

A Tribute to Mom

Mother's Day

Selected Scripture

Introduction

An article in *USA Today* caught my attention this past week. It was an article on Mother's Day.

It all began in 1907 when Anna Jarvis, of Philadelphia, wanted to honor her deceased mother by wearing a single white carnation, which was her mother's favorite flower. In 1914, after several years of letter writing campaigns and public meetings, Anna Jarvis convinced President Woodrow Wilson to declare the second Sunday in May a national holiday called, "Mother's Day".

After Mother's Day was officially selected, cards, candy, and flowers began to be sent to mothers like never before. It was interesting for me to learn that as the years went by, Anna Jarvis was rather upset by the explosion of mass-produced goods and profit making. She intended it to be a quiet day of reflection and thank-you's. She was especially upset by the ready-made greeting cards, which she called, "a poor excuse for the letter you are too lazy to write."ⁱ

In spite of her sentiment, in this year of 2003, more than 144 million cards will be sent or given to mothers all around the world. Some of them will be serious; some will be funny; some will be apologetic; some will even play jokes on very secure moms.

One such card has three moms pictured on the front. These women are sitting together, bragging about their grown sons. The first one said to the others, "You should have seen what my son did for me on Mother's day. He threw a big party at a fancy restaurant and even hired a big band to come and play."

The second woman said, "That's nice, but my son gave me an all-expense-paid cruise to the Greek islands."

Then, inside the card, the third woman said, "That's nothing! For the last three years, my son has been paying a psychiatrist one hundred dollars an hour, twice a week – and the whole time he talks about no one else but me."

The truth is, every card sent this year will have one thing in common – they will be unable to adequately communicate the words that need to be said to and about Mom.

I want to do something different today. I want to pause in our study of Romans and deliver a sermon on the subject of motherhood. I tried to find a mother somewhere in Romans, chapter 6, and I just could not find her. So, from various passages of scripture, and from the lives of several women, I want to reveal portraits of godly mothers. I hope our session this morning will be nothing less than a gift from God to every mother, and a special infusion of God's grace into the heart of every mom.

Portraits of Godly Mothers

Bathsheba – Proverbs 31 & II Samuel 11-12

We will begin with Proverbs, chapter 31. And, immediately, when I mention this passage, I can feel the stress rise in every woman's heart. This is the dreaded passage that most women would rather not look at. It is a picture of "the perfect woman".

One woman told me that every Mother's Day, her mother would leave church totally depressed. Her pastor preached an annual message from Proverbs, chapter 31, on "The Perfect Wife and Mother".

Scan the chapter to discover that this woman:

- verse 24 – makes all of her family's clothing, when you have trouble buying them fast enough to keep up (right?!);
- verses 16 and 24 – sells real estate and certain clothing for tradesmen, when you still cannot pull a yard sale together;
- verse 18 – never lets her candle go out at night, when you cannot wait to turn off the lights and fall into bed;
- verse 14 – exports food from afar, when you can never keep enough milk and bread in the refrigerator;

- verse 22 – is always dressed in fine linen and purple, when the only purple on you is grape juice from your child’s “sippee” cup.

That is as close as you get to Proverbs, chapter 31. And, you are probably thinking, “I thought you said today would be an infusion of God’s grace and encouragement, but you have us looking at that ‘perfect woman’ passage.”

Have you ever thought about the fact that this woman did all this stuff in Proverbs, chapter 31, because she had employees, called handmaidens? She managed a full staff that operated her vast and expansive enterprises. That one point is most often ignored.

My wife has often kidded with me and said, “Listen, honey, I’ll do everything in Proverbs, chapter 31, if you’ll hire some handmaidens for me!”

Today, however, as I take you to this text in Proverbs, I am really not interested in persuading any of you to dress in purple or sell real estate. The first portrait that I want you to see is of the woman who wrote Proverbs, chapter 31. This is the portrait that I find absolutely fascinating.

