

“She/Her/Hers”

2 Timothy 1:3-7

Hyattstown Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

May 10, 2020 (Mother’s Day)

READ 2 TIMOTHY 1:3-7

Consider the women you most admire, and why.

According to a survey of 42,000 people in 41 countries, Michelle Obama, Oprah Winfrey, and Angelina Jolie are the three most admired women in the world. Queen Elizabeth, Angela Merkel, and Malala Yousafzai also make the top ten. In the USA, add Ellen DeGeneres and Condoleeza Rice to the list. In the history of the world, Princess Diana, Mother Teresa, Marilyn Monroe, Indira Ghandi, and Anne Frank are among the women most admired.

On Mother’s Day, consider the women you most admire, and consider why.

The first Mother’s Day was the inspiration of Anna Jarvis in 1908. She just wanted to honor her mother Ann, who raised 13 children. Anna specified a Sunday in the month of May, and called it “Mother Friendship Day”. Six years later, President Woodrow Wilson declared it an official holiday, but Anna Jarvis fought the rest of her life against the commercialism of the observance, which of course continues today. Anna Jarvis wanted simply to honor her mother!

My mother Madlynne Stinehelfer would, I admit, hold the top spot on my list of women I have most admired! Maybe you would say the same about your mom. Madge taught me that every person was precious in God’s sight, that there was no more noble activity than helping another person in need, and that I was to love unconditionally, just as God loved me.. Madge taught kindness, generosity, and a love for the Church. She was not hesitant to keep her son on the right path. Allow me one example:

Some years ago, a national officer of the United Church of Christ recommended me to a colleague who was building staff at a prestigious, large membership congregation near Chicago. It was then, and is now, one of the leading churches in the denomination. I was invited to join his team. At that time, I had been serving my current church only a year and a half, a rewarding ministry, and I felt that I should not leave so soon. I said thanks, but no thanks, to the Senior Pastor in Illinois. Then I told my mother what had happened. Madge knew of that church. She scolded me in no uncertain terms: "Jeffrey! You call them back!" I did. It was the right path!

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You could insert Madge's name with the names of Eunice and Lois in the Apostle Paul's second letter to his young protégé Timothy: (Chapter 1, verse 5): "I remember the sincere faith you have, the kind of faith that your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice (Madge) also had. I am sure that you have it also." If there was one thing that people knew about my mother, it was that her faith was sincere.

Paul had met Timothy and his family in the town of Lystra, during his first journey as a missionary. The evangelist was busy establishing Christian communities throughout territories of Asia Minor that are now modern day Turkey. Timothy's father was Greek, and probably pagan. His mother, though, and her mother, were Jews who had converted to become avid followers of Jesus Christ. The qualities of devotion and loyalty that Paul saw in Timothy had been passed on to him by Eunice and Lois. These two women are credited with being the "founding mothers", so to speak, of faith training that became the life-blood of the Early Church. That's why the Apostle Paul spoke so affectionately of them. It was because of the influence of Eunice and Lois upon Timothy that Paul came to trust that he could succeed with independent missionary assignments of his own. Paul's letters to Timothy, whom he loved like a son, were intended to encourage him in that mission work even if he encountered resistance,

suffering--or worse-- martyrdom. For his part, Timothy was only too aware that the encouragement was sent from a prisoner in Rome soon to meet that fate.

Is this what Eunice and Lois had trained him for?

I know of a mother waking to Mother's Day thinking about her eldest son reeling from unexpected divorce. Is this what she trained him for?

I know of a mother waking to Mother's Day thinking about a troubled son who died on his motorcycle. Is this what she trained him for?

I know of a mother waking to Mother's Day thinking about a teenage son killed by gang violence. Is this what she trained him for?

I know of a mother waking to Mother's Day thinking about a son murdered while jogging. Is this what she trained him for?

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Of late, I've been intrigued by the electronic signatures of two female friends. Under her name, each adds the pronouns "She/Her/Hers". I thought the phrase would get attention as a sermon title on Mother's Day. You can determine how, or if, it fits.

Online inquiry reveals that this emerging trend is about diversity and inclusion.

I asked both of these friends to share with me why they have adopted this means of signing their names. It is, after all, a public statement: "She/Her/Hers"! Help me understand why?

One of my friends explained: *"I learned that some people do not experience gender as female or male. Those who consider themselves neither male nor female, or non-binary, go by 'they'. I use those pronouns to show I am in solidarity with those who are often marginalized."*

My other friend answered this way: *“Not only do women bring life into the world; women are much more than that...One definition of ‘womanism’ that I love is ‘outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior’...The ‘womanism’ movement came out from ‘feminism’ where it highlights the experience of black women and women of color...To be a woman means to love herself, to be strong, to be wise, and to use her tools to propel her to love others.”*

I have thought of myself as an advocate for women and women’s issues: inclusive language, equal rights, equal pay for equal work, etc. I have thought of myself as a partner for “feminism”. Now, along comes “womanism”! Eunice, and Lois, and Madge, the women who raised me, might say I still have much to learn.

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