A mother was putting her son to bed the night before his fifth birthday, and as she did, she talked to him about what the next day meant. She said, ‘Tonight is the last night you’ll be four years old. Do you know what that means?’ Of course, the little boy knew how to tell people he was four years old, and he held up four fingers on one hand.

His mother said, “That’s right, you’re four years old tonight. Do you know how old you’ll be tomorrow when you wake up?” The boy looked at his hand, popped his thumb out, and triumphantly said to his mom, “Tomorrow, I’ll be a handful!”

Today, we not only come together to celebrate Jesus and all that he has done for us, but we also set aside this day each year to honor our mothers, who have all had handfuls at one point or another. I know that my wife certainly does with four handfuls at home, plus a baby to deal with on top of that.

One day a year is not enough to honor the mothers who give and serve so sacrificially every day of the year. Mothers have a God given calling to raise their children well, and after watching the mothers in my own life, and knowing what I put my mother through, I have to believe it’s one of the most difficult jobs in the world. Yet year after year, you ladies do it with grace and class.

Along with being difficult, being a mother is one of the most important jobs in the world. Without our mothers, we would not know how to survive in this world. We wouldn’t know how to do basic things like wash our laundry, cook and clean, or even basic hygiene. Our mothers teach us how to live.

**Proverbs 1:7–9 ESV — 7** The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction. **8** Hear, my son, your father’s instruction, and forsake not your mother’s teaching, **9** for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck.

**Proverbs 22:6 ESV — 6** Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.

That’s the task a mother is called to every single day. More importantly than that, Genesis tells us that both men and women are made in the image of God, so there is a part of the character of God that we get to know through our relationship with our mothers. The nurturing, loving, caring nature of God that we see a small glimpse of in the way a mother loves and cares for her child.

For that, our mothers deserve the respect of kings, even if they don’t get it often enough. I love this glimpse we get of the way Solomon treated his mother.

**1 Kings 2:19 ESV — 19** So Bathsheba went to King Solomon to speak to him on behalf of Adonijah. And the king rose to meet her and bowed down to her. Then he sat on his throne and had a seat brought for the king’s mother, and she sat on his right.

Solomon was the wealthiest, most powerful king of his day. Rulers from all around the world were coming to pay homage to Solomon and give him tribute. Yet when his mother entered the room, he bowed down to her, and he gave her a seat of honor at his throne. That was before he even heard what she had to say. That is the kind of honor and respect our mothers deserve.

Today what I want to do is look at the life of a woman who was called by God to be a mother, a woman who also had a handful, and did a brilliant job of being a mother to the son she was given.

We’re going to take a look at the life of Mary, and I want to pull a few characteristics out of what we know of Mary’s life that help us know what it means to be called by God to be a mother. The first time we meet Mary is in Luke 1, and we already see her character shining through.

**Luke 1:26–33 ESV — 26** In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, **27** to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin’s name was Mary. **28** And he came to her and said, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!” **29** But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. **30** And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. **31** And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. **32** He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, **33** and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

Mary was an impressive young lady. She was likely only 12-14 years old when the angel Gabriel appeared to her and already she was called favored by God. I’m not sure what kind of kid you were in Junior High, but I imagine very few of us could have had that kind of title when we were that age.

Mary was a girl who even at an age that we would still consider to be a child had the kind of integrity and character it took to bear a great responsibility. But her character and integrity weren’t all that made her special. What was even more important than that was her response to God.

**Luke 1:34–38 ESV — 34** And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?” **35** And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. **36** And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. **37** For nothing will be impossible with God.” **38** And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

So, the first characteristic that we see is that a mother called by God completely submits to God’s will. Mary was an unmarried young lady about to have a child in a culture that didn’t just frown upon unwed pregnancies. She would have been ostracized from her community. Her fiancé Joseph could have had her stoned if he chose. Agreeing to this plan, submitting to God’s will in this, was submitting to a life of hardship.

Mary was engaged to be married. She was about to be on her own with her new husband, setting off on a new adventure. I’m sure, just like all couples about to be married, they had made lots of plans of what life was going to be like when they were off on their own. But then she got this news, and all the plans she had made with Joseph had to change.

Mary could have objected to God’s plan for her life because it didn’t fit in with her plan. She could have demanded that he do things on her timetable. She could have made excuses for why she wasn’t the right person for this responsibility.

When God called Moses to speak for his people to Pharaoh, he had all kinds of excuses. Who am I that you would send me before Pharaoh? What if the people don’t listen to me? They will never believe that God sent me. I can’t speak in front of people. And finally, he came right out and said, “Oh, my Lord, please send someone else.”

Moses made excuses for why he couldn’t or wouldn’t submit to God’s will. God’s plans for his life were not what Moses had planned, and he came up with every excuse he could not to do what God wanted of him.

Mary had perhaps even more reason to object to what God wanted her to do than Moses did. She wasn’t just going to speak to a King, she was going to raise one. She was sure to be mocked and ridiculed for being pregnant before marriage, and her plans for her life were going to change dramatically.

If anyone had a reason to object to God’s plan for their life, it was Mary. If anyone had a reason to make excuses it was Mary. If anyone had a reason to ask the question “why me?” and ask God to choose someone else, it was Mary. But Mary didn’t do any of that, because she had the right perspective. She knew who God was, and she knew who she was before God.

