

"A MOTHER'S AWESOME INFLUENCE"Exodus 2:1-10**THEME: Mother's Day. The example of Jochebed.****DATE: 05/13/07**

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Early influences in our lives are arguably the ones that go deepest and last longest.

The late supreme court justice Byron R. White once said, *'I think the early influences are critical. . . I believe that if you haven't had any good influences in your early years, it is still possible to recover, but it is hard to recover from good influences.'*

- For most people the strongest early influence in life was mother's.

So the crucial question is: was mother a good influence?

Having children is not all it takes to be a mother.

The columnist Sydney J. Harris wrote: *'The commonest fallacy among women is that simply having children makes one a mother—which is as absurd as believing that having a piano makes one a musician.'*

Mothering is an enormous challenge, considering the young hooligans mothers must try to mold every day.

A mother was preparing pancakes for her young sons, Kevin age 5 and Ryan age 3. The boys began to argue over who would get the first pancake. Their mother saw this as an opportunity to mold their young characters. She said, "Boys, if Jesus were sitting at the table he would say, *'Let my brother have the first pancake; I can wait.'*" Kevin turned to his younger brother and said, *'Okay, Ryan, you be Jesus.'*

- Most often mothers have the strongest spiritual influence on their children, and therefore on the whole family.

According to an old Spanish proverb, *'An ounce of mother is worth a pound of clergy.'*

God arranged human life and the family in such a way that a mother's role is pivotal in the character formation of a child.

- I have a holy respect for godly mothers, because of my mother. She died fourteen years ago, shortly after I came to First Free Church. Without a doubt she has been the strongest spiritual influence in my life.

The influence of a godly mother lasts longer than a lifetime. It reaches to successive generations.

If we could trace the record of history's greatest heroes to their mothers' influence, I wonder how telling that would be.

With so many destructive forces aligned against the family today, how can mothers safeguard their God-intended influence on their children?

- This is Mother's Day. But we're not here to worship mothers. God alone is worthy of our worship.

I don't usually preach about mothers on Mother's Day. In more than 33 years as a pastor I have only done so 4 or 5 times.

But today the sermon is about mothers and their influence.

- Moses is the great hero of the Jewish people. His mother's influence on him was enormous. She had to risk practically everything to gain temporary custody of her son.

Let's see what we can find out from the Bible about the mother of this great hero, Moses. Her name was Jochebed, the wife of Amram. We don't learn their names until Exodus 6.

- Moses was born in Egypt while the Hebrews were enslaved to the Egyptians. God had fulfilled his promise to the patriarch Abraham that his descendants would as innumerable as the stars in the sky (Genesis 15:5). But this population explosion of Abraham's descendants happened many generations earlier in Egypt, where Jacob and his family had found salvation from a severe famine in Canaan.

We read in Exodus 1:6-7, *'Now Joseph and all his brothers and all that generation died, but the Israelites were fruitful and multiplied greatly and became exceedingly numerous, so that the land was filled with them.'*

Then a new Egyptian king came to power in Egypt. He didn't care about Joseph the great Hebrew-Egyptian hero who had saved Egypt from national starvation. He said, *'Hey, this is our land. The Hebrews are increasing in number. If we don't do something they'll take over.'* *'So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites and worked them ruthlessly.'* (Exodus 1:11-13)

Then the King of Egypt ordered the Hebrew midwives to make sure that Hebrew baby boys didn't survive birth.

But the midwives were God-fearing women and wouldn't do it. When the king interrogated them, *'Why have*

you let the boys live?' they answered, 'Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women. When they have a baby, it's express delivery.

By the time the midwives arrive the baby is already born and the family is dancing and singing "*Hava Nagila, Hava Nagila, Hava Nagila, Venis'mecha*"—Let us rejoice, let us rejoice, let us rejoice and be happy.'

- So the Hebrew people kept multiplying.

