

Who Taught You About God?

May 14, 2006 (Mother's Day)

Happy Mother's Day. This is one of those days it is hard to know what to say. There are so many wonderful things that we could say about mothers, about women and about the family. Mother's Day is not a Christian Holiday, but for Christians it has added meaning.

Women add so much to the church and Christian mothers add so much to families. As a church we are to be like a family. Community is so important within a local church and as we experience community we take on many roles in supporting one another and in training our children. So today as we celebrate mother's day, I want us to first of all be thankful to our mothers and to the mothers and all the women of our church. I want us to be thankful to every member within this church that works in helping train children and in being an example to children and I want us to most of all realize the importance of a Christian family.

I have entitled my message, "Who Taught You About God?" In the past year I preached a sermon on evangelism in which we did a little survey. I asked for everyone that is a Christian to think about who was most influential in leading them to become a Christian. I gave about 6 categories for everyone to consider. Things like: Christian T.V. or radio, a Christian book or tract, a sermon, a family member or friend. Hands down the family member or friend won that survey.

Similarly if I asked who not only lead you to become a Christian but who taught you about God, I imagine some of you would say you learned about God from attending Church, others would say their friends, or even a book, but most would probably say they learned about God from their family.

This is not to say that everyone learns about God from their family. Some people learn about God in spite of their family. In some cultures, if a person accepts Christ, they will be disowned by their family. But as Christians, it should be our goal to teach our family about God. When I was in seminary, I had a class entitled, "The Family as a Cradle of Theology." That is an interesting title. The basic idea of the class is that much of our theology and things that we believe about God came from our family. When we call God Father, if our father is not loving toward us, then that affects how we view God.

If our parents go to church, but don't live the Christian life, then that teaches us something. If our parents are committed to God and work to have a Christian home environment than that affects us.

So I ask you, "Who taught you about God? What did they teach you?" And are you teaching others in your family about God. This is a sermon that is to mothers, fathers, grandparents, children, grandchildren, brothers, and sisters. We can have a great impact on members of our family.

The last thing that Jesus said before he ascended is recorded in **Acts 1:8** *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

This morning, I would like for us to look at a couple of events that are found in Acts 16. This is a chapter that has a lot of activities of Paul & Silas including two interesting events with families.

The first event took place in Philippi.

Acts 16:13-15 *13 On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. 14 A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. 15 When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home." And she prevailed upon us.*

Did you understand what took place? A woman named Lydia was leading a group of women in the worship of God. Paul & Silas meet with them & Paul taught them about Jesus. Then Lydia and **her household** were baptized. What would her household include? Everyone that lived with her. Other family members and possibly slaves. They were all baptized and then she urged Paul & Silas to come and stay at her house.

In 16:16-24 we read about a slave girl who the Bible says had a spirit of divination. She could tell the future & her owner made a lot of money from this. She followed Paul & Silas around & eventually Paul ordered the Spirit out of her. She could no longer tell the future and her owners were upset. They brought false charges against Paul & Silas. The two were beaten severely and thrown into prison.

Let's pick up with **Acts 16:25-29** *25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. 26 Suddenly there was an earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened. 27 When the jailer woke up and saw the prison doors wide open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, since he supposed that the prisoners had escaped. 28 But Paul shouted in a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." 29 The jailer called for lights, and rushing in, he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas 30 Then he brought them outside and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"*

The jailor had been observing Paul & Silas. They acted different than most prisoners. They were beaten severely and thrown into prison & they were singing. That is not normal.

Then when the jailor awoke and saw all the doors open, he was about to kill himself because he was going to be killed anyway. When Paul tells him that they are all there, the jailer runs to him. He wants in his life, what he sees in Paul's life. He ask,

“what must I do to be saved?” Notice the response.

Acts 16:31 *They answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and **your household.**"*

Again notice Paul speaks of the household being saved. Let's read on. **16:32-34** *32 They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. 33 At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay. 34 He brought them up into the house and set food before them; and he and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God.*

The jailor and his entire family are baptized. These are two interesting accounts of baptisms of a family or household.

Salvation for a household?

What does that mean? We always focus on individual salvation, so what is this about? What is the meaning here?

