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**Mother's Day 2016**  
**Greatest Lesson, Greatest Gift**  
Pastor Ted Cunningham

We're talking today about the greatest lesson your mom ever taught you, and we're talking about the greatest gift you could ever give her. How many of you have a hard time buying your mom something? Today, that problem is solved. We're going to fix the whole thing.

I went on Facebook and I asked you to tell me the greatest lesson your mom ever taught you. I got pages of responses within 24 hours. You love talking about your mother and I think that is fantastic. We will just look at all the different ways mom serves us. If you were to put these in categories, here are a few of the categories and some of the samplings.

**Mom as Nutritionist**

She's the one that keeps us fed. Mom loves it when she leaves for an overnight trip or a two-day trip and then comes back to realize that dad did not feed the children. Does anybody know what I'm talking about? Or, mom is gone all day and everybody is sitting at home, waiting for Mom to return to eat because Dad has an inability to feed children. Men know this.

Rick's mom says, "You will eat because I said so and your father will be home soon." That's the greatest lesson he ever learned.

**Mom as a Cheerleader**

I love this. Your mom was your biggest fan. Dad, not so much. Dan was more of a coach. Mom will tell you that you did awesome when you didn't. Dad will tell you "That was horrible; you're riding home in the trunk. I am embarrassed to be seen with you. That was terrible. Why in the world did you play like that?"

All week, my brother and I have been going back and forth about the greatest lessons our mom, Bonny Ludwig Cunningham, taught us. This is the greatest lesson we got from mom. She used to always tell us "Don't let the turkeys get you down," as she sent us off to public schools every day. I had no idea how much I would use that saying as a pastor. Not that I'm calling the congregation turkeys, but...

## **Mom as a Physician**

When you get hurt, you don't go to dad. You come in the house and scream for Mom because Dad doesn't care. How many of you remember dad spending hours trying to stop the bleeding before realizing he probably should take you to the hospital. "Dad, really, I can see the bone sticking out. I think we should do something about this."

## **Mom as Warden**

I love what Shari Radford's mom taught her. "If you ever decided to run away from home, you will leave here naked the way I brought you into this world." You get nothing.

## **Mom as Counselor**

When life is not going all that well, who is the one you call? She's the one that's going to help you. I love what Suzette Brawner's mom said. "If you ever get in a fight with your husband, don't call me. I will always take Jim Brawner's side." That's a good mom who says, "If you have a marriage problem and you call home, I'm taking your spouse's side."

## **Mom as Minister**

As we move towards today's message, how many of you had a mom who was the minister? We believe that in this church. We believe every Christian, every member of this church is a minister of the gospel of Jesus. You are called to proclaim the gospel of Jesus, starting at home with your children, living out the gospel at home.

Julie Van Boening's mom said, "Always preach the gospel; whenever necessary, use words," followed by, "Make sure your ears and fingernails are clean."

How many of you had a mom that would say something like this: "Sit up in church." – Mark Greenwalt's mom. That was a mom, followed by Dad, behind your mom, popping you one on the back.

Scott Trammell's mom said, "Your sins will find you out." Raise your hand if you had a parent who always told you Jesus is watching. "I don't have to keep tabs on you. When you sin tonight, it will come back."

## **Mom as Teacher**

Today, we are looking at mom as teacher and the lessons that mom taught. For how many of you is it the older you get, the more you realize your parents are getting smarter and smarter with every year. How many of you find yourselves talking like your parents? I'm 42 years old and Bonnie Cunningham is coming out of my mouth. My mom is the easily excited one. My dad is the calm one.

My mom's favorite line when we were growing up was "EVERYBODY, CALM DOWN!" That was her way of calming us all down. I can say that in our marriage, I am the one that is easily excited and Amy is the calm one. I have regularly looked at my kids, when things seem out of control to me, and said, "EVERYBODY, CALM DOWN." And everybody looks at me and calmly says "Alright."

