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## THE INFLUENCE OF GODLY MOTHERS

2 Timothy 1:5; 3:14-17

By

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Mother's Day Message

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Behind every great man is his mother. Someone imagined the mothers of these well-known sons making the following comments:

Mrs. Morse: "Sam, stop tapping your fingers on the table--it's driving me crazy!"

Mrs. Lindbergh: "Charles, can't you do anything by yourself?"

Mrs. Washington: "George never did have a head for money."

Mrs. Armstrong: "Neil has no more business taking flying lessons than the man on the moon." (*Reader's Digest* [3/88], p. 78.)

Mothers do influence their sons and daughters! One of life's greatest blessings is to have a godly mother. And, thus, one of the greatest gifts you can give your children is to be a godly mother.

But, sadly, the influence of the feminist movement has caused the status of motherhood to decline. Women are encouraged to find fulfillment in a career, not in raising children. If kids come along, they are dropped off at the day care center, sometimes even as infants. In 1950, only 12 percent of women with preschool children worked outside the home. "Leave it to Beaver" was not an untypical home situation! By 1985, over 50 percent of mothers with children five and under were working. Young mothers also return to work sooner after the birth of their babies than ever before. In 1976, 31 percent of mothers were back on the job before their child's first birthday. By 1987, that figure had jumped to over 50 percent.

Even many Christians have adopted the cultural trend. While I realize that there are legitimate cases of economic hardship where the mother's job is a necessity (as with single moms), there are also many situations where the family could make it on just the husband's job, but they choose to have the mother work so they can "have a better lifestyle." But I question whether trading a mother at

home for increased income really provides a better lifestyle. Most kids would vote for less junk and a mom at home.

I'd like to elevate the role of godly mothers by looking at the influence a godly mother and grandmother had on a well-known young man named Timothy. In 2 Timothy 1:5 we learn that his faith came to him through his grandmother, Lois, and his mother, Eunice. The Apostle Paul's preaching may have been used by God to bring Timothy to actual conversion, but behind his preaching were years of godly influence by Timothy's grandmother and mother. In 2 Timothy 3:14-17, we also learn that the sincere faith of these women was combined with instructing Timothy from his earliest days from the Scriptures. Their example and the results in Timothy's life show us that ...

Through faith in God and by honoring His Word, godly mothers have great influence as they train their children.

1. Godly mothers are women of sincere faith (1:5).

As Paul thought fondly of Timothy and his sincere faith, he was reminded that such faith also dwelt first in Timothy's grandmother, Lois, and in his mother, Eunice. We don't know when these women had come to faith in Christ. Even though they had Greek names, at least Eunice was a Jewish believer (Acts 16:1). Perhaps Lois had been converted in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost and had come home to tell her daughter. Or, perhaps both women were devout Jews who responded to Paul's preaching when he visited Lystra, their city. But the implication is that their faith pre-dated that of Timothy.

Timothy's father was apparently a Greek unbeliever (Acts 16:1). We have no clue as to why a godly woman of faith like Eunice would marry a pagan man. The Old Testament is very clear that Jews should not marry outside the faith. Perhaps Eunice, though raised by Lois in a faithful Jewish home, went through a time of rebellion, during which she got married, but later came to faith in Jesus as Savior and Messiah. We can only speculate.

We do know that the Bible clearly forbids a believer from marrying an unbeliever. But Eunice's story is in the Bible to give hope to women in mixed marriages. If her son, Timothy, could

grow up to follow the Lord as he did, then God can do the same for your children, even if your husband is not a believer. While God intends for the father to take the lead in the spiritual training of the children, the mother can have a great influence even in situations where the father is passive or hostile to God.

One prime quality which such a woman needs is sincere faith. The word "sincere" means, literally, "not hypocritical." It is possible to have a hypocritical, not genuine form of faith. Phony faith is the mask that is put on in front of church members or out in public, but it's set aside in the home. The parents may be fighting as they drive to church, but when they drive in the parking lot, they act as if everything is just great. Kids smell that kind of phoniness a mile away.

One pastor had been preaching on the importance of daily Bible reading. When the pastor and his wife were invited to a parishioner's home, the pastor's wife noticed that the woman of the house had written on the kitchen calendar for that date, "Pastor/Mrs. for dinner--Dust all Bibles." Another pastor, after having tea with a parishioner, said, "I'm glad to see the way you're living." "Oh, pastor," replied the man, "if you want to know how we really live, you must come when you're not here."

Having a sincere faith doesn't imply perfection. But it does imply reality with God. Such faith dwelt in these women; it was at home in them, a comfortable, everyday sort of thing. Sincere faith means that you have sincerely believed in Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord. It means that you walk in reality with Christ each day, spending time in His Word and in prayer. It means that you confront yourself with Scripture and judge your sin on the thought level. It means that when you do sin against a family member, you ask their forgiveness and seek to work on your weak areas. It means that you develop godly character qualities and attitudes of submission, thankfulness, and joy in the Lord. Your kids will realize that, while mom isn't perfect, she does walk with God.

