

May 14, 2006

Happy Mother's Day! - For many across this country – this is a happy day. Celebrating the love for our mothers or grandmothers that have touched our lives. If you trace back the US origin of Mother's Day, we find a Methodist woman named Anna Jarvis. She spent about forty years advocating this holiday. Anna loved her mother – the daughter of a Methodist Pastor, because of her evangelical piety and practice, her lifelong work in Sunday School, her graces and her love for the Word of God. So Anna started celebrating her mother's life every year and eventually started celebrating all mother's on the second Sunday in May.

Anna started a huge letter writing campaign and got backing from large organizations and other notable people. In 1912 the Methodist Church formally embraced the holiday at its General Conference. From there, many governors and senators started backing this movement and it eventually found its way to Woodrow Wilson's desk and was recognized as a holiday in 1914. Of course, FTD and the National Association of Greeting Card Manufacturers were formed around this same time.

When Mother's Day was started 92 years ago, everyone rejoiced. Unfortunately, there are many today that don't have wonderful memories of their mothers or step-mothers. They may be still working on these issues or have gotten past them, but it is a fact of today's society that not every family unit has been great. And I am not even talking about mothers-in-law – but more about that later.

Let's look at some of the mothers that have helped us get to where we are today.

Let's start with Eve – as in Adam and Eve - The Bible teaches that Eve is the mother of all of us. She had a rocky start with that apple and all – but what about her first two kids? One was jealous of the other so he killed him. The first family was dysfunctional – how do we have a chance?
(Genesis 4:8)

Let's look at the next major mother in the bible – Sarah. Sarah was married to a man named Abraham. When Abraham was 75, God chose him and Sarah to be the parents of a great nation – which was the beginning of the Jews. However, Abraham & Sarah didn't have any kids. It is hard to be the parents of a great nation – without any kids. And since Sarah was too old to have kids, she figured she would just help God out and gave her maid to Abraham to have a kid with. Now this might sound weird, but that was the custom for a family with no kids. So Abraham and Sarah's maid – Hagar – had a son named Ishmael.

Then when Sarah was around 90 years old, God finally blessed them and she had a son named Isaac. Ishmael and his mother were put away from Abraham and Sarah because of jealousy – but since God promised Abraham that his line would be blessed, Ishmael was also blessed and his mother was told he would also be the father of a great nation. This is where the Muslims get their start. So because Sarah and Abraham wanted to help God out with his promise, we have had thousands of years of fighting in the middle east between Muslims and Jews. Okay, so the second major family was dysfunctional.

(Genesis 16-17 and 21:1-7)

Next? How about Moses' mother – she was scared that Moses was going to be killed by the Pharaoh because all baby boys were to be put to death. Shortly after he was born his mother put him in a basket and floated down the river. The Pharaoh's daughter happened to see the basket floating there and took Moses as her son. Now here is the irony – Pharaoh's daughter had Moses' birth mother nurse him until he was older then his mother took him back to Pharaoh's daughter! You can get dizzy just trying to follow along.

(Exodus 2:1-10)

Okay, so three of the major families were dysfunctional, but the next one has to be normal right? Let's look King David. He is considered favored by God – He married a woman named Bathsheba – But so he could marry her, he sent her husband out to war so he would be killed so King David could marry Bathsheba. Their first child died, but they did have another son named Solomon. (2Samuel 11:14 – 12:25)

Let's jump to the New Testament – Maybe things will get better there.

There was this couple named Zechariah and Elizabeth. They were up there in age – and didn't have any kids. Zechariah was a priest. He went in to the inner sanctuary of the temple – where he saw an angel that told him his wife was going to have a son named John and this son will be great in the eyes of the Lord. But here is the kicker – because he doubted the angel, Zechariah was struck mute until John was born. To top it off, when John got old enough, he went into the wilderness with wild beasts and he lived on a diet of locust and honey. (Luke 1)

Okay – one last try – let's look at this guy named Joseph. He was engaged to this young lady named Mary. It was going fine – they were probably in love, making plans – sending out invitations, choosing place-settings, interviewing DJ's – that kind of stuff – getting ready for the wedding – and, as was their custom, they didn't have a physical relationship until after they were married. Then one day Mary says, oh by the way Joseph, I'm pregnant. I'm still a virgin, but I am pregnant. Talk about a rocky start to that relationship!

Well – we just looked at a few of the major families in the Bible. At first glance, these appear to be some pathetic families. Every one of them had some major issues.

So where does that leave us? Well, I feel that we can learn something from all of these dysfunctional families. Each and every one of them had their problems. But by perseverance, and God's love and grace in their lives, things did get a little better.

Let's take a look and see what happened in these stories –

Adam and Eve ended up having more kids without any problems.

