

“Remember to Pray”

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Jacqueline Cole

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I learned early that outwitting my mom was almost impossible, but I kept trying to do that anyway. As I packed to leave my home in Sierra Leone for college in America, my mom grabbed a few items from around our home and slid them into my suitcase. One of these items was a plaque that she thought I could use to decorate my dorm room, to help me be less anxious, and less homesick. It was a great idea, except that as you can imagine, what your mom thinks is cool sometimes, is not necessarily cool to you. When she had stepped away, I quickly removed the plaque from my suitcase, and set it on my study desk. I was not comfortable displaying it in my dorm room with a complete stranger, but I did not want to travel with it and keep it locked up in my suitcase either.

I arrived safely in America for College here in Pennsylvania that August and when I called my mom to tell her that I had arrived safely, I was expecting her to express her disappointment that I had left the plaque behind in Sierra Leone. She did not mention it. We spoke frequently after that and she never brought it up. A few months later in December, I opened up my Christmas gifts from her, and one of them was the plaque. Inscribed on it were the words, “Remember to pray.” At the back of the plaque, was a simple handwritten message. “Jacqueline, Merry Christmas.” My mom calling me by my full name “Jacqueline” was never a compliment for me.

Good Morning Church! Even though you know my full name, please call me Jacquie. I am grateful to Pastor Doug for the opportunity to share my faith journey with Christ, through experiences with my mom. To all the moms and mother figures here in person or worshipping with us online, A happy mothers day to you all.

I was born in Sierra Leone, a small country off the coast of West Africa. I was born into a Christian family, baptised, and raised in the Anglican church. My family was very active in the church. To name a few, my grandmother taught Sunday school, my grandad sang in the

choir and played the organ and my dad has been a choirmaster at his church for over 40 years. Outside of being a loving grandmother and prayer warrior for our family, Grandma Chrissie, who some may refer to as my step-mom, but who I refer to as my BONUS MOM, enjoys spending her time teaching kids about Jesus, through her Noah's Ark program. I am blessed with three sisters Yasmin, Nadine and Ngozi who live with their families in Maryland, Connecticut and Philadelphia respectively. We were raised in love, taught to love and trust God, obey his teachings, and to be kind.

Model: Demonstrate Christ-like behavior. M- Model. My mom, Enitan, modeled a Christ - like life for me.

I was a sophomore in College in Sierra Leone, when an ongoing civil war in Sierra Leone escalated terribly. Rebels took control of the capital city, Freetown, which is where I lived with my mom. The sight of military tankers and the sound of fighter jets became the norm. People were being killed or kidnapped and tortured. The homes of innocent people were being looted or burned down. It was horrendous, and we lived in fear. If you are into movies, you may have seen the movie "Blood Diamonds" featuring Leonardo DiCaprio which depicts the war I speak of. Over 50 thousand people died, and about 2 million people were displaced. Everything was mostly shut down. Schools, colleges, corporate institutions etc...

Everyday, my mom and I would kneel in front of her bed to read the bible, and pray. Like me, she was scared, but like most moms, her first priority was calming my fears. One of the scriptures we read often was Philippians 4:6. "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." I understood the part about prayer and petition, but thanksgiving? Thanksgiving for what? The War? I like to have conversations with God and at that time, I had so many questions for him. Like why do bad things happen to good people? Or why do the perpetrators of evil appear to be getting away with their actions? I had many prayer requests, and honestly, it seemed like none of them were being answered fast enough. Everyone who could leave the country did so, and everyday, my network of friends became smaller as people fled. I learned to let go of my fears realizing that there was nothing I could do but pray. I understood for the first time

then, what it truly meant to put ALL 100% of my trust in God.

When I got the news of acceptance into a College here in Pennsylvania to continue my studies, my mom and I were elated. I was also nervous that I was leaving my mom behind in Sierra Leone but she planned to stay in Sierra Leone so that she could be with my grandpa, who was a journalist, and had already been targeted twice. When she gave me that plaque that said “Remember to Pray” it meant a lot to her. My faith in the power of prayer and my relationship with God had become stronger at that stage in my life. At the same time however, I was not comfortable with blatantly professing my faith to strangers which is why I had chosen to leave the plaque in Sierra Leone.

Obey: Follow God's commandments and teachings.

As I continued to grow in my faith, I realized that obedience is important because we see many examples of this in the scripture like Abraham, Noah, Mary the mother of Jesus, and also with Jesus, whose selfless act of allowing God's will to be done, by dying on the cross for our sins, is the most profound act of love and obedience. This is profound and humbling to me because full obedience to God's word is not always easy even though his commandments and teachings are clear and relatively easy to understand.

