

Throughout my life, I have been blessed to have a wonderful biological mother: Paula Crawford Squires. My mom came from a family of little means and grew up in Kalamazoo, Michigan. She was the middle child of three children and started working from a very early age. My mom has an incredible work ethic and is very determined. She has created an amazing legacy for my sister Katie and I to follow, as a mother, business woman, and Christian. My mom loves to sing, and I credit her with my love of music. I also credit her for teaching me many Bible songs which I still remember today. It has been beautiful to hear my son start singing these very same songs which she now has taught to him.

My mom has been an incredible mother who continuously offers me her love and support. I appreciate her even more now that I have my son, as it gives me a glimpse to all the sacrifices, she made to take care of me.

Today we celebrate mothers. For many today is a day of celebration, a day in which they will be celebrated. Today is also a difficult day as people mourn the loss of their mothers, as people lament about their strained relationships with their mothers, or as people grieve because illness has made their mother’s unrecognizable. We also have mothers who are grieving the loss of their children today and women present who either chose not to have children or were not able to have children.

So, hand and hand we hold these feelings of joy and sadness as we celebrate Mother’s Day together. In our lives we are blessed by many different kinds of mothers. Our biological mothers, step-mothers, mother’s-in-law and finally what we will focus on today: our spiritual mothers.

One of the greatest blessings of being part of the church is the relationships that we get to have with one another. I know that for myself I have been spiritually formed by so many spiritual mothers. Growing up at Bon Air United Methodist Church I was adopted by these spiritual mothers from a young age: my Sunday School teachers and choir director taught me about the Bible. My youth pastor, Fran, encouraged me to go on mission trips, and my pastors Rhonda and Christy encouraged me to further discern my calling to ministry. In fact, my Pastor made the first ever intern position at my home church so that I could experience the many facets of ministry.

While I was on vacation recently, I was able to attend my home church and so many of my spiritual mothers welcomed me back. They were right there where I had left them: worshiping God and serving the Lord.

This is where we find the disciple Tabitha. She was a devoted disciple of Christ. Her faith most often embodied good works and acts of charity. When she died, her community was overcome with grief, you see, she was their spiritual mother. She took care of this community of widows by clothing them. They could not afford to clothe themselves, but Tabitha outfitted them in beautiful outfits.

Tabitha’s friends were not ready to let her go, and although they had already prepared her for burial, they still believed in the healing power of Jesus Christ and called upon Peter to heal her from even death.

Peter could barely get in the door because her community was showing off all the beautiful clothes that she made for them. It seems that Peter did not know what to do with all these grieving widows and all the fabric surrounding him, so he sent everyone out of the room.

This was actually Peter’s second healing in a short time frame. He had just healed a bed-ridden Aeneas in the name of Jesus Christ and those who witnessed this healing believed in Jesus Christ.

Peter knew that Tabitha was a faithful servant of the Lord and just as he was calling to someone who was sleeping and not dead Peter said, “Tabitha, get up” (Acts 9:40). Immediately this woman who was dead, woke up and was alive again. Then I believe Peter took a death breath and invited all the widows to come back in the room and rejoice that Tabitha was alive again. Their spiritual mother was back with them. Due to this miracle many people gave their lives to Jesus Christ.

This is what a spiritual mother does, brings people to Jesus Christ. Through Tabitha’s good work and charity, the widows she cared for experienced the love and grace of God. Through her resurrection, more people were able to experience this love and grace, all because her friends, these widows were not ready to give up on her yet.

A spiritual mother never gives up.

Jochebed is a mother that we do not talk about very much. She was the mother of Moses, Aaron and Miriam and we hear about her faith in Exodus 2:1-10. You see at that time Pharaoh had commanded that all Hebrew boy children were to be thrown in the river. Pharaoh was trying to prevent the Hebrews from rising up against him.

Jochebed hid her son Moses for three months, but when she could not hide him anymore, she made a plan, put him in a basket in the shallow river and told his sister to supervise the process. Moses was found and sent back to her for a short time before he went to live in the lap of luxury. Had it not been for his mother’s faith and God’s provision; Moses certainly would have died.

Being a spiritual mother means that we do not give up on people. Even when they are consumed by sin, even when they are unrecognizable, we are called to journey with the people that God placed in our lives.

The beautiful thing about my own mother and the spiritual mothers in my life is that they have not given up on me. When I shared, I was called to ministry I got a lot of mixed reactions from people in my life, but my spiritual mothers were 100 percent behind me. The process to become an ordained elder is 10 years, and they were with me every step of the way.

