

Proverbs 1.1-8; Mat 20.20-28

May 9th, 2004

St. Stephen's Mother's Day "Help For Moms"

Well, I'll tell you I don't think that there is hardly any time in the history of our culture where moms need more help than they need these days. It's a tough, tough, tough task being a mom in America today. I want to open with a story about how some sons tried to help their mom out.

There were four brothers who left home for college and they'd become successful doctors and lawyers. They prospered and some years later they were chatting after dinner. They were talking about how they could give their mom some of the help that she obviously needed. She was elderly. She lived away in another city. They really loved her and they had some ideas.

The first one said, "I'm going to build a big house for momma," and the second one said, "I had a hundred thousand dollars that I can put into a home theatre so that mom can just watch movies - anything she wants all the time," and the third one said, "I'm gonna have my Mercedes dealer deliver her an XL600," and the fourth one said, "Listen, you all know how mom loved reading the Bible and you know she can't read it anymore because she can't see very well. I met this priest who told me about a parrot that he's got who can recite the entire Bible. It took twenty priests twelve years to teach him. I had to pledge to the church to contribute one hundred thousand dollars a year for the next two decades in order to get that parrot but it's worth it. I'm gonna get it and send it to momma. All she has to do is to say chapter and verse and the parrot will give her the Bible lesson."

Well, the other brothers were impressed, and after the holidays, mom sent out her thank you notes. She wrote this...she said, "Milton, the house that you built is so huge, I only live in one room, but I have to clean the whole house. Thanks anyway." And then she said, "Marvin, I am too old to travel. I stay home. I have my groceries delivered, so I never use the Mercedes, but the thought was good. Thank you." And then she said, "Michael, you gave me this expensive theatre. It's got Dolby sound. It could fit fifty people, but all my friends have passed away and I've lost my hearing. I'm nearly going blind. Thank you for the gesture just the same." And then she said, "Dearest Melvin, you were the only son who had good sense to give a little thought to your gift. The chicken was delicious. Thank you."

It's just hard to get moms the help they need these days. I want to take a shot at it though. I want to give our moms this day four keys to being the kind of mom that I know you want to be and God wants you to be - and maybe here's a little bit of help along the way about being that kind of mom.

Key One ~ Consistent Spiritual Cultivation

As we turn to your outline this morning, here's the first key I want to bring before you. To be the kind of mom that you really want to be, you need have consistent spiritual cultivation. You need to be able to bring that to your family. We are going to start this morning with a quick look at a ministry partner to St. Paul, a young guy named Timothy. You might remember some of the phrases that Paul used to describe Timothy. He called him, "My son." That means he lead him to the Lord. "My son whom I love who is faithful in the Lord." Great words to say about somebody. He said that Timothy, in Philippians, had proved himself on the mission field. He done that and in 1 Timothy, he said he was "my true son in the faith." Paul had a great deal of affection for this young partner in mission. In Philippians, chapter 2 verse 20, he said, "I have no one else like him."

When you see a guy like that rising in his impact for the Lord, you have to ask the question, "How did he get like that?" You would think - I would anyway - that it started with his conversion as an adult, but as I reminded you last week, grace goes deeper than the moment we first surrender to the Lord. It goes back further. Its roots go way down in our lives. Paul knew that Timothy, like himself, had grace roots that went way back into his early years. He wrote this...2 Timothy 1:5..."I have been reminded of your sincere faith which first lived in your grandmother, Lois, and then in your mother, Eunice, and now I am persuaded lives in you, also."

Timothy had been the product of a home where faith was there in the home, consistent spiritual cultivation from generation to generation to generation. It was multi-generational faith that lived in that home but you know faith does not become multi-generational automatically. It happens because the faith was intentionally passed on through consistent spiritual cultivation by the parents. God doesn't have grandchildren. We say it like this, 'He only has children'. Every generation must be won anew to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, how did that happen in Timothy's home? We're told in 2 Timothy 3 that "from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." He was taught the Scriptures in his home. They opened the Bible. They read the Bible. They spoke about the Bible. They probably memorized the Bible. Every indication is that his mom and his grandmother, by the way, were the ones who took the lead in this. We aren't told a single thing about Timothy's dad or his grandfather. His mom, his grandmother provided consistent spiritual cultivation.

