

Series: MOTHER'S DAY - May 8, 2011

THE TOUGHEST JOB IN THE WORLD

Luke 1-2

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1. One of my favourite shows on TV is **Dirty Jobs**. Anyone besides me ever watch it? At times the footage has been enough to make a strong guy gag! Breeding cattle, cleaning sewers, cleaning up rotten fish, being bitten by snakes—having rats run over your feet and cockroaches run down your arm would classify, in my book, as a tough, dirty job!

-The **toughest** job, in my opinion, is **parenting**. I say this because I'm **doing** it—and I've watched it drive some **very** competent, high-energy people right to their knees! Especially Moms! The highest moments are extreme: "I'm the **luckiest** person in the world!!" There are **disgusting** moments—we won't get into those. The hardest moments are the heart-breaking ones that leave Mom's feeling ripped off—unloved—and sometimes hated.

-Remember the old country song, **Take This Job and Shove It!?** Can't do that with parenting. And the **stakes?** As high as they get. You're dealing with a **soul** that will live forever!

- a. How many of you Moms would like to have a **perfect** child? Brilliant. Obedient. Spiritual. Talented. And **goood-looking**—but not obsessed with guys or girls? Here's the problem I would have with being the parent of a **perfect** child; I'm flawed. Lori would say, "screwed up"—but I'll stick with "imperfect." Imagine how intimidating that would be!

-Well, we'll never have to worry about raising a perfect child. Only one person ever has: Jesus' mother. Mary.

- b. Most of the historical records are pretty concise when it comes to her experience—but we are given some detail—particularly, by Luke. He researched the life of Jesus very carefully—and I get the feeling that he may have interviewed either Mary—or her other children.

-Now, Mary doesn't do a tell-all—but you do get the feeling that she struggled at some of the same parenting crossroads where we struggle!

2. Two things are clear about the story of Mary; first, she was promised—engaged—to a man named Joseph. Secondly, she was a virgin—which was critical to God using her as He did. In that culture, the engagement ended when the husband-to-be finished building a room onto his parents home for them to live in. Before that happened—Mary had a visitor who changed **everything**. He showed up one day and told her she was favoured; graced by God.

-This was not necessarily good news at first.

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. (Luke 1:29 TNIV)

-The angel told her that through God's direct intervention, the normal sequence of events in her life would be mixed up. She would carry the Messiah, the Son of David—but she would become pregnant **before** she married. In that culture, that was dangerous—and, if nothing else, the scent of scandal would **never** leave her. Imagine that happening in a small town like Nazareth; population, 400!

- a. This is where Mary's character shines!

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me according to your word." (Luke 1:38 TNIV)

-The interesting part of this story is that the angel uses Elizabeth's pregnancy to let Mary know how miraculous this whole thing was. Mary was an example of **too early**; Elizabeth was an example of **too late!** Anyone here ever met a woman who wants to have her first baby when she's in her 60's?

- b. The thing that is **so** clear in these stories, though, is that the child these women carried were **not** about them. God satisfied something deep inside them both—but both John the Baptist and Jesus were about **God's** mission—**God's** timing—**God's** purposes. I'm pretty certain that in her dreams for this baby, Mary **never** thought about giving birth to Him in a place mainly used for livestock! But, parenting is always unpredictable.

-See, it's possible for Mom's and Dad's to think that having children is about **them**. That we get to do this in **our** timing—you know, when everything's perfect. And having children **does** take planning. I get that. What we sometimes don't get is that **all** parenting means embracing **God's** plan. For Lori and me, God's plan started about five years later than we thought it should. At the time—it was **very** painful. We lived in the fertile crescent! Babies were coming from every direction—except ours! In retrospect—God's plan was **perfect**—but it didn't seem like it then.

- c. Sometimes we think, "But I don't **want** to leave anything up to chance." I might add, it's **not** up to chance. God is fully involved in it all. But it **is** out of our control! And we don't like that. We'd like to think that, at just the right time, we can have 2.3 brilliant, talented kids—who love and cooperate with their wonderful parents! Doesn't happen that way!

