

## “Things our Mothers Taught Us”

Date: May 12, 2019

Place: Lakewood UMC

Occasion: Mother’s Day

Text: Proverbs 31 (selected); 2 Timothy 1:3-7

Themes: Mother’s Day, Confidence, Faith, Love

Some time ago I received an email that I’d like to share with you. It’s a collection of sayings entitled, “Things My Mother Taught Me.” See how many of these you can relate to:

- My mother taught me to **appreciate a job well done**. “If you’re going to kill each other, do it outside. I just finished cleaning.”
- My mother taught me about **time travel**. “If you don’t straighten up, I’m going to knock you into the middle of next week.”
- My mother taught me **religion**. “You better pray that comes out of the rug.”
- My mother taught me **logic**. “Because I said so, that’s why.”
- My mother taught me **foresight**. “Make sure you wear clean underwear, in case you’re in an accident.”
- My mother taught me about **irony**. “Keep laughing and I’ll give you something to cry about.”
- My mother taught me about **stamina**. “You’ll sit there until all of that spinach is finished.”
- My mother taught me about **behavior modification**. “Stop acting like your father.”
- My mother taught me **about weather**. “It looks like a tornado swept through your room.”

So, for all the things you taught me, Mom, thanks!

Mother's Day can be a mixed bag. If you had a wonderful mother while you were growing up, it is certainly a day that you want to celebrate. But if your mother was less than perfect, or if you are a mother and feel like you're not doing it perfectly, Mother's Day can either bring back a lot of bad memories, or give you a major guilt trip.

But the reason we celebrate Mother's Day is not to turn our mother into some kind of goddess whom we worship. Rather, it is simply to give thanks for the gift of life and for the good things that mothers have added to our lives, to show our appreciation.

In the reading from Proverbs, the scriptures celebrate the wisdom of a good mother and wife who imparts wisdom to her children. The apostle, Paul, seems to imply in the book of Ephesians, that the father should be the spiritual head of the household. But very often it is the mother who is the spiritual leader in the home.

Mothers teach us many things. I could be here all day if I tried to share all of the lessons that mothers teach their children. Therefore, instead of trying to tell you everything a mother gives her children, let me lift up three important values I think parents in general, and mothers in particular, need to pass along to their children: Confidence, faith and love.

**The first is confidence.** Dr. James Dobson, author of several books on raising children, cautions us: "A child can learn to doubt his (or her) worth at home, even when deeply loved by their parents. Destructive ideas find their way into their thinking process, leading children to conclude that she is ugly or he is stupid, or that the child has already proved to be a hopeless failure in life."

The famous psychiatrist, Dr. Alfred Adler, had an experience when he was a young boy which illustrates how much power such a belief can have.

Alfred got off to a bad start in arithmetic and his teacher became convinced that he was “dumb in arithmetic.” The teacher then advised his parents of this “fact” and told them not to expect too much of him.

They too were convinced. And his grades in arithmetic proved they had been correct. He got poor grades. One day, however, he had a sudden flash of insight and he thought he knew how to solve a problem the teacher had put on the board, and none of the other students could solve it.

Alfred announced as much to the teacher, “I think I can solve the problem.” She and the whole class laughed. Whereupon he became indignant, strode to the black-board, and worked the problem, much to their amazement. In doing so, he realized he could understand arithmetic.

He felt a new confidence in his ability. And he went on to become a good math student. Well, the moral of the story is this: we need to encourage our children, not put them down, and not criticize them. We need to surround them with love, yes, but we also need to help them feel competent as persons.

I wish every one of us had inscribed on the walls of our homes, the words of Dorothy Law Nolte’s poem, “Children Learn What They Live.” And even better than posting the poem, I wish every parent would heed its words. Perhaps you’ve heard it before:

“If a child lives with criticism, he learns to condemn.  
If a child lives with hostility, she learns to fight.  
If a child lives with ridicule, he learns to be shy.  
If a child lives with shame, she learns to feel guilty.  
If a child lives with tolerance, he learns to be patient.

If a child lives with encouragement, she learns confidence.  
If a child lives with praise, he learns to appreciate.  
If a child lives with fairness, she learns justice.  
If a child lives with security, he learns to have faith.  
If a child lives with approval, she learns to like herself.  
If a child lives with acceptance and friends, she or he learns to find  
love in the world.”

Mothers, fathers, let us teach our children to have confidence in themselves.

**A second thing mothers teach their children** is about the love of God. There was an interesting story on the news some years ago, about a 25 year old man in San Francisco who was dying of AIDS. He was gay and he contracted the disease by having sex with another man.

Because of that, his father had completely disowned him. His mother was dead. So there was nobody in his life to comfort him. The man looked like he could not weigh over 100 pounds, and he had the look of death on his face. A reporter asked him how he was able to stand all of the pain - not only the pain of death, but also the pain of rejection. Here was his answer.

He said, “I stand it by closing my eyes and imagining that I will awaken in the arms of my mother. I know that *she* will never leave my side.”

I tell you, friends, long after some fathers have disowned their children, a mother will still be there. There is tenacity about a mother’s love – a love that will not let her children go, no matter what they have done. And I think that teaches us a lot about God’s love. God loves us tenaciously, and will not let us go, no matter what we have done.

**Third and finally**, mothers teach us about faith. Some have said that the only Bible some people will ever read is their mother’s life. Christian mothers teach their children the faith – by reading the stories of the Bible,

taking their children to Sunday school and to church, and by teaching them Christian values as they grow up. Mothers teach as much, maybe more, by example, than they do by words.

Robert Ingersoll was a notorious skeptic of the Christian faith (19<sup>th</sup> century). He often lectured on college campuses trying to convince people of the folly of believing. After one of his lectures, two college students were walking back to their dorms. One said to the other, “Well, I guess he really knocked the foundations out from Christianity, didn’t he?”

The other student said, “No, I don’t think he did. That guy didn’t explain my mother’s life, and until he can explain my mother’s life, I will stand by my mother’s God.” Yes, faith is often taught, or rather caught, from our mothers.

In the lesson from Timothy this morning, the apostle Paul gives thanks for young Timothy’s mother and grandmother. He thanks God for their faith, which is where Timothy first learned about the Lord Jesus Christ. Very often it is our mother who brings us to faith, who nurtures us in our faith, and who encourages us to remain faithful.

Many scholars have concluded that you really cannot understand John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Movement in England and the United States, unless you understand his mother, Susanna Wesley. She was so instrumental in his life that she inevitably influenced the Methodist movement and its direction.

You can’t really understand Methodism without knowing about Susanna Wesley. Timothy, in the New Testament, would not be a Christian were it not for his mother and grandmother. And perhaps the same could be said for many of us, that without our mother’s influence, we would not be a Christian today.

Three things our mothers have taught us, or I hope they have: Confidence in ourselves, the knowledge of God's love, and a personal faith in God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Thank God for our mothers. Amen.