You know, women, if dad takes the lead in this kind of cultivation, thank God for that man. Thank God everyday for that man who will take the lead in these matters. But if dad does not or is not there, then you need take the lead. That's what happened in Timothy's home and God honored and blessed it. And so from that home, so to speak, they took him to church. They took him to the children's ministry. He was there from infancy on. As well as learning this at home, they gathered in their synagogue. They brought him to church. They participated in the children's programs. They took him to student ministries. They made sure that this kid was in a small group with someone else who could teach him the Bible as well as mom and dad. They sent him on youth retreats and mission trips. They continually plowed the Word into his young heart.

This week, I heard the results of a survey of three hundred high school students that was done by a student ministry somewhere on the east coast. They went to kids all throughout the community. They asked them three questions. It really is a sobering survey. First question... "How many of you get some kind of spiritual reinforcement at home before leaving from school in the morning? Five kids said, "Yes, I do" out of three hundred. Second question... "How many of you have someone ask you about your day when you get home and give you spiritual encouragement to keep you going forward in your life for God?" Seven kids said, "Yes, I do." And the third question... "How many of you get prayed for in the evening and get some kind of consistent spiritual encouragement before you go to bed at night?" Six kids said, "Yes."

Now I want to tell you, this is the way it is. It's the measure of our times. We have become so over-committed, so frazzled, so stressed out as moms and dads that the very most important kind of help that our kids need - they often don't get - and we can't depend on someone else to take it all over for us. Proverbs says, "Listen my son to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching." Dad's instruction and mom's teaching out of the Word of God has got to be there. We just simply cannot let that priority be eroded by all of the demands and pressures of our lives.

Can I say a special word to moms and dads here? You know spiritual cultivation honestly starts? Not by what you do for your child, but what you do for yourself. You cannot give away what you do not have. If you want your children to inherit the power and the blessing and the grace of a real and authentic relationship with Jesus Christ (there is no greater treasure in life), you must have yourself what you want to pass onto them. It's got to start with you... You can't just bring them to church and drop them off. You've got to lead the way yourself. You've got to make sure if you want them to know His forgiveness, that you've got His forgiveness. If you want them to know the power of his Spirit, that you've got his Spirit. If you want them to be guided by his word, that you are guided by your word. You cannot give away what you don't have. It starts right here with you.

Key Two ~ Supernatural Vision

Here's the second thing moms and dads need. Moms, you need Supernatural Vision. You need to be able to see further than your eyes can see - your natural eyes. Over the years, I've come to believe that moms are given by God Supernatural Vision. I was almost never ever able to pull anything over on my mom. I was astounded time and again what she knew when I thought I was sneaking around her. She knew exactly what I was doing.

Back in Cleveland, where I grew up, we had a local radio show. It was kind of our version of Mr. Rogers, led by a guy named Captain Penny. Captain Penny closed his show every day with this phrase, "You can fool some of the people all the time and all the people some of the time, but you can't fool mom." A lot of us kids grow up knowing that he got that right. But you know, honestly, maybe it's harder today than it was then. Our lives are so stressed. There's hardly time to think let alone see supernaturally deep into our kids lives, and our kids have built these little bubbles that they live in. It's Instant Messenger. It's cell phones, and it's internet chat rooms and it's the peer culture... and it's hard for parents to penetrate that culture.

You've got to be able to do that though. Somehow you've got to be able to do that. There are at least two places you've got to be able to see supernaturally well to raise your kids. Here's the first... You've got to be able to see sin in the heart of your child. You have to and sometimes, it's hard for moms to do that. You know, we're all the time getting fooled by how they look on the outside. We say, "They are so cute. They are so sweet. I am so proud of them. You know, I know my child may have some troubles. I know my kid may have made some mistakes, but deep down..." we like to say, "These are good kids." Now, I want to tell you - that is not true. Not true. Moms, you need a sober and unbiased recognition of your child's sin nature if you are to raise them for the Lord. You got to see with Supernatural Vision. Look how Jeremiah said it. He said, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" That is true of your cute little kids. They come in the world broken and bent. We all do. Wives, moms are real and honest and straight up about what their kids have to face in life. Too many moms think that their child was the second Virgin Birth or something like that. Don't do that. Your cute little son or daughter is lost and needs to be found. Is spiritually dead and needs to be reborn. Is caught in the power of sin and needs to be forgiven and redeemed and needs a new heart and a new life. Don't lose sight of that. Don't forget it. Don't lose the Biblical perspective on the power of evil.