Mary knew that God’s plans were bigger than her, and bigger than her plans for her life. When God called her to be the mother of Jesus, she submitted to God’s will. She saw herself as a servant of God, there to do his will and not her own.

With all the parenting techniques and strategies out there today, many parents are not submitting to God’s plan for their lives and how they should raise their children, but are attempting to do it all themselves.

The good news is that you are not in this alone. God does not expect us to know everything we ought to do in every situation. He expects us to trust in him, and to submit. Easier said than done, but Mary is an excellent model of exactly what that means to submit to God.

That does not mean it will be easy, far from it. But as the angel told Mary, nothing will be impossible with God. Whenever you feel overwhelmed, whenever you feel like you can’t handle the yelling kids, the mess, or the headache, remember that you are not in this alone. All you need to do is submit to God and trust in him to get you through.

More good news, a mother called by God does not have to be perfect. Mary certainly wasn’t. When Jesus was 12 years old, his parents went to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. When they left, they assumed that Jesus was with one of their other friends or relatives, so they didn’t bother searching for him for a full day.

When they returned to Jerusalem, they finally found him three days later in the Temple with the teachers of the Law. For three full days, Mary and Joseph lost the Messiah. So, the next time you have to hunt for your kids among the aisles of Walmart, don’t feel too bad.

Several years later, as Jesus was just beginning his ministry, he and his disciples attended a wedding. **John 2:1–4 ESV — 1** On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. **2** Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. **3** When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” **4** And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.”

This incident shows us two things. First of all, Mary had complete confidence in her son. She knew exactly who he was, she knew what he was capable of, and she knew that he could help in that situation.

For the host of a wedding to run out of wine was a social faux pas. The whole town would have been talking about it for a long time to come. It would have stained the reputation of a good friend of the family. Mary knew that her son had the ability to fix it.

But this incident also shows us that Mary was not conscious of Jesus’ ultimate mission. She was thinking of how Jesus could help right here, right now. She never considered how that might jeopardize Jesus’ larger mission. Her confidence in her son blinded her to the fact that he might not be ready to start using his power publicly yet, and in a way, she forced his hand.

Finally, in Matthew 12, we see Jesus’ mother interrupt his plans yet again. **Matthew 12:46–50 ESV — 46** While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. **48** But he replied to the man who told him, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” **49** And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! **50** For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

Jesus wasn’t rejecting his family. What he was doing it making it clear that his ultimate purpose was to reach the people that he was speaking to. He was in the middle of doing exactly what he was called to do here on this earth, and his mother and brothers wanted to interrupt that.

In fact, Mark tells us that they wanted to stop Jesus from doing what he was there to do. Jesus had begun to have great crowds following him, listening to his teaching. Then he called twelve men to be his disciples who weren’t the usual people you would ask to be your disciples. **Mark 3:21 ESV — 21** And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, “He is out of his mind.” That’s what Jesus’ mother and brothers were there to do that day.

They were trying to stop Jesus from doing the very ministry he was called here to do, and Jesus wouldn’t have it. He very clearly stated his priorities, and we don’t see his family try to intervene again.

Again, Mary knew who her son was, but she did not know the full extent of what he was here to do, and she had no idea what his ministry would look like. She mistakenly tried to stop him from doing the very thing he had come to do.

Even Mary, the mother of Jesus, made mistakes. And she raised the Messiah. Just because you are called to be a mother by God does not mean you are going to be perfect. Paul makes it very clear that none of us will ever be perfect on this side of heaven.

Whenever you feel like you cannot handle your calling to be a mother, when you can’t handle the mess, or the laundry, or not eating dinner until everyone else has everything they need, or stepping on one more lego or dinosaur toy, remember the grace of Jesus is sufficient for even you, and even the mother of Jesus made mistakes.

Finally, a mother called by God never stops being a mother. After all that she had experienced raising Jesus, and watching him do his ministry, Mary finally ended up watching her son be crucified. **John 19:25 ESV — 25** but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

I can’t imagine watching one of my children lose their life. Some of you have experienced that and know how painful it is. Mary didn’t only watch her son die, she watched him being tortured, flogged, mocked, and executed in one of the most brutal ways man has ever devised.

When the rest of Jesus’ disciples, all those who should have been with him when he need them the most, had run away in fear of their own lives, the one who never left his side was his mother. Even though watching her son go through that torment had to be torment for her as well, she was there for him in the midst of his agony and his death.

The calling to be a mother doesn’t end when your children leave the house, it only changes. Beth and I have been blessed by those of you who have already watched your children grow up, and now live out that calling to be a mother with our children when you can as well, and I know we aren’t the only ones blessed by you.

That is the kind of commitment a mother called by God has to her children. Every time you stand by your children and stay committed to your calling as their mother when they need you most, every time you continue to live out that calling even when your own children are grown, you give the people around you a little glimpse of the kind of steadfast love and commitment their Heavenly Father has for them as well.

Mothers, may your love and commitment be unwavering for your children as you seek to live out the calling God has placed on you. May God look at you with favor, as he looked upon Mary. May you learn to completely submit to God as you raise your children to love the Lord. And may your love for your children and your commitment to live out your calling as a mother show the love and commitment of our Heavenly Father to all those who see you.