

What I Have Learned from My Mother

Ephesians 6:1-4, et al

Take a first look.

Tribute, Eva Lois Johnson McCandless

By Frank R. Johnson

In 1922, a girl was born to Ross and Betty Harmonson. They named her Eva Lois. In customary Texas fashion, they called her by both her first and middle names, Eva Lois. In fact, someone who had met her in her senior years, once asked my wife and me why people called her "Evil Lois." "She seems like such a nice woman to us," they said. I replied, with customary tongue in cheek, "You don't know her like we do." Then we set their minds at ease: "It is *Eva* Lois, not Evil Lois." "Oh" (followed by nervous laughter). This girl, #8 of 10 of the siblings born alive to the Harmonsons (2 did not survive birth), grew up with a love for God and for her family.

She quit school at the age of 18 and went home to nurse her own mother through her final illness. She cared for her mother for 2 years before her passing. Then, she went back to school. After college came seminary, an unlikely choice for a young woman in the late 1940s and early 1950s. But she persevered and took an M.Re. degree (Masters in Religious Education).

Not long afterward, she took a teaching credential in the state of Texas and began to serve the Lord in churches both in Oklahoma and in Texas. It was while serving at one of those churches in Texas, Morgan Avenue Baptist Church in Corpus Christi, she was approached by an older single man requesting some help with a class of Junior boys in a Sunday evening study. Clyde B. Johnson, Sr., was asking for help with Junior-age boys, but he was looking for a wife. As he told the story, the first time he laid eyes on Eva Lois, it is as if God told him that she was to be his wife. Thankfully, he didn't approach her with that line, or perhaps I wouldn't be here telling this story today!

She was naively unaware of what was brewing behind the scenes, perceiving simply a class leader who needed help. She offered to help with the class. Not too terribly long afterward, they had come to terms with the call of God on their individual lives, and discovered that those callings merged well together. Eva Lois felt a calling to missions; Clyde felt a calling to start churches in rural Washington State, which was considered "pioneer missions" by the good brothers and sisters in Texas at that time (and maybe still today). As they talked and prayed about these visions of the future, they saw how clearly they fitted together. They married, and within five years, Clyde had completed his college work and had graduated from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Not long after that, they packed up their two sons and moved to Washington. Their little boys were 8 and 5 at that time, one son named Clyde Boyde Johnson, Jr., and the other named after his two grandfathers, Franklin Ross Johnson. Over the next 10 years, those two boys saw most of the western states out the back window of the family station wagon. And now, also, in fulfillment of what can only be considered a prophetic insight from Clyde, Sr., both of those boys are proclaiming the truth of God as pastors in their respective churches in Washington and Colorado. [I usually say at this point, it is obvious that insanity runs in families!]

From that moment in 1960 when the Johnson family moved to Washington State, until Clyde B. Johnson's (my father's) death in 1979, my parents formed a partnership in church planting that depended fully on my mother, Eva Lois, to work. She taught in the public school system while Dad planted churches. This would not have worked any other way. Dad never drew more than a housing allowance over his own lifetime in ministry in the churches. Mom's income supported the family, for the most part. Not only that, Mom was Dad's tireless and mutual partner in ministry. She produced the church's bulletins, led the youth group (or whatever else needed leadership), sat side-by-side with Dad in marital conferences, and produced a monthly newsletter (on a hand-cranked

mimeograph machine) to all the folks “back home” that supported the work both in prayer and in financial giving.

If that all wasn't enough, within two years after Dad's death, in 1981, my mother began a Christian School. I had just graduated from Cal. Baptist University that summer, and mom had enlisted us to help her “with some of her projects.” Those coalesced into a K-12-grades Christian School, one that still operates in the city of Colville, Washington, these over 3 decades later. Jeannie and I were immersed in that ministry, teaching full-time, homeschooling, directing the chapel program and more over the next 10 years. In the middle of those years, in 1986, she surprised all of the family with the announcement that she was considering a proposal of marriage from a man we had grown up calling “Uncle Lee.” He was not really our uncle; he was married to my father's niece. She had passed away a couple of years earlier, and these two widowed folks connected across the miles. After their marriage, mom moved to Corpus Christi, Texas, where she lived and served the Lord for the next 16 years until Lee McCandless passed away in 2002. During that time, she wrote a complete Language Arts Curriculum for grades K-High School (in her spare time!).

In yet another stroke of mom's strong-willed initiatives, after Lee's death, she served notice to my brother and me: I want to move in with you, dividing my time between Washington and Colorado. That worked out pretty well for the next six years, until she decided that she needed yet another change and moved into Hearthstone Cottage in Ellensburg, Washington. She has continued to serve in witness and in prayer while living there the past 4 ½ years.

