

A Grandmother, a Mother and a Son: Growing Sincere Faith

Text: 2 Timothy 1:5

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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 (NIV).

Sermon statement

Timothy's sincere faith was nurtured and developed by his grandmother, Lois and mother Eunice. The matrix of faith formation is by teaching about the faith, living out the faith, and growing one's own faith.

Introduction

While it is right to celebrate Mother's Day because mothers everywhere and of every generation from the time of Eve is to be recognized and appreciated. However, I believe it is too narrow to limit it to only biological mothers. How about thousands of women who are married but do not children, aunties, grandmothers, godmothers, babysitters and guardians of children who are not biological mothers but look after children? Don't they deserve recognition even though they are not biological mother? I wish to make a case for Motherhood Day instead of Mother's Day. Happy Motherhood Day!

I thought it fitting, on this Motherhood's Day, that we remember two mothers: Lois, who was grandmother of Timothy, and Eunice, Timothy's mother. In particular, I want to honor the heritage given Timothy because a mother and a grandmother loved him enough to give him their most precious possession: the gift of sincere faith. This faith, according to Paul was first in Timothy's grandmother Lois, then in his mother, Eunice, and is now to be found in Timothy himself.

2 Timothy was probably written during Paul's second Roman imprisonment. Here the old apostle is waiting for his execution and longs for the company of Timothy. In this letter he would ask Timothy to join him in Rome (cf. 4:9, 21). Paul had longed for Timothy's companionship which was such a joy to him. Even the great apostle at times became lonely, discouraged, and in need of support from fellow Christians. In his long ministry, Paul has experienced the betrayal of many friends and colleagues. He remembers fondly of Timothy's sincere (*anypokritou*, "unhypocritical") faith which he attributes to the influence of Lois and Eunice. References to Timothy as Paul's son in the faith (cf. 1:2; 2:1; 1 Tim. 1:2) could therefore probably be understood to mean a mentor-protégé relationship.

Lois and Eunice were first mentioned in Acts 16:1. We know Timothy's real father was a Greek and his mother a Jewish Christian. Timothy's father was a Gentile and probably an unbeliever; hence no mention of him is made here.

Eunice, Timothy's mother was a woman of notable faith (2 Tim. 1:5). She was Jewish (Acts 16:1) and pious, for Timothy's biblical instruction had begun early (2 Tim. 3:15), but her husband was a Gentile and her son uncircumcised (Acts 16:3). In view of Jewish intermarriage with leading Phrygian families such things may represent her family's social climbing, not personal declension. Some Lat. mss of Acts 16:1, and Origen on Rom. 16:21, call her a widow, and *hypērchen* in Acts 16:3 might support this. She lived at Derbe or Lystra (linguistically a case can be made for either). Her name is Greek, and does not seem common. It is sometimes suggested that Paul refers to Jewish faith, but the most natural interpretation of 2 Tim. 1:5 (and of Acts 16:1) is that Christian faith 'dwelt' (aorist, perhaps alluding to the event of conversion, doubtless in Paul's first missionary journey) 'first' in Lois and herself (*i.e.* antecedent to Timothy's conversion).¹

¹Wood, D. R. W. (1996, c1982, c1962). *New Bible Dictionary* (346). InterVarsity Press.

Lois, Timothy's grandmother is presumably the mother of Eunice (2 Tim. 1:5). Paul doubtless alludes to her Christian faith: had she been simply a godly Jewess, her devotion is less likely to have been known to him.

(1) Teaching about the Faith

How powerful is the teaching of scripture in the lives of our children and grandchildren? Note again what Paul said to Timothy:

"Indeed all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceivers and deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:12-15).

How important to the lives of our children and grandchildren is the learning of scripture? This cannot be emphasized enough. But what is more important, as the apostle Paul stated next is the foundation of our teaching.

"All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16).

How then do we teach our children scripture?

- Age appropriate teaching
- Read the Bible together
- Discuss the sermon
- Relate it to their everyday life
- Memorise the Scripture

(2) Living Out the Faith

One day four ministers stood talking and, as so often happens, the conversation soon drifted to shop talk. "I prefer the King James Version of Scripture," said one, "for its eloquent use of the English language." A second minister gave forth that no Bible could match the New American Standard for its faithfulness to the original Greek and Hebrew text. "That may well be," said the third, "but I prefer the New International Version for its contemporary language and easy readability." There was a thoughtful period of silence, and then the fourth minister said, "I like my mother's translation best." It was with some surprise that the others said: "We didn't know that your mother had translated the Bible." "Yes, she did," he replied. "She translated it into her daily life, and it was through her translation that I came to faith."

