

A PARENT'S FAITH

HEBREWS 11:23

By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's command.

Today is Mothers' Day - and out of the mouth of a few Second Graders let me give you the answers to a few commonly-asked questions about mothers... *Here's some words of wisdom from second graders...*

Why did God make mothers? She's the only one who knows where the scotch tape is... To help us out of there when we were getting born...

How did God make mothers? He used dirt, just like the rest of us... God made my mom the same like he made me. He just used bigger parts...

What ingredients were used when God made mothers? God makes moms out of clouds and angel hair and everything nice in the world and one dab of mean... He started with men's bones. Then He mostly used string, I think...

Why did God give you your mother and not some other mom? We're related... God knew she likes me a lot more than other people's moms like me...

What kind of little girl was your mom? My mom has always been my mom and none of that other stuff... I don't know I wasn't there, but my guess would be pretty bossy... They say she used to be nice...

Why did your mom marry your dad? My dad makes the best spaghetti in the world. And my mom eats a lot... My grandma says that mom didn't have her thinking cap on...

What's the difference between moms and dads? Moms know how to talk to teachers without scaring them... Dads are taller and stronger, but moms have the real power 'cause she's who you got to ask if you want to sleepover at a friend's house...

What does your mom do in her spare time? Moms don't do spare time...

What would it take to make your mom perfect? On the inside, she's already perfect. Outside, I think some plastic surgery...

If you could change one thing about your mom, what would it be? She has a weird thing about me keeping my room clean. I'd get rid of that... I'd make her smarter, so she'd know it was my sister who did it, not me... I'd like for her to get rid of those invisible eyes in the back of her head...

In this morning's text we find the story of a Hebrew mother - a good mother. From all accounts there's not one thing we would want to change about this mom.

Her name was Jochebed - and her three kids were Aaron, Miriam, *and the most famous of the three, **Moses***. Jochebed mothered a nation's deliverer.

Our text credits Moses' upbringing not just to his *mom*, but to his *parents*. Moses had the blessing of a good dad, as well as a faithful mom. Exodus 6:20 identifies them both by name, "**Amram and Jochebed**."

Exodus provides other details. In 2:2 we're told, "**So the woman conceived and bore a son. And when *she* saw that he was a beautiful child, *she* hid him three months.**" Notice, the writer of Hebrews speaks of "**parents**," while the author of Exodus focuses on "**the woman?**" We know that Exodus was written by a full-grown Moses. *Whereas, Hebrews was authored by an objective third party - many years after the incident.* The perspective of Hebrews is obviously from the outside looking in. While Exodus is written by an insider, Moses himself drew from his own memories.

What I gather from this, is that Dad was in the mix - on the job. Amram was no absentee father. He made a vital contribution... *providing a home, and giving his family structure, guidance, courage, and resources.*

But what the child remembered most was the touch and tenderness of his mother. Moses recalled Jochebed's tender words and nurturing manner... Dad played a vital part - an indispensable role. No one today is diminishing the job of a dad. Yet there is still a special relationship between a mother and her child.

Several years ago I did some firsthand research and discovered that "*Mom*" tattoos outnumber "*Dad*" tattoos, probably 30 to 1. I interviewed *Painless Paul* at *Lucky Tattoos* on Highway 78. Paul said folks are far more likely to get a tattooed tribute to mom than dad.

As a matter of fact, Painless Paul said when someone asks for a "*Dad*" tattoo it's usually after the old boy has kicked the bucket. It's a memorial. But *mom* gets honored with ink while she's still alive. Among the painted population memories of a mother conjure up far more tender feelings than that of a dad.

And this is not only *true* if you have a *tattoo*. Have you noticed whenever the cameras comb the bench at a college football game you never hear a player shout, "**I love you, dad.**" Their words are always directed to mom. *A mom has a special place in every child's heart.*

When my firstborn came into the world my dad took me aside and warned me. "**Sandy, your son will love Kathy more than he'll love you.**" Dad told me, "**Get use to it, and don't be jealous of it - a son just loves his mom more than he loves his dad. It's just a fact of life.**"

Generally speaking, moms have a tenderness and tolerance dads lack. You've heard of stand-offs between a dad and child, "I'll never speak to him again" or "I'm done with him." *But I've never heard of a stand-off between a mom and her child!* A good mom never cuts-off a child. No matter how far the child falls, she still sees beauty in her kids, *and refuses to let it die.*

Poet John Killinger words it this way, "I believe in the love of all mothers, and its importance in the lives of the children they bear. It is stronger than steel, softer than down, and more resilient than a green sapling on the hillside. Her love closes wounds, melts disappointments, and enables the weakest child to stand tall and straight in the fields of adversity." And this was the love that Jochebed had for Moses.

