

From woman to woman...

# **Mothers-in-law and Daughters-in-law**

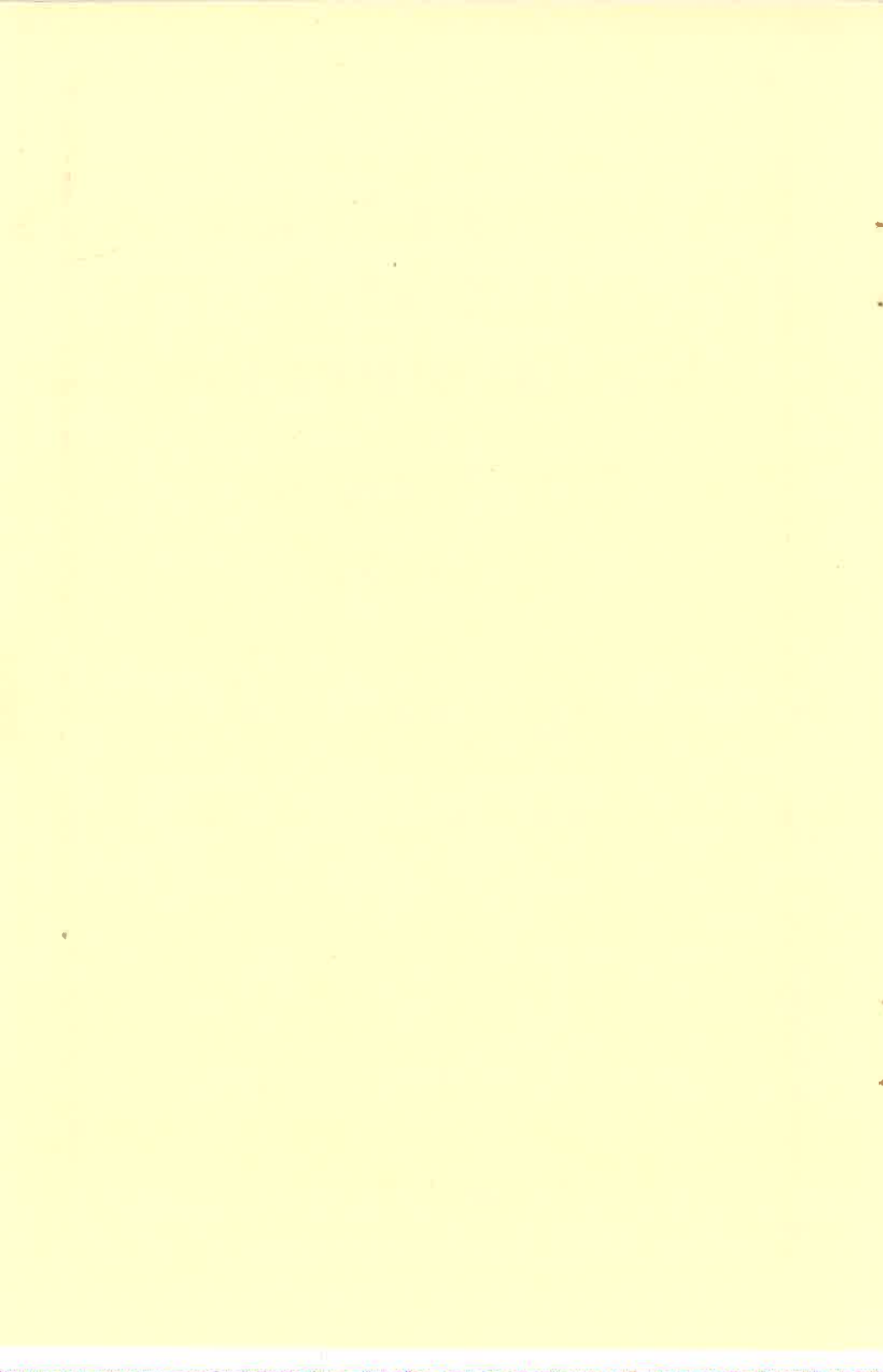
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## **Can They Be Friends?**



**Margaret Elliott**



## Can They be Friends?

As Jean walked across the parking lot toward the people waiting for the van to take them home from work, she saw that everyone was listening to one man. Then they all laughed. Again he spoke briefly, followed by more laughter. When she was closer she called, "What's going on?"

