

MESSAGES TO INSPIRE MOTHERS

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1. REBEKAH, A MARVELOUS MOTHER

Nathan Ausabel tells of the Jewish couple with 9 children who went to the Rabbi to get a divorce. When the question of custody came up the wife said she wanted 5 of the children and he could have 4. The husband said, "Why should I have only 4? You take the 4 and I'll take the 5." In order to resolve the conflict the Rabbi suggested that they live together one more year and have another child. Then they could divide with an equal share of the family. The couple agreed to the plan. But a year later the man came back to the Rabbi and said the plan did not work. The Rabbi asked, "Why? Didn't your wife give birth?" "Yes," he said, "But you see, it was twins." They were right back where they started, and even Solomon in all his wisdom could not divide an odd number of children evenly.

Twins can be a problem. Luis Palau, the Billy Graham of South America, was worried sick when his wife gave birth to twins in 1963. The doctor told him there was a very strange heart beat and they may loose the child. They did not know she had two babies in her. Palau had to make the decision that if necessary they let the baby die to save his wife, but it turned out to be a day of joy as the irregular heartbeat was really the regular heartbeat of two. What a scare these twins gave him. Twins have scared people all through history, and in many cultures they have been immediately killed. Christian missionaries have labored hard to convince natives that twins are not an evil omen, and today there are many healthy twins where once they were killed.

This does not mean that twins are no longer a problem. They are often double trouble, and because of their potential for mischief Walt Disney has been able to make some of his greatest movies about mischievous twins. It is not all fiction either, for there are numerous true stories about the complexity of raising twins. One mother heard both laughing and crying coming from her twin's bedroom at bath time. She went to see what was the matter and the laughing twin pointed to his weeping brother and said, "Grandma has given Alexander 2 baths and hasn't given me any at all."

The problems get greater as they get older. Jean and Auguste Piccard, the famous Swiss twins, decided to have some fun with a barber. Jean went in for a shave and complained that he had the most annoying beard in the world because it grew back so fast. The barber assured him that his trusty razor would keep it off for 24 hours or he would shave him free. Jean let him scrape away and left. Several hours later Auguste came in with a heavy stubble and collected his free shave. He left the barber pondering the most amazing beard he had ever seen.

The reason I share these twin stories is because we are looking at the mother of the most famous twins of the Bible. Rebekah was the mother of Jacob and Esau. These two brothers were as different as night and day. They had the same parents and the same environment, but they were opposites and totally different in personality, and in the way they responded to the will of God. It is superficial to expect all children in a family to be alike. Even in a godly family there will be radical differences. I once had a family in my church where the best kids and the worst kids were from that same family. Two of them ended up in the ministry and another broke the parents hearts with unbelievable ungodliness. This can be tough on parents, but it has to be accepted as a fact of life that the best parents have no guarantee that their children will follow their values.

Rebekah was a great mother, but her twins sometimes became as famous for their folly as for their faith. Some twins become much alike for all of life. The most famous example in our time is Ann Landers and Abigail Van Buren. They are both famous counselors, and their advice columns are very much alike. Other twins do not follow the same pattern at all. One of the 12 Apostles was a twin. Thomas called Didymus was a twin. Didymus is Greek for twin, and Thomas means twin in Aramic. We have no idea about his twin. He may have been an enemy of Christ for all we know. Twins can be opposites and that is what we see in the twins of Rebekah. They were opponents.

Rebekah favored Jacob and her husband favored Esau, but in the end mom's boy became the man God used. Mothers often are the key persons in determining the success of their children. Rebekah Bains Johnson, whose grandfather was a Baptist pastor, and who came from a long line of pastors going back to Scotland, was determined to make her son a great politician. Her father was a politician and she married a politician, and she dreamed that her son could be a great one. She had 4 other children, but she favored Lyndon and pounded it into him that he was destined for leadership. She kept him reading the books and writings of Thomas Jefferson. She guided him through college and on to Washington, and eventually to become the 35th President of the United States.

Like the Rebekah of the Bible she was obsessed by her need to favor one son and do

all she could to promote him. This led to her other son, Sam Houston Johnson, being hurt. He worked for Lyndon and went to law school, but he never practiced. He never got equal time and encouragement from his mother, and that made a world of difference in their careers. A mother motivating her children makes a world of difference. We want to look at Rebekah as a mother, and try to learn from lessons from her life.

I. HER MARRIAGE.

Ideal motherhood always begins with being a good mate. We have looked at this theme before and have concluded that the best thing any mother can do for her children is to love their father, just as the best thing a father can do is love their mother. Marriage comes before children, and it is the foundation that must be well laid before the family is built upon it. In spite of Rebekah's deception of Isaac we have to recognize she was one of the most loved wives in the Bible. Isaac is the only one of the Patriarchs who did not take a second wife or a concubine. In a culture where polygamy was perfectly acceptable Isaac was a one-woman man. Rebekah had to be some kind of woman to keep a man a monogamist in that day. He never saw Rebekah until the day he met her and married her, but from that day he loved her, and only her, for the rest of his life. She also was faithful to him for all of her life.

Here was a couple who had the world's shortest wedding. Gen. 24:67 says, "Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he married Rebekah. So she became his wife, and he loved her..." Here was a primitive wedding without benefit of clergy or premarital counseling. There was no courtship and no vows are recorded, and yet they made a commitment for a lifetime. The old system of arranged marriages could work because people were committed to love the one they married. They did not fall in love and then get married, but they married and then grew in love.

The modern idea of selecting a mate by the computer is not as far fetched as it may seem. If two people are brought together with all of the values and qualities that each likes, and they are willing to make the commitment of the ancients to love the one they married, these could turn out to be marvelous mates. The odds are better than the superficial way many do it now. They feel sexual attraction, and their only commitment is to keep their relationship going as long as their hormones keeps pushing them in that direction. We could learn from the ancients that the most important commitment on the human level is to love the one you marry. I've never met a couple who has so many problems that they could not be solved by this single principle.

Isaac loved Rebekah in spite of the problems they had. The first problem was that she was barren. For 20 years Isaac waited for her to have a child. The culture left him free to take another wife, but he never did. He waited and prayed, and God finally answered that prayer, and Rebekah became a mother. They are the only couple in the Bible who are caught making love in public. Gen. 26:8 says that King Abimelech looked down from a window and saw Isaac sporting with Rebekah. We know this does not mean they were playing tennis. Isaac was caressing and fondling Rebekah, and that is how the king knew she was not his sister, but his wife.

The point is, Rebekah was a fun and loving partner. Abraham and Sarah had their fights over Hagar and Ishmael. Jacob and Rachel had their fights over Leah. But in spite of Rebekah's deceit of Isaac there is not one word of dispute between them. They had one of the most ideal marriages in the Bible, and possibly the most ideal. We need to keep her marriage in mind when we look at the negative action of her deceit. She did what she did in all good conscience. It was not to do any harm to her husband, but to assure that the son that she knew was most worthy would be blest. God confirmed her choice and blest Jacob. It seems that mothers tend to have a degree of insight into the spiritual potential of their children. Abraham leaned toward Ishmael and Isaac leaned toward Esau, but the mothers chose Isaac and Jacob, and these were the two that God chose to be in line to the Messiah. Mother's and God seem to be on the same wavelength. Father's look for the more macho type, but mothers look for the spirit that is more willing to follow God's leading.

I have to admit that until I looked at Rebekah through the eyes of Isaac I had some negative feelings about her. I had the same feeling I had toward the wife of Job until I discovered that Job loved her in spite of her faults, and stuck by her, and did not demean her. So also, we see that Isaac has not a bad word for his wife, and that is the final authority in judging a wife. If Isaac loved her and treated her like a queen, then it really does not matter what I think. She was a good wife, and that is where ideal motherhood begins. Being a good wife starts before marriage. Rebekah as a young woman was enthusiastic about serving the needs of others. Motherhood and servant-hood are linked as one. We see her serving spirit when Abraham's servant came looking for a wife for Isaac. She was the one who volunteered to draw water for his camels. That was the sign that she was God's choice for a good wife. Find a girl who cares about kindness and helpfulness and you are on the right track to a good marriage and good motherhood.

Tally Rand said of a young lady of the court, "She is intolerable, but that is her only fault." Mark Twain once saw a mother with young twins and said, "This one is a girl isn't it?" She replied, "Yes." Twain said, "And is the other one of the contrary sex?" The mother replied, "Yes, she's a girl too." Rebekah was not a contrary person. She took opposite sides from Isaac from which twin was to be favored, but as we will see this was not a serious conflict with Isaac. He found Rebekah to be a marvelous wife, and he was a happy man in his marriage. He considered Rebekah a marvelous mother. So let's go from her marriage relationship and look more carefully at-

II. HER MOTHERHOOD.

Rebekah was a good wife and a good mother, but one of the facts of life is that good mothers do not necessarily have good children. Her first-born was Esau, and he married a couple of Hittite women. Gen. 26:35 says, "They were a source of grief to Isaac and Rebekah." Jacob did not marry Hittites, and they were please with him. Isaac had to be pleased with the clever way Rebekah worked out a plan to give the blessing to Jacob. Has Esau been the one to inherit the riches of Isaac it would have all gone to the Hittites. But by her cleverness Rebekah saw to it that it would go to the people of Israel instead. Sometimes husbands are happy that their wives win in a conflict, for in their hearts they know the wife is right. This seems to be the case here.

Rebekah still loved her rebel son, and so she sent Jacob away lest he fight with Esau and she lose both in one day. This is part of motherhood. They have the pain of loving one who is careless and indifferent to God and His will. Love is the cause of much of the suffering of the world, for mothers still love those sons who go astray like Esau. It is a paradox, but it is true that the greatest virtue in life is also the cause of so much pain. If mothers did not love rebel children, mountains of pain would be eliminated, but the mountain stands as testimony to the pain of love. If God did not love the rebel race of mankind, He would not have had to suffer the loss of His Son, and Jesus would not have had to die on the cross. It was all because God so loved the world. God suffers because he loves, and so do mothers.

Gipsy Smith was one of the great evangelists in the history of England and America. He tells of the price his mother paid because she loved her children. His sister was sick and they called for a doctor. When he examined her he said she had small-pox. He ordered her to get out of town so it did not spread to others. They set up a tent outside of town where the mother and 4 other children stayed. They put the sick girl in a wagon 200 yards away. Soon one of the boys got the pox and was sent to live in the wagon. One day the mother also got the pox. She had to go through great suffering as a mother as she cared for her sick children while she was sick herself. Her great love made a life long impression on Gipsy, for he learned that suffering and love go together. If you love deeply, you will suffer deeply.

The way to escape suffering is to never love, for the more you love the more you suffer. Just ask Jesus. But what a pathetic world it would be if nobody loved enough to suffer. Motherhood would not be exalted role as it is if there were no cost to it. It is the suffering of mother love that makes it the noble thing that it is. Show me a mother who does not care that her children are rebels, and I will show you a mother, who by her lack of suffering, is part of the problem, and not part of the answer. Suffering love is the answer. It is God's answer, and though it does not solve all problems, it has the potential to do so if rebels will respond to suffering love.

Motherhood is linked to servant-hood, and servant-hood is linked to suffering, and the result is that good mothering is linked to Christ-likeness. Motherhood incorporates both the joy and the pain of the cross. Motherhood begins with both the pain of birth and the joy of new life. Pain and pleasure, burden and blessing are combined in becoming a mother. Children are also both a pain and a pleasure in the marriage. They can add so much joy to a couple's life, but they can also add so much pain. Many couples report that the happiest time in their lives are before children are born and after they grow up and leave the home. But people go on having children, because they are the greatest potential for the future. Children give hope that the future can be filled with the blessing of God, and that is why motherhood is so honored. It is the path by which mankind reaches out for God's best.

The Israelites were condemned to die in the wilderness, and yet they went on having children. It was because they knew God had a future for His people, and their children became the children of God who entered the promised land. Motherhood was the key to God's plan being fulfilled, and that is why motherhood will always be exalted. Had Isaac

and Rebekah given up after 20 years of trying to have a child, Jacob would not have been born. And Jacob was the father of the twelve tribes of Israel. He was crucial to God's plan. They never gave up and endured the pain of it all, but out of that pain of waiting, and then of motherhood, came the greatest of blessings, and God changed all of history through them.

Rebekah was an ideal wife and marvelous mother, but that did not mean she was a hundred percent successful. Esau was a rebel and caused her much grief. But she learned to concentrate on what she could do for the best results. She focused on being a good wife and she focused on being a good mother. And this meant she would specialize in seeing that the full potential of her most likely son would be realized. Nobody can do everything and no mother can be everything. She has to learn to focus on what she can do and not become so fragmented in going in all directions. Dr. James Dobson wrote, "I believe more divorces are caused by mutual over commitment by husbands and wives than all other factors combined. It is the number one marriage killer."

Good wives and mothers are those who know they cannot do all things, and so they specialize in doing well what they can do to please their mates and benefit their children. Let us learn from Rebekah to choose some things we give top priority to in order to be the best wives and mothers we can be. If your husband is happy with you, as Isaac was with Rebekah, and one or more of your children are going in a way that pleases God, as was Jacob, then you are succeeding, like Rebekah, as a marvelous mother.

2. REBEKAH A MARVELOUS MATE AND MOTHER

Annie Taylor was the first person to ever go over Niagara Falls in a barrel and lived to tell about it. That was in 1901. In 1932 Pearl S. Buck was the first woman to receive a Nobel Prize in literature. In 1979 Susan B. Anthony became the first woman to ever appear on a United States coin. There are whole books written about women who were the first to do specific things. On this Mother's Day we are going to focus our attention on the first woman in history that we have any record of who gave birth to twins.

Rebekah in giving birth to her two boys Jacob and Esau became one of the most unique mothers ever, for her two boys changed the course of history. In fact, her boys represent the two great forces of human history-good and evil. Jacob was the line to the Messiah, and Esau was the line to Herod the Great, who tried to kill the Messiah as a child. Her twins each took one of the two main roads in life. One took the way of doing the will of God, and the other took the way of defying the will of God. Rebekah then represents both sides of motherhood: the success and failure of motherhood.

We often only look at the positive side of motherhood, but the Bible gives us a balanced picture. The same mother who bears a child who goes on to produce the 12

tribes of Israel, and the very people of God, also bears a child who becomes a rebel who marries pagan wives and produces a people who are great enemies of the people of God. Here is a mother who can be praised for being a mother of the best, even though she bore one who was the worst.

It is important that we see this, for I have a hunch there are millions of mothers who are made to feel rotten and guilty on Mother's Day by sermons that exalt mothers to the heights of sainthood. This can be disturbing to mothers who are like Rebekah. They can point to their Jacobs and feel proud, but they also have their Esaus who have gone a different route, and they feel hurt, bitter, and frustrated. They have done their best, but all of their children are not what they wish, and what they have prayed for. They feel guilty when good mothers are portrayed as always having all their children as wonderful examples of good and godly people. It is a comfort that the Bible gives mothers a break, and portrays one of the great mothers of Hebrew history as one who also had failure, and a truly rotten kid. Mothers need to know they can still be good and even great mothers, even though they have failed to guide all their children in the way they ought to go.

Now I must confess it has taken me years to choose Rebekah for a Mother's Day message because I had some negative feelings about her as a mother and a wife. Our text here in Gen. 27 portrays her as deceiving her husband Isaac, and of aiding her son Jacob to lie and deceive his father too. Who needs TV to lead a child astray with a mother like this around? This has been my feeling over the years. But then I began to study the facts that the Bible reveals about Rebekah. I discovered I was judging her unfairly, and that I had a prejudiced attitude toward this unique woman based on a narrow view of this one event in her life. I did the same thing with Job's wife because she told him to curse God and die. Then I discovered that Job never rejected her, but she was his precious partner for life. The same is true for Rebekah. Jacob never rejected her.

In almost every Mother's Day sermon I have ever preached one of the qualities that most stands out in the great mothers of the Bible is that they were first of all loving and loyal wives. A mother's first obligation is to help her children love God, and the second is to love their father on earth, and they do this by being a good wife to the father. I always thought that Rebekah got an F in this department because of this story of deception in Gen. 27. But then I discovered the facts that make Rebekah stand out as one of the most marvelous and precious wives in all of the Bible. Let me share the facts, for maybe you have the same prejudiced attitude toward her as I have had.

Isaac was 40 years old when he married Rebekah. He stayed with her for 20 years, even though she was barren. Finally, when Isaac was 60 years old she gave him the twins of Jacob and Esau. Isaac lived to be 180, and so he was married to Rebekah to 140 years. Most marriages do not last that long because people don't last that long. Today the 75 anniversary is the diamond anniversary. What would it be for the 140th anniversary? Maybe uranium would be worthy, but I don't think we need to be concerned about it. But here is the point: Show me any other couple in the Bible who were married this long and yet they kept the vows of keeping themselves to each other as long as they both lived.

They are the most unique couple in the Bible. It was an age of universal polygamy,

and yet they were monogamous. Their culture and environment favored multiple partners. Isaac's father Abraham had the multiple partnership, and so did both of Isaac's sons. They were the only monogamous couple in their time. Through 20 years of barrenness they struggled, and through this time of deception, and yet these two never stopped being committed to each other. They are an example to married people in all cultures and all times. Isaac was a one woman man married to a one man woman. From the wedding to the grave they were faithful to each other. This is rare even among the great people of the Bible. This helps us see this one negative incident in the light of the bigger picture. They were so committed that this negative event did not hurt them in any permanent way.

We need to see also that in Gen. 25:23 Rebekah was told by God that her first born would serve the younger son. She knew it was God's will that Jacob be the blessed son, and so what she did was to help her failing husband do what was right and best for the kingdom of God. If you read Gen. 28 you will discover that Isaac did not rebuke Rebekah, nor did he take a concubine unto himself to hurt her. He respected her judgment and went along with her plan completely, and he blessed Jacob again and send him off to find a wife among the daughters of Rebekah's brother Laban.

There is no hint of Isaac being offended with his life partner. In fact, he was so pleased with the wisdom of Rebekah that even Esau saw it and decided to conform to some degree to his mother's wishes, and he went off and married an acceptable wife from the line of Abraham. In isolation Gen. 27 makes Rebekah look bad, and it gives the impression of her being a bad wife and mother. But when you see the whole story it reveals her to be a wonderful wife and marvelous mother. If we learn nothing else, let us learn not to judge anybody by any isolated incident in their lives. By doing this to Rebekah I have had negative feelings about her, and it was foolish for Isaac never had these feelings. He loved her and respected her judgment.

