

Spiritual Fathers and Godly Mothers

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[0 : 00] 2nd Timothy chapter 1. The section that ends at verse 5.

I suppose I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and now I am sure dwells in you also.

Why do we have what's called a family service? Because I suppose every service really should be a family service.

You know, the blessing of a time of corporate worship when children are gathered with parents and grandparents, when we have the blessing of children in the service, whether it's for part of the time, for the whole of the time.

But you see, a service such as this, helps us to focus on family, to focus, we might see, on the family. And when I speak of family or the family, I'm not just speaking about the context of a home, you know, a home, your parents, children, but also in the context of a church, the church family.

[1 : 19] And I think a service such as this helps us to see that emphasis and the importance of bringing up our children in the nurture and instruction of the Lord, just as Paul, you know, commanded the church in Ephesus to do.

So a service such as this reminds us, as parents, as grandparents, whether natural parents, whether church parents, it reminds you of your responsibilities towards our children.

So that we're reminded again of the importance of teaching them, whether teaching them in the context of a home or in the context of a church, or a Sunday school, children's address, everything that we do for the sake of our children, to train them, to nurture them, to direct them to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And, you know, it's so important that, you know, we as parents, grandparents, or in the context of a home or a church, that we show by example our parental love and care towards our children.

because, you know, as much as I do, the kind of days that we're living in are strange days, strange morality, strange spirituality, days that, you know, we could scarce have imagined would be happening, you know, when we were being raised in church and family.

[2 : 51] And so to help us to focus on the needs of the family, as I said, whether church or home, then this passage here is so helpful, so important.

I mean, this is Paul's last letter that he wrote before his death. Who's he writing to? Well, he's writing the first instance, he's writing to Timothy. Timothy, his protege, Timothy, his companion. It's interesting, this is the companion of whom it's written more than any other of Paul's companions in New Testament script. So, here's an important figure in church history.

Here's an important figure in the work of the Gospel. And so what we've got before us here is Scripture, God's Word, to teach us, to show us, to give us a greater understanding of God working through ordinary human beings to further God's extraordinary purposes in the spread of the Gospel. And you see these first few verses of this letter, what do we notice? We notice this great theme of heritage, true godly heritage, the way that God has blessed His children through those who've gone before us, those who've influenced one generation to the next, who've given that influence, shown that the influence of true Christian faith, that's faith in the Lord Jesus, who've shown what truly matters.

[4 : 26] And there are two things that I think we find here in these verses, that are the heading of the sermon, spiritual fathers and godly mothers. And we really do need to focus more on this whole aspect of godly heritage, because that heritage speaks of relationships, relationships within the home, relationships within the congregation.

In any church, in any congregation, relationships are absolutely crucial. Churches rise and fall on the basis of relationships. Now ultimately, of course, your relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ,

your relationship with God in Christ, that, of course, forms how you conduct yourself, one with another.

And where there's that growing in faith in the Lord Jesus, where there's that growing in hope and in love, it's going to be then shown in the way that you relate one to another.

Where there's humility, where there's gentleness, where there's bearing with one another in love, where there's that patience as we were thinking last Lord's Day, then that's going to foster a spirit of unity in the church.

And I cannot stress that more. Where there's a breakdown in relationships, that will be because your relationship, my relationship, to God and Christ, it's when that's weak.

[5 : 57] When, even as Jim was saying to the children, when we're seeking first the kingdom of self rather than the kingdom of God, that's when there's going to be problems in the church. When pride replaces humility.

When harshness replaces gentleness. When intolerant behavior replaces bearing with one another in love. When impatience replaces patience, even patience in another's weaknesses.

So your relationship with God and Christ, that has a direct bearing, a direct impact in your relationship, one with another within the church, within the congregation, within the body of Christ. And that's why when we look at spiritual fathers and godly mothers, the emphasis there is on relationships within the home, within the church, and so crucial for building up, or building up one another, yes, in the context of church, of home, and family.

So, what do we see first of all? Spiritual fathers. You know, when we think of the way that the Apostle Paul related to those whom he was writing to, whom he was preaching to, whom he was teaching, you see how much he loved those whom God had given him to instruct.

[7 : 13] And you see that expressed in the way that we see Paul showing, we might say, fatherly love. A fatherly love that's shown the way that he spoke to those whom he was writing to, preaching to, speaking to.