One of my favorite pictures from my ordination is my youth pastor Fran, standing beside me looking up at me bursting with pride. This picture is my favorite because she saw God’s calling upon my life even before I was even aware of it.

Spiritual mothers continue to acknowledge that God is working in and through us, even when we are unable to see it for ourselves.

This is the role that Ruth played in Naomi’s life in the book of Ruth. Naomi was ready to give up, she had lost everything, but, Ruth knew that God had a plan for her, Ruth knew this was not the end of her story and Ruth invited her to receive new life.

Spiritual mothers continue to invite us into the new life of Jesus Christ.

We see that Jesus highly valued his mother. Mary was the one who, much like the mother of Moses, saved Jesus from Herod who wanted to kill him as an infant. Mary continued to be there for her son throughout his ministry and was even there during his last moments at the cross. That day Jesus entrusted his mother’s care into the hands of the beloved disciple, and Jesus also entrusted the beloved disciple into his mother’s care. She was to become John’s spiritual mother.

The hard thing about being a spiritual mother is that we are called to pour our lives into others and equip them to be disciples, then we are called to let them go. Just as Jochebed and Mary were called to let their sons go so they could answer God’s callings upon their lives, we too are called to let those who we mentor go.

This is hard because we care about the people that we are taking care of spiritually. We sometimes feel if we are not in their lives all the time that perhaps they will make a huge mistake, but this is where we have to trust in God.

Mentoring is something I am very passionate about. You may not know this about me, but outside of my responsibilities at the church I serve on many conference agencies in the area of mentoring. I help young adults discern their callings through our conference Calling 21 program and I oversee all the mentors for our pastors in the ordination process. Just this past week I made call after call after call to continue to line up mentors that would encourage these pastors as they make their journey to ordination.

Over the years, I have mentored many people, some of which I am still in touch with and some of which I have lost touch with, but it has been amazing to watch all the things they have done, and what God has done through them. Being a spiritual mother is much like being a mentor.

Being a spiritual mother is embodying our faith so others may know what it looks like to be a Christian. Our three churches on our charge are built upon the shoulders of many spiritual mothers and fathers who poured out their faith and lives so that these churches would still be here today and for them we do give thanks: for their lives and for their lessons and their legacies which have outlived them.

Today I hope we can all say a prayer of thanksgiving for our spiritual mothers wherever they may be.

I also hope that each one of us, women and men, take a moment to think about someone in our lives that may be in need of a spiritual parent. This could be a family member, it could be a friend, it could even be an acquaintance. What would it look like for each of us to take the time and let someone know that we will not give up on them, that God is right there with them?

Just as Tabitha’s friends did not give up on her, the good news for our lives today is that God has given us the gift of the church, women and men, who continue to journey with us through their model of faith in Jesus Christ.

There have been so many spiritual mothers who have gone before us, making it possible for us to be here today. To close my sermon today, I want to tell you about one more spiritual mother that you may not have ever heard of.

In the 1700’s there was a woman by the name of Mary Bosanquet. She was swept up in the Methodist movement and much like the disciple Tabitha, she embodied her faith through good works and charity. She joined up with other Methodist women and “established a Christian community...that took in some of the most destitute children and adults...a total of thirty-five children and thirty-four adults (mostly widows) in five years.”ⁱ

This Christian community expanded rapidly so they moved to Yorkshire.ⁱⁱ Their community became known as “a vital center of Methodist worship and witness.”ⁱⁱⁱ You see, God had placed a calling upon Mary’s life to preach, but she was terrified to go against the Bible as she understood it and the Methodist denomination. At that time women were not allowed to preach. So, she wrote a letter to John Wesley about her dilemma, and here is his response: “I think the strength of the cause rest there, on your having an Extraordinary Call. So, I am persuaded...St. Paul’s ordinary rule was, ‘I permit not a woman to speak in the congregation.’ Yet in extraordinary cases he made a few exceptions; at Corinth, in particular.”^{iv}

It was due to Mary’s obvious calling from God, that John Wesley started allowing women to preach, and paved the way for women like me in the future. So today I am thankful for Tabitha, for Jochebed, for Ruth, for Mary the Mother of Jesus, and for Mary Bosanquet all of who were spiritual mothers. May we all strive to embody their faith, their courage, their kindness, and their compassion. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Endnotes

ⁱ Jean Miller Schmidt. *Grace Sufficient: A History of Women in American Methodism*. Abingdon Press: Nashville, TN. 1999. P. 30.

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} Ibid. 31.

Additional Resources

Keck et al. *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*. Vol. X. 1995. P. 143.

Sakenfield et al. *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*. Vol. 2. Abingdon Press: Nashville, TN. 2007. P. 159