

What My Mother Did Right

Mother's Day

Written By

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Since I moved here ten years ago, I have not been with my mother on Mother's Day. For the nineteen years prior to 2008, I celebrated this great day with her because she and my later Father, Al, attended my church. That all changed when we moved to Virginia.

But today is unusual day because my mother is here visiting us for the month of May. No, she won't be in all of the services, but in light of the fact she is here, and she was, and is, a godly woman and mother, I think it fitting to pause our study of Romans and pose a simple and instructive question:

What Did My Mother Do Right?

Learning from another believer is certainly a biblical concept. Consider Paul's words regarding this timeless truth:

Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ (1 Cor. 11:1).

Do you realize the opening verb "be" (γίνεσθε) present tense command denoting perpetual action? Interesting and gusty. Paul says to the dysfunctional Corinthian church he founded that one of the best ways to grow up in the faith involved heeding this command to model their lives after his. We know this is true because the Greek for "imitators" is *mimetai* (Μιμηταί) from which we get our word "to mimic." Can you image having your spiritual act together to the point where you could challenge other saints to follow your example of following hard after Jesus (now, there is a life goal for the rest of 2019). Can you image being able to say this and it not being grounded in pride, but humility. "Want to be like Jesus?" says Paul, "then just do what I do in my spiritual walk."

Although my mother never said these exact words to me, my life of faith has really been . . . whether she knows it or not . . . a study of her life. I've learned much in this particular life course, and I think the concepts I've gleaned from her spiritually obedient life are concepts any Christian woman, any Christian mother would desire to build into her life because their application leads, by definition, to maturity in Christ. The application of these positive life concepts also leads to growing up godly children, as well as building a strong, stable marriage.

So, this day we pause to rightly consider what this particular mother did right in order encourage and challenge our mothers to go and do likewise so they, too, move toward maturity in Christ. And, before we consider those pivotal points, I must stop and point out the obvious. My mother would be the first person in the room to say she didn't do everything right either. She'd tell you she wasn't, and isn't, perfect, by any means. How could she be since she is woman who is still in the flesh (Rom. 6:19ff)? But I'll tell you, after watching and studying her for a lifetime, she understands what cross-bearing is all about and how to move from sinful living to godly living.

Hence, I submit to you a life worth mimicking for Christ by considering the question at hand:
What Did My Mother Do Right?

At first blush, I must say I can think of many things she did well:

- She respected and loved my dad, Al.
- She allowed our home to be open to our friends.
- She showed up for our functions and cheered us on.
- She built laughter in our home. We joked and kidded about anything and everything.
- She gave me and my two sisters piano lessons, and, then, she learned by listening to us practice for all those years.
- She let me have godly and godless friends.
- She wasn't a helicopter parent, but gave us space and more responsibility as we matured.
- She kept us busy during the long summer months with swimming lessons, art projects, board games and the like.
- She was thoughtful and creative, especially where gifts were concerned. I still have many of them. Now that they are antiques perhaps I can sell a few of them and retire comfortably. I have the original Batman car made in England, along with most of the Matchbox and Hot Wheels cars. I still have my GI Joe's from the 1960s, too, in the original footlocker box.
- She gave us memorable vacations each summer to see our family in South Carolina.
- She made sure Christian music recorded on vinyl albums (remember those?) played on our car size walnut sound system. Who can forget The Gaithers, Second Chapter of Acts, Tennessee Ernie Ford, and the like?
- She paid attention to how we were individually wired by God, and then she sought to build on our positive traits.

I, like you, could easily go on, but these are not the character traits I want to focus on this morning.

As I think about the gift my mother has been to my life, especially spiritually speaking, six easily surface to the top. If you are a mother who is struggling right now, if you are a mother who wants to move yourself and your family upward in the faith, if you are a mother who wants to build a family known for its stability and life impact on others, then I invite you to mimic these admirable traits evidenced in my mother's walk with God. And please realize these are not in any ascending order. On the contrary, I'd dare say they are all important.

Timely Trait #1: She Made Church A Priority

Boy, did she. Worshipping God, studying the Word of God, and fellowshiping with other saints formed the bedrock of our home. Why? Because my mother was raised in a non-Christian home;



therefore, she knew firsthand the high value of putting God at the center of the home. She took the divinely inspired words of the author of Hebrews to heart:

²⁴and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and

good deeds, ²⁵not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near (Heb. 10).

