

"REFLECTIONS ON MOTHERHOOD"

Gordon Pearce

Westminster Presbyterian Church
May 14, 2006 (Mother's Day)

Here in America, especially on Mother's Day, we think of a godly mother as one whose life serves as a role model for her children.

But such a mother can also live the sort of life that inspires a skeptical husband to start thinking about this business of Christian faith.

In my family, that's exactly what Marlise did.

We were married 49 years ago down in Southern California. I really lucked out.

Nine months earlier, over in the Swiss Alps, God had brought her into my life. Near the foot of the Matterhorn, his Spirit told her that I was going to be her husband. No kidding. She first laid eyes on me when I was coming down a hotel staircase in Zermatt. I don't even recall seeing her that morning. Yet she turned to her father and told him that I was the man she was going to marry. He told her she was crazy. Perhaps she was. But, as it turned out, she was also right.

When we got married back in 1957, Marlise had been a Christian for many years. But I was not. I had long been a happily contented non-believer – first as an atheist and then as an agnostic. So, at the very start of our life together, we were unequally yoked. By the way, thirty years later all three of our pastors in Solvang said they would never have agreed to marry us under those circumstances. Thankfully, a Swiss pastor, who retired in Hollywood, had been willing to do so.

Anyway, when our two children were born, Marlise brought them up in accordance with her Christian beliefs. That was fine with me. But I never let her intrude on my own tidy little agnostic world.

Marlise did not attend church in America, because her Swiss upbringing discouraged wives from attending without their husbands. But in 1974 she finally decided to go and hear the inaugural sermon of a new senior pastor at the La Jolla Presbyterian Church. Once again, God's Spirit entered our lives. But this time his target was me. He told my heart that I should not let her go alone. So, for the first time since childhood, I actually went to church. As it turned out, the new pastor was a straight-talking, tennis-playing man of God. I soon wanted to start talking theology with him.

That's exactly what he and I did for the next seven years. At the very outset, he encouraged Marlise to stay in the background. He wisely sensed that if she were

to talk with me about her Christian beliefs, the way she had done with the children, it would probably backfire. I would have resented it.

So for seven years Marlise continued being a Christian mother to our children. But now things were different. Her Christian life was on display to a husband who was finally willing to consider the faith. My mind was wrestling with the truth of the gospels. But my heart was being influenced by Marlise's daily exhibition of Christian faith – a faith that she patiently waited for me to embrace.

I might never have grabbed hold of Jesus' outstretched hand if it had not been for her terrific example of a Christian life. Her deeply held faith steadily seeped into the very essence of who I was. She had come to be a role model, not only for the children, but also for me.

When I finally accepted Jesus as my Lord, and believed in my heart that God raised him from the dead, her attitude could have been, "I told you so." But it wasn't. Instead, she rejoiced when I was baptized. She knew that I had finally gotten it right. And I knew that she had been a vital part of the process.