



The notions of mentoring and motherhood from a practical theological approach: Biblical examples and viewpoints

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Abstract

This paper investigates the importance of gleaning suitable information from the Old and the New Testaments to explore the concepts of 'mentoring' and 'motherhood/or womanhood'. The paper also aims to determine the possibility to employ narratives about women as mentor figures in the Bible. An important issue to consider in the context of this paper is how women/mothers lived as role models for others during biblical times in patriarchal societies. Significantly, God established "right and loving" relationships with women throughout history. God has a special relationship with mothers, and He desires that all women develop caring relationships in order to guide and disciple other women. God assigns both parents the duty of teaching their children about His Word and commandments in Deuteronomy 6:7. Parents have a duty to instil in their children the knowledge of God's rules through instruction and discipline, as stated in Exodus 10:2. The teaching role of parents and grandparents is also confirmed in Joel 1:3. Children in this teaching function are guided or led to comprehend who they are in God. In addition, Luke 8:20-23 makes it clear that women accompanied Jesus. This Scripture comments on the essence of complimenting mothers for listening to God's Word and emphasising the family bond and the value of family. Also, in Psalms 127:3, and 139:13, motherhood is ordained and a blessing from God to families and society. Throughout the Bible, the notion of motherhood is described as a unique and important calling. In essence and summary, while both parents share an equal responsibility for teaching and disciplining their children, mothers have a greater task because of the many responsibilities they carry in life.

Keywords: mentoring, motherhood, womanhood, practical theology, biblical examples.

Introduction

Freeks (2011:34) highlights that the Old and New Testaments abound with examples of men who served as leaders and mentor figures, demonstrating their ability to help, lead, teach, and make disciples of those who were mentored. An illustrative case is Moses, who skilfully guided his protégé Joshua, enabling him to become a remarkable leader in his own right. It is key to know that the word 'mentoring' is not explicitly used in the Bible. However, the biblical word 'discipleship' is interpreted as comprising different aspects of a mentor and mentoring. From both a practical and theological perspective and understanding, mentoring means the role that individuals must play to teach and guide the younger and inexperienced person to follow the more experienced person in a certain field. The purpose is to assist the younger person in making the right choices in life, instead of the wrong ones.

Biblical narratives also present instances of older individuals serving as mentors to younger individuals, exemplifying the desired outcomes of effective mentoring relationships (Acts



18:24-28). Aquila and Priscilla, for example, provided counsel and guidance to Apollos to develop his career and spiritual growth. They also came to the rescue of Apollos to teach him more about the “high standard; the willingness of fellow disciples to correct them is an important means of promoting health in the church, and the willingness of teachers to be corrected is a key sign of their fitness for the teaching ministry” (Bock, 2013:728-729). Wisdom lies not merely in possessing a “fervent spirit” and deep knowledge of the Scriptures, but in humbly listening and being receptive to correction from teachers and mentor figures, as exemplified in the case of Apollos. Moreover, mentor figures must be open to correction themselves, as it contributes to the redemption process in general terms.

Mentoring from a practical theological approach

Significance and definitions

Miller-McLemore (1994:19) posed the following important question: “A good mother who can find?” She bases this question on Proverbs 31:10, where the author, Solomon, asks the question in relation to his own mother and describes the characteristics of a good mother. Miller-McLemore suggests that the question must be answered with “the courage to dispel the clouds of silence that enshroud the complexities of mothering, and with the first-hand knowledge of the power of a woman close to a child” (Miller-McLemore, 1994:19). Bober (2017:vi) grew up with sisters and a mother, along with other family members, but without the presence of her father. Bober (2017:vi) expresses heartfelt appreciation to her grandmother, mother, two daughters, and other family members for their invaluable support throughout her journey as a single mother. While she expresses gratitude to her ex-husband for his assistance, she does not mention her father, as he was never part of her life. It is clear that women don't need men to bring up children and to be successful in life. Miller-McLemore proves this statement by narrating the successes of single mothers she studied. Lee (2020:1) expresses the importance of “reclaiming the Biblical vision of Church leadership” in her book, *The Ministry of Women in the New Testament*. She argues that Mary holds the distinction of being recognised as the “apostle of apostles”, as she was the first woman to witness Jesus after his resurrection (John 20:11-18) and the initial recipient of the core message of the Christian Faith. In our opinion as authors, women, especially in the New Testament, have played an important role in the life of Jesus and showed deep allegiance and commitment to him.