As Hebrews tells us, "By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his **parents**, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's command." Amram led the way... supplying vision, and bravery, and wisdom. But Jochebed followed in step – protecting her child, believing in her child, and risking *her life* to save *her son's life*. Together they made a good parental team.

This morning, as we look deeper into our text I think you'll find the parents of Moses had three chief attributes... They were **protective** of their child They saw **potential** in their child. And they relied on God's **providence** in the life of their child. And these are the same ingredients that make good parents today...

Hebrews 11:23 describes **the faith of a parent.**

Parents **hold on** to their kids, and **protect** them from danger... Parents **look at** the child's beauty, and encourage their **potential**... And eventually parents **let go** of their children and trust in God's **providence**...

*And all three actions - **holding on**, and **looking at**, and **letting go** require great faith.* Parents need faith.

Notice first, "By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his **parents**..." Amram and Jochebed were quick to recognize this world is a dangerous place. It's not conducive or safe for the rearing of children. Even today, our world is full of predators and evildoers who desire to harm our kids.

And like Amram and Jochebed it's a parents' duty to hide their children while they're vulnerable and innocent, until they grow and can stand on their own.

In their formative years, It's a mom's responsibility to **hold on** to her children and **protect** them. Like an animal in the wild, it's a mama bear's instinct to guard her babies. Hey, if parents don't protect their kids, *who in the world will?* Yesterday's societal safety net of media, schools, and neighbors has disappeared. Apart from the church parents today are on their own.

Imagine, the situation facing Amram and Jochebed... An evil, power-mongering despot - Egypt's Pharaoh - wanted to control the expanding population of the Hebrews so he commanded all male babies two years old and under to be thrown into the Nile River. He wanted to feed the baby boys to the crocodiles.

The Jewish secular historian, Josephus, provides us additional insight into the possible motive behind the Pharaoh's death decree. Josephus writes, "One of Egypt's sacred scribes who was very discerning in foretelling future events truly, told the king, that about this time there would be a child born to the Israelites, who if he were reared, would bring the Egyptian dominion low, and would raise the Israelites."

Pharaoh wanted to crush this Israelite rival. His first plan was to recruit the Hebrew midwives, and use them to sabotage the deliveries of the male infants. But when the midwives refused to cooperate, Pharaoh took off the gloves. He issued an executive order, *infanticide by drowning. Can you imagine a crueller way for a child to die? A baby being tossed into the current, gurgling water into his lungs, then his bloated body being shredded by the crocs. Your son alligator bait...*

But as gruesome a picture as I've painted it's not unlike the spiritual dangers facing kids today. The Egyptian Pharaoh wore a coiled serpent on his crown. The serpent is a symbol of Satan. And no less than the devil and his nasty demons are out to attack *our* kids.

You know about the child snatchers, the pedophiles, the drug dealers, the gang members, the school shooters - but your kid is threatened in far more subtle ways. What your child thinks and believes is under assault on a daily basis. *A materialistic media - a sexualized and coarsening culture - a godless and violent entertainment industry all want to capture the soul of your child.* Crocodiles of a different sort circle in the water to feed on our children. Parents today have to be vigilant and remain in *protection mode*.

Did you know the average American child sees 40,000 TV commercials a year? Parents don't be naïve! Advertisers spend \$15 billion a year targeting your kids, trying to influence their values. If it didn't work, they'd save their money! Annually, the typical teenage girl views 1500 references to sexual activity on television. When Taylor Swift is the role model for our little girls you know we're in trouble. All parents need to operate under *a homeland security red alert*.

Ellen Goodman is a liberal American columnist. Her opinions run in the Boston Globe and Washington Post. Recently, she commented about parenting...

"At some point between Lamaze and PTA, it becomes clear that one of your main jobs as a parent is to counter the culture. What the media delivers to kids in masses, you are expected to rebut one at a time... Parents are expected to protect their

children from an increasingly hostile environment. Are the kids being sold junk food? *Just say no.* Is TV bad? *Turn it off.* Are there messages about sex, drugs, violence all around? *Counter the culture.* Mothers and fathers are expected to screen virtually every aspect of their child's life. Parents need to check the ratings on the movies - read the labels on the CDs - find out if there's MTV in the house next door... all the while staying in touch with school... and in their free time, earning a living.

