

WHAT MOTHERS-IN-LAW SHOULD LEARN FROM JOHN THE BAPTIST



What does a bona fide weirdo (*no disrespect; he owned it*) prophesying in the Judean wilderness, have to do with a mother-in-law?

Sounds like a stretch, I know — but hear me out.

Scripture is living and active (Hebrews 4:12), which means that the insights and applications that the Holy Spirit illuminates on any given day are truly endless, and often *surprising*. This was one of those unexpected revelations for me, and I want to share it.

According to Jesus, John the Baptist was the greatest person ever born of a woman, meaning that out of *anyone* who is not born-again, he is the best there ever was, or ever will be. That's quite the commendation.

So, what made this locust-eating, camel-hair-wearing man so remarkable—other than those obvious eccentricities?

He knew his place.

He understood what his role was and recognized when it was time to gracefully bow out from his position of prominence.

John had been baptizing people and drawing large crowds for some time, when all the sudden, another man steps onto the scene and begins to steal his proverbial thunder. John's disciples approached him about it, saying something to the effect of, "Remember Jesus, who you baptized in the Jordan? He's beating us in popularity now, and the people are going to him instead of you."

John's response:

28 You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Messiah but am sent ahead of him.' 29 The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. 30 He must increase; I must decrease."

"The bride belongs to the bridegroom"

John was well aware that he was not the groom, but simply a *friend* of the groom. When his disciples questioned him about this new guy who was starting to get more attention in the baptism department, John wasn't envious or upset. His response was essentially, "Praise God! My work here is almost done. It's time for me to yield and gradually step down, as he takes his rightful place."

His job was to **prepare** the bride for her groom—and he rejoiced when that groom arrived.

He could have gotten possessive.

He could have desperately clung onto what was never his to begin with.

He could have competed.

He could have sulked or whined,
"But I was here first."

That sounds laughably childish for a grown man, yet that was more or less the *exact* reaction the Pharisees had: throwing jealous temper tantrums because someone was stealing their spotlight—even planning violence because they felt like he was winning.

That behavior is reminiscent of a teenage beauty pageant, or perhaps Tonya Harding.

Nonetheless, there is *another* scriptural precedent for it: John's third epistle mentions an additional man-child, named Diotrephes — a leader in one of the early churches — who "loved to be first."

He, like far too many church leaders today, was not biblically qualified for his position of authority, and was a hazard to his flock. **"Foxes guarding the hen house" .. "Worse than wolves disguised as sheep, are those disguised as shepherds," but I digress.**

Like the Pharisees, his Cain-esque character was *so* glaringly obvious, and his intention to attack anyone he deemed a threat was *so* thinly veiled, that it makes you wonder how he took himself seriously, claiming to serve God — and who thought it was a good idea to put him in charge.

"He must increase; I must decrease"

Believers ought to be the last people who operate out of a fragile ego, base instincts, or self-aggrandizement, yet so many professing Christians do. **Key word: professing.** *"They claim to know God, but by their conduct they deny Him"* (Titus 1:16).

We all have unflattering moments when our flesh gets the best of us, but when this kind of ruthless, self-serving behavior is habitual in a person's life, and when confronted, they belligerently double down on narcissism, instead of repenting — well... as Matthew 7:16 teaches. *"You will know them by their fruit"* —not by their church attendance, or their position, or their knowledge of the Bible, any

other factor, but only the presence of the **fruit of the Spirit** (or lack thereof) are we able to discern authentic followers of Christ from the fraudulent. The sheep from the goats, the wheat from the tares..

Having said that, many church-going mothers get inappropriately possessive of their son when his future wife comes into his life, acting like she's her rival for *first place*—or as if she's a threat that must be eliminated altogether.

That is a disgrace.

But a disturbingly common phenomenon.

John could have behaved in a similar manner, but instead, he spoke from a **higher perspective** about the man who appeared to be his opponent:

"This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me...'" —John:1:31 NIV

He saw with spiritual eyes, despite natural appearances. Although Jesus had just come into the picture, the **bride** had always belonged to *him*; the union was ordained by God before the foundations of the world.

John wasn't angry about being displaced, and he had no desire to sabotage Jesus' ministry or usurp the position that was always reserved for him.

In humility, John honored him.

