

2013 - Issue One

The Mother's Mission

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Sally Clarkson, *The Mission of Motherhood: Touching Your Child's Heart for Eternity* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2004, 224 pages).

"I must choose to believe that it matters that I am choosing to be with my children and slowly build their character instead of pursuing a full time career where the results of my labor may be more immediately tangible."

Mothers who are ready to agree with this statement and who already struggle to believe this every day will find much that is helpful in Sally Clarkson's book. She outlines an intensely proactive approach to the formation of both the heart and mind of one's children, with an in-depth focus on the physical, spiritual, educational, and emotional milieu of the home environment.

While Clarkson herself maintains that her priority is and always will be her spouse and children, she is far from cocooning herself within the walls of her home. Together with her husband, she founded and still leads an active ministry to families and women in particular, which involves extensive national and international travel, speaking, and writing. The trick for her, she explains, has been to include her children in much of the ministry, as an enriching and educational experience.

There is a notably Protestant flavor to Clarkson's approach to spirituality, scripture, and evangelization. Additionally, the initial analysis of why a wife and mother should be so intensely focused on the home, rather than on an outside job, may not convince the most skeptical or career-minded women. However, Catholic and Protestant mothers who are already well-committed to the endeavor of "making home" can find many practical, down-to-earth suggestions for the formation of personal habits and methods that will improve both their personal and family life.

Of particular value are the chapters "Reaching Children's Hearts for Christ" and "Building Loving Relationships with Our Children." Vague good intentions have no place in Clarkson's home – she and her husband delineated a list of twenty-four specific goals for their children: how to learn to relate to authority and one another, how to work, the development of proper attitudes, the dispositions to strive for, how to make choices, and so on. In day-to-day life they refer to these "ways," as they correct and guide their children. Clarkson also suggests several "relationship principles" for mothers to keep in mind as they interact with their children. Though self-evident, they bear repeating as they can get lost in the scuffle of raising and caring for children: mothers should make time to be available to their children; they should remember to give generous amounts of affirmation and encouragement; they should strive (remembering to rely on the assistance of grace) both to accept their children for who they are, and to train them in the ways of properly relating to others.

Some mothers may struggle with the overall tone of this book. Sally Clarkson has several older children and teens, and although she always states that she has her own imperfections and bad days, she relates many anecdotes of how her children have responded well to her sacrifices and her hard work, many with explicit words of thanks to her for her presence, her care, and her time. She does relate the slight flaws of their characters, but overall the lives of her children are not in crisis and are stable. Although Clarkson is not making a guarantee that hard work produces good kids, there is a dangerous implication here that could cause some discouragement for those who have troubled children, and who are most likely already asking themselves what went wrong and what they did that made their children turn out this way. Also, mothers of small children, who as a rule tend to be less aware of the endeavors that others are pursuing on their behalf, may wonder in the absence of such explicit gratitude if the good they are doing is “making a difference” at all.

