



Unity Church of Christianity  
Mastery Through Motherhood  
May 9, 2010

### **Howard Caesar**

I want to begin this morning by sharing a short essay by a third-grader in answer to the question, “What is a grandmother?” This little boy--or third-grader, it might have been a girl too--response was, “A grandmother is a lady who has no little children of her own, so she likes other people’s. A grandfather is a man grandmother. Grandmothers don’t have to do anything except be there. They’re old so they shouldn’t play hard or run. It’s enough if they drive us to the market and have lots of dimes ready. And when they take us for walks they slow down past pretty things like leaves and caterpillars, and they never say hurry up. And usually grandmothers are fat, but not too fat to tie your shoes. They wear glasses and funny underwear,” I don’t know where this third-grader’s been, but anyway, “and they can take their teeth and their gums out. Grandmothers don’t have to be really smart, only answer questions like, ‘Why isn’t God married?’” I mean, how tough is that? Geez! And, “How come dogs chase cats?’ Things like that. And when they read to us they don’t skip pages. And they don’t mind if we ask the same story be read over and over again. Everybody should try to have a grandmother, especially if you don’t have a television, because grandmothers seem to be the only grown-ups who really have time.” So isn’t that cute? Very good.

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So, how would you describe your grandmother; a grandmother that you had, perhaps, growing up? And grandmothers, how would you describe yourselves? So mothers are very important certainly, and statistics show us how important they are, because on this day, Mother's Day, more than any other, there are more calls made, significantly so, than any other day of the year. And what it tells us is that there is a longing to reach out and really express the love that we feel in our heart to our mom, if she is still in this dimension, or really to any other woman or significant person who has played that mothering role of some sort. We just want to make a connection; we want to express our love and our gratitude. It's a very natural thing. The fundamental law of life is the law of love itself. And so we are learning in this life to express love more fully and completely.

In the scriptures in first John, we find that verse where it says, "Beloved, let us love one another." And it says, "For love is of God. And everyone who loves knows God. And everyone who does not love, does not know God." In other words, the way that you come to know God is actually to open up to love that you feel more close to God. That's a very powerful realization to have. And we know that love is not always easy, most certainly. And that during the course of our life we often times learn certain conditions that we create that begin to stand in the way of us being able to really express the fullness of love. We set conditions. And then what we have to do in life if we are really to express what is inherently our true nature as loving beings and experience more of God, then we have to work at getting past those conditions that we have set. We have to actually become conscious of them and move more fully into what we call unconditional love. And so conditional love is full out, whole-hearted love --unconditional love is. Conditional love is certainly not that. And it's unfortunate sometimes, I think, that for those who have unresolved issues with their mothers, and therefore they can't really experience the allness and the fullness of what love is intended to be and felt. This wholeness that might be likened to God's love itself - being perfected in them. Because, really, what we are trying to do is perfect the love of God in us. And as we perfect it in us then we really feel the energies, the vibrations, the frequencies, the connectedness, the oneness of love moving through us, which is God.

Parents are not perfect. We know that. They are in their own stage of learning and growing and unfolding. It was Socrates who said, "Parents are destined to disappoint their children." Interesting. "Parents are destined to disappoint their children." What he, I think, was saying there is that there really are no perfect parents and that essentially, they mess up. And they mess up in varying degrees. It doesn't mean that you had a horrible parent or a horrible mother, but I am just saying that, in many instances, people have met up and clashed in their relationships with a parent, that it definitely goes on. And so we start out as children, and because they are bigger than us we make them into gods. And then as we grow older, we get to discover that they're human and they have flaws too, and they are growing and learning, unfolding like we are. And so we have to adjust to that or else we hold regrets and various things that don't do well by us and stand in the way. And so anyone can think back and wish their mother perhaps had more

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this or was more like that, or wish they had done this or done that, or said this or not said that, or whatever it might be. There certainly could be some disappointments and there could be some hurts along the journey of that relationship with a child and a parent. And it could be that that is all actually part of God's plan; that we come up against some things that we have to learn and grow, that we have to develop forgiveness, understanding, acceptance, various dimensions of our own spiritual growth. We could not really always expect all of us to draw a perfect mom who is stress-free, and who is totally tolerant, always understanding, noncritical, totally unconditionally loving, all of that. But every relationship has its imperfections, and both parties are always still learning to perfect love in them.

Comment [M1]:

And so whether a mother is still with us in this realm or has passed over into the next realm, I think there is always the opportunity to make a connection, and also to have a healing. You know, it's not limited by time and space, and it's important to remember that. Relationships are everlasting. They never end, they just change form. And so you can always be really in relationship with any soul. And so we are talking about moving actually toward more of a perfect love within ourselves, in what might be described as an imperfect relationship. And so somebody has to move in that direction. We have to reach out towards the fullness of love, and that's part of our growth and unfoldment. And we have to realize that our mothers, or our parents, may not have been able to meet every need for us physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually.