Mothers-in-law may be the *most* notorious for undermining the relationship between a husband and his bride, but they aren't the only ones.

It's a common sinful reflex—the “hey, wait a minute” moment when someone we're close to gets married, or is headed toward the aisle.

A feeling of offense rises up within us because we've known the person for twenty-plus years, yet suddenly this new **significant other** is more *significant* than us. It's as if they showed up last-minute and immediately cut the line.. outranking us overnight in our loved one's heart — and list of priorities.

It's humbling and disorienting when the dynamic shifts, and we are no longer the main man or woman in someone's life anymore — when their loyalty, time, and attention suddenly belongs *primarily* to someone else

However, every moment of our lives was written in God's book before any of them came to be, including who we will marry (Psalm 139:16).

Marriage is ordained by God, and He commands that it be held in honor among all. "Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate" (Mark 10:9). If we say that we know Him, then let's take a page out of J.T.B's book: choose the eternal perspective, and recognize that regardless of how recently they met, or how quick the courtship and engagement were, their spouse *did* come **before** us.

“What God has joined together, let *no one* separate”

The same way we want our spouse's family and friends to embrace us and respect our relationship, we should do the same for others. Let us say in our hearts, "*he/she must increase; I must decrease,*" and then live like it.

Who are we to meddle in a union God has orchestrated? — one He planned before they were born, and long before *we* ever came into the picture either.. Before we were given the privilege of raising them, growing up beside them, or building a friendship with them.

Yet, so many allegedly Christian Mothers have *The Audacity™* to believe it is their right to interfere, both before the wedding and afterwards.

If there is a sincere doubt about whether or not the marriage is God's will, our first instinct should be to pray — not to insert ourselves where we don't belong, overstep boundaries, manipulate, gossip, or complain that the timeline is "too fast." God sets the pace, not us. And He is more than capable of warning both parties if the relationship is not His best for their lives. That said, adults have free will and can choose to ignore that *still small voice*.

There may be an appropriate time to share concerns, but otherwise, let's stay in our own lanes and respect that it isn't our decision, because it isn't our life.

To reiterate:

John the Baptist's mission was to **prepare** the bride for the groom.

As a father, sister, brother, aunt, cousin, friend, we were given a similar assignment in the lives of the people we care about. We must be content to play this role, and be glad when it's time for that preparation (our contribution) to be put to use, resisting the urge to covet the #1 spot in someone's heart that was pre-arranged for another.

The father of the bride walking his daughter down the aisle is a symbolic representation of what we all ought to be doing when our loved one is walking towards the altar:

letting go.

We have to accept that our relationship with that person is going to be different moving forward. Instead of expressing jealousy and resentment, or trying to derail the relationship because it feels threatening, we should pray against that selfishness and repent.

Miriam once spoke arrogantly against her brother Moses' new wife and marriage. Despite her lofty position in the leadership structure of Israel, the Lord's anger burned against her severely for this indiscretion.

Based on that true story, if for *no other reason* than the fear of God, it seems wise to err on the side of caution, to show the utmost respect for any relationship between a man and his wife — both publicly and privately, because we know that He hears everything we say behind closed doors.

Of all the types of relationships in life, none of them can compare to marriage. Even identical twins who have been inseparable since conception, will never experience a bond like husband and wife. That is because “they are no longer two, but one flesh.” (Matt.19:6) This is a profound mystery, but a fact.

“They are no longer two, but one”

So, if you are a mother who feels entitled to life-long ownership of your adult children, because you carried them for nine months and fulfilled the duties/made the sacrifices that are required of a mother, this may come as a shock, but parenthood is *stewardship* — not *ownership*.

If you are a Christian woman, then you should be very familiar with this verse: “*Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife*” (Genesis 2:24). To put it bluntly, you are way out of line and you’re **fighting against God Himself** if you prevent your son from leaving you and cutting the figurative umbilical cord, or hinder him from solidifying his connection with his wife.

To reverse the genders in John the Baptist’s quote: “**The groom belongs to the bride.**”

It may be time to take a long look in the mirror at your motivations (Proverbs 16:2), at the authenticity of your faith (2 Corinthians 13:5-7), and at what has been neglected in your own marriage, that you’ve grown overly-attached to your son, demanding devotion from him that should only come from the groom who belongs to *you*.