This woman would never have been chosen as the “Mother of the Year,” or the “Wife of the Decade”. God used an unlikely author to write a standard for her generation . . . and no woman is able to ever completely fulfill it.

God does that, by the way. He records His standard of excellence. For example, in I Peter, chapter 1, verse 16b, He says,

. . . You shall be holy, for I am holy.

In Titus, chapter 1, He writes of men who will accept the responsibility to be spiritual leaders in their homes and in the church,

. . . he must be blameless . . .

God does not write words such as these to discourage us, but to direct us. This is simply the direction we are to travel, by His grace and leadership. And, not one of us will ever say, “There, I’ve arrived.”

So, our first portrait is of the author of Proverbs, chapter 31, who was a ungodly woman that later, became a godly counselor. Her name was Bathsheba. And, to this day, her name conjures up thoughts of deception and infidelity.

Her fall into shame is recorded in II Samuel, chapters 11 and 12. You may remember that David, the king, was on his rooftop and saw Bathsheba carelessly bathing. Some believe she was

purposefully doing so in broad daylight. David called her to his palace, had relations with her, and sent her home.

Later, Bathsheba sent news to David that she was carrying his child. David immediately sent for her husband, Uriah, who was serving on the field of battle. Uriah had been a faithful warrior and friend of David’s. David offered him a vacation with his wife Bathsheba, which he refused. He would not even spend the night in his home, in honor of his fellow soldiers who were still fighting in battle.

David sent Uriah back to the field with a sealed note to his general that when the fighting grew dangerous, they were to pull back and leave Uriah unprotected so that he would be killed. The order was followed, Uriah was killed, and after a brief period of mourning, David married Bathsheba in a public ceremony.

Everything looked good on the outside. But Nathan the prophet came and confronted David’s sin. David repented, amidst great sorrow.

A little less than nine months later, a baby was born to David and Bathsheba. However, God judged them by taking the baby boy home soon after his birth. Both David, and evidently, Bathsheba, mourned their sin and never forgot this lesson.

God then acted with grace toward them and gave them another son. They named him Solomon, but he had other names as well. Jedidiah was one of his names and, in Proverbs, chapter 31, he has the name of Lemuel. Lemuel is simply a translation of the phrase, “belonging to God”.

Now, the advice Solomon wrote concerning the virtuous woman in Proverbs, chapter 31, was given to him by none other than Bathsheba, his mother.

Before we go any further, let me give a couple of timeless truths that are observations from this portrait.

1. First, it is possible to have failed early in life and yet, wield godly influence later in life.

Imagine, through the centuries, how many men have learned what to look for in a wife from Bathsheba. Imagine how many sons this once unfaithful wife has taught.

Consider the irony of Bathsheba’s counsel to Solomon to find a woman like this, when verse 11a records,

The heart of her husband trusts in her . . .

It is as if she is saying, “Take it from me, a woman who engaged in an illicit affair and became

an accomplice to deception and cover-up, including my silence as the order was given to have my own husband killed. If you want a woman you can trust, let me tell you what she is like.”

There is another timeless truth that comes from the life of Bathsheba.

2. Lifelong consequences do not erase the potential for a godly legacy.

Bathsheba had every right, as she grew older, to grow bitter. She could have blamed David, the king, for his lust and his invitation to the palace. She could have excused her sin and deception as something she could not help. She could have blamed God for the way her life had turned out.

The consequences for her sin were lifelong also. Centuries later, in Matthew, chapter 1, as Solomon is recorded in the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the inspired text of scripture says,

. . . David was the father of Solomon by Bathsheba who had been the wife of Uriah.

This sin was something Bathsheba would have wished to conceal. However, God displayed it so that every woman on earth would know that past sin does not erase the potential for godly living in the present. A shady past does not erase the potential for a godly legacy.

Bathsheba’s lasting legacy is found in verse 30 of Proverbs, chapter 31, and it is one of the most well known verses in all of the Bible.

Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised.

Widow of Zarephath – I Kings 17

There is another portrait I want to unveil for you. It is the portrait of a single mom who exercised great faith in God’s word.