The household was an important institution in that time period. There was a strong bond within a household. Becoming a Christian was a major decision and the leaders of the household in making that decision would be leading the family to make the commitment as well.

It reminds me of what Joshua said, as is recorded in Joshua 24:15 ***15 Now if you are unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.***

Even today it is important to make family commitments. That is not to say you can make a commitment for another person, but as leaders of a family you can do your part to create a Christian home environment to point others to Christ.

During the NT period not all individuals that were Christians lived in a totally Christian household. There are scriptures that refer to one spouse being a believer, while the other is not. We do, see, however, from these two examples of household baptisms, that a family commitment to God can be vitally important.

Beyond making that family commitment to God, we need to ask ourselves, how does one learn about God in their household or within their family?

Your life – children watch what you do more than they hear what you say. Be an example to your family. So often, we work to be on our best behavior everywhere but at home. I admit it. I have been guilty of this. We may be really careful about what we say at work or with friends and someone may say or do something that really upsets us. We

hold in our frustrations or pain and then get home and take it out on our spouse and children. They really need you to be a Christian example – are you?

You want your child to read the Bible and learn about God – do you read it to them?

You want your child to learn to pray – do you pray with them?

I read about a little girl who came to her father & asked him to go to Sunday School so they could learn about Jesus. He said, no. I have had a busy week and Sunday is my only day to rest. He decided instead to go fishing. Months & years later his daughter was no longer asking him to go to Sunday School and he realized that this is what they needed. He then he tries to get his daughter to go to Sunday School with him, but she responds that she had stayed up late at night and needs to sleep.

Where do you think she learned that?

Even if you take your child to Sunday School every Sunday , there may come a time when the child rebels, but Proverbs 22:6 promises us, “*Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray,*” There may be some slipping away, but that early training makes a great impression.

ILLUS - Children learn from their parents. Let me share with you the words of Lewis Smedes, a former professor at Fuller Theological Seminary.

May I share with you some reasons why I believe? All good reasons, none of them the really real reason. There's my family. I believe because I was brought up in a believing family. I don't make any bones about that. I don't know what would have happened to me if I had been born in the depths of Manchuria of a Chinese family. I just don't know. I do know that I was lead to believe in the love of God as soon as I learned that I should eat my oatmeal. We did a lot of believing in our house. We didn't have much else to do, as a matter of fact. Other kids sang, "Jesus loves me this I know, 'cause the Bible tells me so." I sang, "Jesus loves me this I know, 'cause my ma told me so."

I wasn't along. A reporter once asked the great German theologian Karl Barth, "Sir, you've written all these great volumes about God, great learned tomes about all the difficult problems of God. How do you know they're all true?" And the great theologian smiled and said, "Cause my mother said so!"

Families are God's primary missionary society.

If Christianity is to be taught at home, it is best if both parents are Christians, but it is not necessary. Timothy was taught about God by his mother and grandmother. It adds so much to home if both parents are Christians, that also teaches us something about the importance of Christian dating. If our goal is to have a Christian home, then that begins by dating other Christians and by building our relationship around Christ from the start.

Christianity can be taught by parents, but also by Children. I will never forget the father who was a committed Christian and church leader who told me that his daughter when she was only about 12 years old lead him to become a Christian. I also treasure the memory of the grandfather who told me that when he had stopped attending church his preschool grand daughter influenced him to get back involved in church.

Family members can have a great impact on one another. Sometimes it is difficult to talk to family members about God, especially to our parents or siblings. It begins by having that commitment to God, in which they see something different within you. Then you should pray and seek opportunities to share about God.

Conclusion

Where did you learn about God? In Acts 16 we find entire households accepting Christ. There is something about the family bond of learning together and sharing things in common.

I am glad that I can say – I learned about God from my family. My salvation is personal. It must be. You are not a Christian because your parents are Christians, but you can learn from them and then accept Christ yourself.

Whether you learned about God from your family or not, the family is the most basic place to teach about God. Teach your children, your spouse, parents, grandchildren, other relatives or friends. Begin where you are and share wherever you are led to go.

Today is Mother's Day and I am so thankful for Christian mothers. Today we focused on the family. I encourage you to make a commitment to God and to your family & friends, to do your part in having a Christian home & friendships and to influence others for God.