

Motherhood - In a Variety of Settings

Mother's Day

Selected Scripture

Introduction

Several people have e-mailed me lists of lessons learned from our mothers – lessons with a humorous twist. Here are a few of them:

- My mother taught me the value of a clean home when she told my brother and me, "Listen, if you're going to kill each other, do it outside; I just finished cleaning."
- My mother taught me the value of passionate prayer when she said, "You'd better pray that it will come out of the carpet."
- My mother taught me logic when she said, "If you fall out of that swing and break your neck, you're not going to the store with me later."
- My mother taught me about consequences when she warned, "You keep on crying, and I'll give you something to really cry about." You probably heard that one growing up . . . and I'll bet you tell your kids the same thing now!

How about these:

- My mother taught me about the circle of life when she said, "Listen, I brought you into this world, and I can take you out of it."
- My mother encouraged me to learn contortionism when she said, "Will you look at all that dirt on the back of your neck?" or "Didn't you see all that dirt in your ears?"
- My mother taught me that love has boundaries when she said, "When that lawn

mower cuts off your toes, don't come running to me."

- My mother taught me the value of stamina and perseverance when she said, "You will sit there until all that spinach is gone."

I can identify with that! You probably can, too!

My mother taught me that same kind of stamina. Many a night I would be left at the dinner table with squash or peas or some other product of a fallen earth – proof that the earth is groaning for redemption. There those vegetables would sit on my plate, having grown cold and even more horrid. I would be told I could not leave the table until they were *gone!* What do you mean by *gone?* I would store my peas under the rim of the plate – mash them under the rim – and then get up and volunteer to rinse off the dishes. My mother told me many years later that the way she solved this problem with my three brothers and me was to buy clear glass plates. That fixed *that!* And all these years I thought she just liked glass plates.

We all must have learned well from our mothers because we are now repeating these lessons to our children.

This is a day especially for you, moms – for having to put up with all of us!

- You are underpaid, undervalued, and taken for granted;
- You can never call in sick, choose the first shift, or ask for weekends off;
- You are the one your children call for when they are sick or hurt or throwing up – they never call for Dad;

- You are never *not* a mom – ever again; once you are a mom, you are in it for life and you are giving it your all.

I love the realism in the story I read, in which two ministerial students in Birmingham, Alabama, were doing summer evangelistic work in a rural area near Montgomery. One hot day they stopped in front of a farmhouse and proceeded up the path through an array of screaming children and barking dogs. When they knocked on the screen door, the woman of the house stopped her scrubbing at the sink, brushed back some stray hair, and asked them what they wanted.

“We would like to tell you how you can have eternal life,” one student answered.

The tired homemaker hesitated for a moment and then responded, “That’s kind of you, but I don’t believe I could stand it!”

If you are a mother, then you understand the meaning of the phrase, “The days are long but the years are short.”

Is that not true? The days are long – especially if your children are small and demanding, and you are on twenty-four hour shifts.

- You have mastered taking a nap standing up;
- You wear baby lotion as if it were your newest perfume;
- You graciously put off buying that set of silverware and china in favor of a car seat that morphs into a stroller that morphs into a high chair that morphs into a bunk bed (maybe not!);
- You have learned how to awaken, not by an alarm clock, but by a monitor which has replaced the alarm clock – and you can hear every whimper;
- And . . . you have learned to *never* leave home without Cheerios!

Be encouraged, Mom; the days – and nights – are long, but the years are short.

Before you know it you are standing at the ironing board, not over a pile of little jeans outfits or ruffled dresses or tiny flannel shirts, but over a graduation gown – and a tuxedo shirt for the wedding.

Yes, the days were long . . . but the years were short, after all.

We can never adequately say thank you for the million things you do! It is the hardest job on the planet – and the rest of the planet hardly notices.

One seminary professor said that when his wife was at home full time with their young children and someone would ask her, rather condescendingly, “And what is it that *you* do, my dear?” she would respond, “I am training two Homo sapiens with the dominant values of the Judeo-Christian tradition in order that they might be instruments of transformation in the world toward that eschatological plan God willed from the beginning of creation.” Then she would ask them, “And what do *you* do?”

If you have a godly mom or you are fortunate enough to be married to one, then you understand the truth of the following attributes. A godly mother:

- teaches more lessons on character than she ever will on fashion;
- relates the activity of a child’s life to the word of God, more than to the latest magazine or celebrity or talk-show host or hostess;
- challenges a child to pursue the approval and pleasure of God over and above the approval of man and the pleasures of life;
- is more interested in teaching a child that the greatest treasures on earth are not discovered in earthly things but eternal things.

If you had a godly mom, she probably taught you how to cry softly, and why you must pray continually, and that you will be required at times to stand alone.

