Who can blame Janey for the divorce. But she *did* have a temper

You know, Janey must have got that temper from Judy's side of the family because my Jimmy was always such a sweet boy

Did I mention that Judy used too much grease in her cooking? And her spaghetti sauce was saltier than the Dead Sea, and that house of hers ... you could get lost under the piles of clothes everywhere

She just couldn't ever keep a clean house because she was always off doing that Zoga thing down at the gym ... but the poor dear *did* try and ...

"Thank you, Marie. You may step down from the witness stand."

I think for a lot of you Mormon Moms out there THIS is sort of how you think your judgment is going to be.

Undoubtedly, all the people you have interacted with in life will be paraded before you at the final judgment.

Undoubtedly, your children will be chief among them.

But here's the paradigm shift ...

Here is what I've said before, and I'll say it again because I believe with every fiber of my being that it is true ...

Here's what I want you mothers to remember ...

For your judgment, this parade of people will not be asked how they feel about you. *You* will be asked how *you* feel about *them*.

And *that* will be your judgment.

The implication flowing from the great commandment to love is that your heart will be the witness.

The implication flowing from the great commandment to love is that it does not matter how others feel about you. Everything depends upon how *you* feel about *others*, especially your children.

It is for this reason that I plead with you mothers to believe that if you love your children, that is enough.

And because I know—and God knows—how much you love your children, I want you to believe that you are doing much, much better than you think you are ...

You might be asking yourself, but Brother McDonald how can you be so confident that if I just love my children, that will be enough?

That if my heart is in the right place I'm okay with God?

I can tell you why ... it's because God has made it very clearly that what he wants most is your heart.

Let me make my case ...

Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 13

What do we learn from verse 1?

God doesn't care if you're eloquent or well spoken ... he only cares that you have an eloquent heart:

1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

(1 Corinthians 13:1)

What do we learn from verse 2?

God doesn't care if you're a walking encyclopedia of scripture or a pillar of faith, knowledge and testimony:

And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.

(1 Corinthians 13:2)

What's in your heart is so much more important to God than what you do or don't do that he tells us in verse 3:

And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing

(1 Corinthians 13:3)

In the Book of Mormon we read in 2 Nephi 26:30:

... wherefore, the Lord God hath given a commandment that all men should have charity, which charity is love. And except they should have charity they were nothing.

(2 Nephi 26:30)

If you don't have love in your heart, it profiteth you nothing; on the flipside, if you HAVE love in your heart that seems to be everything to God

How can I be so confident that your final judgment will not be a parade of witness testifying about you but your heart testifying about what it feels for the parade of people in your life?

Because John tells us in 1 John 3:21:

“Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.” (1 John 3:21.)

John follows that in 1 John 4:17, with “Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment”

And it says, elliptically, in D&C 121:45 – “45 Let thy ^abowels also be full of charity towards all men, and to the household of faith ... *then* shall thy ^cconfidence wax strong in the ^dpresence of God; “

If you truly love your children you should not fear that you are failing, and you should not fear God’s judgment because, I ask you, what more can God ask of you?

Upon the commandments to love hang *all* the law and the prophets.

If you genuinely love your children ... that is enough.

If our success depended upon the success of our children, then God would be a complete failure since the vast majority of his children are completely messed up. Just look at the world we live in today. God’s really messed up those kids of his, hasn’t he? If you have no right to judge God that way, you have no right to judge yourself that way either. I’ll talk more about that later.

Now I know that you are confronted with this ideal—the Mythical Mormon Mother. You see her or hear about her every six months in your women’s conferences. You

sometimes see her or talk about her in Relief Society. She is polished and eloquent. She is beautiful and fit. She is a beacon of faith. She goes to the temple. She prays. She teaches her children and they, of course, are seemingly perfect. She's multi-talented. She might even have a successful career. She seems to have it all together. She seems to keep everything in balance.

Sisters, despite what you might see or hear, this ideal is a myth. It's not real. It's a product of our culture and *not* the gospel of Jesus Christ. It's *not* what Jesus is looking for and I can prove it to you.

Is Jesus impressed by the person who does everything on the list?

Turn with me to Matthew 23 v. 14.

Here, Jesus is talking to his own people, people of his own faith and culture ... the Pharisees. And does what he did best ... shattering the cultural myths of what makes a person "successful" ...

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation."

[Matthew 23:14](#)

I could be wrong but Jesus is talking about prayer ... isn't that one on the list?

Let's read v. 15

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves."

[Matthew 23:15](#)

Missionary work ... raising valiant young missionaries ... that one's on the list, too, isn't it ...

Verses 16-22 talk about their temple attendance ...

Let's go to verse 23 where he talks about another thing that's on the list, tithing:

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith”

[Matthew 23:23](#)

Is Jesus looking for people who seem to have it altogether? Is he looking for Moms that somehow magically do everything on the list? Or does he prefer that humble mother who feels like a failure ... who feels like everything in her world is falling apart and that it's all her fault?

In Luke 18:10 Jesus answers those questions rather decisively:

10 Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.

11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.

12 I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

13 And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.

14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

[Luke 18:10-14](#)

Does Jesus want to be around so-called “perfect” women, who keep all the rules, do everything on the list, and have everything under control? Or is he more comfortable

around the ones whose lives are out of control and yet have their hearts in the right place?

Once he again, he answers these questions rather decisively in Luke 7:

36 And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat.

37 And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment,

38 And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.

39 Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner.

....

44 And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head.

45 Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet.

46 My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment.

47 Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.