Not only are godly mothers women of sincere faith, but also they seek to hand off that faith to their children. Hypocritical faith can't be handed off. If you're a phony, your kids won't want anything to do with your version of Christianity. But genuine faith is contagious. Timothy's faith could be traced back through his

mother to his grandmother. He could see the Lord in them, and it attracted him to the Lord.

How do you hand off your faith to your kids? One of the main ways is by training them in God's Word:

2. Godly mothers honor God's Word and train their children in it (3:14-17).

In the most reliable manuscripts of verse 14, "whom" is plural, pointing to Lois and Eunice, as well as to the Apostle Paul. The phrase, "knowing from whom you have learned them" points to the reality of God's Word in these people who had influenced Timothy. He could look at their lives and see that the Bible is a reliable Book. By the way, while the parents should be the primary agents for teaching their children God's Word, pray for godly mentors for your children, such as Paul was to Timothy. Don't be so jealous as to think that you're the only one who can influence your children. Pray for godly Sunday School teachers, youth workers, elders, pastors, or other men and women of God to influence your children for righteousness.

The main way your children will grow up to love and serve God is through His Word. God's Word of truth is powerful to save (James 1:18) and to sanctify (John 17:17) His people. The best thing you can do for your kids is to instill in them from an early age the importance of reading, studying, memorizing, and obeying God's Word. How do you do it?

- A. A mother must grow in her own love for God's Word.

You cannot impart what you do not possess. If your kids seldom see you seeking God through His Word, they won't catch it for themselves. If they don't see you changing through your growing understanding of and obedience to the Word, they won't be motivated to be in the Word for themselves. If the TV is on every night, but the Bible is seldom read as a family, guess what the kids will assume is the most important? Your kids should be able to see evidence of your love for God's Word.

I strongly encourage you to begin reading the Bible to your children even when they're very young. Stick to the story portions until they're old enough to listen to the likes of Romans. You can buy Bible story books that have simple text and a lot of pictures.

As they grow older, you can read things like the “Muffin Family” stories that have a Bible story which is then applied by a story about the Muffin family. But even when they’re toddlers, they can absorb more of just straight Bible reading than you would guess.

Once when Joy was just a young toddler, we were driving down the mountain where we lived in California on a day with beautiful clouds. She pointed to the sky and said, “Look, Jesus!” I couldn’t figure out why she was saying that until it dawned on me that a day or two before around the dinner table we had read Matthew 26:64, where Jesus says that we will see Him “coming on the clouds of heaven.” Even though she wasn’t more than two years old, Joy made the connection between clouds and Jesus! You never know how God is using the seed of His Word.

- B. A godly mother will use God’s Word to lead her children to saving faith in Christ.

“... 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” (3:15). Salvation is built on the knowledge of the truth revealed in Scripture. Children need to know more than “Jesus wants to be your friend, so you need to invite Him into your heart.” They need to know what God’s Word reveals about the condition of their hearts, that they are rebellious and disobedient toward God. They need to know not only that God is loving, but also that He is holy and just, and that He will bring terrible, everlasting punishment on those who do not turn from their sins and trust in Christ. They need to know what Christ did on the cross, dying as our substitute. They need to understand that God forgives our sin because of His kindness, apart from our good works. They need to know what saving faith is, as opposed to empty profession that does not result in salvation.

As you read the Bible to your kids, they will learn about people who turned from their sin to God and were saved. They will hear of others who made wrong choices, who loved their sin more than God, whose lives were ruined. They will hear stories of children whose parents were godly, but the children did not follow God, and of others whose parents were ungodly, but the children chose to follow the Lord. They will learn that each person is accountable before God. As you read the Bible to them, pray that

God will use it to convict them of their sin, to show them their desperate need for salvation, and cause them to trust in Christ as Savior and Lord. If you use simple illustrations, even young children can understand the basics and genuinely be converted to Christ.

You need to be careful not to assume that just because your five-year-old “asked Jesus into his heart” that he is truly saved. He may be, but he may not be. Look for evidence of genuine conversion: Is he sorry about his sin and sensitive to it? Does he show a growing love for God and His Word? Does he want to talk about the things of God? Does he want to please God with his life? It seems to me that “easy believism,” especially with children, is a major danger of the modern evangelical church.

If you want to read a chapter that shows the stark contrast between the former days and our day, I commend to you chapter 6, “Through Much Tribulation,” in volume one of C. H. Spurgeon’s *Autobiography* (Banner of Truth). For over 20 pages, he goes on and on, describing the mountain of guilt he was under from age ten until he was converted at 15. He is so graphic and consumed with his own sinfulness that I’m sure, had he lived today, we would take him to a Christian psychologist!

