



Memories of My Mother
By *Elizabeth*

**A Mother's Day
Shortcoming**

A MOTHER'S DAY SHORTCOMING

Thirteen Years Earlier:

Hael stood in the background watching Gretchen as she felt the burgeoning bump that would be her first and only child. His normal smiling demeanor tilted towards concern as the demon katepA reminded Gretchen of her mother's failure in the past and present. As Hael watched Gretchen's face, her emotions rose and fell nearly at the whim of katepA. Hael wanted to reach out and swat this impish demon into eternity and outer darkness, but that would not be God's plan. Hael hurt for Gretchen and yet he began to smile, because he trusted God Almighty. Even though it became clear that she was now concerned with what kind of a mother she would be as this baby in her womb prepared to make its way into the world, Hael knew the One who had already won the battle, and he knew that Gretchen would too.

Modern Day (for Gretchen):

As I write this memoir of my husband, which is a message for mothers, I'm reminded of my own shortcomings and . . .

With a Cheshire Cat grin that spread across and beyond his face in a truly unrealistic width, katepA whispered into Gretchen's inner ear that her husband would forever be disappointed that she, his wife, could not measure up to his saintly mother.

. . . I confess how my husband, who never said this, must have looked at me and compared me to his mother. Oh my readers, there are times when we just do not measure up to other folks do we? I again confess that this is becoming harder and harder to write and I have only just begun.

My mother-in-law's birthday is in May. To honor her Alexander has been preaching a special Mother's message in May ever since I've known him, which reaches back twenty or so years before we were married. He also preaches a special message to fathers in June because his father's birthday is in June. What always amazed me was that every May his message was different even though the subject was the same. Imagine my surprise when we married and I traveled with him and learned that not only were the messages different year to year, but within that year each of the May messages and then each of the June messages were different in every church. I can honestly say that for the last twenty years that we have been together and for the twenty years or so before that, I do not recall him ever repeating a Mother's week message.

I'd like to share with you a message that has remained so supremely in my mind since the first day I heard it, probably because it is so far removed from who my mother is and how she has lived, which you would know if you have read Mark's book *The Pray-er's, Book 1, "Troubles"* where he teaches prayer as men and

women model prayer through the fun of a novel. In that book he introduces my mother in a very unflattering, but accurate way. She is a woman who struggles in her own right (and I'll leave it at that until you read his novel).

When I finally met his mother, I call her Mother Rich, I immediately got a sense that when she and God would talk, she sat across the table from Him with her husband and they would all talk about the issues that were needed. Her prayer relationship with the Lord has always seemed that intimate with God Almighty. Forgive me, but when this is your mother-in-law it can be sobering, maybe even intimidating. . .

At this point the demon katepA leaned in close, "You're such a loser Gretchen!"

. . . Pausing in her writing she furrowed her brow, and tilting her head she looked thoughtfully at the words she had just written about her mother-in-law. "Lord," she said, "why do I feel so inferior? Have I really failed as a wife and prayer partner to my husband? Oh Lord!" And then her voice trailed off, not completing her prayer.

Returning to her writing after a few minutes of contemplation, Gretchen picked up her pen and wrote:

At some point I'm sure I'll write about Alexander's father because his father too has the very same heart toward prayer that his wife does. In fact now that I'm writing this memoir, I realize something that had never occurred to me before. The reason my husband is such a man of prayer is because his parents were the example to him that they were and are. They are a man and woman of prayer. Hmm, I never recognized that correlation before. But that dovetails perfectly with his message that I will share in this memoir from Alexander.

Again, a time of contemplation occurred as Gretchen felt the unease of her own lack of prayer. Her silent admission that she could pray more and should. And as she rolled these items around in her head, looking at them from different angles she again realized that she could never measure up to Alex's mother. . .

Hael stood by watching Gretchen, this time her thoughts were not from the evil one. This time they were from her own flesh, "winding-herself-up," as it were.

In a darkened corner, katepA laughed a high-pitched cackle, knowing his work had hit the mark.

. . . Tentatively the committed woman, who had committed to writing this particular memoir, even though it became not merely difficult but painful to write, Gretchen continued:

The following message that my dearest gave I will never forget, and it has challenged me to be a woman of prayer just as Hannah was. I hope you enjoy it.

While I had planned to tell it from my perspective, I am for some reason not feeling confident about it, so I will let Alexander share this message as he did that morning in my church in Jeffersonville Georgia.

A MOTHER'S DAY SHORTCOMING

I am always honored at this time of year when I spend the entire month of May giving messages about my mother. By now you know that her birthday is in May and it allows me the opportunity to honor her in this way.

