



Advocates For Children

Mothers are, above all else, advocates for children. If you are an advocate for children, you are doing the primary work of a mother.

"But when the time of the promise drew near, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt, till another king arose, which knew not Joseph. The same dealt subtly with our kindred, and evil entreated our parents, so that they cast out their

young children, to the end they might not live." ~ The Acts 7:17-19

To wipe out a race of people by keeping their children from living, that is the topic of the verse. To abandon the young children in the desert, separating them from, nurture, nourishment, & care. Not killing them outright, but letting them starve. Yes, "To the end that they might not live" (Acts 7:19). They separated the parents from their children.

Beginning in ancient times, to the Spartans of the ancient Greek City-State, throughout history, to our modern day such stories find their place on the pages of books and the footage of films.

A synopsis of the history surrounding our passage is known to us all:

Joseph was sold as a slave to Egypt by his brothers --an ugly thing in itself. In a curious change of events, over the years, Joseph rose to power in Egypt. Meanwhile, a drought came to his home country. At that time, Joseph was able to provide a refuge in Egypt for his 75 relatives. There they prospered as a family, grew & multiplied.

After some time, a king who was not favorable toward Joseph and his people came to power. As a result of his reign, the children suffered; they were left in the desert to die of starvation. Why? Because the king knew full-well that children are God's link to future generations.

The story of Moses took place at this time in history; however, Moses was rescued by Pharaoh's daughter when his mother placed him in a floating basket in the bulrushes. In Moses's case, the story ends well because of the advocacy of Moses's mother & Pharaoh's daughter. These two women fit the best description of what a mother is. They were advocates for children. I believe that Pharaoh's daughter provides one of the best examples of what a mother does, that we have on record anywhere.

But most of the children were left to starve; there were few advocates. It was hard work & dangerous to be an advocate for children.

I will suggest that there is a parallel to this story, and what has happened to children in every age.

One of my clients in a residential diagnostic/testing center for children was 13-year-old Dan. Dan and I spent a great deal of time together. Dan was not ordinary in any sense of the word; he was, after all, only 13 and had already stolen three cars. It was part of my job to find out why. Did he need a car? No, he didn't need a car. No, he didn't have a chop-shop. It didn't take a lot of psychological testing to find out why Dan stole the cars. On our second day together, he told me. According to Dan, his plan was that he would continue to steal cars until somebody took him out of his abusive home. If it took ten cars, so be it; he would steal ten cars.

When I worked with Dan, he was living in a place that was a lot like a prison, --it was a residential juvenile detention center. Yet, Dan thought it was the most wonderful place in the world. He thought the food was great, he had his own bed, people talked with you, rather than yelled at you. There were a lot of good points about the juvenile detention center --according to Dan. At the time, his only worry was that he would eventually have to leave juvenile detention. You would have thought he was at summer camp.

No, he didn't need the cars at all --he didn't want the cars. He just wanted to get where the cars could take him --and that was out of his home. What he needed was for someone to notice that he was alive, alone, for all practical purposes, abandoned, and hurting. How do you get people to listen? You steal cars, that was all he could think of --and, for Dan, it worked.

One of the first things I noticed about Dan was that his nose was smashed. I have never seen a nose that scarred and flat. It was actually hard for Dan to breath. Dan's nose was a target for an angry father. Does it surprise you that the kids who were beaten the most, are now the adults who fill our prisons? Apparently, their parents were not able to "beat some sense into them."

Our testing took three days to finish, and Dan loved every minute of it. If you can imagine the fun of taking a Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, a Wechsler IQ test, a Rorschach Inkblot test, and about twenty other tests. About every three hours, I would take Dan down the hall to the pop machine and buy him a soda, and we would take a little break from testing. After giving him a full battery of tests and a clinical interview, over a three day period, I asked him one last question before making out my report. "If you could have 3 wishes, what would you ask for?" His reply said everything, "I would only make one wish. I would wish that you could be my father."

A year later, I was working in an out-patient counseling center. I was at my desk catching up on reports when a flat-nosed little boy peeked in with a big smile on his face. He said, "They told me you were here. Guess what? I have a new home."

What I saw was the result of a society that was leaving its children to starve, while it debated whose fault it is. How much of our efforts for children, actually get to the children. I believe to actually help children you need to by-pass Pharaoh, in the spirit of Pharaoh's daughter, and pluck the children from the water. Plucking children out of the water is never easy; it is never cheep. These kinds of things have a real cost and require a true commitment --it is the spirit of Pharaoh's daughter.