"Oh, Jack is telling his latest mother-in-law jokes," replied George.

"Yeah," added Sally, "but the funniest part is that he must know my mother-in-law. He describes her perfectly."

What kind of mother-in-law are you? What kind of daughter-in-law are you? When a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law get together it many times spells trouble, conflict and misery. At least that's the story that is going around. Are not mother-in-law jokes all too true? Do any of the following stories come too close to home?

Elsie opposed the marriage of her son to Mary. The young couple went ahead and got married anyway. Elsie acts as if Mary is incapable of providing for the daily needs of her new husband. Elsie calls on the phone every day to check on what Mary is doing. When she comes over for a visit she criticizes how the apartment looks and rearranges the furniture. She never has a kind word or a compliment.

Rosemary is upset because her husband spends so much time with his mother, Myra. Rosemary wants him to limit his visits and spend more time with her and the children. Myra, who had been accustomed to seeing her son daily before he married Rosemary, insists that he should continue the practice. She declares that a mother has priority over a wife in the attentions of the son.

Isabel continually checks on the health of her son. She thinks her daughter-in-law, Jo Ann, doesn't know how to cook his food properly. She frequently, without any warning, sends over his favorite meals prepared and she expects that they be eaten regardless of the preparations that her daughter-in-law has already made.

Betty is upset with her mother-in-law because she allows the kids to watch anything they want to on TV when they are at her house. Sometimes the kids run next door to Grandma's house without permission because she gives them candy and soda between meals. Relations between Betty and her mother-in-law are strained.

Dora has been a difficult mother-in-law to get along with because of her bossiness. When she visits the young couple she tells them how to do everything and dominates all the conversations. Matters got even

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worse when her son and daughter-in-law announced that they were expecting a baby. Dora immediately had all kinds of advice to give and she calls every day to make sure Judy is following it. Dora talks continually about "her baby" and is making all kinds of plans for what she is going to do with "her baby." She even hints strongly that if it is a boy it should be given the name of her little boy who died in infancy.

Matilda's marriage was a failure ending in divorce. When her son married Grace, Matilda was very jealous of their happiness. She takes every opportunity to say that their marriage won't last long. When she sees her son alone, she uses the occasion to criticize and tear down Grace. When she is with Grace alone, she talks about all the other girlfriends her son had before he married and about all the pretty girls who work in his office.

Alice so completely disapproves of her daughter-in-law that she refuses to have anything to do with her. She insists that her son come to visit her alone. When Betty tries to be friendly and call her on the phone, Alice hangs up and won't talk.

Because she is a widow with insufficient income to live alone, Hilda has come to live with her son and daughter-in-law and their 3 children. Usually they get along fairly well, except when Hilda interferes with the discipline of the children. She thinks her son, daughter-in-law are too harsh and always defends the child being punished. As a result the kids run to grandma for sympathy. On the other hand, Margaret expects her mother-in-law to baby-sit whenever she has errands to run or meetings to attend. She does not consult with her mother-in-law to see if it is convenient but assumes she is always available.

Nancy has a loving, pleasant mother-in-law, but during Nancy's childhood her own mother always worked outside their home and often travelled, leaving her with a nurse-maid. When she was home she made promises she didn't keep and almost daily told Nancy she was too busy to be bothered with her childish problems. Because of these experiences Nancy cannot accept that another mother could be genuine. She is cool and aloof when her mother-in-law comes to visit in her home and seldom goes to see her mother-in-law even with her husband.

Elvira is the clinging vine type. Since her mother lives too far away to see her often, she runs over to see her mother-in-law in the next block two or three times a day. Elvira is insecure and afraid. She wants her mother-in-law to do everything for her and make all her decisions.

Mae and Alexandra have opposite approaches to life. Mae, the mother-in-law, is easy-going, keeps a moderately neat house and is always ready to drop everything to do something else. Alexandra, on the other hand, is rigid in her thinking, lives by a strict schedule and keeps such a neat, perfect house that it is more like a museum than a home. Each is trying to change the other to be like herself. This has created conflict between them.

