

Given that's its mother's day I thought I'd start by sharing some of the principles of motherhood that I've managed to pick up over the last 18 years. Those of you who are mother's or grandmother's may be able to identify with some of these, and for those who are young enough to still aspire to parenthood, it will give you something to look forward to!

So here's what I know about parenting:

If it was going to be easy it would never have started with something called labour.

An alarm clock is a device for people who don't have small children.

The joy of motherhood is what a woman experiences when the kids are finally in bed.

Life's golden age is when the kids are too old to need a babysitter and too young to borrow the car.

Raising a teenager is about as easy as nailing jelly to a tree.

The best way to keep your adolescent at home is to make a pleasant atmosphere – and let the air out of their tires.

Adolescence is the age when children try to bring up their parents and stop asking questions because they know all the answers.

And lastly, I desperately wish I was half as wonderful as my children thought I was when they were small and half as stupid as they think I am now.

Mother's day isn't everybody's favorite day of the year. Some of us will have relished the opportunity to receive breaky in bed and a lovingly home made card, but for others, today will be more difficult.

Perhaps your mum has died recently, you may have bad memories of your mother, you may have longed to be a mother but it has alluded you, your children may not contact you, or indeed you may have lost a child. In any of these circumstances today is bound to be tough and for that I'm truly sorry.

Interestingly, although the bible paints a wonderful picture of mothering in some respects, it also has plenty of stories about all these other less than perfect situations. There are lots of mothers who we might describe as less than ideal in the bible – it would be difficult to find a hallmark card for Rahab and Gomer; Hannah and Sarah struggled with infertility, and there are too many stories to name of mother's who had to grieve the loss of their children – Eve was the very first, but of course we also think of Mary, the mother of Jesus, and the collective mothers of Bethlehem who suffered terrible loss when King Herod ordered the genocide of baby boys.

But today we do want to take the opportunity to honour mothers. Mother's Day has unfortunately become a fairly commercialized occasion but if we look at the origins of Australia's mother's day, we find that it comes from the American tradition, and although that too has become terribly sentimentalized and commercial it's interesting to go right back to its origins. It was Julia Ward Howe in the mid 1800's, so distraught by the death and carnage of the civil war, she called on mothers to come together and protest what she saw as the futility of sons killing others mothers sons. Listen to her challenge:

Arise then women of this day

Arise then women who have hearts

Whether your baptism be of water or of tears

Say firmly

Our husbands will not come to us reeking with carnage

**Our sons shall not be taken from us to unlearn all that we have
been able to teach them**

Of charity, mercy and patience.....

**And so her strong rallying call to all the women of American
rang out. Of course, the quickest way to disempower a
movement is to sentimentalise it – you only have to look at the
fate of Easter and Resurrection Sunday which is trivialized
with chocolate and fluffy bunnies (or bilbies in Australia), or
the incarnation of Christmas which has been hijacked by a fat
man in a red suit, to know that.**

**So today, I want to get back to the original intent of the
mother's day movement and talk about something which we
can all do to make a difference – not only mother's but every
one of us. And to do that, we're going to go back into the Old**

Testament to the story of Jacob and we're going to start at the end as it were, with Jacob nearing the end of his life.

I have to admit that final words intrigue me. A few years ago a book called 'the last lecture' became a best seller. The book grew out of a speech that had been given by Randy Pausch, a professor of computer sciences. He had been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and had only a few months to live. His friends put the lecture on u-tube, it received millions of hits, and then the book was born. There were originally only about 400 people in the lecture theatre but although subsequently millions of people heard what he had to say, Randy Pausch said what he did for 3 people – his young children who he feared wouldn't remember him. His speech that day was his legacy to them and he died just a few months later at the age of 47.

There are lots of final words recorded. Some are very profound and some are just funny.

Humphrey Bogart apparently said 'I should never have switched from Scotch to Martinis', Bing Crosby 'That was a

great game of golf fellas’, and Oscar Wilde opened his eyes one last time and said ‘Either that wall paper goes, or I do!’

But what about last words of men and women and faith?

Christ’s last words are well known and we looked carefully at those on Good Friday just a few weeks ago. Genesis 48 is Jacob’s equivalent of the last lecture. His life is coming to an end and like Randy Pausch he wants to leave a legacy for his children – a legacy inspired by his dreams. God had appeared to Jacob in a dream at a point in his life when it seemed that all Jacob had ever wanted was lost. In the dream God promised Jacob the land on which he slept that night, and he promised that Jacob’s descendents would be like the dust of the earth and that all the peoples on earth would be blessed through him, which seemed a long shot quite frankly given that at the time, Jacob was a lonely exile. God had also offered Jacob a stunning promise that he would be with him and would watch over him wherever he went. And it was the hope of these promises that Jacob wanted to pass on to his sons and grandsons in his final words.

