

The Secrets of Every Happy Family – Week #3

Welcome to the third week of our series we're calling "**The Secrets of Every Happy Family.**" If you missed the last two messages you can go to our website and click on messages to catch up. Probably, not surprisingly, this series has already generated a lot of discussion in many families and hopefully, also eventually, in your family.

Last week we looked at the role fathers undertake in successful and happy families. Today we're looking at another role - the role that mothers play in the family. And in particular we're going to look at the relationship Jesus had with his mother. It's Luke's Gospel that tells us the most about Mary, but we get perhaps the most interesting snapshot into the relationship of Jesus and Mary in the Gospel of John. And it's John who tells us this story.

There was a wedding at Cana in Galilee and the mother of Jesus was there and Jesus and his disciples were also invited. Pay attention to the order that John sets up for us there because the order has a purpose. John puts the mother of Jesus first and then Jesus and then his disciples. We'll get back to that point in a moment.

As we hear in the story the wedding party doesn't go as planned. John tells us when the wine ran short, the mother of Jesus said to him, "**They have no wine.**" Running out of wine would have been a major embarrassment for the couple, effectively bringing the party to an end and even casting a shadow over the prospects of their married life. Mary must have known the couple well enough to have been privy to the problem and clearly, she was helping with the service of the wedding. So, she brings the problem to Jesus with a clear expectation that he's going to do something about it.

Instead, he says to her, "**Woman, how does your concern affect me?**" If that sounds like Jesus is pushing back, that's because he is, but seemingly deaf to this response, **ever get that from your mom?** Seemingly, deaf to his response, his mother said to the servants, "**Do whatever he tells you.**" Jesus said to them, "**Fill the jars with water.**" Then they fill them to the brim and then he told them, "**Draw some out and take it to the head waiter.**"

The servants filled these huge jars with water and then take a sampling to the head waiter who would've been in charge of the wedding service. And the

head waiter tastes the water now made wine. And it's interesting John notes the head waiter tasted it. He did not realize where it had come from. But the servants who had drawn the water knew. He didn't know but the servants knew.

Interesting footnote.

Anyway, the head waiter calls to the bridegroom and he says, ***"Everyone serves good wine first and then when people have drunk freely the inferior one, but you have kept the good wine until now."*** So, we learn not only did Jesus turn water into wine but he turns it into really fine wine. A suggestion of his generosity. Also, wine in scripture is a symbol of abundance. Jesus provides a superabundance, gallons, and gallons of wine equivalent to perhaps a thousand bottles of wine in our own measurement.

This miracle takes place all because of the relationship of Mary with the couple and the relationship of Mary with her son. And that, by the way, is why many Catholics prayerfully turn to Mary. Catholics pray through Mary to bring our prayer to her son. Anyway, that's what happened here to a most successful effect.

And then John concludes this story. He tells us after this, Jesus and his mother and his brothers and disciples went down to Capernaum. Now, you see the order is changed. Jesus is listed first and then his mother and then all the others.

So what? What's the significance of that? Well, when Mary tells Jesus about the lack of wine, it's not just about the lack of wine. That's not all that's going on in this scene. She's doing something else that's quite significant in the story of the Gospel in the arc of Jesus' life.

She knows her son. And she's well aware of what he's capable of and what he can and will accomplish in the world. In performing this miracle, events will be set in motion that will lead inevitably and rather quickly to the cross. And he knows it. and he's checking with her to make sure she knows it too.

Essentially, he's saying, **"Do you understand what you're asking? Do you realize that this is going to change everything including our relationship? Our relationship will be different."**

Up until this point, he's been under her authority. The Bible tells us that he's spent his life in Nazareth and that he was obedient to her. But in making this request, Mary is changing the equation. She's releasing him from his obedience, she's releasing him from her authority, and she's releasing him into the world to undertake his mission and his ministry. The story begins with Mary first, but now Jesus is first and Mary is his disciple. The roles have changed and that can take some getting used to.

Happy families - successful ones are characterized by moms who understand their role is one of preparation. They're preparing their kids for release into their own lives, under their own authority, in the larger world, in the same way that Mary released Jesus into his public ministry. But as Mary herself surely knew, this release is not a one-time deal. It's going to happen in little ways and then in larger ways, over and over again in an ever-expanding release until it's a complete release because moms are not raising children, they're raising adults.

And as such, it's a pretty selfless role because good moms, great moms are giving everything they have to their kids and then they have to give their kids away too. Their very success brings loss in a certain sense and certainly, sadness. Sometimes it's sadness that a mom must bear silently and all alone. And that doesn't seem fair. It just doesn't seem fair, but it must be so. For the success and the happiness of the family, it must be so.

On the flip side of this story from John's Gospel, we see that happy families are also marked by respect toward mothers. Despite the distance of Jesus words in the end, he did exactly what his mother asked him to do. He honored his mother's request and in a generous and abundant way. While the authority a mother has over her children, eventually comes to an end, honor, and respect are permanent features of the relationship.

In the 10 commandments, God Himself commands us, "Honor your father and mother." Respect and honor for his mother was a clear feature of Jesus' own life. In John's Gospel the very last thing that Jesus ever did was to make provision for the care of his mother. He did that from the cross in his very last words.

So, when it comes to application for moms, my question is this. Are you parenting your child with God's purpose in mind? By which I mean, are you parenting knowing that eventually, your job is to let them go, to release them

into the world? And are you practicing on a daily basis, right now, or are you holding on a bit too tight? Are you hovering a bit too close? Are you trying to control everything, to know everything, to be everything, to be everywhere? Maybe it's a problem for you and maybe not. If, on the other hand, your children are grown and they're now adults ask yourself are you honoring, are you respecting their independence and their authority?

As for other family members, are you honoring the mother of the family? And that means different things at different stages of life. As a middle school or high school student that requires obedience in what you do for sure, but also in how you talk to your mother, in the tone of voice that you use, in your body language, and your willingness to lend her your attention. All of that is part of honoring your mother. You might not like to hear it, but she actually gets it more than you think.

If you're in college, if you're a young adult, if you're newly married, it might mean giving time to that relationship and bringing your best game when you do so. Not acting like it's a sacrifice or some kind of imposition. Being generous with yourself in the relationship.

If your mother is older, perhaps there is patience and kindness and care that is now required that wasn't part of the relationship before. If your mother is deceased, you can still honor her and you should. You must in your thoughts, in your prayer, in your kind remembering of her.

The family is an image and reflection of God's love. It is an imperfect reflection for sure, but it is a reflection. In fact, it's imperfection and our frustration at its imperfection point us to our desire for something more. And our desire for something more is the family of God. Ultimately, what God is doing in the world is building his family and we get to be a part of it. But here's the thing: we're supposed to be practicing now in our own families.