I cannot tell you the depth of joy it gives me as a father to hear my wife reinforcing these things above everything to our children – three of whom are now college-age and above.

It has been a long time since Marsha ironed little ruffled dresses and tiny flannel shirts. In fact, she is looking forward to never ironing again!

However, each time we brought our sons home from college at the end of the year, they brought piles of . . . what? Laundry!

I suggested, “Charge ’em a dollar a shirt!”

Their mom wouldn’t think of it.

If you are like me, growing up in a godly home, you might have come in contact with this same little phrase that burned its way into your mind and heart. It might not have made much of a statement of classy décor but in the home where I grew up, over the door that led outside, a wooden plaque sat perched on top of the doorframe. It read,

Only one life, 'twill soon be past;

Only what's done for Christ will last.

What did you learn at home growing up . . . what did your mom teach you?!

In a book by Eugene Peterson, subtitled, *Growing Up with Your Teenager*, he writes,

A search of scripture turns up one rather surprising truth; there are no exemplary families. Not one single [nuclear] family is portrayed in Scripture in such a way so as to evoke admiration in us. There are many family stories, there is considerable reference to family life, and there is sound counsel to guide the growth of families, but not a single model family for anyone to look up to in either awe or envy. [Maybe that's why God left it out].

Adam and Eve are no sooner out of the garden than their children get into a fight. The sons of Noah are forced to devise a strategy to hide their father's drunken shame. Jacob and Esau are bitter rivals and sow seeds of discord that bear centuries of bitter harvest. David is a man after God's own heart and Israel's greatest king, but he cannot manage his own household.ⁱ

It's all true . . . and more.

It is even more fascinating to me that one of the clearest examples of a godly heritage in the New Testament takes us inside a *mixed* marriage, and possibly even a broken home, with a *single mom*. How fascinating that one of the church's greatest leaders is reared in this home environment.

This godly young man, raised in an unlikely setting, is introduced to us in several of Paul's letters. His name is Timothy and although his family background is sketchy, it speaks volumes.

Observations from a Unique Heritage

The first appearance of Timothy is in the book of Acts. Paul is on his second missionary journey, traveling to places like Derbe and Lystra and Troas and Thyatira. In Acts 16:1-2, we find

Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. And a disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek, and he was well spoken of by the brethren . . .

Most believe that Timothy was between the ages of eighteen and twenty-three during this visit. We are *not* told when Timothy became a believer, but if the clues are pieced together, it seems that Timothy's grandmother and mother had become believers during Paul's earlier visit to Lystra, while on his first missionary journey.

During Paul's first visit a few years earlier, he had performed miracles, validating the power of the risen Lord and the gospel of Jesus Christ. However, an angry mob turned on him, resentful of his message of repentance. They stoned him and dragged him out of the city, leaving him for dead.

The disciples gathered around Paul, who was lying there broken and bleeding. To their utter disbelief, he got up, miraculously healed, and went back into the city. His preaching brought many people to faith in Christ. Two of these converts were Jewish women – a mother and daughter named Lois and Eunice.

Before we go any further, let me make some observations. In fact, I want to make six of them as we glean what we can from the story of Lois and Eunice and Timothy.

Observation number one – an earlier failure as a wife and mother does not eradicate the potential for future success.

We have no record of the details of their home life, but twice Luke writes in this text that,

. . . his [Timothy's] father was a Greek (Acts 16:1).

This is clear indication that he was not only a Gentile but a Gentile pagan – an unbeliever in the God of Abraham. As Acts 16:3 says,

. . . they all knew that his [Timothy's] father was a Greek.

Eunice had earlier, no doubt, broken her mother's heart by marrying a Gentile unbeliever. Timothy was, many Bible scholars believe, the son of a mixed marriage.

The strict Jew would refuse to accept this marriage. In fact, if a Jewish girl married a Gentile boy, her parents would regard their daughter as dead. So much so, that sometimes a funeral was actually carried out, symbolizing their grief and the loss of that daughter to the world.ⁱⁱ

We are not told when or why, but even before Eunice heard the gospel message brought by Paul, her heart had returned to the Old Testament scriptures and had begun to devour them and obey

them. From what Paul will write in II Timothy, Eunice had returned to the faith of her fathers before she bore her son.

We can conclude this because Paul will write to Timothy that he was taught the scriptures *from* his earliest childhood days (II Timothy 3:14-15).

Eunice had disobeyed the law of God in marrying an unbeliever – a Gentile – but evidently returned to the scriptures. Later, when Paul arrived in Lystra, she came to faith in the Messiah.

An earlier failure as a wife and mother does not eradicate the potential for future success.

