

The Mothers of My Life!

Today is Mother's Day. I have been around mothers all my life. I can never remember a week in my life that a mother has not influenced me. Even when I was a dorm student in college, mothers discovered me. It was sometimes a grandma whose grandson and I were in ministry and on the way up to street-preach in Chicago who made us sandwiches. Sometimes it was a doting teacher that took personal interest in me if I did not do my best on a project. In my life it was more in particular, my mom, my mother-in-law, and the mom with whom I have spent most of my time, my dear wife. However, there are two mothers that you don't know - my grandmothers. Today I want to introduce you to my paternal grandmother, Willie Florence Wyatt Pope whom we called "Mamaw," and my maternal grandmother Mary Sutterfield Edwards, whom we called "Grandma." I would like to list three lessons of life these two great ladies taught me.

I. My grandmothers taught me that love never lets go.

Of the nine children of Willie, one was very special. Her name was Oline Jewel, referred to as "My Jewel" by Mamaw. In our family on Dad's side, school teachers and preachers were resplendent. Aunt Oline was probably the best school teacher in the history of three generations of our family. Up to when my cousin Roy Pope retired from his prestigious teaching position of forty years, he told me from time to time he still met people who said Oline was the greatest teacher they ever sat under. I was recently holding a picture of her in my hand and even though it has been decades since she passed, there was a kindness that radiated from her gentle eyes. She died at an early age. My Mamaw loved her so dearly that she once told my dad, she wondered if she could ever cry again, because she cried all her tears for her Jewel. Whenever the family gathered, Mamaw would always turn the conversation to Jewel. She never let her be removed from the memories of the Popes. And she never quite cried up all her tears, for the mere mention of my aunt's name would always moisten her piercing blue eyes.

Of the thirteen children Mary reared, one was very special and her name was Ruby. Ruby Masel was never quite sound in mind, body and even speech. I would imagine Aunt Ruby never progressed beyond seven years of age. She could not read or write and her speech was difficult to understand. In what little schooling she had, the difficulties were insurmountable. The hardest part for my grandma was the fact that many of the children mocked and made fun of her. My beautiful little brown-eyed grandmother one day had quite enough and to further shield Ruby from shame and embarrassment, took her out of school and protected her and taught her the best she could. Grandma also wanted to be there to hold her as still as possible during her frequent grand mal seizures. Here is a remarkable fact, my grandmother could not read or write. Ruby learned a lot. She learned enough to call on the Lord to be her Lord and Savior. She also had the best doll collection I've ever seen and took immaculate care of each and every one. It was precious as the little nieces and nephews would gather round her and she would pull out her dolls and stuffed animals to entertain the grandkids in royal fashion. By the way, she was a very tough checkers player. Grandma took care of Ruby to her dying day. And in her last days and hours, Grandma gave specific instructions on not neglecting or forgetting Ruby. When Aunt Ruby died, the sisters and brothers were there for her, obeying their mother's wishes in detail. Beholding the affection of Grandma toward Aunt Ruby was a beautiful testimony of love.

One of the outstanding attributes my wonderful grandmothers taught me is love never lets go. Dr. Charles Allen said there was a mother and grandmother he knew who had a child that went wayward and when everyone insisted she forget about this child and go on with her life, she said, "You can no more un-love a child than you can decide to love a child; it's just there!" "*Charity (God's kind of love) never faileth...*" (I Corinthians 13:8).

II. My grandmothers taught me to laugh throughout the seasons of life.

When we would visit my Mamaw in Big Sandy, Texas she would give us Banana Bikes (a delicious taffy candy) and draw us pictures of a made-up character called Granny Creeps. What an imagination she had as she fictionalized this weird little cartoon. She would talk as she drew. Then she would pull out a jew's harp and we all laughed as she played silly little melodies and sang funny songs. She was a lovely lady, made even lovelier by the smile on her face, which was there so often.

To this day, I hear my Grandma Edwards laughter in my memory. Her most familiar welcome was her outstretched arms with "Come here, you crazy outfit, you." This was not a personal insult; all the grandkids were "crazy outfits." In my early days of preaching, Grandma would go with me any time I preached near her home in North Little Rock, Arkansas. One very cold, winter night I drove Grandma to Sharon Missionary Baptist Church in Benton, Arkansas where I was preaching and after the service we began driving home. We drove fifty miles in the wrong direction and by the end of the night this excursion cost us one hundred extra miles! On top of it all, I had an opening in the floorboard that allowed cold air to blow in on the passenger side of the car. So my eighty-five year old grandmother had to put her feet in the center of the car where the heat came out to stay warm. Here we come at 11:00 p.m. driving through downtown Little Rock, an eighteen year old with his grandmother right next to him, heading home! She stayed in her rare form of humor all the way home.

Both of my grandmothers suffered hardships as they reared up large families throughout the Great Depression. No matter what the hardship they maintained and nourished their healthy sense of humor.

Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore" (Psalm 16:11).

III. My grandmothers taught me to protect and to own the faith passed to us.

My Mamaw Pope was a Primitive Baptist preacher's daughter. And although my Grandma Edward's father was a Missionary Baptist preacher, she was mostly influenced by her shoutin' Methodist mother. You could not get much more diversified that these shades of faith. My Mamaw believed strongly in the predestinated purposes of God while my Grandma believed strongly in man's works that matched his faith. Mamaw was a great hymn singer and had a song for every occasion of life. My father often talked of the music he learned at his mother's knee. She taught her children to bravely face the future, because we are all part of God's Divine plan. My Grandma put wonderful emphasis on answered prayer (of which I have been a recipient of). In Grandma's strict upbringing, she was not allowed to attend much of the day's entertainment, such as the dance. When she was a young teen-ager, she was going behind her mother's back to go to a dance. Her mama looked at her and said, "Mary, I believe you are lying to me about where you are going tonight. I don't know what you are doing tonight, but wherever you are and whatever you are doing, I am praying that tonight the Lord will get a-hold of you." I don't have the time to tell you of this great answer to prayer. In short, that night, my grandma always referred to this as the night she literally "saw the light." My grandma fell to her knees and in her words, she "commenced to prayin'." She said, "Son, I come off my knees shoutin'. They stopped the dance, called the preacher and before we left for home over fifty of us got saved right there on the dance floor." As I look back, some of the most dramatic, life-changing meetings I have ever preached was when Grandma was praying for me. Although she never learned to read or write, she could tell time and wherever in the world I was preaching, she anticipated my time in the pulpit. Grandma had my picture above her bed, just over the clock. It was explained to me how she focused on my picture, and when I would begin to preach, she "commenced" to praying for her preacher grandson, Johnny-boy.

Today, I stand on the shoulders of giants. The best ones I know are the mothers in my life.

- Pastor Pope -

[Back to Pastor's Word](#)