The concept of a ‘mentor’ is associated with the concepts of ‘advisor’, ‘friend’, ‘teacher’, and ‘counsellor’ (Knippelmeyer & Torracco, 2007:2). Mentoring has been used in higher education, nursing, psychology, medicine, business, and research (Freeks, 2021:1). This important life skill has also become an increasingly important matter related to the functioning of families (Freeks 2021:1). Furthermore, mentoring is an essential and effective method to help men and women comprehend the essence of fatherhood and motherhood (Freeks, 2021:1). In addition, Santora et al. (2013:427-428) define mentoring as a cooperative and personal relationship in which the mentor guides and leads the mentee to achieve their potential and success. Tucker's (2007:iii-vi) studies shed light on the perspective of the mentee, highlighting that mentoring requires the mentee's willingness and readiness to actively engage in a learning relationship. According to Tucker, mentoring involves an exchange of learning, experience, knowledge, and insights, wherein the mentee should be prepared to derive meaningful benefits from this dynamic interaction. Mentoring takes place in various domains, including education, business, health, e-mentoring, practical theology, pastoral narratives, and even in the context of the family (Masango, 2011:3-4). Various scholars and authors provide different explanations and definitions pertaining to the concepts of a ‘mentor’ and ‘mentoring’. Mentoring, for example, is an extremely broad and complex concept that includes many components that are exceedingly difficult to define (Chiroma & Cloete, 2015:1).



Chiroma and Cloete (2015:1) define mentoring as a relationship process in which learning, experimentation, and the developing of potential skills can take place, and the desired outcomes can be measured in terms of competencies gained. The mentoring process must last for a certain period to be effective. On the other hand, Masango (2011:1) stresses that mentoring is a process of support that aims to change behaviour in such a way that the protégé functions fully and effectively. *What is a mentor in this context of the paper?* A mentor can be a person with applicable life experiences and wisdom who could provide the right guidance and support to a younger, inexperienced person. In most instances, mentor figures are older than their mentees.

According to Chiroma and Cloete (2015:2), numerous instances exist in which words correspond to and convey the same meaning as mentoring. For the purpose of their study and its relevance to this paper, they highlight the word *meno*, which means “enduring relationships” in the Greek language. Beisterling (cited by Chiroma & Cloete, 2015:2) indicated that the word “enduring” means “to persevere”, and to be “steadfast” in building relationships with others. Jesus used the words “steadfast relationship”, showing that He enjoyed this type of relationship with his disciples. Chiroma and Cloete (2015:2) assert that the idea of older Christian coaching, developing, or helping a young believer to grow, develop, and mature is replete in the Bible. Fransman (2020:2) refers to mentoring as the process of the “reciprocal relationship between mentor and mentee”. Hence, “what happens during this process could be subjected to the reason, why this process was put in place” (Fransman, 2020:2).

In the context of this paper, God wants to restore women in all generations to a “right and loving” relationship with Him (Wilson, 2019:33). Mothers have a special relationship with God, and when they align themselves with His principles and instructions, God enables His divine purpose to manifest in their lives. As a result, they can fulfil their role as effective and influential leaders and mentor figures in life (Wilson, 2019:33). This paper emphasises a clear and fundamental principle: God desires all women to build loving relationships with other women, serving as both mentors and disciples. Women who are disciples or mentor figures in Christ should actively support and assist fellow women in Christ who need assistance (Wilson, 2019:33). Mentoring, in essence, is a covenantal process between women, aimed at supporting one another’s growth and development into mature individuals who understand what God intends for them (Wilson, 2019:19).

Oss (cited by Wilson, 2019:21) states that during the times of the patriarchs, in other words from Abraham to David, wives and women played an important role in influencing their sons to fulfil God’s covenant for Israel. They are important and need to be equipped to understand God’s plan and purpose for them.

Deuteronomy 6:7, 11:18-21 and also Ephesians 6:4, emphasise the shared responsibility of both parents to impart God’s Word and commandments to their children. However, due to the significant amount of time mothers typically spend with their children during the day, their responsibility is often considered greater. Deuteronomy 6:20-21 further elucidates the reasons behind instructing their children in these commandments and laws, namely: “We were slaves in Egypt and the Lord rescued us by His great power”. Gill and Cavaness (2009:21) argue that women and mothers played a pivotal role in the teaching and “transmission of godly values to the next generation”. Exodus 10:2 affirms the collective responsibility of all parents to teach young children about the laws of God. Similarly, Joel 1:3 reinforces and confirms the teaching role of parents and even grandparents. The teaching role involves guiding or leading them to understand who they are in God. We concur with the perspectives of these authors who emphasise that we need to teach our children about the laws of God, nurturing their commitment to be devoted children of God.