She is an ideal example of the first principle of motherhood. She was a loyal and loving wife. Children need to see this in a mother in order to be good mates themselves. A mother who is a good mate will give her children the foundation for building a good marriage themselves. This does not mean the children of all good mates will never ruin their own marriage, for this happens all the time, but it will not be because they lacked a good example. Rebekah gets an A for her role as a good example. God knew all along when He guided Abraham's servant to choose Rebekah to be the wife of Isaac. He was the unique son of promise and needed a special wife, and Rebekah was God's choice for him.

God's plan to bring His son into the world depended a great deal upon sensitive mothers. Mothers seem to have a greater sense of which of their children are most likely to be God's choice. Abraham would have given his blessing to Ishmael, and Isaac would have given his blessing to Esau. But it was the mothers' choices who were the ones God chose. A mother's choice is more likely to be the choice of God. Isaac was in favor of Esau because he was so macho. He was rough and tough, and a man of nature. He was a mighty hunter who could live off the land in its wild state. Jacob was more of the domesticated type. He had his garden and animals, and was more of a home body. He was gentle and tender, and far more romantic than Esau. He was mom's favorite, and God's

as well, for God's Son was going to be more like Jacob than Esau.

God uses both types of men, for the greatest man of the Old Testament was John the Baptist and he was the rough and tough man of nature. God uses all types to play a role in His kingdom, but the star role goes to the Star of Jacob, who was the Messiah. He would be more like a mother's favorite. Mary was the chief influence in the life of Jesus, for Joseph died and she raised Him as a single parent.

God says some powerful things about mothers in His Word. There is just no escaping the evidence. They are the key tools God uses to determine the course of history. The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world is not a superficial cliché, but is supported by God's revelation, and no where is it seen more clearly than in the life of Rebekah. Let's look at some of the details of her life that are almost trivia that reveal just how a mother can be used of God to make a difference in the world. First we see-

I. REBEKAH WAS A GOOD COOK.

This whole story revolves around tasty food, and if Rebekah could not have made a goat to taste like wild game she never would have been able to pull off her plan. But she was confident she could make a meal fit for a king that would please Isaac, in verse 17 states that she also made bread. Here we get a picture of the old time country kitchen with homemade bread and a pot of stew.

This image is radically changed in our day, and the majority of Americans will be eating out on this Mother's Day, or sometime this week. The home is not the center of eating as it once was, but it is still the place where mothers need to provide their family with pleasurable experiences around food. Rebekah had no choice. She had to learn to be a good cook. Today, mothers do not have to because there are alternatives galore with fast food and microwave dinners, as well as numerous places to eat out. The danger is that mothers will fail to realize that it is still a vital part of family life to have enjoyable times together around good food. There is something special that is never forgotten about the enjoyment of a delicious meal made by mom.

Mothers are the first source of food and pleasure to a baby. It is one of the roles of motherhood to be a food provider. It does something for the whole family to be able to enjoy the pleasure of good food prepared by mom. It gives the husband a sense of pride, and the children a sense of security, as well as memories of a happy home life. The comedian may have only been joking, but he may also been expressing a deep seated disappointment when he said, "In my house you could eat off the floor. Most of the time, that's where the food would end up. We would sneak it off our plates and give it to the dog. I wouldn't say mom was a bad cook, but one year we went through 12 dogs.

Bad cooking even leads other people to lie. A new preacher received a pie from one of his members. It was so terrible they could not eat it. They had to throw it in the garbage. He didn't know how to respond when she asked how he liked it. He did not want to tell her the truth so he said, "I can assure you that a pie like yours doesn't last long at our house." Mothers who want to avoid things like this need to focus on the fact that they

still play the key role in what happens at the family table. It needs to be a time of fun with tasty food and positive family fellowship. Heaven begins with a great family feast at the marriage of the Lamb.

Part of good mothering is to make sure your family praises God for taste buds because they are exercised frequently around the table, and giving them pleasant memories of home and family life that will guide them to seek the same when they establish their home. This may seem like a secular quality to stress, and it is, but it is also a spiritual matter. Rebekah had the spiritual concern, and her good cooking was just mothers means to the greater end that she and her family be tools to accomplish God's will in history. Indifference to the physical side of life is not an asset, but a hindrance to the spiritual side of life. Anything a mother can do to enhance the physical enjoyment of life will be an aid to her guiding her children spiritually. The poet wrote,

It isn't the hours that makes the home,
That gives a glory to life.
It isn't the things that fill the room.
It's mainly the heart of a wife.

Rebekah was the heart of her home, for her heart was set on first of all pleasing God, who chose her and Jacob; secondly pleasing her husband, and thirdly pleasing her children. That is the order of priorities for the ideal mother. She used her cooking skill to accomplish all three. She learned that there is a lot of truth in the saying that, "The way to a man's heart is through his stomach." It was also the way to God's will. Rebekah is the ideal example of how developing physical and secular skills can be a major factor in accomplishing spiritual ends. The second thing we want to note is-

II. REBEKAH WAS A GOOD PROBLEM-SOLVER.

Mothers are, by definition, people-makers. Women make a lot of things, but as mothers they make people. People are the result of their labor as mothers. The only two people in all of history not mother-made were Adam and Eve. God only made two people by Himself. All others have been made by mothers. But since the first mother fell even before she became a mother, all of the people mothers make are also fallen, and so problem making goes along with people making. Where there are people there are problems. If a tree falls in the wood with nobody there to hear it, does it make any sound? That is an age old question that is debated, but one thing we know for sure, if there are no people there to hear it, it is not a problem, sound or no sound. There are only problems where there are people, and God's people have never been problem free.

Here is a godly family, and they are a key link to the line to the Messiah. The salvation of the whole world is in their hands, and they are about to fumble. Isaac is about to go with his preference and forget God's choice. He is ready to bless his rebel son Esau, and he would have had it not been for Rebekah's clever plan. By this plan she saved her husband from folly, and helped fulfill the prophecy of God. We just have accept this reality of life that mothers are sometimes the best trouble shooters. They have insights and wisdom, and a sensitivity to what God is doing that men sometimes do not have.

Jesus did not give all of His most profound teachings to His disciples. He often chose a woman to hear His deepest revelations, for He knew they could see what men often miss.

Even in the Old Testament where men were in control, and where they had all the authority, we see God using a woman like Rebekah to get His plan accomplished, even though the men were doing all they could to derail it. The fact is, God's will that Jacob be blest and the ruler over Esau would not have happened without Rebekah. The fact is, a lot of God's will would never be accomplished without mothers.

Jacob saw his mothers determination to do what she was convinced was the will of God, and solve the problem that stood in the way. He became a problem solver like this himself. He had to work out problems with his father-in-law Laban over his wives and wages. He had to work out his problems with Esau. He even wrestled with God and won a victory. He had a life of problems, but he solved them and became the channel by which God's people were formed. When he died he was buried in the same tomb where his mother was buried.

Charles Dickens said, "I think it must be somewhere written that the virtues of mothers shall be visited on their children as well as the sins of their fathers." This was certainly true with Rebekah and Jacob. He could have said with the poet,

**All that I have she gave to me-
She molded my destiny
With loving care she raised me,
And gave me a legacy.**

A mother came into her kitchen and found her two young boys fighting over the last cookie. She took the cookie and said, "I'll solve this problem for you. I'll eat it myself." And she did. Sometimes the only way to solve a problem is to eliminate the basis for the problem. Rebekah did this by getting Jacob sent off to her brother's place to find a wife. The separation even helped Esau to cool off and forget his plot to murder Jacob. Separation is a great problem solver. Eve might have saved Abel by this strategy. Rebekah did save Jacob, and by doing so changed the course of history.

Kay Kuzma, a university professor, wrote an article called Every Mother Is A Working Mother. She has three children, and she calculated that by the time they reaches 18 she will have put in 18,000 hours of child-generated housework. That is housework she would not have had if she had not had children. There is no such thing as a non-working mother.

A mother of 11 was asked how she found time for all of them. She replied, "When I had my first child I realized that one child can take all of your time, so I decided to have more, for it couldn't make much difference." Kay Kuzma wrote, " No one has any idea how much time it takes to love a child into maturity- until they have had one! You know, I think that is why so many women get discouraged after a couple of years. By choosing to spend more time at home with their children they envision they will have time to do everything they have always wanted to do. Instead it takes them twice as long to read a

book, the Christmas light are still up for their family's Easter celebration, and there is no time for those home improvements they had dreamed of making. Instead, the carpet gets spotted, the doorways get fingerprinted, the walls get scribbled on, the curtains get snagged and their favorite china gets chipped. Plus, the bills just keep getting bigger! You begin to think you will never get ahead!"

Rebekah married into great wealth when she married Isaac, and she had servants too. So maybe she had more time to think and plan strategy than most mothers. Mothers differ greatly in the time they have to give to helping their children find God's best. Rebekah succeeded in helping Jacob, and to a lesser degree even Esau, for he also was changed. She was a problem solver for the whole family. The record of her life takes up a good portion of the book of Genesis. She is a major person in the history of God's people. She is not famous for any great project or movement. She did not write a book, a song, or a poem. She did not achieve any public fame. All she did was be a marvelous mate and mother, and that is enough to have made her special to God.

3. HAGAR, A MOTHER SEES GOD

Sarah was the oldest mother in the Bible, and likely the oldest woman to ever have a baby. She was 90 years old when she gave birth to Isaac. This is not a record many are striving to match or break, so it is likely to stand for all time. Abraham is the father of Judaism, Islam and Christianity. He is the father of all who call themselves the people of God because his wife became a mother of one son in his old age. Her one experience of motherhood made her the most famous mother in history. A mother of an only child can be as great or greater than a mother of a dozen.

Because of her greatness we seldom pay much attention to another mother in Sarah's shadow. She was also the mother of an only son. Hagar is her name, but it never became popular in our culture like the name Sarah did. Hagar was an Egyptian servant girl in the house of Abraham and Sarah. She was a comparative nobody, but she became a somebody that God used to change history by her motherhood. These two mothers of only one son make it clear that God never counts one as a small number. One is enough for God to change the course of history.

The Bible and history teach this lesson over and over again. God knew man would not be impressed with one, and so they would not realize the significance of loving, caring for, and teaching just one. Many a Sunday School teacher has given up because they only had one student. They missed the message of God's Word that one is enough. Paul preached his heart out in Athens, and Acts 17 tells us that when all was said and done only one named woman and one named man responded to the Gospel. Paul could have said, "I quit for the fruit is just too little." The one man who responded after all the debate was Dionysius the Areopagite. He went on to have a great impact for Christ in that city, and many of the pagan temples became churches, and he became the patron saint of Athens. One is no number to belittle if you have the perspective of God.

One righteous man like Noah was all God needed to save the human race. One faithful man like Joseph was all God needed to save Jacob and his family, and thereby the future of the Jewish race. One courageous woman like Esther was all God needed to save the Jewish nation. One sinless Son was all God needed to save a world of sinners for all eternity. Study your Bible and see how often God uses a committee to achieve His purpose in history. You will not find much at all. But study to see how often he uses one individual, and you will have a great many notes. God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is the God of Sarah and Hagar. He is the God of individuals, and so one is always a major number with God.

It is an old story I have heard a number of times, but it gives us an image we need to be reminded of often. An old man was walking the beach where masses of star fish had been stranded by a storm that washed them ashore. He was picking them up and flinging them back into the sea. A young man asked him why he was doing it, and he explained that they would die if left to the next day. But the young man protested that the beach goes for miles and there were millions of them. He asked, "How can you make any difference?" The old man looked at the starfish in his hands and then threw it into the waves saying, "It makes a big difference to that one."

By not recognizing the importance of one we let the bigness of life's problems overwhelm us and paralyze us. We cannot see how we can make a big difference and so we do nothing. When the fact is, all we need to do to make a difference is to focus on one. Chuck Colson in his book Loving God tells this remarkable story of a Russian Jew named Boris Kornfeld. He was a doctor in the Gulag caring for the sick prisoners. An unknown Christian told him about Jesus and he believed and became a committed Christian in a Communist system. He stopped cooperating with the ruthless system that treated prisoners like dirt. He became a nuisance to the authorities, for he reported injustices rather than look the other way.

One of his patients was a young man recovering from cancer surgery. He told this young man of his faith in Christ and he listened. Kornfeld was soon clubbed to death to get rid of him, but the young man he witnessed to became a Christian. His name was Alexander Solzhenitsyn, the most famous Russian Christian of modern times. Kornfeld only lived long enough as a Christian to win one man to Christ. What a tragedy, some might say, if all they knew was human math. But a victorious life was his if you know God's math where one is enough to make a world of difference. MacLeish wrote, "We are neither weak nor few as long as one man does what one can do." Or, one mother, as was the case with Sarah and Hagar, and a host of other mothers through history.

Sarah became the mother of Isaac, and Hagar became the mother of Ishmael. These two sons became the fathers of the Jews and Arabs, who get on the front page of the newspapers frequently because they continue to carry on the feud that started with their ancestral mothers. Males are usually the war makers of history, but the battles of the Jews and Arabs all started with mothers. Father Abraham loved both of his boys, but their mothers basically hated each other. They were both good mothers, and God loved and cared for both of them. But the Bible reveals that they were very human and had their problems with sinful attitudes.

It is good that the Bible tells us about the sins of mothers so that we keep a balance and avoid idolatry. Much of the preaching on Mother's Day, and much of the poetry written about mothers portrays them as paragons of virtue and ready at any time to step in and take the place of any Seraphim that might have to leave the throne of God. The Bible keeps us realistic by telling it like it is, and by showing us that mothers struggle with envy, jealousy, fear, and all sorts of negative emotions. We see Sarah so filled with fear that Hagar's boy will interfere with her boy's inheritance that she demands they be cast out of the family. There is no need to assume she knew this would lead to their death in the desert, but accept for the grace of God that is exactly what would have happened.

Mother's Against Drunk Drivers is an organization I support, but I don't think I would be interested in a group called Mother's Against Other Mothers Whose Kids They Think Are Brats. This would, no doubt, be a sizable group. Sarah felt that Hagar's son was a brat and a threat, and so she had them sent out of their household. Sarah had only one child. If she had other children she would have soon learned that her own kids could be brats as well. She would have had to struggle then with whether or not to banish her own child. She lacked this experience that any mother of more than one understands, and so she had Hagar and Ishmael banished.

Poor Hagar found herself wandering in the desert with her water supply exhausted. She was just waiting for her son to die of dehydration. It is one of life's heaviest burdens to be a mother of a very sick and dying child. Nobody prays more than a mother watching her child suffer. Hagar put Ishmael under a bush and went off to let the tears of despair flow. Ishmael was also crying, and verse 17 says that God heard the boy crying. It is as if to say that tears are themselves a form of prayer, and God listens to such prayers.

If anyone ever needed to be heard by God it was Hagar and Ishmael. Hagar is now a single parent mother with no means of support. She is poor and alone, and without resources even to keep body and soul together. She represents the homeless, the destitute, the lonely and forsaken of the world. Without the grace of God she and her son would have perished in the desert. But God who is pro-mother came to her rescue, and not only spared their lives, but promised Hagar that He would make her son into a great nation. Here was a mother who was taken from the pit of despair and put on the solid rock of security by the promise of God.

Everything she did for her son now had meaning and purpose, for poor and homeless as they were, they were destined by God for greatness. God opened her eyes to see the well He provided, and she took water to Ishmael and raised him in the desert as a single mom. She got him a wife as soon as he was of age, for she had the promise of God that he would have a vast offspring. She became an optimistic mother because of God's rescuing them from a hopeless situation, and because of his promise. Not all mothers have such a promise from God, but the fact is, every mother plays a major role in their child's future by her attitude.

Jacky Hertz, mother of 13 children, in her book *The Christian Mother* writes, "The mothers approach to her children makes all the difference in the world in how they

behave. If you begin the morning by telling the kids how naughty they are, within the hour you will have mother-produced fireworks, liter and mayhem." Mothers need to be optimistic, and they need to make sure their children feel good about themselves, their value, and their role in life. Hagar could do this for Ishmael because she knew God was going to make a great nation of him. But every child needs a mother who makes them feel they are important and secure. I do not know how Hagar did it with her level of poverty, but we do have records of how some other poor mothers gave their children this sense of security.

Katheryn Forbes had a TV program called I Remember Mama. This Swedish-American family of 5 were very poor, and yet they felt secure. Each Saturday night mama would stack the coins needed to pay the landlord, the grocer, and other bills. Then she would smile and say, "Is good, we do not have to go to the bank." Year after year they made it always secure in the thought they could always go to the bank. It was not until Katheryn grew up and sold her first story that she discovered the truth. She took her check to mama and asked her to put it in the bank account, and that is when her mother told her there was never an account. She did it just to give her children a sense of security so they would not be afraid of being poor.

Catherine Marshall in her book Meeting God At Every Turn tells of how her mother did this for them. They were very poor, but never knew it. Her mother would make fried mush often and keep part of it separate so that after they ate they would go and give it to other poor people. They never felt poor, for they were taught to share with the poor whatever they had.

The point is, a good mother has to give her children a sense of security. No matter how hard their own life is, this is a mother's job. Hagar had a very tough life. If you think life is unfair, look at the life of Hagar. She is a slave girl away from her own people. She is used as a baby maker because Sarah wanted a child by any means, and so she is forced to become pregnant. Then she is hated for being pregnant. Gen. 16 tells us that Sarah mistreated Hagar and she ran away. God persuaded her to go back, but then her son was later hated also, and they became outcasts. This is not exactly the life anyone would choose. How can a mother survive the road she had to travel?

Gen. 16:13 gives us the answer. Hagar responds to God who comes to her as the Angel of the Lord. "She gave this name to the Lord who spoke to her: You are the God who sees me, for she said, I have now seen the One who sees me." Hagar is one of the rare persons in history that is permitted to give God a name. She calls him the God who sees me. In other words, the comfort and encouragement she received just by knowing that God knew her and her situation gave her the strength and the courage to live her unfair life quite well. If you are going to be a source of comfort and security to your children, you need such a Source yourself, and Hagar had her Source in God-the God who sees her.

Hagar only got one break in life, and that was that God cared about her. He did not make her life easy, and spare her from its hardships, but he assured her that he was watching. She was not living her hard life in isolation with nobody to care. God was

seeing the whole thing, and she mattered to Him. When she saw that God saw her, and that made all the difference in the world. She was able to be a slave, a surrogate mother, and an outcast, and still be a good mother because she had the assurance that God saw her and cared.