I begin my message on this important Mother's Day with this tribute to my mother. She was a one-of-a-kind woman, to be sure. When I read the tribute to the Faithful Wife and Mother of Proverbs 31, and then when I think of my own mother, I think, “You left out a few items, Lemuel.” Mom, our grateful love and thanks goes to you today. May something of your legacy continue to inspire us as your children, your grandchildren and your great-grandchildren, to seek your Lord and ours and to offer Him a whole life of devotion, as well.

Mom was known as a loving friend, a devoted and beloved wife and mother, a faithful follower and servant of her Lord Jesus Christ, and the greatest fan of her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Her love surrounded and drew in all who came close enough to be touched by it. All who knew her would echo the sentiment expressed in Proverbs 31:29: “Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all.” They would also say, as that passage concludes. “Give her the reward she has earned, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate” (Proverbs 31:31).

Mom was ushered into the presence of the Lord on Friday, May 17, 2013, at about 3:00 AM. She is survived by one brother, Ross Harmonson of Spencer, Iowa, sons Clyde Johnson and his wife Janice of Durango, Colorado, and Frank Johnson and his wife Jeannie of Ellensburg, Washington, step-son Bill McCandless and his wife Patti and their two children, five wonderful grandchildren and one wonderful step-granddaughter, and fourteen very wonderful great-grandchildren. She is preceded in death by her parents, ten brothers and sisters, and her first husband Clyde Johnson, Sr., her second husband Lee McCandless, and one step-daughter Joyce Sheen.

What I Have Learned from My Mother

Ephesians 6:1-4, et al

Take a closer look.

I. We are truly blessed when we honor our parents. vv. 1-3

To “obey your parents in the Lord” means these things:

a. *This means that we should do what they tell us while we are under their care and provision.* This is really a basic attitude and not just a matter of behavior. We should have a sense of respect for our parents and want to obey them, even in circumstances in which it is difficult to do so.

I—My mother always displayed a spirit of respect toward her parents. She spoke of how even a stern look from her father gave her a sinking heart, and I don't think that she reported too much of what we would call "corrective discipline" in her upbringing. Now maybe the sons in that family of nine children got a little more of this. ☺ I will have to ask the only surviving child, my mother's younger brother Ross, next time I talk to him.

b. *This means that we should do what they tell us that is not contradicted by the teaching of our Lord. The "in the Lord" element is centrally important in all relationships.*

I—Clearly, parents can sometimes ask us to do things that we know are not right. Some parents have asked their children to steal for them. Some have asked them to lie for them ("Don't tell them I'm home!"). Some have taught them to be prejudiced towards people that are different, in race or financial standing or in some other way. These things are not right for parents to do, and children are not required by God to obey unjust and immoral commands, or to follow a bad example.

My mother never asked either my brother or myself to do anything like this. In fact, both of my parents, born and bred in the great state of Texas, taught us a strict respect for all people everywhere, whether of African, Asian, European, South American or native American descent. As any of you know who knew her, Mom had a way of drawing in almost anyone who got close enough to the magnetic field of her personality. I am grateful for her example of not only a lack of prejudice but of a spirit of antagonism toward such bigotry, and I have tried to follow this example explicitly. The basic idea is found right here in this little open letter that has been named **Ephesians (Ephesians 2:14-22, NIV)**:

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,¹⁵ by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace,¹⁶ and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.¹⁷ He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.¹⁸ For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

¹⁹ Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household,²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

If God has "destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility" between Jew and Gentile, then He can destroy any barrier, any dividing wall of hostility that exists anywhere and anytime. My mother was a builder of bridges between people and not of walls.

c. *This means that we must look for ways to honor our parents.* To honor our parents means that we speak well to and of them in every way and time possible, and that we learn to serve them according to their needs and our abilities.

I—We picked this up from our mother, also. She spoke well of her parents, even though they had issues like every other fallen human being. And she acted on this. As I reported already, when she was 18 and already attending college, she left and went home. She spent the next 2 years caring for her mother in her mother's final illness until her passing. Then, Mom went back to school. I consider that an act of great honor, and it still inspires me. In our case,

this is why we adjusted our lives in 2013 to allow Mom to live out her days in her chosen home, Hearthstone Cottage in Ellensburg, WA. It would not have been possible without the direct help and loving service of many of you. For this, we will be eternally grateful.