The Bible showcases numerous strong women who played vital roles in the upbringing of children and praising the Lord. Of course, motherhood was raised by Mary to the loftiest



heights when she became the ‘Mother of God’ who is “blessed among women” (Luke 1:42). The author contends that in today's contemporary world, there are also resilient women and mother figures who can fulfil the role of an absent father, even in situations where they may be barren. According to Lee (2020:39), the Bible reveals that many women played significant roles as preachers and prophets. In the birth narratives of Jesus, several women are portrayed as prophets, namely Mary, Elizabeth, and Anna (Lee, 2020:39). Additionally, in Mark 1:29-31 and Mathew 8:14-15, we read about the instantaneous healing of Peter's mother-in-law. Her profound experience of Jesus' healing power led her to serve and follow Him (Lee, 2020:17). Moreover, the Galilean women who were dedicated to Jesus showed extraordinary faith in Him (Lee, 2020:17).

In the Book of Luke, it is mentioned that women followed Jesus (Luke 8:20-23). France (2013:138) supports this scriptural account by highlighting its significance, as Jesus acknowledges the importance of family by complimenting his mother and brothers for listening to his Word. This passage emphasises the family bond and underlines the value of familial relationships. Within the context of single parenting and communities, mothers have played a significant role as mentors and role models.

Galatians 3:28 reads: “The day is coming when myriads upon my myriads, millions upon millions of the spirit of those who have been redeemed will stand before the throne of God. On that day no one will ask, what race were you? No Jew or Greek, no male or female, bond or free, rich, or poor, intelligent, or unintelligent, but they will all be one in Christ Jesus”. This is indeed a very powerful prophetic statement that includes everybody and not only a certain group. Fletcher (2012:90) mentions that women in the Bible showed leadership awareness when called by God to do something for Him. The author's view is that all women should recognise the leadership and mentorship roles they can fulfil within their communities. They should equip themselves and be open to spiritual growth in order to effectively engage in mentoring others.

Fletcher (2012:90) states that women should arise to the call of leadership and never be denied the privilege to lead. She continues by saying that women must “gain” leadership “awareness” from their “peers by carrying out their call with confidence, authority, and obedience to Him who called them to lead” (Fletcher, 2012:90). In the New Testament, there are numerous instances of house churches where women held leadership roles. Fletcher (2012:89) highlights that many women were leading the groups. The following women are mentioned as leaders who played a vital role in sustaining the house churches: Mary, the mother of John Mark, who hosted a gathering of people in her home to pray for the release of Peter (Acts 12:12). It is possible that Rhoda, a young woman in Mary's house, benefited from a mentorship programme where she was taught the Scriptures and prayer. Other notable women leaders include Lydia (Acts 16:40); Chloe (1 Corinthians 1:11); Aquila and Priscilla who served as leaders in a house church (Romans 16:3–5; 1 Corinthians 16:19); Nympha (Colossians 4:15); and Apphia.

The significance of motherhood/womanhood in practical theology

‘Motherhood’ and ‘family’ are two significant and foundational concepts in society, prompting extensive scholarly discourse due to their multifaceted nature. These notions transcend mere functionality or descriptive attributes and occupy a central position within discussions surrounding gender. For example, the debate over motherhood is frequently at the heart of conflicts because of the significant duties and responsibilities women shoulder in the family. This prominence in the discourse stems from the recognition that mothers often bear a greater burden compared to fathers (Miller-McLemore, 1999:286).

Furthermore, Miller-McLemore (1999:287) argued that many theologians are in fact mothers but only a few have investigated the intersection of mothering and theology (Rheinbolt-Urbe,



2023:15-16). In conjunction with the mentioned notion, the creation narratives in Genesis 1 and 2 make it clear that God created the first mother, Eve. The advocacy that God has for women shines through in biblical narratives. Women are given pride, reverence, attention, and responsibility for motherhood by God. Wolstenholm (2021) refers to motherhood as a “blessing” and “ordained” by God (Psalms 127:3; 139:13). Motherhood is spoken of throughout the entire Bible as an extraordinary and significant calling, and God established the family according to Genesis 3 (Wolstenholm, 2021). In Isaiah 66:12-13, it is stated that God will look after us, as a mother cares for her child.

Furthermore, Miller-McLemore (1994:20) refers to motherhood as mothers who perform all kinds of indispensable caring, who must support one another, and that the act of mothering is a unique and largely “untapped resource of theological reflection”. In her book *Also a Mother: Work and Family as Theological Dilemma*, she mentioned that she was confronted with the challenges of life when she was pregnant and heard her baby calling her mother (Miller-McLemore, 1994:21). Mothers have many challenges working full-time and being co-providers for their families (Miller-McLemore, 1994:21). Daily responsibilities and struggles of motherhood add to the pressures of fulfilling their roles as women. Juggling a nine-to-five job alongside cooking and caring for the family amplifies the challenge of finding a balance and meaning in one’s life. This phenomenon is observable across various workplace settings, including the field of education. A notable illustration is the case of female teachers who, regardless of whether they teach at public or private schools, undertake a full day’s work and subsequently assume the additional responsibility of caring for their families.