The Greek word here for “forsaking” literally means “to abandon something.” It is also an emphatic form of the word in question. It is as if the author says, “Do not ever think of abandoning the concept of being present in worship.” You know the drill. Miss one Sunday and it’s easy to miss three. Manufacture excuses for being in worship and it’s no problem with devising more in the future. Next thing you know and you haven’t been in church for months, which means you’ve missed out on Christian fellowship, accountability, and learning about God through the teaching and preaching of the Word of God. Inconsistency doesn’t build a spiritual house . . . consistency does. My mother understood this.

Hence, when the church doors were open, we were inside. Ostensibly, this meant we attended age appropriate Sunday School classes, worship service at 10:45 a.m., and then we circled back each Sunday night at 6:00 p.m. for BYF (Baptist Youth Fellowship), and worship. Typically, after evening worship services we went to the homes of other believers for what



we called *Sip N Sings*. Here we ate deserts (which is what Christians do) and we sang worship songs. Here’s one which is burned in my memory bank:

*It only takes a spark
To get a fire going
And soon all those around
Can warm up in the glowing
That’s how it is with God’s love
Once you’ve experienced it
You’ll spread His love
To everyone
You’ll want to pass it on*

Yeah, in our home, worship of the living God was the number one concern.

Did I enjoy being there all the time? No. I was a typical kid and teen. Did I mess around during worship? Yep. My friend, Donnie, and I devised a baseball game with the church bulletin. We'd draw a long horizontal line, and then divide it with seven short lines to form a seven-inning game. Once this was complete, we'd take turns at bat. Words which started with "t" equaled a triple, those starting with "D" were doubles, and "S" represented a single. Words beginning with "H" represented home runs, and everything else was an out. I can't tell you how many baseball games I played while the pastor preached.

But through it all I was listening, big time. Those old hymns taught me great doctrine, as well as how to worship Christ. Those sermons taught me how to think about God and how to appreciate the value of the Word of God for life and living. Dr. Lind taught on Sunday evenings from a slide projector with rolling clear film which he wrote one as we studied. He'd also adorned the stage with massive, colorful, biblical charts on easels. From exposure to a teaching pastor I learned early on the importance of having one of those in your life. He lit a fire in my life which still burns today, a fire to know God and to know His Word. Through his teaching example I also learned what a preacher should be about with his flock.

I thank God for a mother who made sure I was in worship and Bible study. That commitment enabled me to build my life on the Rock, Jesus Christ. That commitment prepared me to face trials of life with hope because the Word flowed in my mind and heart. That commitment put me in touch with many songs which ministered to me in tough times. Who can forget *His Eye Is On The Sparrow*?

Why should I feel discouraged, why should the shadows come,
 Why should my heart be lonely, and long for heav'n and home,
 When Jesus is my portion? My constant Friend is He:
 His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me;
 His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.

Refrain:

I sing because I'm happy, I sing because I'm free,
 For His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.

They sang that song when my roommate in college, Brent, lost his mother, Glenda, in her early forties to ovarian cancer. I'll never forget singing that song that day and gaining great strength and encouragement from it. Later, that became my sister Marla's favorite hymn as she battled the same dreaded disease. How can the saint be joyous in the face of trial? Because they know God's eye is on them, which means He is with them because they are more important than a little bird.

And to think that all of this came about because my mother made sure we put God first in our lives as a family. Believe me, it paid dividends then, and it pays dividends now. I am the man I am before God because my mother made sure nothing got in the way of making sure worship of Him was the most important quest in life. How about you? Are you making sure worship is central to your family? Believe me, it is the greatest gift a godly mother can give to her children, and it will positively impact them for the rest of their lives.

Timely Trait #2: She Showcased Servanthood

From my earliest remembrance of my mother to the present, I have witnessed her continual desire to be a servant of Christ to saints and sinners. Some women like to be served, doted on, and made

to feel like the queen. That was not my mother. Understood the essence of verses like Mark 10:45 and Galatians 5:13,

⁴⁵For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many (Mark 10).

¹³ For you were called to freedom, brethren; only *do not turn* your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another (Gal. 5).

She understood these verses and she wove them into her life. If there was a gap in the church ministry, she was there to fill it. If there was a need which needed to be met, she did what she could to alleviate it. She was, an is, one of those great saints who doesn't have to be asked to serve. She steps up and serves freely and willfully. Service for Christ, of course, means you'll probably be obscure and do things no one will ever know about . . . except your Lord . . . but you are content with that because you serve because He set the pace for what constitutes service.

