

## LESSONS FROM MY MOTHER 12-14-14

(Proverbs 1) Proverbs 1:**8** *Hear, my son, your father's instruction. And do not forsake your mother's teaching* 6:**20** *My son, observe the commandment of your father. And do not forsake the teaching of your mother.* And then listen to what it says about the lessons you learn from your father and mother. **21-22** *Bind them continually on your heart; Tie them around your neck. 22 When you walk about, they will guide you; When you sleep, they will watch over you; And when you awake, they will talk to you.* What a wonderful treasure are the lessons we learned from our parents. That verse says they guide us when we walk. They even offer protection in your sleep. And when you are awake they talk to you. At 11:02 on Thursday you will find yourself in some situation you aren't sure how to handle and the voice of your mother will come over your mental intercom with one of those pearls of maternal wisdom such as, "if you can't say something nice..." Robert Fulghum has written a bestseller entitled, "All I Really Need To Know I Learned in Kindergarten." I sure can't say that. My childhood memories before the age of seven hardly exist. I don't remember learning a thing in kindergarten, but I have similar thoughts to Fulghum's about the lessons I learned from my mother. And today I want to share those with you, partly because of the worth they have had for me, and because they are lessons confirmed and expanded in Scripture.

The context, as you know, is my mother's recent death a week before her 93<sup>rd</sup> birthday. When I was a child I had a problem in school. Too many things struck me as funny and I would often crack up and be unable to stop laughing – which would not please my teacher. The strategy I developed to stifle my laughter was to think about my mother dying – because that was the saddest thing I could imagine. Fifty years later, her passing is not quite so tragic but still it is a big deal to this boy. My mom was an interesting woman, something of a character. Her hobby was contesting – the entering of sweepstakes. She won, among many other things, six vehicles, around thirty trips, a registered poodle, a six-foot long sandwich flown in from New York and a year's supply of afro-sheen which I gave to the brothers on my basketball team. She was the National Chicken Cooking Champion and was on *To Tell the Truth* as the real Martha Hendley. My mom gave speeches from time to time and had three children who became public speakers. She taught Bible in the schools back when that was done, drug me to Full Gospel Business Men's Meetings in the late 60s and is definitely one of the two persons who most influenced my life in a positive direction.

Now, I wouldn't try to share all the things my mother taught me. Certainly that would be impossible in a single sermon. But I sought to isolate those critical lessons of life which I believe my mother, more than anyone else, drilled into me in the 20 years I lived with her. Okay, does that sound like fun? I'm going to talk about four lessons so they should be easy to remember.

Lesson from Mom #1, the first thing I learned from her is that I am important. I am a big deal. I am somebody. I am. And there ain't nobody what can tell me it ain't so cause my momma knew me better than anybody. And my momma said, by word and by deed, that her boy Dan is a special child, a good boy. And you know what? I believe her. I always have. And do you know what kind of strength this gives a person? Do you know what kind of emotional backbone this provides a young man or woman? It's an awesome gift we parents can give to our children. I love what Greg Louganis, the Olympic diving champion said. When asked what he thinks about when he prepares for a dive he said, "I think to myself that even if I blow this dive my mother will still love me." What's he saying? He's saying that his life, his sense of worth and purpose do not depend on him winning the gold medal. He is secure in who he is because the first person he ever met thinks he is great and won't have her opinion changed one little bit by a diving contest. Someone considered wise has said that you aren't what you think you are, you are what you think others think you are. The point is that our self-image is enormously affected by what we believe others think about us. And there are no significant others in your life more significant than your parents.

Now, listen, all of us struggle with problems of self-image and self-esteem. But those who had sweet, healthy relationships with loving parents generally know far fewer problems in this area. Your view of self is terrifically influenced by your Mom and so I am very grateful that I had a Mom who repeatedly affirmed my personal worth. And you know what? Not only is your view of self closely linked to your parent's esteem but so also is your view of God. Many there are who find it well-nigh impossible to believe God really cares for them, and the root of their doubt is in their childhood and how they were treated by Mother and Father. Possibly you had a home in which you were appreciated and valued only when you performed well and you think God the Father is just like that. You have never laid down the chains of performance-based religion because that is how you were trained to think and it all began with dear old Dad or dear old Mom. I'm not blaming your unbiblical thinking on your parents, but I am saying that we who enjoyed an abundance of unconditional love and esteem have had the way to faith made easier.