To be a good mother, a good father, or a good anyone it is crucial to know that God cares. This is the key to a meaningful life. Look at the genealogy of Jesus and you will see 4 mothers who had a really rough life. They were all unworthy to be a part of any plan, let alone the plan of God to save the human race. Tamar played the harlot; Rahab was a prostitute; Ruth the Moabite was from a people despised, and was a widow, and Bathsheba was an adulteress. All of these mothers had a tough life, and 3 of the 4 were outright sinners violating the will of God. And yet each of them is in the bloodline to the Messiah. This makes it clear that God not only saw Hagar, and her life as a mother, but He sees every life and He cares. He is pro-mother even when those mothers are far from ideal. We have the ideal mother portrayed in Proverbs 31, but none of the mothers in the bloodline to Jesus fit that description. But God used them to make a major difference in the history of mankind.

Mothers need to see that God sees them, and if they only have one child, and their life is hard and unfair, and far from the ideal, they still matter to God. He can still use them and their child for His purpose. When a mother has this sense of security they can be channels of that security to their children. Unfortunately, there are many Christian mothers who are more like Hagar then we realize. They feel life slaves who are living a life that is unfair. Clyde M. Narramore gets letters like this everyday year after year:

"I have a problem and I hope you can help me. My husband and I are both born-again Christians, and he is a leader in our church. We have three children under four. In the last several months, my husband has started taking his day off with other men, going out of town, hunting and what have you. Each time he goes I have a feeling of deep resentment, and perhaps jealousy, because he can just up and leave, while I am tied to the house and children. It doesn't seem right.

My husband seems to think I should be content, sweet and happy just to stay at home to cook, wash, iron, change diapers and clean house. Almost every time he leaves, I end up crying, and when he returns it takes a good while for us to get in harmony again. He just grins and waits for me to get over it and tells me I'm acting foolish. He has told me to go somewhere by myself or with someone else if I want to, and hire a baby sitter. But I have not been able to discover much that a woman can do without money- of which he gives me none regularly. He has the money budgeted, but seemingly none for extra things except the few things he buys.

I seldom see people except church friends at services. I want to take time off each week and go with my husband and children somewhere. But he thinks they're too small to do

the things he is interested in. I feel so frustrated that I am on the verge of crying half the time. Do you think my feelings are normal and right, or should I, or must I adjust and be happy to go on like this? I would appreciate any suggestions you may have."

The world of motherhood is filled with the hard and the unfair, and Christian mothers do not escape it. They need to work hard to change what is unfair, and get fathers to share the load. But the fact is, even in the best situations the mother is going to have the heavy end of the load when it comes to raising the children. There are exceptions, but generally speaking, mothers bare the burden of giving their children a sense of security. If nobody else helps, what is a mother to do? She needs to see the God who sees her, and who cares for her. She needs to see the God who knows it is not fair, and who knows it is hard, and the God who can use her and her children, even though they are far from the ideal.

Hagar never could have made it without the God who sees her. Every mother needs the same assurance, even if their life is no where near as hard as hers. Even when life is good and we get a fair shake, we need to know that God sees and cares about us. The happiest and most contented mother needs to know that God has a plan for her children. This motivates her to want to do her best to prepare her children for whatever that plan is. A mother's pride in her child's accomplishments is what motivates them to achieve. A friend once came upon Robert Louis Stevenson turning over the leaves of a scrap book with all the press notices about his books. He asked him if fame was all it was cracked up to be. Stevenson said, "Yes, when I see it in my mother's eyes." The pride and joy of his mother was his greatest reward.

Pleasing God is the highest goal of life, but pleasing mother has to be a close second. Happy is the mother whose child longs to please her, and happy is the child whose mother is pleased. And the best way to achieve this goal is to be a mother who sees that God sees her and cares about her life and her children.

4. RACHEL, A WINNING MOTHER

The problem with cliches is that we forget they are true and relevant because we have heard them so many times they have lost their cutting edge. "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world," is a good example. It is so trite and trivial that it does not even invoke the response of a sigh or a yawn. We need to be jolted back into an awareness of the truth of this cliché if we to restore in our minds the place of motherhood in history. Motherhood has been greatly devalued in our day, and many mothers do not feel a great sense of self-esteem in being merely mothers.

We need to be reminded again of just how great a role mothers play in history. Confucius warned about the danger of letting women become equal with men. Women

were put through foot binding in China to make them practical cripples in order to keep them inferior and submissive. They were given no education, and so they knew no better. But there was one Chinese mother who rejected this nonsense and refused to put her daughter through this torture. She was Mrs. Charlie Soong of Shanghai. She and her husband were Methodists, and long before women's equality was ever an issue in the minds of millions, they trained their girls to believe it.

The first daughter Elaing became the first girl from China to study in the United States. When she was a senior, her two sisters Chingling 16, and Mayling 11 came to the United States. Mayling, the youngest, became the first woman in unofficial capacity to address the congress of the United States. These three sisters became three of the most powerful women in history. Elaing married a wealthy man and pioneered the way for women in China to have the right to accumulate wealth and own property in their own name. Her husband, H.A. King, started a college, and she became a professor in it. She gave her life to the service of the poor, and to victims of tragedy.

When Dr. Sun Yat Sen over through the government of China, and became the founder of the Republic of China in 1912, he asked Eling to be his secretary. Chingling the number 2 daughter became his second secretary, and they fell in love and were married. She became the most beloved woman in China. Mayling the number 3 daughter graduated with highest honors, and she went back to China to serve her people in Christian labor. She worked with the YMCA and the Child Labor Commission. Then she met the military leader Chaing Kai Shek. He courted her for 5 years, and she finally consented to marry him. She became the commander of China's air force, and became the first woman in history to order 20 million dollars worth of planes and parts. Some called her the greatest woman in the world.

Eling and Mayling were two of the richest women in China, and they used their riches to build a hospital and staff it to care for thousands of orphans and widows. Chingling became the vice-premier of the People's Republic of China, and Mayling became the first lady of China. The three sisters became the key ambassadors that got America to stand with China with her war with Japan.

The point of all this about one family in the history of China is that it brings to life the cliché, "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world." These three sisters did not get the chance to play such a role in history because they were beautiful and talented. They got it because they had a mother who said my daughters are going to get an education so they can play a role in life equal to men. She did it, and they did it. Had she not done it, they could not have done it. The point is, mothers often determine the potential of their children by the opportunities they give their children. Mothers need to dream big for their children.

Joseph was one of the biggest dreamers in the Bible. There are more references to his and Daniel's dreams than all the rest of Bible characters put together. By means of his dreams he rose to a point where he, for all practical purposes, ruled the world of his day, for all depended upon his wisdom for survival in the great famine. In this message we want to consider the hand that rocked his cradle. Rachel is one of the most lovely and

most loved mothers of the Bible. It is interesting that her story is also a sister story. She and her sister Leah, along with their two handmaids, became the mothers of the 12 sons who became the 12 tribes of Israel. Rachel was just not the mother of 2 famous boys, Joseph and Benjamin, she was one of the most unique mothers in world history.

You can't call it one big happy family, for there was no end to tension and competition, but it was a big family. It took 4 mothers to produce this brood of a dozen boys who changed history for time and eternity. The gates of the New Jerusalem in heaven will have the names of these 12 boys on them. It was the most important family in the history of Israel, and Rachel was the most loved of these 4 mothers.

Leah had all the statistics going for her, however. She was the first to be married to Jacob. It was by trickery as she was substituted for Rachel, but she was first. She was the first to become a mother, and bare a son for Jacob. She also bore him the most sons. She was the one laid by his side in death. In this greatest of motherly competitions in the Bible Leah won, if you go by statistics.

But love doesn't go by statistics, and so Rachel was loved the best, and her children were Jacob's favorites. As a wife and mother she was number one. She was a winning mother even though she lost most every competition with her sister. But the fact is the competition made life very unpleasant for her.

Brenda Hunter wrote a book called *Where Have All The Mothers Gone?* She describes the fierce competition the average mom in our society feels with the working girls. All of the literature screams at her that you had better be a scintillating sexual partner or else, for waiting in the wings if you let down is the attractive women at work. She quotes the wife of a pilot who said, "You seldom see pilot's wives who are overweight. They know that their husbands work with young and attractive stewardesses who provide keen competition.

Wives and mothers who do not realize they are in competition in our culture often lose in a game they didn't even know they were playing. But they should know, for the evidence is everywhere, and even the most godly of men can be enticed by the competition. The unknown poet said,

Everywhere I look I see
Fact or fiction, life or play-
Still the little game of three,
B and C in love with A.

What we need to see is that the triangle is not new. It was in fact even worse for Rachel than it is for women today. For her the triangle was built in through polygamy. She had to compete with her own sister for her husband's love. It was a terrible competitive pressure. One of the greatest blessings in history for women was the change from polygamy to monogamy. Alexander the Great married two sisters who were the daughters of Darius the king of Persia. Nine thousand people were at the wedding as he took Roxanna and Statira to be his brides. All the wealth and property could not make this a happy marriage. Roxanna had her sister murdered to eliminate the competition.

We do not see this kind of solution in Jacob's home, but it is hard to believe that it was not considered an option as we look at the enormous pressure this put on Rachel. Let's look at this pressure, and how often Rachel lost in the competition. First of all, she lost the numbers game. Leah bore Jacob 6 sons and 1 daughter, but Rachel bore him only 2 sons. Each of their servants bore him 2 sons, and so they canceled each other out in the numbers game, and Leah won easily. If winning is everything, and if fertility is the essence of a female's value, then Rachel was a loser. But we know this was not the case. Jacob loved her in a special way regardless of the score.

The encouragement of this for every wife and mother should be enormous. Being loved is not the same thing at all as being a winner, or being the most, or the best of anything. We live in a very statistic oriented world, and the firsts and figures can be a threat to mothers, or any of us if we think we are losers because we do not measure up to those who come in first. If your measurements are not as alluring as those of the fashion model, and your income is not as high as that of the successful executive, does this mean you are a loser? Not at all. Every wife and mother can still be number one with their mate and children, and that is what mattered to Rachel. She lost the numbers game, but she never lost first place in the heart of her mate and family. Rachel reveals you can even be a multi-loser and still be a winner where it counts.

The second game she lost was the game of life, or the longevity battle. She not only didn't have as many children, she didn't live as many years. The odds were in her favor, for she was the youngest of the sisters, but she was the first woman on record to die in childbirth. She cried, "Give me children or I'll die." She got her way, but the cost was her life. Answered prayer can be dangerous and even deadly. Rachel experienced the mother's nightmare, and died before she saw her children raised. This is every mother's fear, and there is no way that she would escape the question-why me? Again we see that life is not always fair. Leah, who was forced on Jacob, and was not his choice as a wife, got to have him all to herself, and she was the one who was laid in the tomb by his side. She won again, and poor Rachel lost, even though she was the favorite.

There are many lessons here, but one thing is clear, real life is so often unlike the fairy tale. The best people can lose out on some very important contests. This forces us to reevaluate the conviction that winning is everything, and that statistics are the key measurement of life's values. Here is Rachel, the one loved like few have ever been loved, and yet she is a loser in the statistics race. Leah has more children, and lives much longer. Which would you rather be? Our head would tell us to choose Leah, for she was the winner. But our heart tells us to choose Rachel, for she was always the most loved. The issue is the age old controversy-which is best-quantity or quality. Is it better to live 50 years well, or 90 years mediocre?

History reveals that mothers who have died when their children were young, as Rachel did, can still have a powerful impact on their lives. Frederick Douglas, a slave who became famous through his three autobiographies and lectures against slavery, tells of how he was sold to a plantation owner 12 miles from his mother's plantation. To see him she had to walk 24 miles, and so it was a rare occasion for him to ever see her. One time she came and found him being punished by the cook for some offense, and he was

starving because he was not allowed to eat. His mother in fiery indignation let that cook know she had better never deprive her boy of food again, or she would take the matter to the master himself.

Douglas reflecting back on that night which was the last time he ever saw his mother wrote, "That night I learned the fact that I was not only a child, but somebody's child. The sweet cake my mother gave me was in the shape of a heart, with a rich, dark ring glazed upon the edge of it. I was victorious and prouder on my mother's knee, than a king upon his throne." He never saw her again, but the impact of that night never left him. He was somebody's child. The quantity was so little, but the quality so great, because in that brief time his mother gave him the self-esteem he needed for life.

Henry Ford gives a lot of credit for his success to his mother, but he did not have her very long. He writes, "My mother did so many things for me that it is hard to define them. You know, she died when I was 13 years of age. People often ask me why we keep our shops immaculately clean. My mother was a great woman for orderliness and cleanliness. I want my shops to be as clean as my mother's kitchen."

History is filled with moms like Rachel. They lost the longevity race, but they were still winners where it counts, because they had a quality impact on the lives of those they loved. John R. Rice lost his mother when he was five, but her memory and her godliness went with him all his life, and he became one of America's greatest evangelists.

We are still not done with Rachel's losing streak. The third contest she lost was that of being the blood line to the Messiah. Leah won that one just like the rest, and it was her son Judah who became the link in that blood line to Christ. The hope and dream of every woman in Israel was to be the mother of the Messiah, or at least to be a link. Rachel again lost out to Leah. You begin to wonder why Jacob loved Rachel the best. He must have been one of those guys who goes for the underdog. But let's not be too hasty in our conclusion.

The fact is, her son Joseph saved the necks of all his brothers, and so not only did Judah survive to be the line to the Messiah, but all of Israel survived only because of the work of God through Rachel's brilliant and godly son who saved most of the known world of his day from the great famine. What a paradox is Rachel. She lost every competitive game she played, and yet she was one of the best players of all time, and leaves the majority of mothers in history a powerful example. You don't have to be a winner to win. Even so called losers are winners when their desire in life is to be what God wants them to be. Rachel was loved by Jacob, and though she was never number one as far as any one could measure, she was number one in his heart. She only had two sons, but they changed the course of history for Israel and all mankind.

Joseph and Benjamin became two of the most beloved people in Israel. The first king of Israel came from the tribe of Benjamin, and the Apostle Paul was proud to announce several times that he was an Israelite from the tribe of Benjamin. It would take us hours just to study the role of the Benjamites in Bible history. You do not have to be mother of the year, or mother of the month, or win any title at all to be a mother whom God can use

for His glory. It is a competitive world, but woe to that mother who thinks her self-esteem is based on her statistical standing. Most mothers are like Rachel. Their statistics for being winners are not very great, but their status as being loved still makes them number one with their family.

This message of Rebekah's life is very important for mothers to hear because the pressure to be the ideal mother can do a great deal of damage. Ideals can be a pain when they become a burden. Mothers feel the pressure to be a great parent, a great provider, a great community servant, as well as a homemaker. She must be a great lover, a great reader, a great supporter of church, social, and political activities. When she is married to a man who is also trying to be the great father, they will be a couple who are being killed by ideals. Dr. James Dobson, the leading Christian family counselor, writes, "I believe more divorces are caused by mutual over commitment by husbands and wives than all other factors combined. It is the number one marriage killer."

Outstanding and gifted Christian leaders are ruining their marriages and families at an alarming rate because they have swallowed our secular cultures value system that says winning is everything. You have got to be high on the statistical charts to be a successful Christian. They give their all to be winners on that level, and the result is they lose out on the level of love. They forget that love is not based on statistics. God does not love conditioned upon our standing in some competitive race, nor does anyone else who really loves us. True love is unconditional, and it does not have to be won by statistics.

The success of motherhood is not determined by an impersonal score sheet and statistics, but by a personal relationship. This puts every mother on an equal footing. There are vast differences in gifts, energy, and personality that make for a vast diversity of levels in the realm of competition. But all mothers are equal in their chance to be loving mothers. What the children of this world need is not successful mothers, celebrity mothers, or high achiever mothers. What they need is mothers who are loving mothers who have the adoration of their children's father. That is what Rachel had going for her, and that is the best description I know of for a winning mother.

Rachel was always number one in the eyes of her husband, and that is a key to being a winning mother. Everything you read supports this that the best thing a mother can do for her children is to love their father. It is the best training you can give your children for their own happy marriage. The great mothers of the Bible and of history were women who loved and were loved by their husbands. I think Lavonne was a good mother, not just because she loved the children and they knew it, but because she loved me and they knew it. They have had the best training in love you can get, and that is a mother's example.

Rachel's whole life revolved around her family. This cannot be the limited focus of millions of working wives in our day, but the fact is, a truly successful wife and mother must focus on the family. That must still be a priority whatever the other pressures of life. It is granted that back in the old days men took advantage of women who were full time housewives, and they did not share in the burden of raising the family. Martin Luther depended on his wife to do absolutely everything in the home. Once he was on a

trip and wrote a letter to his wife. He wrote, "I can't find any suitable presents for the children in this town, although it is annual fair. See if you can dig up something at home for me to give them." Many of us can identify with Luther. It is great to pass the buck when you have a wife who will fall for it. Modern wives are not so easily fooled, for they too are busy.

The fact remains that mothers will still, in the majority of cases, be the emotional heart of the family. Her love for dad will still be a major factor in the emotional balance of her children. Every text I have ever preached on for Mother's Day leads to the same conclusion, and that is that a good mother must be first of all a good wife. She must convey to her children a sense of love and security that a child can only get when they know that mom loves dad. Deprive them of this, and you are robbing your child of one of the pillars of a solid life.

There are a lot of questions about Rachel. We do not have a record of any noble achievement, or of any high aspiration of this woman. She was a beauty, but that is a gift. There is nothing in her character or conduct that is worthy of holding up as a great example. If you are looking at her life for tips on successful living, you will find there are more negatives than positives. She had envy for her sister. We see her nagging her husband, and stealing from her father. As an ethical guide she was a loser again. But the Bible does not portray her life because she was the ideal anything. Rachel was just a woman who was loved by Jacob, and gave birth to two sons. She was no different than millions of other wives and mothers.

But we have this fascinating insight into her love for her husband Jacob. He loved her so much that working for 7 years to win the right to marry her seemed like only a few days. She so loved him in return that when Joseph was born she gave him that name because it means may he add. Her prayer was may the Lord add to me another son. Her main goal in life was to make Jacob happy twice. She died doing it, but it was her goal.

I read of a poor little English girl who had gone to school without breakfast. Her mother was a destitute widow. A kind gentleman seeing her plight gave her a shilling. She went and changed it into two sixpenny pieces before going home. She gave her mother one as soon as she got home, and then a little later she gave her the other one. "Why did you split the gift in two parts," her mother asked? "Because," she said, "I wanted to make you happy twice." That was what Rachel longed to do. It may not seem like much of an ideal to follow, but ask Jacob if he loved such a wife, and ask Joseph if he loved such a mother. Rachel was no big deal in so many ways, but she was loved by her husband and children, and no wife and mother can aim higher, for this, and this alone, can qualify a woman to be considered a winning mother.

