­“Hope for Imperfect Moms”

May 8, 2016

II Timothy 1:1-10

If you have found that you are a perfect Mom, today’s sermon is not for you. Or, if you think you are the perfect Mom, then this sermon isn’t for you. Or, if you’ve found a perfect mother in the Bible, this sermon is not for you.

Folks, there are just no perfect mothers. Would anyone say that Eve was a perfect mother to her three sons; Cain, Abel and Seth? How about Sarah? How about Rebecca? How about Mary, the mother of Jesus?

I’ve titled today’s Mother’s Day sermon “Hope for Imperfect Moms” for the simple reason that, the ordinary mother is the also the imperfect mother. No matter how good you are; no matter how great your mothing skills; whoever you are, you need hope. Today’s sermon is “Hope for Imperfect Moms.” Shall we pray?

Please open your Bible with me to the Gospel of Luke at chapter fifteen.

You’ve probably not heard the story of Noel and Abraham? Noel was Abraham’s mother. This is a true story. You can find it in an issue of Christianity Today from 2012 [Christianity Today, June 20th 2012].

Noel was and still is a devoted mother; a loving mother, and a genuinely Christian mother. She watched as her son Abraham, at nineteen, was excommunicated from their local Church in Minneapolis, MN. Quote, from that day on, for the next four years, Abraham was walking away from the LORD. He had decided to make a name for himself in disco bars as a guitarist and singer, and just doing anything but destroying himself.

Abraham also had a godly father. Both parents walked in the ways of the LORD. Both served the LORD faithfully. And so, Noel had indeed raised Abraham in the truths of the Bible and according to the principles that you and I would agree are Biblical child-raising principles. Yet, Abraham was now out of the house and he’d turned away from the LORD.

You see, there is no promise in God’s Word that the best Christian parenting produces the best Christian children. So, as I begin today, it should give you tremendous encouragement because you know that you are not a perfect parent. They just don’t exist.

Here’s what Noel says. “We were praying like crazy that he wouldn’t get somebody pregnant or marry the wrong person.”

Keep in mind that Abraham grew up in a home where the Bible was taught and where the Bible was lived. Both Noel and her husband John are, to this very day, deeply committed Christians. Abraham heard the Word from the day he was born. Yet, he made his choice at nineteen to leave home and make his own way in the world. On the evening after he was excommunicated from the Church he responded to his parents with “That’s what I expected you to do. That has integrity. I respect you for doing it.”

There are plenty of stories about the children raised by the godliest of parents that went astray or turned away from the LORD. One daughter who grew up inside the goodness of a Christian home turned out to be a drug addict. Until recently nobody even knew if she was dead or alive. One woman of God who is connected to a large Christian ministry has two sons; one is now an atheist and one an agnostic.

Janet and I have good friends, a Pastor and his wife in New York whose youngest son, Paul, walked completely away from the LORD and is living in adultery with his girlfriend.

Another friend, a missionary we know, has two sons who have done very well financially with the gifts God has given them. Both of their sons have forsaken the ways of the LORD.

Only someone who has had this happen has an idea of how difficult it is. But here’s what we’ve discovered. So many parents have the idea, no, the myth, that since they quote “did everything right,” their children *should* be following the LORD. As one writer puts it, so many mistakenly think that quote “Christian parenting techniques produce godly children.” That’s not true as is evidenced by the stories of so many who have lost their way as far as the LORD is concerned.

My hope today is to be an encouragement to Mom’s. After all, it is Mother’s Day. But what I want to say is this. Godly parents sometimes do lose their children to the world. That doesn’t mean they really messed us as mother and fathers.

How do I know that?

In the cases I just cited to you of the people I know whose children are not walking with the LORD, the parents continue in faithful service to the LORD. They fully love their sons and daughters. They faithfully pray for then. But, they are not perfect parents.

But godly parents pray. And yes, they may stray. But can anyone stray from the faithful prayers of a Mom and Dad? Here’s what Jesus came to do. He came to be the Good Shepherd Who seeks that one hundredth sheep who has gone astray.

Please find with me verse eleven of this fifteenth chapter of Luke. The passage, I’m sure, is familiar to you. But today I would like to read it from a completely different viewpoint. I want to read it with you from the viewpoint of a Mom whose son is the prodigal. Most, if not, every time we read the story of the Prodigal Son, we focus completely on the father and the two sons. And that is fair because that’s what Jesus was teaching. The message of the faithful love of God, the Father is truly the point in the story. But behind the scenes isn’t there a mother? Let’s read it from that viewpoint today.