But wait a second. Is this business of self-esteem a biblical notion? Isn't this just an example of 1990s psycho-babble? Well, I'll be quick to agree that the self-esteem craze is often taken to

unbiblical extremes. But dear friends, the basic premise that I am a creature of enormous value is clearly and abundantly affirmed in Scripture. The whole idea of man's special creation in God's image as opposed to evolving from the slime is the basis for any sense of self-worth. I think our school system is nuts the way they teach evolution in the science department and then appoint special commissions to lift the self-esteem of our young people. What a crock! Evolutionary philosophy rejects the foundations for self-esteem, but the Bible establishes them. Certainly this is so for the Christian man or woman. I John 3:1 *See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God* This is an awesome thing. Low self-esteem can't survive around words like that. And I would argue that the principle of human worth extends to non-Christians as well as Christians. Jesus was preaching to a mixed multitude when he said in Luke 12:7 *the very hairs of your head are all numbered. You are more valuable than many sparrows.* What is the point of that verse? It is to affirm my value in the eyes of God. The One who slung the galaxies into place knows my name and even has my hairs all numbered off. The lesson I learned from my mother is repeated in Scripture. I am a big deal. I am important. I am a somebody. And I believe nobody can teach us that like our moms and dads. Do you Mother, do you Dad, by your words and your kisses, and your choices communicate to your child his or her great worth? I know you feel it, but just feeling it does nothing for your child. You have to say it, express it, live it. I think of ways my mother did it for me. There were the common ways of affectionate names. There was the frequent touching and stroking and kissing. I can't remember when I was a baby or a toddler but I saw how my mom took her grandbabies and rocked them and sang to them and talked to them like they were the most fascinating creatures on the planet, and I can only assume she did all that with me, building a foundation for my life which is embedded in my unconscious soul. As I grew older I remember how my mom would never let me get down on my self. When I spoke disparagingly of myself my mother would say, "You can't talk to my son that way." My mother was 35 years old when I was born. My dad was 40. I was their fifth and last child. The youngest of my sisters was five years older than me. I was not in the family plan, if you know what I mean. I never asked the details but my mom would often refer to me as her happy mistake. There are worse things that parents call their kids. My mother made it clear that she was glad that I am. Psalm 127:3 *Behold, children are a gift of the LORD, The fruit of the womb is a reward.* And my mother treated me that way. I could hear it in what she said. I could see it in the choices she made - choice after choice, decision after decision she put my interests over hers, from the food she fixed to the vacations she took, to the schedule she kept. Hey Mom, hey Dad, how do your kids rate with your

things? Is there some piece of furniture, some appliance, something on wheels, some toy closer to your heart than your child? Everything we do says something to our children about who they are. I thank God my mother taught me of my own personal worth. I thank God my wife taught my kids the same lesson.

Lesson #2. The second lesson I learned primarily from my mother is that real love can really hurt. What I mean is that that true love goes deeper than kindness and is concerned about a lot more than how I am feeling. C.S. Lewis makes this distinction between kindness and love in which he essentially says that kindness is concerned about the elimination of pain and the provision of pleasure whereas love is concerned about the long-term well-being of its object and therefore addresses more substantial matters of character. It is sort of the distinction between the traditional role of parents vs. that of grandparents. We see it as being the grandparents role and privilege to spoil the kids, which is purely fun. But what is the problem with spoiling the kids? Why can you not give a kid everything he wants? Because he won't learn to handle the real world and all the disappointments of it. It will destroy his character. Someone has said that if you give a pig and a boy everything they want you end up with a good pig and a bad boy. Let the grandparents say, "Yes" all the time; the job of parents goes far beyond that. As a Dad one of my duties was saying, "No" to my kids. Vitamin N. Vitamin N may be the most important one you give your child. It's not your job as a dad to make your kids happy. It is your job to make them holy, with the understanding that holiness will translate into happiness over the duration of their lives. And our example for all this is God himself who is called in the New Testament our Father, not our grandfather, but our Father. And Hebrews 12 sets forth a portion of what that means. **6 FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES.** That word "scourge" means to whip. It means to give considerable pain. And who is it that does this? The Lord. And who does he do it to? His children. I tell ya, if people would just take seriously this one verse we would have done with a lot of theological error. R.C. Sproul tells the story about going on the 700 Club, a Christian talk show, and just before he was to come out the previous guest shared a tale of tremendous suffering that he had been through with a child of his and Pat Robertson, in seeking to bring some comfort to this man said to him, "Isn't it good to know that God has nothing to do with our suffering?" @ I can understand why someone might want to say that. I can understand why someone might want to believe that. But honestly, it is unfathomable to me how someone who believes the Bible as Pat Robertson certainly does, can make a remark like that. In Scripture God is forever connected to suffering and is Himself frequently presented as the specific