Also, motherhood is dedicated, intended, and ordained by God. In Psalm 139:13, for example, it is written: “For you created my inmost being: you knit me together in my mother’s womb”. This Scripture highlights how motherhood instills hope, confidence, and joy, while also emphasising its inherent worthiness and the honour it commands (see Proverbs 22:6; 23:25; 31:28; Ephesians 6:1-3). Motherhood is a blessing from God, and He uses the metaphor of *mothers* to describe the way He loves and cares for his children (Isaiah 66:13). The women or matriarchs of Israel were very good examples of motherhood and mentoring. They were an integral part of the redemptive plan God had for the world by sending His Son to die for our transgressions. God used and still uses motherhood and womanhood even today as part of His redemptive purpose, despite their frailties. He birthed Jesus from these imperfect women, not only to demonstrate their imperfections and weaknesses but to overcome human imperfection and established His redemption plan (Wilson, 2019:41-42). In the following section of this paper, the authors identify and select possible mentor figures from both the Old and New Testaments, highlighting their significance.

Women (or mothers) as possible mentor figures in the Old Testament

Sarah and Rebekah

Despite Sarah laughing about God’s promise that she would become the mother of a son in her old age, God fulfilled his promise to Abraham (Wilson, 2019:41). According to Walton and Keener (2016:16), Abraham instructed his servant to find a wife for his son Isaac from his father’s household. This was in line with the practice of endogamy, defined as the practice of keeping the inheritance within the family and being married in a social group that relates to you. Rebekah is also part of the lineage of Jesus and a matriarch just like her mother-in-law Sarah (Wilson, 2019:38). The story of how she became the wife of Isaac is found in Genesis 24. Rebekah was a beautiful young virgin woman who was friendly, well-mannered, and supportive (Wilson, 2019:38). Her hospitality was a positive aspect of her behaviour, for the woman was the hostess of the Hebrew family, and they were expected to be hospitable (Walton & Keener, 2016:57). Exodus 24:15 gives a brief explanation of who she was – namely, the daughter of Bethuel and Milcah. Bethuel was the son of Nahor, the brother of Abraham. In the narrative of Rebekah, it is recounted that her mother and brother initially desired her to



delay becoming Isaac's wife, requesting her to stay with them for an additional ten days. However, Rebekah chose instead to trust Abraham's servant and immediately left with him to become the bride of Isaac. Rebekah's inspiring act of courage and faith served as a catalyst for her transition from her familial home into a new and unfamiliar environment (Wilson, 2019:38).

Furthermore, Rebekah's decisions and behaviour showed that she was trustworthy, honest, and adventurous (Wilson, 2019:38). Genesis 27:8-17 gives an account of how Rebekah deceived her husband in getting him to bless Jacob instead of Esau. By doing so, Rebekah "transgressed a serious social prohibition" (Wilson, 2019:39). The Word of God in Deuteronomy 27:18 convicted her conduct, stating: "God's curse is on anyone who leads the blind in the wrong direction". However, despite this wrongdoing, God still used Rebekah to be a direct ancestor of Jesus. Rebekah favoured Jacob to be the heir of Isaac based on what God said to her in Genesis 25:23: "Two nations are within you; you will give birth to two rival peoples. One will be stronger than the other; the older will serve the younger." Rebekah's partiality toward Jacob, the younger brother, can be traced back to their birth, as described in Genesis 25:26. Jacob emerged from the womb holding onto the heel of his older brother, Esau. This significant event marked the beginning of Rebekah's inclination toward Jacob. As the story unfolds, Rebekah feels compelled to ensure that God's prophetic word concerning Jacob's destiny is fulfilled.

Finally, although Rebekah acted as a deceiver, she gave birth to twin sons, one of whom became part of a generation of men and women whom God used in His plan to bring deliverance and free the world from sin. Rebekah's motherhood serves as a reminder that even in the face of sin and its consequences, God remains faithful to His promises. God fulfilled the promises He made to His people (Wilson, 2019:41).

However, Rebekah's deceit had lasting consequences. Rebekah lost the respect of Esau when she deceived his father to bless Jacob instead of him. Their relationship was not the same again. Recognising that Isaac strictly prohibited his sons from marrying foreign women, Rebekah seized the opportunity to send Jacob away by using the Hittite women as an excuse. She expressed her disapproval by suggesting that she would rather die than see Jacob wed a Hittite woman (Genesis 27:46).

