

This morning, I'm going to share some thoughts about motherhood and mothering.
 Maybe I should have Nancy up here doing this... but she declined.

I do think that being a mommy is one of the most difficult tasks on earth.

It is long and full of loose ends.

It begins painfully... and messy... and usually expensively... and it only gets more expensive.

You are never done unless death separates you from your children... and that is hard. Sometimes indescribably hard.

You get virtually no training before you begin.

In order to teach school or prescribe medicine or do other people's taxes or design irrigation systems...
 you go to school for 4-8 years.

In order to be a mommy... well... you know... It's either that or adopt.

In neither case is there anywhere close to the equivalent preparation.

And, yet, you are entrusted by God with a task that will consume much of the rest of your life and energy.

You begin not really knowing what you are supposed to do, and it seems that you never get ahead of it.

Being a mommy demands constant work and self-sacrifice... late nights, early mornings...

And you can go 18 years... or more... without getting anything in the way of appreciation.

Mommies are often taken for granted by their children, and their husbands, if they have them, which is hard.

If they don't have a husband... it's even harder.

Mommies have to love little imperfect people who soon become bigger imperfect people.

To make it all infinitely more difficult, mommies are themselves imperfect... they have all of their own failings and sins as well.

And yet, what would the world be like without mommies?

Let us look together at a series of mommies in Genesis... we've met all of them by now as we have been going through the book.

And then I want to focus on a very important lesson.

A lesson for mommies... and for daddies too... and for children... and all the rest of us.

Where to start when it comes to mommies?

Oh! I know. Let's begin where the Bible begins.

I. Eve

We discover in Genesis 2 that the Lord formed her from her husband for her husband. She is to be his helper.

In Genesis 3 she leads him into sin... and it is more his fault than hers. He ought to have been leading.

And then **Genesis 3:20**. Without Eve there would be nobody!

But, because of their sin... life is going to be hard. In fact, life will be harder than she probably imagines.

We read about the beginnings of her family in **Genesis 4:1-2**. She is full of hope for the future.

But we know what happens with these children of hers. The older kills the younger and is cursed by God.

Life is not over... but can you imagine the pain that she would be going through?

We move ahead... past the flood...

Noah's wife is mother to his children, but we do not know her name nor do we know much about her.

...past Babel and the scattering... some 2,000 years... to Abram travelling from Ur to the land of Canaan. He has a wife.

II. Sarah (whose name when we meet her is Sarai)

Because she is married to Abram, she has to move away from her family and everything familiar to her.

Some of you mothers have had to do that.

And, she is barren. That is familiar territory for some of you as well.

And, she has a difficult time believing God will do as He tells her.

Genesis 16:1-3 And, this idea of hers makes things much more difficult for her and her husband.

Sarai becomes jealous and treats Hagar badly... so much so that she runs away.

In spite of Sarah's disbelief, she is given a son of her own by God. **Genesis 21:1-7** The son of the promise.

And, then Sarah treats Hagar even worse.

And Sarah dies before she meets her son Isaac's bride, not to mention grandchildren. Tragic?

And then there is Hagar, a significant mother in Genesis in her own right.

III. Hagar

Hagar, the maid that Sarai picked up when she was in Egypt and then mistreated when she was pregnant by Abram.

But in Gen. 16:4 we can see that she somewhat brought the mistreatment on herself. She became prideful.

Back to **Genesis 16:7-13**. She is in misery in the wilderness and God sees her. He has a plan for her.

Then, to Genesis **21:9-21**. Hagar's son, following his mother's way, mocked Isaac. It was his doom.

Again she finds herself in the wilderness... and she prays... for her son... and God hears.

Is there anything better that a mother can do?

She finds that God has a plan for her son.

Hagar... hers was a difficult life... a combination of things that were done to her and things that she did.

She is like many of us.

Next to Isaac's bride...

IV. Rebekah

Abraham sends a servant to find her in Genesis 24.

God leads that servant to her... and her family is not so sure they want to let her go.

But, at the critical moment her family miscalculates and asks her what she will do. **Genesis 24:57-61**

Rebekah is married to Isaac in Canaan. **Genesis 25:20-26** That's 20 years of barrenness.

But their prayers move the hand of God.

How does her family do? **Genesis 25:27-27-28** This is not the right way to parent.

And, the family bears the result of this favoritism. Rebekah has Jacob steal his brother's blessing and Esau wants to kill him.

Esau ends up bringing grief to his parents. Because of Esau, Rebekah says that she is tired of living.

Some of you can relate to that.

Her messed up family is her own fault... and yet, it is in God's plan.

Part of God's plan is that Jacob would flee his brother for his own safety. He would flee to Haran, there to look for a wife.

He finds one...

V. Rachel

Apparently, she is quite a woman... Attractive, servant-hearted. Jacob instantly likes her and wants to marry her.

Her father makes him work 7 years for her and at the wedding secretly gives him her sister, Leah.

Jacob has to work another seven years for Rachel... but apparently she's worth it.

But, right away we discover that this odd family has issues... issues that come from Rachel, the favorite.

Leah was having children. Rachel became jealous and gave her maid to her husband. Now there are three wives.

Then Leah does the same. Four wives... and the family dynamic is awful.

Rachel does have children then, last of all... Joseph, instantly his father's favorite. Then Benjamin and she dies.

VI. Leah

Leah's children do not begin well. Leah's daughter goes wandering and gets in trouble and Leah's sons become murderous.

Then they take the lead in selling Joseph, their half brother, into slavery. It's better than killing him, which was the first plan.

Then Judah visits a prostitute, he thinks, but it is his daughter-in-law, Tamar.

VII. Tamar

And, we know little of Tamar... except for this... she is vigorously interested in preserving her family, whatever it takes.

She pretends to be a prostitute and gets pregnant by her father-in-law. Ick! Does it get any worse?

Genesis 38:24-26 Tamar is one of the few people in all of Genesis who are called "righteous."

She bears him twins.

Why does God make it so that Jacob marries Leah? Why is Tamar justified in what she does?

Why include Leah and Tamar in this list of mommies? What did they do?

Well, it's not about what they did. It is about what God was doing.

As the rest of the Bible make clear, though Joseph and Benjamin are important...

The line of the Messiah goes through Leah and Tamar.

VIII. What then is the great lesson?

Well, at first it can be depressing. Where are the hero mommies?

Where are the mommies that do it right? Who make no mistakes? Who focus on their families and have perfect children?

Where are the mommies who honor God in every way, who live with character and consistency?

Where are those who show no favoritism nor jealousy?

They don't exist... not in Genesis at least.

For these mommies... who, like you, have no training in mommy-hood before they begin the job... life is hard.

And, they make it harder... for themselves... for their families...

And, in spite of this... In spite of their misbehavior... In spite of their hardships... In spite of their messed up families...

In spite of the sins... committed by them... committed by others, fathers, husbands, family, others, affecting them...

In spite of all of this... God uses them in His plan for their good and for His glory.

This is the lesson. It is a simple lesson. Maybe you already knew it... but do you believe it?

God uses imperfect people for His great purpose... and what a purpose!

The Messiah came because of Eve, Sarah, Rebekah, Leah, Tamar... these are not cleaned up people!

And, yet, they had a place in God's greatest work in all the world!

So, you may look at your life and think, "What a colossal mess... and my children are not doing well."

But, ultimately, it is not about what they are doing. It's about what God is doing.

And, He works through very imperfect people... messed up people.

Messed up mommies and their messed up children... and He can teach, humble, clean, and use people just like us.

And, that, I think, is a great message.