

## Don't Blame Mom [Slide 1]

A lot of pressure goes into being a mother, because being a mother is hard, demanding work. It's a complicated job that requires you to be a chief counselor, cook, wise instructor, referee, maid, domestic engineer, disciplinarian, nurse, scheduler, money manager and loving wife. It's not an assignment for the fainthearted.

[Slide 2] Today is Mother's Day and I want to look at two mothers in the Bible and learn some lessons from their lives. The first mother is Sarah, wife of Abraham, and mother of Isaac. Sarah is one of the two women who make it by name into the hall of faith in Hebrews chapter 11. Hebrews 11:11 says of her, "Read." The Scripture lauds Sarah as a woman of faith who considered God faithful to give her a child. This categorization of her seems ironic because if you know her story, she didn't at all seem like a person who trusted God to give her a child after she was past child-bearing years.

Let's begin with Genesis 15:1-6. Turn in your Bible to the first book, Genesis and make your way to Genesis 15:1-6 and I will read that passage. Read. God promises Abraham an heir who will come out of Abraham's body. God shows Abraham all the stars in the heaven and says, "Count them. That is how numerous your descendants shall be." Abraham believes God and because of Abraham's faith in God's promise, God justifies him or declares him to be righteous.

Abraham would have shared this good news with Sarah. "God says that I am going to have an heir, a son, from my own body. Our descendants will be as numerous as the stars in the heaven."

Time passes. Still no pregnancy. So, Sarah decides to take matters in her own hands. In the laws of that day it was possible for a man to gain an heir by fathering a son through his slave. Legally, the child would become the offspring of the man and his wife. Sarah decides to urge Abraham to use that means to gain an heir. Let's read Genesis 16:1-2. Read. Look at what Sarah says in verse 2. "The Lord has prevented me from bearing children." She blamed God for keeping her infertile. That's the exact opposite response to God than what Hebrews 11:11 describes. Where's the faith that God will give Sarah a child? She has no faith that God will give her a child. Sarah employs a work of the flesh to gain a son for Abraham through Sarah's slave girl, Hagar. Hagar gives birth to Ishmael. Abraham is 86 years old at the time.

Thirteen years later when Abraham is 99, God appears to him again and renews his covenant with Abraham and repeats his promise that Abraham will be the father of many nations. God gives Abraham some instructions about their covenant including the requirement for circumcision and then God mentions Sarah beginning in verse 15. We pick up the story in Genesis 17: 15-21. Read verses 15-21. This time God specifically promises that Sarah will conceive and give birth to the promised heir.

God leaves Abraham and Abraham quickly acts to obey God's instructions to circumcise himself and every male in his household. No doubt he also told Sarah the good news that she was going to have a baby boy.

God returns to Abraham a second time. We pick up the story in Genesis 18:9 where God again mentions Sarah. Read verses 9-12. Sarah overhears God's promise to give her a son and what is her response? Does she respond in faith? No, she laughs. She finds it ludicrous that a woman of her age can have children. The thought is so outrageous to her that she laughs at it.

So, God responds to Sarah's laugh in verses 13-14. Read.

Now, Sarah lies to God. Read verse 15. Sarah lies to God and God exposes her lie.

Genesis does not record Sarah's change of mind and change of faith. If it weren't for Hebrews 11:11 we would not know that Sarah changed her attitude and decided to trust in God's promise and because of her new faith received the power to conceive.

[Slide 3] What do we learn from Sarah? You don't have to be a perfect mom. Sarah wasn't a perfect mom. For much of her life she lacked faith in God. She manipulated the situation with Hagar. She initially did not believe God's promise. She made some very obvious mistakes most of them involving a lack of faith in God's promise, but in the end she made God's hall of fame of people who walked by faith.

I think one of the encouraging things about her story for all of us, is that God remembers us for our successes not for our failures. God could have said, "She doesn't belong in my list of heroes of the faith because of the Hagar incident, because she laughed at me and then lied to me. God chooses not to remember our failures, but to remember our successes. Could you be encouraged by that news today? Could you walk out of here today with a bounce to your step knowing that God does not define you by your failures but rather by your successes? Can feel better knowing that you can make some mistakes as a mom and still be considered a success in God's eyes?