Mom said things to us over and over again to where we rolled eyes at it. Mom would say something... How many of you remember saying this to your mom when you were growing up: "I know! I know! You say that all the time. Why do you keep saying that? I already know that." Why do moms do that? We know this about beliefs on the heart. It's what you hear over and over again that finds its way into your heart. And out of the heart flows all your words and actions. Above all else, guard your heart; it is the wellspring of life. Your heart has all these messages placed there by mom. Mom as your teacher. She would repeat herself over and over. Today we want to look at the greatest lesson your mom ever taught you and then the greatest gift that you could ever give her.

The greatest gift you can give your mom is your life reflecting what she said to you over and over again. When you're 18 or 19, you think your mom doesn't have a clue. When you're 50, you think your mom is the smartest woman on the planet. You don't know what happened in the past 30 years, but you begin to understand your mom knew some things. What Mom was teaching us came out of her experience and her wisdom and from her parents.

Let's look at that today. What's the greatest gift you could ever give your mom? It's your life. Proverbs 23 puts it this way: **22 Listen to your father, who gave you life...** This is where your dad got the line "I brought you into this world and I will take you out." One of my favorite lines to tell the kids is "I brought you into this world and I will take you out. I'll get rid of you and create another one just like you. How about that? Knock it off."

**...and do not despise your mother when she is old.** Don't forget about your mom. Don't treat your mom poorly. Now watch what we are gaining here. Verse 23 is the life well lived. **23 Buy the truth...** Want the truth. Want to live a life full of understanding the truth, which is wisdom. Wisdom is that experience you've picked up over a lifetime where you get what Mom was saying. "I didn't get it at first because I was rebelling against it, but now it totally makes sense." That's because she experienced something and learned some lessons from it, and now you're experiencing it and you get to do what Proverbs is all about. You can choose to be a wise person or you can choose to be a fool. It's your choice. You want wisdom. You want instruction.

We use the term *teachable*. Are you teachable? When you hire somebody, you want somebody who is teachable. The reason Southwest Airlines is such a great airline is because they hire attitude and they believe you can teach skills. Most of us do it backwards. We hire skills and terrible attitudes. Have you ever been around someone who doesn't like instruction? This is not a person you want to be around. It's the know-it-all.

I've been with people at conferences where they go into a breakout session. They hear 50 minutes of great information. It's the person who walks out of going "I knew all that." That's a fool. A wise person

listens to something they've heard thousands of times maybe and they go, "That's good." A wise person loves instruction whether they knew it or not. A wise person leans into instruction.

You've been in conversations with people where you're trying to share something and they won't shut up long enough to listen to it. Your sharing something or maybe giving instruction to someone at work and they're like "Yeah, I got it. I got it." Can I just tell you young people this is the difference between being successful at work and being fired. When your boss is trying to say something that maybe they've told you before, there's a reason they have to tell you again. It's because you didn't do it right the first time. Be the person who leans into it and love the instruction.

An authoritarian is someone who just never asks for your opinion. This may be your boss. He doesn't like instruction. He likes barking orders, but he's not into instruction. The authoritative person says, "Well, what do you think?" I think that when it comes to parenting, you can still ask your parents for their opinion. It doesn't mean you have to listen to it. It doesn't mean you have to follow through with it, but just say, "Hey, Dad, you've purchased a lot of cars." "Mom and Dad, you've purchased three or four houses in your lifetime." "Dad, when you retired..."

Your parents have had a lot of experiences with things that are a long way down the road from where you are right now. Ask them what they think. Do you want to have a really good lunch with your parents? Just ask them what they think about Donald Trump. You don't have to vote based on what your parents tell you. Ask them what they think of Bernie Sanders. Why can't you just say, "Give me your thoughts and opinions?" Be a person who loves instruction and leans into it even if you already know it. Guard your heart against being the know-it-all. I know you just graduated colleges and you're worth \$150 grand a year. Be a person that when you go into work, you realize your degree really brings you nothing. Walking in, you are going to fly through that organization, company, workplace, wherever you work, if you're one who loves instruction.