Cause of suffering, even for his own people. For discipline's sake, for the purpose of growing them up, we read of how God caused many Israelites to die in the desert, of how he took the child of David in infancy, of how he afflicted Paul with a thorn in the flesh. Hebrews 12:6 *THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES.* And the passage goes on to explain **7b-8** *God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 10bc He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness.* That expresses the goal of all discipline. We discipline our kids for their long-term good, specifically with the goal of holiness in mind. Kindness wants to see the child smile. Love wants to see the child mature and therefore is willing to put up with some tears and some long faces. **11** *All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.* ® I saw this at work in my mother. I saw how she cared too much for me to let me get away with sin. This is why Proverbs 13:**24** *He who withholds his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him diligently.* I could give you another six or seven verses out of Proverbs on the subject of spanking. The rod is a physical object that was applied to the backside of a child. Proverbs frequently speaks of how the rod and reproof bring wisdom. I once saw some poll asking what people thought about the relationship of spanking and crime. The question was, "Do you think there would be less crime if parents would spank more?" How would you answer that? I think it is certainly historically verifiable that as spanking went out of style crime rose dramatically. But I don't like the way the question was put. Spanking itself doesn't mold character. Indeed, spanking without love can anger and embitter a child. But you ask me if loving discipline, administered with a rod, will reduce crime my answer is, "Certainly! Guaranteed!" It is the wisdom and the way of God. But that discipline has to come from a context of love and with my mother there was never any doubt. The affection was abundant, and so were the spankings. And I am persuaded that I am a better man for it.

I saw a TV promo for a documentary on the subject of spanking and it showed this Day-Care worker saying, "I don't believe in spanking. The children we see hit each other when they are angry and where else do they learn that except from their parents." Good grief. You don't have to train kids to express their anger inappropriately. They are born with a propensity to hit and scream. The parents have to train them out of that. And this old business about spanking producing violent children is rank nonsense. My mother spanked me and I've never hit a soul in my life. My own children don't hit. They aren't violent and they aren't partly because they know what would happen

if they were. Now, sure, if your kids see you expressing anger through spanking that would be one thing, but that is not what biblical discipline is all about. It is the discipline of thoughtful love, not impulsive passion. And to those who have been trained by it, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. I thank God for a mother who loved me enough to hurt me for my own good. In so doing she taught me about the nature of genuine love.

The third thing I learned, primarily from Mom is that its okay to have fun. It's okay to have fun. Now this isn't a real heavy thing and I'm not going to spend a lot of time with it. But it struck me as certainly worth a mention. Frankly there are an awful lot of stuffed shirts in the church and in the world. Some guy wrote to Readers Digest of how his mom was out feeding old bread to pigeons when a stranger approached her to remind her of all the starving children in China that could use that bread. The writer said his mother just looked up and said, "I'm sorry but I can't throw that far." You ever been around people like that who just want to make sure that since there is so much suffering in the world you had better not have a good time? You had also better not enjoy sensual, fleshly things, because that is what sinners do. Christianity is sometimes portrayed as a negative, joyless religion, full of things not to do. But my mother never bought into that. And as I've come to understand the Scriptures I see that she was right. Colossians 2:**20-22** *If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, 21 "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch! 23 These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.* Ascetism, the rejection of bodily pleasure, is not based on Scripture. It comes from man-made religion. Now, I know this is not a problem many of you have, but some of you do. You are world-rejecting where the Bible is world-affirming. God saw what He made and called it good. And you need to understand that God has given us good food, and God has given us the gift of marital pleasures and God has called us to party and enjoy what He has made. Look at the warning of I Timothy 4:**1-3** *But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, 2 by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, 3 men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth.* You see what that says? These doctrines of demons will say, "Sex is wicked. These foods are bad. You can't eat that popcorn with butter." But Paul says that God has created these things for what purpose? Our pleasure. **4** *For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it*

