

Harris Creek Baptist Church
Blair Browning
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Mother's Day Q&A

Blair: Harris Creek good morning! It is fun to see those pictures. You can see we're going to have a little different type of service today. I'm so excited that you're here to be able to experience that with us. My name is Blair Browning, I serve as one of the elders here at Harris Creek (audience cheers). I appreciate the lifegroup over there trying to influence the crowd. I love getting to serve this body and I love what we have in store for you today, which is to hear from some of the elder's wives. We've got a great day ahead, but first we want to acknowledge a huge milestone for many of you; this weekend was graduation. Did anybody graduate this weekend? (People applaud) I love it. So many hands. I know that families are in town, and so that is great to have you with us. We also have a graduate on stage, Don Holmes, graduated with her masters from Truitt this weekend. I believe she started 27 years ago, literally, and through this time has continued to take courses, so that is an amazing accomplishment.

We're so excited to celebrate moms today. It's mother's day, and we know that this day holds some tension, because we know that there are those of you in this room that would love to become moms; we know that there are some of you here who have strained relationships with your mom, perhaps have even lost a mom. We know that some of you in here are moms and have a strained relationship with a child or have lost a child. We want you to know that just as Scripture says in Psalm 34 that the Lord is near to broken-hearted, that God sees you and that we see you. We're here with you, and so we want to acknowledge that tension that in this world—in our broken world right now—not everything is as it should be. At the same time, there are a lot of joyful things that we want to celebrate, so one day a year—which I think we should all acknowledge should be a lot more—we want to pause and celebrate moms and honor them. So with us today we have four of the Elder's wives. There are actually six Elder's wives, Monica Pokluda who is married to JP, and Carol Underwood who is married to Jim Underwood—the other two Elders—are traveling this weekend and with family. So we have four amazing women and moms with us today and I'm so excited that you'll get to hear and learn from them. There's a ton of wisdom on this stage. Let me just start by having y'all introduce yourselves.

Don: I'm Don Holmes, and I'm married to Chris. We've been married for 33 years, and we have four children; they are ages 26, 25, 23, and 17. We also have a daughter in law—wonderful daughter in law, and soon to be son in law. And I should just say too, that I am an imperfect mom.

Carol: I'm imperfect mom number two. My name is Carol Neilson, my husband is Bill. We've been married 47 years tomorrow (audience cheers). We have been blessed with three adult children—well, they weren't adults when they were born but they're adults now—and each are married so we have three more children through marriage, and we're so thrilled for that. We have seven grandchildren and our lives are very full.

Karen: My name is Karen Smith; I too am a very imperfect mother. I've been married to Stacey for 22 years, and we have four boys—they are 17, 16, and we have twins that are 12.

Jordan: My name is Jordan Browning, I am imperfect mother number four, and I am actually married to Blair that's on the other end there. We've been married for almost 23 years. And we have four children that are ages 17, 15, 12 and 9.

Blair: Thank you, and just to even start, you can hear the humility talking about imperfection and that it gets complicated when—in particular—when you're married to a perfect spouse (audience laughs). It makes it harder—anyways. Let's start off, Jordan or one of you, maybe a Mother's Day memory that any of you have.

Jordan: Yes, so they had actually asked us “Hey, just think of a Mother's Day memory that one of you have.” We kind of all, for a moment, just stared at each other, and none of us could really think of anything. Eventually I said, “The shorter answer to the question, “Do you have a favorite Mother's Day memory” is not really”—sorry Blair. I think the more that I thought about this, I realized that especially when I was a young mom and when my kids were little, that I had pretty high expectations for this day. A lot of times mother's day ended up being very disappointing for me, just because I pride myself on being an excellent gift giver; and on mother's day, in my mind, I was like, “This is the day that they're going to get me the perfect gift.” It never really happened- again, sorry Blair. I think what has changed is that I have had a perspective shift particularly about Mother's Day probably in the last five years; it has been a lot more about me learning that it's not about how my kids or my spouse celebrates me on this day, but it's a lot about me celebrating who they have made me to be. For me the role of Mom has been a very sanctifying role and it has made me look a lot less like Jordan and a lot more like Jesus; and I was going to read Isaiah 62:2 says “**And you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give.**” This is really talking about your new name when you become a Believer, but I think that we all have various different roles as we are believers in Christ. For me the role of mom is a new name because it is something that God has given me and that's something that I can celebrate.

