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Title: Five Women

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Scripture: [Deuteronomy 6:1-9](#)

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I must confess that I've been an ordained minister for 31 years and I've never preached on Mother's Day. I'd heard from colleagues that ministers must be careful about Mother's Day and, to a lesser extent, Father's Day. In preparation for today, I began to fully realize what they meant. While it's an important holiday and a time of

celebration for many families, some don't celebrate it at all, for a variety of reasons. For some, it brings to mind the loss of their mothers, perhaps even very recently. Others have memories of an abusive or dysfunctional home. Add to that, many parents struggle through memories of children who have passed away too soon. Others have miscarried or want but cannot have children of their own.

I am very aware that Mother's Day isn't easy for some people. Add to that the fact that we find ourselves at different places with such holidays at different points in our lives. If you are one of those people who struggle with this day, thank you for being here. I know it's not easy. Today, I want to look at five women and see what we all can learn from them. Perhaps we can adopt their positive traits into our faith journey. We, men and women, young and old, are models to others around us, men and women, young and old, and we need all the help we can get.

These five women range from young to old, famous to obscure. For some, you'll know their stories well while others, you've likely forgotten if you ever knew about them in the first place. I thought that I'd call someone at random out of the congregation to give a brief history of each one – no, I won't, I just wanted to see if you were listening. I'll give a brief history of each one as a reminder of why this woman is important and then I'll suggest what we might adopt from their actions. Let's get started.

REBEKAH - We are first introduced to Rebekah in Genesis 24. This chapter begins just after the death and burial of Sarah, Abraham's wife. Abraham became quite aware of his mortality and, like any responsible father, was

keen to put things in order before he died too. One of the things that concerned him was that his son, Isaac, find a wife - but not just any wife - "a wife from his country and family" rather than from Canaan.

He set all of this in motion by telling his chief servant of his wishes and making him swear that he would do everything to ensure this happened. The servant set off on a journey back to Abraham's country to find Isaac a wife. A very long story short, this ended up being Rebekah. In paintings, she will be depicted with a jar of water because that is how the servant meets Rebekah after a prayer to God. Fast forward many years - God revealed to Rebekah that, after years of barrenness, she was pregnant with twins. God went on to tell her that the second-born child would be greater than the first and that the older would serve his younger sibling, something quite out of the ordinary. Rebekah believed this and worked to make it happen. She came up with a plan to ensure that Jacob, her second-born son, would receive the blessing of her first-born son, Esau, which would have been Esau's birthright.

Rebekah saw an opportunity to see her revelation come to pass and she acted on it by making her husband believe that Jacob was Esau. As harsh as this may seem, Rebekah understood that for the revelation that God had spoken to her to be fulfilled, it required that Jacob be given the blessing of the firstborn. Our vision rests on our ability to listen for God and act on God's purpose for us - even if it takes years as it did with Rebekah. What can we learn from Rebekah? **REBEKAH – FOLLOW GOD'S LEADING.**

JOCHEBED – There was a new Egyptian Pharaoh in power and he viewed the Israelites with suspicion. He enslaved and oppressed them and made their lives difficult. To control their population, he ordered the Hebrew midwives to kill all the newborn boys. However, the midwives feared God more than they feared Pharaoh, so they defied him and did not kill the male infants. Pharaoh then commanded his people to throw the babies into the Nile River.

The story of Jochebed, the mother of Moses, can be found in the second chapter of Exodus although she's not explicitly named until Numbers 26:59. After the birth of Moses, Jochebed hid him for three months but "When she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river." (Exodus 2:3). You may remember the scene from the 1956 movie, *The Ten Commandments*. The basket ultimately fell in the hands of the Pharaoh's daughter who was bathing in the river. Moved with compassion, she decided to adopt him.

The "sister" of the child, presumed to be Miriam, who had been watching from a distance, came forward and suggested that a Hebrew woman be found to nurse the child. The Pharaoh's daughter agreed so Miriam called her mother, the mother of the baby Moses, and Jochebed was appointed to take care of him. God gave Jochebed the courage and ability to think clearly and creatively. God's redemptive plan for Moses and the entire nation was put in motion by this selfless act on the part of Jochebed. What can we learn from Jochebed? JOCHEBED – ACT SELFLESSLY.

NAOMI - Naomi and her family fled to the country of Moab because of a famine in their land. Her husband died, and her two sons married Moabite women, Orpah, and Ruth. After 10 years both of Naomi's sons passed away, and Naomi heard that God had blessed the land of her people with food again. She told her daughters-in-law that they could return home to find new husbands. One refused to leave Naomi's side.