5. JOCHEBED, A GREAT MOTHER

Mother had worked hard with her little girl in teaching her a part for a church program.

The little girl had gone over it again and again, but when she stood up in front of people her mouth went dry and her mind went blank. She did not know what to say. Her mother sat in the front and tried to calm her, and she tried to help by forming the opening words on her lips. Nothing happened, but finally in desperation she whispered, "I am the light of the world." Immediately the girl's face lit up and in confidence she began, "My mother is the light of the world."

We want to look at a mother who was indeed a light in a world of darkness. Jochebed was the mother of Moses, and like many mothers she is only known because of her children. Everything was against her being a good mother. Her husband was a little more than a slave. Pharaoh had made it so that men could get no education and had to do hard labor, and they had no political rights in Egypt. He made it miserable for all the Jews, and he decreed that all boy babies were to be cast into the Nile. Miriam was between 13 and 15 and Aaron was between 3 and 5, and so they were safe, but Jochebed was expecting another child.

She must have hoped it would be a girl, for then it would be no problem, but God's plans do not always call for a life with no problems, and so she gave birth to a boy. It was, in a sense, a twin birth, for not only a great man but a great mother was born that day. We will see this as we see the way she handled the problem and the results of her wisdom. We will see her greatness as we focus on 3 aspects of her mothering.

I. HER WISDOM.

She knew it was better to obey God than man. Her mother love refused to obey the law of wicked Pharaoh. To him a baby was only a little enemy to be gotten rid of before he became stronger. Like all powers of evil he worked in sheer brute force. One thing he forgot, however, and that is that babies have mothers, and a mother's love is stronger than evil. Guided by the wisdom of God a mother's love can outwit the devil himself. It was through motherhood that God would send His Son into the world to defeat Satan. God has found a faithful mother in Jochebed and through her he will raise up a deliverer. The book of Hebrews says she acted in faith to save her child. She trusted that this child was given her by God for more than crocodile food.

William James said a baby is, "A bundle of possibilities." Jochebed felt this was the case for her baby boy. She vowed that no Pharaoh was going to make her give up her baby. The very fact that Pharaoh wanted to get rid of babies is a testimony to the power of motherhood. With the right mother a baby can grow up and be a overwhelming force for good, and that is why evil forces become baby killers. It must have been very hard hiding a baby like she did. The tension must have been beyond endurance, and she realized she could not go on hiding the child, but she was not going to give it up. How she must have prayed as she worked out her plan. Things looked dark, but she faced the dark future with the light of faith.

Sometimes you wonder how God's timing. For 400 years Israel was in Egypt, and God waits until Pharaoh orders all boy babies to be killed to bring the deliverer onto the stage of history. God obviously loves a challenge, and He loves to see His people face up

to one and gain the victory. He deliberately develops a context of great danger. He knew Jochebed would be a great mother, for that was the only hope for the survival of Moses. She could have surrendered to the inevitable and obeyed this vicious law, as did many other mothers, but by faith she decided to buck the system. She took the same radical and paradoxical approach that God took. If He was going to give her a boy at just the worst possible time, she, in turn, would hide that baby in the very spot where they were drowning the babies-right on the river's brink.

Logic would tell you that if babies are being thrown into the river it would be wise to take the baby as far from that danger as possible, but the wisdom of a mother is often not logical, but, nevertheless, effective. She hid him by the river.

We see two truths that are worth noting. 1. Tension, anxiety and problems may come into a home, and into the life of a mother in the very plan of God to call forth the best in her. Do you have the eye of faith that sees purpose even in problems, or do you let them defeat you and drag you down? 2. God does not hand down a copy of the plan to be followed-not even a poor carbon copy. He works within the very thinking of Jochebed. She had to think up the plan herself with all the wisdom she had, and then go ahead in faith not knowing the outcome. When we have done our best God will do the rest, and in His providence work out all things for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.

We notice that faith uses means. You don't say, "I have faith that God will work it out," and then do nothing. Faith without works is dead. Faith says that God will work out what I do. It is blind faith that says I will do nothing and trust God to do it for me. Faith does not say I don't have to bother to put pitch in the basket. If it gets knocked into the river God will preserve the baby. That is not faith, but it is presumption. A mother's wisdom is that wisdom that says I must do those things that must be done and can be done by me, and then leave the results to God.

She made her ark of papyrus and sealed it with pitch. She put it in a place where she knew the daughter of Pharaoh bathed. It was a religious duty to bathe in the sacred Nile. When the daughter discovered the baby Moses cried and won her heart. He was already a leader with powerful influence as a baby. The wisdom of Jochebed is again apparent at this point, for she let her teenage girl Miriam help out in this serious plan. It is a wise mother who recognizes the capacity of her teenagers and makes them a vital part of family plans. Miriam proved herself, and in obedience to her mother became an important link in God's plan to deliver Israel. I wonder if that ever occurred to a teenager that obedience to one's mother may be a necessary step in God's will for their life. Here was a mother and daughter team that God was using to change the course of history.

Miriam approached the daughter of Pharaoh at an opportune time realizing the childless princess would need a nurse, and she volunteered to find her one. When the princess agreed, she ran to get her mother. With a pounding heart from both fear and excitement Jochebed trying to control her emotions ran to the princess and received back her baby boy. Her wisdom had paid off. Here was a mother who ranks up there near Solomon for her wisdom. Next we see-

II. HER WORK.

What a thrill to clasp to her breast that rescued treasure. Moses was not only safe, but by the grace of God he was back in his mother's care. God realized how important those early years were for a child. She only had him for 3 or 4 years at the most, and some might feel that little can be done in that short time, but she had him for those years when love and security determine so much of the personality of a child. The first and most enduring ideas of God come from parents. Modern psychologists tell us that what a mother does with her child in the first 3 or 4 years establishes attitudes and characteristics of the mind that influence a person's relationships and behavior the rest of his life.

Francis W. Parker, a distinguished Chicago educator, finished a lecture and a woman asked, "How early can I begin the education of my child?" Parker asked, "When will your child be born?" She responded, "Why he is already 5 years old." He cried, "My goodness, you have already lost the best 5 years." So important is the mother to a child that in most cases the will to live is lost without the mother. It can be a nurse or anyone, but without the love and security of a motherly nature a baby will begin to die. The most important work of a mother is love. The Jews had a saying that God could not be everywhere, and so He made mothers. Written into the very nature of man is the need for love, and all men can see something of the love of God in the love of a mother.

Jochebed recognized this, and also the basic truth that to raise a well adjusted child who is yet ignorant of God is to fail as a mother. She received her child from Pharaoh's daughter for only awhile, but it is true that all children are only given to our care for awhile. If only we could see it and realize how soon they will be in Pharaoh's palace, and if we have not prepared them they will certainly fall into the trap of pleasure and sin. Better that he be eaten by crocodiles than to live without God. Any mother who can launch her child into the treacherous current of modern life without the compass of faith in God to guide is failing as a mother.

Jochebed not only nursed his body but filled him with the milk of the Word. We can only assume that there was continued contact even after he was given back to the princess, for there was so much to teach him that he could not learn as a young child. She, no doubt, continued to have an influence in his life all the years he was growing up in the palace.

Mother's Day is a day of praise and poetry of mothers, but not just for motherhood in itself. Just to physically bear children is a wonder, but not worthy of honor in itself, for we all know a mother can have a total neglect of her children, and even sacrifice them for her own pleasure. Many of those ungrateful goats at the day of judgment will be mothers. Mothers can lose all the blessings of motherhood by self-centeredness. Jochebed was child-centered and not self-centered, for she took great risks for the sake of her child. She realized that a child can be the tool that God uses to change the future for good, and so she gave her all for the sake of making her baby the best possible instrument for God to use. That is the goal of all mothers who want to be tools in the hands of God. You sacrifice for the sake of your child, but it is also for the sake of the

kingdom of God.

Marrow Coffee Graham, the mother of Billy Graham said, “When God and His Word are given their rightful place in the home it is then that we who are mothers have in some measure discharged our responsibility to those God has given us. Then, and only then, can we look at our children and at the future with confidence.” Not all faithful mother are raising a Moses or a Billy Graham, but all are great mothers, for, like Jochebed, they are doing the work which makes anyone great, and that is the work of imparting the knowledge of God to children.

III. HER WAGES

Is motherhood all sacrifice and no reward? No, for nothing done in God’s will is without its reward. The wages Jochebed received was not the wages she got from Pharaoh’s daughter. This just shows us the humor of God, for out of Pharaoh’s treasury is coming the support for the very child who will one day be used of God to set His people free from Pharaoh. Pharaoh is subsidizing the person planning his defeat. On the basis of this we can conclude that even a sinner’s money can be used for the purpose of God.

Jochebed did not receive her wages in silver and gold, but in the same currency which she gave, and that was life. She gave of herself, and the only adequate payment can be found in the results of the life of her child. She cannot be satisfied with anything less than what she has worked and prayed for. Her son is in the best possible position for a good education and power, but it would all be for nothing if he was not committed to God. Jochebed received her wages when the test came in the life of Moses to choose the pleasure and treasure of Egypt, or to choose to be afflicted with the children of God. Moses chose to go with God’s people, and in this was her riches.

Only a mother’s children can pay her the wages she desires. All other gifts without the gift of a child’s love are futile and inadequate. One of the greatest historical examples is that of a brilliant teacher of Rhetoric who was rebellious at his mother’s religion. Monica prayed and grieved over the sinful life of her son, but the day came when she received a hundred fold in wages. Her son Augustine not only became a Christian, but he dedicated his life and ability to the extent that he became recognized as the greatest influence in the church since the Apostle Paul. He had continued to influence the church right up to the present day. This is a mother’s greatest wage if she is a wise mother doing the work God has ordained for her to do. A mother’s greatest wage is not what her children give her, but what her children become.

May God challenge every mother to live up to this ideal: “The magic words of our language are Jesus, home and mother. But until the stars are old, and the sun grows cold, and the leaves of the judgment book unfold, no one will ever know the full measure of service the mothers of earth have constantly, faithfully, and lovingly rendered to their children.” A hundred years from now it will not matter what you fed your family, or what you made them wear, but for all eternity it will matter that you were a mother of faith. And the greatest thing any child can do for their mother is to be answer to her

life's labor and love, and her prayers by being that person she prayed you would be. There is no higher honor for a mother than to have children who trust in Jesus Christ and give their life in service to Him. By so doing you make your mother a great mother.

6. BATHSHEBA A MOTHER WHO MADE A DIFFERENCE

Everything you can say about mothers is true, no matter how good or how bad. But it is surprising when you discover that one who you thought was so bad turns out to be so good. Who would ever dream of holding up Bathsheba as an example of motherhood? Is she not the hussy who seduced David into his greatest fall, and thereby became one of the few Bible women to be welcomed to the Hollywood screen? She entered the stage of history with nothing but a bath towel, and she walked off in the royal robes of a queen. This is the stuff of soap operas, and Bathshebas was willing to play a nude scene, and so she would have been popular in our day.

This is the image we have of this woman, and so it is hard to see past the scandal to the facts. If a woman is raped it is her fault says the popular philosophy of our day. She was asking for it they say, and we impose this view on the Bible. Bathsheba was taking a bath where her body was exposed, and so she is presumed guilty of being a seducer. Never did a bath create so much dirt. The waters are so muddied by the shocking event of David's affair that nobody bothers to look at the facts. Let me share them with you.

Bathsheba was never once rebuked or urged to repent, as was David.

Nathan the prophet who condemned David for the sin is always shown as having the highest respect for Bathsheba.

Bathsheba was a victim of a power structure over which she had no control. It was just like the case of Sarah being taken by the king into his harem. She and Abraham had no control.

David had 8 wives at the time of the affair, and yet he took another man's wife by force. The full weight of guilt for the whole scandal lies on his head.

So the question is, does being raped make you a bad person or a bad mother? The clear answer is, absolutely not. In contrast to the world, which Christians often follow, who put down Bathsheba as one of the bad women of the Bible, God exalts this abused woman and compensates for her awful tragedy by making her one of the most famous mothers who ever lived. She bore 4 sons to David and one of them was the wisest king who ever ruled Israel. King Solomon was possibly the wisest ruler who ever lived. You can bad-mouth her all you like, but God used this mother to change history in ways that no other mother has ever been used. God's judgment is that being sexually assaulted does not make a woman a bad mother.

She had more than her share of tragedy. She was assaulted by the king and then had

her husband murdered because she was unfortunate enough to get pregnant. The child was taken shortly after birth, and so at a young age she had lost both a mate and a child. As a more mature woman she suffered the danger of being killed by plots within the royal family, and she got one of the family killed her self by trying to do him a favor. It made David so angry that he had one of his own sons killed. Even without the sex scandal her life could have been a soap opera. Being a good mother does not shield anyone from suffering. In fact, it was the asset of her great beauty that started all her suffering that we have recorded in Scripture. There is a price to pay for beauty, and it is often a very high price, as her life illustrates.

She was a pretty woman, but a part from that asset the Bible does not reveal her to be one endowed with any great gifts. She was a queen, but as far as the record goes, she was just like any ordinary housewife. As one commentator pointed out, she never says a word or takes an action by her own will. She is completely dominated by men, and has not a liberated bone in her body. She is totally submissive within a system of male domination. There is nothing about her that draws our attention to her except her beauty. That is why she is a good example of motherhood. She was really quite commonplace and unspectacular, and not the sort of mother who wins the mother of the year award. She does not stimulate flowery poetry.

Bathsheba was surrounded by the luxury of royalty and the artistic gifts of David and Solomon, who were two of the most creative men ever to live. But she was just ordinary as far as the record goes, but she was greatly loved and honored by these two men. That is a message that mothers need to hear. You don't have to be a wonder woman and Helen of Troy rolled into one to be a good mother. The good mother is simply one whose children grow up to love and appreciate her because of her love and influence. Thomas Fessenden wrote-

You painted no Madonnas,
Or chapel walls in Rome,
But with a touch divine
Upon the walls of home.

You wrote no lofty poems
With rare poetic art,
But, with a finer vision
You put poems in my heart.

You craved no shapeless marble
To symmetry divine,
But with a nobler genius
You shaped this soul of mine.

You built no great cathedrals
The centuries applauded,
But with a grace exquisite
Your heart was house of God.

Bathsheba represents the vast majority of mothers, and as we look at her role in her son's lives we see it is one that every mother can play. It is almost a cliché, but the fact is, the best thing a mother can give to her child to make her a good mother is love. All the studies on how the love of a mother affects a child's personality is fulfilled in Solomon. He became the first king in the Bible who got along with the whole world. He had a reign of peace without war. He built relationships with all the nations of the world. He had no urge to go out and put his sword through an enemy. He had the most powerful army in the world, and he had the most sophisticated weapons, but he didn't use them, for he was a man of peace. You have to give his mother a lot of credit for this.

Ashley Montagu in his book On Being Human writes, "The evidence is overwhelming that when the child's basic needs are adequately satisfied, when, in other words, the child is loved, and it is exposed to the necessary but minimum amount of frustrations, no matter in what culture or class that child grows and develops, it tends to be a better equilibrated, less aggressive, more cooperative person than one who has not been adequately loved in childhood. We live by a pure flame within us. That flame is love. It is the source from which we draw and convey our warmth to others. It is the light which guides us in relation to our fellow men."

Bathsheba suffered from the violence of her day. She was taken by force into David's bed, and her husband was murdered. Warfare was a way of life as she grew up. She raised a king who was into making peace rather than war. He wrote the great love song and built up the world's biggest harem and produced a golden age of peace and prosperity where love was the theme, and not war. Bathsheba had to give Solomon a lot of mother love to produce a personality like his, which was so radically different from the culture, and from his father who was a man of war. The fact is, she was a mother who made a difference.

7. SARAH, THE MOTHER OF NATIONS

An Indian chief's daughter by the name of Shell Flowers came to appreciate the ways of the white man. She learned English, and then took for herself the Christian name of Sarah. She was fortunate to come under the influence of General Howard, the commanding officer of Fort Lynn, for he loved minorities and fought for their rights. He was a hero of the Civil War who had fought for the rights of blacks, and now he was trying to be a peacemaker between the Indians and the whites.

When the Indians of Idaho went on the war path, Sarah risked her own life by finding their camp and rescuing 75 of her own people. Then she rode on horseback for 223 miles in three days to get General Howard. He was able, because of her information, to put down the uprising and prevent widespread blood shed. General Howard wrote a book titled Famous Indian Chiefs I have known. In this book he wrote this of Sarah

Winnemucca: "If I could tell you but a tenth part of all she willingly did to help the white settlers and her own people to live peaceably together, you would think as I do that the name of Sarah should have a place beside the name of Pocahontas in the history of our country."

Most people are not aware of this Sarah who played a major role in part of our countries history, nor are they aware of the thousands of Sarah's all over the world who have made this an honorable name by their achievements. We have such women as Sarah Caldwell, the only woman who has ever conducted at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. Many are the famous and ordinary people who proudly wear the name Sarah. It has been a popular name all through history because of the first woman to ever wear that name, which was Sarah the wife of Abraham. She is the only woman I am aware of who had her name changed by God, like many of the famous men in the Bible.

The name Sarah means princess, and it was given to her directly by God. Sarah could not imagine that her name would become so famous for all the rest of human history. After all, she was 89 years old and barren, so the future looked very bleak as far as posterity goes, and any chance of making her name of any significance in history. Yet, out of these extremely limiting circumstances Sarah became one of the most famous mothers in all of history. It is hard to find anyone who can come close to matching Sarah in the fame she achieved in a world notorious for putting women down.

As Abraham is the father of Judaism, so Sarah is the mother of Judaism. These two were Gentiles who married each other in the pagan culture of Ur of the Chaldees, and they became the first two Jews in history. What a paradox that Judaism started with Ma and Pa Gentile. No wonder God says of Sarah in verse 16, "I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her." No other mother in history has been so honored by so many nations. The Jewish nation, the Christian nations, the Mohammedan nations, all trace the origin of their faith to father Abraham and mother Sarah.

They are the only couple in the Bible who are both referred to in the great faith chapter of Heb. 11. They are the only parents in the Old Testament who are promised by God that their seed would be a blessing to every family on earth. They are the only couple in biblical history whose tomb is still a place of honor in the world today. The only burial of a woman recorded in the Bible is that of Sarah. She is the only woman in the Bible whose age at the time of death is recorded. She was 127 years old. She and Abraham had over a 100 years of married life together, and she had 37 years of being a mother in spite of her late start at age 90.