[Luke 7:36-47](#)

If I were to translate this story into modern colloquialisms it would go something like this:

Simon you are a "righteous" priesthood holder of whom little needs to be forgiven because you do everything on the list; but you "loveth little" ... you don't know how to love. You didn't give me anything I could wash my feet with before dinner. You didn't greet me politely with a kiss or hand shake. And you were too cheap to even give me oil for my head. This "sinner" was kinder

to me than you were. What's more important ... doing everything on the checklist or being kind?

Forget about all the checklists

Forget about all the guilt

Forget about all the judgments that are placed upon you

All of these things are false idols; they are modern-day golden calves; they are myths. They are the things the Pharisees sought. We seek them because, to some degree, they are measurable.

But what really matters to God is that which is immeasurable.

There is no one but God who can measure how much you love.

Only you and he know that. And, really, only you and he can see that.

But so long as you love ... and I know that you do ... what more matters to God?

We talk in our culture about Mothers Who Know ... But I want you to remember that you are Mothers Who **Jesus** Knows

And mothers, Jesus knows

He knows what it's like to be you because he was you 2000 years ago in Gethsemane

The burdens that you bear, the hurts that you feel, feeling forgotten, feeling unappreciated ... it brought him to his knees to the point that he begged for reprieve

Mothers, Jesus knows ...

Now I want to shift to a slightly different but related theme

Now comes the part where I get to chew you out in a way that hopefully makes you feel better about yourselves ...

You mothers have been doing something that is reprehensible and offensive

It's offensive to your husbands

It's offensive to your children

It's offensive to God

You are judging and condemning yourselves

You do it every day

I hear you say "I'm so fat"

"I'm so ugly"

"I'm not a very good visiting teacher"

"I'm a terrible cook"

"I'm a terrible housekeeper"

"I can't sing"

"I can't spell very good"

“I don’t go to the temple enough”

“I need to start reading my scriptures”

“I’m a terrible mom”

You go down the checklist and you look at the empty boxes and you feel terrible

You feel like a failure ... you feel like you’re not good enough ... you feel like you’ll never be good enough.

Can I steal a line from President Uchtdorf and say “Stop it!”

You have no right to judge yourself.

You have no right to condemn yourself.

Once again, please let me make my case.

“Judge not,” commanded Jesus. (Matthew 7:1.)

“Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned.”
(Luke 6:37.)

It is a sin to judge or condemn others.

But if you are to fully live the golden rule, you must not judge or condemn yourself.

The comparative command—love thy neighbor *as thyself*—is inherently reciprocal.

If you are to truly treat others as yourself, you must also ***treat yourself as you would treat others***. Otherwise, Christ commanded the immeasurable and impossible. Otherwise, the golden rule is nothing but fool's gold.

Jesus taught, “If ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses,” (Matthew 18:35) you will be “delivered ... to the tormentors.” (Matthew 18:34.)

But that's what you've done to yourselves ... you've delivered yourselves to the tormentors through self-criticism, self-doubt, self-loathing, self-condemnation all of which you measure against the false ideal of the Mythical Mormon Mom

Stop it.

If you are to love others “as thyself” then you must love yourself as you are taught to love others.

You must not judge yourself. You must freely forgive yourself.

Nobody will let you down in this life more than you will. There is no greater tormentor than yourself. But you must forgive yourself—even until seventy times seven. It's a commandment.

I often think of the woman taken in adultery and brought to Jesus in the temple. As you recall, the scribes and Pharisees sought to trap Jesus, reminding him that the law of Moses required the woman to be stoned. But they disingenuously asked, “what sayest thou?” (John 8:5.) Jesus replied, “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.” (John 8:7.)

One by one, each scribe and Pharisee left, recognizing that he wasn't yet ready for judgment or sentencing either. Then Jesus and the adulterous woman were all alone.

A tender dialogue that reveals Jesus Christ's deep understanding of the natural tendencies of women followed:

When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee?

She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.

(John 8:10-11.)

When Jesus asked if any *man* had condemned her, she shamefully responded, "No *man*, Lord," perhaps suggesting that this woman still condemned herself and that Jesus, who understood women better than any man to walk the face of the earth, knew it was a natural tendency of women to condemn themselves.

Mothers, Jesus knows ...

Jesus didn't judge or condemn her. Now, he didn't give her a hall pass or excuse her sin either. Instead, he said "sin no more." But I wonder ... what was the greater sin? Was it the adultery? Or was it the self-condemnation?

It is not in God's nature to condemn us.

"For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved." (John 3:17.)

So if we want to become like God self-condemnation cannot be part of our nature.

Now, apart from the golden rule—do unto others as you would have done unto you—there's an even higher rationale for abstaining from self-criticism and self-judgment:

Because Jesus taught, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me,” everyone, in God’s eyes, is a proxy for Jesus Christ ... including you. (Matthew 25:40.)

He has purchased you with a price

You have taken his name upon you through covenant

As far as he is concerned you and he are one and the same, inseparable, part of the same yoke, an extension of the same vine,

So what you say of yourself is what you say of him

What you think of yourself is what you think of him

When Jesus taught, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me,” he meant *you, too*. (Matthew 25:40.) Because you are also “one of the least of these,” you are a proxy for Jesus Christ. Therefore when *you* hurt you, you hurt him ...

So please, sisters, stop it. Love yourselves. Forgive yourselves. Rejoice in the fact that you have a friend in Jesus, who knows what it’s like to be you

As I said, he knows how hard it is

Being you brought him to the brink of giving up; he asked, if it be possible let this cup pass

He asked this not just once but three times

This cup that he wanted to pass ... it included your cup

Mothers, Jesus knows.