

## The Challenges of Motherhood

A family talk for Mothers' Day by Rev. Michael Gladish  
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When we're young – and sometimes even when we get older, before we have children of our own – we may not think much about what it's like to be a mother, and especially what a hard job this can be. Of course there are many joyful things in a mother's life, from the birth itself to the giggles and smiles of the baby, and of course the happiness of comforting, encouraging and teaching a young person all about life in this world and in heaven. But there are also many things in a mother's life that are really, really hard.

Today I'm going to ask you to think about some of those hard parts of a mother's life – not to make you worry or feel sorry for your mother (or yourself if you're a mom), but to make sure we all appreciate how brave and strong a mother has to be.

But first, let's talk about the joyful parts. Is anyone who is a mother willing to tell us what YOU think is the most fun part of this job? Can you tell us about something that happened with one of your children that made you feel especially wonderful about being a mom?

[ stories: maybe 5 minutes ]

OK, now let's think about the hard parts. And let's begin by recalling some of the stories about mothers in the Word.

Do you remember Hagar, Ishmael's mother? She was an Egyptian handmaid, a servant of Sarah, Abraham's wife. Since Sarah was not able to have children of her own she arranged for Hagar to have a baby instead, so that Abraham would have a child. Today we would call Hagar a surrogate mother, that is, a kind of substitute mother. This arrangement seemed to work for a while, but then, after Sarah had a baby of her own Hagar began to make fun of her and so she was kicked out of the house and had to try to survive with her boy in the desert.

Of course it wasn't long before their water ran out and they were both starving. But then an angel appeared to them and showed them a well of water, and told Hagar that her son would not only survive but become the head of a great nation.

Now this is a VERY unusual story, and as part of the Word it is filled with very deep meaning, but for now just think about how Hagar must have felt as a mother. It's the same sort of thing all mothers feel when their children are sick, or in danger, maybe crying and just not getting what they need. It's a VERY DIFFICULT

THING. And just as Hagar “lifted up her voice and wept” with sadness, so every mother suffers when her children suffer, or struggle, or maybe have some disability. I imagine Hagar herself was very sorry that she had made fun of Sarah, but it was Ishmael that she really worried about, and just so, mothers today may be sorry about a lot of things, but what they really worry about is their children.

So what can we learn from this story? Well, one thing is not to give up. We never know where help may come from, but we do know that the Lord is in charge, and that He can bring good out of ANY situation – as He did with Hagar and Ishmael. We can also try to be angels for them, and show them things that might help. But on a very basic level this story simply reminds us that being a mother, being responsible for another human life, is hard, and so when we think of our own mothers we should be careful to notice and be thankful for all the difficult things they have to face and TRY to do for us.

Remember Moses’ mother in the book of Exodus? She was a Levite’s wife and she already had an older daughter when Moses was born, but the problem was that Pharaoh had told the Hebrew nurses to KILL all the baby boys that were born to the Hebrew women. So of course she tried to hide her baby, but when it became impossible to keep him hidden at home she made a little boat and hid him in it at the river’s edge among the reeds that grew there.

Again, you know that the story has a happy ending, since the Pharaohs’ own daughter found Moses and decided to keep him, and especially since Moses’ sister tricked her into having his own mother come and take care of him. But think for a moment about how HARD it was for this mother to try to protect her baby and how terribly dangerous it was for her to let him lie in that little boat alone. It’s an example of a lot of very scary things mothers sometimes have to do to protect their children – trusting the Lord and other people to help them when they can’t do any more themselves. Sometimes they get their other children to help, sometimes they have to give the baby to a hospital or a baby-sitter and just hope he’ll be alright.... Sometimes they don’t know WHAT to do, and it’s really hard because they want their children to do well.

So again, what can we learn from this story? Perhaps the most important thing is just to recognize and respect our mothers for the hard choices they sometimes have to make. Then again, we can try to be helpful, and not make things worse!

To take just one more example, think of Samson’s mother. You all know the story of how Samson went down among the Philistines and found a woman named Delilah whom he loved and wanted to marry. This didn’t turn out very well for Sam-

son, but one thing you may not remember is that neither of his parents approved of this marriage. So it must have been a great sadness to this mother when her son decided to go against her advice and do something foolish.

Mothers today feel the same sort of sadness, even heartbreak when their children do not make good choices, but you know, especially when the children grow up, it is very important for the parents to let them make these choices, even if they have to learn from their mistakes.

There are other stories in the Word about mothers who had to suffer because of their children, for example Mary, and all the other women whose babies were threatened or killed by Herod when the Lord was born. But we don't have time for them all. Instead now let's ask the mothers here today if any of them are willing to share one of the hardest things they've had to do as mothers for their children – and why it was so. Or if you're not a mom, maybe you can share something your mother did for you that you can now see must have been very difficult for her?

[ stories: maybe another 5 minutes ]

Okay, now we're going to shift up a level and talk about one way that we can ALL be mothers, and how challenging that can be. It's not about being a woman, it's about being part of something that is said to be like a woman, that is, the church.

Remember when the Lord was in Galilee speaking to a big crowd of people, and His disciples came and told Him that His mother and brothers wanted to see Him? He surprised them by saying, "Who *is* My mother and who *are* My brothers?" Then, gesturing toward the disciples themselves He said, "***Here*** are My mother and My brothers! ***For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother***" (Matt. 12:47-50). Those of us who do the will of our heavenly Father are members of the church, and so we have the same sort of duties toward one another that a mother has toward her children. And there's no getting around the fact that this can be very challenging, hard work.

First of all, like every mother, we have to learn to control ourselves – to control our thoughts and feelings, and even our tempers when we get upset with other people, so that we always do the best we can to be HELPFUL, rather than making a problem worse! Like Hagar, we all need to learn to trust the Lord and look around for the solutions that He provides for our problems. But most of all it is important for us just simply to recognize that being a member of the church, like being a mother, involves HARD WORK and sacrifice. But the Lord invites us to take on this work and sacrifice because He knows how tremendously rewarding it can be!

Yes, we'll have to give up some other things – just as mothers everywhere give up other things they might like to do, for the sake of their children. But when we do this in the church we have the opportunity to enjoy a kind of fulfillment and blessing that really looks to eternal life and provides for it.

Yes, there can be sadness, and even heartbreak at times in the church, just as there is in motherhood, but remember, our goal, like the Lord's goal for all of us, is not that we all get our own way, but that we do whatever we can to help others find *their* special kind of blessing, in *their own* freedom according to *their* best understanding of the truth. We show them all that we can from our point of view, and we listen and we do the best WE can, *but then we let go* and let every member develop his or her own understanding and way of life, trusting that the Lord and His angels will lead and guide them.

If they stay in the church we rejoice with them; if they go somewhere else we rejoice without them knowing that they are in His hands. Sure, we worry about our little church, but we know that the Lord does not save by many or by few, but by the power of His love accommodated to every person in just exactly the right way.

If we would just receive and share that love, as a mother loves and cares for her children, everything will be alright.

Amen.

Lessons: 1 Kings 3:16-28  
Matthew 12:46-50  
True Christian Religion #305-307, selections