

Today is Mother's Day; a day in which we honor our mothers, but in reality, we should honor them each and every day, because where would we be without them. Abraham Lincoln said that no man is poor who has a godly mother. When Lincoln was asked what was the greatest book that he had ever read, he replied: "My mother." Franklin D. Roosevelt said that no nation is greater than its mothers. Lord Shaftesbury stated: "Give me a generation of Christian mothers, and I will undertake to change the face of society in twelve months."

This morning, I want to look at the influence that a particular mother and grandmother had on one of the earliest preachers in the Bible. Our scripture text is taken from 2 Timothy, the first chapter, verses 3 through 7. Listen to these words of encouragement from the Apostle Paul to Timothy, his young student pastor.

Read 2 Timothy 1:3-7

According to the *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, Police Chief Phil Keith was in the middle of a city council meeting in Knoxville, Tennessee, when his pager beeped. Startled to see that the call was from his mother, he rushed to the press room and phoned her. "Philip Keith, are you chewing gum?" demanded his mother, who had been watching the meeting on the local cable TV channel. "Yes, ma'am." "Well, it looks awful. Spit it out." Keith removed the gum immediately and went back into the meeting. There is no one like mothers!

Mother's Day, in one form or another, has been around a long time. In ancient Greece, a celebration honoring mothers occurred every spring. In the Middle Ages, a custom called *Mothering Sunday* began when children who often left home early to learn a trade or to become apprentices, would be released from work every year on the fourth Sunday of Lent to attend church with their families. As they returned home, the children often took cakes or little gifts to their mothers. This was termed "going a – mothering." To this day, Mother's Day in the United Kingdom is celebrated on the fourth Sunday of Lent.

It was in 1872 that Julia Ward Howe, the author of the *Battle Hymn of the Republic*, suggested the idea of a Mother's Day in the United States. The cause was taken up by Anna Jarvis, daughter of a Methodist pastor. Jarvis felt the scars of the Civil War could be healed by mothers – and by honoring mothers. She died in 1905 before her dream of establishing a holiday could be fulfilled. But her daughter, also named Anna Jarvis, took up the crusade.

Anna had been deeply influenced by her mother and had been particularly touched at the age of twelve while listening to her mother teach a Sunday School class on the subject "Mothers in the Bible." Mrs. Jarvis closed the lesson with a prayer to this effect: "I hope and pray that

someone, sometime, will find a memorial mother's day. There are many days for men, but none for mothers."

After her mother's death, Anna began a campaign to establish a national Mother's Day. She and her supporters began to write a constant stream of letters to ministers, businessmen, politicians and newspaper editors. She spent a fortune trying to attract attention to her idea, and took every opportunity to give speeches, send telegrams, or write articles promoting her cause.

On the second anniversary of her mother's death, May 12, 1907, Anna led a small tribute to her mother at Andrews Methodist Episcopal Church in Gafton, West Virginia. She donated 500 white carnations, her mother's favorite flower, to be worn by everyone in attendance. On this first Mother's Day service, the pastor used the text from John 19:26-27: "Woman, behold your son; Son, behold your mother." That same day a special service was held at the Wannamaker Auditorium in Philadelphia, which could seat no more than a third of the 15,000 people who showed up.

After that, things began to take off. Various States jumped on the bandwagon, officially proclaiming Mother's Day each year, and in 1914, President Woodrow Wilson officially established Mother's Day as a national holiday to be held on the second Sunday in May. I don't know if you knew the history of this special day to honor our mothers, but you can see that the Methodist Church played a major role in its establishment here in the United States.

There are many ways to describe our mothers. One of the best descriptions from the Bible can be found in Proverbs 31:10-31 which is entitled the "Wife of Noble Character." It ends with these words – "Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised." Do you know anyone like this? Most likely it's your mother.

A small boy invaded the dress section of a big department store and shyly presented his problem to the salesclerk. "I want to buy my mom a present – a dress," he said, "but I don't know her size." The clerk said, "It would help to know if your mom is short or tall, fat or skinny." "She's just perfect," beamed the little boy. In the eyes of little boys and girls, mom is perfect!

When we think of our mothers, love is the first word that usually comes to our mind. The words "mother" and "love" should go together like our right and left hands. And the best biblical description of that is found in 1 Corinthians 13. Now this particular scripture passage is used a lot at weddings because it sums up what we hope and expect love to be. Do you remember the text? "Love is patient, love is kind, it does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. Love is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of

wrong. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trust, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.”

However, sometimes mom has to give that tough love. You know the kind that doesn’t feel good at the moment, but in the long run is better for you. When I was growing up, my father was usually the one to administer the punishment for the misbehavior of my brothers and myself, which was quite often, but Mom was the one who kept us in line. She taught us right from wrong and made us toe the line. I can still hear her saying: “Wait until your father gets home.” Those were some of the longest hours in my early childhood.

