

Imperfect Mother's Day

(Matthew 1:1-17)

Hallmark Cards advertises that 133 million cards will be exchanged on this Mother's Day. Hallmark.com will address, stamp and mail your Mother's Day cards for you. Approximately 65 percent of Mother's Day cards sales occur during the five days prior to the holiday. Hallmark offers nearly 1,000 different cards for Mother's Day. Some are serious and others are not.

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

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

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

There are no perfect moms. I read this list of lessons learned from these less than perfect moms. Listen and remember if you ever heard some of these lessons.

Here is a list of rather humorous lessons learned from our mothers – lessons with a humorous twist.

My mother taught me the value of a clean home when she told my brother and me, "Listen, if you're going to kill each other, do it outside, I just finished cleaning up."

My mother taught me the value of passionate prayer when she said, "You'd better pray that will come out of the carpet."

My mother taught me logic when she said, "If you fall out of that swing and break your neck, you're not going to the store with me later."

My mother taught me about consequences when she warned, "You keep crying, and I'll give you something to really cry about."

My mother taught me about the circle of life when she said, "Listen, I brought you into this world, and I can take you out."

My mother encouraged me to learn contortionism when she said, "Will you look at all that dirt on the back of your neck?" or "Didn't you see all that dirt in your ears?"

My mother taught me that love has boundaries when she said, “When that lawn mower cuts off your toes, don’t come running to me.”

My mother taught me the value of stamina and perseverance when she said, “You will sit there until all that spinach is gone.”

I say again, there are no perfect Moms. And nowhere is that better illustrated than in Jesus’ family tree recorded in Matthew one. There are four very imperfect mothers listed in Jesus’ genealogy in Matthew one. Though very imperfect these mothers were still greatly used by the Lord. The fact that women are listed at all was highly unusual because fathers more often are named because it was the father’s name and inheritance that were passed on from generation to generation.

We are not surprised to find in Jesus’ family tree Jewish men like David, Israel’s greatest king or Abraham, the father of the nation of Israel, or Solomon who was the wisest of all men in Israel. Yet even these leaders had some dark chapters in their lives. Not only are all mothers imperfect but so are their husbands, all fathers and all children. So if you find yourself on a shrink’s couch, be sure to include yourself in the conversation.

Nor would we have been shocked to read about some of Israel’s Jewish matriarchs such as Sara, or Rebekah or Rachel. But Matthew included four Gentile mothers who had been either prostitutes or outcasts or adulteresses or mistreated.

The four most unlikely to spiritually succeed mothers who brought us the Messiah are Tamar (1:3), Rahab (1:5), Ruth (1:5), and Bathsheba (1:6). None of these would have been voted Mother of the Year or Wife of the Decade.

Matthew doesn’t just list these women, which was abnormal in itself, he emphasizes these four mothers along with Mary, the fifth mother in Jesus’ family tree. He highlights these mothers by breaking the pattern in the family tree. The normal pattern is “So-in-so begat so-in-so.” For example, “Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judah and his brethren.” So there is the pattern. But in the next statement the pattern is significantly broken: “and Judah begat Phares and Zara by Tamar.” For the first time in the family tree the mother is mentioned. And then the pattern resumes.

The same breaking of the pattern will happen with Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba. The pattern is most importantly broken with Mary. After saying 39 times that this father begat this son, in 1:16, Matthew did not record “and Joseph begat Jesus.” Matthew broke this pattern and did not write, “and Joseph begat Jesus.” Because Joseph was not the father of the virgin born Jesus. But rather Matthew wrote, “Of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.”

Matthew doesn’t just name four very imperfect mothers, he spotlights them. These four mothers, though not supermoms, because of God’s forgiveness, became great influences in their families. They helped bring Jesus to their families and to you and me.

1. Tamar the Mistreated Mother (Matthew 1:3)

In Genesis 38, Tamar was lied to and mistreated by her father-in-law, Judah. At this time in Judah's life he is at his lowest point spiritually. He agreed to kill his own brother Joseph and when that did work out he consented to sell to travelling traders.