Finally, in desperation Pharaoh, the Egyptian king gave a decree: *Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: "Every boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live."* (Exodus 1:22)

- And that's when Moses was born. **READ EXODUS 2:1-10**

Jochebed, Moses' mother took courageous action to care for her baby boy.

- The forces intent on destroying babies today are not exactly the same as those in Egypt 3,500 years ago, but they're just as vicious and unrelenting.

Today's social environment seduces our children with so many negative influences! It takes a committed and determined mother not to surrender her God-given role as the strongest influence in a young child's life.

This brief snapshot in Exodus 2 of the role Moses' mother played in his earliest years provides some helpful **guidelines** for mothers today.

I. ALLOW YOUR LOVE TO GUIDE YOUR ACTIONS (2:1-2)

God placed an indestructible love in you, mother. Don't let any social pressure or destructive power drive it out. George MacDonald wrote, *'The mother's heart, more than any other God has made, is like him in power of loving.'* A mother is often the only person whose influence is strong enough to out-muscle society's influence on her children.

A counselor said, *'There has to be at least one person who has an irrational involvement with the child . . . someone who thinks that kid is more important than other people's kids, someone who is in love with him and whom he loves in return.'* (Yuri Bronfenbrenner)

- Jochebed was a mother like that. No Pharaoh was going to tell her that her baby was trash to be tossed to the Nile crocodiles.

¹ *Now a man of the house of Levi married a Levite woman,*

² *and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months.*

Moses was a *fine child*. The Hebrew word means 'good' or 'pleasing.' This doesn't mean that Moses was a cute baby. It means he was healthy. There was nothing wrong with him.

This baby deserved every opportunity to live. There was no way his mother could toss him in the Nile and try to justify her actions by saying, *'He was such a sickly baby. He would have died anyway.'*

- This wasn't Jochebed's first baby. She already had Aaron and Miriam.

It wasn't easy to do the right thing, but she knew she had to do it.

Lucy, a character in one of George MacDonald's novels says, *'I don't think the difficulty of doing right makes it unnecessary to do it.'* (*The Prodigal Apprentice*)

An indestructible maternal love is one of God's strongest forces for doing right in this world.

- Mother, let your God-given love for your children guide your actions. What today's culture calls reasonable and acceptable is more often than not in conflict with God's revealed will.

[2nd helpful guideline for mothers today]

II. USE YOUR WIT TO DISARM ANY DANGERS (2:3-10)

O how often a mother's wit has shielded her child from a father's rage!

Mother's are geniuses in finding ways to protect their children. God made them that way.

³ *But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile.*

Something happens in a healthy child that makes him more difficult to hide. His strong lungs give his voice a hearty amplitude.

- There was probably constant Egyptian surveillance.

Jochebed knew it was becoming more and more dangerous for her baby boy every day.

She made a little papyrus ark—it's the same as the Hebrew word for Noah's ark.

- She used her wit.

If one of the Egyptian spies were to interrogate her, *'We've heard reports of a baby crying in your home. We learned that you had a baby a while back. Was it a boy? If so, where is he?'* then she could have answered *'Yes, it's true. I had a baby boy. But I put him where Pharaoh commanded us to put baby boys. He's in the Nile.'* She didn't have to add, *'in a cozy little boat.'*

If they didn't believe her and wanted to investigate, she'd hidden the boy in the one place where no Egyptian guard would even think to look—the Nile River.

When I was a young boy I loved to play 'hide and seek.' Our place in Africa was ideal. One person would be "it." All of us would come to a place called "home." It was an X we had marked on the garage door. The seeker had to face the spot, close his eyes and count out loud to 100 while we all ran to hide. The goal was to sneak back home and touch the spot before the seeker could get you. The seeker usually expected the hiders to get far away and hide. So I decided to hide as close as I safely could to the spot. I could make it home safely because I was hiding where the seeker didn't expect. It always worked if the person who was 'it' hadn't played with us before.

Jochebed hid Moses where the guards wouldn't have thought to look.

Furthermore, she put the little ark in a place where the guards had probably been told not to go. It was near to Pharaoh's daughter's favorite swimming hole.

