

# All in a *Mother's Day*

I am not a public speaker, Sunday school teacher or co-host of a church television program.  
My gift is that of mother.

By JACKIE BUCKINGHAM

I was on my way through the Atlanta airport one morning, rushing to catch a connecting flight from my home in Melbourne, Florida, to wherever it was that my husband, Jamie, had called for me to meet him. As I rounded a corner, I came face-to-face with a woman about my own age.

"Oh," she gasped, a look of recognition spreading across her face. "I know you. You're Bob Mumford's wife."

I laughed. "No, I'm Jamie Buckingham's wife."

She threw her hands up. "Well, hallelujah! I knew you were somebody's wife."

She was right. But I am more than somebody's wife: I am somebody. I am called to the highest calling in the world. I'm a mother.

At church one Sunday night, my husband called on several women to testify. One of those was our grown daughter Robin, who is married to Jon Moore.

Robin and Jon met at Oral Roberts University, where he was studying health and recreation and she was getting a degree in special education. After they married they moved back to our town and built their house next door to our house in the country. Robin had planned to teach school, using her degree from ORU. Instead, she started raising her own students—three beautiful daughters now ages 8, 6 and 3.

That night when her daddy called her to the platform, she turned to me and whispered, "But I don't have a testimony. I'm just a mother."

"Go on, honey," I coaxed. "You've got something important to say."

I watched Robin proudly as she shared with the congregation. In her face I saw myself.

I have five years of undergraduate study in the field of education, but have never stood before a classroom to teach. Instead, I started having babies—five of them.

My own mother had raised her family while working long hours in a full-time job to help supplement my father's

meager salary. It had been extremely difficult for her, as well as for my brother, sister and I. I knew that wasn't what I wanted for my children if I could help it. Jamie and I agreed I would stay home.

That night, when Robin finished speaking, Jamie said something absolutely profound.

"What's wrong with spending four or five years in college to get a degree in education, or home economics, or nutrition, and using it to raise your own children?" he asked. "Who says everyone with a college degree has to go to work in the secular world? If the highest of all callings is to be a mother and a wife, why not go to college to prepare for your calling?"

Robin came back to her seat and squeezed my hand. "I guess I'm just following in your footsteps, Mom," she said.

If she does, it will be the most exciting life imaginable.

Like Robin, we had our children early. Jamie was a student at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Ft. Worth, Texas. I was trying to finish my senior

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year at Texas Christian University when our first son, Bruce, arrived in 1955. Robin was born a year and a half later—before we left the seminary. Bonnie came along shortly after we arrived in Greenwood, South Carolina, where Jamie had accepted a call to pastor a Baptist church. Tim arrived two years later and our last daughter, Sandy, was born in 1963.

It doesn't take a college degree to have five children in eight years, but I defy anyone who says being a mother isn't a full-time job.

All five of the children gave their hearts to Christ at an early age. All were baptized by their father. All were later married by their father as well. All five families with eight grandchildren (and two more on the way) live on our property in the country.

None of the children has ever had a major crisis. None has ever been seriously ill. Growing up on the east coast of Florida has exposed them to a heavy emphasis on free sex and illicit drugs, but all five have chosen to stick with kingdom principles.

Although we have not encouraged it, we are pleased they have migrated back home and are raising their children in a close family setting. Without planning it, we have taken on much of the flavor of the ancient tribes. Jamie is our patriarch. The children have pitched their tents next to ours. My job has been that of a shepherd girl to a small flock. I have checked the water for poison, chased away a few wolves, smacked the unruly ones who wanted to stray and led them to the green pasture. The Chief Shepherd has done the rest.

In short: Mother is a full-time job.

A friend stopped by one day and asked what my hobbies are. Hobbies are for those who have spare time. Maybe, when I am older and the grandchildren are grown, I will have time for a hobby. When you are cooking dinner for as many as 20 of your own family at night, cleaning five toilets each day, riding the tractor, answering the phone, dealing with anxious editors who want to know where your husband is and trying to find out why the well is pumping saltwater, you don't have much time to needlepoint.

Our son Tim, the rancher, grew up with animals. He was constantly bringing home stray creatures—not just dogs and cats, but horses, hogs and cows. One of his pets was a 2,000-pound Brahman cow a local rancher gave him when it was a day old and its mother had died. Tim brought it home, but I was the one who

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went out five times a day to feed it with a bottle. It grew to the size of our Volkswagen with horns longer than my arms. The back half of our 20 acres is fenced as pasture, but when something weighs 2,000 pounds it can eat wherever it pleases—fence or no fence. I was constantly out in the yard, beating on the cow to get her out of my flowerbeds and back into the pasture.

One afternoon, as I was pounding on her with a broom, she turned and looked at me. I knew I was in trouble when she lowered her head and muttered something like, "I've had enough."

I started backing up but she kept coming. Fortunately, I had lost 30 pounds the year before so when she had me backed up against a fence post, I fit right between her horns. She pinned me against the post with her huge head, then started moving it up and down. I was holding onto her horns with both hands, my feet off the ground, my back against the fence post which was wrapped with barbed wire, screaming at the top of my lungs. Two sons-in-law, Jon and Marion, heard me hollering and rushed to my rescue, pounding on the cow until she dropped me in the sandspurs and ambled back to the pasture.

Hobbies? Over the last five years my life has been occupied with two cats (one of them pregnant), two big dogs, eight puppies, two horses, four pigs (which seemed to leave their pen whenever they wanted to in order to eat my potted plants), two cows (both of which got pregnant and delivered calves within a week of each other), five children, five children-in-law, eight grandchildren (and a pregnant daughter-in-law living in our upstairs bedroom), constant guests from all over the world and one compost pile.