Chuck Swindoll told about a Mother’s Day card that was really cute. It was a great big card written in a little child’s printing – like a first-grade printing. On the front was a little boy with untied sneakers. He had a red wagon and toys all over the place. He had a little cut on his face and there were smudges all over the card. The card read: “Mom, I remember that little prayer you used to say for me every day.” Inside the card was the prayer: “God help you if you ever do that again!”

I can tell from your reaction that some of you have said that prayer as your children were growing up. But in all seriousness, there is nothing as wonderful as a mother’s prayer for her children. No one prays or feels for her children like a mother. Motherhood is a partnership with God. Someone once said that a mother’s patience is like a tube of toothpaste – it’s never quite all gone.

Several years ago, Randy Travis had a wonderful song entitled “When Mama Prays.” In the song, the mother is a devoted Christian woman who was always in church while her husband and son were not. The husband even claimed that he would never set foot in the church, but mama kept praying and one Easter he walked right in and sat down on the first row with his wife.

In the next verse, the son comes home late one night after drinking and running around. He hears his mother in the living room on her knees talking with Jesus, and he knew right then and there that his wandering days were over, because when mama prays good things happen. Oh, there’s lot of truth in that statement, my friends! Because when mama and daddy pray, things happen. The Book of James tells us the prayer of a righteous person is both powerful and effective. We must never underestimate the power of prayer, especially in the lives of our children and grandchildren.

But of all the qualities of a mother, to me the greatest is their faith. In our scripture, Paul tells his student Timothy that he is thankful for his sincere faith that first lived in his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice and now lives in him. How many of us are here this morning because of the influence of our mothers?

I know for a fact that I would not be here today without the faith that my mother passed on to me. She gave me love, a good education, a work ethic, but the greatest gift that she left me was her faith in God. She not only shared her faith, but she lived it out each and every day of her life.

Nothing kept Mom out of church on Sunday or even during the week. She loved the Lord and church. She read her Bible daily and was always in prayer for her family, friends and others. She taught Sunday School and played the piano for worship each Sunday up to the day the Lord called her home at the age of 76.

At the age of 46, she was widowed with three teenage sons to raise. On her secretary's salary, she put all three of us through Clemson University – at one time all three of us were there – a senior, junior and freshman. One of my favorite stories is the time that Mom could not get tickets to the big football game between the Clemson Tigers and their archrival the South Carolina Gamecocks. So she wrote the president of the university and told him that she was a grandmother who had put three sons through that school. A few days later she received two tickets on the forty yard line. I had to sit in the upper deck on the ten yard line. She was also persistent and a little stubborn. The latter characteristic that I inherited.

But it was her love for God that influenced me the most. When she died, I told my brothers that all I wanted was her Bible. It is now on the shelf of my office where it reminds me of her faith and devotion to the Lord. Both of which I hope and pray that I will be able to live up to.

So where did you get your faith? Was it your mother, father, grandparent, other relative, or friend? But the bigger, most important and critical question for you and me today as mothers, fathers, grandparents, friends and neighbors is – are we passing our faith onto our loved ones and friends? Someone has said that Christianity is always just one generation away from extinction. Our faith is a precious gift given to us, not to be hoarded and taken with us to the grave, but to be shared and passed on.

Over the years I have led several studies on the Book of Revelation in which we had some really deep discussions. Someone once asked what happens when you get to heaven and look around and some of your loved ones are not there? The Bible says that there will be no more tears or crying in heaven, but won't your heart reach out and weep for those who will not share paradise with you? Makes you think doesn't it?

Now this was brought home to me during a visit to New York City several years ago. Judy and I were riding the subway to downtown Manhattan with our son Jack. At one stop a family was trying to catch the train before the doors shut. Unfortunately, only the daughter got on the train and the door closed leaving her parents standing on the station platform. They looked at each other through the glass of the door and tried to shout where to meet. I thought to myself, will I be looking through the doors of heaven at someone who didn't make it because I was reluctant to share the love and grace of Jesus Christ with them?

Now this is serious stuff on this day of celebration. But as Christians, God has called each of us to help others to come and know Him as we do. Of course there are some people, and our loved ones, friends and neighbors may be among them, who will never accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, but have we done all we can to let them know about Him? There may be a time in the future when we will regret our silence and reluctance to share God's love with others. God gives us opportunities each and every day to share our faith; we must not pass up these opportunities. We may be the one person who can make a difference in another person's place in eternity. We are called to pass God's love on to others.

The last verse of our closing hymn states: "I wish for you, my friend, this happiness I've found; you can depend on Him, it matters not where you're bound. I'll shout it from the mountain top; I want the world to know; the Lord of love has come to me, I want to pass it on." I hope and pray that we all feel this way.

I know that when I get to heaven, it will be because of Mama's faith that she passed on to me. And I pray each day that my sons, daughters-in-law, and grandchildren will also be there because of the faith that Judy and I hopefully are passing on to them.

I thank God for all those people who have shared their faith with me.
May God bless every mother, and every person, who got us here today.
Happy Mother's Day! Amen