Karen: It's funny the one that popped in my head when I thought about it was a year when Stacy was actually out of town. Due to communicating lots of expectations, they tend to do a good job on Mother's day. But this particular year he was gone and so I think the boys woke up and they were a little panicked like, “It's Mother's Day aren't we supposed to do something?” And so they left me a crisp 20 dollar bill. Generous.

Blair: Cash.

Karen: I mean nothing wrong with cash; I kept it too.

Blair: I'm taking notes. It's a fun memory for us now because we love the Smiths; they are some of our best friends. We've been in life group with them for over a decade now and Jordan and Karen became moms the same day, within two minutes of each other. So, our oldest are two minutes apart and we love that.

As I said at the beginning we know this day does hold some tension and with some of the fun memories and with some of the joyful memories, we know there are challenging ones and as we talked amongst the panel I think each person could share a story. But Don if you would just share maybe some of the challenges that this day does hold for you.

Don: Sure. So, starting when I was young, I always knew I wanted to be a wife and a mom. After Chris and I got married we wanted to start trying to have a family. It took a bit longer and required a bit of help to have that happen. Then about five years into our marriage we learned we were expecting. We were so excited to welcome a new person into our family. At that time sonography was new and really only done at the beginning to determine a heartbeat. So, we weren't trying to find out if we were having a boy or a girl and there really wasn't any need for more testing along the way. So, we had a 40-week, nine-month pregnancy, and on the day of my due date I went into labor. After a while, we learned after the birth that our baby had a challenge—a defect—and it changed really quickly from a joyful, exciting time to a pretty scary time. He had to be taken to a different hospital; he had to have surgery right away, and we were told he had about a 50/50 chance of living. That was very difficult. We reached out of course to family, friends, and had people all over the world praying for us and praying for him. But after four days he did die. That was really hard, and some dark days. It was a really challenging times for us.

On the day that we were going to bury our precious baby James, we woke up that morning and we're going to have a graveside service. It was pouring down rain, and I just remember feeling a lot of pain and disbelief about that. We were already feeling so sad and that just seemed hard to have on top of everything else. But after the service one of the friends that attended told me that she felt like it was God weeping along with us, and that did bring some comfort and resonate with us. So after that time we decided to start trying again, and about a year later we had a later miscarriage of a little girl, and this time something different was the challenge. So it was just a really hard time; we felt like we really wanted to be parents. It was hard to figure out if we had the strength to try again and face again what might happen. But we felt the Lord leading us to that. In the scriptures it says that Jesus wept over the death of Lazarus, and I can honestly say he wept with us; he has done that over time and he was near to us during that.

We did go on to have children and we feel so thankful for them and for the life we've been able to share with them; along with their many milestones of you know growing up, being in school, graduating, some of them getting married—which are all such joyful times. I can just tell you that along with that joy of celebrating with them, there's always that little bit of sorrow and pain in knowing what we missed those with our other children. So we are thankful that God has walked us through these days; he never left us. We don't have answers as to why things like that happen, but we know that it drew us near to him.