Rachel and Leah

The narrative of Laban and how he tricked Jacob into working for him for seven years to take Rachel as his wife, but then gave Jacob his older daughter Leah instead, is recounted in Genesis 28:23-25. But Jacob loved Rachel, and he worked for his father-in-law for another seven years (Wilson, 2019:39). Just like her mother-in-law, Rebekah, and her grandmother-in-law, Leah was infertile for a time (Wilson, 2019:39). God, however, opened their wombs and they bore children that would be part of the lineage of Jesus (Genesis 21:1-4; 25:21; 30:22), highlighting the significance of these women. Rachel was Jacob's favourite wife, and he loved her more than all the other women in his life. However, just like her mother-in-law, Rachel was a deceiver and stole Laban's pagan gods (Wilson, 2019:40). Genesis 31:32-35 indicates that she lied to Jacob and Laban about her wrong deeds. Rachel died bringing Benjamin into the world on their way to Bethel (Genesis 35:16-18). God used Rachel to become the mother of a great leader and governor in Egypt despite her flaws (Wilson, 2019:42).

In addition, Rachel and Leah are remembered as the matriarchs of the 12 tribes of Israel (Wilson, 2019:42). While Rachel held a special place in Jacob's heart, Leah garnered attention for the sons she bore to Jacob (Wilson, 2019:42). The two sisters had the potential to establish a lasting legacy for generations if they had only shown reverence and respect for one another, setting aside their differences and animosity. Unfortunately, unity was lacking among the sons



born to the two sisters. A prime example of this division is seen in the story of Joseph, Rachel's son, who was sold into slavery by his own brothers (Genesis 37:12-28). The lesson we learned from the interaction between Rachel and Leah is that reverence, cooperation, and respect have the potential to create a heritage of God's love and care (Wilson, 2019:42).

Tamar

The narrative of Tamar is told in Genesis 38. Tamar was not like Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel who were barren. Tamar bore twin sons who were directly part of the bloodline and lineage of Jesus (Wilson, 2019:42). Tamar, originally from Timna, was a Canaanite woman (Amid, 2009:216). She was married to Er, the son of Judah. However, Er's life was cut short due to his wicked behaviour and his actions that provoked God's displeasure, leading to his untimely death (Genesis 38:7). The Levirate marriage laws were clear that when a man died without leaving a male heir, his brother had to marry the widow to conceive a son on behalf of the brother. The reason for this was that the brother should have a son with the widow and therefore ensure the continuance of the bloodline and the family name (Ryan, 2019; Genesis 38:8). Tamar eventually married her brother-in-law, Onan, who refused to impregnate her and wasted his seed by spilling it on the ground. This act went against God's laws, and as a consequence, God killed him (Genesis 38:10).

Furthermore, Judah was worried that the same fate would befall Shelah, his youngest son, if he allowed him to marry Tamar (Genesis 38:11). After the death of Judah's wife, Tamar tricked Judah into having intercourse with her by changing her clothes and covering her face to avoid being recognised. She succeeded in her plan, fell pregnant, and gave birth to twin sons, Perez and Zerah (Genesis 38:27-30). Perez's name means "breaking out" (Genesis 38:29; Good News Bible, 2009). According to Wilson (2019:42-43), Tamar employed a similar tactic of deception to that of Rebekah in order to secure the inheritance rights for Perez as the firstborn son. Tamar represents one of the "imperfect branches of Jesus's family tree" (Wilson, 2019:43), and she used deceiving strategies to ensure that her children receive their portion of the inheritance from Judah (McKay, 1999:218). By disguising herself and deceiving Judah, she ensured that Jesus would be born from the bloodline of Judah through Perez (Genesis 38:29; Matthew 1:2-6a).

Fuerst (cited by Wilson, 2019:43) argues that Tamar was mistreated by Judah, and she simply took matters into her own hands to correct the wrong. Tamar, through desperation, acted and disguised herself as a prostitute to ensure an inheritance for her sons (Genesis 38:26). Tamar is mentioned with five other mothers as the ancestors of Jesus (Wilson, 2019:44; Deuteronomy 25:5-6; Matthew 1:1-3; 22:24).

Finally, the authors strongly contend that every woman or mother only wants what is best for their family. Tamar faced a certain stoning if it was found that she behaved improperly to have intercourse with her father-in-law. Although she did this act after her mother-in-law passed away, it is still viewed as adultery, but God showed His mercy and grace.

