

“They decide us.”
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“Mother’s Day”
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Its normal, its natural, it happens all the time, nonetheless each time it is incredible. What is? Motherhood. Motherhood also is ferocious, tender, brave, usually patient, and in a world bent on viewing strength as ripping phone books in half or hoisting barbells or inflicting damage on the enemy, motherhood supremely defines real strength. You want to see a mother’s strength? Just endanger her babies. Never get momma angry!

Lizards, sea turtles? They lay their eggs and move on. Okay, kids, you’re on your own. The lower the specie, the weaker the maternal bond. Not so with higher species, even though mommy alligators will carry their offspring in their mouths, likely to protect them from daddy eating them. No, the higher the specie, the stronger the bond.

Killdeer pretend to be injured to lure predators away -- distraction display. Canada geese will honk aggressively and attack golfers who come too near their nestlings. When scared, when threatened, baby monkeys and apes rush to leap and cling to mommy. Cats carry their kittens by the scruff of the neck. Momma bears? Momma Elephants? Momma Whales? Momma Lionesses? Never get between them and their cubs, calves. More remarkable is how among higher species, mommies will form pacts to protect each other’s babies. Visit any town playground and you’re likely to see the same thing with human mommies.

Moms are remarkable. Forgive my antediluvian attitude, for I believe fathers might be adequate at building houses, mothers are best at building homes. Anybody can build a house. It requires only money, lumber, concrete, and PVC piping. Far more demanding, far more lasting, are parents who build a home. By virtue of womb, you moms get to be internally creative as well as externally creative. We guys, born outsiders, cannot conceive of such innermost creativity.

Which returns us to our higher specie motherhood musings. A famous preacher, Harry Emerson Fosdick, mixed cups of anthropology into religion, highlighting how dependent are human babies. Hence, the more intelligent the specie, the longer the infant’s dependency upon mommy. Lizard hatchlings don’t need mothers, just an egg delivery system. Furthermore, the younger the offspring is, if dependency is disrupted, the more severe is the toxic trauma offspring experiences. Similarly, the deeper the love, the fiercer the grief. Can anyone suffer more than a mother? Lullabies silenced by the primal howl of a mother in grief.

How long does it take a foal to no longer need mommy mare? In four to six months foal is weaned. In one week they eat hay. In one hour they can walk. Whale calves can suckle for up to twenty-four months. Separation might occur between five and fifteen years. How long for human infants? They’re dependent for at least eight years (sometimes 21 years).

Simply put: the lower the form, the lesser the need for parents, family, religion, society, civilization. The higher the form, the greater the necessity for civilization, society, religion, family, parents. How else protection, security, growth, promise, hope, love?

Fosdick preached that the entire ethical life of humanity is wrapped up in this prolonged dependency of human children, fostering the origins of morality, family, society, institutions. Babies depend on us to love well. They redeem us. Babies demand that we develop caring, patient, disciplining, nurturing attitudes. Baby's dependency demands from us sacrificial impulses of selflessness. Babies, he preached, are decisive. They decide us. So how are we doing taking care of these who depend on us? Are those 20,000 unaccompanied children at the southern border a problem? Or a gift, a trust?

Tony Campolo, another preacher, told a story about him visiting an orphanage his church built. He flew down there to help set it up. They were bringing to the orphanage little children from a certain region. They boarded the bus and headed out to collect the kids. They arrived. Once there Campolo counted over 300 children. 300 orphans. 300 children with bellies distended from hunger, their hair turning red from malnutrition. 300. He had to choose 50. When you choose 50 to live, you choose 250 to die.

Campolo described the ride back to the orphanage with the bus filled with the chosen 50. While the kids sang, he was silently screaming at God: "Where are you, how can you be this cruel?"

If you're going to get angry at God, if you're going to get angry about something, please make sure it is something worthwhile.

On that bus Jesus answered him: "You know what the problem is."