I also want to say that some of you might be feeling some pain over your children and the things they might be facing; the challenges that are in front of them, or maybe you're afraid because they're making some choices that are taking them astray on a path that's dangerous or scary. I would just say to you, I know it's hard because you probably feel afraid, but in scripture, about 365 times it says “Do not fear.” I will tell you I know that's hard to do when you're walking in the midst of those things, so sometimes it's a moment by moment choice; when you feel that fear, immediately turn it back to the Lord. I know that's hard. Some things I've learned along the way from both of those situations is that these children are not ours, they're His. They are on their own journey, and we get to come alongside them, share life, and certainly play a role, but they are making their own way. So, sometimes you're tempted to think, “Lord I've done so much for you. Why are these hard things happening?” And that's a normal question—he certainly can handle all those types of questions. More than that I would struggle with saying, “Lord what did I do wrong? Why are these hard things happening?” I'll just say to you he can handle all of that and he wants us to bring it to him. While there are not answers, we do have him, and he brings us into closeness with him. Just like Blair alluded to a moment ago, there's a scripture in Psalm 34:18 that says, **“The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and he saves those who are crushed in spirit.”** I can tell you that that's true.

Blair: Thank you Don. I have to think that your story connected to so many people in the room, so thank you for sharing. I think the role of mother is probably perceived differently by different people in the room. So, Karen, maybe if you could just tell us how do you view the role of a mom?

Karen: I think that question is a little bit like asking a first-time mom of a newborn: “How was your day?” Or better yet, “What did you do today?” Those are dangerous questions because you're experiencing both the highest of highs; like, I held this miracle in my hand that the Lord in His Grace has gifted to us—this perfect baby—I've never felt closer to God, and I also sat on the bathroom floor and cried for a real long time because I don't know how to raise this baby, and they sent it home with me like I'm supposed to know how to do this. You start off just holding that “both/and” that Don was talking about; and I think that just continues all throughout motherhood, is that role of just the highest highs of your life of getting to watch your kids thrive and watching them do what they love to do, watching them grow, and then also one of the most stressful things—feeling like you're not enough or feeling like they're falling short can be

incredibly challenging. I think the different seasons that we walk through also require different roles as mothers. We have boys in junior high and high school so there's a lot of discipline, correction, boundaries, and "putting off the bad putting on the good." But I also teach preschool and in preschool we talk a lot about who made you. And they'll say, "God made me", and what did he say when he made you? He said, "You were good." So you're constantly turning back to that reminder that his love for us is unconditional. You can never fall away from it. As parents, even though our love is flawed because we are flawed, our love is also unconditional. So whatever stage you're in; be it a difficult season, where you feel like all you're doing is disciplining, correcting, or making them feel like they're falling short, you want to just always couple that, no matter what season you're in, with you can never fall away from his love and you can never fall away from my love. Carol probably has the most wisdom on this she's been through the most seasons.

Carol: Well, I am in a different season. My children are adults and so I transitioned from that authority, even though I still am and attempting to control things (even though sometimes I still try because I'm an imperfect mom, don't forget that). But what this season has done for me as mother is it has given me an opportunity to transition to a time of mentoring and being a friend, an encourager, and hopefully and prayerfully to point my children to the Lord, which is something I've always wanted to do as a mom. I had an opportunity last night to come alongside my daughter and share in a night of remembrance of her sweet baby that's with Jesus right now, Micah Faith, and just worship with her and remember her. So there are treasures in this season of life. We're called empty nesters because our children are gone, but our hearts are never empty; they're always full. As a mother, our children are always right there with us, and it's a blessing.

Blair: Thank you Carol.

Jordan and Karen lead a Ministry at Harris Creek called Square One, and it's for first-time moms, which we would highly encourage anyone in that stage of life to be a part of. One of the really neat days that they have is when they have a panel come in, and they have a mom who is a stay-at-home mom, a mom who works part-time, and a mom who works full-time, and all three are faithfully following Jesus. All of them are walking in the gifts that God has given them. All of them are working full time—we know that. Yet, in a full-time occupation outside of the home, it can certainly bring challenges, as you are spinning a lot of plates. So I know that Don, you have worked outside the home, could you maybe speak to some of the challenges that that may bring?