Luke 15:11 *“And he said, A certain man had two sons: (12) And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. (13) And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.*

*(14) And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. (15) And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. (16) And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.*

*(17) And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! (18) I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, (19) And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.*

*(20) And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. (21) And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.*

*(22) But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: (23) And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: (24) For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.”*

Now, some of what I’ve decided to say today comes directly from Abraham himself; yes, the Abraham who at nineteen decided to leave home. Abraham who was excommunicated from his home Church, a Baptist Church in MN.

First, there are no perfect Moms (or Dads). You do your best. There are no “How to Be the Perfect Mom” manuals on the market. And the Bible knows only one kind of parent; imperfect ones.

Second, it is the responsibility of every parent to bring the Good News of Christ’s death to their children. No higher privilege can be found than to lead your children to the LORD.

The two people that have the greatest influence on your children is you and your spouse. Janet and I had the privilege of leading most of our children in the salvation prayer.

Fortunately, both Janet and I wanted the same thing when it came to our children; that they be saved. And God honored our desires.

Yet, to a child and both Janet and I are fully aware that we fell far short of being perfect parents. You could honestly say we messed up way beyond anything you can imagine. You might even go so far as to say that our children had to endure the trial of their parents. Neither of us knew how to raise children.

But, wouldn’t you agree that, of all the things a mother or father can do for their children, it is that they point them to the Cross and to the work of the LORD Jesus Christ? And, because you believe that there is power in the Gospel, let the Gospel do its work. Thankfully, the Holy Spirit will use His Word and speak to the hearts of your children.

First, there are no perfect Moms.

Second, we are called to lead our children to the LORD.

Third, we are called to love them.

The story of the prodigal son illustrates the love of God. But wasn’t that love there when this son came asking for his inheritance?

It may be that the greatest thing that a parent can do is to love his or her children. Someone has aptly said “Uncon-ditional love is love without requiring anything in return--love no matter what. Love never fails.” [Heather Forbes found on www.ahaparentinglcom]. I Corinthians 13:13 “Love never fails.” This term “fail” means “becomes inefficient or loses.”

And, folks, just like you know and believe your parents love for you, your children know it just as surely.

I have no doubt that the prodigal’s mother loved her sons unconditionally.

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Fourth, imperfect moms pray for their children.

Some of you might have heard of the great St. Augustine. St. Augustine was the man who wrote the books “The City of God” and “Confessions.” God gave Augustine seventy-six years.

Augustine’s father died when Augustine was in his teens. So, his Monica had to raise him as a single parent. But it wasn’t until her husband had died that Monica began to truly follow the LORD. But, by then, Augustine had made some very poor choices. He’d decided to live a life of immorality. He strayed very far from the LORD. Yet, no son or daughter can stray far from the love of a praying mother.

There is no greater love a mother can show to her children than to take them before the LORD in prayer. Folks, you all know that He knows. He’s made promises. He’s able. He’s able to do exceeding abundantly above all that you ask or think. He is your greatest Resource in influencing the lives of your children.

Here’s a testimony of one child regarding the prayers of her mother. “I remember seeing my mother kneeling at the side of her bed and praying aloud for each of her children and grandchildren. The memory is forever etched in my mind and I will never forget sensing a strong presence of God through her intercession. I came away with a sense of reverential fear and trust that no matter what would happen to any of us, God would honor her prayers on our behalf.” [Found on [www.chrismasmag.com](http://www.chrismasmag.com) “A Mom’s Prayer Can Change Her Child’s Future” by Ruth L. Whitfield]

Pray and after you’re done praying, pray some more.

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Fifth, always welcome them home.

Rarely have we thought about the mother of the prodigal son. Rarely have we ever heard anyone reference her. I’ve never read anything that even mentioned her. But there were four people in the prodigal’s family; dad, mom, and their two boys.

And, yes, the story teaches us that God is the greatest loving Father there is. But wouldn’t you agree that the heart of this mother was broken when her son received his inheritance and then left home? And all the while he was gone, don’t you think she was waiting for his return.