Because affordable housing is not available, a mixture of in-laws and other relatives are living together under the same roof. There are conflicts over who is head of the house, how the house bills are to be paid, the division of space and responsibilities for each family unit, lack of privacy, and the discipline of the children.

Jan is ashamed of her mother-in-law, Josephine, because she is sloppy in her dress, speaks English with an accent, and isn't up on the latest manners. Josephine has a friendly, warm manner with everyone and insists that she should be included in all the gatherings that Jan plans in her home. Jan feels that her mother-in-law doesn't fit in and should stay in the kitchen if she shows up unannounced.

Patty and her husband had to bring his mother home to live with them because his father died and his mother couldn't make ends meet on her Social Security check. It has created a big upheaval and there are dozens of adjustments that everyone needs to make. There are days when Patty doesn't know if she can stand the situation another minute.

Hazel and her mother-in-law, Joan, are members of different churches which teach different doctrines. Both of them have difficulty discussing their respective churches without getting into a verbal fight. Both are absolutely sure their church is the right one.

Miriam loves to give parties and she expects her daughter-in-law and son to attend them. However, the young couple have become Christians and don't want to take part in parties where there is drinking and dancing.

Virginia and her husband are having a real struggle to make ends meet and provide the essentials of life for their growing family. In spite of this, John continues to give his mother money when she asks for it. This has made their financial situation worse and created conflict between Virginia and John as well as causing Virginia to be angry with her mother-in-law.

Does it have to be this way? Do mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law have to make life difficult for one another? Let me tell you a story I read.

### The Ideal In-law Story

There was a mother-in-law living in a foreign country. She had not one but two daughters-in-law living with her. What a situation! All three of them had something in common, however, for all their husbands had died. The custom of the day was for daughters-in-law to become servants after the death of their husbands. But this mother-in-law did not choose to treat them so. She considered them daughters.

As time passed, this mother-in-law began to think of her home country and especially her home town with great longing. She had come to the foreign country with her husband and two sons because times were so hard at home. There had been no rain for ever so long and crops had failed. However, over in a neighboring country there was food. The decision was made. Even though it had at times been an enemy country to their beloved land, they had moved. They hadn't seen any other way to survive.

She thought back over the difficulties of the resettlement, the differences of language, the strange customs, and the idolatry of the people that they met when they arrived. How she had longed to return home to her own people! Then tragedy struck. Her husband died. For ten years her grief was comforted in her two sons. They had married girls from this foreign land but she had accepted that. What now seemed more than she could bear was that both of her sons had also died, leaving her with two foreign daughters-in-law.

The three women living alone had difficulty making a living. They had a roof over their heads but the continuing problem was to have food on the table. The more she thought about it the more she wanted to go back home. Her relatives would surely remember her and help her. The news from her home town was good. There would be a bountiful harvest this year.

But she had a problem. She couldn't just pack up and leave. What would she do with her two daughters-in-law? Certainly they would not want to leave their town, their homeland, all that was familiar to them since their birth. She could free them from any obligation to her and send them back to their families. But that might not work out. They might be very unhappy as young widows in their fathers' houses.

Besides they were like daughters to her. How could she part with them?

So it was decided. The three women packed a few belongings. They left the house and began walking down the road toward the land of Judah. It would be a long, hard journey, through wilderness land to get around the Dead Sea, through hill country to get to Bethlehem. Walking, it would take many days, possibly a week or more to get there.

As they walked along in the hot sun, the mother-in-law still felt uneasy about her decision to bring her daughters-in-law along. Suddenly she stopped and turned to them, saying with much emotion, "Daughters, go back to your mothers' homes. You have been wonderful wives to my sons and good daughters-in-law to me. I'm sure God will reward that kindness. May He give you new husbands. You are still young." Then she kissed them as she wept.

Both the younger women wept also for they loved their mother-in-law. They had suffered much together. "No, no," they said, "We will go with you to live in your land."