Sarah and Abraham – well they still had some issues but their son Isaac grew up fine and had a son named Jacob whose name was later changed to Israel – which should sound familiar to everyone here. This is who the country, Israel, is named after.

Moses – well, he grew up a little confused – the Pharaoh's Daughter was his mom – but his biological mother was a slave – as all of the Hebrews were at that time. But Moses went on to free the Hebrews from their slavery and had a relationship with God like nobody else had in the Old Testament. Moses was actually responsible for the first five books of the Old Testament.

King David and Bathsheba! They are an entire sermon series all in themselves. But their son, Solomon – grew up to be the wisest King Israel had ever known. He also built the very first temple to God.

How about John the Baptist? Okay, so his diet of locust and honey might not sound that appetizing, but he was there fulfilling the prophecies in scripture – He was the one chosen by God to come before the Messiah and prepare the way of the Lord.

And Mary and Joseph – well, as we know, Jesus turned out okay. Dying for our sins – as John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

What a great message of hope we find through all of these scriptures. Even the most broken families can still find healing and goodness through God's grace. I'm pretty sure all of these people were influenced to some degree by their mother – and what a tough role a mother has. Did any of you go through that time in your life when you were “too grown up” to need your mom? For those of you with grown kids, did they ever go through that? I know I was like that. Too much of an adult to “need” my mom. Good thing I outgrew that – it must be hard on mothers to have their kids push them away like that. But we see from these scriptures that good can come out of the most dysfunctional families. So if you are worried about your kids, or grandkids – pray for them – trust that God will touch them.

I don't know about you, but I wasn't the best kid on the block. Not many of us were. But it is good to hear stories of the ones who were good. For example, The Book of Ruth is one of my favorite stories about the love for a mother – and not just a mother- but a mother-in-law of all things! There was a woman from Bethlehem named Naomi. She was married and had two children. They all moved to a place called Moab one day. Her sons married Moabite women: Ruth and Orpah (not Oprah!)

One day Naomi's husband died and about 10 years later her sons died. So all three ladies were alone. Naomi decided to head back to her own people in Bethlehem. She told her daughters-in-law to go back to their own families because they would be accepted and life would be okay for them. After a lot of discussion, Orpah agreed – but Ruth didn't. Now some of us might consider Ruth stubborn and disrespectful because she didn't listen to Naomi like Orpah did.

But Ruth knew that Naomi was alone and needed all the help she could get. It wasn't going to be easy for Naomi. So Ruth walked away from an easier life for herself and told Naomi, "Where you go, I will go – your people shall be my people – your God, my God – where you die, I will die.

Imagine, giving up everything: your own family, your own friends, your way of life, to be with your mother-in-law – to love her like your very own mother, to accept her way of life. Done out of love to help her with the struggles that face her – even so much as going out into the fields all day long, looking for a little bit of grain that was left behind when the fields were harvested.

Ruth could have easily gone back to be with her own family – but accepted Naomi as her own mother and was willing to face the challenges with her. Through many struggles, Naomi and Ruth prospered, Ruth got remarried and became the Great-grandmother of King David.

So even though mothers are "indestructible" from a kid's – or man's point of view - they sometimes need that extra help – like Naomi did – or that extra special attention – a thank you – a hug. In my opinion, mothers have the hardest job around -

Erma Bombeck put it this way:

When the good Lord was creating mothers He was into His sixth day of over-time when the angel appeared and said, "You're doing a lot of fiddling around on this one."

And the Lord said, "Have you read the specs on this order? She has to be completely washable, but not plastic, have 180 moveable parts, run on black coffee and leftovers, have a lap that disappears when she stands up, a kiss that can cure anything from a broken leg to a disappointed love affair, and six pairs of hands.

The angel shook his head slowly and said, “Six pairs of hands...no way!” “It’s not the hands that are causing me problem,” said the Lord, “It’s the three pairs of eyes that mothers have to have. One pair that sees through closed doors when she asks, ‘What are you kids doing in there?’ when she already knows; another here in the back of her head that sees what she shouldn’t but what she has to know; and, of course, the ones here in front that can look at a child when he makes a mistake and say with her eyes, ‘I understand and I love you’.”

God went on to say, “She also has to heal herself – she can’t get sick, and feed a family of six on one pound of hamburger.”

The angel bent over and ran his finger across the cheek. “There’s a leak”, he said.

“It’s not a leak”, said the Lord, “It’s a tear.”

“What’s it for?”

“It’s for sadness, disappointment, pain, loneliness, happiness, love and joy.”

This Mother’s Day – let’s remember our mothers, our grandmothers or any other woman in our lives that have touched us or our family in a positive way. Let us pray for them and thank God for blessing us with the love and memories we will always carry.

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