**II. We are truly blessed when we seek to pass on this godly heritage to those who follow us.
v. 4**

1. *We can be tempted to make our children angry by our own behavior.* This is what the older translation meant by do not “provoke to anger,” or what the NIV means by “do not exasperate” them. The Greek verb simply means to “make angry.”

a. *We can make children angry by acting out of anger ourselves.* Kind begets kind here.

b. *We can make children angry by being absent from their lives in any meaningful sense.* Every child needs that parental *presence*, even if it is expressed by someone else than the actual parents.

c. *We can make children angry by being unjust.* It is hard not to sympathize a little with the brothers of Joseph when we read his story in Genesis 37. He was obviously the favored son, with his “Amazing Technicolor Dream Coat” as Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber called it. They are not justified by their actions, but from a purely human point of view, at least you can understand their attitudes a little. No one likes to be “the other child.”

c. *We can make children angry by being overbearing.* That may be in view here. Screwing down the boundaries too tightly or setting boundaries arbitrarily without expressing a loving and godly purpose can beget anger and resentment.

I—In my happy case, I had two parents who really cared for my brother and me. This was pretty obvious for any casual observer. This doesn’t mean that we had no pain in our relationships. I spent some fruitless teen years blaming my father for being overbearing and too hard on me especially. I later repented of the anger I expressed toward and evoked from him. I now realize that my father made a difficult and painful choice. He saw me slouching down a dangerous path, which he in his world-savvy experience understood, and he simply threw himself across my path. We collided. It hurt both of us. We were scarred. But, in the grace of God, we both recovered. All of that made a better father out of me. I learned from his mistakes, and I have learned from my own.

During all of this, my mother stood beside the both of us, trying to keep the peace or make some when needed. I don’t remember her actually taking sides with either of us, except to stand with Dad on the decisions that they made together about appropriate boundaries for my behavior. I can say this, if I got into trouble and the sentence was a spanking, I knew what would get from Dad—four swats with a belt. Evaluate that any way you wish. I lived through it. However, if it came to that and Mom was pushed to the point of exasperation herself, well, she might just spank me all over the house! Forgive me, Mom, for mentioning that, but I do so lest everyone think you walked on water even when it wasn’t frozen. ☺

2. *We must make every effort to influence the generation that follows us for our Lord.* “Bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.” That is pretty obvious in meaning, isn’t it? Set boundaries (“training”) and give teaching (“instruction”) that commend the Christian message and way of life to those who watch us the closest and who learn both from our teaching and our example.

I—And here again, my mother (and father) have left my brother and me a legacy that we are struggling to maintain and pass on to those who follow us. Mom loved the Lord from

childhood, accepting Christ into her life as Lord and Savior at her earliest opportunity. She never looked back, it seems. She went to school to equip herself to serve the Lord, eventually taking that M.RE. degree I have already mentioned. She did something that I have heard her say in advising many young adults. She “went to sleep in the Lord” and trusted Him to wake her up if marriage was in His plan. Well, it took her to her 29th year before the Lord woke her up (and yes, she has been asked, “What if God forgets to wake me up!?” It’s really a matter of faith, isn’t it?).

Every child becomes most intimately aware of his/her parents’ faults and inconsistencies. But the direction of the parents’ lives is what really makes the most difference. I have mused on **the story of Jacob** many times. His deceitful ways catch up to him when God meets him on the eve of his reunion with his brother—whom Jacob fully expected to exact revenge on him for stealing his birthright. He wrestles with the angel of the Lord until daybreak. When that is over, he walks away with a limp, but *for the first time in his life he was limping in the right direction*. I rather take that as a wonderful example. As I sum up the application: even a limping person can lead others if he is limping in the right direction. So yes, I am aware of some of my mother’s faults. I may have complained about some of these out loud in her final years, months, or days. For that, I hope the hearers of such complaints will extend grace to me. In my defense, I try to remember that each of us is a mixed bag of good and bad example. The trick is to embrace the good while forgiving the bad.

There is no question about the direction of my mother’s life. She loved the Lord; she served the Lord; and she tried to have an influence for the Lord until her last breath. No one got near to her for long before she made known her love for the Lord in some way. She finished well. Had it not already been written, she could have said, shortly before her passing [2 Timothy 4:6-8, NIV]:

For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure.⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.⁸ Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

This was equally true of my mother, as it was for Paul.

Take it home (applications).

Please excuse the perhaps overly personal nature of the message today. This is Mother’s Day and I have been contemplating my own legacy lately. Her generation has passed, with the exception of her one brother, my Uncle Ross Harmonson. It falls on my brother and me to perpetuate our particular strand of the Johnson name. It is a strand of love for the Lord and service to Him, offering up our lives for His purposes in the world.

So I encourage all of us today with these simple applications, looking in both generational directions:

I. Let’s look for ways to honor our parents. Tell more stories about their good qualities than about their faults. Offer them the same grace that we ourselves have received from the Lord.

II. Let’s look for ways to influence the generation that follows us. We must do an example-check often. We must be intentional about teaching God’s way. We must impart a Christ-centered way of seeing the world and ourselves in God’s world through our teaching and our attitudes. Let’s keep it real! And then, let’s trust God with the results in their lives.