Words that showed the true feeling of his heart, that showed that he was, yes, a spiritual father to those whom God had given to him. He had a true heart of love for those whom God had given to him to show forth the love of Jesus.

And, you know, we've seen that even at the start of this letter. Look how he refers to Timothy. Verse 2, he calls Timothy his beloved child. Now, we know Timothy wasn't as natural as his biological child.

Timothy was, we might say, a spiritual child. If you go to another part of Scripture, for example, 1 Corinthians 14, verses 14 and 15, Paul there speaks of the church in Corinth.

Believers there, it says, beloved children. Verse 15, I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. And then even a few verses later, again, he's referring to Timothy as my beloved and faithful child in the Lord.

[8 : 26] So, evidently, Timothy was converted under Paul's ministry. That preaching, of course, accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit, no human can actually convert anybody.

It's only a work of God's grace that changes anyone. But, we have to say, it was through the preaching of the Word that Timothy had first heard the gospel of Jesus.

Paul had faithfully proclaimed the gospel of salvation. And Timothy received that word with faith.

Timothy was converted. And just as these other believers in Corinth, Timothy's regarded as a child, a child in the Lord.

Someone who needed the nurture of a loving, spiritual father. Someone who needed to be cared for in the Lord. Someone who needed to be provided for as a Christian.

And that, of course, would be Paul himself. Because Paul himself, he'd been nurtured by others when Paul came to faith in Jesus. Paul himself was, of course, a child of God.

[9 : 32] And now, Paul's exercising spiritual care over Timothy. He's a, I said, well, Timothy is Paul's child. Spiritual child. Now, yes, of course, Paul's an apostle.

He's speaking as an apostle. He's got that authority as an apostle. But isn't there a principle here within the church? The duty of, and the responsibility of spiritual fathers within the church.

Whether you're a minister who has a fatherly responsibility to care for the spiritual needs of a congregation. Whether it's elders who've got a fatherly responsibility in sharing with a minister in the spiritual care of a community of God's people.

whether it's men to give help and guidance and prayerful support to give encouragement in the Lord to others. There's that chain of responsibility.

That chain that Christian men in particular have been given to show forth the love of God to others. And, of course, where does that chain begin? That chain of fatherly love, that chain begins with God.

[10:46] It begins with God to His children. And, of course, see it in the way that Christian men show the love of God to others. But, you might say, well, how does that show itself in practice?

Well, look at what Paul did towards Timothy. Look at how Paul showed his fatherly care over Timothy. Look at the start of the chapter there. Verse 3. He thanked God for Timothy.

He gave thanks to God for the faith that God had gifted Timothy to come to know Jesus as his Saviour. And in thanking God for Timothy, he prayed for Timothy.

And notice he prayed constantly for Timothy. Okay, he's at a distance, physically at a distance or geographically at a distance, but he longs to see Timothy. And you who are men of God, is that how you're showing fatherly care over others, whether in the church or in the congregation or beyond the confines of the congregation?

Are you thanking God for each other? Are you praying for one another? Are you longing to have fellowship one with another? Last Sunday morning at the children's address, that was Father's Day.

[12:03] We were thinking of Father's Day, what makes a father a good father. And one reply that was given, I won't say who it was, but she said that a good father helps me when I'm stuck.

And shouldn't that be the work of spiritual fathers? You know, helping one another when you're stuck. When, you know, say there's a particular difficulty, maybe you've got a problem with assurance of faith, for example.

Or maybe there's some difficulty in your understanding a particular part of God's Word. Or maybe there's some crisis, difficulty in your life. Yes, of course, you come before God in prayer and you seek His wisdom and guidance.

But remember, in God's care, in God's fatherly love, He'll send those who bring that fatherly care and compassion to help others in need.

It was John Stott, he was the great English, well, amongst many other things, Bible teacher and pastor, and he wrote these words that really stand out when we think of spiritual fathers.

[13:08] He said, I thank God for the man who led me to Christ and for the extraordinary devotion with which He nurtured me in the early years of my Christian life. He wrote to me every week for, I think, seven years.

He also prayed for me every day. I believe He still does. I can only guess what I owe under God to such a faithful friend and pastor. And it's particularly these words, He nurtured me in the early years of my Christian life.

and surely then it's for you and for me to thank God for faithful men of God, for spiritual fathers who've given themselves, yes, over the years to take care for your soul and nurturing you, instructing you in the way of the Lord.

Spiritual fathers. But then there's, in verse five, particularly godly mothers. Paul says to Timothy, I'm reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now I'm sure dwells in you as well.