⁴ *His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him.*

⁵ *Then Pharaoh's daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the river bank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her slave girl to get it.*

⁶ *She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him. "This is one of the Hebrew babies," she said.*

It seems that Jochebed realized that Pharaoh's daughter might find the baby. So Moses' big sister played lookout. If the coast was clear Jochebed could have come to take care of the baby's needs and even take him back home for a few hours.

Jochebed used her wit to deal with any danger to her baby boy. Miriam had been instructed what to say if the baby was discovered.

⁷ *Then his sister asked Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?"*

⁸ *"Yes, go," she answered. And the girl went and got the baby's mother.*

⁹ *Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you." So the woman took the baby and nursed him.*

Thank God for the tender maternal nature of women.

Pharaoh's daughter didn't say, *'It's one of those cursed Hebrew babies. Take him to where the crocodiles are and throw him in.'*

- So it was that because of a mother's wit Jochebed was paid to raise her own son with wages from the daughter of the man who decreed death to all Hebrew baby boys.

I'm sure our Jewish friends still delight in this bit of irony whenever the Torah is read.

- But we mustn't think this was all because of a mother's wit. God was controlling the whole drama.

And Jochebed had strong faith in God.

In the New Testament both of Moses' parents are listed among the all-time heroes of faith, *'By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict.'* (Hebrews 11:23)

No mother can oversee all the circumstances that influence the life of her child.

Jochebed's time with Moses was limited. She only had temporary custody. She had to make the most of it.

¹⁰ *When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, "I drew him out of the water."*

Jochebed had Moses for his earliest years. Would her influence be strong enough to stay with him after he went into the royal court? What would happen to the boy when he was plunged into a pagan Egyptian culture?

What happened? In the Book of Acts, Stephen said, *'Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action. When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his fellow Israelites. He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian, so he went to his defense and avenged him by killing the Egyptian. Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not.'* (Acts 7:22-25)

- What does this tell us about the influence of a godly mother?

We certainly don't condone killing. But it's clear that Moses' heart was still that of a Hebrew—after all those years!

It was the strongest. Again in Hebrews we read, *'By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time.'* (Hebrews 11:24-25)

A wise, courageous mother poured all she could into little Moses' life for the few years that she had him with her. Then he was taken away to a home that was as different in culture, religion, morality from what he had known during his early years. But more than 30 years later God honored the mother's investment.

- Perhaps some of you can identify with Jochebed—and this is for fathers too. Maybe divorce has taken your child away from you, for part of the time or most of the time, depending on the custody arrangement.

Maybe you're doing all you can do to be a godly influence in your child's life, but your former spouse is not serving the Lord and home is not a fit place for your child—as Pharaoh's court was no fit place for the young Moses.

Be as positive, as resourceful, and as godly as God helps you to be while you have your child with you. Use your influence to impress godly, Christian values on your child. And when the child is away from you, pray, pray, and trust God.

- I have no doubt that Jochebed, who laid her life on the line for her baby boy, called out to God in prayer ceaselessly while he was in Pharaoh's court.

God answered her prayers.

Susanna was the wife of an Anglican minister, Samuel Wesley. She was the mother of John and Charles, and 17 other children. God used John and Charles Wesley to bring about a great spiritual awakening on both sides of the Atlantic. John's preaching and Charles' music changed society. I would not be surprised if more than half of us in this room today are serving Christ because of the way God used John and Charles Wesley in the 18th century. John Wesley often referred to the holy influence of his mother on his life. He attributed to her love and devotion whatever success he may have achieved.

Mothers and future mothers, I hope you will resolve before God today never to yield to society's corrupt mores in the matter of raising your children.

To all of you who have or had a godly mother, including myself, do you thank God for her influence and celebrate it by pleasing God in the way you live? Or have you been fighting that influence and struggling with guilt because of the choices you are making?

- A godly mother teaches her children about Jesus. God loved us so much that he sent Jesus to die for our sins and give us new life by faith in him.