-The question that comes from Mary's experience is: Can you embrace God's plan? See, embracing **God's** plan is only a problem when **we** think we have a better one. Accepting a child as God's plan is a huge comfort. Know why? Because God never gives someone a job they can't do! He offers all the power of Heaven—but the power is behind **His** plan, not ours! Mary knew that.

3. Something else was clearer to Mary—than it generally is to us. This child would bring joy—and **intense** pain. The first whiff of this came from Simeon—an old guy who met them at the Jewish temple when they came to dedicate Jesus. His first prophecy was how great Jesus would be. **Every** parent wants to hear that. But then:

“This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”
(Luke 2:34-35 TNIV)

- a. In other words—people will get exposed—and they are going **hate** Him! Did this come true? You’d better believe it did! See, our expectations as parents sometimes are about our own pain avoidance. And that makes sense—**no one** wants to experience pain! Here’s the problem; when you sign up to parent—you **sign up for pain!**
- b. The kind of pain Simeon was referring to here was the rejection and hatred Jesus would face. If you’ve ever had your child rejected by **anyone**—it’s excruciating. You feel angry—and **very** helpless. And Mary didn’t have to wait long. Probably in the first year of Jesus life, Herod, notorious for murdering any threats to his throne, went after Jesus. An angel woke Joseph in the middle of the night and said, “Get Mary and Jesus **out** of here! And they escaped to Egypt.

-I wonder if the thought ever occurred to Mary, “Why didn’t the angel just take Herod out instead of telling us to run?”

- c. There’s an instinct most Moms feel when someone is after their child. I saw it demonstrated recently on a YouTube video where a huge male grizzly attacked a cub. The **Mama** grizzly—half the size of the male-- saw this going down—and went into attack mode. I mean, she didn’t even let up after he dropped the cub—which was fine! Any **Mama Grizzly’s out there?**

-Here’s the crossroads—the **toughest** thing about parenting. You simply **cannot** protect them from all the dangers, disappointments, and bullies they fill face in life. I mean, it’s bad enough that all toddlers are on a mission to kill themselves—keeping them away from poison, knives and stairs is bad enough! But there comes a **time** when they begin to progressively leave that controlled environment.

-And Let me add something you **may** not want to hear. If you try to play helicopter parent—you know, hover over them and swoop in to keep them from **any** disappointment—believe what **they** say over teachers, coaches--anyone else in their lives--**you’re helping you, not them!** Children have to somehow learn to face and deal with correction and pain as they mature. They need you to help them with pain—not prevent it.

-That, friends, is **tough** truth! “I would give my life to save theirs, but I am **not** all-knowing; I am **not** all powerful; I can **not** be ever-present—I am **not** God! But I can listen, intervene when necessary—and trust God for the wisdom and insight I will need to help my children face life with resilience and courage!”

4. Mary faced another struggle that Mom’s and Dad’s face. It’s the fact that we **all** are made to **want** independence as we move into adulthood. How many of you have every thought of Jesus, Son of God, as a **teenager**? Seems weird, doesn’t it? God with **pimples**—with his voice cracking. The Messiah saying, “Really, Mom, give me some space!

- a. We first see some signs of this through a record from Jesus’ life when he was 12—one year away from what was considered full adult, accountability. In fact, quite typical of that age, Jesus does something that has his parents **very** upset with him! A whole bunch of people from Nazareth took a trip to Jerusalem every year.

-Well, a day into the journey home, Mary and Joseph realize that Jesus has been left in Jerusalem. **Home Alone...in Jerusalem!** So, they travel back—that takes a day—and then it takes a full day to find him. And when they find him at the temple, they’re ticked! See if this sounds typical:

His parents didn’t know what to think. “Son,” his mother said to him, “why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been frantic, searching for you everywhere.” “But why did you need to search?” he asked. “Didn’t you know that I must be in my Father’s house?” But they didn’t understand what he meant. (Luke 2:48-50 NLT)

-That is **so typical** for the parents of a teen to say: **Why have you done this to us?** And Jesus don’t understand Jesus’ answer—which is **also** typical! Jesus, like most people entering adulthood--is learning to be his own person—different from his parents. And that is **never** a painless process, is it?

- b. This **bugged** Mary. The account says,

And his mother stored all these things in her heart. (Luke 2:51 NLT)

She replayed that tape a **lot!** What’s clear is that Mary struggled at the same points we do; like **letting go** when we need to.