Parents see themselves in a struggle for the hearts and minds of their own children. It isn't that they can't say no. It's that there's so much to say no to.

There has been a fundamental shift. We once expected parents to raise children in accordance with a dominant culture of morality and decency. Today parents are expected to raise their children in opposition to the culture. It's what makes child-raising harder... It's not just that American families have less time with their kids. It's that we have to spend more of this time battling with our own culture. It's like trying to get your kids to eat green beans after they've been told all day about the wonders of Milky Way bars."

Our text tells us for three months Amram and Jochebed put out enormous time and effort to keep the baby Moses protected, and shielded, and secluded.

They made sure Moses was fed, changed, and occupied so he wouldn't cry. They prayed every day he wouldn't catch the croup or get colicky. Imagine, what would happen if Moses coughed or cried at the wrong time... What if while changing his diaper, Amram stuck little Moses with a safety pin?... What if he stuck himself with a safety pin?... One whimper and it could be curtains for parents *and* child. This is why *Jochebed*, went to bed exhausted every single night.

I hate to inform you younger parents, but I've gone to bed exhausted almost every night for the last 41 years, which incidentally is how long I've been a parent. It reminds me of a story I once heard. "One day dad was reading in the living room, when my brother and I decided that we could play basketball without breaking anything. When I took a shot that redesigned the glass table, my mother came in with a stick, and said, "So help me, I'll bust you in half." Without lifting his head from his book, my father said, "Why would you want twice as many?" Hey, some days you wonder!

Parenting is a tough gig. It's not for the faint of heart. And I'm just a dad – it's more-so for moms. Parents, one day your child will be equipped to make their own choices and fend for themselves - ***but until then you've got to protect them.*** Don't get lax – you can't wear out – parents need to rise to the challenge.

Parents need to *hold on* to their kids and *protect* them as long as necessary – but mothers also should **look at** their kids and recognize their **potential**. "By faith Moses,

when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, *because they saw he was a beautiful child...*” They saw a beauty in Moses.

According to Josephus, Moses’ dad, Amram, was a man of prayer. He’d been interceding for the nation, asking God for someone to deliver his people from slavery. One night Amram had a vision. God promised him a son who would save Israel. God said of the boy, *“His memory shall be famous while the world lasts...”* After Amram awoke, he shared the vision with his wife.

In other words, the couple had clues of their child’s destiny before he was born. And upon his birth nothing caused them to doubt God’s promise. Moses was a beautiful baby. Actually, Josephus tells us, Moses was so handsome as an infant, that while in the court of Pharaoh, people would go out of their way to walk by the nursery just to admire the boy’s good looks! *My parents had the same problem... with my brother!*

When Moses was born Jochebed saw that the child was beautiful - there was something about Moses that indicated all the predictions were true. Her child did have a special, God-ordained quality. Jochebed was a good mom because she saw her child’s potential.

Good moms *believe in God AND they believe in their kids*. They sense and see their heavenly, eternal value. God sensitizes them to His beautiful purposes.

A good parent values their child’s uniqueness. He or she *looks at* their child. When my kids were small I’d walk into their room and just watch them sleep. At times Kathy and I did it together – and we’d dream of *where their little feet would walk* – and *what those little hands would do*. And we’d re-dedicate them to God.

Though they didn’t know it, even when they were teenagers sometimes I would watch them sleep (*when I could stay up late enough*) and I would think similar thoughts. A good parent studies their children – and takes notice of their talents and strengths. Then they tailor the child’s training to bring out that potential.

A five year-old “Heather” was being scolded by her mom, *“Heather, why can’t you be as well behaved as Stacy next door?”* Heather protested, *“Mom, I’ll never be as good as Stacy, she’s a doctor’s kid.”* Mom scratched her head, *“What does that have to do with anything?”* Little Heather answered, *“Mom, everyone knows the doctor always keeps the best babies for himself.”* *That’s how a good mom feels about her kids.*

She’s not blind to their flaws - and she certainly disciplines their rebellion - but she never loses sight of the good and beautiful in her children. No matter how wayward they become she never overlooks their value.

John Ashcroft is a former Attorney General of the United States. He credits his success to the prayers of his dad. As a small boy, Ashcroft would wake up - not to the crowing of a rooster, or the smell of coffee brewing, but to a father's prayer. Often he'd join his dad. He would curl up under his dad's giant frame.