One of the greatest parenting ideas found in the story of the prodigal son is verse twenty. Luke 15: 20 *“And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.”*

I can’t imagine the father watching afar off and seeing his son a great way off and Mom not watching and waiting as well. But what I’d like to surmise with you is this. Wasn’t Dad trusting God that He would work in his son’s heart and send him back home? If so, who’s to say that Mom wasn’t praying and trusting as she too waited for him?

Some of you know the story of Franklin Graham. His dad, Billy Graham would be out preaching and Ruth had to raise the children. Franklin was, from what I read, her greatest challenge. Now, when Franklin decided to do his own thing, do you think Mom would say to him, “Don’t come home”? I don’t want you around here until you get your life right with the LORD.” No, instead, she kept both her heart and her home open to her son. And eventually Franklin did return home.

Here’s Mom in action when her children are out somewhere on the landscape of the world. She “has stretched out her arms in merciful blessing, never forcing herself on anyone, but always waiting; never letting her arms drop down in despair, but always hoping that her children will return so that she can speak words of love to them …. Her only desire is to bless.”

I think the key to the heart of every child is held by his mother. After all, she carried him in her womb for nine months. She nursed him at her breast for the first year of his life. She loved being called “Mommy” for every little thing.

So, when you consider that dad was waiting for his wandering child to return to the nest, don’t forget that Mom has this faithful trust in her heavenly father that He is at work upon her child’s heart. Hebrews 4:16 says this. Hebrews 4:16 *“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”*

And in this waiting a Mom has the joy of knowing that her heart is akin to the heart of her heavenly Father, Who too waits while the events and chastisements of life fall upon her children for their good.

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Moms, aren’t you glad God doesn’t expect you to be a perfect parent? Aren’t you glad you had to opportunity to tell your children about the LORD? Aren’t you loving them by the LORD’s grace? And aren’t you praying for them? And isn’t both your heart and your home open towards them?

The prodigal son returned to the open arms of his loving family.

By the way, Abraham, from our earlier story, returned to the LORD and to his home and to the welcoming arms of the Church family he’d known since he was born.

Here’s his personal testimony. “When I was 19, I decided I’d be honest and stop pretending I was a Christian.  At first I pretended that my reasoning was high-minded and philo-sophical. But really I just wanted to drink gallons of cheap sangria and sleep around. Four years of this and I was strung out, stupefied and generally pretty low. Especially when I was sober or alone.

My parents, [John and Noel Piper] who are strong believers and who raised their kids as well as any parents I’ve ever seen, were brokenhearted and baffled. I’m sure they were wondering why the child they tried to raise right was such a ridiculous screw-up now. But God was in control.

One Tuesday morning, before 8 o’clock, I went to the library to check my e-mail. I had a message from a girl I’d met a few weeks before, and her e-mail mentioned a verse in Romans. I went down to the Circle K and bought a 40-ounce can of Miller High Life for $1.29.

Then I went back to where I was staying, rolled a few cigarettes, cracked open my drink, and started reading Romans. I wanted to read the verse from the e-mail, but I couldn’t remember what it was, so I started at the beginning of the book. By the time I got to chapter 10, the beer was gone, the ashtray needed emptying and I’d *become a genuine Believer in Christ* [“become a Christian].

The best way I know to describe what happened to me that morning is that God made it possible for me to love Jesus. When He makes this possible and at the same time gives you a glimpse of the true wonder of Jesus, it is impossible to resist His call.”

The Church then held a beautiful restoration service for Abraham. Can you imagine the joy in the heart of that mother and father? Can you imagine the tears of joy in those hearts that day? Abraham continues to this day serving the LORD.

The Apostle Paul says this in Romans chapter eight. Romans 8:28 *“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”*

If the LORD is in control; and He is; then can’t He be trusted to use your life, Mom, to influence your children? Can’t He be trusted to speak to their hearts even when they’ve gone astray from Him?

Moms, when it comes to the matter of your imperfections, remember, He’s the One Who gave your children their parents. Who will you trust? Will it be the LORD or yourself?

Today, for Mother’s Day, I hope these words have been a

blessing a hope to your soul. Today you can rest confidently that God will answer your prayers for your children

If you’d like, you can pray a pray just like this one: *“LORD, I thank you for each of my sons and daughters. You brought them into this world and into my life. I surrender them to you again. Bring them to Yourself. That’s my true prayer. In Jesus’ Name.”*

Now, let’ sing the hymn “Be Thou My Vision.” It’s found on page 562.