Now, let me remind you a little of Jacob's story. He was the father of Joseph whose story I'm sure you know well. Remember that Joseph, of technicolour coat fame, was betrayed by his jealous brothers. They told Jacob that Joseph was dead – which nearly killed the man, because Joseph was very much his favourite son – because he was the first born son of his much loved wife Rachel. But we know that Joseph wasn't dead and was actually sold into slavery in Egypt and through a series of God orchestrated events, was elevated to a position of great authority in the land – second only to the king in fact. Eventually a famine drives Jacob and his family (and it was a big family because he had 12 sons in total to 4 different wives and they had their wives and children) out of Canaan to Egypt and there Jacob is reunited with Joseph, having thought he was dead for decades.

So in Genesis 48 we pick up the story that Jacob is now ill and near death. He calls for Joseph to come with his two young sons. When they arrive Jacob begins a long speech that has all sorts of important ramifications in history but I just want to highlight 3 aspects of it – 3 lessons that we can learn in our own quest, no matter our age, to leave our own legacy.

The first is this – if you want to leave a lasting legacy, don't make this world your home.

Jacob knew what it was like to be an alien. He'd lived as an alien in a foreign country most of his life – firstly when from fear of his angry brother he hid in exile for 20 years, and then later, because of the famine, when he'd had to leave his God-given land of Caanan and move to Egypt – all the while God promising him that he has a land for him.

In Hebrews 11:9 we read: by faith Jacob (and Abraham and Isaac) made his home in the Promised Land like a stranger in a foreign country....for he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. And then verse 13 and 16: All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. Instead they were longing for a better country – a heavenly one.

Again and again the bible tells us that those who live by faith in God's promises for the future are aliens and strangers in this world. Have you ever been a visitor or lived in a country that

wasn't your own – a place where you couldn't understand the language, didn't know the way around, or didn't really like the food? But more than that, have you ever had a feeling of being uncomfortable and uneasy somewhere – of not understanding the people, the culture and the heritage A feeling of not belonging?

That's really how the bible is telling us we should feel about this world generally – that we shouldn't be too comfortable here, that we shouldn't take to heart the things and the customs of this world. That wealth and power and position, the things that this world thinks are important, are meaningless in the scheme of eternity. And we are not merely Australians or South Africans or English, first and foremost we are Christians – the people of God. Our language universally should be the language of love and compassion and justice, our emptiness should be filled by the presence of the living God, our real food should be the meal that Jesus taught us to share in remembrance of him; and our breath, should be the very spirit of God.

The great Christian author Max Lucado said:

‘The twists and turns of life have a way of reminding us – we aren’t home here. This is not our homeland. We aren’t fluent in the languages of disease and death. The culture confuses the heart, the noise disrupts our sleep, and we feel far from home. And, you know what? That’s ok.

Have faith in the promise of what is to come – don’t forget who you really are – don’t make the mistake of making this earth and the things of it, your be all and end all – it’s not!

2nd thing to learn from Jacob’s last words:

If you want to leave a lasting legacy, remember God’s faithfulness to you. I was astounded when I looked at what Jacob had to say about this. In Genesis 48:15 he says ‘May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, the Angel who has delivered me from all harm – may he bless these boys.’

How could Jacob in all honesty have called God his shepherd – how could have thought that God had been faithful to him? Think back to his story – wasn’t it Jacob who suffered a

broken relationship with his brother? Who lived as a fugitive in a foreign land for nearly 3 decades? Who was repeatedly treated unjustly by his father in law Laban? Who lost his beloved wife Rachael? Who provoked his children to such hatred that they severed him from his favored son Joseph, so that he believed he was dead for most of his life? Who lived in a famine so desperate that he sent his sons to Egypt for aid? Who suffered the anguish of losing not only Joseph but also his youngest son to Rachael; Benjamin? Who died in Egypt, on foreign soil? Jacob himself summed up his life to the Pharaoh of Egypt with the words ‘my years have been few and difficult’. And they had been – Jacob’s life was marked with conflict, struggle, heartache and sin!

Yet in despite of all this, Jacob still called God his shepherd and in so doing, he reminds us that we need to remember the faithfulness of God in our own lives – especially when the going is tough! Even when our experience is marred by conflict, struggle, heartache and sin! Many of you know Dorothy and George Mathieson and their companion life prayer ministry. Part of what they do is encourage people to think about the times when they know God has been active in their lives, they even get people to write down the times that Jesus has been

real for them....for the very purpose that when the day comes (and trust me, the day comes for each of us – if you haven't yet experienced trouble in your life, all I can say it that it probably will)... when the day comes that we don't feel God at work in our lives, when we don't feel the presence of Jesus – we can go back and remember those times that he was – to encourage us and to keep our faith burning bright through the dry and barren times, through the times of flood and inundation, through the times of conflict, struggle, heartache and sin!

In looking at Jacob's story – it seems to me that God shepherded him mostly by rescuing him from himself. It was Jacob himself who was the principal cause of most of his own problems but still God rescued and blessed him. God restored his broken relationships with his father Isaac and his brother Esau, despite the mess Jacob had made of them through his own greed and dishonesty. Looking back on his life, Jacob could see that God had protected him from Laban, his father in law, and from his neighbours when Jacob had feared they would attack him. God righted all the wrongs in Jacob's life – and in the end he prospered him, gave him his beloved Rachel, and returned both Joseph and Benjamin to him. God was indeed a good and faithful shepherd to Jacob – rescuing him,

restoring his relationships and the righting the wrongs in his life.