Don: Sure. I just want to start by saying all moms are working moms and you will be for the rest of your life. Sometimes the roles definitely shift and change, but I've had the opportunity to stay home, I've worked part-time, I've worked full-time, and so I know there are challenges with every type of situation. But moms who are currently working outside the home I just want to tell you I know how it is to wake up early and try to get a load of laundry in, start the dishwasher or empty it, and to be you riding in the car to work and not really sure if you've got a dinner

planned; and how are you going to get everyone to soccer and choir or get the dress they need for the upcoming event? Sometimes there's Orthodontics thrown in there, or a sick child. There's just lots of factors at play in your day. I know you stay up late trying to make sure everything's ready for everybody, so I see that and I know that. I know that you are sometimes torn between wanting to do your job with excellence and heartily, and wanting to do that at home, and that sometimes those just don't work well together. So I just want to encourage you to lean in on the Lord with that. You can juggle a lot of things, you can do a lot of things, but you need him. You need his help to know what is most important. I would just say too I know sometimes you feel like as a mom you're not enough—you feel too stretched, and that's probably true—but with the Lord you are enough. I say if you lead with love for your family, that just covers so many things. If they know of your love they can be helpful and forgiving when you fall short. So a Scripture I wanted to highlight for us is a very well-known scripture. Proverbs 3:5-6, **Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.**

Blair: That is great, thank you. As we think about parenting and discipleship and how those hopefully kind of go hand-in-hand; Carol how have you seen those almost reflect the heart of God?

Carol: I'm going to stick with my theme of imperfection because as a mother, my desire is to reflect the heart of God, but we all know that God is perfect. He loves us unconditionally. He's steadfast. His mercies are new every morning. He is faithful. So as I think about reflecting his heart, first, I've got to spend time with him and know that he is God. Then I can only reflect what I'm looking at. I'm imperfect, and so I'm not going to reflect perfection, but I can reflect God's love, his grace, and his mercy to my children, and recognize that I will fail sometimes. There's a situation in 2Chronicles where King Jehoshaphat is facing this great multitude, and he says "I don't know what to do, but my eyes are on you Lord." As a mom, that's how I reflect, or try to reflect, the heart of God by looking at him first and seeking his guidance.

Karen: I love that. It makes me think of the example y'all probably heard that when you tell your kids, "The stove is hot don't touch it. The stove is hot. Hey, this is hot it's going to burn you if you touch it." Over and over again, "The stove is hot, don't touch the stove." Then they touch the stove and they're like, "That was hot it burned me." You know, shock and awe. And you're trying to train them, you need to trust me, I know what is best for you so I am trying to protect you and keep you from harm. In the same way, I feel like the Lord gives us his word, his beautiful word—this guide for our lives—and he says follow this, this is a better way. Yet, we sin, we touch the stove, and we're like "That did not go well for me." And he's like, "I know dummy, I told you right here in my word." But I think it's in his kindness that he lets us see that through raising our children. That perfect picture of how we must be seen by him. Of like, I couldn't love you more, but would you just trust me, would you just follow my word!

Blair: That's so good. There's a verse, I Corinthians 3:6 talks, Paul is saying, **“I planted the seed and Apollos watered it, but only God makes it grow.”** I know that all parents feel the weight—moms in particular I think, oftentimes— feel the weight of our children's spiritual growth, but we're called to plant and water. It's really amazing that we have a body and a church that comes alongside us, and that we're not left on our own, we're not here in isolation. So Jordan and Karen, you both—you know—we have children that are younger. Can you speak to maybe some of the unique challenges or just current challenges? And maybe how you've seen the church come alongside in that parenting and discipleship with you?

