

WHAT'S A MOM TO DO? Part 2

WHEN MOMS PRAY

Shaping the World to Come

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There are two common roads to prayer. One is trouble; the other is triumph. Both will lead us to our knees, either in desperation or in thanksgiving. Moms, too, come both ways to the throne of God.

Hannah Cried

The Old Testament story of Hannah, the wife of Elkanah, typifies the first path, for she was a troubled woman; tormented by her inability to conceive a child. Her sorrow eventually was turned to joy.

¹ *Samuel 1:9* Once after a sacrificial meal at Shiloh, Hannah got up and went to pray. Eli the priest was sitting at his customary place beside the entrance of the Tabernacle.

¹⁰ Hannah was in deep anguish, crying bitterly as she prayed to the Lord. ¹¹ And she made this vow: "O Lord of Heaven's Armies, if you will look upon my sorrow and answer my prayer and give me a son, then I will give him back to you. He will be yours for his entire lifetime, and as a sign that he has been dedicated to the Lord, his hair will never be cut."

¹⁷ Eli said, "go in peace! May the God of Israel grant the request you have asked of him."

¹⁸ "Oh, thank you, sir!" she exclaimed. Then she went back and began to eat again, and she was no longer sad.

Proverbs 13:12 Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when the desire comes, it is a tree of life.

Hannah's desire came to pass, and she dedicated her young son, Samuel, to the Lord. He grew to be a great prophet and statesman in Israel.

¹ *Samuel 2:1* Then Hannah prayed:

"My heart rejoices in the Lord! The Lord has made me strong. Now I have an answer for my adversaries; I rejoice because you rescued me. ² No one is holy like the Lord! There is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God."

Mary Sang

The New Testament story of Mary, the young woman engaged to Joseph, a carpenter, typifies the other path. Unexpectedly receiving a vision of God's glorious purpose for His people, she burst into a song of praise, not realizing that His purpose would cost her the very thing she prized the most: her son. Her joy eventually was turned to sorrow.

Luke 1:46 Mary responded,

"Oh, how my soul praises the Lord. ⁴⁷ How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior! ⁴⁸ For he took notice of his lowly servant girl, and from now on all generations will call me blessed. ⁴⁹ For the Mighty One is holy, and he has done great things for me.

Luke 2:10 But the angel reassured [the shepherds]. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. ¹¹ The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born to-

day in Bethlehem, the city of David! ¹² And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger.”

¹⁷ After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. ¹⁸ All who heard the shepherds’ story were astonished, ¹⁹ but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often.

Luke 2:33 And Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, “Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against ³⁵ (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”

Hannah prayed through her tears, not knowing how or if God would answer, until, at last, she rejoiced with praise for the answer.

Mary, on the other hand, rejoiced in expectation of her reward, then later prayed through her tears, not knowing how or if God would bring her dream back from the dead.

Whichever path may be set before you, at times, we all come to pray through difficulty or sorrow. These are familiar paths, especially to mothers whose hearts are knit so closely to their children. And they are effective prayers, over time. But there is third path.

If, to this day, challenge or grief or overflowing thanks are the only paths that have pressed you to pray, you should be pleased to learn that there are other motivations for prayer. However, they require greater sensitivity and intentional response.

Mary and Martha Waited

Later in the New Testament, we are introduced to a woman named Martha, who lived with her sister, Mary, and her brother, Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from death.

Martha is sometimes represented poorly when compared with her sister, Mary, yet the story is clear that Jesus appreciated her and did not put her down. Let’s take a look at her story.

Luke 10:38 As Jesus and the disciples continued on their way to Jerusalem, they came to a village where a woman named Martha welcomed them into her home. ³⁹ Her sister, Mary, sat at the Lord’s feet, listening to what he taught. ⁴⁰ But Martha was worrying over the big dinner she was preparing. She came to Jesus and said, “Lord, doesn’t it seem unfair to you that my sister just sits here while I do all the work? Tell her to come and help me.”

⁴¹ But the Lord said to her, “My dear Martha, you are so upset over all these details! ⁴² There is really only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it—and I won’t take it away from her.”

What immediately precedes this account is the story of the Good Samaritan, in which Jesus taught that good neighborliness means showing kindness. Martha was the epitome of such character. She fulfilled most of the qualities of the noble woman of Proverbs 31, just in this brief account. She was a living object lesson of the truths He had taught His disciples.

Moreover, Jesus addressed His comments to “my dear Martha” (literally, “Martha, Martha,” which was a grammatical vehicle for expressing high value). More than mere politeness, He expressed His esteem for Martha — for her character and behavior. She was a “virtuous and capable” woman.

