

## Mary: Mother of James

Chuck Swindoll in his classic book *You and Your Child* writes these words: “She cooks, she cleans, she comforts, she corrects. She has six pairs of hands and eyes in the back of her head. Mother.”<sup>1</sup>

For some, this word conjures up images of June Cleaver, complete with lace apron and pearls, singing lullabies, baking brownies, kissing away a child’s hot tears. Others envision the Erma Bombeck model who drives a wood-paneled station wagon and whose hobby is dust. Whatever the type, no one has more influence than a mother. For better or worse, she will forever impact the life of her child.

Tough and tender, wise and warm, a mother must be all things to all her family at all times. That is quite a job description, and anyone who is a mother or has watched one in action knows there is no career more demanding or more endangered in today’s society.

One thing is for certain on this Mother’s Day—either you have a mother or you are a mother. So this morning I am sharing what can potentially touch more of you than nearly any other topic.

First, if you have a mother (and we all do!) you can show your love for her whether she is present, alive, or has passed away from either your life or this world. I’ll show you how from God’s Word.

Second, if you are a mom (new, not so new, or grand) you can learn about how to be an ever better mother or grandmother whether your children are here or there or no longer in your life or on this world.

### Mary the Mother of Jesus

This morning may I introduce you to Mary, the mother of Jesus and of James! Who is presented as the most honored woman in the Bible? Mary. Who was chosen out of all the women in the whole world to raise God’s Son? Mary. Who is the greatest living, breathing example of Proverbs 31 in ordinary everyday life? Mary. Without exception who is probably the most beloved and best known woman in the world? Mary, and Mary was a mother.

Mentioned only twenty times in the Bible her life is a portrait of godliness, humility, and yieldedness. She stands in Scriptures as an example to all of us of devotion and faithfulness. Her strengths and struggles are all laid out in the Bible. We can benefit greatly from looking at them today and many times in the future, but especially on this day we honor our mothers.

Let’s meet this incredible woman. Of all the writers of Scripture, it is Luke who highlights Mary. Twelve of the twenty verses that name her are in Luke and one is in Acts, so 65 percent of all that we know about Mary comes to us through Luke. Turn with me to Luke 1, and we will look at the qualities God admires in a woman. He picked her out of all the women in the world for the special assignment of bearing His Son!

## What Made Mary Great?

*Mary was sought out by God:* “Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. And having come in, the angel said to her, ‘Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women’ ” (Luke 1:26–28). She like so many others in Scripture—Adam and Eve in the Garden, Noah in the pre-Flood world, Abram in Ur, Saul on the road to Damascus—were sought out and chosen by God. Even today God is in the people-seeking business.

*Mary was humble:* “But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was” (Luke 1:29). Can you picture Mary thinking, “Who me, a highly favored one?” She had no airs, no pride, just a humble, troubled heart that anyone would even say such a thing. She knew her own heart; certainly God would too!

*Mary partook of God’s grace:* “Then the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God’ ” (Luke 1:30). *Found favor with God* literally means “discovered grace of God.” Mary was not a sinless woman as some today assume. She was saved by God, and she is one in the countless multitude who are heirs of eternal life by God’s grace. Her knowledge of the Word led her to the open arms of God her Savior.

“Marvelous grace of our loving Lord, grace that exceeds our sin and our shame!  
Yonder on Calvary’s mount outpoured, there where the blood of the Lamb was spilled.”<sup>2</sup>

*Mary had an incredible ministry opportunity:* “And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:31–33). To produce within her body tiny hands that would some day touch lepers with a healing touch, to form a mouth within her womb that would speak the very Word of God, to feel the kick of feet that would walk the roads of Israel and spread the Gospel. What an incredible ministry opportunity!

But wait, not to lessen her calling, isn’t that the opportunity all moms have? To teach those tiny little ones that the greatest joy in all the world is to be touched by Jesus and be healed from the dreaded “leprosy” of sin? To use their mouths to share the power of the gospel with any who will listen. Can’t all mothers share in Mary’s great opportunity? As a mother you can start their feet toward serving the Lord in many ways? Yes, what an opportunity you share. That is why Paul said in I Timothy 2 that women are saved from second rate ministry. They are equal with the men in church. Though the men have the teaching and leading ministry, the mothers are the ones who bear and raise the teachers and leaders!

So there is a mom to model. If you never knew yours, or if your mom was not the best or even if she was, we can all learn from the mother God picked to raise His Son!

## How to Really Love Our Mothers

How can we really love our mothers? Here are a few practical ways for us to take to heart today. First, let them make mistakes. Jesus followed Mary's instructions at the wedding in Cana even though He said His hour had not yet come.<sup>3</sup> Moms aren't perfect, even though sometimes it seems like they are! They fail like we all do. But God is most concerned with two things, your response to His Word and how you finish. Mary responded wonderfully to God's Word in Luke 1:38, and she stayed with the Lord to the end according to Acts 1:14 as well as church history.

Secondly, let them work through their grief. Mary knew pain and grief: "Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: 'This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too'" (Luke 2:34-35 NIV).

Part of life is pain. Part of motherhood is being so knit to your children that their lives can pierce you like a sword. Things never turn out like we think at first they will. Sometimes they get better, sometimes they worsen. We need to live in the refreshing and liberating reality of God's Word.

Let us look at the facts. There was no perfect family mentioned in the Bible, not even Mary and Joseph's. No, their boys wanted Jesus done in. Yes, when the heat was on and the leaders were plotting against His life, those brothers sent Him into the fire! "After this, Jesus went around in Galilee, purposely staying away from Judea because the Jews there were waiting to take his life. But when the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles was near, Jesus' brothers said to him, 'You ought to leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples may see the miracles you do. No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world.' For even his own brothers did not believe in him" (John 7:1-5 NIV). Certainly an imperfect family. We know James and Jude changed, but we do not know about the others.

Let's stop our expectations of perfection. If all your children follow the Lord you are blessed. If all do not, God understands. He has seen it in the lives of all His children from Eden onward. Need I mention the families of Adam, Abraham, Eli, Samuel, David and so on? The only perfect parents in the Bible had no children that we know of, like Paul and the apostles.

Thirdly, let them live on in our words. That is what God does! Look at the Bible. The wonders of Mary, the devotion of Hannah, the care of Moses' mom Jacobed, all remain. Every time I hear about Monica mother of Augustine; or Susanna Wesley mother of John and Charles; or one of you who faithfully loves, prays for, and teaches your children about the Lord, the influence of another life is touching mine today.

Finally and most importantly, let them know how they touched our lives. "Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her" (Proverbs 31:28 NIV). When is the last time you praised your mother for being God's special gift to you? Hannah was in Mary's family tradition, and so she spoke of her life and her work. The Bible says in Hebrews that one who lives a life for God lives on by his life testifying of God's grace. If you mom is with you today, before you get to the car think of a way she has touched your life. Maybe it is her loving smile, her gentle voice; maybe it is the soft

yet strong touch of her hands. Can you let her know how her prayers or phone calls or letters have touched you? How about her cooking great meals, sewing on those buttons, cleaning your room, or always having a loving shoulder to cry on? Surely this is only the start. Not just today should you call and tell her, but do it all throughout the year. Rise up and call her blessed!

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<sup>1</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, *You and Your Child, Bible Study* (Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1986), p. 90.

<sup>2</sup> Julia H. Johnston, "Marvelous Grace of Our Loving Lord" (Chicago: The Bible Institute Colportage Association, 1911).

<sup>3</sup> John 2:1-4.