

How to build a spiritual legacy \* 2 Timothy 1:5, 3:14-15

May 8, 2022 \* Mother's Day \* Langford Community Church \* Graham Gladstone

Ever since my grandma went to be with the Lord, I've been thinking a lot about her spiritual legacy. It's nothing flashy – she wasn't a street corner evangelist or anything, I don't think she ever went on a mission trip – but every day, she set out to honour the Lord in all that she did.

For my ordination, she gave me some money which I used to buy a theological dictionary and I had her write in the front of it, and at the bottom she wrote – 'In all your ways, acknowledge Him, and He will make straight your paths.' And I think that's what she did. In all her ways, she acknowledged Him and in that simple action, she left a legacy of quiet, everyday faithfulness that remains for all of us who follow in her footsteps.

And I think it's pretty amazing how that legacy passed into my mom and shaped her life and faith and then she passed it on to me – all of my family really. There is this neat three generation legacy that I see from Aileen to Beth to me.

And when I think about that, I can't help but think about another three generation legacy in the Bible – that's Timothy's family that we hear about in 2 Timothy 1:5.

5 I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also. (2Ti 1:5 NIV).

Paul says – 'I know that your grandmother was a woman of genuine, literally 'not hypocritical' faith and I know that your mother was a woman of genuine, literally 'not hypocritical' faith and I see that they have passed that genuine, not hypocritical faith in you.' And I think that Timothy's family gives us a perfect opportunity to talk about building a spiritual legacy in OUR families here on this Mother's Day.

Now John Stott was one of the most influential Christian thinkers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; thinking about this verse, he wrote –

"The most formative influence on each of us has been our parentage and our home. Hence good biographies never begin with their subject, but with his parents, and probably his grandparents as well. True, no man can inherit his parents' faith in the way that he inherits facets of their personality. But a child can be led to faith by his parents' teaching, example and prayers."<sup>i</sup>

I think he's on to something there and so I'll like to use his three ideas there – teaching, example and prayers – and the experience of Timothy's family - to think with you today about how we can build a spiritual legacy in our own families and circumstances.

So turn with me to 2 Timothy; we're going to be focusing largely on 2 Timothy 1:5 and 2 Timothy 3:14-15 and we'll think together about how we can build a spiritual legacy in our families through our teaching, example and prayer.

So, you've heard it already, but let's look at 2 Timothy 1:5 again. Paul is writing to his protégé Timothy and he says:

5 I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also. (2Ti 1:5 NIV).

We know from Acts 16:1 that Timothy's family lived in a place called Lystra which is now in modern day Turkey. Acts 16 also tells us that Timothy's father was a Greek, but Timothy's mother was a Jewish believer. She and her own mother evidently had faith in the OT promises of God and when they heard about Jesus, they realized that he was the fulfillment of those promises, and put their faith in Him. They then instilled that same faith into Timothy, into a third generation.

How did they establish that legacy? Well, *teaching* was a part of it.

If you flip over to chapter 3:14, Paul writes – 14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, 15 and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Have many of you have memories of learning the Bible from your mothers and grandmothers? I certainly do – I remember very clearly my grandma Gladstone tucking me in at a sleepover at her house, reading to me from the book of Daniel and telling me about Shadrach, Meschach and 'To-bed-we-go.' It's cute, but at the same time, it reflects the reality that for many of us, our first experience with the Bible comes from our mothers and grandmothers.

And that was no different for Timothy. Paul says to Timothy – 'from childhood, you have known the sacred writings which are able to make you wise for salvation;' who do you think introduced him to those writings? It wasn't dad – dad was a Greek and probably a pagan – it was mom and grandma. Yes, synagogue probably played a part, but I learned this week that teaching by the rabbis didn't start until age five. So it was mom and grandma, all the way. They were the ones who got Timothy acquainted with the sacred writings.

And I think that this is really interesting – what are the sacred writings that they're teaching? The Old Testament. The NT barely existed at this point. (I mean, as he's reading it, Timothy is reading the first copy ever of this book we call 2 Timothy – how cool would that be?!). And yet, Paul says, even the OT can make you wise for salvation. Even the OT can point you to Jesus' grace.

And so now that we have both the new and the old, I think that that's really important as we build a spiritual legacy in our families by teaching.

Now just stop and think for a minute. We teach our children a lot, don't we? Without even thinking about it. How many of you have ever said this?

Do not make that face or it will freeze in that position.  
Don't sit too close to the television, it'll ruin your eyes.  
If you don't clean your plate, you won't get any dessert.  
Be careful or you will put your eye out.

Those are funny but what about this? Constantly worrying is normal. Gossip and slander are harmless. Your job is more important than family or church.

Whether we mean to or not, we teach our children a lot of things. Let's be intentional about teaching them something that will make them wise for salvation.

As we're teaching our children, we need to point them to Jesus. We need to tell the stories that point to Him – the OT – and the stories about Him – the NT – but not only that, we need to teach them the grace of Christ and the love of God which is even greater than OUR love for them. Yes, we should teach them Christian ethics, but just like Paul did in the book of Romans, we need to start from the knowledge that God already sacrificially loves us and then move on to living in a way that is motivated by that love.

We want to teach the Bible and love of God in all that we do. How do we do that? Well, I think Deuteronomy 6 is helpful – verses that Lois and Eunice and Timothy would have known - 7 Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

You might want to have times when you specifically sit down to read a Bible book together and teach in that way, but I think this Deuteronomy way is even more organic. When the opportunity comes up, take advantage of it. When you're travelling, talk about how God is God all over the world. At the zoo, talk about the incredible creativity of God. When you're giving advice to older kids, don't just tell them your opinion; think together about how God may be leading them in whatever in going on.