But the older woman continued persuading them, "Why do you want to go with me? My daughters, go on back home. I am too old to have another husband and to give birth to more sons for you to marry. Even if there was such a hope, you would not be willing to wait so long. You are young and I am old. There is hope for you but not for me. The hand of God has gone against me."

The women wept together over the sadness of the situation and over the husbands they had all lost. They wept, too, over the idea of parting from a mother-in-law and from daughters-in-law whom they had learned to love.

For one daughter-in-law perhaps there was a feeling of relief and gratitude that her mother-in-law understood. She did not need to be persuaded more. She kissed her mother-in-law good-bye and turned back toward her village, her people and all she had known in the past.

But the other daughter-in-law did not want to go with the one who was leaving. She loved her mother-in-law more than her background, more than her own blood relatives. As her mother-in-law tried to persuade her to go back too, she clung to her, speaking from her heart. "Don't insist that I leave you or turn my back on you. I want to go where you go and stay where you stay. I want your people and your God to be my people and my God. I will stay with you as long as I

live. If anything but death ever separates us, I hope Jehovah will deal severely with me.”

When the mother-in-law heard these strong words she knew it would be no use to continue to try to persuade her otherwise. So together the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law continued their journey until they reached Bethlehem.

If the story ended there it would be beautiful, but it goes on. Ruth, the daughter-in-law, cared for Naomi, her mother-in-law, accepted and followed her advice, gained a reputation of being good and kind though a foreigner, and showed herself a diligent worker. The good things being told about Ruth around the town came to the ears of Boaz, one of Naomi's kinsmen. He showed Ruth favor and made arrangements to marry her, but Ruth never forgot her mother-in-law by her first marriage. Ruth, a Gentile, thus became an ancestor of our Lord Jesus. (See Ruth 4:13-22; Matthew 1:1-17)

The story of Ruth and Naomi is an ideal in-law story. How can we translate this delightful story of long ago into modern day reality?

### **How Did They Make It Work?**

If you are a mother-in-law, consider the outstanding characteristics of Naomi the mother-in-law.

She accepted her daughters-in-law as they were even though she probably wished that her sons could have been back home to choose wives from among their own people. She accepted these foreign girls who probably spoke her language with an accent, who had grown up with other customs, and who worshipped other gods, into her home and called them “daughter.” This could have been a miserable situation for all of them but Naomi made it work. She may even have been heart-sick over the choices of her sons, but she determined to accept what she could not change.

She must have established a good relationship with her daughters-in-law for them to desire to stay with her when she released them from their obligation. According to the custom of the day, widows became servants in the house of their in-laws, but Naomi, the mother-in-law treated them as daughters and called them by that honored name. The tears shed by them all when she was persuading them to return to their mothers' homes shows the depth of love they shared.



She demonstrated her kindness toward her daughters-in-law by realizing that they would probably be happier if they went back to their own people and customs rather than with her into a strange land. In many ways it would have been easier for her to keep them with her as consolation for her grief and poverty. They were closer to her than the people she had left behind many years before. They understood what she had suffered and had suffered with her. But with love and kindness she tried to send them back.

She held no bitterness toward them for not bearing children while their husbands were living, nor did she blame them for the death of her sons. Nor was she bitter toward Orpah for deciding to return to her father's house.

She had a good influence over their lives by her example or by her teaching. The name of Jehovah God must have come frequently from her lips. If not, why would Ruth be so ready to make Naomi's God her God? Naomi must have been a godly woman. She was a woman of good influence.

She must have had a good relationship with Ruth, her daughter-in-law, because they lived together in the same possibly small house, talked together, travelled together, with no record of major friction. This relationship stayed strong throughout their recorded lives, even into Ruth's second marriage.

She gave advice wisely, being concerned for her daughter-in-law's welfare. She counseled Ruth where to work and about the customs of this foreign land into which her daughter-in-law had come. She saw that Ruth was impressed by Boaz and would willingly follow her advice. She wished the best for Ruth and advised her to that end.

If you are a daughter-in-law, look at the characteristics of the daughters-in-law.

Imagine the nervousness and fear of two foreign girls being brought into the home of strangers as wives of their sons. Apparently they accepted their position of being under the authority of their in-laws for they showed respect for their mother-in-law and respect for her God.