I don't have time for hobbies. I'm too busy chasing pigs off the patio, pulling puppies out of the swimming pool and going after a 4-year-old grandson who has learned how to start up the tractor

and is on his way down the driveway dragging the bushhog.

Someone once told me that John Wesley's mother, Susanna, had 12 children and a wood stove. The only way she could find quiet time was to reach down, grab the hem of her dress and pull her long skirt up over her head. There, in her little cloth closet, she would pray.

Actually, it is prayer which has enabled me to function in my multifaceted role of pastor's wife, receptionist, editor, travel agent, farmer, plumber, hotel manager, cook—in other words, mother. Jamie has never wanted or expected anything of me other than what I wanted to do. From the beginning of the church we founded, Jamie has taught that each person should find his own gifted area and operate inside his gifts. I am not a public speaker, worship leader, Sunday school teacher or co-host of a church television program. My gift is that of mother—and now, grandmother.

When I was a child growing up in the small community of Vero Beach, Florida, we always heard stories of preachers' kids who "went bad." Later, as a college student at Mercer University, I met a number of "PKs" in my dormitory who were really wild. When Jamie and I moved into our first parsonage I lived with the constant, nagging fear that our children might turn out that way—rebellious and reactionary.

It has not happened, perhaps because we have given our children the same liberty Jamie has given our church—to find their gifts and operate in them. Besides this, we have been a loving, touching, laughing family. Jamie and I both believe in physical touch as a part of love. Even today it is not unusual to come in and find one of our grown daughters sitting in her daddy's lap, or to have one of our married sons pick me up and carry me in his arms.

We talk as freely about sexual activity as we do about prayer. Jamie has written two children's books on sex. In them, he freely quoted from our own children and gave graphic examples of various situations they fell into. Instead of embarrassing them to see their escapades in print, they thrived on it. We try to practice personal modesty, but with this many people living this close together, there's always someone walking in on somebody who's in some stage of undress. It makes for a good dinner story when it happens.

Primarily, though, we have learned the secret of Jesus' parable in Matthew 13



of the tares and the wheat. There He said to let the weeds grow up alongside the wheat and not trample through the tender growth trying to extract each tiny sin. The angels, he said, would do the harvesting. My job as mother is to make sure the soil is prepared, plant good seed, do lots of watering and fertilizing, and trust God to reap the harvest.

Perhaps the biggest test of this principle came when our youngest daughter, Sandy, announced she wanted to marry a young man we didn't approve of. We had given each of our older children the freedom to make their own choices, but we severely questioned Sandy's judgment when it came to Jerry Smith, whom she had dated all the way through high school. In fact, we had done everything we could to break up their relationship.

Although Jerry was a Christian—and a member of our church—he had not been raised in a Christian home. His Catholic parents had accepted Christ about the time Jerry entered his teens. Spirit-baptized, they were dedicated to the Lord, but those earlier, violent years had scarred their son.

Jerry was an outstanding athlete, but was impulsive, short-tempered and often violent. At times he and Sandy had physically battered each other—sometimes in public. This was entirely foreign to our gentle way of life, and Jamie and I were deeply concerned that Sandy might become an abused wife if she married Jerry.

We met with Jerry's parents. They were equally concerned. We recommended counseling for the kids and both submitted themselves to a friend who has a deliverance ministry. Things got better, but evidences of the old life were still there. The Smiths cooperated with us by insisting Sandy and Jerry break off their relationship for a year. Sandy went off to ORU and Jerry attended Evangel College in Springfield, Missouri. At the end of the year, Sandy was back home. The phone bills were staggering and the relationship, even from afar, was just as strong.

There was another year of separation when Jerry joined the U.S. Coast Guard. Jamie and I kept praying, hoping Sandy would meet another boy, or Jerry another girl.

"Mom," Sandy kept saying, "why can't you see the good in Jerry that I see? Underneath that rough exterior, he is a real man of God. He's just frightened of you and Dad. That's the reason he seems unfriendly when he's around you."

Then one day Sandy made her announcement. "Jerry and I are going to get married. We'll not do it until you and Dad bless us, but we are going to get married."

I talked with Jamie. "We've done everything we can to break them up," he said. "Maybe God wants us to start blessing them rather than cursing them."

We looked at Matthew 18:18 together: "I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (NIV).

"Let's loose them," Jamie suggested.

"OK," I agreed warily.

Jerry was to be home the next week on leave from the Coast Guard in New Orleans. We took the young couple out to dinner and Jamie laid it out for them to understand. "All these years we've 'bound' you," he said. "We've done all we can to separate you. Now God has told us to 'loose' you. We are going to bless you. If you want to get married, we are going to bless that, too."

They looked at each other in amazement. Slowly Jerry's ever-present scowl turned into a grin. "You really mean it?"

"We mean it," I said. "Jamie's parents did everything they could to keep us apart because they didn't approve of me. But when they loosed us, when they started blessing our relationship rather than cursing it, everything changed."

It was a tough decision, for in the flesh we didn't see any hope for the marriage to work out. But over the next eight months before the wedding, we watched Jerry become who Sandy had said he was all along—a man of God. His violence, which we now realize was his only defense against our disapproval, disappeared. In its place emerged a kind, polite, Christian gentleman who has made a wonderful husband for our daughter—just as she had faith to believe.

One of the special privileges of motherhood is watching your children grow up and step out in faith. Sandy's faith for Jerry was far more powerful than the facts we were using for evaluation. Because of it, I have grown in faith also and now give thanks. Like the mother in Proverbs, I am able to "laugh at the days to come" (Prov. 31:25).

Christian women—especially pastors' wives—serve in many ministries. Me? I'm just a mother. ■

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