If you've listened to me at all you will remember that I've shared with you the way that she prays for protection, namely never asking God for protection. I know that many of you will remember that message because you were so aghast that a mother would not pray for protection for her children. Remember that she did talk to God about protection, but it was always from the standpoint of trusting God to be her children's protector and her husband's protector just as He had already promisedⁱ in the Book of books.

And I hope you will remember that I shared with you her view of Psalm chapter five verse three. Because of that verse, when she comes to the Lord in the morning and lays her requests before Him she waits in expectation. That expectation is never for a "no or a maybe" from Him, but always and expectation of "yes." She always expects God to answer in the affirmative. You'll remember I told you the reason she does that is because she believes that God lays upon her heartⁱⁱ what to pray and then that is what she prays.

Above all, let me remind you that when she prays, she prays with her Bible open. I always remember that about my mother. Anytime I saw her praying, she always had her Bible open in front of her, and to this day she does the same thing.

This is Gretchen again, if I might interject. Part of the reason I'm reminded to give this message from my husband is because we recently received George Muller's autobiography. He and Alexander have been acquaintances for a while. And we were completely overwhelmed to receive a personalized copy from him. Anyway, in his autobiography he writes of his similar prayer stance, which he says, "Allows the word of God to direct his prayers." I'm sure that Mr. Muller came to the Lord with a prayer list as my husband encourages people to do but it was obvious from his autobiography that there were times when he would not pray from a prayer list but he would let the Word of God direct the way he prayed. That is so impressive to me because I thought of Mother Rich. Let me give the story back to my husband:

Today I would like to share with you a message that I had never considered about my mother even though I've read this passage many, many times. The passage is First Samuel chapter one. It's the story of Hannah. I love the way Hannah cried out to the Lord. I love the way Hannah was obedient to the Lord.

And I love the way that she handled the fulfillment of her promise to the Lord, even though it meant giving up her most valuable treasure, her son.

What I had never connected though was what I read in chapter twelve and I think verse twenty-three. In the preceding chapters, Samuel has been rejected by the people as their leader, for they preferred a king, “just like all of the other nations.”ⁱⁱⁱ Remember that Samuel led these people for years and then the Israelites decided that they did not want to have a prophet lead them, they chose to have a king. I think that it is completely understandable that God had to tell Samuel, more than once that “they did not reject you, Samuel, they rejected Me.”^{iv}

As I began to meditate on this passage and to think about what I would be teaching you today, I thought about some of the difficulties I have had in churches. When we have struggled, here in Jeffersonville, and in my other churches that I oversee, I have often thought that you were rejecting me. It always amazed me that my mind would retreat to a place of rejection, even causing me to wonder if I needed to give you up as one of my churches in my circuit.

But hear me my friends, I am not bringing this up to hurt anyone’s feelings. I have no desire to do that. I bring up the reminder of hurts and difficulties for only one reason, because I believe these struggles have given me some insight into Samuel that I never saw before. In fact, if you don't mind me smiling when I say this, I believe I can actually thank the Lord for the troubles that some of you have given me. They have given me insights into Samuel.

This is Gretchen again. I remember that the congregation chuckled, somewhat self-consciously, until Alexander let out a loud laugh and lifting both arms, as if he were going to give us a corporate hug he said, “My friends, my struggles have never been with flesh and blood^v although I may have decided for a time that my struggles were against you personally. . . .” He paused and smiled at us relieving some of the tension, and then continued. “Some of you meant these issues for evil, but God meant them for good^{vi} and then He used them for the better^{vii} in various ways. Truly my friends, we can and should thank Him for our past struggles.” Chuckling again at us he looked sternly and said, “that isn’t a license for you to attack me again, okay?” I’ll never forget that last sentence because none of us knew whether we were to laugh or not. Let me get back to Alexander giving you his message:

Nevertheless, as I read this passage on Samuel and his mother, I became more and more intrigued that the Lord told him at least twice that they did not reject him rather they rejected the Lord. I believe Samuel needed that encouragement. But that's not where I want to focus because in verse twenty-three Samuel says something that not only showed that he felt the pain of rejection, but that his responsibility to the Lord would be more important than his hurt feelings. You see, what Samuel says to the Israelites in verse twenty-

three of chapter twelve is, “far be it from me that I should sin by ceasing to pray for you.”

Think about that! Is it not incredible that this man Samuel, whom the Israelites rejected is looking them square in their defiant faces saying, basically, “even though you have rejected me, even though you have rejected the God that I serve, I will not reject you. I will not sin by ceasing to pray for you. Incredible.”