-See, if Moms and Dads don’t learn to let go, their kids get this funny idea that home is a prison—and they have to **escape!** Mary was thinking, “Poor little Jesus! Only 12—in a big city! He’s not **ready** for the real world” when, truth is...let me read it for you:

...They finally discovered him in the Temple, sitting among the religious teachers, listening to them and asking questions. All who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. (Luke 2:46-47 NLT)

-Friends, if you **ever** need God's wisdom and courage as a parent—it's knowing when to start letting them go. Well, Jesus went back to Nazareth, learned Joseph's trade, carpentry, and stayed with Mary after Joseph's death until he was in his 30s! It's **pay back** time!

5. There's another fascinating scene from Mary's relationship with Jesus as a single adult. They were at a wedding in Cana—not far from Nazareth—when the wedding party ran out of wine—humiliating in that culture. So Mary comes to Jesus:

When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine." "Woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." (John 2:3-5 NIV)

-Now, do you understand what Jesus is saying to Mary, his mother? If I'm getting it right, it would be something along the lines of, "Don't use your relationship with me to control my calling as the Messiah." Anyone ever heard of the concept of **boundaries**? This is where you stop; this is where my life, my calling begins. This, friends, was a very polite, but clear STOP sign! Now, Jesus actually used the occasion to turn water into wine and perform his first miracle. His issue with Mary was her **controlling** behaviour.

-This comes up a second time. It's clear from the records we have that Jesus' brothers didn't believe in him as the Messiah. Was it sibling rivalry? "He's the **perfect** son! He's **never** wrong!" It would be a little hard to call your older brother the Son of God, wouldn't it. They **think** they are—but most are not.

- a. Anyway, Jesus has started his ministry—and people are coming out of the woodwork wanting to be healed and delivered. The crowds are **so** big—that Jesus' doesn't have space or time to eat. Well, Jesus' family decides to do an intervention:

When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind." (Mark 3:21 NIV)

-Based on what is said later, I think Mary was a part of this. And as they're standing on the edge of the crowd waiting to come and get him—Jesus said, "My real flesh and blood—mother, sister, brothers—are those who follow me and do what I ask!"

-What's **that** about? Jesus, if you'll remember, had spoken at the family synagogue in Nazareth. Things went well at first—but he offended them and they tried to throw him off a cliff. My guess is that Mary and Jesus'

brothers were there—and were **humiliated** in front of their friends and relatives. It would seem that Jesus' brothers have convinced Mary that he's gone over the edge—and that they need **take charge of him** and chain him up until he comes to his senses. It's clear—they think Jesus is insane!

- b. What we're seeing here is something parents know all about. Control. I could be wrong, but it would appear that Mary wanted Jesus to save her friend who was hosting the wedding from an embarrassing situation—and then, later, for Jesus to **stop** embarrassing the family.

-In both situations, Jesus lovingly but firmly puts up some barriers, as if to say, "Mom—as much as I love and honour you—what I'm doing is **not** about you!" I think the issue of control is a **huge** temptation for parents. And sometimes we're trying to control our children to get them to perform and make us proud—or save face when they're embarrassing us.

- c. I've said this before—I'll say it again; control and manipulation are **not** forms of love. In fact, when you genuinely love someone, you don't try to manipulate them and control what they do with guilt, innuendo, pity, anger—and all the other tricks moms, dads, husbands, wives, grandparents and friends use. See, control and manipulation is about getting someone to do what **I** want them to do—what **I** think they need to do. Control is actually a form of pride and self-centeredness—and it **always** destroys relationships.

6. There's one final scene in the relationship between Mary and Jesus. And this one is the most painful of them all. It's the scene at the cross.

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home. (John 19:25-27 NIV)

-I can't even **begin** to imagine Mary's pain. The angel had said that he would take David's throne; that He would be very great; that he would save his people. And **now** he was being tortured to death—slowly dying at the hands of people who **hated** him. From Calvary, Mary could see the temple and probably Simeon's words:

**"This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel...And a sword will pierce your own soul too."
(Luke 2:34a,35b TNIV)**

-That's **exactly** what this scene would feel like to a parent; like a sword going through—not just your body—but the core of everything you stood for. And in a final act of love, Jesus asks John to take care of her. It's clear—by his own

admission, his life was **over!** Maybe it crossed Mary's mind, "Why doesn't Gabriel, the angel who promised him come and **save** him from death?"