They respected and obeyed the decisions of their mother-in-law when she made plans to take them back to her homeland.

Their mother-in-law testifies to their kindness both to their husbands and to her. They were apparently girls of gentle and thoughtful natures.

Ruth showed a willingness to sacrifice her desire to be with her own mother and father in order to be with her mother-in-law. It seems that she had learned to love and feel closer to her than to her own blood relations. When the two of them do arrive in Bethlehem, the daughter-in-law was willing to put aside any fear of strangers or pride in order to go out among the gleaners to work hard to secure grain for her mother-in-law and herself to be able to eat. She did not expect Naomi to do the work but accepted the position of one who serves. Because of her attitude and work she gained a good reputation among the strangers where she had come to live.

Ruth recognized the good qualities of her mother-in-law. Her beautiful speech of pleading and dedication to Naomi, her people and her God express her great love, respect, and recognition of these good qualities. If Naomi had been an unpleasant, difficult person to live with, Ruth had the perfect opportunity to escape from her when Naomi tried to send her to her mother's home. Even when she heard her mother-in-law's bitter words of desolation when they arrived in Bethlehem, Ruth did not turn away with hurt feelings. She could understand how Naomi felt for she had suffered loss also. Instead of returning bitterness for bitterness, she determined to be a true friend as well as a daughter-in-law to Naomi. She recognized that Naomi needed her. Later the town's women said to Naomi, "Your daughter-in-law who loves you is better to you than seven sons."

Ruth, who was born and reared among an idol-worshipping people, came to understand who the true God was through the influence of Naomi. She was willing to leave what she had known and to follow Naomi's God, and she even called Him as her witness that what she promised her mother-in-law was true. She had come to realize that Jehovah was more powerful than the idols of her youth.

Ruth listened to the advice of her mother-in-law because she recognized that her mother-in-law had more knowledge and experience upon which to base her advice. Her mother-in-law was able to clue her into the customs and practices of this strange land into which she had come to live. Because she followed her good advice, Ruth was able to marry a second time, this time to a man of standing in his town. Through this marriage Ruth became the great-grandmother of the famous king David and an ancestor of Jesus Christ himself.

Ruth accepted her position as a servant to her mother-in-law. Even when Naomi was no longer her mother-in-law after her second

marriage, she did not abandon her but took her into her home. She allowed Naomi to be thrilled over the birth of her son and to have a part in caring for him. It seems that she did not express jealousy over the joyous attention that was given her former mother-in-law when her son was born. She must have realized the ache that had been Naomi's over the fact that her own sons had never been able to produce sons. Now that ache had been soothed.

Because this mother-in-law and daughter-in-law showed mutual concern and respect for one another, showed kindness toward each other, were willing to sacrifice for one another, and recognized the good in each other, they have been known internationally in many languages over the centuries.

Their story can be your story too. It takes patience, cooperation, adjustments, effort and time on the part of both in order to create a good relationship. Maybe your mother-in-law does not think she needs to change but you can be the one to begin changing yourself, daughter-in-law. Perhaps your daughter-in-law thinks all the fault is yours, so you, mother-in-law, can do some self-examination and start making efforts toward a happier association. Try the hints that follow. They have worked for others. They can work for you too.

### Hints for Mothers-in-law

1. Cut the apron strings that you have tied around your son. From the time a child is born, the parents should begin preparing themselves for the day when they have to let go of their authority over him. When your son becomes engaged, you should use the time until the wedding to become dis-engaged. Accept the fact that your son is now an adult, not your little darling. Matthew 19:5 tells you that you can no longer be Number One in his life. He now has a wife. Don't think that you are losing your son; rather, consider that you are gaining a daughter. Don't make your son's life miserable by having a tug of war with his wife for his affection and attention. If you wish them true happiness, you will want to see their relationship work.

2. Accept your daughter-in-law as she is. Don't expect to make her over in your own image. Accept her right to be different. Just because you are older, don't think that your way is the best way. Don't take over the kitchen or rearrange the furniture when you visit them. Our daughter-in-law and I have a very congenial arrangement when we visit

their home. She remains the queen of her kitchen, plans and cooks the meals. She very thoughtfully takes into consideration my special dietary requirements. When a meal is over, I take over the job of cleaning up the kitchen.