You know, among other things, that means you've got to have a willingness to enforce consequences for wrong actions in your home. I mean, God wired our moms to be so sweet and so tender and so kind and forgiving. This could really come tough for a mom but you've got to set realistic limits. You've got to insure reasonable consequences for actions.

When I grew up, in my home, my dad took the lead in this... (laughter) He had us five boys. On the wall in our kitchen, there was a paddle. He called it, "The Boy Beater." You know, we don't have those hanging in our kitchens very much anymore. Leighton Ford's mom had a paddle on her wall and over the top of the paddle, she had a favorite saying. It went like this, "I need thee every hour."... (laughter)

But you know, if God gives supernatural sight to see your child's sin nature, you've got to have supernatural sight to see a second thing as well. To see help in the heart of God. You have to remember that Jesus loves this child. He has given more than you do. He sees more deeply. He understands the problem far more personally and profoundly and expensively and He is the One Who said "Let the little children come to Me. Bring them to Me. Because God's got a Kingdom for little ones just like them." And you have to hold fast to that invitation to know that there is help in the heart of God. You can bring them to Him no matter what they have done. No matter how they have discouraged you or broken your heart. You can bring them to Him and find the power to heal and to help and to transform from Jesus Himself. I think He is a mom's Best Friend. When your kids are young, you can do it. When your kids are older and gone, you can do it. You've got to keep the cross in sight as you raise your kids because it sharpens your Supernatural Vision.

I want you to look at this slide up here. This is a shot from Mel Gibson's movie, "The Passion of the Christ" with Jesus hanging on the cross. Gibson's movie, among many other wonderful things about it, has pictured the suffering of Jesus so starkly, so confrontationally, that it almost

takes away your breath. There's a point behind it. It is at the cross of Jesus where you see most clearly. If your sweet little kids are so good, and so wonderful, let me ask you a question... Why is that so necessary? That suffering and that sacrifice is necessary because the problem is far more profound, far deeper than moms and dads are willing to admit. You have to be honest about the power of sin. The best place to be honest is at the foot of the cross because there you can see it clearly. But if you see there the true depth of our problem, you see there also the true extent of God's help and His mercy. There is no length He will not go to for the sake of your son and your daughter. No price He will not pay to solve the problem of the human heart. Keep the cross in sight as you raise your kids. It sharpens your Supernatural Vision.

Key Three ~ Never Give Up on Love

Here's the third thing mom needs: "Never give up love". Moms are world famous for this kind of love. A heart of a mom is a river of love. She's always there. Her ears are always open. She's got time late in the night for those conversations. It's notes in the lunchbox. It's never - forgotten birthdays. Its special events that are faithfully celebrated. And then when we do mess up, it's our moms who say to us over and over again, "You are my son. You are my daughter. There is nothing you can do to change that fact and change my love for you. I'm never going to stop loving you. I am never going to give up on you. I am never going to walk away from you."

How many of us have heard over the years words like that from our moms and whisper them to our kids. St. Paul wrote these famous words about love. He said, "Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails." Most of us tasted that kind of love from our moms before we found it in Jesus. Kids who are loved like that ...they grow up rooted and strong and healthy and ready to take on the challenges of life. So mom, keep at it. Never ever give up no matter what. You never throw in the towel. You say to your kids again and again, "You are not gettin' rid of me. I am signed on for life. I will pray for you. I will love you. I will stand by you. I will believe for you and hope for you when nobody else will. I will not give up. I will not go away. I will not quit. I will be there and God Himself will be there with me." Love like that changes lives.

Key Four ~ Prayer

The fourth things moms need. Reach for help... Prayer. I think that prayer is the single greatest weapon God puts into the hands of moms. I mean, there are things we can do for our kids and we do them. Moms and dads do them. But there are important things that moms and dads will never be able to do for their kids that only God Himself can do, but you can get done through prayer to Him. Job prayed the prayer everyday for his kids. [Job 1:5] "When a period of feasting (translate that: partying. These kids were partying all weekend long, all week long. That's what is going on here), had run its course, Job would send and have them purified." Smart dad.

Early in the morning, he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them thinking, "Perhaps, my kids have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." Now just translate that again, read, "Perhaps my kids have gotten an attitude or they don't think that they need God anymore. They think they can handle life on their own. They think they could cut loose and live inside that little bubble of theirs and get it all done. Oh God, Oh God. And Job is on his face before the Lord. We're told

that it was his regular custom. Job brought each of his kids before the cross everyday - that's what is going on here. He offered a sacrifice for them because he knew that it would take a sacrifice to reconcile them to God. Job was standing in the shadow of the cross because the cross is the place where you see things clearly and the cross is the place where God's power meets our need.