As difficult as it is to raise children in a two parent home, the burden becomes nearly unbearable in a home where a mother is left to raise them on her own. This may arise as a result of the death of her husband or as a result of divorce, but either way, it is what most would call an almost impossible situation.

A chapter to study at length is I Kings, chapter 17, where the story of a widow unfolds. This is the story of a woman who was raising a son without the help or provision of a husband.

Look at verse 8, where we are informed that this widow lived in a place called Zarephath. Zarephath

is an interesting Hebrew word. The verb form literally means, “to refine”. When used as a noun, it refers to “an instrument of refining”.ⁱⁱ

What an appropriate name for the place where this widow lived, and nearly died, along with her son, as she is refined by her difficulty into a woman of great faith.

Elijah the prophet, announced a drought in the land. This was a judgment from God on the rebellious Israelites which resulted in several years of no rain. Caught up in this divine judgment was this widow, who was already facing the pressures of raising a son on her own.

Elijah is sent by God to the widow’s home for care and provision. When he arrives in Zarephath, he sees the widow gathering sticks. He asks her for a drink of water. Verses 11 and 12 of I Kings, chapter 17, pick up the drama.

As she was going to get it [the water], he called to her and said, “Please bring me a piece of bread in your hand.” But she said, “As the Lord your God lives, I have no bread, only a handful of flour in the bowl and a little oil in the jar; and behold, I am gathering a few sticks that I may go in and prepare for me and my son, that we may eat it and die.”

You cannot help but hear the solemn desperation in her words. For this widow, the resources had run out, but the demands kept coming. And now, a prophet of God is adding to her burden. As far as she was concerned, there was no way out of this alive.

Elijah then encourages her to believe his word and act in faith. Look at verses 13 through 16.

Then Elijah said to her, “Do not fear; go, do as you have said, but make me a little bread cake from it first and bring it out to me, and afterward you may make one for yourself and for your son. For thus says the Lord God of Israel, ‘The bowl of flour shall not be exhausted, nor shall the jar of oil be empty, until the day that the Lord sends rain on the face of the earth.’ ” So she went and did according to the word of Elijah, and she and he and her household ate for many days. The bowl of flour was not exhausted nor did the jar of oil become empty, according to the word of the Lord which He spoke through Elijah.

This, ladies and gentlemen, provides the secret of cooperation for us all. She, by faith, did everything

she could to obey the word of God, and God did everything He needed to provide a way out of an impossible situation.

Let me give a third timeless truth that comes from this portrait.

3. While God's method of provision will vary form generation to generation, His faithfulness will never fail.

No matter how difficult your environment; no matter how deep your needs are felt, God has not forgotten you. What you truly need, He will provide.

This boy would grow up with a mother who could testify over and over again about her obedience and God's faithfulness.

Abraham Lincoln, who himself was born to impoverished parents, once said, "He is not poor nor destitute who has had a godly mother!"

Ahinoam – I Samuel 20; Eunice – Acts 16 & II Timothy 1

A similar scene to this is played out in homes across our country. We could call these women "spiritual widows". This third portrait is of women who are married to unbelievers, yet exert godly influence in their homes.

These are women who may have knowingly violated God's command to not become unequally yoked with an unbeliever, or they became a Christian some time after they were married, or perhaps, they married a man who said he was a Christian, only to later discover that he was not telling the whole story. However, the story remains the same that these women are, on their own, trying to raise godly children, without the help or encouragement of their husbands.

An early example would be a woman that we know very little about. She is the wife of King Saul and her name was Ahinoam.

The only time we read anything about Ahinoam, in fact, is when Saul explodes in anger toward their son Jonathan. Saul says to him, in I Samuel, chapter 20, verse 30,

... You son of a perverse, rebellious woman!
...

This verse actually tells us a lot about Ahinoam. Since the context of Saul's explosion is related to Jonathan's friendship with David, it is obvious that Jonathan's mother also disagreed with Saul's hatred

for David. And, her godly view of Israel's future king caused no shortage of difficulty and heartache.