3. Resolve differences with love. You can love your daughter-in-law because God commands us to love. Love her because your son loves her and love her as a new daughter. It's up to you to decide to love and work toward that end. Be willing to admit when you were wrong or have overstepped your position. Allow room for differences of background, age, and personality. Love your daughter-in-law, but don't smother-love either her or your son.

4. Enumerate and concentrate on your daughter-in-law's good points. Look for ways you can honestly compliment her. Tell her sincerely, "I love you and I'm glad you are a part of our family."

5. Make kindness the cornerstone of your words and actions toward your daughter-in-law. Avoid critical remarks to her directly or to your son about her. Refuse to gossip with others about her.

6. Respect your son and daughter-in-law's right to privacy. Don't be over helpful. Let them live their own lives. Don't demand or expect daily visits or phone calls. Don't be a nosy, busybody who thinks you have to know everything about what your daughter-in-law and your son are doing or planning to do. And don't try to include them in all of your plans. Don't play the martyr when you are not included in their activities. Feeling neglected? Without spite or vengeful feelings toward your son and daughter-in-law, look for others who are in need of your love and care.

7. Don't give advice unless asked. Then give ideas very carefully and leave it up to them. Giving advice does not give you the right to keep tabs on what is happening as time goes along. Let them make their own decisions and let them make their own mistakes. Your advice may not be the best. You could even be wrong.

8. Refuse to take sides when your son and daughter-in-law have a disagreement. Above all, refuse to listen to tales brought to you by either one. If they need counsel, send them to someone in whom they can have confidence to give help. It is the rare in-law who can give impartial advice. If you say anything, let it be to encourage the good points of their relationship.

9. Don't gossip about your daughter-in-law or son. Gossip is wrong at any time; but especially in this relationship, if your words get back to them, they could cause almost irreparable damage. Build an open, trusting relationship.

10. Don't be tempted to provide money and things "to help the poor kids out." You will insult the bread-winner's manhood. He wants to provide for his own wife. If "the kids" come to you for a loan, be very careful that it is for a real necessity. Remember that loans among relatives can be a miserable source of friction, misunderstanding and hard feelings.

11. When grandchildren come along, respect the parents' rules but don't lower your standards when they are in your care. Insist on obedience but don't try to remake them or you will be resented. Remember that the grandchildren are not your children. Don't try to take over their upbringing against the parents' will. Be willing to babysit from time to time but don't allow the parents to take advantage of you as an automatic full-time baby-sitter. Raising children is the parents' responsibility.

12. Pray for your daughter-in-law and for yourself. Share your faith in God at appropriate moments. If she is a Christian, this gives you both a good basis for working out your difficulties. If she is not a Christian, don't be afraid to share Jesus with her but don't pressure her. Remember that your actions and attitudes will tell her what being a Christian means. (1 Peter 3:15,16)

### **Hints for Daughters-in-law**

1. Be a daughter to your husband's parents. When you married, you took them to be a part of your family. Call them "Mom" and "Dad." It is never too late to start. Do your part to help them feel comfortable with you, a person whom they personally did not invite to be a part of the family.

2. Love your mother-in-law for who she is. Concentrate on her good qualities and remember that to a degree she made your husband what he is. She could be responsible for both his good traits and bad. However, don't hold anything you don't like about your husband against her. Remember that you both love him. Accept the fact that she is not just like your own mother.

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3. Seek her advice carefully, but make your own decisions. Ask for her help. She will be happy to share family traditions or her son's favorite recipe. Remember she has many years of experience and may be able to share some wisdom or hints on child raising or housekeeping. It doesn't mean you have to do everything she says.

4. Take criticism as a Christian, gracefully. Think it over honestly. Learn what to take to heart and what to ignore. Thank her and prayerfully consider the more serious criticisms without getting overly emotional. Learn to laugh together about some things. For example: if you are short, how can you see the dust on top of the refrigerator?

5. Always be respectful even though she may be uneducated, uncouth and interfering. Recognize superstition and ignorance, but do not ever make fun of her for it. 1 Peter 2:17 tells us to honor (respect) all people.