We want to buy truth. **...and do not sell it— wisdom, instruction and insight as well.** Be the person at the table that listens. I have to work on this myself. I don't need to give my thoughts, opinions, and insight into every matter. Amy tells me I have an opinion on everything, but I don't need to share it all the time. I want to be the one who listens. If you've been around great leaders, you've been around people who know how to listen. This is what Mom and Dad are doing. They're giving you truth, wisdom, instruction, and insight.

**24 The father of a righteous child has great joy...** In other words, the dad who sees a child living all this out has this peace. We have these little moments as parents when our children behave in a certain way that we didn't ask for. Like when your child apologizes to another child and you did tell them to. Those are the moments that bring great joy. **...a man who fathers a wise son rejoices in him.** He has an expression of gratefulness towards that type of child. **25 May your father and mother rejoice...** May they express deep joy over you and the life that you are living. **...may she who gave you birth be joyful!** Do you want to honor your mom? Do it with your life. Honor her by the way you live. Today, remind her of things that she taught you and show her how you are applying that. This brings great joy to a mom.

Here's how the Proverbs continues. It's this idea of traveling with wisdom. We know this from the scripture. You won't be with Mom and Dad forever, so plan accordingly. You are going to leave home. Genesis 2: 24 says for this reason, a man leaves his father and mother. Proverbs 6 paints the picture this way. ***My son, keep your father's commandment, and forsake (forget) not your mother's teaching. Bind them on your heart always; tie them around your neck. When you walk, they will lead you; when you lie down, they will watch over you; and when you awake, they will talk with you.***

This looks like the language in Deuteronomy 6 that we share often. From the time you get up in the morning, until the time you go to sleep at night, and as you walk along the way, Mom and Dad are instructing their children in the way of the Lord, teaching their children about Jesus, teaching their children the words of Jesus. It says here to take them with you because when it's packed away, when you walk, they will lead you; when you lie down they will watch over you; and when you awake, they will talk with you. Some of you can't get your parents out of your head with the things that they've said over and over again. Take that wisdom...

The word picture I always like for a parent is the idea of a backpack. We went camping the last two weekends. The father/son was last weekend and the father/daughter was this weekend. I wanted to be prepared. How many of you are over preparers. You take stuff that you maybe don't need, but you never know if you will need it. I have some stuff that I used and some stuff that I didn't in my backpack. This is just one of the bags that I took.

First thing, I had to make sure I had binoculars because when you're camping, you never know what spying you are going to need to do. Also, I'm a bird watcher. I never opened them, but they were there in case I needed them. I had an axe. You never know if you are going to need to protect yourself and they don't allow guns at the national parks. You never know if you have to chop down a tree. I took it. I didn't need it, but it was in the bag. I had a light. You always need a light when you travel. Now, this is something a mom gets: snacks. Isn't mom always worried about snacking? Dads never worry about snacking. Someone said to me "You will never see a dad prepare a Ziploc bag full of games for his children and then label it *Activities*." You're never going to see that, but mom is worried them not getting enough to eat and wants to make sure they aren't bored. That's why we're camping. The point is to be bored so you find something to do.

How many of you remember going on long trips? We would be 12 hours in the car. My dad couldn't care less if I was bored in the car.

"Dad, what do you want to do?"

"Why don't you count license plates?"

We didn't have iPads and iPhones and all that. When counting license plates got boring, we just started keeping track of how many states we saw. Do you know how many different cars are driving on the Ohio Turnpike? There aren't that many. We were able to find them all except Alaska and Hawaii. That's how we entertained ourselves.

This towel was in case we got wet and needed to dry off. I have a lighter because you never know when you are going to have to start a fire. I have a knife to protect us from bears. I have a coffee mug. I have a first aid kit. I have the Bible. I have a flashlight. I have ointment. That's for me.

As a parent, this is what we are doing. This is really all what raising children is about. It's about figuring out what they are going to need in life. What am I sending them out of the home to do? Some of you are at that stage where you are packing up fast like "Get this kid out of here. We have done all we can do. There is nothing more we can do." Here's what's interesting to me. You can tell there is just a lot of practical stuff in there, stuff I would need. We packed about ten minutes before we left for the canoeing trip.