He recalls, "I was shielded by his body as he pleaded for my soul." Ashcroft says he never heard his dad pray for his son's happiness – or for a bigger house, or car, or bank account. Ashcroft remembers, "He prayed that our hearts would be ignited and inspired to do things of eternal consequence."

He quotes his dad's petition, "Lord, turn our eyes from the temporal, the physical, the menial - and toward the eternal, the spiritual, the noble..." Ashcroft sums up his father's influence on his family, "My father never pressured us toward achievement. He simply dangled before us the possibilities. Thanks to his example, we sometimes took the bait." *Parents, are you dangling possibilities before your children?*

Ken Langley tells of a time when he was painting the laundry room with his 10 year old son. *Ken had the brush. Justin had the roller.* Every time his son left the room Ken would grab the roller and re-roll what his son had painted. Ken didn't mind his son's help, but it was frustrating to watch the boy stretch for places he couldn't reach. Ken was afraid the boy would step in the paint, or spill it on the floor. When he saw Justin do it again, Ken shouted, "I told you to stop stretching! I'll get that." Justin replied, "Ok, Dad, I won't do it again."

Ken recalls, "In the silence that followed, I wondered how many times I've given my kids the message: "Stop stretching." I've said, "You can't. It's too hard. Let *me* do it. Don't be unrealistic. Don't reach so high?" Too often, I'm afraid. I hope they weren't listening!"

It's terrible to see a parent let his own fear hold back a child's potential. If mom and dad ain't behind you, *who is?*... It scarred a young George Washington when he had wasted his allowance. His mom scolded him, "Oh, George, you never did have a head for money."

Can you imagine the trauma Samuel Morse, inventor of the telegraph, endured when his mom scolded him, "Sam, stop tapping your fingers, it's driving me crazy."

Or poor Neil Armstrong, future astronaut, after his mother said, "Neil, you have no more business taking flying lessons than the man in the moon." *It's always sad when a mom or dad discourages their child.*

A friend, Coach David, told me about the time it happened at the ballpark. The mother of a little boy on his team took her son home before the game was over.

David realized the kid was coming up to bat that inning, and if the child left early it would cost the team an automatic out. He called to the mom, “**Why, don’t you let Billy hit? If he doesn’t come to bat the team will have to take an out.**” And right there in front of a grandstand of people she shouts out, “**Aw, he’s no good. He’d make an out anyway. We’ve gotta go!**”

To the contrary, a good parent believes in their child. Good moms and dads nurture the beauty in their child.

Amram and Jochebed **held on** to their child and **protected** him. Together they **looked at** their child, and realized his **potential**. And finally, moms should **let go** of their children and trust in God’s **providence**.

Jochebed was a mom who believed God cared more about her child’s future than she did! She trusted God to be involved in her son’s circumstances. *A good mom believes she’s not alone in the rearing of her children.*

Understand this term, “**providence**” - **It’s God’s overarching intervention in human affairs.** *His involvement in our circumstances.* Providence is God’s means of accomplishing His purposes through events beyond our control... And there comes a point with every parent, where *they are no longer in control of where their child goes, what their child does, and who their child is with...* In those moments a parent has to trust in God’s love for their child and in His providence.

Bible commentator John Darby sums up divine providence, “**God’s ways are behind the scenes, but He moves all the scenes that He is behind.**” And Jochebed trusted God to move some scenes in her son’s life. Exodus 2:3 tells us what this mother did, “**When she could no longer hide (Moses), she took an ark of bulrushes for him, daubed it with asphalt and pitch, put the child in it, and laid it in the reeds by the river’s bank. And his sister stood afar off, to know what would be done to him.**” She waterproofed a basket.

She created a floating bassinet, and laid her baby on what had been a watery grave for many Hebrew infants. Then launched the basket downstream... into the flow of hidden undertows and underfed crocodiles.

Here, a mom trusted God to control the current, and bring her precious son to safety. She laid the basket in the Nile, and **let go** of her son into God’s loving arms.

This is what Tracinda Foxe did in December, 2005. When her third story apartment caught fire Tracinda’s one month-old infant began to choke on the billowing smoke. She held her son out of the window for as long as she could. But her arms gave way and she had to turn her baby loose. The baby fell three floors...

But here's where God's providence prevailed... A New York Housing employee named Felix Vazquez saw the situation and moved into position to catch the child. *It just so happens*, Felix is a catcher on a local baseball team. And since Felix was also a lifeguard, after he caught the baby he was able to administer mouth-to-mouth resuscitation... It saved the baby's life.