-Jesus had said as a pre-teen that he needed to be doing the work of his Father. Yet, he called out to His Father and said, "My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?" And when he died, he was pried—bloody and broken—from the cross—and immediately buried by a man she didn't even know.

-But within three days—**everything** changed. Everything! Jesus was more alive than He had ever been. I mean, it wasn't a vision of him as a spirit being; he was powerfully alive. And the rest is history. Mary had said, in the spiritual euphoria of carrying Jesus,

"From now on all generations will call me blessed..." (Luke 1:48 NIV)

They did, they have...and they still do...and they **should!** Mary was an **amazing** person.

-What you realize in this story is that it was only when Jesus walked out of that grave that Mary **fully** understood Who He really was—and **believed**. The biblical record tells us that after Jesus' resurrection, He appeared to James and other brothers—and they all believed. Strange, isn't it, that he died to save his family, too.

-Please listen carefully to what I'm going to say. There is **usually** a point in parenting when you feel like everything you've sacrificed for, all the sleepless nights, the pain, the tears, the love, the attention—is buried behind a big rock. Like Jesus. And when that happens—and the dreams are lost--it's like this sword goes through your soul.

-But you need to know--it's **not** lost! God is at work in the worst situations of life. His goal is **always** to redeem, **always** to restore, **always** to make dead things alive. When things are totally out of our control, that's actually a **good** thing, because it gives God a **lot** of room to work! It's sometimes **only** when things are out of our control that we get a wake up call, humble ourselves...and **pray!**

7. Parenting—being a Mom or Dad—**has** to be one of the most exhilarating experiences in the world...**sometimes**. When things are going well, your child is making you look good, they're listening to what you say, bright, intelligent—doing all the tricks you've taught them, gasping at the gifts you buy them, telling you that you're the best in the world—there is **no experience in the world that is better than that!** Then they turn **two**—and it stops! Just kidding—parenting can bring the **highest highs!**

-But when they're in pain, on a self-destructive course, in failure mode, disappointing to themselves and, if you'll admit it, to you—or when their name is in the paper, or in the news—and it's **not** for an award this time—it's crushing. The sword **twists!**

-And the problem is that you can **love them**—but you can't force them to **love you**. Or even respect you, for that matter. You can see danger—but if **they want it**—you are helpless to stop them. You weren't made—or called—to control them; and they weren't made to **be** controlled or manipulated. And **that's when we experience on a small scale what God experiences—loving people who resent him and reject his love!**

-Want to know what **God** feels like? Imagine loving—and being resented and blamed. Imagine seeing your child in extreme danger—but they ignore your voice. Imagine showering your gifts on a child every day—telling them in thousands of ways that you love them—and every message gets ignored.

-The difference is that **God** knows the future—we don't. He can see ahead to a time when His investment pays off; when He knocks, and we're desperate enough to answer the door. If you're a Mom...or Dad...there are some things you need to know this morning:

- a. First—God is not just using you to shape your children; God is using them to shape you—grow you up—emotionally and spiritually and mentally—in ways you would never dream. What He has in mind is **very** good!
- b. Secondly—God is at work through you. Even if you **never** see the growth you'd like to see in your lifetime, God is at work and has chosen to use **you**. Yes, you've made mistakes; you haven't taken time to understand your child, you've tried to control them, or you've said harsh words. Please know—it's never too late to ask for and find forgiveness.
- c. The **third** thing—and this is **so** important—is that every time you ask for help, or for wisdom—every time you pray, God hears—and **works!** Will you have this tingling sensation in your spine, fall on the floor and twitch—or have brilliant bursts of prophetic insights? Probably not. But God pours out His power and grace—indiscriminately to **anyone** who asks. See, He knows the stakes. He knows that what you're doing is probably the toughest, most demanding—most important job on the planet. Apparently, all you have to do to get his strength is...be **weak**—cause He's said that His strength is **always** made perfect in weakness! I can be **weak!** Can you?