

Hopefully, Steve Bartman (**picture**) has been able to come out of hiding by now. Mention his name to a die-hard Cubs' fan and prepare to hear a tirade.

It was October of 2003. As a foul ball sailed into the Chicago night sky down the 3<sup>rd</sup> base line, a group of fans stood up in Section 4, many hoping to snag a souvenir from a potentially historic night at Wrigley Field. It was a common reaction, something baseball fans had done for ages, but this particular one on October 14, 2003 proved to be different, and, rightly or wrongly, altered Major League Baseball history.

The Cubs were only 5 outs away from their first appearance in the World Series since 1945, when disaster struck...again. Several Cubs fans leaned over to catch a foul ball, but the hand of Steve Bartman deflected the ball, preventing Cubs outfielder Moises Alou from retiring Luis Castillo. The Marlins would go on to score seven runs in the inning, and the Cubs would lose the following game, blowing their chance to appear in the World Series. Bartman was the first in a string of events that conspired against the Cubs that season, and he remains a pariah among Cubs fans.

Once you make a mistake or get labeled, it's hard to shake that label. What if you did a lot of good, had a long history but you were only remembered for about 24 hours of your life – one failure that you're always known for; That's the case with Eve. . If we're honest, most of us think of Eve as some dumb blonde type. Stupidity and ignorance are not synonymous. Eve wasn't some bubblehead. She knew the names of all of the animals. How many can you name?

What we miss is that Eve's story doesn't end in Genesis 3. Genesis 4:1-2 says, *Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, 'I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord.'* And again, *she bore his brother Abel...* Other than her listening to Satan and both her and Adam's sin and disobedience in the Garden, I can't recall ever hearing a message about Eve. Yet, I believe that not only is Eve the first Mom but her life is a pattern for all Moms.

Genesis 5 tells us that Adam lived over 900 years. Eve's lifespan was no doubt similar. There's a lot more to her story. We have just a few glimpses yet I believe that we can draw some important conclusions from them. Let me suggest then...

**1. Every Mom needs a relationship with God like Eve had.** Adam refers to her as *"the mother of all living."* Her name means "Life Giver." Through her story we can all find our roots and connectedness to God. That's because Eve shows us all how to respond to sin and failure and have new life.

Put yourself in her skin for a moment. Eve has lost everything. No more Paradise...all because of one slip of disobedience. I've been in the room three times for childbirth. The word *"pain"* just doesn't do it justice.

So, how do you respond when you're held accountable for blowing it? Anger, resentment, bitterness.

Unlike her husband, Adam, there's no indication that Eve blames God like Adam did. Though God took her to the woodshed, she owns it. There's energy and excitement in her worlds, *"I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord."* It indicates a renewal of her relationship with God and repentance. We'll later see the opposite, denial and hardening of a heart when Cain sins and his soul becomes a piece of granite.

The very best gift a Mom (and parent) can give her child is her own repentance of sin and regeneration. *Repentance* is a biblical word. The Old Testament echoes it, *"Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin"* (Ezekiel 18:30). The New Testament vigorously exhorts men and women to repent. *"Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish"* said Jesus (Luke 13:3). *"Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out"* said the Apostle Peter (Acts 3:19). Paul said, *"But now [God] commands all people everywhere to repent"* (Acts 17:30).

Eve repented and has a fresh relationship with God. You can't have a relationship with God without repentance and trusting God for salvation.

It's noteworthy that we know nothing of Eve's conversion experience. We evangelicals have blundered here and departed from the biblical pattern. We put all of the emphasis on saying a prayer and asking Jesus into your life. Please understand there must be a point in your life when you repent of your sin and trust Christ as your personal Savior. The Bible never indicates that we have to know when that happened. It only matters that it happened. Other than the Apostle Paul, there is hardly a record of the salvation experience of anyone in the early church. The evidence that you are trusting Christ and are born-again is not that you said a "prayer." It's a changed life. If Jesus has come into your life, there is a radical change. Check out the Bible for yourself. Read James 2 or the little book of 1 John.