You have packed a bag for your child and you have sent them out. Here's what I know. I didn't need all that stuff, but there may come a time when I need it. Parents sometimes forget that you've placed stuff in that bag that may not be used for 20 years, but it's there. Sometimes we forget this what our role is as parents. We take that bag when we lie down, when we wake up, and as we walk along the way.

Here's what Proverbs 22: 6 says. If ever a verse has caused Mom and Dad to have regret and to feel guilt, it's this verse right here. You have to remember that Proverbs are not guarantees. Proverbs are tendencies. If you live this way, this is typically the outcome. If you work hard, typically, you're going to eat. The scripture says ***Train up a child in the way he should go...*** There are parents all throughout this room who did that to the best of their ability with the skills and the knowledge they had at the time they were raising their children. You worked hard to train them up.

Now let me turn the tables on the adult children in the room, the teenagers in the room. When you are old, don't depart from them. Don't forsake your parents. Don't forsake your mom or treat your dad like a fool because you take what he has given you and you discard it. When you go to college and that first professor questions everything your parents every taught you, don't be a fool and listen to one man with too many degrees. As you get advanced degrees, don't allow your degrees to replace the wisdom that your parents gave you. Don't forsake it. Don't move away from it. ***...even when he is old he will not depart from it.***

Here's the idea in Proverbs 1: 8-9. ***Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching.*** Take it with you on your journey. ***They are a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck.*** May you always have it with you.

My brother and I have been reconnecting quite a bit over the last couple of years. As you left home, you may have gone different ways from your siblings and you may live in different parts of the country. You're raising your family and doing your work... That was kind of my brother and I for the last few years. We just decided to be more intentional. We took a trip together a couple of weeks ago.

This week, we've been talking about Mom. I asked him to give me some of the best stories he had. Andy shared with me... He's 45 and I'm 42. We had a lot of good texts going back and forth. Some I can share with you and some I have to wait for my mom's funeral. Isn't it something that you can't share

some of the lessons until that day? My mom and dad say we are going to have so much fun at their funerals. We will be mourning. But, in the Cunningham family, we mourn with hope and humor.

Andy said, "She taught me a lot, but the last couple of weeks I've been thinking a lot, looking back on all the moments we had while she was teaching me to drive." This is so good. My dad taught us a little bit, but it was primarily my mom. My mom... How do I want to say it? It's Mother's Day and I want to honor her as I say this. Mom is a fast driver. She's aggressive, but she's good and she's safe. She is a defensive driver. The 1970 something Plymouth Volare that she trained my brother and I to drive with... What you have to know if you haven't trained boys how to drive yet is that the front part of a boy's brain doesn't really develop until they are like 60 or 65. That's why you look over to your daughter, she's at ten and two or nine and three, and she's following everything. But, the boys... They are just looking around and not really paying attention.

My mom taught us how to be defensive drivers. I can remember her taking us into parking lots that were full of snow. We were going to practice doing donuts. She wanted to teach us how to have control of a car. So, there we were in the church parking lot, learning how to peel out.

My brother is the best driver I know. He's aggressive; he's fast and he's safe. We have this road going to McDonalds out of our town. It's called Douglas. There was a subdivision off to the left before you got there called Boulder Hill. There were three roads to the left that led to Boulder Hill. It was a 35 miles per hour zone, which was ridiculous.

I'll never forget Andy driving down Douglas one day with me in the passenger seat. I'm probably 13. He's 16 and we're in a Ford F100. A police officer passed us. Andy looked down and he was going 50 or 55... I have no idea. He was going fast. He sees the officer starting to turn around. For my brother that meant floor it. He takes off. Before the officer turns on the lights, he takes that third street and he guns it. He's going 100 miles per hour down this road. I put the seatbelt on and started yelling. We are not felons. We are evading the police. He asked if I saw the officer behind us. He was flying and I was convinced that if he had seen an open garage, he would have pulled in, hit the button, and waited for the officer to go by. He flew all the way down to the Fox River and we hid underneath a bridge. I think that's called "laying low." I have a guilt prone nature and I'm like "We're going to jail!" Where did he learn that? He learned that from my mother.