I think it is illuminating that she named her son Timothy, which means, “honoring God.” It’s as if Eunice was saying, “I didn’t honor God when I became a bride, but I want to honor God now that I am a mother.”

There is nothing quite like the cry of a newborn to send many a man and woman back to the scriptures, back to a walk with Christ.

Eunice said, in effect, “This son will be named to reflect the condition of my heart, as well as my prayer that he will grow up to do the same – honor and obey and love God.

To this day, the names we give our children can often be a reflection of our own spiritual walk with God.

One day I received a card from the Crawford family. On the front was a photograph of their newborn son, Luke Roman Crawford. There he was – eyes closed, wearing a white cap with the Wolfpack logo embroidered on it, and red and white pajamas with the NC State insignia all over them. It is important to start young, right?

Underneath the photograph was this very sweet note that said, “Dear Pastor Davey, this is our son, Luke Roman Crawford, whose middle name is in honor of all that we have learned during your 6-year series of sermons through the book of Romans.”

Is that not amazing? Some can say, “I started coming to Colonial Baptist Church during Romans,” but *he* can say, “I was *born* during Romans.”

The note continued, “We would like to have another baby in three years. Please do that future child a favor – don’t preach through the book of Habakkuk!”

Observation number two – the absence of a godly father does not forfeit the potential of godly children.

Paul wrote to the wives of unbelieving husbands in Corinth that they should not abandon their families but remain a holy and sanctifying presence in their midst (I Corinthians 7:13-14).

In Acts 16 young Timothy, perhaps at eighteen years of age, has distinguished himself as a pure and godly young man, dedicated to the truth of scripture, and a devout follower – a disciple of Jesus Christ.

His father was an unbelieving Greek. His father stayed home on Sunday morning and read the newspaper while Eunice and Timothy went to the synagogue.

His father never had any advice for Timothy or any encouragement about spiritual things. They could only talk about the weather or the Olympic games or the Roman senate race – and that was about it.

However, the absence of a godly father did not forfeit the potential of his godly son.

The text in Acts actually implies that Timothy’s father was no longer around. Perhaps there was a divorce, but more than likely, a death. Either way, Timothy grew up without a father to help him develop his faith in God.

The lack of a father’s spiritual influence in the home does not automatically forfeit spiritual insight in the children.

Observation number three – the dedication of a godly mother can overcome enormous disadvantages in raising her children.

What a blessing it is in a home where there is spiritual leadership from a father and husband who is following after God. It is the model God intended for us who seek to build our families and our homes according to His word.

But today, I’m writing to mothers – many who are single – many divorced – many more who are married to spiritually unresponsive husbands.

Some of you walked away from the God of Abraham – and now that you are a mother and have repented and returned to walk with God, you are wondering if there is hope for your children.

Take it from a woman named Eunice – there is hope!

What we read in this text is the dedication of a woman who battled back – overcoming enormous disadvantages to raise her son to follow after God.

I have had the privilege of welcoming into our fellowship a young mother, with young children, whose life has been turned upside down. Not long ago her husband openly admitted his homosexual lifestyle to her . . . then walked away. To compound her grief, he had been sexually involved with *her* own father – a closeted homosexual, and pastor, who continues to lead a double life. Imagine, in *one conversation*, she was robbed of her relationship with her husband and her father. Both men, by the way, were involved in full time ministry.

She came to our church, slipped into a seat, seeking desperately to begin making sense of her life, clinging to the hope of finding healing for her devastated heart.

After attending for a few weeks, she wrote a letter to me that included these incredible words, “I am so grateful to have found Colonial . . . I can tell that you can be trusted . . . I am praying for you to stay true to Christ.”

When I read her note, I immediately prayed that God would enable me and our church to keep her trust.

Like Eunice, by the grace of God, she is overcoming great challenges by raising children who walk after her example – her commitment to her Lord and Savior.

Observation number four – the benefits of another believer coming alongside to encourage and assist a parent are enormous.

II Timothy 1:1-2 records this encouragement,

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the promise of life in Christ Jesus, to Timothy, my beloved son . . .

Imagine what this choice of terminology meant to Timothy. Paul could have as easily called him, “my beloved brother,” or “my fellow Christian,” or “my comrade in the faith.” But he called him, “my beloved *son*”!

Imagine someone like Paul calling your son, “my beloved son.” Imagine the impact that would make if your son did not have a godly father.

What joy it must have brought to the hearts of Eunice and Lois to see their son and grandson spiritually adopted by the apostle Paul.

We cannot overestimate the benefits of a devout Christian pouring time and energy into your son or daughter. What a wonderful encouragement this would be to the godly parent who is attempting to raise a godly child.