Orpah returned to her people and her gods, but Ruth said, "Where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people will be my people and your God my God." (Ruth 1:16) Ruth was already learning from Naomi's faith even during a time of bitterness. Naomi continued to watch out for Ruth and instruct her wisely in her dealings with Boaz, who became her kinsman-redeemer. God blessed Naomi, and she gained a son when Boaz married Ruth. Ruth and Boaz had a child, Obed, the father of Jesse, the father of David who would become king. What can we learn from Naomi? NAOMI – GIVE WISE COUNSEL.

MARY - "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

Mary wondered how this would be possible, and the angel told her, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So, the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God." Mary embraced these words in faith. When she visited her cousin Elizabeth, Elizabeth proclaimed, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!" Mary believed God would fulfill His promise.

From a manger in Bethlehem to a cross on Golgotha, Mary was there. Arguably, the most famous depiction of Mary is in Michelangelo's Pieta – a stunning work of marble sculpture. Mary cradles the lifeless body of Jesus. Her expression is pained but prayerful. Mary treasured many things in her heart as she raised Jesus, but she also had to endure the greatest sacrifice

of all time—her son was the Son of God and He had come to give Himself up as a sacrifice, the one and only sacrifice that could be made for us.

Mary was blessed among women, for she was chosen by God to bear His Son and raise Him. Though there was death there was also joy for Mary, as there was that morning at the tomb. In this Easter season in which we find ourselves and throughout the year, we proclaim him risen. Mary was blessed among women and we are blessed as recipients of God's grace through Jesus Christ. What can we learn from Mary? MARY – KNOW YOU ARE BLESSED. ¹

EVALINE – You might be thinking that you've missed hearing about the name Evaline over the years in your study of the Bible. You would be right. You can study the Bible backward and forward and not find it. Evaline, named after her aunt Eva, was born in 1924 and went through the depression as a young child moving from Iowa to Kansas with her family as they searched for a livelihood. She and her husband had two children, the first, Ron, at an age that couples of that time would normally have children. She always spoke of her second child, Ryan, as "the most pleasant surprise" since he (me) came 14 years after the first. I appreciated her attempt to give the pig lipstick, but I'm pretty sure the adjectives "most" and "pleasant" would not have accompanied the word "surprise" at the time.

Evaline modeled a work-life balance, working full-time as a medical assistant in a doctor's office and caring for family and home. She modeled faith and was most proud of completing the Menninger Bible Study course – much like the Bible Study Fellowship with which some here are familiar. She also had all the sayings that many of you might remember in your own life experience. I heard them related this week like this and it hit home for me...

My Mother taught me LOGIC: "If everyone else jumped off a cliff would you do it too?"

My Mother taught me HUMOR: "When that lawn mower cuts off your toes, don't come running to me."

My Mother taught me GENETICS: "You are just like your father!"

My Mother taught me THE CIRCLE OF LIFE: "I brought you into this world, and I can take you out."

And the all-time favorite thing my Mother taught me, JUSTICE: "One day you will have kids, and I hope they turn out just like you. Then you'll see what it's like! I can't wait!" ²

When she was diagnosed with bladder cancer in 2016, one of our students from Geist Christian Church sent me to Kansas with a "Peace Bear" that the student made for cancer patients. The tag on the bear said, "someone who

cares about you very much wants you to know how much you are loved! I hope this bear makes you smile because then I will feel you smiling back at me. Hug this bear tight!”

When I tried to think of one word to describe my mom, the word that wouldn't leave my mind was “connector.” She connected her family – always wanting them to be together. Because of my mother's insistence, I have relationships with cousins that I might otherwise not even know I had. At church, she did the same. Connected people's gifts with tasks. Within her friendship circles, she had a knack for keeping old friends while bringing new ones into the fold. After my father's death, she remarried at the age of 81 and if she could have formally adopted my step-dad's 50 and 60-year-old kids, she would have done it. What can we learn from Evaline? EVALINE – MAKE CONNECTIONS.

The passage from Deuteronomy talks about our actions impacting our children and our children's children. I'm convinced that this is not just talking about an individual's biological children. Chapter 6 – verses 5 through 7 say it best - “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise.” (Deuteronomy 6:5-7).

Never, ever underestimate the power and influence you have by the example you set each day of your life. There are lots of wonderful women to be our example on this Mother's Day – I've chosen five, but I encourage you to add your own that are meaningful to you, much as I took the liberty of doing this morning. I encourage you to learn from your interactions and to add to what we have seen this morning from these five incredible women – FOLLOW GOD'S LEADING, ACT SELFLESSLY, GIVE WISE COUNSEL, KNOW YOU ARE BLESSED, MAKE CONNECTIONS.

¹ Idea of highlighting women and information about the four Biblical women in the sermon was found in article “Your Guide to the Top 10 Most Extraordinary Mothers of the Bible” posted May 6, 2020, by Liz Kanoy, Senior Editor of Crosswalk. Found at www.crosswalk.com.

² List found at “Things Our Mothers Taught Us” by Joe Alain found at www.sermonsearch.com.