- He paid attention to the poor, and she did too. I can't tell you how many wool hats she has knitted to give away to poor people.
- He made time for hurting people, and she did too. They typically found themselves in our living room.
- He taught in the synagogue, she taught at church. She taught in the children's Sunday School when I grew up and she taught in the Awana program at my last church. She's looking forward to teaching here when she moves here, and she's retired . . . well, sort of.
- He met needs, and she meets needs. She has been here for two weeks and she and Liz have sewed all kinds of products for poor women in Africa.

I mentioned these brief things, which will probably embarrass her because she is a humble woman of God, because they are so instructive, so worthy of implementing into your life as a mother.

- Servants are selfless and desirous of focusing on others, not themselves.
- Servants see needs and meet needs
- Servants do that which is hard, not that which is easy.
- Servants don't draw attention to themselves.
- Servants don't live for the limelight but for the shadows.

A servant of Christ. That's what my mother was and is. They are a rare breed in our narcissistic, it-all-about-me, check out my latest selfie culture.

- When her best friend contracted breast cancer in her twenties while I was a young teen, I watched her love on Phyllis until the Lord took her home.
- When her sister battled the same disease for some thirteen years, she stayed with her as best she could until the Lord took her home at 52 years of age.
- When my father battled brain cancer, she stood beside him through all the ups and downs of what the disease does to a body.

- When my sister battled three forms of ovarian cancer, she put her life on hold, moved up to Spokane where Marla lived, and stayed with her literally until the Lord took her home. What better place for a mother than by child as God moved to call her home? What better place for a servant than with those facing their own mortality?

There is no greater thing for you to be as a godly mother than being a true, committed servant of Christ. It will minister to others, it will bring a smile on the face of God, and it will teach your children how to really live life to the fullest. Thanks, mom, for the Christ like example. Because you set the bar high, I've always known what God has called me to do and that is to serve others to best of my ability. May you, as mothers, set that same bar high for your families. Do it and God's blessings will rest upon you.

Timely Trait #3: She Was Committed To Consistent Discipline

I am the man I am today because of my mother's commitment to love me enough to discipline me. And from what I hear and remember, I needed a lot of attention in this area because I was the quintessential strong willed child. You name it, and I did it.

No sooner did she give me my first lesson on not touching the top burners of a stove EVER, and I waltzed into the kitchen and laid my soft, little hand on the burner. You can guess what happened. She had just turned it off, so I found out quickly why my mother had said what she said by way of Mosaic command.

Remember those old refrigerators with the rounded tops. I do. To keep me out of the cookies, my mother placed her coveted teddy bear cookie jar on the top of the fridge . . . way out of reach from the likes of me. Or so she thought. One day when I had a craving for some cookies, I pushed a dining chair up next to the side of the fridge where the teddy bear was located. Stretching as high as I could, I managed to get my little pinky finger on one of teddy's toes. With glee, I slowly pulled teddy toward me. My plan was ingenious at that juncture. I'd get him to slide off the rounded edge and then I'd catch him. That plan, however, didn't work. Gravity worked faster than I had anticipated. I watched hopelessly and teddy blew by me and shattered all over the linoleum tiled floor.



One day after school, my sister Marla and I couldn't see my mother's car. After waiting for a while, we decided to just walk home. When we arrived the front doors and windows were locked up tight, so I told Marla we needed to walk around to the back. Eyeballing the back wooden door, I said, "Hey, I think I can run and throw my body through the lower part of that door. That way we'll get in the house before mom comes home." Great idea huh? Marla replied, as she usually did, "Marty, you are going to get in BIG trouble." Well, I didn't listen to her and within a few minutes I was airborne as I blew through the door. Trust me, my mother wasn't too excited when she met us inside the house later. "How did you kids get inside the house?" was her first question. After that, Marla sang like a happy bird.

Doing my own thing, defying the clearly stated boundaries, and getting disciplined for my infractions was, well, the course of my young life. One relative told my mother at one point, "Sue, if you don't get control of that boy he's going to wind up in prison. But if you can channel him perhaps he'll make a great leader someday." Thank the Lord for a mother who channeled me by means of biblical discipline.