Like Jacob, God has rescued and restored each one of us, and has righted the wrongs in our lives. In Jesus we are delivered – he died for us. He promises that no one can pluck us from his hand, that death has lost its sting and the grave its victory, that nothing can separate us from him. Actually that’s just the start of it! Did you know that there are over 7000 promises of faithfulness that God makes in the bible? I can give you verse after verse that speaks of God’s faithfulness – and here is just a very brief selection of some of my favourites on the screen.

We create a powerful legacy to those around us, when we remember, in the midst of our circumstances, in the midst of our troubles, that God is faithful to us.

And the third thing to learn from Jacob – we create a legacy of blessing when we have certain hope in God’s promises.

I love that verse I read earlier – ‘the angel who has delivered me from all harm – may he bless these boys.’ It goes on to say, ‘may they be called by my name and the names of my fathers

Abraham and Isaac, and may they increase greatly upon the earth.'

For those of us who are parents, I think the greatest legacy we can leave our children has nothing to do with property or other wealth. Our greatest blessing to them will be hope. Quite simply we need to give our children faith (the certainty of things hoped for) in the promises God has given us. Faith is worth so much more than money or land or tradition or family reputation. It is of inestimable worth. We bless our children, whether they realize it or not, when we love God more than anything else in this world, when we make time to worship and serve him, when we love his church and his people, when they see us read and study the bible, when we put our own desires away and instead submit to God's will for our life.

I didn't grow up in a Christian family. Although Mum has a strong faith today, that's come to her in fairly recent years, and my Dad, sadly, is still agnostic at best. But my Grandmother had an enormous faith – she loved Jesus with all her heart and she left me an incredible legacy of hope. Nanna's own life had not been easy and she was powerless to do anything about our family circumstances which certainly

during my early teenage years were dire – mum and dad’s marriage was disintegrating rapidly, domestic violence and distress were everyday occurrences, we were grieving the death of my brother, and mum was terribly ill – but I have never forgotten Nanna’s steadfast faith through it all. The way she prayed for us, the hymns she sang as she drove and cooked – she was a fearfully good cook and an equally fearfully bad driver and I’m sure the hymn singing helped both no end!, the way she served in her local Methodist parish – right up until the time of her death. She was what would be old fashionably called a pillar of faith and she left me a legacy that I am so thankful for – I am who I am largely because of her. My own mum is now doing the same for her grandchildren – leaving a legacy of hope in the ‘very great and precious’ promises that God has for us. (2 Peter 4)

And don’t assume that if you don’t have children or grandchildren that I’m not talking to you, because the same actually applies to each one of us here. We all come into contact with children and young people every day of our lives – no doubt there are children and young people living in your street or neighbourhood, there are countless children and teenagers who are a part of this very church and who you come

into contact with. These children will be shaped not only by their parents but potentially by each of us. Perhaps you can remember the people who helped shape your life?

My 18 year old daughter Jess has spent most of her growing up years in this church and when I asked her about who she thinks has shaped her life she didn't hesitate to name Liz Adams, who she calls simply the best Sunday school teacher ever, Lesley Robertson who has called her 'beautiful girl', every single time she has seen her in the last 14 years, Uncle Ken, who encouraged her at every opportunity during her younger years, Bev Harding who has prayed for her almost every day of her life, and most recently she names Stu, her pastor now. Jess's life has been shaped by some of the very best and as her mum I'm terribly grateful now that she's an adult in her own right.

Brad, my 16 year old is still being shaped here in this faith community. When I asked him the same question – he quickly named 5 young adults – Patselles (his nickname for Nick, one of our previous youth interns who has gone on to theological college in Brisbane), Andrew, Crystal, Elizabeth and Ralph. I guess what's astounding about that is that apart from Ralph,

our youth and young adults pastor, all these guys are under 24 and already they are going out of their way to help shape another generation of young people.

Don't think that each of us can't similarly shape and bless the life of a child in this place or somewhere else. We absolutely can! Quite simply, we bless children, but also everyone we come into contact with, when we are able to give them the certain hope that God's promises are true and for them!

So, to remind you – the origin of Mother's Day is about making a difference. So although I'm all for breakfast in bed and other lovely gestures (particularly from the father of my children!), I'd love to think that we take something away from today that's bigger than that. I don't know about you, but I want to leave a legacy. And the greatest legacy I can leave is not property or wealth or even a good name. The greatest legacy I can leave is hope in the certainty of God's promises – not for health or wealth or happiness because frankly I don't think that God ever promised those things – but for his loving presence not only through all that life brings us, in joy and in sorrow, but forever in eternity.

Will you pray with me please?

Gracious God,

Thank you for mothers and grandmothers, and for all those who have helped to shape our lives.

May we be life shapers too Lord – help each one of us to build and leave a legacy that will last for all eternity.

More than anything else God, help us to cling to your promises of faithfulness such that not only will we be sustained through all that life has for us, but that many will see and find that great hope for themselves Lord.

In Jesus name we pray Lord – Amen.