

The Legacy of a Godly Mother

When you hear the word “Mother”, what picture comes to your mind? Perhaps it reminds you of a warm smile, hands that never tire and a heart that always loves. Or maybe you think of discipline, judgment and even rejection. No matter what memories flood your heart, a large part of who you are today was shaped by the actions and words of your mother. Mothers have a profound impact on who we grow up to become. And so I write this with a deep sense of gratitude to my mother Elizabeth Mohan – “*Amma, I will always be indebted to you for your undying love and constant prayers*”.

A mother’s day is packed with a multitude of tasks that require time and energy; preparing meals, washing clothes, cleaning the house and caring for her children. These jobs are all necessary and important. But in the routine of providing for a child’s physical, emotional and social needs, mothers often forget their most important role – that of providing spiritual nurture and training. As Christians, God has called us to be mothers who are dedicated to providing spiritual guidance to our children. Without this crucial component, we are no different from mothers of other religions who also love and care for their kids.

Are we mothers who stand for God against cultural and social pressures? How can we become mothers who exemplify God to our children? The Bible gives us many different characteristics of a Godly mother. Here, I want to focus on 3 gifts mothers can give that will change the lives of their children forever – *the gift of spiritual discipleship, the gift of communicating love and the gift of service in ministry.*

1. *The Gift of Spiritual Discipleship*

A disciple is one who learns or is taught by another. There are many aspects to spiritual discipleship. This may include introducing your child to the salvation of Christ, teaching them the word of the Lord, praying with them or giving them guidance on real life issues.

Discipleship becomes even more necessary when kids grow up in a culture that gives little importance to God’s Word. Most schools in the US teach Darwin’s theory of evolution as the answer to the origin of life. The role of God as the creator and sustainer is not even allowed to be taught as an alternative in some schools. This is in great contrast with the Jewish educational system that was in place during the time of Christ. The ancient Jews valued the Bible so much that every child was trained to read, write and memorize the first 5 books of the Bible by the age of 12! How much time do our children spend a week learning God’s Word apart from Sunday school? Do we take time at home to daily instill a deep desire for the Bible in the hearts of our children?

Prayer is an equally vital part of discipleship. Through prayer, we deepen our relationship with God. Prioritizing both individual and family prayers will help children understand that God is not just a powerful being but also a personal father who listens and talks to us. A mother’s heartfelt prayers can bless many generations to come. Though my mother was never very vocal about her faith, I always remember the countless hours that she spent on her knees praying and petitioning for us. I strongly believe that most of the blessings that I enjoy today are because of her faithful prayer life.

The gift of discipleship will not be complete without the gift of quality time. Most modern moms living overseas are super-moms who strive to balance work, family, social life and church, all of which competes for their time and attention. In the midst of this busy life-style, moms often have little time and energy to give sufficient guidance. Our kids live in a place and time, which is very different from how many of us grew up. Recently, the Chicago Marthoma church took a survey of the top 10 fears among teenage children. The results included several social and personal struggles such as: “the fear of not meeting parent’s expectations”, “the fear of getting pregnant outside wedlock”, “facing violence and gangs in school”, “the fear of not being attractive enough”, “homosexuality and sexual abuse”, “fear of not being accepted by peers” etc. As mothers, how do we respond to these issues? Do we take the time to address these in our homes? Do our kids feel safe to approach us and talk to us about these things?

Instilling daily spiritual discipleship is a daunting task that requires time and commitment. The most common challenge (or should I say excuse) to accomplishing this is the lack of time. Our children's schedules are filled with school, soccer and piano lessons – and bible study often becomes a Sunday event. Mom's days are equally packed, and daily prayer times and Bible reading seem next to impossible. To overcome the time challenge, Moms need to prioritize time with God. This means cutting down on activities that are optional and pre-scheduling prayer/bible study times to fit daily schedules. Of course, this is not possible unless we truly believe that spending time with God is the best investment of our time.

Taking time to have weekly mom and daughter/son dates is a great opportunity to spend quality time with our children. This can be a time where mothers discuss controversial issues (example, whether to date or not) and point kids to answers and standards set in the Bible.

Another hindrance to effective discipleship may be a mother's lack of physical, emotional or spiritual well-being. A mother who is physically ill, battling a strained marriage or spiritually undisciplined will find it extremely difficult to impart this gift to her child. Having accountability partners - mature Christian women – that you meet to pray with on a weekly basis is a great way to remain motivated and be self disciplined.

Though imparting the gift of spiritual discipleship takes perseverance and faith, moms who take the time to do this will reap great rewards.