There was a columnist in L.A., a writer, some years ago, that was trying to write a column. And I guess it was coming up on Mother's Day, or whatever. But she was telling what it was like to be a mother and trying to write a column and I want to share with you what she writes. She says, "My 6-year-old son and his friend have just left the dining room where I am writing. The boys were wearing black sweat pants, black turtle-necks they had pulled from Ryan's dresser. They cinched the pants at the waist with belts through which they slipped wooden swords. Then they crept up on me, and when I looked up from my computer they ran squealing from the room. This stunt was repeated ten times in 8 minutes. The repetition did nothing to diminish the hilarity for the two boys or increase it for me. The pirate spy routine has been preceded by attempts to pogo in the family room, skate in the kitchen, dribble a basketball down the stairs, burp the letters of their names, and play catch in the stairwell. I took away the pogo stick, put the skates outside, stored the basketball in the closet, told the boys I'd heard enough burping for one day, and guided the game of catch into the driveway. Still ahead was the friend's anguished departure, homework, spelling flashcards, dinner, dishes, books, and a pokey, meandering to bed. And during this time I had to finish my column."

One night earlier I sat in a darkened room at a Zen retreat not far from my house. The room was packed with people who had come to meditate, and then listen to a lecture on spirituality. The teacher mentioned how he had traveled to Asia as a young man to learn the ways of the monks. He sat in a snowy forest for days with little food, drink, or sleep. He sat like a yogi on the banks

of the Ganges river for 20 hours at a stretch, though his legs burned with pain and his eyes longed for rest. He explained that the effort of his mind to overcome the deprivation and distractions took him to higher states of clarity and vision and taught him patience."

"I was thinking about this," she writes, "as my son and his pal staged a sword fight in the hallway. The connections of the last few days began to fall into place. I thought about the repeated reminders and admonitions we parents deliver through the day; the noise, the lack of sleep, the long waits for our child to get dressed, clean his room, or get out to the car. 'Come on we're going to the store now. Come on! Come on! Put the soccer ball down! Come on, we're going! We're going! No the dog can't come. What are you doing? That cookie's probably been under the seat for a month. Don't eat it! Come on, let's go! Let's go!' The only things children seem to do quickly are go to the bathroom, eat dessert, and climb fences that separate playgrounds from deadly freeways. Suddenly it clicked. I understood why monks must sit in snow and on the banks of the Ganges. They don't have children!" "It occurred to me that in my search for self-improvement and enlightenment I had everything I needed in my own home; every parent does. There are the long painful nights we sit without moving because one twitch might wake the potentially very loud baby in our arms. There is the excruciating mind and muscle control to stifle a smile when our child earnestly tells us that he didn't pick up his toys because he got hit with a ball at school and he suffered brain damage. There are the tests of concentration when you are talking to a client on the phone and your child appears in the doorway with nothing but boots and a gun belt and acts out the final scene from *High-Noon*. There are the years on end without getting to sleep before midnight, because only when the kids are asleep and the phone isn't ringing can you get your chores finished. And then you're up at 6 to make lunches, get breakfast, shovel them off to school before you go to work. Religious students travel the globe to find tests of will, patience, deprivation, and selflessness. Parents live them every day. Anyone looking for a mysterious, contradictory, and fulfilling religion couldn't do much better than child-rearing; all the components are there - rituals, generosity, penance, guilt, desperate power. All punctuated by moments of transcendent clarity and unmatched joy. I'm just thinking out loud here, but I'm wondering, couldn't I get a tax exempt status for this? End of story. (laughter and applause)

So those of you who are moms can relate. You can say, "Yeah, been there, done that, got the t-shirt." And there are those of us who can better gain a perspective on what the role of a mom is, what she goes through, what we sometimes even forget, perhaps. But the goal is to experience God's love, and we cannot experience the fullness of love really until we fully decide to open our hearts and move in the direction of healing relationships and healing all our relationships fully. And some of us have healing to do with our relationships. Some of us have healing to do with our moms. There are people here today, or listening on the TV audience, that have healing to be done today with their mom.