He says, “For five years, as a child, there was nothing before my eyes but my guilt, and though I do not hesitate to say that those who observed my life would not have seen any extraordinary sin [he was a minister’s son in Victorian England!], yet as I looked upon myself, there was not a day in which I did not commit such gross, such outrageous sins against God, that often and often have I wished I had never been born” (p. 58). After many more pages describing his guilt for disobeying God’s law and his fear of being condemned, he says, “Then I was brought down to see my corruption, my wickedness, my filthiness, for God always humbles the sinner whom He means to save” (p. 72).

In an earlier chapter, Spurgeon tells how every Sunday evening, his mother would stay home with the children, read and explain the Scriptures to them, and plead with them to think about the state of their souls and to seek the Lord. He remembers one time her praying, “Now, Lord, if my children go on in their sins, it will not be from ignorance that they perish, and my soul must bear

a swift witness against them at the day of judgment if they lay not hold of Christ." He says, "That thought of a mother's bearing swift witness against me, pierced my conscience, and stirred my heart" (p. 44).

Spurgeon's father was often away from home preaching. Once, as he was on his way to a service, he feared that he was neglecting his own family while caring for the souls of others. So he turned back and went home. When he came in the house, everything was quiet, except for the voice of his wife behind the bedroom door. He listened and heard her pleading earnestly in prayer for the salvation of all her children, and especially for her strong-willed first-born, Charles. His father thought that with his wife caring so well for the spiritual interests of his children, he could go on about the Lord's business, so he left again for his preaching engagement without disturbing her (from pp. 44-45).

So a crucial task for godly mothers is to pray for and use the Scriptures to lead each of her children to faith in Christ.

C. A godly mother will train her children in how to live by God's Word.

God's Word is mighty to save, but also is sufficient for all of life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3, 4). It is profitable for teaching us the ways of God, how God wants us to live (2 Tim. 3:16). It reveals the very thoughts and intentions of our hearts (Heb. 4:12). It reproves us, which means, it convinces us of our wrongs. It corrects us by showing us how to get right with God and others. It trains us in righteousness, showing us how to keep on the path of obedience and blessing. Scripture is not given to satisfy our curiosity or to give us interesting stories. It is given to be profitable for how we live, to correct us and keep us on God's path of holiness. Your kids should see you applying Scripture and you should teach them how to apply it to the things they face as they grow to maturity. If you use God's Word to lead your children to saving faith and to train them in God's ways, it follows that ...

3. Godly mothers have great influence on their children.

Who knows what lifelong influence Lois and Eunice had on young Timothy? Sure, he was strengthened greatly through his relationship with Paul. But the foundation was laid by his godly

mother and grandmother. It is not too much to argue that world history is shaped in the home through godly mothers.

Spurgeon says, "Never could it be possible for any man to estimate what he owes to a godly mother. Certainly I have not the powers of speech with which to set forth my valuation of the choice blessing which the Lord bestowed on me in making me the son of one who prayed for me, and prayed with me. How can I ever forget her tearful eye when she warned me to escape from the wrath to come?... How can I ever forget when she bowed her knee, and with her arms about my neck, prayed, 'Oh, that my son might live before Thee!'" (p. 44, emphasis his).

President Theodore Roosevelt said, "When all is said, it is the mother, and the mother only, who is a better citizen than the soldier who fights for his country. The successful mother, the mother who does her part in rearing and training aright the boys and girls who are to be the men and women of the next generation, is of greater use to the community, and occupies, if she only would realize it, a more honorable as well as more important position than any man in it. The mother is the one supreme asset of the national life. She is more important, by far, than the successful statesman, or businessman, or artist, or scientist" (in *Encyclopedia of 7,700 Illustrations*, by Paul Tan [Assurance Publishers], p. 845). That is not to disparage the crucial role godly fathers must play. But it is to encourage you in the crucial role godly mothers play.

### Conclusion

Maybe you feel like a failure as a mother. Where do you start? God always honors repentance. Turn back to Him. Confess your failures. Begin to obey Him where you're at. As a Christian couple, you may have to consider having the wife quit work to be home with the children. Even if your children are grown, God will honor your repentance. Go to them and ask their forgiveness for failing to be an example of godliness or for failing to train them in God's ways. God can use you as He used Lois, a grandmother, in Timothy's life. Walk with God in sincere faith. Use His Word to lead your children and grandchildren to the same sincere faith and to train them in God's ways. You will be mighty in influencing our nation and even world history for Jesus' sake.

## Discussion Questions

1. Is it sin for a Christian mother to have a career outside the home? How does Titus 2:4, 5 apply?
2. How would you counsel a Christian mom who says that housework and rearing children is not fulfilling?
3. How can a Christian woman with an unbelieving husband teach the children to love their dad but not to follow his ways?
4. Should a mother force her children to submit to her efforts at teaching them the Bible if they are resistant?

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