

Monday, May 9. Read Mark 3:20-35, John 19:25-27. Jesus should have had a perfect family life if anyone did, right? Yet his mother and father once lost track of him for three days (cf. Luke 2:42-46). At another time, his mother and brothers came to “take control” of him, fearing he’d lost his mental balance. John 7:5 said that his brothers didn’t believe in him. But he always loved his mother, and even on the cross made sure he provided care for her. How could Jesus’ mother have so significantly misunderstood what her son was doing in carrying out his mission? Have your parents ever failed to understand you, or you to understand your children or siblings? How can you offer wisdom and support to those you love, and yet keep from heavy-handedly trying to control their lives? • Jesus did not “disown” his mother in Mark 3, as his loving act toward her while he was on the cross showed. But he was serious when he spoke about his bond with those who do God’s will. How can faith and shared experience with God create ties as close as, or closer than, those we share with family members? Do you have any additional “family members” because of belonging to God’s family? *Prayer: Lord Jesus, you lived through the pain of malfunctioning relationships, and the beauty of caring and loving. Make me into a person who can maximize the beauty of all the relationships I’m a part of. Amen.*

Tuesday, May 10. Read Samuel 1:10-11, 19-20, 24-28, 2:18-19. The prophet Samuel’s mother, Hannah, lived in a culture that allowed men to have more than one wife—and she suffered the anguish of being “the childless wife.” She pleaded with God for a son, promised to devote her son to God’s service, and did. But Hannah also kept on playing a loving role in Samuel’s life, helping clothe and support him. The full story in 1 Samuel 1 said that when Eli the high priest saw Hannah weeping and praying silently, he at first thought she was drunk. In fact, she was simply turning to God to express her sadness and distress. When you experience anguish or distress, are you more inclined to take those feelings to God in prayer, or to distance yourself from God? We know that Hannah’s little boy Samuel grew up to be a pivotal, transitional figure in Israel’s history. In what ways would you expect that his mother’s faithfulness, both to her promise to God and to him as her beloved son, helped to shape the man that Samuel became? In what ways, if at all, was your mother’s influence on your life mainly a model of faithfulness to God?

Prayer: Lord God, I thank you for each person who helped to point me to your love and goodness. Help me to live in ways that are a positive influence on others. Amen.

Wednesday, May 11. Read Proverbs 31:15-30. Scholar John Walton called the multi-faceted wife and mother in this Israelite wisdom passage “an idealized wife.” The purpose of laying out this ideal with such detail and strength, however, was not to make readers feel guilt or shame. Rather, the wisdom writers worked in the same spirit as the person who said, “Ideals are like stars—we may not reach them, but we can set our course by them.” Which of the qualities or activities this passage mentions, if any, have you experienced from a mother or mother figure? Are there any of them that you have been able to do for your own or someone else’s children? What are some activities for

wives and mothers today that are similar to the ones the ancient Hebrew writer mentioned? Verse 20 sounded a theme we find often in many different portions of the Bible. This “ideal woman” has a heart for helping those who are poor and in need. What gifts and resources do you have that you can use to bless people who are in need? How can you use them to reach beyond your own family and bless others?

Prayer: O Lord, I wish I were always energetic and shrewd, loving and actively caring. Help me to set my course toward this ideal, and to grow every day a bit more into the person you call me to be. Amen.

Thursday, May 12. Read Exodus 20:12, Ephesians 6:1-4. When the letter to the Ephesians quoted the fifth commandment as “the first one with a promise attached,” it pointed to the need to respect and obey parents. It added an important qualifier: “obey your parents in the Lord.” It also pointed to the need for parents to treat children with respect, to be worthy of children’s obedience. Would it be possible for a parent to make a demand that you could not obey “in the Lord”? Have you ever had to face a painful situation like that? If so, what did you do? Have you ever obeyed your parent(s) when what they asked went against your wishes, but not against God’s teachings? In practical, everyday terms, what does it look like when parents “don’t provoke your children to anger, but raise them with discipline and instruction about the Lord”? How well or poorly did your parents find a way to live out those two commands? If you’re a parent, how would your kids say you’re doing on those two points?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I give you my allegiance above all human allegiances, even family ones. But I also ask you to help me be the most loving, caring family member I can possibly be. Amen.

Friday, May 13. Read Isaiah 49:8-15, Matthew 23:37. Almost all of us know that the Bible used the image of a father to portray God. You may be surprised, however, to find that the Bible also used “mothering” images to show how much God loves us. Isaiah said God is less likely to forget us than a mother is to forget her nursing child. Jesus compared his caring for the people of Jerusalem to a mother hen. (Psalm 131 is another example.) Even in a highly patriarchal world, the Scriptures said that both fathers and mothers share in God’s image (cf. Genesis 1:27). In what ways, if any, is or was your mother a reliable positive presence in your life? Did your mother help to make God’s steadfast love seem real to you? How does Isaiah’s imagery speak to your heart at those testing times when God’s presence and power are not on obvious display? Jesus’ picture of the mother hen showed God’s heart, but it also showed that we can choose to refuse God’s love. Have you found it easy or hard to trust that God loves you and will never, ever forget you? How has opening yourself to God’s nurturing love begun to heal any gaps left by the way you were treated as you grew up?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for never forgetting me, for offering to gather and shelter me under your wings. Guide me as I learn to rest trustingly in your mothering love for me. Amen.

Saturday, May 14. Read 2 Kings 8:25-27, 11:1-3; Exodus 1:22-2:10. The historian described Athaliah's behavior chillingly: "she immediately destroyed the entire royal family." This woman ruthlessly traded any shred of motherly or grandmotherly caring for six years of power, despised by her own people. Moses' mother Jochebed (cf. Exodus 6:20), on the other hand, saved her son's life from a murderous Pharaoh. She was even willing to nurse him and then send him to an Egyptian princess to raise. Moses played a pivotal role in the Bible story. He was the human instrument God used to deliver Israel from slavery in Egypt. How crucial were his mother's (and sister's) courage and creativity in saving his life? In what ways do you see God's power at work with and through Moses' loving family? What blessings and limitations do you see in your own life, past and present? What role do you think out-of-control ambition, a thirst for power and control at all costs, played in turning Athaliah and Pharaoh into murderous tyrants? How might an underlying fear of never being "enough," of being surpassed, have led to them becoming people capable of such awful actions? Have you ever seen a person changed in bad ways by attitudes and fears like those? How can you keep those feelings from gripping you? *Prayer: Lord God, keep me from ever being so wrapped up in my own wants that I'm willing to harm others in order to achieve power, wealth or comfort. Give me the type of heart Moses' mother had. Amen.*