



Series: EXTREME MAKEOVER: HOME EDITION  
Sermon: "The Front Porch – From Generation to Generation"  
Scripture: 2 Timothy 1:3-7; 3:12-17  
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Who was the most important Christian influence in your life? Who was the first person that you can remember who showed you the life of Jesus? Who are your spiritual parents? For many of us, these are flesh and blood parents or grandparents; but for a number of us, it is other people who have gone before us in the faith because they modeled Jesus for us. We can see Jesus living in their lives.

A story is told of four preachers who are out fishing one day and, as we preacher types are prone to do, we cannot concentrate on the task at hand very long – we always go to 'shop talk.' The men began talking about the different aspects of ministry, and one of the pastors asked what their favorite translation of the bible was. One pastor quickly spoke up and said, "I love the King James version because the poetry and eloquence of the English language reminds me of the faith of my grandmother, and also reminds me of the faith of my youth." Another one said, "Well, I like the New American Standard version best because it is so faithful to the translation from the original languages." The third one spoke up and said, "I really like Eugene Peterson's translation in The Message because it puts deep things in very simple every day language." The fourth one was quiet for a while as he pondered the question; and then he said, "I like my mother's translation the best." The other men looked at him and said, "We didn't know your mother translated the scriptures." He replied, "Yes – every day of her life. She brought the scriptures to life in the way that she lived and, because of that translation, I came to faith."

Faith is often passed from generation to generation. I think it is fitting on this day when we celebrate the nature of the Christian home that we remember two individuals that got it right – they passed their faith from one generation to another. Lois was the grandmother of Timothy, and Eunice was his mother. The truth of this is – whether we are parents or not – all of us have the chance to give the gift of faith to those who live around us and come after us. I want us to learn how to honor the heritage that Timothy had because a mother and grandmother loved him enough to live before him a life that became the Gospel.

In the text of the hour, the Apostle Paul is writing to his spiritual son, Timothy. In chapter one and verse five, Paul says something like this, "Timothy, I know your grandmother, and her faith is authentic. I have seen the same thing as I have observed your mother. Her faith is authentic. After watching you all of this time, I am convinced that your faith is authentic as well." Paul is telling Timothy that he is a third-generation Christian with a first-generation faith. All of us want to transfer faith from one generation to the next, but we want the next generation to have the

first-generation faith experience the way that we did.

Paul uses a word describing Timothy's faith – in English it is translated to 'sincere,' which literally means without hypocrisy. Lois and Eunice showed Timothy by word and example what it meant to live an authentic faith – a faith without any hypocrisy, without pretense. It was the real thing, it was genuine, and it was sincere. Can you think of a higher accolade or tribute given to any Christian – especially a parent or grandparent – than to be able to say, "You gave me authentic faith.?"

Who modeled faith for you? Who lived before you the life of Jesus? Chances are somebody modeled this for you. Somebody showed you along the way and inspired you to have this faith for yourself. The more important question is – who are you modeling faith for? Who is taking their cue from you?

I love our children. Nathan is 22, Joe is 20 and Page just turned 19. Each day I become more and more aware that my legacy of faith is going to be lived in their lives. They are my responsibility. I want you to know that I love your children, too. I love the children of this church and community. Every once in awhile, I will walk through the hallways on Sunday morning, and I will look in the nursery or in Fuel Worship or at Rt. 56 or Fusion or in one of the Sunday school rooms, and I am increasingly aware that our legacy of faith will be lived out in their lives. They are our responsibility and a tremendous gift and trust to us from God.

This morning, Dr. Wiley baptized four infants. I want to remind you the covenant that was made was not just between those parents and God, but also includes all of us here. We responded by saying, "With God's help, we would so order our lives after the example of Jesus, that each of those children would be surrounded with faith." That we would do everything in our power to live before them a life that becomes the Gospel and to exercise all Godly care that they be taught the Holy Scriptures, that they be given a good example and learn to give reverent attendance upon the private and public worship of God. We are in this together. These are our kids as a part of the family of God and community of faith. If we do this right, it will not be possible to convey the depths of joy that we experience through the lives of our children. Similarly, children will take their cues from us because we transmit faith from one generation to another.

We men like to think that we run the world – we do not. The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world – mothers usually do this. Mothers are the molders and makers of each day. They often counsel us and advise us, and they shape the attitudes of every morning. We believe that we can do anything if we have a mother who believes in us. We believe that we can endure anything if we know that we have a mother who loves us. We believe that we can overcome anything. Our mothers are the first person to shape our view of life.

I recently read a quote by a wise mother and wife who said, "A wife and mother usually hoists the sails of her family's ship every morning, and she determines whether those sails catch the breezes of God's love and understanding or the winds of bickering and discord." Where are you hoisting your sails? The same mother later wrote, "When a family member succeeds, they do so by climbing a ladder that is steadied at the bottom by a woman who believes in them." Timothy's every day world was molded by Lois and Eunice. Paul reminds him that he has been given a steady ladder which is guaranteeing his success – a sincere faith that has been transmitted from one generation to another. Paul reminded Timothy that he had been given a gift – a gift of power, of love, of self discipline and of control.