Mother's Day honestly is very hard for an awful lot of women because motherhood and heartbreak are too often associated in the best of our families. There is heartbreak along the road of motherhood. In the most difficult of situations we find that we often long maybe for kids that we never had or hurt for kids that we've had and who need the help of God and he doesn't seem to be responding to it. Moms and dads, you can get things done in prayer that you not get done any other way. Whether your kids are far or near, you can get things done in prayer. A child can come to faith because mom's been praying. Can build self-esteem. Can be protected from tremendously difficult threats by prayer. By prayer, you can get wisdom for your child to make good decisions. The choice of just the right life partner. The right college to go to. The right career move to make. All that can happen because a mom is on her knees before the Lord praying for that son and that daughter and won't give up.

Let me tell you a story about John Newton... John Newton. You know him as the author of the famous hymn, "Amazing Grace."... "Saved a wretch like me" was one of the phrases in the hymn. We sing it all the time. It was an honest phrase for John Newton. He wrote it because he meant it. He was born in Liverpool, England. When he was just an infant, his dad ran away. When he was only seven years old, his mother died. He was orphaned at a very early age. He became a slave trader. I wonder if you knew that about him. His career was bringing kidnapped slaves, taken captive in Africa, over the West Indies and to the colonies. The problem with John Newton was immense. Half of his human cargo would die on the way over. He didn't care. He sold those who survived into a brutal lifetime of slavery. John Newton was a drunk. He was a profane man. One time, he got so drunk he fell overboard and the only way his crew could get him back was that they literally harpooned him, with a whale harpoon, in the leg, dragged him back onto the boat. He walked with a limp for the rest of his life because of that harpoon wound.

His mom... who lived only until John was seven years... was very different. She was a godly woman. John Newton remembered just a few things about his mom but one of the things he remembered clearly was his mom everyday on her knees before God for her little son. By the time John Newton was in his mid thirties, his mom had been dead for three decades. One night in Liverpool, he was drunk again but that night in Liverpool when he stumbled around the town, there was an itinerant preacher in the town square, a guy named George Whitfield who was preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the people of the town. That night, he wandered into that square, heard the Good News of Jesus, the Holy Spirit fell on John Newton and he was dramatically, permanently changed. He became among the foremost preachers and hymn writers of his day. His epitaph went like this, "Once an infidel and a libertine. A servant of slaves in Africa. By the rich mercy of Jesus Christ, persevered, I was, restored, I was, pardoned, I was, appointed to preach the faith I once tried to destroy." Do you know, among all the things that factored into John Newton's conversion, do you know what he listed near the top of the list? His mom's prayers. Only before he was seven - she'd been dead for thirty years - but her prayers echoed in the heart of God and the Spirit of God moved in answer to those prayers.

The prayers of believing moms are world famous and honored by God Himself.

There's a Focus On The Family article... A Personal Testimony "When I joined the ranks of moms at the tender age of nineteen, I did not have a clue that I had signed on for the most important assignment of my life. However, it didn't take long for my romantic notions of motherhood to wear thin. Chris... he cried all night long. My husband and I... we took turns walking back and forth across our postage stamp sized apartment. I'm not even sure how I survived those early years. I'm not sure how I survived the parenting that came with them. I loved our sons, but I was amazed the amount of time and work it took to be a mom. While my friends were pursuing their academic goals and careers, I was watching "Sesame Street" and reading "Green Eggs and Ham." I packed more lunchboxes than I can count. I sat on bleachers watching every imaginable sporting event. We survived chicken pox, wisdom tooth extraction, colds and flu... And yes, I gave all those talks about being true to Godly standards. The years passed as quickly as more seasoned moms had predicted. Why hadn't I believed them? One day, I was sitting in high school graduations and then walking past empty bedrooms with a hard to swallow lump in my throat. There were times when I was tempted to turn in my mom's badge and resign but as I observe our own grown sons, I am more keenly aware than ever that the opportunity to influence a child is the most demanding, the most heart-rending and the most rewarding job that a woman can have in her lifetime.

Moms, this day, we thank God for every single one of you. We want to tell you again that we need you in our lives like we've never needed you before. May God Bless every single one of you in the Name of Jesus... Amen.