Sarah is the first woman in the Bible to have the journey of her life recorded. More is more recorded about Abraham and Sarah than all of the human race up to their time. Certainly God intended us to learn something about motherhood from this most unique of all mothers. The first thing the record compels us to examine is-

I. HER MISSED MOTHERHOOD.

There are few people who know both sides of the story like Sarah. She knew by experience the full impact of non-motherhood. It seemed strange, but the most famous mother in history is also the leading authority of what it is like not to be able to be a mother. Many have gone years before they could conceive a child, and many have never been able to conceive, but there is no record of anyone ever living 90 years with near 70 of them in trying to conceive. This most successful mother of nations holds the record for failure to become a mother. Most of the non-mothers of history have not lived motherless as long as Sarah did.

She knew what it was like to spend her entire youthful state of life listening to other mothers talk about babies, and not have one of her own to talk about. She experienced all of the social and culture agony of having no fruit of the womb. She could have written the book on the misery of denied motherhood. Even though she finally conceived, the fact is, she lived the entire period of her child bearing years barren and childless. She is the only mother we know of who experienced so completely the life of missed motherhood. This is not without great significance, for it reveals that Sarah could live a life pleasing to God as a good wife and godly person without motherhood. If she had not been a good wife to Abraham, and a woman faithful to God through all of those years of barrenness, God never would have chosen her to be the mother of nations. But if God had never chosen her, her life would still have been one pleasing to Him.

The point is, her life as a non-mother was a beautiful life and worthy of honor. Motherhood is not what made Sarah a beautiful person. She was beautiful as a non-mother, and is thus, a great example to the non-mothers of history. She was a faithful loving wife for near 70 years before she bore Abraham a son. She proved you can have a satisfying and fulfilling married life even without a child.

Most of the Bible couples were parents, and their lives revolved around their children, but Abraham and Sarah were husband and wife, and their lives revolved around each other. They developed a high esteem for each other as mates. Sarah was so deeply loved by Abraham that had she never bore him a child there is not the slightest hint that he would have left her for a woman who could. We need to remember that Hagar was Sarah's idea and not Abraham's. She was more to him than a baby maker. Sarah was first of all a good wife, and that is the primary responsibility who wants to be a good mother. Next we see-

II. HER MIRACULOUS MOTHERHOOD.

Her story puts the typical change of life baby story into the shadows by comparison. I have known women who have conceived in their 50's, but to give birth at age 90 is beyond anyone's experience. This is like having a delivery room at the nursing home. It is obvious that by this miraculous conception God is calling attention to the fact that He is doing a special work in history through this mother. There is no history at all without mothers. Had Eve not become a mother history would have ended with the first couple.

Motherhood is God's means of making any history at all. But God's plan is for a history within history that fulfills His purpose, and it is to be carried out by means of

miraculous motherhood. The final fulfillment of this plan was the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, but the start of this chain of events was the miraculous motherhood of Sarah. Her womb was dead, but out of that dead womb God brought forth life, and Sarah became the first biblical illustration of the resurrection and God's power to bring life out of death. She produced history's first miracle baby. Next we want to consider-

III. HER MINI MOTHERHOOD.

Sarah did not raise a number of children, but only one. Isaac was her only child, and that would certainly be enough for a woman her age. The point is, you do not have to have a large family to be a great mother. Sarah became a mother of nations, and her single experience of giving birth was all it took for her to start the chain of events that changed all of history, and led to the Messiah, who changed all of eternity as well.

Never put down or minimize an only child, for that is how God started the most important family that ever lived, for by means of it every family on earth has been blest. With God one is always adequate to achieve His purpose for all. He only has one Son Himself, and He was adequate to redeem the world. Being a good mother to one child is in God's eye's a marvelous achievement, and no one has ever been more honored for doing it than Sarah. She was a good wife to one man, and a good mother to one child.

Her only son Isaac was not one of the most exciting characters of the Bible, but he is one of the best. He had his flaws, but there is no major sin in his life that is recorded. The record reveals that he was just a good and godly man. Men like Isaac often trace their goodness back to the influence of their mother. Edward Everett Hail, the distinguished Boston pastor and author of *The Man Without A Country*, tells of bringing his report card home from school. It should he was 9th in a class of 15. He was depressed about it and felt ashamed. His mother could see this, and so with tenderness and understanding she said, "Never mind, Edward, I notice that in your report you are first in good behavior, and son, that means more to me than to have you the head of the class and not behave well."

Hail wrote in his dairy: "That was one of the most stirring and heartening experiences of my life. My mother's understanding and sympathy, making me see that behavior was more important than high grades, gave me a courage such as nothing else on earth ever gave me. I might never become a great scholar, but I could always be a good boy and a good man. That was within the reach of my abilities, and I thereupon resolved that, what ever else I might become, I would always see to it that my behavior record was high." He was good and godly because of his mother's influence.

A mini-mother gets only one chance with only one child, but that is all they need for success. Sarah became the greatest mother in history as a mini-mother with one good and godly child. God works from quality to quantity, and from this one good child all the families of the earth were blest, and Sarah by her mini-motherhood became the mother of nations. Next we look at-

IV. HER MEMORABLE MOTHERHOOD.

There is not a great deal said about this mother of nations as far as her mothering goes, but the little hints we have tell us she was a marvelous mother who left behind precious memories. Abraham so loved Sarah that the entire 23rd chapter of Genesis is devoted to her loving concern for her burial, and his purchase of a cave from the Hittites in which to bury her. There is only verse that refers to Isaac's response to his mother's death. In Gen. 24:67 it says that Isaac brought his new wife Rebekah into his mother's tent, and it closes with-"and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death." A husband and son deeply moved by the loss of this memorable mother.

She did, of course, have this advantage-she died before she became a mother-in-law. Otherwise she may have left other than pleasant memories. She did not have to pass this test. Other Sarahs have been so tested and failed. Sarah Delano, for example, the mother of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the man who spent more years as president of the United States than other man. She was a very dominant mother, and Franklin was never out of her sight for more than hour for the first 14 years of his life. Even when he was asked to run for public office he said he would have to ask his mother first.

She postponed his wedding with Elenor for a year, and after they got married it was a constant battle for who was to be in control. These two women could not be in the same room for half an hour without an argument. Elenor forbid her children to drive, and so grandma Sarah bought them each a car for their birthdays. She left behind her many memories that her loved ones would wish to forget. Certainly one of the goals of mothering is to leave your family with memories of good times in sharing love and fun, and not times of tension and frustration. These come to all, and are an inevitable part of life, but these will all fade from the memory if mother's dominant characteristics are positive.

Millions have stories like Dr. Samuele Bacchiocchi, a professor of church history and theology at Andrews University in Michigan. He is convinced that mothers are better equipped to instill self confidence and self worth in children than are their fathers. He remembers when he failed an exam in 5th grade in Italy. His father was ready to take him out of academic studies and put him into vocational school. But his mother knew he could make it, and she encouraged him, and she got him special help so that he did make it. He writes, "Truly I would have never become a minister and a teacher were it not for my mother's vision that saw in me what others failed to see and instilled in me a sense of self worth and of mission." His memories of his mother were a precious heritage.

Rosemary Ruether is another contemporary professor of history and theology at Garrett Evangelical Seminary in Chicago. She says that she is what she is because of her mother who gave her a strong sense of self esteem. She taught her to care about her own rights as well as the rights of others. As she got older and discovered that the God of the Bible was also concerned about the rights of others, and that He was for the oppressed and against the oppressor, she wanted to be a theologian and fight injustice with the Word of God. Her memory of her mother is a precious heritage.

There are many other testimonies that confirm the picture of the ideal mother in Prov. 31 where verse 28 says, "Her children arise and call her blessed." Such was the lot of Sarah, and such should be the goal of every mother. The child may fail to follow the way a mother teaches, but that is not the failure of her motherhood. The test is, does even a failing child look back and say, my mother should me a better way? Some of the worse children had great mothers, and they gave testimony to this fact by expressing the same positives as successful children.

Tom Bell robbed the first stagecoach in American history on August 11, 1856. A posse went after him, but he escaped. They went to the home of his girl friend and waited for three days, and finally he came and was caught. He was marched to a tree, and there at age 26 he was hanged. He was allowed to write a letter to his mother first. This is what he wrote: "Dear Mother; I am about to make my exist to another country. I take this opportunity to write you a few lines. Probably you may never hear from me again. If not, I hope we may meet where parting is no more. In my prodigal career in this country I have always recollected your fond admonitions and, if I had lived up to them probably I would not be in my present condition: But dear mother, though my fate has been a cruel one, yet I have no one to blame but myself. Give my respects to all of old and youthful friends. Tell them to beware of bad associations and never to enter into any gambling saloon, for that has been my ruin. I bit you farewell forever. Your only boy, Tom."

His mother did not fail him. She was a success, for she gave him an alternative, and he was free to choose it, but did not. God did not fail Israel because she went astray. He gave them the wise alternative, but they would not submit. A memorable mother is one which makes children look back from their success or folly and say, mother pointed me in the right direction. She gave me choices that were good, and whether I took them or not they bare witness that she was a good mother. Sarah was such a mother, and her son Isaac was a good and godly man who looked back at his mother's life with precious memories.

One of the memories everybody had of Sarah was of her laughter. Abraham and Sarah are the only couple in the Bible who are both in great chapter of faith of Heb. 11, and they are the only couple who are both portrayed as laughing. It was a joke to both of them that they would have a child in their old age, and they laughed at the very idea. It was so funny that their laughter became a lasting memory, for they named their miracle baby Isaac, which means laughter. Children are richer forever who have memories of a mother who could laugh and enjoy the humorous side of life.

Norman Vincent Peale loves to recall his mother's sense of humor and laughter. He remembers once when he sat with her at a funeral, and something the preacher said set her off. She was fighting desperately to hold it back. She took his hand and whispered, "For heaven's sake, stop me from laughing." Peale say, "I gave her a stern look which slowed her down somewhat but I could still feel her shaking." He says he remembered that incident at her own funeral, and the memory greatly comforted him. Her laughter made her memory very positive.

Ruth Graham, wife of Billy Graham, and mother of his children, is remembered for

her sense of humor. She was going to meet Billy once in a Southern town that she told him was full of hillbillies. She pulled down her long dark hair and blocked out a tooth, and she took off her shoes and walked barefoot to meet him. She had disguised herself so good that Billy went right past her and didn't even notice it was her. She once felt the family did not give prayer attention to the importance of Thanksgiving, and so she put shaving cream instead of whipped cream on the pumpkin pie. She got their attention, and after that they became more aware of the need to be grateful.

She once served tadpole soup with the tadpoles swimming around to a man who was forever boasting of himself and bragging of his achievements. When he looked at the strange contents of his bowl he remained silent the rest of the evening. She had a very unique way of using humor to change situations, and she will be remembered for this sense of humor.

It is a good question for a mother to ask herself often-what will my children remember? Is my motherhood memorable, or will they prefer to forget? Phyllis C. Michael put it in poetry:

What will my boys remember
When they've grown old and gray?
The pants knees oft were full of holes?
Or the trout we caught that day?

Just what will they remember most?
Two little beds unmade?
Or the fun they had at hide-and-seek
The days that Mother played?

What matter if my ironing waits
While I smooth out their troubles
Take time to kiss those briar-scratched hands,
And start them blowing bubbles?

Will they remember mud-tracked floors
When they've grown old and gray?
What care they if each room is dusted,
If I'm too tired to play?

God chose only one mother to be the mother of nations, but every mother is called to so live with and love their children that they will want to love Jesus and know God's will for their life. This is a memory that none will forget, and so on Mother's Day let us commit ourselves anew to be memorable mothers for the glory of God.

8. WOMAN OF TYRE A MOTHER'S FAITH

AND DOG FOOD

Lucy Webb Hayes was one of the greatest mothers to ever live in the White House. She was the wife of the 19th President of the United States, Rutherford B. Hayes, who was elected in 1877. She was the first college educated first lady of the United States, but more important, she brought to the White House a deep Christian faith. Daily it was hallowed by family prayers, and she departed from the custom of serving alcoholic beverages. She said, "It is true I shall violate a precedent, but I shall not violate the constitution, which is all that, through my husband, I have taken the oath to obey.

Because of her stand she was dubbed, "Lemonade Lucy." It was a small price to pay to be the mother she knew God wanted her to be. She explained to a friend, "I had three sons just coming to manhood and starting out in society, and I did not feel as if I could be the first to put the wine cup to their lips." She had two smaller children, and three sons who had died in childhood. She had a powerful impact on her children, and on the whole country, because of her leadership in Christian women's organizations. The Lucy Webb Hayes Training School for Deaconesses in Washington is named in her honor. The poet John Greenleaf Whittier said of her, "her presence lends its warmth and health to all who come before it; If woman lost us Eden, then such as she alone restore it."

There is much truth to what the poet says, for Godly women, and especially Godly mothers, have played a major role in God's plan to restore man to the beauty of Eden. From Mary, the mother of our Lord, all through Christian history it has been true that the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world. Most of the great men of God that changed the course of history, and whose influence never dies, were men who had Godly mothers. Men like Augustine, or John Chrysostom who, even though they lived over 1500 years ago, have their sermons yet in every library right along with those of Billy Graham. Men like Bernard of Clairvoux whose mother taught him early to love Jesus, and 500 years later, Martin Luther said of him, "Bernard loved Jesus as much as any man." Now over 1000 years later we still sing his love song, Jesus The Very Thought Of Thee.

We could go on for hours praising the powerful influence of mothers in history, but even though it is true, it will not have the impact on us that our text can have, for in this text we see Jesus confronting one of the most amazing mothers of all time. Jesus never complimented anyone in a higher way than her, and yet she was a nobody. She was not the wife of a great man, or the mother of outstanding children. We don't even know her name. Her only claim to fame was her faith, for it was great, and it was motivated by her love as a mother.

Here is a mother whose life and love has a message for all mothers, for all mothers cannot raise children in the White House as a national example, and all mothers cannot raise world famous preachers, but every mother can, like this mother, see to it that their children get God's best for them. In her case God's best was only dog food, as we will explain, but it was enough, and because of her success her story is made known around the world by both Matthew and Mark. We want to examine the characteristics of this

famous nobody of a mother, for though she is very unique her story is instructive for us all. First we observe she is-

I. A COURAGEOUS MOTHER.

Her very approach to Christ took courage, for she was a Canaanite woman. If you know anything about the Old Testament, you know that her people were the hopelessly wicked people the Jews were commanded to destroy, and drive out of the promise land. She was a descendent of these hated enemies of the Jews. She was a Gentile from the area of Tyre and Sidon, two of the most godless cities of antiquity. Yet in spite of this background, she had the courage to come to a band of Jews and cry for help. She heard stories of what Jesus could do, and she believed Him to be the Messiah of Israel.

Just as a lovely lily can grow out of a putrid pond, so here is a woman of fantastic faith and compelling courage coming out of a corrupt society. She had one strike against her before she started, but she had the courage to start because of her love for her daughter. She may have been a pagan, but we are blind to the realities of life if we think non-Christians do not possess the blessings of mother love. God's grace is universal in mother love, and you will find mother's honored, loved, and exalted the world over. We sometimes think, or rather unthinkingly assume, that mothers who lose children in some pagan land do not suffer as do Christian mothers. This is foolish, for they have the same love and compassion, and are driven to acts of desperation to save their children.

Mother love which sacrifices to protect the offspring is even seen in the animal kingdom. I remember reading of a farmer who was kicking objects around after his barn burned down. As his foot pushed a pile of burnt material off to the side, out ran some little chicks. A closer examination revealed that the mother hen had gathered them under her and perished in the flames, but had saved them by her sacrifice. Jesus only once portrayed Himself in the role of mother. He did so by saying, "Like a mother hen gathers her chicks under her wings, so would I have gathered the children of Israel." Only God's love is greater than that of a mother.

As we look at this Canaanite mother coming courageously to plead for her sick daughter, we all can feel her love and desperation. Certainly Jesus, the most compassionate man who ever lived, would be immediately touched by her need. But her plea falls on deaf ears, and Jesus ignores her and answers not a word. That must have been a blow to her faith, but with two strikes against her she goes on courageously swinging. We will examine the fascinating reasons for why Jesus reacted this way in the next message, but for now we want to concentrate on the characteristics of this mother.

She is an outsider in the first place, and now she is clearly rebuffed, and you would think she would face reality and go away, but she persists. She apparently began bugging the Apostles to get Jesus to respond to her, for in Matt. 15:23 they came begging Jesus to get her out of their hair. What nerve! She was like a Jacob wrestling with an angel, and she wasn't going to let go until He blessed her. If the leader won't talk to you, and the followers are all clamoring for you to get lost, you would tend to get a feeling of being unwanted. Who would bother to seek help from people who treat you like that. No one

but a courageous mother.

She finally did get Jesus to say something, but what He said was even worse than silence, and was like the third strike against her. He said in Matthew's account that He was not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. In other words, you just as well go away, for I cannot help you. My flock is Israel and you are from another flock not under my jurisdiction, so you had better look elsewhere for help. That was strike three, but like so many mothers she didn't care beans about the rules of the game. She kept on swinging. It was apparent that she didn't realize that she was out of the game. Then Jesus adds insult to injury and tells her that it is not fair to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs.

That should have been the last straw. Jesus was referring to the fact that the Jews were the children of the kingdom, and the Gentiles were considered the dogs. She was one of the dogs, and had no right to expect the Messiah of the Jews to take what He had for their benefit and give it to a Gentile. She got the point, for it was as clear as a ton of brick on her head, but she did not slink away like a defeated dog. With courage she went on until she gained the victory. Here was a mother who had more cold water thrown on her flame of love than anyone in the Bible, yet she continued to burn and prove that water cannot quench the fire of love. Billy Sunday said, "If the devils in hell ever turned pale, it was the day mother love flamed up for the first time in a woman's heart."

Here was a mother's love that overcame even divine resistance. She was the only person to ever win an argument with Jesus. Demons had her daughter, and the only power that could release her from their possession was resisting, but mother love never gave up. That poor demon possessed girl had no idea what her mother was going through to help her, and this is true for most children. Few ever realize what motherhood is all about until they go through it themselves. The poet spoke truly who wrote,

Until the stars are old
And the sun grows cold,
And the leaves of the judgment book unfold,
No one will ever know the full measure of service
The mother's of earth
have rendered to their children.

This mother's little girl probably never knew of the courage of her mother as we do, and most of will never know until eternity what our mothers went through for us, but it is safe to assume it wasWWe see next that she was not only a courageous mother, she was-

II. A CLEVER MOTHER.

It would seem that Jesus had said the last word when He told her He could not take the children's bread and give it to the dogs. But this mother had the wit to come back with an answer as clever as those that Jesus used in dealing with the Pharisees. She said,

"You are right Lord, but even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from their master's table." Jesus was overwhelmed by the force of her faith, and He granted her request.