I never heard a foul word come out of my dad's mouth. Never a bad word, but my mother... So every now and then, when something slips out of my mouth, I just look at the kids and say, "Poma Bonnie." The older I get, the more I become like my parents. The older I get, the more my parents seem to be getting smarter. The older I get, the more I want to honor my parents because I realize instruction, insight, and wisdom went with them

Here is another way to honor your mother today. Pass on the wisdom in your life to your mother's grandchildren. When a great, great grandma sees her great, great grandchildren and her great grandchildren and her grandchildren being taught and instructed and she's seeing the wisdom that she's passed on now in two and three generations removed...

We get this idea in Deuteronomy 4: 9. ***Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen...*** The way your parents have led you. They way they've instructed you. ***...or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.***

Mom, you have such a great responsibility in teaching. You're packing the backpack; you're packing the suitcase right now for your children. Right now, you thinking they don't get it, you don't see them living it out. I want to encourage you. Keep teaching, keep instructing, keep being the cheerleader, and keep pressing in.

If I can say something to the 16, 17, 18, 19, and all the way up to mid-20s and maybe early 30s. To honor your mother today, one of the greatest things you can do is to begin repeating back to her the lessons that she taught you. Share with her how you've applied something she taught you at work this week or in your own family. Do you want to be known as someone wise beyond your years? Don't rebel against instruction. Don't be arrogant in the presence of someone who is insightful.

Don't go to work tomorrow acting like you know it all because you don't. There are people who have walked before you who do. Do you want to go places in life? Do you want be successful? Do you want people to see you as a leader in the church and the community and in your home? Lean into what your parents taught you. Lean into their instruction. You may think your parents don't have a clue, but they have way more of a clue than you think. They've lived it. For some of you, you want to make your own mistakes and go your own way and experience life as they experienced it. You feel it's not fair that they were able to experience it and you didn't. They would tell you that they wouldn't experience it again.

One of our elders said something to me yesterday and it's been this thought I've been meditating on since he said it to me. It's good. I'm 42 and I'm looking at family and friends and all of that and I'm seeing many in this church who are still in their 40s, dealing with the consequences of decisions they made in their 20s and 30s. We believe Jesus breathes life into dead people, so no guilt trip here. I'm just trying to encourage some in the 20s and 30s who are in that mode. You feel like you're not dealing with any consequence now, but you will. The decisions you're making right now... One of the comments someone sent in from their parent was "Life is all about the decision that you make." My mom would always tell us that. Every decision you make will come back years down the road. So make good decisions. Lean into what your parents are teaching you.

I'm going back to the parent right now who says, "I just do not think my son is getting it." "I just don't think my daughter is fully appreciating all I do as a single mom to try to help her and encourage her." "I just don't think they are getting it." We found this video to encourage you.

[Video Plays] – The Invisible Women – Nicole Johnson

*It started to happen gradually. I would walk in to a room and say something and no one would notice. I would say, "Turn the TV down please" and nothing would happen. So, I would get louder. "Turn the TV down please." Finally, I would have to go over and turn the TV down myself.*

*Then I started to notice it elsewhere. My husband and I had been at a party for about three hours and I was ready to go. I looked over and he was talking to a friend from work. I walked over and he kept right on talking. He didn't even turn toward me. That's when I started to put it together. He can't see me. I'm invisible.*

*Then I started to notice it more and more. I would walk my son to school and his teacher would say, "Jake, who's that with you?"*

*My son would say, "Nobody." Granted, he's just five, but nobody?*

*One night, a group of us gathered and we were celebrating the return of a friend from England. Janice had just taken this fabulous trip and she was going on and on about the hotel she stayed in. I was sitting there, looking around at the other women at the table. I had put my makeup on in the car on the way there. I had on an old dress because it was the only thing clean and I had my unwashed hair pulled up in a banana clip and I was feeling pretty darn pathetic.*