Judah then married a Canaanite idol worshipper and had three sons. The oldest Er also a Canaanite idol worshipper married Tamar. Er dies because of his wickedness. As was the Jewish custom, the next brother, Onan, was to marry his brother's widow. Onan refused and God judged him for his disobedience. Judah promised Tamar that as soon as his last born was old enough, Shelah, he would marry Tamar. But Judah lied never intending to give Shelah to Tamar.

Tamar finally took matters into her own hands. When Judah was returning home from a long trip, Tamar dressed as a prostitute along the roadside where Judah passed and Judah took his one night with Tamar. When Judah later found out that Tamar was with child he intended on burning her for her sin. But when Tamar produced the evidence that Judah was the father, Judah repented and said, "She has been more righteous than I" (38:26). This was a turning point in Judah's life. Eventually, Judah is chosen as the tribe through which the Messiah will come according to Genesis 49.

The twins mentioned in Matthew 1:3 were born from the incestuous relationship of Judah and his daughter-in-law. Had Tamar not intervened, Judah would not have produced any descendants. Judah by his sinfulness almost cut off his family tree, the family tree which would later include Jesus (Genesis 49:10).

Sadly too many mothers are mistreated. But God can use them to bring repentance to those who mistreat them.

George Sweeting writes of "a young lady who ignored the claims of Jesus Christ. She laughed at her mother's prayers and turned her back upon her mother's God. She seemingly was headed in the wrong direction. There came a day, however, when she was moved to pen these words:

I grieved my Lord from day to day, I scorned His love so full and free. And though I wandered far away, My mother's prayers have followed me. I'm coming home, To live my wasted life anew, For mother's prayers have followed me, Have followed me the whole world through." (#1 Special Sermons For Special Days page 68)

2. Rahab the Prostitute (Matthew 1:5)

Whereas Tamar was a prostitute for a day, Rahab was a career prostitute. In Joshua 2, Rahab runs a brothel/ hotel in Jericho. Joshua sends the two spies to check out Jericho before they conquer the city. Rahab along with all of the other Jerichoites had heard how

Israel's God had delivered Israel out of Egypt and also had defeated the Amorites. She requests that when Israel invades and defeats the city that she and her family be spared.

God honored her faith and did spare her and her family. This former prostitute is mentioned twice in the NT because of her faith. She is mentioned in Hebrews 11, the hero of faith chapter, along side of Abraham, Moses, and Joshua. "By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace" (11:31). James mentions Rahab as one of his two examples of faith, that if genuine, works in James 2:24-26.

Rahab the harlot became Rahab the heroine of faith. Rahab who once exerted bad influence became a godly influence and was used of God to save her family.

Thank God for every mom who has trusted Christ and is seeking to win her children and grandchildren. If you have such a mother you should rise up and call her blessed.

The next mother in Jesus' family tree was not a prostitute but she had them in her past relatives.

3. Ruth the Victim (Matthew 1:5)

Ruth was born with all kinds of baggage that was not her fault. She was a Moabite. The nation of Moab came about because the two daughters of Lot got him drunk and committed incest with their own dad. One daughter gave birth to the nation of Ammon and the other to the nation of Moab. The Moabites became enemies of Israel and were forbidden from entering the congregation of Israel (Dt. 23:3).

When Ruth was exposed to the true God by Naomi who came to Moab to escape hard times in Israel, Ruth believed in the one true God as her own words testify in Ruth 1:16-17. When Naomi whose husband died, along with her two sons who were married to Ruth and Orpah. Naomi decided to go back to Israel. She told her two Moabite daughter-in-laws to stay in Moab and remarry, but Ruth refused because she now also was a believer.