But there was more...

The New Testament is all about “better” things. It is a better covenant, based on better promises, and providing a better hope. And here is one example of that.

Jesus wanted to point out something better — not something “instead of,” but something “in addition to.”

If all the world’s Marthas — those virtuous and capable women — quit their diligent care, there would be no breakfasts or dinners, nor even a place to sit and talk!

A Matter of Context

It’s a matter of context. When Jesus comes to visit, it’s time to set aside the daily tasks and worries and give attention to Him.

The issue was not Martha’s busyness, but that it overshadowed Jesus’ presence. Her attention to detail distracted from the attention that was due to Him. Mary recognized the moment and shifted gears.

It is not without reason that the following passage is the Lord’s most in-depth teaching on prayer — already illustrated by Mary’s behavior. When there is a special opportunity of fellowship with the Lord, this becomes “the one thing necessary.”

That is why gatherings of the local church to worship and pray, like this one, are so important — more important than other normal activities; important enough to alter your other plans. For “when two or more are gathered in [His] name,” He presents Himself to us, and it is time to shift gears and sit before Him.

This is also why a mother’s prayers are so vital. Of all the things you can offer your husband, your children or your grandchildren, your prayers are the most important — the one thing needful. Not just your requests for their blessing and prosperity, but your attentiveness to the voice of the Lord and His purpose for their lives. Spending time with Him, without a particularly pressing need, is necessary — it is not frivolous or wasteful.

But it may be difficult. Difficult to make the time. Difficult to set aside distractions. Difficult to focus your own mind. Difficult to voice your thoughts. Difficult to listen to His voice.

But the power of your prayer, the effect of it, the influence of it, makes it worth the effort.

Releasing God’s Influence

Proverbs 22:6 Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.

That training is more than instructing and correcting. It must involve the influence of the Holy Spirit released and applied through earnest and continuous prayer.

We’re all pretty good at recognizing what’s wrong with others’ behavior and how they should behave correctly. And we’re pretty good about complaining when they don’t. But there is one more thing that is necessary: *God’s influence* released through prayer.

Think of your own life’s problems and perplexities. Think of how you have needed God’s help, even after you knew what behavioral changes were necessary. Your family need more than just instruction

about right behavior. They need the *power* to act rightly. And that does not come from good parenting; it only comes from God, in answer to faithful prayers.

If you have, or if you are, a praying mother, then you know — a mother's prayers will *always* follow her children. Whether through *tears* or through *praise*, her prayers will bear an extraordinary influence on their lives.

When I read news stories of parents who have abandoned their children, left them to the streets, without provision or protection, I am appalled. They are often judged to be mentally impaired. How else can we understand it? There must be something missing inside! Sometimes, that something is not merely mental but fundamentally spiritual.

If a mother (or a father) neglects to pray, it is the equivalent of *spiritual* abandonment. Children are left to wrestle with unseen and unknown forces of evil, uncovered by a parent's spiritual support in prayer.

Here is where parental example takes a back seat. Personal example cannot replace the power of prayer. Your good behavior and instruction cannot make up for a lack of God's power released through your many prayers.

Mothers, your children need your prayers. It is not too late to begin or to resume praying. Their future depends on it. It is the way God has ordered it.

This kind of leadership and covering is why children are created from the union of a man and woman and, according to God's plan, within the context of a loving marriage. It is for the children's sakes. And it is effective.

Your prayers may not be answered as soon as you wish or in the way you expected, but God keeps account, as this story shows:

Years ago a devout woman of Scotland prayed earnestly that her son might be called to the Gospel ministry. He grew up to be an earnest Christian man, and in his young adulthood began to prepare for the high calling to which he seemed destined. But before his preparation was complete, he decided that he was not called of God to this work. He left school and entered a bank. He continued to the end of his days a financier. He died, successful and rich.

A disappointing turn of events? It seems the mother's prayer was not granted. But when her son's will was read, it was found that his large fortune had been left to the endowment of what is now the Kentucky Theological Seminary. By this, not one, but scores of ministers have been given in answer to his Scottish mother's prayer. For that prayer, though not answered in the way she hoped, was answered.

Do not abandon your children. Pray for your children. Don't wait for sorrow or difficulty to press you to pray. Learn to recognize the presence of the Lord and wait with Him. Pray diligently. Heartily. Frequently. Persistently. From now on.

When moms pray, they shape the world to come!