6. Be firm about not allowing interference in your life and with the children. Include your mother-in-law in your life, but not to excess. If you live far away, be sure to write regularly and remember special days.

7. Never gossip *with* her, especially about your husband. And don't gossip *about* her to others, no matter what she does.

8. Return good for evil. If she is bossy, opinionated, interfering, unpleasant, and causes trouble, treat her with love. Christians are commanded to love their enemies. (Luke 6:27,28) Learn how to avoid being hurt. For example, if she can't keep a secret, don't tell her things you don't want spread around. Pray for her. Don't make your husband's life miserable by complaining to him about his mother.

9. Study her likes and dislikes. Try to find ways to please her. Admire, concentrate on, and compliment her good qualities.

10. Invite your mother-in-law to visit. If she comes and tries to take over, allow her to do some cooking and helping around the house, but be firm about her not doing everything. If necessary, have a loving, frank talk about limits. Enjoy the help. Some women are not comfortable unless they are helping. Never make her feel she is in the way. Allow her to take joy in helping. Make her feel useful but not obligated. If she doesn't help, don't be offended or make her feel she is lazy. Don't argue over unimportant things like how to set the table or the best way to clean the house. When she is in your home, allow her to help. When you are in her home, do things her way.

11. Don't expect her to be an automatic baby sitter; but do let her enjoy her grandchildren.

12. Be aware of her needs, both physical and spiritual, taking into consideration her special personality. Do what you can to fulfill those needs without being over-bearing. This is especially true if she is widowed or elderly. Preserve her dignity. Allow her to be herself. If she tends to be too dependent, with love, firmly insist that she do what she can for herself. Assure her of your loving concern at all times by the things you do for her and your frequent verbal expressions of love.

13. Pray for her. Pray for yourself. Share your faith in God with her. Have patience. If she is not a Christian, you may be God's instrument to bring her to Christ. (1 Peter 3:15,16)

### **What to Do When Your Widowed Mother/Mother-in-law Must Move in With You**

Never make her feel you are over-burdened with her presence in your home. Remember it is a privilege to have an extended family. Make her feel comfortable, cared for and wanted as a part of the family. Think of what it will be like when your children have to care for you some day.

1. Daughter-in-law (or daughter), confer with your husband and agree on some basic rules that you need to establish for the good of everyone. Consider the need for privacy and agree on how to provide as much as possible for everyone.

2. Next, the two of you get together with the mother/mother-in-law, but out of the hearing of your children, to discuss how to work things out. Establish areas of responsibility, privileges and taboos from everyone's standpoint, including the grandchildren. To prevent hard feelings, establish a system and/or schedule of the distribution of household tasks and responsibilities agreed on by the three of you together. If necessary, post the agreement. If your husband does not see the necessity of such a get-together, have a conference with your mother/mother-in-law for a frank discussion preceded by prayer.

3. The son/son-in-law is head of the home, not the mother/mother-in-law. The couple are not 2 children living at home. All of you are adults with rights, responsibilities and privileges. All of you must recognize

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and respect this relationship as adults. Treat one another the way you want to be treated.

4. The couple should make all their decisions in private. Any difference of opinion should be ironed out by the two of you privately. Allow mother to also make her own decisions as long as she is able. Don't take over her life just because she has to live with you.

5. Arrange a time for you and your husband to be at home alone and a time for your mother/mother-in-law to have her time alone also. Be sure she feels free to have her friends over to the house.

6. Have both separate activities outside the home and things that the entire family can do together, just as you would if you lived separately. Don't check up on one another's comings and goings, but for safety sake, it is a good idea for the family members who are leaving the house, to say where they are going and when they expect to return. Everyone should be courteous about calling if possible when plans change or they will be late. Be considerate of one another's feelings and possible inconveniences.

7. If at all possible, the mother/mother-in-law should have her own transportation. This can make the world of difference in the freedom that everyone can have. If, however, it is not possible, be considerate of one another's needs and time.