2. The gift of communicating love

We all love our children unconditionally and there is no doubt about this. But do we always communicate this to them in a way that they understand? Perhaps not. And this is because of several reasons. One of the biggest challenges of being an Indian mother, who has a child that is born and brought up in the US, is that of being able to understand the cultural difference. The generation of our children have been named by some as the “coconut generation” - brown on the outside and white on the inside – or in other words, Indian on the outside but American inside. As immigrants, we uphold values like cultural preservation, communal acceptance and conservatism. Our kids, on the other hand, believe in cultural assimilation, individualism and liberal thinking.

This difference in outlook causes communication breakdowns. When children start feeling that we don't understand them or love them, they start developing what is known as a “dual identity”. They talk and behave one way at home because they want to rise up to our expectations but when they are outside home or at school, they behave in a different way because they want to be accepted by their friends and society. Having this kind of a double identity makes our children confused about what is right and wrong. This is a dangerous situation because kids will react in one of two ways. Either, they will withdraw from us and stop confiding in us or they will act out by rebelling and blatantly disobeying us. Either way, we as mothers lose out. We will not have the privilege of ministering to them and guiding them. And so it is of great importance that we begin to communicate with our children in a manner that they understand.

As mothers, our baseline should be God, not culture. Our Lord's interaction with the Samaritan woman is a great example of how He broke the barriers of cultural expectation to communicate with someone from another cultural background and understanding. This may be difficult for a lot of us because of our upbringing. But nothing is impossible with God. If we have willing hearts, God will change us. When we expect our children to change, we must also have a heart for change. Often, our children can teach us a lot and we should be open to learning from them.

Another great resource for effective communication is Gary Chapman's book entitled “*The Five love languages*”. In his book, Gary talks about how different children respond to different expressions of love. He lists five primary love languages - touch, words of affirmation, quality time, gifts and acts of service. Some children, especially younger kids feel loved when we hold them, or have them sit on our lap while reading a bed time story. Other children may respond best to encouraging words. Yet others most value our undivided attention and quality time. Gifts like cards or teddy bears often signify lasting memories of affection for some kids even in their adult life. And finally, acts of service like doing their laundry or cooking their favorite meal is what speaks love to others.

We need to understand and speak the love language that our child responds to the most. God Himself communicated His love in a language we could understand by sending His son to earth in the form of a human being.

3. The gift of service in ministry

One of the most important gifts we can give our children is to inspire them to serve God and His people. Kids look up to us to set an example for leadership at church. Many of our kids today are dropping out of the church once they start going to college. Some are going to alternate churches while others don't go to any church. According to a survey that was conducted, by the time kids reach the age of 19-20yrs, less than 5% attend the Marthoma church. Another national survey aimed at understanding why this was so. Top responses were: "I find the liturgical service to be boring and repetitive", "I don't understand the Malayalam sermons", "I can't stand the politics", "Nobody really cares", "There is no real spiritual growth" and "There are lots of good alternatives".

To change this situation, many things have to change from a higher organizational level. However, the Sevika Sangham can also play an important role in creating this change. The Sevika sangham is currently serving exceptionally through fund raising efforts and culinary skills. But there is so much more we can do that will inspire our kids to continue attending church and take up leadership in the church. Kids of today are relationship motivated. If we can involve them and make them a part of the solution, they will respond to us.

There are many valuable efforts that are worth thinking about. Starting a community outreach program is a great opportunity for children to follow our Lord's example in interacting with and serving people from different economic strata. Having one-one mentorship programs will help bridge gaps between older and younger youth members, allowing older youth to play the role of a big brother/sister to younger youth members. Organizing a baby-sitting facility during service times will allow young mothers to give their full attention to Sunday services. Older women can offer their gifts to young mothers through marriage counseling, cooking classes or just by teaching them to wear a saree!

Church also needs to be an emotionally safe place where kids can voice anything and know that they will be guided, not judged. Facilitating regular youth meetings to discuss a topic of their interest in a fun atmosphere will help build trust and friendship. We can also encourage our kids to offer their creative talents in fund-raising and other church activities.

The gift of service in ministry will lay the foundation for a child's future calling in life. It is a training ground that will prepare them to discover their special gifting in the body of Christ. By imparting this gift, moms re-dedicate their children into the hands of God and inspire them to follow God wherever He leads them.

In closing, my prayer is that God will help us become women who see motherhood as the most important calling in our lives. The gifts of a Godly mother are irreplaceable. As we strive to give our kids the gift of discipleship, the gift of communicating love and the gift of serving in church and community, let us do so with the assurance that God will grow the seed that we plant in their young hearts. The ministry of motherhood is certainly challenging. But its rewards far outweigh the effort. Proverbs 31:28 – 29 states this about a Godly Mother:

*"Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her:
29 "Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all."*