

## WFWP USA: Held and Holding, The Everyday Sacredness of Motherhood

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One of my favorite times of the day is the early morning when everyone is just waking up. Our two boys, 9 and 5 years old, jump out of bed and come join us in our room. Baby Sophia wakes up and starts babbling or calling out "mommy, mommy, mommy" so one of us will bring her over to join in the family cuddle. The bed gets very crowded, but these are a few precious moments when things feel very calm in the short minutes before we actually have to get up and start the morning chaos of getting ready for school and work. Here we are, all together.

Unfortunately, this can also occasionally be a very stressful time. Because every kid desperately wants to be next to mommy and sometimes everyone is unwilling to compromise. My husband is mostly left alone while they climb over me, fight with each other -

maybe someone ends up crying because they didn't get their favorite spot - and I am still half asleep getting poked and prodded by six knees and six elbows.

Perhaps your children are in a similar stage of life, when they are young and everything seems to revolve around mommy. Perhaps you recall that time which seems like ages ago, yet also just yesterday, when they were so small and could still fit in your arms.

Most of us don't remember this, but each one of us comes into existence within the embrace of our mother. That is, in the womb. In your entire life on the earth, there is no other time when you are so perfectly embraced and perfectly cared for. Many social scientists have noted that human beings are designed for relationships and connection. I believe that is because we come into existence in the context of a relationship and through a process of interaction. On a cellular level, there is an intimate connection between mother and child.

Thus, it is very natural, especially when children are young, to have an innate draw to mommy's love and care. Certainly the actual functions and duties of motherhood can be quite challenging. Pregnancy brings its own ups and downs, but when you're pregnant, the little baby never complains about what's for dinner. There are many days where I feel like I must be going crazy when three little voices are calling my name and must have my attention immediately or it's the end of the world. Sometimes parenting feels like a flawed system. Just when I feel like I have gotten a handle on how to support one child's current stage of emotional growth, the next one starts going through something new and unexpected and the same strategies don't work anymore.

In all of this, I think about this quote from Cristina Grenholm: "The careful creation of a child takes place inside the woman's body. She gives the child space and she is the space she gives it." When pregnant, your womb stretches and expands, your organs rearrange, so to give space for this new life. You could not say definitively where you end and where the baby begins as you are, in a way, sharing one body for these nine months. I make a space for new life, but I am also the space that is given.

I don't think this ends after the baby is born. As they are growing, learning new things, discovering who they are (also independent of me), I am creating a space for them. I invest myself into our home, our family, planning things we do together, making sure they have proper nutrition, and so many things to create an environment in which they can grow, and grow well. How many times have you picked out a book, a toy, or a food just because you know your child would like it? Just as in the womb which is a physical space for growth, comfort, and safety, all these seemingly external things communicate "you are loved."

At the same time I myself am the space that is given. In my voice, my presence, my notice, my response to their wants and needs, however seemingly small or insignificant. When my one-year-old babbles in this way, pointing at this thing, with this look on her face, how is it that I know what that means while other adults are baffled? That intimate connection is not something which can easily be measured or described in words. But just as I gave of myself, my own flesh and blood, so they could grow in my womb, I am giving of my own spiritual or internal essence for the sake of their continued growth as individuals.

So, I reflect on how I can both create an environment where God's love can flourish in my home and family and I myself be the space for their dynamic growth through my simple presence and existence. Dr. Hak Ja Han said once, "When all is said and done, a mother's parental heart reflects God's motherly heart."