Do you want to be a great Mom? Know a great God first. Know Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior first. God is love. You will never love your children as you should if you don't know God.

God is our only source of true wisdom. You will never lead or instruct your children in the right path unless you're plugged into God's wisdom.

Our children don't need an education. They need wisdom. You can be educated and evil. *The Unabomber*, Ted Kaczynski (**picture**) entered Harvard at age 16 and taught at Berkley. But he mailed or hand-delivered a series of increasingly sophisticated bombs that cumulatively killed three people and injured 23 others. In all, 16 bombs were attributed to him.

Mom, the greatest gift you can ever give your children and grandchildren is to know Jesus personally and share your faith. Famed Bible teacher, Dr. G. Campbell Morgan had four sons and they were all preachers. Someone once came into the drawing room when all the family was there. They thought they would see what Howard, one of the sons, was made of so they asked him this question: "Howard, who is the greatest preacher in your family?" Howard had a great admiration for his father and he looked straight across at him and then without a moment's hesitation he answered, "Mother."

**2. Every Mom needs faith in God's Word like Eve had.** What's Eve talking about? *"I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord."* She thought that Cain was the fulfillment of God's promise in Genesis 3:15. *"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel."*

She thought we blew it yesterday and God is fixing it today. Though it wouldn't happen for several millennia when Jesus fulfilled that promise and prophecy, Eve still believed God and took Him at His Word. Do you?

Ruth Bell Graham (**picture**) in her book, *Prodigals and Those Who Love Them* writes: *"We mothers must take care of the possible and trust God for the impossible. We are to love, affirm, encourage, teach, listen, and care for the physical needs of the family. We cannot convict of sin, create hunger, and thirst after God or convert. These are miracles, and miracles are not in our department."*

My earliest memories are of waking up and finding my Mom every single morning with her green coffee cup beside her Bible as she was studying God's Word. I learned to trust God's Word on my Momma's knees.

We have been fed a cultural lie that a successful Mom is one who breaks the glass ceiling. There is nothing wrong with breaking the glass ceiling and being a business success. But true success and significance comes from passing on faith in God's Word generationally.

Years ago, Carol Mahaney (**picture**) was asked, *"If you could parent your daughters all over again, what would you do differently?"* Mistakes and failures flooded my mind, but in a moment I had my answer. *"I wish I had trusted God more."* She then relates that she often worried that she wasn't doing enough or doing the right thing. She now realizes her children didn't need her to do more for them. They needed her to trust God more.

Even with her limited knowledge, Eve chose to trust God's Word.

**3. Every Mom needs patience to deal with stress from children, particularly sibling conflict.** A little boy and a little girl were riding a mechanical horse in a shopping center. The little boy, who was riding in front turned to the girl and said, "If one of us would get off, there would be more room for me."

The most famous story of sibling rivalry is the story of Cain and Abel. Every parent soon learns that their child has a sin nature. Nothing brings that out as quickly as a second child and sibling conflict.

In the Bible, names often had specific meanings. For example: "Adam" means "earth" and God so named him that because God formed him from the dirt of the ground. When we get to Cain and Abel, the meaning of their names is intriguing. "Cain" means "acquired" and Eve explains why she named him this by saying: "I have "acquired" a man from the LORD." But then Abel is born. The verb (*habal*), means to act emptily or become vain, and the noun (*hebel*) means vapor, breath, in the negative sense of having no substance and being something very close to nothing.

Really? Abel meant emptiness, and nothingness? Why on earth would Eve name Abel... Abel?

We're not sure but I wonder if Eve thought: I've got Cain, what do I need Abel for? Cain's my ticket back to the garden. Abel is just chump change. If I'm right, Cain became the golden child and got special attention as the 1<sup>st</sup> born. He couldn't do anything wrong. All he has to do is "show up" and he gets the "participation trophy."

But now Abel is a different kid. He has to try twice as hard to get half the attention Cain gets, so he's used to giving his best 100% of the time. And Cain likes it that way.