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There are three words that I want to cover today, rather swiftly, and the first word is *recognition*. And the way I want to talk about recognition is in order to open our hearts fully, we have to have a recognition that every person, including our mothers, did or does the best they know how. Okay, you've heard that, "But our mother did the very best she knew how." And given her understanding, given her awareness, given her consciousness, given what she had to work with, given her history, her childhood, what was modeled for her, many, many factors, she did the very best that she knew how. And right now, if she is still with us, she is still doing the very best that she knows how in having a relationship with you. And recognition also includes not only that recognition that your mother has done the very best she could do, but the recognition that in a way that our mind may not at this moment be able to comprehend, it was perfect; the recognition that it was perfect. It was divinely ordained. It was divine appointment. It was my soul choosing this mom in all the universe to have the experiences that I needed to have that were brought to me and I to her and to have these opportunities for significant awakening, significant opportunities to understand, to make strides, to learn, to grow, to have shifts of understanding within one's own consciousness. And so when we don't have that kind of recognition, then we have resistance, and then we have separation. And we want to move beyond that sense of separation.

Now the next word actually is an r-word also, and that word is *reconciliation*, and this is the willingness to move inward and into our heart; open our heart and actually ask the Holy Spirit to go to work in our heart toward whatever is necessary in a powerful way to bring forth a healing or a connecting at a deeper level than you have previously known, regardless if our mother is here now or whether she has moved on. One mother who had experienced a kind of a gap with her son, having gone through a divorce, he was in his teens, sensed that there was a distance, that they didn't have the closeness that they had once had. So the mother addressed it with him, and he was now an adult, and she said, "Can we talk? I'd like for you to think of the things in which you feel I may have failed you as a mother in any way. I really want to come closer to you. And it's okay, I'm going to reach for a totally non-defensive position so that I can hear this. So I want you to make a list and in several days we are going to meet together." So they met, and he shared and made a list of things, and she found that it was really seemingly small things but were big to him because of the emotional impact of childhood and so forth. And so she heard them. But what he also did was he brought a list of the things he appreciated. That hadn't been in the plan, which she appreciated, certainly. And then after they shared that and worked their way through it and broke through the things that had seemingly stood in the way, and it was heard, and listened to, and honored, then the two of them wrote down the relationship they wanted to now create. And what were the steps that each one was willing to move toward doing to make that relationship a reality. Very, very powerful.

I have a dear friend, Mary Manin Morrissey, who has an interesting story of reconciliation regarding her mother, Dorothy; something that happened for her. Her mother had the experience of having her mother die when she was 3 years old, and so she never had the opportunity to have

the relationship with her birth mother, the way that she wanted to anyway. Her father raised her and her grandmother, but she just still missed her mother. And so she always wondered, “What would Mom say about this?” and “What would Mom say about that?” and “What would Mom say about dating?” and “What would Mom say about this problem I’m facing?” and “What would Mom say about the man I’m about to marry?” “What would Mom say?” and so forth.

So in the later years when she got involved more spiritually and began to practice these principles, she was praying for a way to be able to connect with her mother or reconcile that feeling, that gap, and have more of a sense of connectedness, even though she had moved on in a physical way. And so she asked the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit through prayer brought to her an idea, and the idea was that she should go to the gravesite of her mother, and she hadn’t been there in all her adulthood. She didn’t even remember where it was; she had to do a little research to find out, and it was like a thousand, 1500 miles away; it would take a long drive. So her husband drove her there, and she asked to be dropped off so she could have some space and some time. And she was there for several hours. And it was there that she just entered into a conversation. Mind you, she is now 70 years old. And she said that she was able to say all of the things that she had always wanted to say to her mother. And the beauty of it is that she felt a real connection that she had longed for her whole life, at 70 years old. How did that happen? It happens in your heart where all deep relationships with love take place. It doesn’t matter whether the person’s here or has moved on, it’s in your heart that those kinds of relationships can be birthed and born and a connection made. Just a side note, my dear friend, Mary Manin Morrissey, lost her mother, Dorothy. Dorothy passed on one day ago, one day ago, at the age of 92. And so we bless Dorothy, the one who went to the graveside at age 70. And we bless Mary and their whole family in that process.

We’re talking about recognition and reconciliation. Jesus demonstrated certainly this when He was able to be on the cross and look at those around him and say, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they’re doing.” From that level of consciousness one is not able to condemn; they know now what they’re doing, they don’t have the understanding. And for us there is nothing to condemn really among those who may seemingly have hurt or disappointed us because they didn’t know what they were doing. They did the very best that they could at the point of their level of understanding. I want to suggest to those of us that have mothers who are in the next dimension that we are not limited by space and time, that there is a connection that can be made.

