

## The Baddest Mother In The Bible

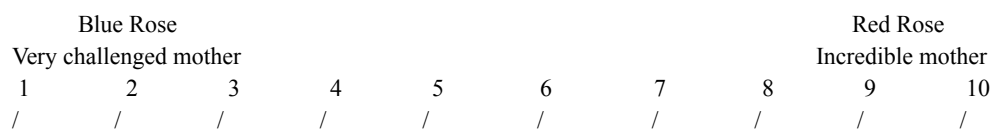
3. Warm-up question: Who's your favorite (or least favorite) TV mother?
4. The baddest mother in the Bible is described in an Old Testament story found in the book of Second Kings. The Arameans had invaded Israel and laid siege to the city of Samaria. The result was horrendous suffering. Read II Kings 6:24-32, as printed on p. 3.
  - a. The famine in Samaria became so bad, people resorted to eating donkey heads and bird droppings. In our culture of privilege, it's hard to begin to imagine what famine is like. What's the longest period of time you've ever gone between meals? Suppose you had no idea where your next meal was coming from, what kind of emotions would well up inside you?
  - b. The actions of the mothers in our Bible story are so unfathomably awful, it defies understanding. But suppose we had to come up with a psychological explanation. What's your best guess of the psychological gymnastics that enabled these mothers to do something so unspeakably horrible?
5. If God wanted this heinous story included in the Bible, there must be an important reason why. Jeff suggested three possible lessons we can draw from the story. **Lesson #1 – Desperate people do desperate things.** What the two mothers did in today's story is a bracing reminder of what we humans are capable of doing in our worst moments.
  - a. We've heard it said before: under the right circumstances, each of us is capable of doing things we never thought we would. Do you believe that? Why or why not?
  - b. Think about a time when you saw someone who was a good person do something terribly wrong in a situation of great stress or desperation. What happened?
  - c. Jeff told about a time when his father erupted in anger at his sisters and became uncharacteristically harsh – even abusive – in punishing them. It was a moment his father still regrets 83 years later. What was one of the most regrettable things that one of your parents ever did when raising you and your siblings?
  - d. I Peter 5:8 says, "Keep alert and of sober mind, for your enemy the devil prowls around looking for someone to devour." What do you think that verse means?
  - e. Why is it so important that we have a healthy appreciation of our own capacity for evil, especially when we are stressed or distressed?
4. **Lesson #2 – Hurting people hurt.** Although the mothers in today's Bible story failed catastrophically, the truth is every parent (even the best) fails in one way or another. In our culture, we idealize the concept of motherhood to the point that it creates unrealistic expectations and puts a lot of pressure on mothers. Then when a mother falls short in some way – maybe even many ways – we don't know what to do with that. It can help us

sort out our complicated feelings, and even feel compassion for our parents' failings, if we realize that they, like us, carry wounds from their past.

- a. Eugene Peterson, editor of the Message Bible, points out that “there are no exemplary families” in the Bible – not a single model family. Peterson says, “The biblical material consistently portrays the family . . . as a series of broken relationships in need of redemption.” Do you agree or disagree – and why?
- b. When trying to understand the failings of parents (or anyone else who disappoints us), I Corinthians 4:7 offers an important insight. There Paul is addressing gifted people who get annoyed with people who struggle. Paul’s response to the gifted people is to say, “What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?” What are the implications of that verse for why people are the way they are – and how we should judge them when they fall short?
- c. Margaret Wheatley once said, “You can’t hate somebody whose story you know.” How does that apply our evaluation of flawed parents (and others)?
- d. Jeff told how his wonderful mother nevertheless had a great weakness, i.e., fear. To her, the world was a dangerous place and she passed on that sense of extreme caution and angst to Jeff and his sisters. It was only as an adult that Jeff could look back and realize that his Mom was as she was because of her life experience – losing both her mother and father at a young age and almost losing her husband (Jeff’s Dad) to cancer at age 30. Tell us about a powerful negative trait handed down to you from your mother or father. How has that affected you? Have you healed from it or are you passing that same trait along to those you influence?

**5. Lesson #3 – Given all that we experience in life, it’s a wonder that there are so many great Moms, Grandmas, Grandpas, Dads, and other beautiful people in this world – and we should appreciate them with all our hearts.**

- a. Tell us something wonderful about your mother or someone who was a mother figure to you – maybe a wonderful memory or trait that you deeply appreciate.
- b. On Sunday, we placed two roses on the altar – a red rose to represent wonderful mothers and a blue rose to represent mothers who struggle. Jeff mentioned that most mothers are actually a complicated mixture of both red and blue. Where on the following continuum would you place your mother? Feel free to share the number you choose and why.



## **II Kings 6:24-32**

24 Sometime later King Ben-hadad of Aram mustered his entire army; he marched against Samaria and laid siege to it. <sup>25</sup>As the siege continued, famine in Samaria became so great that a donkey's head was sold for eighty shekels of silver, and one-fourth of a kab of dove's dung for five shekels of silver. <sup>26</sup>Now as the king of Israel was walking on the city wall, a woman cried out to him, 'Help, my lord king!' <sup>27</sup>He said, 'No! Let the LORD help you. How can I help you? From the threshing-floor or from the wine press?'

<sup>28</sup>But then the king asked her, 'What is your complaint?' She answered, 'This woman said to me, "Give up your son; we will eat him today, and we will eat my son tomorrow." <sup>29</sup>So we cooked my son and ate him. The next day I said to her, "Give up your son and we will eat him." But she has hidden her son.'

<sup>30</sup>When the king heard the words of the woman he tore his clothes—now since he was walking on the city wall, the people could see that he had sackcloth on his body underneath— <sup>31</sup>and he said, 'So may God do to me, and more, if the head of Elisha son of Shaphat stays on his shoulders today.' <sup>32</sup>So he dispatched a soldier from his presence.