Rahab

The narrative of Rahab can be found in Joshua chapter 2. Joshua took over the leadership of Moses and sent spies to Jericho. Rahab is also part of the lineage of Jesus, and she was the mother of Boaz. Rahab earned her place with the "heroes of faith" listed in Hebrews 11:31 (Wilson, 2019:44). A prostitute was used by God to ensure that His spies were well hidden and looked after. When Jericho was destroyed, she did not die like the rest who were disobedient. Rahab did not grow up in a Hebrew family but was a Gentile, a Canaanite, and a prostitute by profession (Tyndale House Publishers, 2005:2084). She did not know who God was nor did she have a relationship with Him (Tyndale House Publishers, 2005:309). Many men visited her house, and they could provide the information needed and requested by



Joshua (Joshua 2:1), and no one would be suspicious of who they were. Her house was built into the wall of the city, which made it easy to use as an escape route if there were problems (Joshua 2:15). God directed the spies to Rahab's house because He knew her heart was open to Him and she would be instrumental in the victory over Jericho (Tyndale House Publishers, 2005:303).

Furthermore, the people of Jericho heard about God and what He could do to His enemies (Joshua 2:10-11). Rahab, upon learning that the king of Jericho sought to capture the spies who had taken refuge in her house, resorted to deception. Rahab's lie was driven by her deep reverence for the Lord and her desire to protect His people (Joshua 2:3-5). Instead of handing the spies over to the soldiers, she hid them on the roof of her house under some stalks of flax (Joshua 2:6-7). Although lying is a sin, God showed His grace to Rahab (Tyndale House Publishers, 2005:304). She was commended for her faith, and God forgave her lie because of the faith she showed in Him (Joshua 2:8-12). Rahab was used by God to deceive the enemy (Tyndale House Publishers, 2005:304).

In addition, Rahab succeeded under pressure and chose to save the people of God. She did not only consider her own safety but the safety of her family (Josh 2:12-13). According to Joshua 2:9, Rahab said: "I know that God has given this place into your hands and that a great fear has fallen on us". The oath the spies made in Joshua 2:14, "Our lives for your lives", by which the men assured her that they would treat her family kindly if she didn't give them away, was kept (Joshua 6:22). Rahab trusted the God of Joshua wholeheartedly and set an example for many citizens of Jericho to have faith in the Hebrew God. God remembered Rahab because of her confidence in Him (Tyndale House Publishers, 2005:309).

Hannah, the wife of Elkanah and Samuel's mother

The narrative of Hannah is related to 1 Samuel 1. She was one of the wives of Elkanah, who also had another wife named Peninnah (Merrill, 2018:123). Initially, Hannah was unable to conceive children, but through God's intervention and her unwavering faith, her circumstances changed. These women and mothers played pivotal roles in the Old Testament. Despite her barrenness, Elkanah's love for Hannah remained steadfast (Merrill, 2018:123). Hannah was a woman of deep prayerfulness, as exemplified in 1 Samuel 1:12. In response to her heartfelt prayers, God graciously opened her womb, and Hannah conceived and gave birth to Samuel (1 Samuel 1:19-20). Samuel was brought up in the temple of God to honour her promise to God as narrated in 1 Samuel 1:11. After Samuel was weaned, she took him to the temple in Shiloh to be trained by Eli (1 Samuel 1:24-27).

Despite Hannah's agony before receiving a son from God, she had to go through that same agony again to release him to God (Wilson, 2019:45). Hannah had much faith in God, which stands out as the best attribute and legacy she could leave to her son, who became one of God's best prophets (Wilson, 2019:45). In the ancient world, a woman's incapacity to conceive made her inferior to a second wife, her husband, her family, and the community (Wilson, 2019:45).

Furthermore, according to 1 Samuel 9-13, the Bible indicated that Hannah was enthusiastic in worship and efficient in prayer. Her enthusiasm in prayer made her honour the dedication she made to God after Samuel was born. In 1 Samuel 2:5, the Bible stated that after she took Samuel to the temple in Shiloh, God opened her womb again and she brought seven other children into the world. Samuel became the last judge and prophet of Israel under the leadership and mentorship of Eli (Wilson, 2019:45). The Bible gives us complete and distinct characteristics of matriarchs – women or mothers – who, despite facing difficult circumstances, successfully fulfilled their role and became exemplary mentor figures for other mothers.



Women (or mothers) as possible mentor figures in the Old Testament

Mary, the mother of Jesus

Mary, the mother of Jesus, is included in the genealogy of Jesus due to her marriage to Joseph. However, it is important to note that no bloodline binds Joseph with Jesus (Matthew 1:18-25). Significantly, genealogy can be inherited through the father, and in this context, Joseph was used in Jesus' lineage to fulfil the requirements of genealogical descent (Malina, 1996:102). God had to make sure that Jesus had his flesh and blood father, Joseph, and God as His Father. Mary played an important role as a virgin and mother of Jesus (Malina, 1996:102).