Do you have a child who is strong-willed? Do you think you are raising a "criminal?" Do you think there is no hope for your boy, your daughter? Think again. Establishing boundaries and then devising various forms of discipline you *consistently* apply will get the attention of the lawbreaker and pay handsomely as they age.

Looking back at my upbringing years later, I can say I can probably isolate my mother's key verses from those days:

¹³ Do not hold back discipline from the child, although you strike him with the rod, he will not die (Prov. 23).

¹⁵ Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of discipline will remove it far from him (Prov. 22).

¹⁸ Discipline your son while there is hope, and do not desire his death (Prov. 19).

My mother didn't just read verse like these. She applied them, consistently. What was the result? My godless self-will met the steel wall of her holy-will. Discipline techniques changed, for sure, over the years as I matured and grew, but she never gave up breaking my strong will so it could be molded into a will which could be used for God's good purposes. Had she been inconsistent, I would have blown past her boundaries at will and probably wound up being a criminal. However, because she loved me enough to discipline me, I learned the importance of following rules, listening to adults, and living a peaceful, law-abiding life.

Mom's, how are you faring this Mother's Day? Got a Marty as a child in your life? Don't worry. You can reach him. You can help him be the man God wants him to be, but it is going to take some hard work on your part. It all starts with first, realizing you have an issue, second, establishing boundaries, third, enforcing the boundaries and encouraging your child as you see them make appreciable progress.

Mom, thanks for doing what God called you to do to help me become the man God desired. Had you not been in my life, there is no telling where I'd be in life. I'm blessed because God blessed me with a tenacious, tender, tough-minded mother who didn't flinch when it came to doing what was necessary to make sure this sinner became a saint.

Now, a verse she knew so well makes a whole lot of sense to me:

⁶ Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from I (Prov. 22).

One day I sat in a state park near the Rogue River with a friend on vacation. Next to the table were two mature trees: the one on the left was twisted and contorted, sickly looking, while the one on the right was straight and true. What was difference between the two trees? The one on the left did not have training stakes to hold it in place. Adverse weather, therefore, took its toll on the tree as it grew. The tree on the right had two large stakes to its left and right with

corresponding wires to keep it steady. When the winds blew against it, it held its own and learned how to grow straight and true.

In my life, the stake on the left was a dad, and the stake on the right was, well, my dear mother, Sue. Thanks, mom, for staking your life so close to mine. The winds have blown many times in my life, but thanks to you, your discipline and training have greatly impacted me.

What about you other mother's this Mother's Day? Are you the stake on your child's tree, doing what God has called you to do in order to train them up in His ways? You have no greater call in life than this, so fulfill it to God's glory.

Timely Trait #4: She Was/Is A Woman Of Prayer

This trait best sums up my mother to me. She evidences many admirable godly traits, but this one is so her. When I think of her, this is what comes to mind: Here is a woman who has prayed for me all of my life.

- She prayed me through getting married.
- She prayed me through children.
- She prayed me through adolescence.
- She prayed me through my teens.
- She prayed me through college.
- She prayed me through four years of grad school.
- She prayed me through all my dating years as I looked a life mate.
- She prayed me through challenging times raising children.
- She prayed me through planting and growing a church over 19 years.
- She prayed me through a church split in 1993.
- She prayed me through the loss of friends like Kenny, Robert, Brad, and Brent.
- She prayed me through wondering whether we should move here to Burke or not. Her advice is memorable: "I would rather my children to be where God wants them to be than near me."
- She prayed me through the loss of my dad and my sister.
- She prayed for me as I worked on my doctorate in apologetics.
- She still prays for me and that is why my life is blessed.
- She stopped me at the kitchen table this morning as I headed to church and said, "Just know that I've been praying for your preaching since I got up."



What son can quantify the importance of his mother's prayers before the throne of God? Jesus put the method of prayer down well when he once quipped:

⁷Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. ⁸For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened. (Matt. 7).

I'm sure at this point in time the Lord knows her knock over that of others. Thanks, mom, or knocking on heaven's door for me. It has changed my life in way I'll probably not understand until I stand on the soil of glory and have the mind of Christ. Thanks, also, for doing so many things right. Because of your life, many mothers have a wonderful example of what a godly, spiritually growing mother looks like. In light of that truth, I pray your traits will become their traits so that one day their children can say "Happy Mother's Day" to a woman who helped shape them into the likeness of Jesus Christ.