To build a spiritual legacy, teach your family the love of God as revealed in the Bible.

To build a legacy then, we teach, but we also need to live it out. They say this generation is especially good at sniffing out hypocrisy and insincerity; we need to be examples of what we're teaching – practicing what we preach so that we can tell our kids to do what we do and not just what we say. We need to be examples of faith in practice.

That comes through quite clearly in 3:14 -

14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it.

I remember in university, I had this professor for a communication class, and it was pretty clear that he was just putting in the time. He taught the basics of what we needed to know, but without much enthusiasm or urgency. He spent a fair bit of time flirting with the girls in the class. I didn't really have any interest in listening to him and I had to make myself pay attention, trying to separate what I could learn from him from the person himself.

But then one day he was sick and another of the faculty member filled in for him and it was like – night and day difference. This guy actually cared about what he was teaching, he believed in it to the point that it made a difference in the way he conducted himself. He seemed to really care about the students – and not just the pretty ones. It was amazing how easy it is to learn from someone who actually believes in what they're saying.

Paul says – 'Look to your mother and your grandmother Timothy. They really believe in what they're saying and you can see it in the way that they live their lives.' He's probably appealing to his own life too here and saying 'look how Jesus has changed our lives. Look how He has changed our lives for the

better. You know us, you trust us, let our lives motivate you to stand firm in your faith in Him, even when others are wandering away.'

If we want to build a spiritual legacy, we need to do the same thing. We need to demonstrate by our lives the truthfulness and the value of what we say we believe. This takes some work, right, because it means putting the interests of others before your own, it means being gracious when all you want to do is lash out. But in doing those things, you are recreating, reflecting the character of the One who died to save both you and your children.

I like what the 'Apply the Word' study Bible says here – 'Eunice offers inspiration to every woman tasked with nurturing her children's spiritual lives, especially if she lacks the support of a husband or her children lack the support of a fatherly presence. Eunice may have had no formal religious education and little help apart from Lois. But she had two crucial advantages that we can still access today—the dynamic power of being a mother and the limitless power of a loving God.'<sup>ii</sup>

Let your life be an example of what you teach, so that your children will have reason to walk in your footsteps.

To build a spiritual legacy, we teach, we set an example, and we pray.

Now, admittedly, there is nowhere in 2 Timothy that says that Lois and Eunice prayed for Timothy but I think it's reasonable to assume that they did. If they talked to Timothy about God, then I think it's pretty reasonable to assume that they talked to God about Timothy.

And that's what we do for our own kids, right? We lift them up to God and say 'let your will be done.' I think it's risky to say 'hey God, please let MY will be done for my kids' but if we say, 'Lord, let your good and perfect will be done in my kids lives,' then we can't go wrong.

I'm sure my grandma prayed for each of us along those lines, all through our lives. And it's neat; in a way, that prayer continues. At the front of my book, she actually prayed for all of us. She wrote: "Through your teaching of Christ your congregation will flourish and be filled with joy. May God give you clarity and efficiency in bringing the word of God."

If she said 'may it be' to me, then I'll bet she said 'let it be' to God.

I'm sure my mom too spent a lot of time praying for me when it wasn't exactly clear what I was going to do with my life and yet I'm sure that her prayers contributed to where I am now.

Now admittedly, we have to acknowledge that John Stott is right. He wrote – 'True, no man can inherit his parents' faith' and it's also true that 'no parent can direct their children's journey.' Our kids may wander and go off do their own thing. But we can bring them to the Lord in prayer, every day, patiently persevering in prayer and trusting God to work for good, even when it seems like the opposite is happening.

St Augustine's mother Monica prayed for him like this. Augustine was a bit of a play boy before coming to faith – he prayed at one point 'give me chastity but not yet' – and his mother prayed and prayed that he would not go off to Rome because that was the big city and she was sure it would be his undoing. He snuck off against her wishes though, without her knowing, but then in Rome, he met St. Ambrose. And

through St. Ambrose he really met Jesus and came to faith and then he became St. Augustine. I think only Paul has been more influential in the course of Christian history. All from a path that seemed to be wandering.

Our kids may not all become Saint Augustines, but none are outside of Jesus' love. Just keep bringing them to the Lord in prayer, trusting in Him to work for God.

We build a spiritual legacy through our teaching, our example and our prayer.

Now I realize that this is Mother's Day and this is a 'Mother's Day sermon' but I want you to know that this is really for any of us. If you're a mom, it's for you. If you're a grandma, it's for you. If you're a dad or a grandpa or an aunt or an uncle or a neighbour to kids, this message is for you.

I like what Bryan Chapell says about this passage and I'll close with this –

"Think what it would mean if we could say to all our children, "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it" (v. 14). "You know your pastors, you know your Sunday school teachers, you know your fathers and mothers and grandparents. You know what they have taught you, and you know that their lives match the teaching of their lips. So continue in the gospel because you know from whom you learned it." Fellow Christians, this kind of challenge will bring continuance. This is what the church needs."<sup>iii</sup>

Let your teaching, example and prayer point your loved ones to Jesus.

Let's pray.

## BENEDICTION

Ephesians 3:17-19 - (May) Christ dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

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<sup>i</sup> John Stott, *The message of 2 Timothy*, (Bible Speaks Today), 2 Timothy 1:2-8a.

<sup>ii</sup> "A Mother's Faith," *Apply the Word Study Bible*, 2 Timothy 1:5.

<sup>iii</sup> Bryan Chapell, *1-2 Timothy and Titus* (Preaching the Word commentary series), 2 Timothy 3:14.