*Then Janice turned to me and she said, "I brought you this."*

*It was a book on the great cathedrals of Europe. I didn't understand. Then I read her inscription. She wrote, "With admiration for the greatness of what you are building when no one sees."*

*You can't name the names of the people who built the great cathedrals. Over and over again, looking at these mammoth works, you scan down to find the names and it says, "Builder unknown, unknown, unknown." They completed things not knowing that anyone would notice.*

*There's a story about one of the builders who was carving a tiny bird inside a beam that would be covered over by a roof. Someone came up to him and said, "Why are you spending so much time on something no one will ever see?"*

*It's reported that the builder replied, "Because God sees."*

*They trusted that God saw everything. They gave their whole lives for a work, a mammoth work they would never see finished. They showed up day after day. Some of these cathedrals took over 100 years to build. That was more than one working man's lifetime, day after day. And they made personal sacrifices for no credit, showing up at a job they would never see finished for a building their name would never be on.*

*One writer even goes so far as to say, "No great cathedrals will ever be built again because so few people are willing to sacrifice to that degree."*

*I closed the book and it was as if I heard God say, "I see you. You are not invisible to me. No sacrifice is too small for me to notice. I see every cupcake baked, every sequence sewn on, and I smile over every one.*

*I see every tear of disappointment when things don't go the way you want them to go, but remember, you are building a great cathedral. It will not be finished in your lifetime and, sadly, you will never get to live there, but if you build it well, I will."*

*At times, my invisibility has felt like an affliction to me, but it is not a disease that is erasing my life. It is the cure for the disease of self-centeredness. It is the antidote to my own pride. It's okay that they don't see. It's okay that they don't know. I don't want my son to tell the friend he's bringing home from college "You're not going to believe what my mom does. She gets up at 4:00 in the morning and she bakes pies and hand bastes a turkey and she presses all the linens." Even if I do all those things, I don't want him to say that. I want him to want to come home. Secondly, I want him to say to his friend "You're going to love it there."*

*It's okay that they don't see. We don't work for them. We work for Him. We sacrifice for Him. They will never see; not if we do it right, not if we do it well. Let's pray that our work will stand as a monument to an even greater God.*

I like that line. You are doing something, Mom, not for your children, but for Him. It's the message you need to leave here with today. You don't work for them; you work for Him. It's the message you need to think about tomorrow when you feel like you are not being heard. When you feel like... I think and I know mom's can see this out of the back of their heads. You know they just rolled their eyes at you. Remember, you're still going to teach. You are still going to instruct because you believe, through the power of Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit, that one day, they will walk in this. They will take this with them as they walk, as they lie down, when they get up in the morning, as they're sleeping, it will be over them. You believe that.

Here's the bottom line of the whole message. The greatest lesson your mom ever taught you is the greatest gift you could ever give her which is that you would live it.

I looked at some more of these and just wanted to share some of them with you:

Kelly Sorci said, "My mom taught me how to pray and how to trust God. I learned by her example. She had a designed prayer time since I was very young. I witnessed her routinely using a prayer closet during times in her journey when things got really tough. I saw her thank God in praise."

Bobby Blackburn wrote, "My mom taught me patience and compassion."

Tory wrote, "Every time we left the house without her, we heard mom say 'Be thoughtful, be helpful, be cheerful.' Every time! Even to this day, when we leave, mom says, 'Be thoughtful, be helpful, be cheerful.'"

Becca said, "My mom taught us to always own up to our mistakes and learn how to say I'm sorry." She said, 'You're never in too high of a position and never too good to say it.'"

June said, "The greatest lesson my mom ever taught me was that even though there were nine of us kids, dad came first in our home."

Anita said, "Don't lose your blessing by tooting you own horn." That's what her mom taught her.

Danielle said, "My mom taught me how to always lend a helping hand."

Lisa said, "My mom taught me how to live without her."

Shelly, Devin, Mark, Brandy, Jason all said, "My mom taught me how to be kind."

Today, as we close out our time together, we just want to encourage you to think about all of those great lessons that your mom taught you.