Fast forward to their adulthood and the sacrifice that these two sons offer to God. Cain does what he's always done. "Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground" (Genesis 4:3) He just brings in some stuff from out in the field and didn't seem to give it much thought. It's just some grain that was close at hand. But *"Abel brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions"* (Genesis 4:4).

"Firstborn and "Fat portions" are code words in Scripture for the best he had. Abel brought the best he had because that's what he's always had to do. God accepted Abel's sacrifice, but rejected Cain's. In other words: "Abel brought the Lord, filet mignon but Cain brought God broccoli and kale."

But there were two parents who were bystanders. Do you ever feel as if you're scolding your children all day long for bickering? Too many parents accept sibling conflict as "normal." Yes, it's a part of our sin nature.

There are no accidents with God. Childhood is an opportunity to learn to get along or as least to not bicker with those who are different from us. If our children do not learn to get along with that sibling, they will often struggle the rest of their life not only with that sibling BUT with others who remind them of that sibling.

Instead of accepting it or attacking it, just a side bar – use it as a building block. How? Work to strengthen the friendships between your kids. Maybe at dinner, go around the table and say one positive thing about each family member, maybe a strength or a gift. The idea is to take the time to intentionally build one another up in love.

Then, you can also teach your kids to demonstrate their love for their siblings by praying for them. Prayer keeps things in perspective and fosters love for the other person.

Finally, look for opportunities in which your children can serve each other. Conflict is rooted in selfishness. After they help their sibling, affirm them, letting them know how kind they are and that it pleases God and you. Think how much better our world would be better if people learned to be kind to those that they have a hard time liking.

We know more than Adam and Eve. Cain and Abel were the first children. Sibling friendship is a countercultural notion, yet a biblical one. Our culture rarely portray siblings as allies. Proverbs 18:24: *"One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother."* True friendship is a gift of the rarest kind. When the writer of Proverbs wants us to conceive of the deepest form of friendship, he says, in essence, "Imagine a depth of friendship that exceeds even that between siblings." He points to siblinghood as the gold standard.

It's part of the job description though. **Every Mom needs patience to deal with stress from children, particularly sibling conflict.**

**4. Every Mom needs God's grace to deal with pain.** It's a heavy pain, as we see in Luke 15, to have a prodigal child. What do you do when your child is too stubborn to listen to your counsel? Too angry to reason with? Tells you that they hate you or other hurtful things.

It's a problem that's common in the society at large but magnified significantly within the context of the church community. The church is full of what Guy Greenfield (**picture**) calls "wounded parents," Christians who have tried to raise their children in Christian homes but whose children have seriously rebelled or become self-destructive anyway. Greenfield estimates up to 20% of evangelical church members who once were active in church no longer are active because of some problem with a son or daughter.

As believers we must avoid being too simplistic in our use of Scripture verses and biblical principles. God's Word is the light that guides our way, but it's not Aladdin's lamp. We can't rub it three times and- *abracadabra!* -Expect a genie to appear and grant us our wishes. Proverbs 22:6 is a good case in point: Train up a child in the way he should go, Even when he is old he will not depart from it. This verse is given to us as a general principle, not an absolute promise. Promises are invariably so; principles are usually so.

Upon accepting an award, the late Jack Benny (**picture**) once remarked, *"I really don't deserve this. But I have arthritis, and I don't deserve that either."* Any Mom dealing with parental pain struggled with that same thought, "What did I do to deserve this?"

Genesis 4:8 says, *"Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him."* Of all deaths, that of a child is most unnatural and hardest to bear. We expect the old to die. While that kind of separation is always difficult, it comes as no surprise. But the death of a young child or a youth is a different matter. Life with its beauty, wonder, and potential lies ahead for them. Death is a cruel thief when it strikes down the young.

*"In a way that is different from any other relationship because a child is bone of his parents' bone and flesh of their flesh. When a child dies, part of the parent is buried."* So writes Joseph Bayly (**picture**), who had the sad duty of burying three of his children.