Ruth did not allow her wicked relatives before her to influence her. Just because parents are drunkards or perverts doesn't mean we have to be. Some children live their entire adult lives blaming their parents. Some children live in bitterness. Every person has some issue that has to be overcome whether it be our parents, other Christians that have disappointed us, etc.

Even though Ruth was a victim, she did not have the victim mentality. Ruth had a beautiful marriage with Boaz even though she had a terrible background of incest.

I heard of a young mother whose life has been totally upended. The mother of young children, her husband, not long ago, admitted his homosexual lifestyle to her and then,

walked away. To compound her grief, he had been involved with her own father – a closeted homosexual who continues to lead a double life. Both men, by the way, were involved in full time ministry.

She refuses to think she is a victim. She is moving ahead with her life and service to the Lord.

The last imperfect mother spotlighted is Bathsheba.

4. Bathsheba the Adulteress (Matthew 1:6)

Matthew doesn't even mention her by name perhaps to stress she was the wife of Uriah who was a Hittite or another Gentile woman in Jesus' Jewish family tree. Bathsheba was David's neighbor who had some indiscreet outdoor bathing habits. She was also the willing accomplice in David's great sin of adultery in 2 Samuel 11-12. There is no indication that she was forced or raped by David. She willingly sinned with him.

She, however, evidently became a positive influence in David's life and Solomon her son. In first Kings 1 when David is old and inattentive to the affairs of his kingdom. David's son Adonijah, attempts to become the next king when Solomon was David's and God's choice. Bathsheba goes into the king's presence to inform him of the attempted coup of Adonijah. David acts swiftly, thanks to Bathsheba, and Solomon is made king.

God uses Bathsheba to preserve the line through which Jesus will descend. Matthew 1:6 says that Solomon was the link to David through whom Jesus was born. Not Adonijah!

Imperfect people are all the people with whom God has to work. There is not one model family in Scripture to my knowledge. Was Adam and Eve's family exemplary? Their older son murdered his younger son out of jealousy. What about Abraham and Sara? Abraham was a chronic liar. Isaac was deceived by his son Jacob because of his fleshly appetite. Jacob was a deceiver. Noah got drunk. David's sins are common knowledge. Even Jesus' brothers and sisters rejected Him until after they were grown.

What is the Message of these Imperfect Mothers?

1. Jesus can save and forgive any sinner. As a matter of fact, every time Jesus saves and forgives a person, He saves and forgives a sinner because all of us are sinners. He can save a Tamar or a Rahab or a Ruth or a Bathsheba.
2. Jesus uses imperfect people who are forgiven. God does not condone our sin, He forgives our sins and changes us and delivers us from our sin and uses us to help others in sin.
3. Jesus uses people who come from imperfect homes or tragic backgrounds who have been abused, mistreated, or neglected.

Mothers here this morning, you are a blessing and we thank God for you. If your mother is passed you can still give God thanks for her. Everyone of us can be used of God.

Elisa Morgan is the former president of MOPS International (Mothers of Preschoolers). While she was president, MOPS expanded from 350 to over 4,000 groups in the USA plus 30 more groups in other countries around the world. MOPs impacts 100,000 mothers each year. You might be thinking, Elias Morgan must have come from a strong Christian home to accomplish all that. Right? Wrong!

She writes,

I'm probably the least likely person to head a mothering organization that impacts thousands of mother's lives for the gospel. I grew up in a broken home. My parents were divorced when I was five. My older sister, younger brother, and I were raised by my alcoholic mother. While my mother meant well, most of my memories are of my mothering her, rather than her mothering me. Alcohol altered her love. I remember her weaving down the hall of our ranch home in Houston, Texas, glass of scotch in hand. I would wake her at seven each morning to try to get her off to work.

Ten years ago, when I was asked to consider leading MOPS International, a vital ministry that nurtures mothers, I went straight to my knees. How could God use me – who had never been mothered – to nurture other mothers? The answer came, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness." (II Corinthians 12:9) God would take my deficits and make them my offering to Him – and find His grace to be sufficient in my weakness.