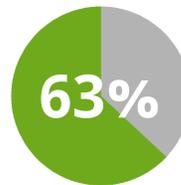


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**Love@3am**



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I am not an expert on motherhood.

*(After raising three boys, I would not **even** claim to be an expert on fatherhood! In fact, I know exactly when my illusion of fatherly competence flew apart: Midnight, March 26, 1979. It had been a long evening as Cathy and I worked on a big project in our little apartment. I handed her a bowl of ice cream and, as she collapsed on the couch, so did the amniotic sac around son #1. My first reaction: "Praise the Lord, the moment we longed for has come!" It was followed immediately by: "Lord have mercy! The moment we longed for **is now!!**" Ready or not. By the grace of God, we all survived my "or not." And not just the **first** "not ready," but all of the ones that kept routinely showing up with son #1. And the new ones with son #2. And yet new ones with son #3. Fortunately, there is much, much more to life than my own "not ready." But, I digress.)*

But I have been hanging around mothers for quite a few years now—after hanging inside one for most of a year before that! So, I have accumulated some thoughts about mothers and motherhood. And they can come to mind at the most unexpected times. Like this time... which began several weeks before Mother's Day.

I was reflecting on the life and work of a dear friend and colleague, Eleazar Ziherambere. Brother "EZ" was about to retire, and several of us would have the chance to say a few words. What would I say? As I flipped through a quarter century of mental pages, my first thought was... "Rats! Where did most of those pages go?!?" *(Fortunately, just as in my physical world, it turned out the "missing" pages in my memory were still there. They just needed to be ferreted out from their hiding places, underneath various and sundry pieces of mental furniture. But, I digress.)*



One theme that jumped out of the mental images was the patient persistence with which EZ serves people, especially "difficult" people. In my friend EZ, the love of God takes on bodily form in acts of good-humored, willing and amazingly patient service... even, and perhaps especially, to people who are hard to serve.

Love when it is hard.

That is also what comes to mind when I think of "motherly love." Oh, I also have the warm and cuddly images, the nurturing images, the delighting-in-her-children images. *(I know Facebook has become—quite rightly—a controversial topic, and a very mixed blessing. But one thing that smart phones and FB have made easier than ever before is that last item: I love to see quick snippets of our grandkids as their mothers and fathers delight in them!)*

But what really stays with me is the way mothers love when it is hard. Love at 3:00 am.

Watching Cathy work with our three, and then witnessing those boys' wives work with eight more like them, I have seen what love looks like at 3:00am... when you haven't had a good night's sleep for days, weeks... or months! When your baby is not being sweet and cuddly, but selfish, cranky and absolutely unreasonable. I have watched the patient, self-sacrificial

work it takes to help these tiny little aliens and savages that we call our beloved children adapt to life in a world that will not revolve around them. The process takes years. And yes, there are many tender and beautiful moments. And yes, the process is absolutely worth it. But none of that makes it easy. Love at 3:00am (and much of the rest of the day too, but clearly at 3:00am) is about denying yourself and patiently serving.



I think that is the kind of thing Jesus had in mind, not for mothers, but for all of us, when he called us to be a people famous for loving others. It is especially the life of love to which he called those who would exercise leadership. As he said in the midst of a struggle for power and prestige among his closest friends and followers: *You know that the leaders all around you love to lord it over their people, and people with authority flaunt it. Do not be like them. Instead, anyone who wants to lead must serve. And those who want to be first must become last of all and servant of all. For even I, the Son of Man, came not to be served but to serve others—even to the point of giving up my life to rescue you all* (Mark 10:42-45).

Mothers, thank you for your example. Thank you for loving—for serving—not only in the easy times, but especially, in the times when we were hard to love.

May the Spirit of God set us free to serve, not only when it is easy and rewarding, but also, and especially, when it is hard and costly. May we be inspired by the love we received at 3:00am, to be channels of that love to others, at all times.

In the love and service of Jesus,

Stan