Wilson (2019:49) refers to Mary as the most famous and honoured among all the women who played a role in the life of Jesus. God chose and set her apart from all other women to carry His seed. Mary conceived Jesus miraculously through the Holy Spirit (Wilson, 2019:49). According to Nicolaidis (2008:1), "...the Virgin Mary, the Mother of Jesus Christ, in her intrinsic reality, has been honoured for centuries as the *Theotokos* (God-bearer) as promulgated by the Third Ecumenical Council and plays a vital role in the Christian economy". In Luke 1:38, the angel of God, Gabriel, says the following about Mary: "She would conceive the Messiah of the world". In Luke 1:29, Mary's reaction to the announcement made by the angel of the Lord was the following: "Mary was deeply troubled by the angel's message, and she wondered what the words meant". Mary was a loyal maiden, chosen by God as the seed carrier according to the prophecy mentioned in Genesis 3:15. Fletcher (2012:65) states that she was obedient and responsible for carrying the "seed of God". God exclusively used women and men to communicate with them for various purposes according to His divine will and because of their "gender-base" function (Malina, 1996:99). Mary is included in Jesus' patrilineal genealogy, as documented in the Gospel of Matthew (1:12-16). Mary was the only person to be present with Jesus when He was born and at His earthly demise on Golgotha. She never abandoned Jesus, even during his adulthood, and more particularly when things were truly bad.

In summary, Matthew and Luke state that Mary was chosen by God to be the seed carrier according to the prophecy mentioned in Genesis 3:15. In Luke 1:46-54, Mary's song of praise (the *Magnificat*) is recorded to honour God for favouring and blessing her (Wilson, 2019:49).

Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist

Elizabeth was the wife of Zechariah and the mother of John the Baptist. The Gospel of Luke describes the circumstances surrounding John's conception and birth rather comprehensively (Luke 1:5-25, 39-45, 57-80). The angel Gabriel visited Zechariah and told him that God heard their cry and will give them a son. God commanded Zechariah to name his son John. When Zechariah questioned the validity of the message from God (Luke 1:19), the angel Gabriel said: "I stand in the presence of God and have been sent to speak to you and bring you the good news". Elizabeth became pregnant and remained in seclusion for five months. In Luke 1:25, Elizabeth expresses her gratitude to the Lord for His actions in her life, saying: "The Lord has done this for me. In these days He has shown His favour and taken away my disgrace among the people".

In the socio-cultural context of the ancient Hebrew nation, the worth and status of a Hebrew woman were largely determined by her role as a mother. Therefore, Elizabeth's inability to conceive and bear children added to her personal struggle and societal stigma and was a deeply emotional experience for her. She came from a priestly lineage, being a descendant of Aaron, which positioned her and her husband in a high spiritual and social standing within Israel. They were renowned for their faithful obedience to the laws of God (Luke 1:6). Despite possessing all the attributes to do God's work, but Elizabeth and her husband experienced the pain of not having children. According to Luke 1:24-25, Elizabeth was convinced that her



pregnancy was an act of God and that He would fulfil His promise to give her a child. Elizabeth recognised that if God granted her a child, He would also remove the public shame and humiliation she endured due to her barrenness.

Elizabeth, like all Hebrew women, carried the responsibility of raising and nurturing her child in accordance with God's laws. Hebrew women were tasked with the responsibility of guiding their children and instilling them with strong moral values. According to Drennan (2020:17), Hebrew women were also responsible for managing the household and acting as teachers of other young women and children. Their role was parallel in significance to that of fathers (Drennan, 2020:16). Block (cited by Drennan, 2020:16-17) states that mothers within the Hebrew family had great “dignity” and “influence” in their households.

Lois and Eunice, leaders in the Early Church

Acts 16 paints a picture of the Apostle Paul giving an account of the history of Timothy. Timothy, however, stayed with his mother, Eunice, in Lystra, and his grandmother, Lois. Both women were Jewish and believed in the God of the Jews. It was the responsibility of Jewish women to teach the children the Word of God, and in the case of Timothy, he had solid Jewish training in the Scriptures from his mother and grandmother (Tyndale House Publishers, 2005:2037). According to Wilson (2019:49), the narratives of Lois and Eunice exemplify the most powerful spiritual partnership within the maternal lineage depicted in the New Testament. They symbolised the women of faith and were dedicated in their mentoring roles. Further, they showed how women can know God's Word and teach it to their children. They portrayed significant leadership roles in the joint upbringing of Timothy (Tyndale House Publishers, 2005:2046).