*is received with gratitude.* Christians have a deeper capacity to enjoy the pleasures of this world because we understand their purpose and their origin. I Timothy 6:17 says *God richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.* My momma taught me to enjoy the gifts of God and not be too uptight. I personally think believers need to learn to have a little more fun. Tony Campolo has written a book entitled, “The Kingdom of God is a Party.” I like some of his thoughts on this. Campolo is just a playful kind of guy. When he goes through a toll booth he will pay for the guy behind him just to see the reaction on his face when the attendant explains what happened. When he gets on a crowded elevator, rather than turning around and facing the door like everybody else does he will just keep looking to the back of the elevator, and if he is on a long elevator trip he likes to get on, face the back of the elevator, get off at the next stop, run down the stairs a couple of floors where he will get back on the same elevator and say, “You were talking about me weren’t you?” Now, hey, if you can’t lead the elevator crowd to Jesus this is probably the next best thing. Clean undestructive fun is a gift of God that makes us healthier and, I think, holier persons. Lesson 3 is it’s okay to have fun.

Lesson from Mother #4 is to never be satisfied with mediocrity ®. Within the last few years a study was done of teenagers in the world’s most technologically advanced societies. And this study was designed to analyze two sets of data. First it was to reveal the aptitude of students in mathematics. Secondly, it was to survey their attitudes about themselves. And here is what the study showed. Of the dozen or so nationalities studied it was the Japanese students who scored highest on the math test. But interestingly, on the part of the test which asked how you thought you did on the math the Japanese students finished last. That is, they did the best, but thought they had done the worst. The American students however were very different. The Americans finished first in their attitudes about their work. The American kids were very confident in their ability, but on the Math test came in dead last. What does that tell you about our society? We have taught and we are teaching our kids to do sorry work and to feel good about it. That is one thing my mother would never let me do. She insisted that I excell. I’ll never forget the times I brought home weak report cards to my mother. Those were never pleasant experiences. I would try to explain to my mother that a B- was really a good grade. I would tell her that a C meant I was average, so B- was hardly something to be disturbed over. But she never bought into that. And I thank God she didn’t. She knew that I could do better work, and she pushed me to do it. She would not be satisfied with having average kids. I have 3 sisters. One graduated from high-school at the head of her class, another came in #2, the one who didn’t do so hot in school won more trophies in twirling and

gymnastics and beauty pageants than you could fit in your attic. And she now has a Master's degree. My brother so pushed himself, that even with a body like mine, he played college football. We had a mother who expected effort and excellence. Now I'm not saying those are the kinds of things that make you a worthy person. I'm just sharing how my mother affected my attitude toward life. And whether you direct your energies toward academics or athletics or business or toward the concerns of the kingdom of God Scripture says you are to go all out. Colossians 3:**23** *Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men.* God's word calls us to be passionate people, not normal, average, mediocre people. Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. And never be satisfied with where you are. For most people it seems the goal is to make Cs, to be average, to just rate as normal. There is, in the human race, and especially among young people, this insipid, ungodly interest in being like everybody else. If we can just be normal, or a little above average we feel good about ourselves. I hope you see how ungodly that is. But I understand it. I was the kid happy to make a B-. Being average is extremely easy. The average pastor prays 7 minutes a day. I beat that. The average father is with his young children a few minutes a week. I beat that. The average American is 25 pounds overweight. I beat that. The average American gives away 2% of income to charity. I beat that too. And you do too don't you? Does God want us to sit back now in triumph? II Corinthians 10:12 says that those who measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves are without understanding. Fools take comfort in beating the averages. My mother used to read with me the biographies of great men. Why? They tend to lift your sights. They draw you out of the mass of mediocrity where we feel comfortable and unchallenged, and they show you the value of excellence and determination. They call you onward and upward. And nowhere is this more important than in the things of God. Listen to the exhortation of I Thessalonians 4:**1** *we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more.* And again in verse **10b** *we urge you, brethren, to excel still more.* Don't be content with your present walk with God. You may be doing well, yes, praise God and keep going, keep growing. This call to excellence which I find in God's word I first heard from Mom and I thank God she did not permit me to be lazy. Elton Trueblood says, "*Permissiveness always destroys excellence. Deliberate mediocrity is a heresy and a sin. To make your life small when it could be large is a sin of the worst kind.*"

Well, I am done. Those were the four lessons that I had enforced for me by the words and life of my mother. I pray God may have used her and His word to encourage you about something today.

But you have a mother of your own don't you? At least most of you do. Don't you think it would be good to reflect today on what she taught you? And maybe you can write her a letter. Don't just sign a card, write a letter sharing your thoughts and your thanks. As the Proverbs have said **6:20,21a** *My son, observe the commandment of your father And do not forsake the teaching of your mother. Bind them continually on your heart.*