What does one say on the death of a child? Those are some of the hardest funerals I've ever conducted. But Eve didn't just lose Abel that day. She lost Cain, too. God punished Cain and he was sentenced to be a fugitive in the earth for the rest of his days.

This one reason that I tiptoe around Mother's Day. Many Moms that call our church home are Moms who are in pain. Some have a prodigal. Some have buried a child. Some have a child who is incarcerated. Yes, there is unbelievable pain with childbirth. But there is also pain with the life of a child. **Every Mom needs God's grace to deal with pain.**

**5. Every Mom needs God's gift of hope.** Eve's last recorded words are found in Genesis 4:24, *"And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said, 'God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel, for Cain killed him'."*

Eve acknowledges that God gave her this son. The name Seth (*Sheth*) means set, settled, placed, appointed. The idea is that Seth was appointed by God to head up the godly seed or descendants upon earth. Some Bible commentators say that Seth also means substitute, that God was actually substituting Seth for the murdered Abel. The point is this: the very name Seth shows how strongly Eve recognized God's hand in the birth of Seth. God was actively involved in the boy's birth.

Seth's name, coupled with the phrase she utters at his birth, more strongly imply her faith in God's promise that her seed will destroy the devil than her expression at Cain's birth. She has hope, knowing that this son has been ordained by her Creator to take the place of faithful Abel.

Can you recall ever being in a hopeless situation? Maybe you're in one right now. Hopelessness happens when you find yourself in a situation where there's no confident expectation for a positive outcome. It's being at the end of your rope. As Eve walked away from the grave of Abel and saw Cain's dust as he ran away, she had hope – not in her circumstances. Her hope was in the promise of God. As someone wrote, *“Often some great tragedy drives a person to Christ. The person who feels no needs in his life has no hunger for God.”* Eve looked upward and it gave her hope.

Simon Sinek notes that the millennial generation suffers from a complete inability to appreciate delayed gratification. Everything is instant. But much of life doesn't work like that and God's plans don't work like that. Like Eve, our generation can see the top of the mountain; what we can't see is the mountain...God's work in our lives takes time.

Rabbi Hugo Gryn (**picture**) used to tell of his experiences in Auschwitz as a boy. Food supplies were meager, and the inmates took care to preserve every scrap that came their way. When the Festival of Hanukkah arrived, Hugo's father took a lump of margarine and, to the horror of young Hugo, used it as fuel for the light to be lit at the festival. When he was asked why, his father replied, *“We know that it is possible to live for three weeks without food, but without hope it is impossible to live properly for three minutes.”*

**Conclusion:** The 19th century British preacher, Charles Spurgeon (**picture**), was riding home after a heavy day's work, feeling weary and depressed, when suddenly the verse flashed into his mind, “My grace is sufficient for you.” He said, “I should think it is, Lord,” and he burst out laughing. It seemed to make unbelief so absurd. He said, “It was as if some little fish, being very thirsty, was troubled about drinking the river dry, and the river said, ‘Drink away, little fish, my stream is sufficient for you.’ Or, it seemed like a little mouse in the granaries of Egypt after seven years of plenty fearing it might die of famine, and Joseph might say, ‘Cheer up, little mouse, my granaries are sufficient for you.’ Or it was like a man up on a mountain saying to himself, ‘I fear I shall exhaust all the oxygen in the atmosphere.’ But the earth might say, ‘Breathe away, O man, and fill your lungs; my atmosphere is sufficient for you.’”

You can't exhaust the grace of God to meet your need in every trial. Some of you are in the middle of some difficult disappointments. Maybe that's you Mom today? It could be a child who's rebelled and turned against you. Maybe you're marriage has gone sour? It may be the loss of a job, a serious health problem, a friend who has maligned you, or some other serious situation that hasn't turned out as you wanted it to. You had high hopes, but now you have no hope.

Like Eve, if Jesus is your Savior, you do have hope! There is God! Hope in God, and you shall again praise Him. Our hope is not in our temporary circumstances but in our eternal God.