

## What My Mother Taught Me

A Portrait of Mom, Part II

Selected Scripture

### Introduction

Several people have e-mailed to me the same list of rather humorous lessons learned from our mothers – lessons with a humorous twist. Let me read them to you.

- My mother taught me the value of a clean home when she told my brother and I, “Listen, if you’re going to kill each other, do it outside, I just finished cleaning up.”
- My mother taught me the value of passionate prayer when she said, “You’d better pray that 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 crying, and I’ll give you something to really cry about.”

How many of you heard that one growing up?  
How many of you tell your kids the same thing now?!

- 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.”
- 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! How about you?

My mother taught me that 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 must have all 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 us all! You:

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

- 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 recently, 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:

- learned how to take a nap standing up;
- learned to wear baby lotion as if it were your newest perfume;
- put off buying that set of silverware and china for a car seat that morphs into a stroller that morphs into a high chair that morphs into a bunk bed (maybe not!);
- 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;
- learned to never leave home without Cheerios.

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.

The days were long, but the years were short.

*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 does not seem to notice.*

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?”

What did your mom teach you?! Perhaps she taught you that you will be required at times to stand alone, how to cry softly, and why you must pray continually.

If you have a godly mom, or you are fortunate 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.

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 officially college students.

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, we just brought our sons home from college this week – and they brought piles of what? Laundry!

I say, “Charge ‘em! A dollar a shirt!”

Mom will never do that.

If you are like me, growing up in a godly home, you might have come in contact with that 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 that read,

*Only one life, will soon be past;  
Only what's done for Christ will last.  
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 in 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.<sup>i</sup>*

This is true.

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

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 of a Godly Heritage**

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

*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 or twenty-four 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 he was 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, he was turned on by an angry mob, 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, lying there broken and bleeding. To their utter disbelief, he got up, miraculously healed, and went back into the city. He preached throughout and 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.

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

Eunice had earlier, no doubt, broken her mother's heart by marrying a Gentile unbeliever. Timothy was 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 that girl 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.<sup>ii</sup>

We have no record of the details of their story, 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 of the God of Abraham. As Acts 16:3 says,

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

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.

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 when she had her son, she named him Timothy, which means, “honoring God”. It is 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 that sends many a man and woman back to the scriptures; back to a walk with Christ.

Eunice said, “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.

I received in the mail yesterday, a card from the Crawford family. On the front is a photograph of their newborn son, Luke Roman Crawford. Here he is – his 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, is this very sweet note that says, “Dear Pastor Davey, this is our son, Luke Roman Crawford, whose middle name is in honor of all that we have learned during our trek through Romans.”

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

The note goes on to say, “We would like to have another baby in three years. Please do that future child a favor – and don’t be in the book of Habakkuk.”

## **2. 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, not to abandon their families but to 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 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 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 a godly son.

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

Ladies and gentlemen, the lack of a father’s spiritual influence in the home does not automatically forfeit spiritual insight in the children. This leads to my third observation.

## **3. 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.

However today, I speak to mothers – many who are single – many divorced.

I read again this week, that 1 out of every 3 children born in the United States of America will not be raised by their biological parents.

Some of you walked away from the God of Abraham – and now that you are a mother, and you 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.

In the past year, I have had the privilege of welcoming into our fellowship a young mother whose life has been totally upended. The mother of young children, her husband, not long ago, admitted

his homosexual lifestyle to her and then, walked away. To compound her grief, he had been involved with her own father – a closeted homosexual who continues to lead a double life. In one conversation, she was robbed of 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 near you to begin making sense of her life – finding hope for her devastated heart. I am so thrilled God led her to sing beside you, to put her children in your child’s classroom, to walk past you in the hallway.

Did you say, “Hello?” Did you smile? Did she hear you sing? Can she draw from your strength and desire for Christ, even now?

She wrote a letter to me recently, that said, “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 all of us, 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.

**4. Observation number four – the benefit of an older believer (man or woman) supporting parents cannot be overestimated.**

Look at II Timothy 1:1-2.

*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 that Paul called your son, “my beloved son”. Imagine that your son did not have a Christian father.

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

Imagine the value of some godly Christian pouring time and energy into your son or daughter. What a wonderful benefit this would be to the godly parent who is attempting to raise a godly child.

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

*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 because of his mother and his grandmother and a man twice his age, named Paul, who poured his life and letters into Timothy’s heart.

**5. Observation number five – even if an unbelieving father might seize every opportunity to deride Christianity, the godly mother must seize every opportunity to defend and define and declare the truths of Christianity.**

Carefully, yes; respectfully, yes, but let your children know. 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, carefully evidently, openly perhaps, 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.<sup>iii</sup>

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 parent’s 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.

When Spurgeon returned home, his father, who was also a pastor, continued to exert a godly

influence over him. But he speaks 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 his mother who helped define and declare 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. This leads to the sixth and final observation.

**6. 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 did.

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

This is the way God displays His amazing grace.

He chose to give you your child. As unlikely as it seems to you right now; as impossible as it is to imagine His will, you are His chosen vessel of clay to pour out on your children, the riches of His grace that He poured first into your life.

The fact that you are the one pouring, is a testimony of His wonderful grace. So pour away – with everything you have!

Elisa Morgan 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 mother's 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.<sup>iv</sup>*

What did your mother teach you?

It would be a lesson to summarize it all – that God's grace is sufficient – that He takes weak people and needy people and powerless people and infuses them with His grace, which then demonstrates His power to parent, to teach, to love.

Let this be the lesson your children one day say, "This is what my mother taught me."

It would serve Timothy well – he would learn the lesson his mother learned. He would live by it and lean heavily on it – that the grace of God is sufficient.

God will get us through what He has called us to do – one day at a time.

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

© Copyright 2006 Stephen Davey

All rights reserved.

<sup>i</sup> Eugene Peterson, Like Dew Your Youth (Eerdmans, 1994).

<sup>ii</sup> William Barclay, The Acts of the Apostles (Westminster Press, 1976), p. 120.

<sup>iii</sup> D. Edmond Hiebert, Personalities Around Paul (Moody Press, 1973), p. 100.

<sup>iv</sup> Elisa Morgan, Christian Parenting Today, (May/June 1999), p. 64.