She agreed with Jesus. She did not argue and say, "I am no dog," and, "How dare you insinuate I am." Instead, she agreed that it is not right to take food from the children and give it to the dogs, but then even dogs are not allowed to starve. The scraps and crumbs from the table are eaten by the dogs, and nothing is taken from the children. All she was asking for was dog food. All she wanted was the crumbs. "I do not ask to be seated at the table with the children. I only ask for that which any dog receives, and that will be sufficient for my need." There is no defeat for a faith like that. Call her a dog and instead of biting you she says, "Okay treat me like one and pass the dog food." This is the only place in the New Testament where Jesus is overwhelmed by the cleverness of another. Many said of Him, "Never man spoke as He speaks," but now He stands before this mother who spoke as none had spoken before.

Some of the most clever people in the world are mothers. They are not always educated and brilliant in the things of the world, but when it comes to getting what they feel is right for their children they are clever beyond compare. Moses would never have survived to become the channel through whom God influenced all of history had it not been for the cleverness of his loving mother whose scheme to save his life worked out even better than she could have dreamed. Billy Sunday said, "I expect to meet Moses mother in heaven, and I am going to ask her how much old Pharoah had to pay her for the job. I think that is one of the best jokes, that old sinner having to pay the mother to take care of her own baby." Who knows how many marvels of salvation have been due to the cleverness of mothers. This one in our text is one of the greatest, for by her wit in asking only for dog food, she opened the door to God's best for her child. In our final point we want to see the foundation for her courage and cleverness. It was due to the fact that she was-

III. A CONFIDENT MOTHER.

In verse 28 Jesus exclaims, "O woman, great is your faith." Jesus was impressed with her unwavering confidence. She was a woman whose faith in Him could not be shaken, even when He was doing the shaking Himself. She knew He could heal, and she was confident He would if she could only get Him to see that it was right that He do so. Without that confidence that love and compassion would win out over His resistance, she would have given up, but faith gave her the victory. Faith the victory that overcomes all obstacles; even those placed in our path by God Himself to test our perseverance. Faith believes God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him, and this mother would let nothing shake her faith in that kind of a God. She kept seeking and expecting to be rewarded even when it seemed God was doing His best to hide.

9. A SERVANT MOTHER

One of the paradoxes of life is the many famous people we don't even know, and many of them are mothers. F.W. Boreham, the great Australian preacher, tells of the English mother Mrs. Trollope who saw her husband and children dying of consumption under her very eyes. She nursed them and supported them by writing novels. She had a life of awful burdens, yet she wrote with such liveliness. When her books were successful she inspired her children to write as well. They wrote more books than was ever produced by a single family in England. This mother watched her husband, two sons, and her daughter die, yet she made it a home of cheer and success.

History is full of great mothers like this that we will never know about, and the fact is there are even famous mothers right in the Bible we know little or nothing about. If it was not for Mother's Day that sends preachers searching the Bible for a different mother to study each year, many of these mothers would be ignored forever. One of the most famous mothers in the New Testament is the mother of Zebedee's sons James and John. Mark tells us her name was Salome. She was a very famous person in the New Testament, and she played a major role in the life of Jesus, but since we seldom put all the pieces together she is an obscure person to most Christians. I hardly knew she existed, but now I see her as one of the most marvelous mothers in the Bible.

Her husband Zebedee was a very successful and well known businessman with a large fishing company. He had two sons working for him, and Peter and Andrew worked for the company as well, and he had other hired hands besides. Salome was the mother of a fairly wealthy family. She was upper middle class at least, and this explains her desire for her two boys to be number one and two in the Master's kingdom. This text alone could lead us to think of her as a spoiled rich mother who expected the best to be just handed to her children, but the whole story demands that we look at a bigger picture of this mother.

She was one of the women who followed Jesus and who, because of her wealth, supported Jesus and his disciples while they ministered to people. Matt. 27:56 lists her as one of the women who followed Jesus and cared for his needs. She was one of the group of women who stood at the cross in Mark 15, and she was one of three women who came with spices to anoint the body of Jesus on the first Easter in Mark 16. In other words, Salome was not a rich snob who thought she was better than anyone else. She was a loyal servant of Jesus who followed him all the way when others forsook him. She used her wealth right to the end in buying spices for the body of Jesus. She was a truly remarkable disciple and one faithful to the end.

She is the only mother of the twelve that is referred to in the New Testament, and she is the mother of two of the twelve that Jesus picked for his disciples, and these two were in the inner circle with Peter. This tells you something about the character and quality of Salome. She was one of Jesus' favorite mothers, and favorite people, so let's not be quick to judge this lady, but learn from her as we examine her most motherly role in the life of her sons. The first thing we note is-

I. HER REVERENCE.

The NIV is weak here and says she came to Jesus and kneeling down asked a favor.

This could be seen as some sort of courtesy. The KJV is really more accurate, for it says she came worshipping him. The Greek word here is *proskuneo* and is translated 59 times as worship in the New Testament. A few examples will show just how weak the word kneeling is to describe it. It is the word for the wise men who came from the East to worship him. It is the word Jesus used to respond to the devil's temptation when he said, "Thou shalt worship the Lord Thy God." It is the word Jesus used to say, "We must worship the Father in spirit and in truth." It is the word in Heb. 1:6, "Let all the angels of God worship him."

It is the word for all the worship around the throne of God in heaven.

My point is, all the evidence makes it clear that Salome was a deeply committed godly mother who acknowledged the Lordship of Jesus. We see here a sincere recognition of Jesus and his authority. She had no doubts about Jesus being the Messiah. Almost everybody else did, and even her two sons lost faith in the end, but Salome never did. They were off weeping in fear when she stood at the cross, and was early at the tomb. She was a woman of strong faith and commitment, and was no doubt the key factor in her two boys being men whom Jesus could use to build his kingdom. A mother's faith is often the key to her children's faith. Paul wrote in II Tim. 1:5, "I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice..."

Faith is personal, but it can be passed on from mother to child. Lois passed hers on to her daughter Eunice, and Eunice passed it on to her son Timothy. Salome passed hers on to her sons. No other mother is more honored than she with two of her sons chosen to be among the 12. The point of this first point is, do not look down on this precious mother, but respect her as one of the greatest followers and worshippers of Jesus. Her reverence for Christ makes her a mother to be highly respected, even though she expected too much for her sons. Secondly look at-

II. HER REQUEST.

All she wanted was the best for her boys. If this be wrong, then most mothers are offensive people. For they all tend to have this same ambition. Her evaluation of her boys was not just a mother's subjective preference. At some point most all mothers feel their children are the brightest and worthy of top billing. But Salome was going by their objective abilities. They were successful businessmen, and they had excellent qualities of leadership. We know this because Jesus chose them as disciples, and he chose her boys to be two of the three in the inner circle. They were not one and two like she requested, but they were two and three. Jesus by his choice of James and John as his closest friends and companions acknowledges that Salome had done a great job as a mother, and her ambition for her boys was not that far out of line. Jesus did not rebuke her for her request. He just said it was not his to grant, for God had already made that decision. And for all we know, one of her boys will be at the right or left of Jesus in his kingdom.

There is an old Greek legend of how the gods summoned gifted people to Olympus to reward with a crown the one with the greatest gift. The artist brought his paintings; the sculptor his statues; the farmer the fruits of his field; the poet his poems, and the inventor his machines. Among them was an old woman with nothing in her hands. "Why

are you here with nothing in your hands?" she was asked, and she replied, "I am here just to look on. I wanted to see who received the crown. These are my children." The judges said, "Give her the crown, for she trained and inspired them all."

The evidence points to Salome deserving a lot of credit for her boys being the kind of Christians they were. And she was not content that they were among the twelve, but was still pushing that they might be the elite of the twelve. She represents those mothers who change the world because of their ambition for their children.

A young boy of ten in Naples took his first voice lesson and was told by the teacher, "You can't sing. You haven't any voice at all. Your voice sounds like the wind in the shutters." The boy's mother did not accept that evaluation. She had visions of her son being great, and though she was poor she made every sacrifice to pay for his voice lessons. She encouraged him to press on when everyone else was applying the brakes. Had it not been for this mother's ambition for her son the world would never have heard of Enrico Caruso, one of its greatest singers ever. If mothers do not have high aims for their children, who will?

It was Jochabed, the mother of Moses, who saved his life and provided Israel with its greatest leader. It was Rebekah who saw in Jacob great potential, and she got him the birthright. It was the godly mothers of Samson and Samuel that made them the leaders that they were. John the Baptist was raised by a godly mother, Elizabeth. Lincoln said, "All that I am and hope to be I owe to my angel mother." Washington said, "If I have been of any service to the U.S. America, the credit all belongs to my wonderful mother.

The point is, volumes could be filled showing that it is the ambition of mothers that motivates children to be the best of what they can be. Do you think James and John would be disciples, let alone two out of three of the inner circle, if they had not had a mother like Salome? It is not likely. The evidence points to her being one of the most successful mothers in the Bible. The rest of the disciples were angry at this plan to get James and John the highest status, but you do not see any anger in Jesus. He understood this mother's ambition, and knew it was the force behind two of the best men he ever knew.

They were far from perfect, and had some rough edges to be smoothed off. It could even be that they were using their mother here, for many feel she was either the sister of Mary or of Joseph, and this family tie could have looked like the edge they needed in the competition among the disciples. Children are notorious for trying to use either mom or dad to get their will accomplished. In a book of letters from camp with the mother's response, one mother wrote this:

"Dear Peter, daddy got your letter and the answer is no! Daddy can't get your counselor drafted into the army." Mothers can sometimes be so uncooperative. One wrote, "Dear Richard, don't sell your tennis racket, aqualung, catchers mitt, or football uniform this summer. Father says this is your third and final warning." It is no wonder some kids can't get ahead with road blocks like that. Another wrote, "Dear Raymond, I refuse to send you \$2.00 to loan to your counselor. Are you trying to bribe your

counselor?" When your own mother doesn't trust you its hard to succeed as a wheeler-dealer.

It is possible Salome's two boys put her up to this, and convinced her it was the right thing to do, but all the evidence seems to point to the fact that she was just a gung ho godly mother who aimed for the stars, and sincerely felt her boys deserved the best. It certainly didn't do them any harm to have a mother who had such a high opinion of their abilities. Her request for her two sons to be at the top is an insight into the heritage these boys had all their lives in their godly mother.

Thomas Jefferson said, "There never was a great man but that there was a good mother behind him." This goes for great women as well. Jenny Lind, who became one of the world's greatest singers in the mid 1800's, was known as the Swedish Nightingale said, "My dear little mother gave me her Swedish Bible, praying that I might never cease reading and obeying its teachings. All that I am I owe to my Christian mother and her great faith in me.

**Of all the earthly things God gives,
There's one above all others.
It is the precious, priceless gift
Of loving, Christian mothers.**

One of the best things you can give your children is what Salome gave her two boys, and that is a high opinion of how useful they can be in the kingdom of God. Make sure your children know that you think they are worthy of key positions in the service of the King. The word service leads us to our third point.

III. HER RESPONSIBILITY.

Jesus used this mother's request, and the emotional moment it created, to teach his disciples and all mothers what their highest responsibility is. It is not to see that children get the best jobs, the highest pay, and the most power, but rather, that they become servants that care about other people. No mother has reason to be proud just because her child is famous, rich, and powerful. She is only worthy of praise and honor when her children are forces of loving service in a world of endless need.

In 1937 when President Roosevelt was observing his 55th birthday, his mother was told you must be the happiest of all mothers, and this 82 year old mother responded, "Every mother who has good children is the happiest mother in the world." It is not power over people, but goodness that matters, and Jesus defined greatness as goodness and a spirit of service that is willing to sacrifice for the good of others. Jesus knew that all the good things that would happen in his kingdom would happen through people who had a servants heart. His kingdom does not need powerful people who lord it over others. His kingdom needs people who love to serve and minister to the needs of others. It is the responsibility of every Christian mother to make sure her ambitions for her children are not worldly ambitions, but kingdom ambitions.

Mothers can so easily take their eyes off Christ given goals, and let the culture dictate the kinds of ambition she will seek to instill in her children. There is no problem with being the president of a bank, or a nation, or any other position of prominence and power, but the point of Jesus is that all of this is much ado about nothing without a servant heart.

This was Paul's point in I Cor. 13. You can be the most eloquent politician with the tongue of an angel; you can be the most brilliant scientist with great knowledge; you can be a financial wizard who raises a fortune to give to the poor, but if you have not love you are nothing. Without the servant's heart that really cares about people in serving them, all other kinds of greatness is of no value. The only people who get into the heroes of history in heaven's library are those who are servants. It is a Christian mother's responsibility to see that her children understand this perspective on greatness.

Salome did see this, for she was herself a servant of the Lord, and her boys were trained likewise. We do not see her suggesting that her boys be given power to push the other disciples around. But you recall these men had a problem with who was the greatest among them. This was a perpetual matter of discussion, and Salome's request just aggravated this open sore the 12 were always picking at. Jesus did not rebuke her, but he rebuked the 12 often for their worldly view of greatness, and their ambition to be number one. This was just another occasion where he tried to get them to see what true greatness was all about. In doing so he made it clear to all mothers and teachers, and all who help formulate value systems, that our responsibility is to produce servants.

Show me a mother whose children are proud to serve, and I'll show you a great mother. Show me a teacher whose students are proud to serve, and I'll show you a great teacher. Show me a church where people care about people, and are willing to give of their time, talent, and treasure to serve people, and I'll show you a great church. Show me a God who would send his Son into the world, not to be lauded and applauded and bowed to, but to give his life a ransom for many, and I'll show you a great God. The bottom line is that the greatest people in the world are servants and, therefore, the greatest mothers in the world are those whose children are servants.

Robert Moffat changed the whole continent of Africa as a servant. When he left home his mother made him promise something. She said you are going out into a wicked world. Begin every day with God and close every day with God. Then she kissed him, and Moffat said it was the kiss that made him a missionary. He left home with a heart to do the will of God and that always means to be of service.

The world's greatest need has always been, and will always be, mothers who recognize their responsibility to help supply the kingdom of God with servants. Like Salome they need to be examples of servant hood, and then also teach it and instill their value system into the mind of their children. If Salome felt the least bit rebuked here, you can count on it she did not go away to sulk, but rather to pray that she would be the mother that Jesus wanted her to be. Phyllis Didriksen wrote a poem that Salome could well have prayed that very night.

**I do not ask for riches for my children,
Nor even recognition for their skill;**

**I only asked that Thou wilt give them
A heart completely yielded to Thy will.**

**I do not ask for wisdom for my children
Beyond discernment of Thy grace;
I only ask that Thou wilt use them
In Thine own appointed place.**

**I do not ask for favors for my children
To seat them on Thy left hand or Thy right;
But may they join the throng in heaven
That sings before Thy throne so bright.**

**I do not seek perfection in my children,
For then my own faults I would hide;
I only ask that we might walk together
And serve our Savior side by side.**

It does not make any difference if you are at the right or left hand of Jesus, but what does matter is, do you have a servants heart? That is the only way to be great and number one is the eyes of Christ. Salome learned a valuable lesson in this experience, and, no doubt, never again tried to get her sons a privileged position. Her only ambition was that they be servants of the Lord, and that she be a servant mother.

10. PROVERBS IDEAL MOTHER

A young man went into a bookstore in Boston and asked the clerk if she had the book Man, The Master Of Women. The pretty salesgirl merely tossed her head and said, "You'll have to look for that in the fiction department." In the battle of the sexes modern women feel they are gaining victories. In spite of all the negative and derogatory remarks on the inferiority of women by men in history, they have risen to places of leadership in almost every field. Many women are now ordained clergy, and there are mothers who are right now straight A students in theological seminaries.

I am keenly conscious of the sharpness of the feminine mind because I graduated from Bethel College third from the top because 2 girls had superior grades. Plato said, "All the pursuits of men are the pursuits of women also, but in all of them a woman is inferior to a man." The facts, however, show that Plato, one of the greatest thinkers in history, was dead wrong. Women can match men both as sinners and as saints. Women can now follow the path of folly just as freely and openly as men. According to the world this is progress, and there cheer is, "You've come along way baby." We cannot argue with the fact that they have come along way, but the tragedy is that for many it has been the wrong way. Women have been blind to their potential, and they have been grasping for that which weakens and destroys their place and power in God's plan. Women are equal with men, but their role is different. God the Father and God the Son are equal, but their roles are also different.

Most women play two major roles in life, and they are being a wife and being a mother. In the role of wife she is to be submissive to her husband, and in the role of mother she is to be sovereign over her children. She is to be both a follower and a leader, and when she plays both roles well she is the masterpiece of God's creation. However, when she gets her wires crossed she brings misery upon herself and those she loves. Women lose out on their effectiveness almost always in the wife relationship rather than the mother relationship. Almost all the negative literature against women is aimed at the wife. Such literature does not even exist against mothers. It is harder to be a good wife than it is to be a good mother. More women fail at being wives than at being mothers. Many men desert their wives, but few ever desert their mother. Men divorce their wives, but they love their mothers to the end. It is just a fact that husbands are harder to please than children. It is not valid to assume that he was joking when a husband wrote this poem to his wife:

When you're away, I'm restless, lonely,
Wretched, bored, dejected, only
Here's the rub, my darling dear,
I feel the same when you are here.

A woman's hardest task in life is to be a good wife, and that is why, even from a woman's lips, we read in verse 10 that a good wife is rare and hard to find. Good mothers, on the other hand, are abundant. It is hard to fail as a mother. Women have been slandered with every name imaginable as wives, but these same women have stimulated floods of poetry as mothers. How can it be that the same person can be seen from opposite perspectives? It is because she obeys God's will for her by nature in her relationship to her children, but her nature resists obedience to God's will in relationship to her husband.

It takes the grace of God to be a good wife, but motherhood and its virtues are common even among pagans. The feminine qualities of a mother's nature come to her naturally as a part of God's creation. Motherhood is a part of God's very nature, and He expressed that in creation. In the second verse of the Bible, Gen. 1:2, we read that the Spirit of God moved, hovered, or brooded over the waters. The picture is of, "That tremulous motion made by the hen while either hatching her eggs or fostering her young." From this picture some ancients got the idea that the world came from an egg. This word has the Spirit of God fulfilling the female function in the incubation of life, and the word came to be used to express the idea of loving, warming and cherishing.