[Slide 4] Our second mother is Sarah's daughter-in-law, Rebecca, wife to Isaac and mother to Esau and Jacob. God identified Rebecca as the one he wanted to marry Isaac. The story is in Genesis 24:13-25. In this story Abraham has sent his servant to find a wife for his son Isaac from Abraham's kinfolk living in Mesopotamia. We begin the story with the servant asking God to identify for him Isaac's future wife. As I read the story, see if you can identify Rebecca's character qualities. Read Gen. 24:13-25.

Rebecca is beautiful, a virgin, and a cousin to Isaac. She is a giving person with a serving heart because she volunteers to draw water for the servant's camels. She's a hard worker and she is hospitable, inviting the servant to her home. She has a certain amount of courage and probably trust in God because she agrees to travel far from her home to go marry Isaac, a man she has never met. Everything about her story indicates she's one fine woman.

The Lord enables her to conceive and then prophesies to her about her children in Genesis 25:21-26. Read. God tells Rebecca that the older son is going to serve the younger son. She knows from birth that Esau is supposed to serve Jacob. That is what God told her.

As the story continues, Isaac favors the older son Esau. Rebecca favors Isaac. Now when Isaac was old, blind, and near death he decided to give the blessing to Esau. This would establish Esau as the favored son, the one who had priority over the younger son. This decision was contrary to what God had revealed to Rebecca and what she would have communicated to Isaac.

To prevent Isaac from blessing Esau, Rebecca connives with Jacob for Jacob to cover himself with animal hides and to present himself to Isaac as his son, Esau. Esau was a hairy man but Jacob was not. When Isaac feels Jacob, he feels the animal hairs from the skins Jacob is wearing and Isaac is deceived into thinking that Jacob is really Esau. He then blesses Jacob. When Esau returns and discovers that Jacob has stolen the blessing from him, he is enraged and determines to kill Jacob after Isaac dies. Rebecca sends Jacob to live with Rebecca's brother Laban in Mesopotamia to escape Esau's revenge.

God reveals himself to Jacob on the way to Mesopotamia and through a series of events God blesses and prospers Jacob and brings him back to the Promised Land with a large family and Jacob continues the line of the Patriarchs.

Rebecca deceived her husband Isaac, and encouraged her son Jacob to carry out the deception. The means she used were carnal and ungodly. It is the same basic problem that Sarah had when she offered Hagar to Abraham to work out God's promise. God had said that Esau would serve Jacob but it didn't look like God was going to act in time for that to happen so Rebecca and Jacob took matters into their own hands to ensure that God's word came true. It's the same problem of not trusting God to fulfill his promise. So, Rebecca demonstrated lack of faith, used deception, and disrespected her husband. Men, wouldn't you agree that if you expressed your will about something and then your wife deceived you to circumvent your will and encouraged your child to deceive you, wouldn't you consider that pretty disrespectful?

Rebecca and Jacob accomplished the ultimate will of God but they used ungodly means to do so.

Nevertheless, God appeared to Jacob in a dream and promised to be with him and finally to bring him back safe to the Promised Land. God could have said, "I'm changing my plan. You used carnal and deceitful means to make a fool of my man, Isaac. I'm giving the birthright back to Esau." But he didn't do that. He accomplished his will despite Jacob and Rebecca's actions.

[Slide 5] What can we learn from Rebecca? God uses imperfect mothers to accomplish his will. Imperfect mothers are the only ones he has available. There is no denying the powerful influence mothers have on their children either for good or for evil. No question about how important it is for mothers to set a godly example for their children.

But the other side of the coin is that God is more powerful than mothers. He works through even the mistakes of mothers to accomplish his will. Relax a bit. You're not going to thwart God's will for your child's life. If you could do that you would be God rather than God being God.

Sarah and Rebecca were like every other mother, a mixture of strengths and weaknesses, capable of moments of faith and goodness as well as moments of unbelief and carnality. There are no superwomen or super mothers in the Bible, only normal women trying to live out their faith to the best of their ability, sometimes succeeding and sometimes failing.

Aren't you glad to know that God can overcome and even redeem your mistakes? His sovereign plans are not held hostage to your weaknesses.

You are God's partner in raising his children. You hold a high and lofty position and thank you for how you bring to that responsibility your love and wisdom. Take courage that it doesn't all depend on you and your husband. God is sovereign and will accomplish his plan. Let's pray.