For Eunice there was also Lois, her own mother. In II Timothy 1:5, Paul recounts,

For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois, and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well.

In this same letter, Paul writes in II Timothy 3:14,

You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

When we put it all together, we discover that Timothy was a godly young man, largely influenced by his mother, his grandmother, and a man twice his age named Paul, who poured his life and letters into Timothy’s heart.

Observation number five – even if an unbelieving father might seize every opportunity to disprove or denigrate the claims of Christianity, the godly mother must seize every opportunity to defend and define the truths of Christianity.

Carefully, yes; respectfully, yes; but let your children know the truth. Tuck them into bed at night and pray with them and say to them, “Jesus loves you.” Bow your head at the table and lead them in a prayer of thanksgiving. Answer your child’s questions of, “Why doesn’t Daddy come to church with us?” or “Why doesn’t Daddy love God?” with deference and respect, but then lead your children to pray for Daddy and care about the condition of his soul.

Timothy’s father was an unbelieving Greek. However, apparently carefully, perhaps openly, Timothy was taught the scriptures.

A Greek scholar named Lenski believed that this phrase in II Timothy 3:15, “. . . from childhood you have known the sacred writings . . .” actually means that Timothy was taught the letters of the alphabet from the biblical text and first learned to read from the Old Testament scriptures.ⁱⁱⁱ

This is like Charles Spurgeon, the great British pastor of the nineteenth century, who was sent to live with his grandparents when he was two years of age. When he returned to his parents' home at the age of six to begin schooling, he was already able to read, having been taught to read the Bible by his godly grandparents.

At home, Spurgeon's father, who was also a pastor, continued to exert a righteous influence over him. But Spurgeon would later speak more of his *mother's* influence. Evidently, she would gather the children on Sunday evening around the table for scripture reading and prayer. Spurgeon said she would pray like this: "Now Lord, if my children go on in their sins, it will not be from ignorance that they perish. My soul will bear witness against them at the day of judgment if they lay not hold of Christ."

It was Spurgeon's mother who helped define and deliver the truth of the gospel that marked him in his early years.

That was the testimony of Eunice. And it marked Timothy forever.

If an unbelieving father derides Christianity or an apathetic Christian father fails to develop Christianity, the godly mother must seize the opportunity to defend and define and declare the truths of Christianity.

Observation number six – when it comes to teaching your children the truth of scripture, it is never too early to start.

If you are tempted to say, "But I'm inadequate," you would be right.

"But you don't know my background!"

I do not, but God does.

Eunice would never have imagined that her son – born out of rebellion to God's word, raised in a mixed marriage to further complicate the issues of parenting and child-rearing – would grow up to be one of the great leaders of the early church.

This is the way God chooses to display His amazing grace.

He chose to give you your child. As unlikely as it may seem to you right now, you are His chosen

vessel of clay to pour out onto your children the riches of His grace . . . grace that He poured first into your life.

The fact that you are now pouring the grace of God into your child's life is a testimony of His wonderful grace. So pour away – with everything you have!

And be encouraged that you're not the only one in your particular setting or context of parenting. Consider Elisa Morgan's testimony. Today she is the president of MOPS International (Mothers of Preschoolers). She writes,

I'm probably the least likely person to head a mothering organization that impacts thousands of mothers' lives for the gospel. I grew up in a broken home. My parents were divorced when I was five. My older sister, younger brother, and I were raised by my alcoholic mother. While my mother meant well, most of my memories are of my mothering her, rather than her mothering me. Alcohol altered her love. I remember her weaving down the hall of our ranch home in Houston, Texas, glass of scotch in hand. I would wake her at seven each morning to try to get her off to work.

Ten years ago, when I was asked to consider leading MOPS International, a vital ministry that nurtures mothers, I went straight to my knees. How could God use me – who had never been mothered – to nurture other mothers? The answer came, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness" (II Corinthians 12:9). God would take my deficits and make them my offering to Him – and find His grace to be sufficient in my weakness.^{iv}

What unlikely circumstance are you in today? And just how insufficient do you feel? Take heart, dear mom, *God's grace is sufficient!* And He delights to take weak people and needy people and powerless people and infuse them with His strength and grace, which then allows them to demonstrate His power to parent . . . to teach . . . to love.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 5/14/2006 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ Eugene Peterson, Like Dew Your Youth (Eerdmans, 1994).

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- ⁱⁱ William Barclay, The Acts of the Apostles (Westminster Press, 1976), p. 120.
- ⁱⁱⁱ D. Edmond Hiebert, Personalities Around Paul (Moody Press, 1973), p. 100.
- ^{iv} Elisa Morgan, Christian Parenting Today (May/June 1999), p. 64.