Obviously, Felix Vazquez was hailed a hero. But in a sense it wasn't Felix that saved the child - as much as a mom's decision to trust in God's providence and **let go**... After Tracinda was rescued she commented on her horrifying ordeal, "I prayed that someone would catch him. I said, "God, please save my son."

If Tracinda had held on to her baby for too long he would've suffocated. And figuratively speaking, Christian parents can make this mistake. We can hold on too long. A father or *mother can smother* a child.

As I said earlier, parents need to hold on to our kids when they're young, and provide them protection, but there comes a point when a parent has to **let go**...

Kids have to learn to stand on their own two feet, and think independently from mom and dad. If I shelter them completely and create a totally safe environment they'll never learn to make it in an anti-Christ world. I want to teach my kids to live by faith... Hey, I believe in keeping the reins tight, but I also believe in turning loose of those reins a little at a time. Kids need to be exposed to the world in *small doses*.

Think of a child learning to swim. You outfit her with water wings. The inflatables keep her head above the surface until she gets accustomed to the buoyancy of the pool. But if you never lose the wings she'll never swim.

Sure it's risky to remove the wings – and the child has to be monitored. And there's a good chance he or she is going to struggle. But this is how you learn to stay afloat. And likewise, kids will never learn to swim in this world if you keep them totally shielded. *A mom has to let go at some point... A dad has to turn loose...*

Pastor Tim Kimmel gives this advice to Christian parents, "You may not want to hear this, but raising safe, Christian kids is a spiritual disaster in the making. Your effort will produce shallow faith and wimpy believers. Kids raised in an environment that stresses safety (above all else) are on track to be pushovers. They tend to end up either overly critical of the world system to the point where they won't have anything to do with people... an idea that comes directly from Satan's playbook. Or, they become naïve about the world system, which ultimately makes them putty in Satan's hands... Few of these kids know how to have a spiritual impact on a wicked world."

It sounds ironic, but if *safety* is the sole priority of your parenting it could prove to be *dangerous* to your child. The initial impulse of a caring parent is to make their child's life as easy as possible – but that's not the best long term strategy. When it comes to

what's needed - easy isn't always *better*. Life is hard, and parents won't always be there to shelter their children.

Thus, from the day a child enters the world a parent should begin the process of **letting go** of that child.

Rather than shelter my child from the world for their first 18 years, I would rather that child be exposed to the world gradually - before he or she heads off to college – so I can be there to help them process life, and integrate their Christianity into real-life situations.

This approach appears risky, but Jochebed also took a risk when she placed her baby in the basket and pushed him out onto the river... **Jochebed believed God was downstream in her child's life.** He was moving props and people to accomplish His purposes.

A parent moves with *confidence* when he or she trusts in God's *providence*. With your children you've got to trust that God is downstream in their life!

Listen to how God steered Moses' ark, and who He brought across its path. Exodus 2, "Then the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river. And her maidens walked along the riverside; and when she saw the ark among the reeds, she sent her maid to get it."

Here's God's providence at work! "And when she had opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby wept. So she had compassion on him, and said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children." Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call a nurse for you from the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for you?" And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go." So the maiden went and called the child's mother. Then Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child away and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed him."

What an amazing work of God's providence. Moses gets adopted by the pharaoh's own daughter. He goes from *Egypt's most wanted* to *member of the royal family*. Moses will grow up on Pharaoh's dime.

And because Jochebed believed God enough to **let go** she stayed in the picture. Pharaoh's daughter pays her wages to nurse her own infant. *Ladies, imagine being paid a salary to breast-feed your baby...* And since children in Egyptian culture were nursed for a lot longer than today this gave Jochebed the opportunity she'd prayed for to teach God's truth to Moses.

In closing, many characteristics make a good parent: *love, fairness, patience, consistency, creativity, firmness tempered with tenderness...* but the longer I live I've

become more and more convinced the number one ingredient of a good parent is **faith**.

Verse 23 tells us “*by faith*” Amram and Jochebed raised their son. Imagine, despite the dangers, these parents pushed their son out onto uncertain waters, trusting God to be downstream in his life. *It took faith!*

Faith enough to **hold on** and **protect**. Faith enough to **look at** and see **potential**. Faith enough to **let go** and trust in God’s **providence**. A request His disciples made of Jesus should be the prayer of all parents, “**Increase our faith!**” Let’s all raise our kids *by faith*.