There is a woman named Rachel Naomi Remen who writes wonderful stories and many different things. She is a great author. She is a medical doctor. She taught at Stanford as a physician. She taught at UCLA Medical School. Anyway, as she grew older she became what she called a Jewish-Buddhist mystic. She was raised in Judaism, fell in love with Jesus, and also began to study Buddhism. And what she found was there is a strain of truth that goes through all religions that really allows every person to experience and come to know that God loves each and every one of us. No matter where we may be, God loves each of us no matter what. And she has a

personal story to tell about her mother that was very profound to me. And she told it this way. She said, "My name is Rachel. I was named after my mother's mother. For the first 50 years of my life I was called by another name, Naomi, which was my middle name. When I was in my middle-40s my mother, who was at the time almost 85, elected to have coronary bypass surgery. The surgery was extremely difficult and only partly successful. For days she lay in a coronary intensive care unit in a major hospital. For the first week, she was unconscious, peering over the edge of life, breathing by a ventilator. I was awed by the brutality of the surgery and the capacity of the body to, even at great age, endure such a major intervention. And when she finally regained consciousness, she was profoundly disoriented and did not know who I, her only child, was. The nurses were reassuring. They called it intensive care psychosis. But as a physician I was concerned. Not only did Mom not know me, but also she was hallucinating. Although she did not seem to know my name, she spoke to me often and at length, mostly of the past and about her own mother, who died before I was born and who was regarded as a saint by all who knew her. She spoke of the many acts of kindness which her mother had done without even realizing she was being kind. Everyone knew her in this way. The shelter offered to those who had none, the encouragement and financial support which helped others, often strangers, to win their dreams. She spoke of her mother's humility and great learning and of the poverty and difficulty of life in Russia which it seemed she remembered only as a child. And she recalled abuses and hatreds that the family experienced, to which many others had responded with anger and her mother only with compassion. Days went by and my mother slowly improved physically, although her mental state continued to be uncertain. I remember one visit," and this is powerful, "shortly before she left the intensive care unit. I greeted her, asking if she knew who I was. She said, 'Yes, honey,' with warmth, 'you are my beloved child.' Comforted, I turned to sit on the only chair in the room, but she stopped me. 'Don't sit there, sweetie.' Doubtfully, I looked at the chair. 'Why not?' 'Rachel is sitting there,' she said. I turned back to my mother. It was obvious that she saw quite clearly something I could not see. Despite the frown of the special nurse who was adjusting my mother's IV, I went into the hall, brought back another chair, and sat down in it. My mother looked at me, and at the empty chair next to me, with great tenderness to both. Calling me by my given name for the first time, she introduced me to her visitor. 'Rachel,' she said, 'this is Rachel. Rachel, this is your grandmother, Rachel.' My mother began to tell her mother, Rachel, about my childhood and her pride in the person I had become. Her experience of Rachel's presence was so convincing that I found myself wondering why I couldn't see her. It was a little more than unnerving, and it was very moving. Periodically, she would appear to listen, and then would tell me of my grandmother's reactions to what she had told her. They spoke of people I had never met, in the familiar way of gossip; my great-grandfather, David, and his brothers and my great-granduncles, who were handsome and great horseman. 'Devils!' said my mother, laughing and nodding her head to the empty chair, 'Devils!' She explained to her mother why she had given me her name, her hope for my kindness of heart, and apologized for my father who had insisted on calling me by my middle name, Naomi, which had come from his side of the family. Exhausted by all the conversation, my mother laid back on her pillows and closed her eyes briefly. And when she opened them

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again she smiled at me and at the empty chair, and she said, 'I am so glad both of you are here now and finally able to meet each other. One of you will be taking me home.' And then she closed her eyes again and drifted off to sleep. It was my grandmother who took her home.

This experience, disturbing as it was for me at the time, seemed deeply comforting to my mother and became something I revisited again and again after she had died. I had survived many years of chronic illness and physical limitation. I had been one of the few women in my class at medical school in the 50s, one of the few women on the faculty at Stanford Medical School in the 60s. I was an expert at dealing with limitations and challenges of any kind. But I had not succeeded through loving kindness. And over a period of time I came to realize that despite my successes, I had perhaps lost something of way more importance. When I turned 50, I began asking people to call me Rachel, my real name, that I might learn to embody the loving kindness of my namesake." End of story.

The beauty of that story is the mothers are there always--teaching us, helping us, loving us. This Rachel, who accepted her name Rachel now, instead of Naomi, learned something in those moments about a loving kindness that she had not been expressing in her life up to that point and thrust her into a strong intention to be what her mother had held her to be and had named her after, which was her grandmother of tremendous loving, tenderness, and kindness. Powerful story.

So we're first here to recognize, second here to reconcile, and third we're here to *rejoice*. To rejoice in the mother that in all the universe we were given, the one and only mother for this lifetime. I think we just step into this day in a way to know that this is the woman that has shown you how to live and how not to live, ways to go and ways not to go, who you are and who you are not, and who has taught you love by means of both darkness and light. To these women, to the women who are on our journey who have taught us love in these many multitude of ways, who are innocent and loving and of God, we say bless you. Thank you. We rejoice in you.

And so it is. Be a light in the world. (applause)