I have spent more time speaking about Samuel than I intended so let me begin to talk about his mother Hannah, because this is where a mother's prayer life becomes so fascinating to me. This is where observing Hannah's prayer life can be so applicable to you ladies. And even the young ladies that will become mothers one day. Hannah speaks volumes as we observe her prayer life. And men, because Paul made it clear that God is no respecter of persons^{viii} and then in Galatians 3:28 Paul goes further, saying that, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” My point gentlemen is simply this. This particular message is for you too! I expect both men and women will be able to apply today's message to your life.

Look at Hannah in chapter one. It's a fascinating passage. First, she's obviously subjugated to a roll of a second-class person, of a second-class citizen in the eyes of her husband's other wife. Note how strongly the writer makes clear to us that Hannah is under incredible torment.

May I interject a broad statement for just a quick moment? I know, and admit that that is not entirely accurate for all women, but I have seen this way too often, and I am always surprised at how mean women can be to one another. It is so divisive ladies. And men, you too can do this. May I remind you what the Word of God says about divisiveness? It says that divisiveness is as the sin of witchcraft. You may not be surprised that it is Samuel in 1 Samuel 15:23 who says this, talking about Saul's rebellion, basically, divisiveness.

You may think that your divisive words or your rebellious actions have no lasting impact. “After all they are just your words,” so you think. But my friends, those words are no better than someone doing witchcraft and let me say it differently, a little more pointedly. If you are being divisive in any way, if you are being rebellious in any way, you are no better than the person doing witchcraft. Forgive me for being so strong, but you must hear it that way.

But let me get back to Hannah. This poor woman, so tormented at home goes to her synagogue, her church if you will, and what do we read occurs there? Look at the passage. Even her spiritual leader torments her by accusing her of being drunk! Can't you just see Eli coming up to her. The closer he got the more indignant he became and the more he judged her. And then putting his nose next to her mouth he sniffs to see if he could smell her alcohol.

The poor woman is crying out to the Lord, her focus is on Him. Perhaps her eyes are even shut, and then suddenly, this priest accuses her of drunkenness. Did she get scared? Probably, at first. But how did she react?

Listen clearly my friends. There are a lot of details in verses twelve through eighteen which we will skip today. You can read them later, but do not miss this, at the end of verse eighteen, her countenance now had hope. The passage says, “. . . her face was no longer downcast.”

Ladies, what happened here? Why did she go from great anxiety, from being judged, and then went to as the passage says, “no longer downcast?” I believe there is only one reason. It is because through Eli, she had a sense of hearing from the Lord.

My mother has always demonstrated this to me. As I watch her amid turmoil I see her turning to the Lord because of the turmoil. It is as if the turmoil - listen closely. It is as if the turmoil helps her turn to God.

Mothers, you will face turmoil. Do not let it surprise you. Even Peter said to us, “think it not strange that you are going through a fiery ordeal.”^{ix} Thank the Lord for the fiery ordeal as it causes you to turn to Him. . .

Suddenly, somewhere in the corridors of a heaven that the mortal eye cannot see a trumpet started to blow, a shofar of incredible size and robust sound where the bright glory of the Lord never ceases to shine round-about.

And as Gretchen records the words of the message that encouraged her then, she is strangely encouraged now.

At the same time, somewhere, lurking in a grotesque marsh and swamp of a location, where darkness and forever languishing rotten smells abound, the demon katepA heard it too, and he knew this meant one thing, that the Spirit of God, his Enemy was on the move. As katepA tried to hide himself all the more, he knew that his speaking into Gretchen, and her own contrivances were going to come to naught and he could do nothing, for where the Spirit wanted to go, He went.^x And then it began to happen, katepA heard the sound of the coming angels, for they always accompanied the Spirit. The sound that he feared, that he heard was the sound of their wings. It sounded like the roar of mighty waters, like the voice of the Almighty Enemy. It was a sound of commotion like the noise of an army.^{xi} While normally the sound of an army meant killing and chaos and katepA enjoyed that, when the sound came from the realm of his Enemy, katepA knew his work was thwarted.

May I step in for a moment? This is Gretchen. As I am looking at my notes of Alexander’s message that I am writing from, I am reminded of something I experienced earlier in this memoir: a feeling of dread, of helplessness. But my friends, my wonderful husband reminded me these many years after his

message that what I felt, I needed to handle as Hannah did. Instead of focusing upon the fleshly issues in my mind, I need to turn to the Lord and let my mind be filled with the things of the Spirit.^{xii} Isn't that what Hannah did? Isn't that what Mother Rich does? Oh my friends. . .

Hael smiled warmly as he watched Gretchen. A tear came from her eye, and as he watched it slowly roll down her cheek he could tell that she was deep in thought. She then quickly grabbed a linen handkerchief from atop her writing desk. Patting her eye, and then both of her eyes she got onto her knees.