Another woman who exemplified this principle of holy living in spite of an unholy husband was Eunice. Eunice was the mother of Timothy, the young man who would be led to Christ by Paul and would later, become the pastor of the church in Ephesus.

The Bible says, in Acts, chapter 16, verse 1,

... And a disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek

In other words, Timothy's mother was a Christian and his father was an unbeliever.

In II Timothy, chapter 1, verse 5, we read Paul's insightful words of Timothy's upbringing.

For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois, and your mother Eunice, and I am sure it is in you as well.

Later, in this same Epistle, chapter 3, verse 15, Paul says that Timothy was taught the scriptures from a very early age.

Eunice, with the help of her mother, was committed to teaching Timothy the word of God. And later, when God brought Paul into their lives, he was able to take what they had already taught Timothy, and lead him to faith in Christ and mentor him in the faith.

Timothy would grow up to become the leading pastor in the church at Ephesus; a man of character of faith.

A fourth timeless truth comes from this portrait.

4. The absence of a godly husband does not automatically forfeit the potential of godly children.

There is no telling how difficult it must have been for Eunice.

There were, in fact, so many women who had come to faith while their husbands had rejected the gospel, they wondered if they could divorce their husbands and start over. Paul answered in I Corinthians, chapter 7, that they were to remain in their current marriage and sanctify their home and children, and even provide a godly influence over their unbelieving husbands.

Eunice illustrated what the apostle Paul referred to as the sanctifying influence of a godly woman in a home with an unbelieving husband.

A fifth encouraging timeless truth comes from the context of Eunice's life.

5. An ungodly husband cannot extinguish the testimony of a godly wife and mother.

Let me pause before closing, and warn every single man or woman:

- do not lower your standards;
- do not become attached to someone who is not interested in the things of God;
- do not settle for some pseudo-spiritual confession from a young or older person; such as, "I'll go to church, if you want me to," or "Yea, I believe in God."

Conclusion

Learn from the lessons of these women that we have just studied. Pull out these texts in the future and study them in more detail.

Listen, it is hard enough to raise children when both parents are committed believers. Amen? It is difficult enough to raise godly children in our ungodly culture, even when both husband and wife are committed to Christ!

There are so many challenging issues; so many decisions; so many things to disagree over with your spouse, right? Even if both of you want the same result, you will disagree over a multitude of things related to the process.

It is amazing how God consistently puts two different people together in a marriage, so that they ultimately, balance one another. One Christian author wrote, "Listen, if you two agreed on everything, one of you would be unnecessary."

God has a better idea. What the husband has, the wife does not have, and what the wife has, the husband does not have. Each needs what the other has and cannot progress without it.ⁱⁱⁱ

So, Moms, pray and work and labor and love and cherish and teach and discipline and pray some more and then, pray some more. It will take heaven to calculate the impact of a mother's prayers for her children. And, you will pray a lot of different prayers along the journey.

Chuck Swindoll wrote in his book, *The Finishing Touch*,

One of my favorite Mother's Day cards has a second grader printed on the front. He's dirty, his pants are torn and he's pulling a wagon full of toys. Underneath, it read,

"Mom, I remember that little prayer you used to say for me every day . . .," and inside, "God help you if you ever do that again!"

My mother prayed that same prayer!

Remember this, while you will be unfaithful at times, and unspiritual at times, and unholy at times, God will remain faithful. In fact, as I John, chapter 1, verse 9, tells us,

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

God is the perfect Father; the perfect Parent; His Son is the perfect Husband; His Spirit is the perfect counselor, teacher, and comforter. Great is *His* faithfulness.

ⁱ USA Today (May 8, 2003), p. 15a.

ⁱⁱ Charles Swindoll, "A Family Album," Insight for Living, (1984), p.21.

ⁱⁱⁱ Anthony Evans, Guiding Your Family In A Misguided World (Focus on the Family Publishing, 1991), p. 16.