8. Don't permit Grandma to interfere with the discipline of the children. She must not by word or action show the children that she is on "their side." The children are to love and respect their grandmother, but make them understand that they are not to go to her for sympathy or counsel against their parents. Any discussion of the children by the adults should be done out of the hearing of the children. Use the opportunity to teach your children to be loving and caring, as well as to appreciate and respect the elderly.

9. Don't expect Grandma to be an automatic baby sitter, but do allow her the privilege once in a while if she wants to do it. Remember that Grandma's health may prevent her from doing it even though she wants to very much.

(NOTE: Don't move in with your parents/in-laws except in the most extreme emergency. It is better for a young family to do with less or do without than to move in with Mom and Dad. If you must move in, be sure to respect the fact that it is her/his/their home, not yours.)



### Special Addendum For Latin America

The poverty in much of Latin America sometimes makes it necessary for several related families to live together in the same house or compound-style situation. For example, a father and mother may be living with several of their married children, or a couple may be living with both his and her parents. As many as four generations might be living on the same property. Such circumstances present some special and frequently difficult situations. Romans 12:18 tells us to live at peace with all men as much as we can. Here are some suggestions that may help you to do this.

1. Ask for a family conference to determine who is the head of the total group. Most appropriately, the father of the extended family would be the head to make the final decisions that affect the group as a whole. Even if it is not possible to have a group meeting, remember that within your own room or apartment, your husband is the head of your immediate family unit. The Bible teaches that when you marry you are to leave father and mother (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5). Leaving entails becoming a separate household with a separate head even if you are just moving to a separate roof over your heads only a short distance from your parents.

2. There should be an agreement, written if necessary, as to how the rent, lights, and water bills will be paid. It must be determined what is each family unit's share and who will be responsible for gathering the funds from each family unit and for paying the bills.

3. Try if at all possible to have your own stove, water storage, sink, and clothes lines. If this is not possible, ask for a family conference so that the schedule of sharing these things can be settled. Include, if necessary, the collection of water, who will dispose of the garbage, the cleaning of the common area, and a schedule of who will watch the house. The schedule, agreed on by all involved, should be posted.

4. Have an understanding about others not interfering with the discipline of your children and you not interfering with theirs. Be calm and objective when your child or children have a conflict with the children of another family unit.

5. Insist that your room or apartment is to be respected. Anyone not living in that room must knock and get permission before entering and must never borrow anything from it without asking permission. Have the same rule for your family toward the others.

6. Try to come to an agreement in a family meeting about the volume of radios, televisions and tape players. Be sure you respect others' rights in this, even if they don't respect yours.

7. Make it a personal rule not to get involved in the personal affairs of other family units. Ask others to please not interfere with your family unit's affairs.

8. Apply the golden rule in all of your attitudes and actions: Treat others the way you want to be treated. If others don't follow Christian ways, pray for them and accept their actions as a form of persecution. (Matthew 5:9-12; 38-48)

9. Make every possible effort to plan for the day when you can move into your own house or apartment, away from the present situation.

10. Pray daily for the others, for yourself, and for the whole situation.

### **Yes, They Can Be Friends**

Not all mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law have difficulty getting along. There are daughters-in-law who love their mother-in-law as their own mother. Some are very grateful to have another "mother", one in whom they can confide and look to for counsel. There are daughters-in-law who have learned to cope with difficult mothers-in-law. There are mothers-in-law who have developed a working relationship in place of a battle ground with their daughters-in-law. There are mothers-in-law who are delighted to have a "daughter" who is her son's life companion. There are mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law who have overcome the barriers between themselves with love, kindness and patience.

Mothers-in-law do not have to be the brunt of jokes. Daughters-in-law do not have to be martyrs. It is time to make life more pleasant for both. Mother-in-law, do you want to be hated or loved? Dreaded or wanted? Daughter-in-law, do you want to be disliked or enjoyed? To be an irritation or a blessing? Today, both of you should make an honest assessment of your own actions and attitudes. Let's remake disagreeable mothers-in-law and angry daughters-in-law into loving, accepting people.

Can mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law be friends? Remember the examples of Ruth and Naomi. It is up to you to make the effort. It takes work, consideration, kindness, love, self-control, acceptance, patience and prayer. Start today. ■■■■■

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