We are the walking Bible. Our children cannot see Jesus but they see us. We are the demonstration of the faith to our children. Timothy must have been building up his faith by watching how his grandmother Lois and mother Eunice lived. How they interact with each other.

Deut. 6: 6-9

6 These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. 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. 8 Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 9 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

(3) Nurturing the Faith

Paul mentions Timothy as co-sender of six of his letters. He also spoke highly of Timothy in his letter to the Philippians. So confident was Paul of Timothy's faith that, in his first letter to Timothy, he called Timothy "my true son in the faith." Timothy became for Paul what Barnabas could not be -- the inheritor of Paul's mission. In Paul's final letter to

Timothy, written near the end of his life, he speaks without reserve, calling Timothy "my beloved child," for Timothy was truly part of Paul's lineage, wealth and crown.

In essence Paul said: "Timothy, I know your grandmother, and her faith is authentic. It is the same faith I have observed in your mother, and after having watched you all this time I am convinced of your faith also." To describe that faith, Paul used a word which means literally, "without hypocrisy." (quote from Wood, D. R. W. (1996, c1982, c1962). *New Bible Dictionary* (p. 694). InterVarsity Press).

Timothy was a native of Lystra (Acts 16:1) and was highly esteemed by his Christian brethren both there and in Iconium (Acts 16:2). When he became a Christian is not specifically stated, but it is a reasonable inference that he was a convert of Paul's first missionary journey, which included Lystra in its itinerary, and that on that occasion he witnessed Paul's sufferings (2 Tim. 3:11). It is not certain when Timothy's mother Eunice became a Christian, perhaps before Timothy, but certainly before Paul's second missionary journey.

- He was first entrusted with a special commission to Thessalonica to encourage the persecuted Christians. He is associated with Paul and Silvanus in the greetings of both Epistles directed to that church
- was present with Paul during his preaching work at Corinth (2 Cor. 1:19)
- is next heard of during the apostle's Ephesian ministry, when he was sent with Erastus on another important mission to Macedonia
- whence he was to proceed to Corinth (1 Cor. 4:17). The young man was evidently of a timid disposition, for Paul urges the Corinthians to set him at ease and not to despise him (1 Cor. 16:10–11; cf. 4:17ff.). From the situation which resulted in Corinth (see 2 Cor.) Timothy's mission was not successful, and it is significant that, although his name was associated with Paul's in the greeting to this Epistle, it is Titus and not Timothy who has become the apostolic delegate
- accompanied Paul on his next visit to Corinth, for he was with him as a fellow-worker when the Epistle to the Romans was written (Rom. 16:21)
- went with Paul on the journey to Jerusalem with the collection (Acts 20:4–5)

- when Paul, then a prisoner, wrote Colossians, Philemon and Philippians. In the latter Epistle he is warmly commended and Paul intends soon to send him to them in order to ascertain their welfare
- When the apostle was released from his imprisonment and engaged in further activity in the E, as the Pastoral Epistles indicate, it would seem that Paul left Timothy at Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:3) and commissioned him to deal with false teachers and supervise public worship and the appointment of church officials.

The question that is important to us is how did Timothy develop this sincere faith that is Paul trust so much? We knew that Timothy received teaching and lived in a household of faith. So how did he develop his own faith?

Many of us who grew up in a household of faith may be living the faith of our parents instead of our own faith. While our parents' faith is good enough for us when we are children, it will no be enough for us when we are adults.

"Indeed all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceivers and deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it (We tend to believe the values our parents give us, don't we?), and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:12-15).

We all have to move from the "faith our parents have in Christ Jesus" to "faith in Christ Jesus." How do we do that? Against Paul has provided the answer.

"All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16).

We are taught the scripture, we live the scripture and the scripture forms us.

The Holy Spirit is given to us to help us develop sincere faith. This sincere faith is based upon the scripture. The Holy Spirit uses the scripture to help us develop our own faith in Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

Timothy's sincere faith was nurtured and developed by his grandmother, Lois and mother Eunice. The matrix of faith formation is by teaching about the faith, living out the faith, and growing one's own faith.

Soli Deo Gloria