Had this been the only time such a picture was used to describe God and His actions we would not dare read much into it, but the fact is, God's motherhood is described elsewhere in the same image of a bird's love and care for her young. In Duet, 32:11 we read of how God cared for the children of Israel. "Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young, spreading out its wings, catching them, bearing them on its pinions." In Isa. 66:13 God says, "As one whom his mother comforts, so will I comfort you." In Isa. 31:5 the bird image is used again and God says, "Like birds hovering, so the Lord of hosts will protect Jerusalem. The mother love of a bird for her chicks was apparently the best illustration of mother love in that ancient world, for Jesus uses it to express His love also. In Matt. 23:37 we read, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood

under her wings, and you would not."

The value of these texts is that they show us that the dignity of womanhood and motherhood is grounded in the divine nature. God created man in His own image. The feminine is part of the image of God, and that is why Jesus had such a perfect balance of masculine and feminine qualities, for He was the expressed image of the father, and the fatherhood of God includes motherhood as well. In setting apart a day a year to honor mothers, we are not merely following a custom of the world, but we are honoring the nature of God, which is the source of all mother love. An unknown poet put it-

**Something of God is in mother's love,
True motherhood has touched His garment's hem,
For strength and wisdom, and I am quite sure,
We honor Him, today, in honoring them.**

We will honor Him all the more if we looked at and seek to live up to the ideal of motherhood, which the Scriptures reveal. This ideal we see in Proverbs in a woman's description, and she is a mother herself. Every mother wants to play some role in choosing her son's wife, and king Lemuel's mother, therefore, taught him what to look for. In a previous message we considered the first requirement for being an ideal mother, and that was to be a good wife. That is the hard part. Today we want to focus on the other characteristics of an ideal mother. The first is that an ideal mother is-

I. INDUSTRIOUS.

Laziness and motherhood do not go together. The ideal mother delights in her labor for those whom she loves. Verse 13 says she works with willing hands. That word willing means with pleasure. The Syriac translation has it, "And her hands are active after the pleasure of her heart." This whole passage stresses how industrious a mother is with her hands. Over and over it pictures how she provides for her family.

In verse 16 it is with the fruit of her hands that she plants a vineyard.

In verse 17 she makes her arms strong.

In verse 19 she uses her hands to spin to provide clothing.

In verse 20 she opens her hands to the poor and needy.

In verse 31 we see another reverence to the fruit of her hands.

Times have changed and mothers no longer have to spin their own thread and sew all their own clothes, but they must still fulfill this principle of being industrious. A good mother is a busy mother. She is never without work to do for the good of her family. Good works do not earn salvation, but in the realm of motherhood earn for her all her praises and glory. A mother's hands are still one of her basic tools for success. Another unknown poet wrote,

**These are the hands that cook, wash and mend,
Hands of the teacher, the nurse, and true friend.
Though scarred by toil and wrinkled with care,**

**They're beautiful when uplifted in prayer.
They write and bake, and their fingers bless,
And all the world's healing is in their caress.**

Many wives and mothers will not appreciate the analogy of verse 14 where she is said to be like the ships of the merchants. In our weight conscious society few women see any honor in being compared to a ship. One boy said to his father, "What would mom like best for Mother's Day?" He replied, "To be weighed and found wanting." Longfellow in a beautiful poem draws an analogy between a barge and a bride. The groom turns and looks, and this is what he sees:

**The sun shown on her golden hair,
And her cheek was glowing fresh and fair.
With the breath of morn and the soft sea air,
Like a beauteous barge was she...**

F. W. Boreham, the great Australian preacher, said no woman should resent this analogy, for all our ingenious inventions the ship is the only one of divine origin. The ark was the first ship, and its plans were divinely dictated. The ark was the means of salvation, and in its bosom man was delivered. And so from the bosom of Mary the mother of Christ came our deliverance. The comparison here in our text is dealing with her industriousness. A ship is a key factor in the industry of that day, and a mother is a key factor in the economy of the home. She would travel far to provide food for her family. This is not necessary today, but again, the idea is that a good mother will be a economic blessing in the home. She will not waste money and be a burden, but will be an economizer. If she cannot raise food in a garden and sew her own clothes, she can still go out of her way to get the best bargain. The details have changed, but the principles remain the same. A good mother is a hard worker.

Verse 17 does not picture the weaker sex as weak, but as strong. Many mothers use more energy in their labor than does the man of the house. Verse 23 pictures him sitting at the gates of the city in dignity, and he is being praised because of his hard working wife. Hard work is not degrading to a woman, but idleness is. A mother with nothing to do is a problem. The industrious mother is not only a blessing to her family, but by her wise and economical living she is able to share with those who are poor. A good mother is a blessing beyond her family, and she is an instrument of God for blessing an entire society. Next we see that she is-

II. INSTRUCTIVE.

A mother is not just a machine good for physical labor. She is life's most important instructor. Verse 26 says, "She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue." Most references to the tongues of women are negative. One said that the last thing to stop moving in a dead man is his heart, but in a woman it is her tongue. Crabb wrote of one, "The wife was pretty, trifling, childish, weak. She could not think, but would not cease to speak." Men often feel women would be better off if they did not open their mouth, but it is in her role as a wife rather than a mother.

A mother's tongue is a source of wisdom. Her words can heal the pain of body and spirit. Her words can cheer and comfort as none other. The kindness she shows and teaches determines much toward the character of her children. Henry Ward Beecher said, "My mother's heart was my school room." Columbus said, "Mother was chart and compass to my life. Her great love held me to the true course all the way." The evidence of history clearly indicates that a mother's teaching does more to determine a child's character and relationship to God than any other single factor. Almost every great man of God, who has been used to lead many into the kingdom, was himself led into the kingdom by his mother, or was strongly influenced by his mother.

Dwight L. Moody loved his mother as a boy. She was a widow with 5 children. She taught them to be generous even in their poverty. Dwight thought she was too severe when she insisted that he go to church to hear a sermon he did not understand after working in the fields all week. When he went out into the world he deliberately missed church, but the habit was strong, and he soon came back. As a man Moody wrote to his children, "I have often said since, mother I thank you for making me go to the house of God when I didn't want to go." A mother's instruction determines whether children will become church goers or church skippers. A Spanish proverb says, "An ounce of mother is worth a pound of clergy." A mother is the most important influence in her child's life when it is so impressionable and pliable. She determines the direction of development. An unknown poet wrote,

Tis woman's to fashion the infant mind,
To kindle its thoughts, and its hopes unbind,
To guide its young mind in the earliest flight,
And lure it to worlds of unsullied light;
To teach him to sing, in his gladsome hours,
Of a Savior's love, with an angel's powers.

God entrusted His own Son to be raised and taught by a godly mother. Joseph died, and the result was an even stronger connection of child and mother. The implication of the experience of Jesus is that a mother is more essential in a child's life than the father. The evidence of history supports this as well. There is so much more to be said of a mother's instruction, but we have to move on. Just let this poem by an unknown author remind you as mothers that you hold the key to your children's future.

I saw tomorrow marching by on little children's feet,
Within their forms and faces read her prophecy complete.
I saw tomorrow look at me from little children's eyes,
And thought how carefully we'd teach, if we were wise.

The ideal mother is industrious, instructive, and finally, she is-

III. INSPIRING.

Verse 28 says her children rise up and call her blessed. The children of the good mother may not recognize her worth as youth, but when they grow up they will look back and praise her as being the main inspiration of their life. Many successful men would never have made

it without the inspiration of a mother. When every one else thinks you are incapable, mother still has faith in you. This faith has inspired many to press on. Thomas Edison said, "My mother was the making of me. She was so true, so sure of me, and I felt I had someone to live for, someone I must not disappoint."

The mother of J.C. Penny had 12 children, and she lived in poverty. She did the work of three women and worked from morning till night. Her husband died and left her with large debts. With all her burdens she still instructed her children in Christian principles, and J. C. grew up to praise his mother for he operated his business based on the Golden rule and was a great success. The mother of the Mayo brothers was also poor and had no formal education, but she raised her children with a love for learning, and they grew up to become two of the most famous doctors in the world.

General Robert E. Lee had a uniquely close relationship to his mother. Ann Carterly was declared dead and was buried in the family vault in Virginia. The next day when the old sexton brought fresh flowers to lay on her casket he heard her calling for help. She let out of the casket and 15 months later gave birth to the famous general. Lee reflecting back on life said, "I had the most wonderful mother-in wisdom, in love, and in inspiration. God resurrected her from the tomb that I might have just such a mother. I owe all that I am and all that I have accomplished to my mother-the best Christian mother in all the world."

George Washington said, "If I have been of any service to the United States of America, the credit all belongs to my wonderful mother." We can't begin to quote all the great men who have risen up to call their mothers blessed and the source to their life's inspiration. I will close with one more example from a Japanese author Isako Hatano who wrote to his old mother, "When the great tree that I love is withered I shall always be proud to have been its fruit." Such is the praise received by the ideal mother, the mother who has been industrious, instructive and inspiring. May God inspire every mother to strive toward this ideal, for the key to the future is in the hands of you mothers.

11. PROVERBS IDEAL MOTHER 2

Harry Houdini as a young 20 year old performer, still years away from fame, met an 18 year old singer named Wilhalmina Rohnes. She sat in the front row of his performance and he spilled a glass of colored liquid that spotted her dress. To make amends he got her to give him her measurements. He then talked his mother into making her a new dress. He personally delivered the dress to her home. He invited her to go with him to Coney Island and there he proposed to her, and before the day was over they were married.

This is what you call love at first sight, and a whirlwind courtship. It is an extremely high risk method of getting married, but the fact is it sometimes works wonderfully. It did for Houdini. They were inseparable for life, and he wrote her a love note everyday for 30 years whether he was home or traveling. The fact that he was a Jew is a key factor in why it was such a happy marriage. The Jews have always been a people seriously committed to being

great lovers. Houdini's father was a Rabbi, and his mother was 25 years younger than his father. The age factor, class factor, and economic factor all of which makes so great a difference in the lives of Gentiles did not make any difference to Jews. They meant it when they married for better or for worse, and they went on loving through all the hardships of life.

A little girl by the name of Lucy came home from school all excited to tell her mother the new story her teacher told. She said, "Snow White lived in the forest with 7 little men and one day she ate a poison apple and fell asleep. Then a prince came and kissed her and she woke up." And then she asked her mother, "Guess what happened?" The mother responded, "They lived happily ever after." "No no," Lucy protested, "They got married." There is a difference between getting married and living happily ever after. Marriage often leads to motherhood, and these two roles add a great deal of tension and responsibility to life. The Jews learned from the Bible that love does not guarantee that life will be smooth and happy, but persistent love is the only way to victory over all the obstacles that will block the way to God's best.

Look at the great couples of the Bible, and you will not find life as a bed of roses without thorns. Adam and Eve fell in love at first sight, and they were married the day they met. It was the world's first romance, but in no time there was sorrow and tension. They disobeyed God and had to endure the loss of perfect fellowship and the ideal environment of Eden. Then they became parents, and who knows what they did for diaper service? They had their problems as they had one child after another. The kids grew up fighting, and one of them even killed another. The first family had enormous tensions but Adam and Eve went on loving through it all. They did not have a lot of choices, of course. Had they gotten a divorce there was none other to turn to. But there is no hint they ever desired separation. After Cain killed Abel they had Seth and many other children. They loved each other and were committed to each other in spite of all the trials.

This pattern carried on, and we see this as the primary characteristic of the Patriarchs and their mates. Job and his wife went through physical and mental hell, but they went through it together, and in the end they are one and in love. Abraham and Sarah had enormous trials and tensions, but they faced them together, and through laughter and tears they endured. The burden of barrenness, the fear of lust, the agony of deception and separation, and of jealousy, and family conflict, and even war and captivity could not pry them loose from their commitment of love.

Their children and grandchildren maintained this heritage. Isaac and Rebekah also fell in love at first sight and were married the day they met. They had twins, and this was double trouble, for each parent preferred a different son. Isaac loved Esau and Rebekah loved Jacob. This led to tension, and later to the deception of Isaac by Rebekah. The things we read in the Bible almost always lead to divorce in our day, but they work their way through their problems and remained committed in love. Their son Jacob fell in love with Rachel at first sight. He had to wait 7 years before he married her, but Scripture says it seemed like only a few days to him because of his great love for her. They had the problem of Rachel being barren, and then the jealousy and conflict with her sister Leah. They had terrible competition as wives and mothers.

All of these couples had their problems, but they persisted in love through them all. This is the biblical heritage that made Jews such persistent lovers. None of the great marriages of the Bible were perfect marriages, but they were persistent marriages. They did not let life's problems dissolve their commitment. The Jews have not only survived, they have thrived in a world that is often determined to eliminate them, and it is because they have had ideals they lived by. Ideals are essential to progress. Those who are content with the real are content with far less than what can be an ought to be. Harriet de Antermont wrote,

No vision and you perish;
No ideal, and you're lost;
Your heart must ever cherish
Some faith at any cost;
Some hope, some dream to cling to,
Some rainbow in the sky;
Some melody to sing to,
Some service that is high.

Every mother has her ideals pictured for her in Prov. 31. It is not an easy picture to examine because it makes the mothers feel that they have fallen so far short. Nevertheless, it needs to be examined, for without the knowledge of the ideal, the real will never have the motivation necessary to change and improve to become more like the ideal. The first thing we need to observe about this picture of the ideal mother is that it comes from a mother. Verse 1 tells us that this chapter consists of the words of Lemuel which he learned from his mother. This section from verse 10-31 is instruction to be read and memorized by Jewish boys as a guide for what to seek in a wife. It is for girls to learn what she ought to be as a potential wife. It is traditionally read by husband and children on a Friday night at the Sabbath table.

To make it easier to be memorized it is put in the form of an acrostic. Each verse begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. There are 22 letters in their alphabet, and 22 verses in this section, and so it would be equivalent to the one time popular song in English that goes, A your adorable, B your so beautiful, C your the cutest one I know, and so on. This fact alone makes us realize how important the Hebrew people felt it was to keep a constant ideal in the minds of youth concerning a woman's role. The one thing on which all wise men have agreed is the high value of a good woman.

Euripides could say, "There is no worse evil than a bad woman; and nothing has ever been produced better than a good one." James Russell Lowell said, "Earth's noblest thing, a woman perfected." The goal of this passage is to aid women in achieving the role of an ideal wife and mother. The first requirement we see here is that she become-

I. A GOOD PARTNER.

It is a mistake to think you can be a good mother and be a poor wife. One of the greatest impressions a child gets comes from the relationship he observes between his parents. There is nothing you can do for or with a child that will blind it to a poor relationship between the two he loves most. If I try and recall sad moments in my home life, I do not think of any of

the spankings I got, or of disappointments because of being denied. The saddest moments I remember are when I sensed my parents were not getting along. Nothing produces more insecurity and fear in a child. Marriage comes first and then motherhood. The marriage is the foundation, and if that is not what it ought to be, motherhood will never be ideal.

We are, of course, assuming that the home has both partners. History is filled with illustrations of widowed women who have contributed immensely to the welfare of the world through mothering great children. Mary raised Jesus much of His life as a widow. Washington was also so raised. D. L. Moody lost his father when he was four. Napoleon lost his father at four. Bryon and President Garfield lost their fathers at three. Chrysostom, the golden tongued preacher of Constantinople lost his father soon after birth, and so with many many more. A mother need not be any less ideal if she has no husband, but the point here is, if she does have a husband her first requirement is that she be a good wife.

Woe to the woman whose husband writes an epitaph like John Dryden wrote for his wife. "Here lies my wife; here let her lie! Now she's at rest, and so am I." Shakespeare wrote, "Should all despair that have revolted wives the tenth of mankind would hang themselves." In other words, a bad wife is far from rare. This has apparently always been so, for verse 10 asks the question-who can find a good one? This implies that they are far from being readily available. If a man finds one, he is richer than if he rolled in rubies and played with pearls. A man in Two Gentlemen of Verona refers to his wife this way: "Why man, she is mine own, and I as rich as having such a jewel as twenty seas, if all their sand were pearl, the water nectar and the rocks pure gold." When was the last time your husband said something similar about you?

Verse 11 tells us one of the reasons a good wife is so precious. She gives a man a sense of security. He can trust her to be loyal to him and his interests. He does not have to worry when he is away that his wife will run him into debt. He knows he will have no need of spoil or added income to take care of the extravagance of a spendthrift wife. Many a marriage fails because a wife refuses to live within the range of her husband's income. The wise wife hunter will be on the lookout for this danger before he marries. There is no escaping it, for economics cannot be ignored in seeking an ideal partner.

Verse 12 tells us that the ideal wife is consistent and persistent in her devotion to her husband. She does not just do him good until the honeymoon is over, but all the days of her life. And not only does she do him good, but she refrains from doing him evil. If that had been left out, the ideal would be easier to attain. Most wives do their husbands good all through life, but they also mingle some evil with it. Job had a good wife, but she did him evil when she told him to curse God and die. Rebekah was precious to Isaac, but she deceived him in her scheme to favor Jacob. Rachel brought idolatry into the home of Jacob, and Michael despised David. Few are the wives that have measured up to this ideal.

But there are those who did try, and who were amazingly successful. They become examples of what can be done when the ideal is aimed for. The ideal is like a star. It cannot be reached, but it can be a guide. Philip Guedalla changed one word in a famous poem's opening lines that makes it apply to our theme.

**Wives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And departing leave behind us
Footprints in the sands of time.**

Consider, for example, the wife of the great reformer Martin Luther. They had much against them when they married. He was an ex-priest and she was an ex-nun. When they united in marriage in 1525 a storm of criticism rose up all over Europe. Even Luther's friend Melanchthon thought it lowered his prestige.

Erasmus the Greek scholar called it a comedy, and Henry VIII of England, who had six wives, two of whom he beheaded, called Luther's marriage a crime. Add to this the fact that Katherine VonBora was 26 and Luther was 42. It would appear that they had two strikes against them from the start. Katherine, however, saw to it that the third strike never came, and they lived for 21 happy years together. So close did she come to the ideal wife that Luther said he once had to chide himself for giving more credit to Katherine than to Christ.

No one can explain Luther's greatness apart from his wife. She fulfilled the ideal of being both a good wife and an ideal mother. Luther said, "I would not change my Katie for France and Venice, because God has given her to me, and she is true to me and a good mother to my children." She looked after an orchard of apples, peaches, pears, figs, and nuts. She had a fish pond which furnished trout, carp, pike, and perch. She had a barnyard with hens, ducks, pigs, and cows, and at times she did the slaughtering herself. She mothered not only the 6 children of her own, but 6 of one of Luther's sisters, plus the son of another sister, the son of a brother, a nephew and great-nephew bringing the total tribe to 16 children. On top of this students from the Wittenberg University boarded at their home, and she took in many monks and nuns who had left the monasteries.