In the context of this paper, it is key to know that Lois and Eunice constantly remind us how important it is for children to learn their roots, faith, and mission (Wilson, 2019:49-50). These two women, as mentor figures in Timothy's life, played a pivotal role in guiding and nurturing him, teaching him and helping to cultivate and strengthen his faith in God (2 Timothy 1:5; Wilson, 2019:50).

In conclusion, Lois and Eunice exemplify faithful and devoted women who demonstrated obedience to God (Tyndale House Publishers, 2005:2046). As Jewish mothers, they recognised their responsibility to instruct their children in the laws and decrees of God. Their roles as mentor figures are commendable. Lois, as the mother of Eunice, mentored and guided her in becoming a virtuous mother. In turn, Eunice mentored Timothy, imparting to him the wisdom and principles of living according to God's Word (2 Timothy 1:5).

Lydia of Thyatira as a leader in the Early Church

In Acts 16 we read about a woman called Lydia. Luke introduces her as a businesswoman in Acts 16:14: “One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira”. Similarly, Polk (2017:20) describes her as a businesswoman who traded in “valuable purple cloth that was worn by Roman leaders”. Lydia was a worshipper not yet converted, but God “opened her heart to respond to Paul's message” (Acts 16:14). Polk (2017:20-21) adds that Lydia met Paul and the other evangelists during a mission to preach the gospel to the pagans and Gentiles who were not yet converted to Jesus. Lydia was in one of these meetings when she became a follower of Christ Jesus (Polk, 2017:21).

Acts 16:15 states that after Lydia and the members of her household were baptised, she invited Paul, Silas, and Timothy to stay with her and her family for some time. Polk (2017:21) stated that Lydia received the “gift of hospitality”. After Paul and Silas were released from prison, they went to Lydia's house and met the other believers there. This implies that her home became a house church for the entire community. As a formidable woman, Lydia hosted



the church at her home and shared the Word of God and her faith with other women in the marketplace where she ran her business (Polk, 2017:21). The Spirit of God opened their hearts to be receptive to His Word and to be converted. Lydia became a true follower and mentor figure of Christ (Polk, 2017:2).

Discussion

Male and female genders were created by God (Genesis 1:27; see also Matt 19:4). Genesis 1:1–2:4a describes the first creation account and Genesis 2:4b-25 the second creation account. In the latter, God created the Garden of Eden. Then, in Genesis 2:18, God acknowledged that it was not good for man to be alone and decide to create a "helper" for him. Furthermore, according to Genesis 1:28, God granted the woman the capacity to bear children. Waltke (2007:237) asserts that this marks the earliest mention of motherhood in the Bible. As a result, it is abundantly clear throughout the entire Bible that women demonstrated outstanding leadership when they answered God's call to serve in ministry and work for Him. They answer the call to leadership and have never been denied the opportunity to do so (Fletcher, 2012:90). These mothers and women from the Old and New Testaments, often known as the matriarchs, were mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus Christ. Even so, there is controversy and disagreement surrounding the concepts of 'motherhood' and 'family' since these notions go beyond being merely functional and descriptors in debates of gender. Because of the enormous role and duty of women, for instance, the motherhood argument is at the centre of the dispute (Miller-McLemore, 1999:286).

In regard to the mentoring roles of mothers, the authors argued that God is honoured in women, especially when they serve one another with love. In fact, God wants all Christian women to develop loving relationships in order to properly mentor or disciple other women and children, and this is imperative in the context of this paper. Hence, this paper views mentoring as a commitment between women to guide and develop them into the women that God intends for them to be (Wilson, 2019:33).

Furthermore, the mentoring and teaching that occurs between women deepen the love and compassion God intended for mothers and women (Wilson, 2019:33). According to the New Testament, mentoring between older and younger women was effective (Wilson, 2019:35). For example, the mentoring process described in Titus 2 is based on the principle that older women should serve as mentors to younger women. This mentoring relationship is essential for the growth and development of younger women, providing them with guidance and serving as positive examples for living a spiritually fulfilling life (Wilson, 2019:35). Importantly, older women should act in a way that serves as an example to younger women, according to Titus 2:3.

Conclusion

Women from both the Old and New Testaments played a pivotal mentoring role in the upbringing of children and teaching young women. They endeavoured to live exemplary lives and serve as examples to their husbands and male relatives. Today, women and mothers possess exceptional abilities and gifts to become suitable mentors and role models within society. They play a crucial role in guiding and directing children, helping them find their moral compass and navigate through life's challenges. Mothers and women are responsible for disciplining children in the family domain and portraying good leadership in the public domain. Even young mothers in devastated families can become self-reliant mentor figures to curb destructive social ills in society.



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