I mean, you know, we talked about heritage and Paul's already spoken about his own spiritual heritage. You know, he's spoken of his forefathers, his ancestors, those who served God just as Paul is serving God.

[14:28] And Paul can speak of his spiritual heritage. People like Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, those who served God, those who followed God. And so he's rejoicing in Timothy's spiritual heritage.

He's remembering his sincere faith. He's remembering the upbringing that certainly grounded Timothy in the one true faith. And so Paul's full of joy. He's recounting Timothy's spiritual heritage. And he speaks of Timothy's grandmother Lois, a converted Jew. He's speaking of his mother, Eunice, another converted Jew. So Timothy had that blessing, that privilege, being brought up in a home under the influence of godly women.

In fact, if you go to Acts 16, the first verse in Acts 16, we're told that Timothy's mother was a Jewess, a female Jew, a converted Jew, but his father was a Greek. And so the influence there, of course, was that Timothy's father remained an unbeliever.

But it's the influence of these godly women that Paul is particularly focusing on. You know, we've read that in chapter 1 and also in chapter 3.

[15 : 45] In chapter 3, we read there of Paul speaking of Timothy's being acquainted with the Scriptures from when he was a child. And you know, you can work out from Pope Paul's remembering about Timothy is that God in his sovereignty, in his perfect sovereignty, placed Timothy in a home, in a family, certainly where at least one parent honoured God and gave instruction in the Word of God to that child.

Timothy had a believing grandmother, a believing mother. Timothy had come to know God, had come to know the Lord Jesus as Saviour through the influence of his mother and grandmother. He'd been saved through the same grace that it saved his grandmother and mother. And if you've been brought up in a Christian home, if you've had a godly mother, you will have had a godly mother who prayed over you, who prayed with you.

You'd have had a godly mother who shared her faith with you in maybe very simple but yet profound ways. Give thanks. If you were brought up in a home where you had a godly mother, even now give thanks to God for that special blessing.

And you read a square of stories of faithful mothers and even faithful grandmothers who by word and by example showed the love of the Lord Jesus to their children and that's something that we should never ever dismiss and, you know, to give thanks to God for.

[17 : 24] You know, when you read biographies of Christian men and Christian women, how do these biographies begin? They don't begin with the subject of the biography.

They begin with a parent or a grandparent or maybe even going back further than these two generations. I've just finished reading a biography of one of the most formidable ministers of our denomination, certainly of the 20th century.

That book's full of his life story. It speaks of his conversion. It speaks of his family life. It speaks of his work in ministry. It speaks of his preaching. It speaks of his humour.

But the biography doesn't begin with him. The biography begins with his parents and the influence his parents had in his upbringing. Now, of course, we have to say this.

We never ever say that somebody's converted because of a parent or a grandparent because that parent or grandparent is a Christian. Timothy wasn't converted because his mother and grandmother were Christian believers.

[18 : 33] but we do have to say this, that a parent's teaching, a parent's example, a parent's prayers are such that we give thanks to God for and the grounding that our children have and the one true faith that's seen in the home.

Isn't that so much part of God's perfect way that he moulds children through the influence of godly parents? That's why we teach our children whether they're in infancy or later, teach them the word of God.

Teach them at home. Teach them at Sunday school. Teach them in a church building such as this. And that's why the blessing of a godly home, a home where there's at least one Christian parent, it's such a privilege.

It's such a blessing. Don't ever take for granted that blessing but give thanks to God for that blessing. You were taught the word of God when you were a child.

Give thanks to God now. Even you still have these early childhood memories, maybe of a mother who trained you in righteousness, a godly mother who nourished you in the one true faith.

[19 : 47] And she was that first influence pointing you to the Lord Jesus. Now I know that's not the privilege of every person. It's not the privilege of every Christian.

There are many, maybe even some here this morning who haven't had that special blessing of being brought up in a Christian home where the Lord Jesus is honoured when the word of God is taught.

But still, under the sovereign care and provision of God, there will be the influence of other believers to guide you in the way of truth and faith.

And that's why, you know, when we speak of godly mothers, we have to include spiritual mothers. The godly women of many a congregation, even of this congregation, were the influence of these, to use the old expression, mothers in Israel or mothers of Israel.

The Sunday school teacher who by example, through the grace of God, showed you the beauty of the Lord Jesus. The lady who prayed for you without even knowing it.