Where do children learn of the Spirit's power? Where do they learn about love and self control if it is not from us or from the elders around them? Timothy learned it from his grandmother and mother. In this text, we hear about an adult who has been given a healthy self-image as a child. Some of us struggle with our self-image. Where was your self-image formed? Who helped you look into the mirror and be comfortable or uncomfortable in your own skin? Did you not learn that as a child? Did you not learn it from a parent or from a teacher at school or from a Sunday school teacher? More importantly, whose self-image are you helping to form? Parents are the most important people who do this in the life of a child.

William Frederick Dunkle Jr., a historian who specializes in French History, says that of the 69 kings of France, only three were loved by their people. They happened to be the only three that were raised by their mothers. Our capacity to love and be loved is formed in that relationship. Child development experts will tell us that the children we baptize today will learn 80-90 % of everything that they learn in their lives by the time they are six years-old. We really cannot blame it on the schools. They will learn values, language and manners and how to give and receive affection. They will learn what the nature of a marriage relationship or a love relationship is like. They will learn whether it is appropriate to hit or to heal. They will learn whether God is important to them or not. And they will learn that before they ever leave our circle of influence. The point is – our homes are the best place for those values to be imbedded.

Early in our married lives, when my wife, Beth, and I both had career options, we came to a place of choice where one of us would be at home with our kids as long as they were out of school. When they went back to school, both of us would pick up those options in our lives. I realize that does not work for everybody, and not everyone has the same decision-making process that we did. Beth and I made a conscious decision that we did not want anybody else to be pouring that stuff into our kids other than us.

How did Eunice and Lois teach Timothy to exercise self-control and to have that kind of self-confidence that allows one to harness the power of the Holy Spirit, to love and – in turn – be loved? That is what second Timothy chapter three is all about. Paul reminds Timothy that he was formed in faith and character by being taught the scriptures from the time of his infancy. Moms, take note. Dads, listen up. Grandparents, pay attention. This is really important! Scripture is God's powerful tool to influence children's lives for good when we do the teaching and are intimately involved. What we are speaking of is generational blessing, to be willing to take the most precious thing that we have in the entire universe and impart that into the children around us. We bless our children, those of our flesh and blood as well of the church and community when we teach them the scriptures because we give them instructions for living.

Who taught you the scriptures? I am so thankful for my Mom and Dad. I am thankful for every nursery worker, every Sunday school teacher, vacation bible school veteran, every youth leader, and everybody along the way that passed the truth of Scripture and the person of Jesus from one generation to another and into my life. Who taught you the Scriptures? More importantly, who are you teaching? Do we want our children – our sons and daughters – to survive out there? We need to begin teaching them God's great story and how that story intersects and impacts their story. We need to use the Scriptures to teach and reproof and correct and train them for right living. This does not happen on a whim and a prayer. This involves intentionality.

I have a preacher friend of mine who likes to say that his oldest grandson Eric does not stand a chance. His parents are training him for right-living; but Eric, who is in his teenage years, does not always get it right. Sometimes he trips and falls and skins his spiritual knees. And his parents love him back. Even though his parents live 800 miles away, his grandmother hears about it. Poor Eric, it must feel pretty awkward and uncomfortable to get a letter from your grandmother which points out – in no uncertain terms – what her expectations are of him and what she wants out of her grandson and why. Poor Eric? No, I don't think so...Lucky Eric. He is receiving the faith the first dwelled in his grandmother and then dwelled in his mother, and now I am confident that will some day dwell in him. I think that Eric is going to be just fine. Do you know how I know that? Because I used to get letters like that from my grandparents and from my parents. They made an eternal impact on my life.

Do you want to make a difference in the life of a child? Invest in them and teach them the scriptures –whether they are you own or somebody else's. I also encourage you, sometime in the near future, to sit down and write a letter to the children in your circle of influence that are dear to you. Tell them in great detail why Jesus is so important to you, and why it is so important to you for them to have a relationship with Christ. Tell them what expectations you have because it is my experience that kids will live up to or down to our expectations. Set the expectations really high so when they trip and skin their knees you can love them back into a good relationship. Tell them the passage of scripture that has been most helpful and why – and bless them. Give it to them while you are living, and ask them to keep it to know your heart when your not.

Beth and I have given letters to all of our children upon their graduation from high school. On behalf of their mother and I, I have written long letters – four to five pages long. The letters have three parts – in the first part, we talk about the importance of their names. We selected each of their names with great intentionality. Each name has powerful symbolism, and we want them to remember the intentionality with which they were named. We want them to know that was done with great care and love. I tell them that the most important name they bear is 'Christian.' When they were little – before they could speak for themselves – we brought them to an altar of a church and made the same vows these parents did today; and we promised that we would do everything in our power to pour life, love, faith and character into our kids so that they would be third-generation Christians with first-generation faith.

In the second segment of the letter, we mention all of the things that we are so proud of – the parts of their character that stand out. We usually end the section with parts of their character that we still want them to work on. We tell them why, and then we end the letter with a blessing because we want them to know that this is bigger than we are. Their life has eternal implications, and we want them to live their life that way. On the night before they graduate from high school – usually with family and friends gathered around – I read them the letter so that they could hear it in the voice of their own dad. Do you know that each one has taken those letters and they keep it in the back of their Bibles? As time goes by, they begin to reveal to us more and more of what those letters have meant to them. I am getting ready to write more letters because, some day, I hope all three kids will get married as I plan to give them a letter the night before they get married. And I am also going to give one to the people they marry.

How will faith get transferred from generation to generation? It will not – unless we do it.