While the bible talks about commandments, outside of scripture we talk about rules. For example, my parents taught me that “rules are meant to be followed.” To have a successful outcome at most things, there are rules that need to be followed. For example, today, many of us have access to a variety of technology devices that seem to be able to do just about everything. Why? Because even computers have rules that have been programmed into them. Have you ever wondered why a computer is so smart? Because it listens to its motherboard. So “Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.” Colossians 3:20.

Speaking of Technology, I work in Technology, and moved to this area when I graduated from College, because of work. I did not know anyone around here. I found Woodside during my search for nearby churches. I had visited other churches in the area by that time, but my spirit had not found my place. I decided to check out Woodside and after the very first service, a

few people engaged with me to either say hi, or welcome, to ask my name. One of them, who became a dear friend, Kim Engelsman of blessed memory, even took it to the next level that same day by inviting me to consider singing with the choir. I left church that day with a warm and fuzzy feeling. Came back the next Sunday, started coming to choir practice shortly after, became a member here, and I have never looked back. My husband, Victor and I got married in August of 2006 right here in the sanctuary. A few years later in August of 2009, we were doubly blessed with the Joy of being parents to Nathan and Matthew.

Over the last 15 years since they were born, one of my most important tasks for me as a mom, has been trying to teach them about obedience, at home, at school, at play, but most important about obedience to God. 2 John 1:6 And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love. As parents, Victor and I, are thankful for you, our Woodside family. For the lessons you have imparted to our boys since they were little, at Sunday School, or VBS or youth group and even to their experience at camp last year. Thank you to our dynamic youth group leaders. Through your obedience to his command, you, our Woodside village, are helping us raise Nathan and Matthew in Christ.

Minister: Serve others with love and compassion.

My dad taught High school Physics, and my mom taught English Language, English Literature and World History. They both loved their jobs and served with compassion. Throughout the time that I have been coming to Woodside, Woodside's heart of serving others with love and compassion has been constant. It continues to fill my heart, and help me experience Christ in many different ways. Over the years, Serving here at Woodside has looked different for me at different times. Whether it was singing in the choir, or creating slides for the classic service or teaching Sunday school, leading bible study, serving as a Deacon etc.. The service ministry here continues to inspire me to want to pursue my interests whether as part of a ministry here or somewhere else. In some ways it is almost like college, with many options to inspire different interests.

I vividly remember the day my mom confirmed that Yes, she would be travelling to the US to attend my graduation from College. We were all very excited especially because she had not been keeping quite well. Shortly after mom arrived in the US however, she was

diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer. This was unexpected and devastating but like we had done before when faced with adversity, we were prepared to pray, fight, and win! Soon after diagnosis, mom started chemotherapy. She fell ill and had to be hospitalized. As a result, she could not attend my graduation which is the only reason she had visited the US. Thankfully, I was able to visit her at the hospital right after my graduation so that she could at least see me in my cap and gown. When I walked in, way past visiting hours. her eyes lit up with joy, gratitude.. and hope! I do not take that moment for granted! I am her only child. Through the hugs and tears, she held my hand and prayed over me. She was not sad. Instead, she was full of praise and thanksgiving Less than 3 months after that unfortunately, she gained her heavenly wings. I grieved mom's loss for a long time.

Corinthians 1:3-5

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. 5 For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. Pulling from the strength of my comforter, and to continue moms legacy of helping others, a non profit called Hematology and Cancer Untold (HACU) was launched in 2017 by my family to serve patients and families in Sierra Leone who are impacted by breast cancer and sickle cell disease. Serving through HACU continues to strengthen my faith in God. Some of you here today have also supported or served with us at HACU. I find fulfillment in service, and I am thankful that as I stand here today, it is not fear, or sadness but joy, that fills my heart. I still have frank conversations with God, but over the years, these conversations have turned more into adoration and thanksgiving. Even when I can't make sense of a given situation, I try to remember that He is God, not me. When I pray, I pray for "His will to be done" because I have proof of His goodness and faithfulness throughout my life. Friends, by his grace, may we continue to:

Model and Demonstrate Christ-like behavior in daily life,
Obey and Follow His commandments and teachings and
Minister and serve others with love and compassion always

Although these words spell MOM, the message truly applies to everyone, not just moms. When the going gets tough, Do not be anxious. Put your trust in God and Remember to pray.

Philippians 4:6.

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” Remember that plaque I was not comfortable hanging in my dorm room? This is it! It holds a very special place in my heart, hangs in my home, and serves as a constant reminder for me to fully trust in God and remember to pray! Please pray with me.