Jordan: Well first of all I would just say we acknowledge that parenting is hard. Being a mom is hard. I think that just like Karen mentioned, that if we are holding fast to God's word, his truth, and that is the foundation that we are building within our families and our household, that you then are going to be swimming upstream. You're going to send your kids out into a world where this is not what they are holding fast to, and what they know is true. That's really hard. I don't think that this is anything new, I think that parents for generations and generations have been called to live counter-culturally. I think that there are some unique challenges right now because with technology, with phones, and with social media— what sometimes we could protect our household from, now we have invited all of that in and there are some unique challenges to that. But that's where I am so grateful for the church. We have joked about often in our life group that we wish that when our kids were babies, we had just established all the hard fast rules of like, “You can be this age when you get your ears pierced, and this age when you get a phone, and this age when you're allowed to date.” And everybody was going to have the same set of rules, and that was just what we were going to do. But we were a little late on setting those boundaries. But I think that that's what the church is. That you are linking arms with people and you're all moving in the same direction, holding fast to the same truth. We have the opportunity within the church, to look forward to those that are ahead of us. I said that this is what Don and Carol are to me, where I can call out to them and say, “This is hard. What did you do here?” I have Karen and other ladies who are in my life group who are walking right alongside of me, and they can encourage me and remind me of the truths that are in God's word. Then I also have the opportunity to call back to people that are behind me. Maybe those are new moms, maybe those are young adults, maybe those are college students who have been brought to our city, and we have the opportunity to fill in gaps where maybe they haven't had someone to Shepherd them and to give them a role model. It is a ripple effect. Just this afternoon we are actually going to go right across the hall and celebrate the graduating seniors from Harris Creek. Blair and I have a graduating senior, but in our minds it's not just about celebrating Keeley today and all that she's done, but Blair and I are there to celebrate with the rest of the church that has come alongside of us; the people on the family team and the youth team who have spoken truth and life into Keeley's life, when we couldn't do it.

Karen: I love the church. I love the church so much. If the church is the people, which we believe that it is, we are broken and we are going to get it wrong. But even in our brokenness I just I just know we are better together. Community through the church has been the most impactful thing on our marriage and on our parenting. To be able to come to a group of people who love you and love your kids. Even if all you have in common is that they love you and they love your kids that's enough—well, and Jesus first and foremost. But to be able to come to them when we are in hard seasons when they say, “Hey, I know we read the books about not touching the stove, we prayed about not touching the stove, and we've told them every day of their whole lives not to touch the stove. But guess what? One of them has touched the stove and they have stepped into sin. So we're hurting and they're hurting. Here's what we've done. Here's how we've disciplined. Here's how we're loving them well. What do you think? Is that enough? Do we need to be doing more? What have you done in this situation?” And then going to God's word. Having people in that group that say, “Okay. Here's what God's word says about you as a parent, about them as God's child, and about their future.” Then to go to the Lord for wisdom, to pray together over that situation, over our child. I mean it is powerful. Just this week we had a family come to life group and they're talking about one of their kids just really struggling with anxiety, and we got to do that. We got to walk through those steps in that time that we met together. Even just saying the words out loud to a group of people brings it into the light and changes the situation. Because it is no more your own, it's everybody's there, and they get to bear that burden with you. I love C.S Lewis's quote when it's like, friendship is born out of someone sitting down next to you and saying, “What? You too? I thought I was the only one.” So the idea of not living in isolation is an incredible tool for your kids and for your family. Jordan was telling me a story just the other day about walking into church and I thought it was a great picture of what it looks like to either be a spectator or be a participant. She was walking with a friend, and the friend's sons are walking in in front of her and they've got their arms around her, just looking like two BFFs. So she's commenting like, “Look at your boys! That's incredible. What are you doing to instill this?” I think if you're just a spectator, if you're not in community, you don't have those people in your circle, you see that and that can lead to a ton of comparisons, like, “Well, what are they doing that I'm not doing? My kids never treat each other that way. And probably their house is always clean and she cooks three meals a day...” and you spiral to this unachievable goal. But that friend who knows and loves Jordan said, “Do not be fooled by what you see right here, they were punching each other this morning. So much so that I almost did not come to church because it was such a horrible morning at our house.” So she pulls back that curtain and says, “Hey we can struggle well together.” So I think the value of community is getting to share life together; the good, the bad, the ugly.