. . . "Oh Lord, my Lord, how excellent^{xiii}, how majestic, how wonderful," and as her shoulders gave an involuntary shudder, she continued with just a slight sob, "how comforting You are in my life."

As I try to turn this message back over to my husband to finish, may I remind you that your identity, like mine, is found in the Lord, not in your mother, or your mother-in-law. Praise the Lord.

Do you mind if I cut Alexander's message short? He went on showing us practical application to her life and how we too can live it, but I believe we have learned much in this memoir. I know I have. I hope you have too. Let me just have him add this:

Frankly, we don't know why, but God didn't answer Hannah's prayer for several years. But when she submitted to God, when she offered her firstborn-to-be up to the Lord, God answered her. I have no idea if Hannah prayed selfishly before this or not, and I do not want to read into the passage what is not there. But let me ask you. What is your motivation for praying? Is it selfish, for you and your benefit? Or is it for God's great name sake?

Maybe the reason God hasn't answered your prayer is that your motivation is wrong.^{xiv} Or maybe there is unconfessed sin in your life.^{xv} Maybe God Almighty is merely awaiting your confession that whatever He gives you, you will give back to Him.

Do you trust God enough to give back to Him, as Hannah did, what He gave you? As I watch your faces I see the turmoil, you want to be a blessing to God, but not if it costs you too much. It cost Hannah her first born. What mothers, is God asking from you? Let me pray.

Lord God of Heaven. Jehovah on high. King of kings and Lord of lords. the God who spoke the words and the worlds and stars leapt into existence. The God whom Isaiah tells us in chapter sixty-six, "uses this earth as His footstool," and then in the very next verse tells us that, "He, You Lord, are close to the lowly." Oh Lord, my Lord, the Majestic Lord of the universe, the One who is both infinite and intimate. I want to come before you now, lifting up to You every one of these ladies that are here and every one of these mothers and mothers to be.

Your Word says through Paul in Romans chapter fifteen verse thirteen that You are the God of Hope, so God of Hope, fill these women with great joy and great peace simply because they are believers and Father allow them to overflow with hope so that when their children come home to them, when their husband comes home, they will see that these ladies overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit living inside of them. And Father, because this is Your Word and Your will, I do not pray that You can do it in their lives nor do I pray that You will do it in their lives, but Father I pray trusting that because this is Your Word and this is Your will, I trust that You are already in the process of doing this in the lives of these women in the name of Your Son who died on the cross for every one of us, shed His blood and then rose again that we too may have eternal life, amen. . .

As Hael watched Gretchen reread her memoir of this message by his charge, Alexander Rich, Hael remembered a promise that he often hears the itinerant preacher lift back up to the Lord. He says, "He who began a good work in you will complete it, even unto the day of Christ Jesus."^{xvi}

And then after a short pause, Hael looking up into the brightness of the heavens, and at the top of his melodic voice smiled and nearly yelled into eternity, "What a great job I have!"

And in a small, dark and sinking hole, the demon katepA contemplated how he might extract revenge on this itinerant preacher's menacing wife.

ⁱ Psalm 91:2

ⁱⁱ Psalm 37:4

ⁱⁱⁱ 1 Samuel 8:20

^{iv} 1 Samuel 8:7

^v Ephesians 6:12

^{vi} Genesis 50:20

^{vii} Romans 8:28

^{viii} Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11

^{ix} 1 Peter 4:12

^x Ezekiel 1:20

^{xi} Ezekiel 1:24

^{xii} Romans 8:6

^{xiii} Psalm 8:1, 9

^{xiv} James 4:3

^{xv} Psalm 66:18

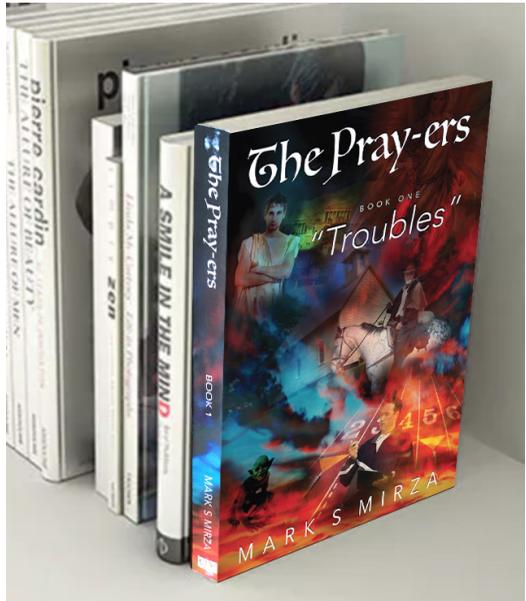
^{xvi} Philippians 1:6

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