With all of this she yet nursed Luther through many illnesses, and encouraged him to press on when he was depressed. Luther gave his time to study and far surpassed her in knowledge, but he never surpassed her devotion. She died 6 years after Luther, and her death bed prayer reveals much. "Lord my Savior thou standest at the door and wouldst enter in. O come Thou beloved guest, for I desire to depart and be with Thee. Let my children be committed to Thy mercy. Lord, look down in mercy upon Thy church. May the pure doctrine which God has sent through my husband be handed down unadulterated to posterity. Dear Lord, I thank Thee for all the trials through which Thou didst lead me, and by which Thou did prepare me to behold Thy glory....Behold now I grasp Thy hand and say, as Jacob of old! Lord I will not let Thee go, unless Thou bless me. I will cling to Thee forevermore." For her husbands good and God's glory she lived all the days of her life.

Consider the Civil War bride of the great evangelist D. L. Moody. Whoever heard of Emma Revell Moody? Yet she, without a doubt, was an essential factor in his greatness. He knew it too, for Paul their son, who became a Presbyterian minister and college president, wrote that till the day of his death Moody never ceased to wonder about two things: One, the use of God made of him in spite of his handicaps, and two, how he won the love of a woman he considered so completely his superior. She raised his three children while constantly living in hotels, and in the homes of strangers both here and abroad. Moody said that she fulfilled the ideal of verse 12, and she did him good all the days of her life. He said

that in 37 years of married life she was the only one who never tried to hold him back. She was always in sympathy with any new adventure.

She shielded him from interruptions, bores, and cranks which were always in abundance as they traveled. She wrote his letters and paid his bills, she did all she could to set him free to do his work for Christ. Moody could never have been what he was without her. She fulfilled the biblical ideal in just the way the Jews considered they should be fulfilled. The Jewish scholar Plout wrote, "The biblical life is the worthy partner, if not the technical equal, of her husband. The closest approximation to this biblical ideal was probably the East European Jewish housewife of the 18th and 19th centuries. Whenever possible she earned the livelihood for the family and attempted to relieve her husband of most of his mundane responsibilities so that he might give his life to the study of God's Word, to scholarship, and prayer."

This has been the pattern followed by many Christian wives. Almost every man who has contributed significantly to the course of Christian history was a man whose wife was striving to attain this ideal. You will notice how this picture of the ideal lacks anything of the sentimental. It seems to be strictly practical all the way through. Verse 30 even brushes aside the factors of beauty and form in favor of the fear of the Lord. The ideal wife is determined entirely by godly character and conduct.

John Calvin, the great reformer and theologian, refused to deviate from this standard in selecting his wife. He replied to his friends who urged him to marry, "I do not belong to the class of loving fools, who, when once smitten with a fine figure, are ready to expend their affection, even on the faults of her whom they have fallen in love with. The only kind of beauty which can win my soul, is a woman who is gentle, pure, modest, economical, patient, and who is likely to interest herself about my health." He finally found such a woman in Idelette De Bures. She was a widow and mother of three. All five of their own children died in infancy, and she died after 9 years of marriage, but so great was his attachment for her that he never considered taking another wife.

We have spent all of our time on the first requirement for being the ideal mother, and even then we have only scratched the surface. But now let's look at a couple of other requirements. She should also be-

II. A GIVING PERSON.

Mother's love so much, and they are loved so much because they tend to be more giving. They give of themselves and their time to their children more than dad does. The giving person tends to love more, for when you give to someone it is the act of love being expressed, and love grows by being expressed. If you have given nothing to someone, you have no relationship of any depth. Only those to whom you have given of your time and self do you have any truly personal relationship to.

Mothers have a deeper relationship to their children because they tend to be more giving. They give birth to the child, and they then give nourishment to the child. They give the most time and energy to the child usually. Mothers are givers. This is not to say that they never

pass the buck to dad. Little Anita was allowed to sit at the table in mother's place one evening when mom was gone. Her slightly older brother resenting the arrangement said with a sneer, "So you are mother tonight. Alright, how much is two times seven?" Anita knew how to play mother better than she realized. She responded, "I'm busy. Ask your father."

Mothers don't have all the answers. Children can stump them everyday, for life is full of mysteries. One mother poured out four glasses of root beer from her one calorie a bottle, and one of the sons watched, and when she was finished he asked, "Which one of us gets the calorie?" There are mysteries everywhere for children, and mothers have to constantly explain these mysteries. One little girl sitting with mom at a wedding asked, "Did the girl change her mind?" "Why do you ask that?" The girl said, "She went down the aisle with one man and came back with another." A little boy came to his mother and said, "I am 9 feet tall." She said, "How did you come to that conclusion?" He answered, "I took my shoes off and measured myself, and I'm 9 of my feet tall." She had to set him straight, or he wouldn't have been impressed with the size of Goliath at all. Mothers must be constantly giving understanding, encouragement, and love to their children. The third characteristic of the ideal mother we want to look at is-

III. A GRATITUDE PRODUCER.

Verse 28 says that her children arise and call her blessed, and her husband also praises her. Verse 31 says she will be praised at the city gate. Many people will feel gratitude toward the woman who is a good partner and a giving person. They will be grateful for her example, and for her influence on their own life. There is a receiving end to all of the labor of being a good wife and mother. There is a pay day. The hardest part of being a mother is often that feeling that says, "Who cares?" Both husband and kids seem to take it all for granted, and they seldom express gratitude. Motherhood is a long range investment. The profits don't come in immediately. It takes time and maturity before children realize what a price was paid by mom for her loving care and guidance.

There are probably more tributes to mothers by famous men and women than there are to any other category of persons in history. Don't feel bad if you haven't heard yours yet, for they often do not come until children are older. Thomas Edison paid this tribute to his mother: "I did not have my mother long, but she cast over me an influence which has lasted all my life. The good effects of her early training I can never lose. If it had not been for her appreciation and her faith in me at a critical time in my experience, I should never likely have become an inventor. I was always a careless boy, and with a mother of different mental calibre, I should have turned out badly. But her firmness, her sweetness, her goodness, were potent powers to keep me in the right path. My mother was the making of me. The memory of her will always be a blessing to me."

The famous sculptor Bartholdi gave 20 years to the work of producing the Statue of Liberty. He looked at many women to model for this majestic statue, but finally chose his own mother for the model of his master piece. This symbol of liberty is also a symbol of praise and gratitude for ideal womanhood and motherhood. History is filled with works and words of gratitude to mothers. One of the greatest tributes is the gratitude that Jesus

expressed even as he was dying on the cross. From that cross He urged John to care for His mother. It is not likely that there was any other person in His life that had a greater influence on Him than His mother, and just before He died for the sins of the world, He wanted to make sure that His precious mother was cared for. Thank God for motherhood, and thank God for this ideal toward which every mother can move for the blessing of their children and the world.

12. A MOTHER'S COMFORT Based on Isa. 66:7-13

Charles Connick was an unknown artist in Boston who brought his mother to live with him. They spent a summer at Cape Cod where they met a Mr. Swift. All summer Mr. Swift noticed how Connick honored his mother. He was so impressed that he decided to do something unusual. He was rich and had given a large fund to put stained glass windows in a church in Brooklyn. He called the architect and asked him to hire Connick for the job.

The architect had never heard of him. "Has he ever done a window?" he asked. "No," said Swift, "But he loves his mother." "That does not make him a window artist!" he responded. "I know," said Swift, "But a man who loves his mother will do his best, so give him a chance." So Connick was asked to submit drawings, and they were the best submitted. Connick went on to become the greatest church window craftsman in America and Europe, and he got his first assignment because he honored his mother.

God promised His people great reward if they honored their parents. The 5th Commandment is, "Honor your father and mother so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you." Having a Mother's Day each year is consistent with biblical values. God Himself goes as far in honoring parents that He identifies Himself with both fathers and mothers. The fatherhood of God we are most familiar with, but the fact is, the Bible reveals also the motherhood of God. All 3 persons of the Godhead are in some way identified with motherhood. In our text filled with motherhood analogy God the Father says in verse 13, "As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you..." God could find no better comparison to convey His love for His people than the comforting love of mother.

In the very beginning of the Bible in Gen. 1:2 we read that the Spirit of God moved or hovered over the waters. The Hebrew word used for the Holy Spirit hovering over the waters ready to give birth to all creation is the same word used of the mother eagle that hovers over her young. In Deut. 32:11 we read, "Like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young..." The Holy Spirit takes on a mother's image in creation. The creation story begins with this mother image of God, and is not completed until this aspect of God's image is put into human form, and God creates Eve the first mother who was made in God's image.

This first act of creation made it possible for the history of man to continue, for the existence of a mother gave man the power to create life. By means of a mother God also carried out His plan of salvation, for it was by means of a mother that His Son came into the

world. This 3rd person of the Godhead was also not shy about using mother imagery to describe His love for man. In Matt. 23:37 Jesus laments the fact that His people are so rebellious that they will have to suffer judgment. He says, "...how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing." All 3 persons of the Godhead knows the joys and sorrows of the motherhood, for they experience both motherly love that is accepted and rejected. Nobody understands motherhood better than God. He made motherhood a major factor in life because it is a part of His nature.

When mother-love functions properly it is the nearest thing there is to the love of God. Unfortunately, mother-love is a part of a fallen world where all is less than it was meant to be. The result is a lot of malfunctioning motherhood. We read of it everyday. Mothers go off and leave their children home alone for days and weeks at a time, and sometimes they die of neglect. Mothers abuse their children and sometimes even throw them away like unwanted trash. We do not have to rehearse the daily news, for all of are aware that there are many imperfect examples. Mothers are the best channel of God's unconditional love, but they do not always work the way God intends.

Mothers need help to be all they can be. Just giving birth to a baby does not make a woman a wonderful mother. Paul makes this clear when he writes in Titus 2:4 that older women, "Can train the younger women to love their husbands and children..." In other words, love is not just automatic for either husbands or children. It is a learned value. The capacity is inherent to some degree, but the application needs wisdom and guidance. Not knowing this leads Christian mothers to have to endure a lot of unnecessary grief and guilt. They assume that if they cannot love on a level that is expected of them they are bad mothers.

Jacky Hertz in her book *The Christian Mother* tells of her ordeal. She had a baby boy, and when he was handed to her in the hospital she did not feel toward this child what she did toward her other children. She felt guilt and shame for this response. She kept this a secret, but one day while out hanging up clothes she was overwhelmed with her doubts, and she blurted out to her neighbor that she did not feel equal love to all her children. Her neighbor confessed she had the same problem but never had the nerve to share it with anyone. She said, "I was so sure I was freak that Bob and I decided not to have other children."

Jacky went on to discover that this was a fairly common problem for mothers. She learned that mother love is not automatic. It has to be learned and developed. For three months she faced up to her problem and no longer hid it. She prayed and worked at developing a love for little Billy. She wrote this testimony: "At last after trying for seemed like forever to build love out of nothing, I sat holding him once again in my arms trying to burp him. Suddenly both his round grasping fists wound around my neck and hugged me tightly. And for the first time since he was born, a rust of love poured through me. I hugged him close, both believing and unbelieving, while one of his hands moved up to touch my wet cheek."

Here was a mother who faced the reality of a defect in her mother love, and she worked to overcome it, and she succeeded. Many do not recognize the need, but they just assume the

child is the problem, and so they spend their life abusing the child. Mother love is like all other love, and it takes effort, struggle, and prayer to get love to work right. The Bible says to love one another, but this does not just happen. It takes commitment to make it work. Loving your enemies is even a harder task, and it takes a deeper commitment still.

We put love so often in the category of emotion, and we fail to realize it is a matter of the intellect and will as well as of the emotions. We need to learn to make right choices to be channels of love. It can be hard work, but it is the best kind of work you will ever get. Mother love is the top of the line, and when God wants to reveal just how loving He can be He uses mother love as His illustration. Here in Isaiah God has had to judge His people for their rebellion. Judgment is everywhere, but God always looks to the day when He can cease to punish and welcome His children back into His loving arms. That is always the bottom line with God-the Prodigal Son returning and the father kissing him with joy and throwing a party in celebration of his return. Sometimes it is the father image that Jesus uses, but He gives equal time to the feminine. Just before the story of the lost son who is found He tells the story of the lost coin and the woman who found it, and of how she told all of her neighbors and there was a great rejoicing with her.

Here in Isa. 66:13 God says to His people who have suffered His judgment: "As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you." God is impressed with motherhood, and especially her ability to comfort her child. God says this is one of the areas where a mother is a specialist. It is not without reason that you see a hurt child crying mommy and running to be held in her lap. A child knows it can be a cruel world, but that there is a place of comfort in the mother's arms. This is one of the major jobs of a mother. It is a God-like job, for it makes the mother the source of good news. The Gospel of motherhood is that no matter how awful a child you have been, and no matter how much punishment you deserve and get, you will be comforted by your mother. If judgment is not followed by comfort, the mother is not functioning as God intended, and she is not being an example of God's love. Comfort is not an option. It is an obligation for successful motherhood.

A father is often in the judgment business, and he has to discipline children and lay down the law. He represents the justice of God. But somebody has to represent the mercy of God, and that is where mother comes in. The family is to experience a balance so that children see the full nature of God. Mothers and fathers ought not to fight over their differences. They are designed to be different. If both were into justice only, or if both were into mercy only, there would be an unhealthy imbalance. Agree to disagree and let each do their own thing, for a child needs both justice and mercy. A mother just has to be careful so that when a disciplined child goes crying from dad to her that she does not give the child the impression that dad is wrong or mean to discipline. A child needs to see punishment as valid, but still feel the comfort of being forgiven and loved.

A mother spends a good portion of her life picking things up, and along with things it is also her assignment to lift up the spirits of her children. God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are all called Comforters, but the comforter a child first comes to appreciate is mom. A teacher of primaries had just given a lesson on the magnet, and in the follow up test this question was asked: "My name starts with M, has 6 letters, and I pick up things. What am I?" The teacher was surprised when half the class answered with the word mother. Kids know mom

is a picker-upper, but they probably don't realize that she does this, not just with clothes and toys, but with their spirits as well. Studies show that the tone of the family is usually set by the mother. If she is down, it is going to be a down day. If she is up, she will lift the rest of the family up also.

Benjamin West, the world famous artist, claimed that it was his mother's kiss that made him an artist. As a child he was on the floor with paper and paint all over the place, and he realized he had made an awful mess, and he feared a severe scolding. But mom came in and bent over and kissed him saying, "Some day you will be a great artist." That was the comfort and encouragement that changed his whole life.

Often it is the case that a child will rebel and not follow the values the mother has imparted. This has always been the case with God's children. It was the case with Israel often, and the church as well. Rebellion is a major part of the history we see in the Bible. But it is the positive side of God's nature that brings the rebel back. Paul says in Rom. 2:4 that it is God's kindness that leads to repentance. It is the memory of a mother's comfort that leads many a rebel to come back home. Probably the greatest illustration ever is in the life of John Newton, the author of Amazing Grace and many other famous hymns.

As a young man he rebelled and followed evil companions. He became a man of such wicked ways, and he fell so low that he became the slave of a black woman in Western Africa. He sank lower than the Prodigal Son, and he would have died for the aid of other slaves when he became deathly ill. His saintly mother died when he was only 6, and so she was spared the sorrow of knowing about his life of vice and shame. But she lived long enough to fill his mind with divine truth. He could not forget her prayers and memory of her comfort. Her love softened his hard heart, and when he thought he was going to go down in a sinking slave ship he turned to the God of his mother and began a new chapter in his life. He became one of the most famous clergymen in England in the 1700's. His influence is still being felt around the world today. Mom only had him 6 years, but that was enough to make a world of difference because she was a comforter.

Arthur Compton won the Nobel Prize in Physics back in the 1930's, and he became one of the immortals in the world of science. As a boy of ten he had some strange ideas, and it would have been easy to brush them off as silly nonsense. For example, he wrote an essay in which he took issue with some experts on why some elephants were 3 toed and others 5 toed. His mother said that when he showed it to her she had a hard time to keep from laughing. But she knew he took the issue seriously, and so she encouraged him and worked on the issue with him. Arthur said to her years later when he was famous, "If you had laughed at me that day I think you would have killed my interest in research."

So much of what is accomplished in this world is accomplished by people who have been comforted by their mother. The next best thing to being comforted by God is the comfort of a mother. That may be the primary gift that a mother gives her child. Some unknown poet wrote,

She could not paint, nor write, nor rhyme
Her footprints on the sands of time,

**As some distinguished women do;
Just simple things of life she knew...
Like tucking little folks in bed,
Or soothing someone's aching head.**

**She was no singer, neither blessed
With any special loveliness
To win applause and passing fame;
No headlines ever blazed her name.
But, Oh, she was a shining light
To all her loved ones, day and night!**

**Her home her kingdom, she its queen;
Her reign was faithful, honest, clean,
Impartial, loving, just, to each,
And everyone she sought to touch.
Her name? Of course there is no other
In all the world...just MOTHER!**

Mothers often feel guilty on Mother's Day because they are lauded, applauded, and idealized to a level where most feel they can never arrive, and so they feel inadequate, and far short of the ideal. But God gives all mothers an attainable ideal, for all mothers can succeed in being a comfort to their children, and that can be a key ingredient in the lives of their children. Mothers can make almost every mistake in the book and still come out smelling like a rose if they never give up their role as comforter. Monica, the mother of St. Augustine, has been used to illustrate this truth more than any other mother in history.

Her first mistake was in marrying a non-believer, and her husband Patricus mocked her faith. She suffered much for her folly. It was not surprising that her son became a rebel and lived a wild and sinful life. Monica never gave up on him, however, but continued to pray for her prodigal son and encourage him with her love. It was a long hard battle, but this rebel did come home to her and to her God. He repented and opened his heart to Christ, and he became one of the most influential theologians in history. That was 1600 years ago and his influence is still strong today. What if Monica would have given up on this rebel child? History may have lost one of its brightest lights for exalting the name of Jesus.

God never gives up on His rebel children. He disciplines and He judges, but no matter how severe His wrath, He always comes back to his mother-like nature, and He seeks to comfort and give hope for the future. His fatherhood of justice is always balanced out by His motherhood of mercy. The result is what we have in the book of Isaiah. It is a book loaded with judgment, but it ends with comfort, hope, and good news, for God is love. In the final analysis this means that the last word with God is, "As a mother comforts her child so will I comfort you. So moms, let not the sun go down on your anger, but no matter what the agonies of the day, make sure your children's last experience of any day is a mother's comfort.