Blair: I love that, thank you. You guys can see the wisdom that that the Elders of the church get from home. You should know that with the idea, the Theology of Oneness, that the two become one, that there is nothing that we discuss in Elder meetings that we do not—that we would not—discuss with our spouses. So they speak into these things. They process these things with us. They pray through these things with us. I'm sure you can quickly tell that that's a win for Harris

Creek; that we get to benefit from them. So, if you could leave us maybe with one more thing. If there's one, word of admonishment or encouragement as you speak to the next generation, what would you want to leave with the body?

Don: Okay I just want to remind us that when Jesus was walking on the earth he had such a short time of life here in Ministry, but he did not turn children away, he welcomed them. Wes Stafford who was the former CEO of Compassion International said, "Every child you encounter is a Divine appointment." So, I just want to encourage all of you. We all have children in our lives. We have nieces, nephews, grandchildren, our own children, our children's friends, our neighbors, they're all around, so I'm just encouraging you to take a look at them, make time for them, ask them important questions, or encourage the people who work with them. Pray. We all need to help to raise this generation, and to join together.

Carol: I think praying is key. Each one of you here, whether you're a mom, a dad, a teenager, a child, a grandparent, single person, wherever you are in your stage of life, one of the things that you can do to contribute to the health of our younger generation into our church is to pray for one another. So Paul had some prayer in Ephesians that I love that I pray for my children and grandchildren and will pray for the next generation as well. Let me just share it with you real quick. And I'll give you the short version, "**And I pray that you will be rooted and established in love, may have power together with all the Lord's holy people to grasp how wide and long and the high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge**" (Ephesians 6:17-19). That we can pray for one another.

Karen: I chose Galatians 6:9, which says "**Let us not grow weary in doing good, for at the proper time you will reap the harvest if you do not give up.**" This actually became one of my favorite verses. Before I had kids and I was serving in student Ministries with a group of sixth grade girls, we were encouraged over and over by, "do not grow weary in doing good". Do not grow weary in doing good. So I think whether you are serving with kids, or you are shepherding a life group, or you are parenting, we are called to not grow weary in doing good. I know motherhood can sometimes be a thankless job. You do a lot of things that go unseen and unrecognized, but this verse reminds me that we will reap the benefits of that. Now whether that's soon or that's years down the road, or maybe it's when we are in heaven, but at some point we will see the fruit of that labor. That even if you feel unseen maybe in your own household, that the Lord sees you and he celebrates you.

Jordan: I chose Hosea 10:12. This is actually a verse that I started out praying for our church—for Harris Creek in the summer of 2018—but the more and more that I was praying it for the body of our church, it kind of became a prayer for myself, and then an extension of a prayer for our family. And it says, "**Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap steadfast love; break up your fallow ground, for it is the time to seek the Lord, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you.**" And my own abbreviated version of that is, "Plow deep, pray hard, and prepare for rain."

Blair: I love it. Thank you for the role that you play in the church. Thank you for being wonderful moms. To the body, thank you for the role that you play in the church and thank you for being wonderful moms. For everybody who is watching today, Happy Mother's Day. It has been incredible to hear from all of you. Jordan would you close us in prayer?

Jordan: Would you bow with me? Dear heavenly father, we thank you for a day to celebrate moms, that of all the ways that you could have created to bring life into this Earth, that that's the way that you chose to do it Lord. We thank you for that. Lord we know that even the four of us sitting up here, that we cannot empathize with everybody's story. We know that there are stories of great loss and great grief, and we also know that there is great joy and great celebration. Lord we can't understand all that everyone in this room is experiencing, but Lord we acknowledge that you can, and that you can meet every single person where they are. Lord we just pray that today you will be each of our hope, and that we will look to you, for nurturing, and for encouragement. Lord we pray that you will be that to every person in this room, and pray for all of us as we celebrate the moms in our lives, whether that is by birth or by people that have influenced us in that way, Lord. We pray, that ultimately, the influence that we have as humble servants of you Lord, that it will continue to give people a correct opinion of who you are first and foremost. We ask these things in Jesus' name, Amen.