He who can say, "They're not my children," is not much of an advocate for children. Pharaoh's daughter teaches us that children are saved "one child at a time." Look at children in the spirit of Pharaoh's daughter - it is that spirit that saves children. **Pharaoh's daughter was a real mother.** If you could look at children as individual persons, seeing beyond the tough glaze that some children have developed, and the sorrow of others, and the fear of yet others, you would see something like this.

You would see some children with feelings of abandonment, for various reasons. There would be a lot of these children --doing their best. You would see children who have been, and *are being* abused by adults. The Bible does say, "Provoke not a child to wrath" (Ephesians 6:4).

I believe you would see children suffering from another kind of starvation. You would see children growing up with withered, bony souls. You cannot see souls --they are easier to neglect.

About 10% of all children suffer with some kind of learning disability. That is a lot of children. These children find it difficult to compete academically. Some of them don't feel like they're worth very much. Educators have worked hard and long trying to figure out how to keep these children from being "labeled" by other children --that's to say nothing about the 50% of all children who, by statistical imperative, must be in the lower 50% of every class. Who would then, venture to think that "name calling" is not problem # 1` for children? Shame on adults who call people names --they are certainly not "advocates for children." Children copy adults.

Whenever parents have problems, they are passed on to the children. In fact, any struggle that a parent has is passed down to the child and added to the struggles the child already has in being a child. Kids have a lot of struggles. One of the most stirring things anyone has ever said to me was something our granddaughter Gabrielle said when she was a little girl. She had been through a most difficult morning (mostly of her own making), when she came crying to me. As I hugged her, she sobbed, "Grandpa, it's a hard job to be a little kid and have to grow up."

What I am feeling is this: There are always children to rescue.

There are always children who are left in a spiritual desert to starve & die. We do not make a mistake when we reach down into the water and pull them to safety. Think of yourself as a modern day Pharaoh's daughter. We must, more than ever, commit ourselves to helping actual children. There are more ways to starve than physically. There is probably some child in this world who needs your ear more than your food.

I love our "Flower Children" project --for a number of reasons: *First*, it helps us all to understand children better. *Secondly* it has raised over 78 thousand dollars to help children. *Third*, it helps us to be better children ourselves --after all, we are all children.

I want to end by looking at the Syrophenician woman who came to Jesus in behalf of her own daughter. Do we pray for our children? She came to Jesus and said, "There is a demon troubling my daughter, and I want you to do something about it." She kept on praying, saying, "I'll take any scrap of

mercy that falls from the table for my daughter" (Mark 7:25-30). The demon left, only because there was somebody to pray for a child.

We must be advocates for children. We don't have a choice!

Nobody comes to Mother's Day without thinking about mother's and father's and who is to do what? This is your job; this is my job. No! This is our job. For lack of a better way to put it, I think we should all be about mothering. Fathers should be doing their share of mothering. Could it be that our motive for encouraging mothers is that we don't want them to stop what they're doing --and we don't want to do it? Nor do we want to help them with the myriad of menial tasks that are required to raise children.

Much of raising children is reading to them, listening to them, carrying them, calming them, changing them, picking up after them, feeding them, cleaning their houses, washing their clothes, and waiting on them and everybody else, --and "waiting for them". Is there really something genetic that keeps men from being able to do these sorts of things? Perhaps humankind could take a lesson from the robin --there is a true family. Dad takes his turn and does his part. Daddy robins are not only good fathers, but they make great husbands, as well. Male robins know how to mother children.

After all, nobody ever thought of putting motherhood on a pedestal, until somebody pointed out, about a century ago, that the pay is lousy and the majority of the tasks are not at all that glorious. Children should be raised by us all.

Adrienne Rich wrote (*Of Woman Born*, 1976), "The worker can unionize, go out on strike; mothers are divided from each other in homes, tied to their children by compassionate bonds; our wildcat strikes have most often taken the form of physical or mental breakdown." The best thing you can do for Mom, is help with the mothering. Do you know what a father is? It is mothering when done by a male. It might be done a little rougher, and with a few more grunts (as with "Tim, the tool man, Taylor"); but, essentially, it is still the same thing. What do you suppose Mom wants for Mother's Day? How about take your turn on the nest?

Mother deserves honor --just make sure that you're not giving it to her in order to keep from giving her what you should be giving her every day of the year --**do your fair share**. Mom, will love you Dad, and the kids will like you better too. And what better way to say, "Happy Mother's Day."