

Mothers
Common Grounds Devotion by Dina Blume
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Debi asked me to speak on a topic. This changed as result of an experience:

- Example of Becky's friend – 10 years of wasted time – mother passed just as they had started to reconcile
 - Thankful I had the time to deal with so much before my mom passed.
- “Feeling” I should talk about this and Debi went with it

As I work with folks – so many times it is mother issues that we need to work through and how many friends I have that have mother issues as well.

The word mother conjures up all kinds of emotions and feelings. What are some of these emotions?
Love, resentment, guilt, fear, trust, nurture (others?)

Our mothers are the very first relationships we experience as her body nourishes us - in preparation for birth. Psalm 139: “Thou didst form my inward parts; thou didst weave me in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to Thee for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” The relationship with her is likely to be one of the top five closest relationships we have (mother, father, husband, children, and God.)

Our pastor brought a wonderful message on mothers this past week. Anyone pray for their kiddos as they folded those little white socks? It is an opportunity to connect with God about our precious children. The message that I bring is kind of the “flip side” of that.

God gave us mothers to protect, nurture, and mature you. Motherhood is the most significant, demanding, and underpaid of all the professions around. I think I saw recently that the value is about \$117,000. Yet for many, mom means conflict, problems, disappointments, and pain. We may have a hard time talking about our feelings with her. We learn our patterns of intimacy, relating, and separateness from mother as well as how to handle failure, emotions, expectations, grief, and loss.

Our mothers did not mother perfectly – and neither do we! But get this straight. Our mothering can explain some of our problems and issues – but as adults we cannot continue to blame them. We are not victims – **we are victors**. If we do not resolve and move on – we run the risk of distorting current and future relationships. This process is called forgiveness and we will talk a good bit about that in a few minutes.

We are commanded to honor our fathers and mothers. Sometimes that is difficult. If it is easy for you – tune out and pray for our sisters here for whom this is not an easy relationship. I would like to briefly describe some different “Mom Types” in an attempt to gain an understanding of what we all show up here today with. You may recognize your mom – or even yourself. The following are courtesy of Drs. Cloud and Townsend.

1. The Phantom Mom – I know she was there – but she was always so busy, emotionally unavailable, and there was a lack of connection.

How does it look for adult children? Experience lack of intimacy in relationships, lack of feeling safe, fear of being alone, depression, feelings of emptiness, inability to have a close relationship with God. You probably found ways to hide your needs.

Be careful not to be placing blame on her – perhaps she parented the way she was mothered.

How to rebuild: Mother injuries are relational injuries – and as the relationship hurt you, the relationship is what can restore you. We must find people to connect with from family, friends, church, support groups, or Common Grounds. Intimacy is not a means to an end it is and end in itself. (Mary was functional, Martha was relational). Our Woman to Woman ministry is a wonderful avenue to connect if you had the phantom mom – As an adult – forgive – more on this later! Invite her into a new kind of relationship (and accept that it may or may not work), If it does – maintain your own separate relationships, set limits and boundaries, or accept the reality that it will not.

2. The China Doll mom – falls apart at strong emotions, fragile, almost becomes a child again herself, hovers over her children to protect them from harm, she punished her child for “wrong feelings.” As mom rocks and soothes the child she takes the feelings to herself and exchanges them for calm. As an adult this child cannot deal with strong emotions – they feel them – then they withdraw, guard themselves so emotions do not get out of control.

What to do: Acknowledge that GOD IS OUR SOOTHER; allow your feelings to be validated. One of the best things we can do for our children is give them emotional words for their feelings (gosh – it sounds like you are scared) Whatever we did not receive the first time around – we still need to experience; what we need from others: soothing, validating.

Validation: being understood and acknowledged there is reality to our experience. Ever had a friend say “you shouldn’t feel that way” – it didn’t help much. How much better it is to say, “That really sounds bad – I’m sorry you went through that.” Find a safe place, risk sharing intense emotions, (journaling or self-talk).

Dealing with the China Doll: we need to experience what we missed out on the first time around– you have to deal with the mother in your head first – we are carrying around feelings from the past that can get in the way of relationships in the now. – We have to let go of the hurts.

When we hate from the past – it is alive in the present. We don’t deny – but we do let go after processing. We relate as much as mom can handle – but keep expectations realistic. – You can prep her – “I would like to share my feelings – but you are not responsible for fixing anything. I just want you to let you know how I am doing,”

Set limits on what you share with her – don’t get caught in old patterns.

Appreciate her for who she is – not what you want her to be

Find ways to show her love

3. The Controlling Mom – does not allow child to express individuality. Controlling mom enjoys the dependency of the child because it counteracts her aloneness. Mom has trouble with her child's independence and attacks the kid's need to grow up. She often uses the guilt that the kid is hurting the mom by wanting to grow up (guilt is the gift that keeps on giving). She may withdraw parental goodies (I won't buy your prom dress if you go with John) – which says I love you when you are an extension of me and my wishes – I won't when you don't. Child becomes afraid of having opinions.

Result is the kid has an inability to say no, fear of intimacy and commitment, codependency (not letting others handle their own stuff). Since mom organized and structured them, they never learn to do it themselves. An adult child of a controlling mom continues to allow her to make choices for them, usually with a pattern of bailouts – paying the mortgage, etc.

What to do: know her care and concern are genuine, but seek out people who are honest, connected deeply to you, allow you time to grow up, make choices for yourself. Start small and then grow, explore (not all decisions are good ones) but take responsibility for your actions. Respect where your mom came from – she was probably over-controlled or abandoned – and calmly share that you are in the process of some personal growth, you value your relationship with her and want to share some of your insights as to who you are, set limits (i.e. leave the house when she starts yelling or criticizing).

4. The Trophy mom - so involved in the child's performance and achievement and blaming anyone else when the child gets a bad grade. Not accepting the child for who he/she really is. But Jesus accepts all of our parts (weaknesses too), so we need to accept all of who the child is (not the same as approval) and the weakness part is really where the child needs that acceptance. It is our weaknesses that allow us to connect to God and others. Many children only feel loved when they are trophies (e.g. mother only lights up when they are successful) Mom needs to be accepting of all her child's feelings and should not insist child is always positive and loving – there are times when our kids feel hate and sadness. These moms deny feelings - you **really** are not sad (mad, etc) your grades are not that bad – it's that school, it's that person, etc.

Adult child: Performs for others – shame driven and live in fear someone will find out who they really are. My example – weight – I was only acceptable when I was thin. Hard for me to handle.

They can become narcissistic, demanding to be special in all situations, which is very bad in a marriage. People can become perfectionists to achieve acceptance, hiding failure, lacking coping skills to deal with failure, anxiety, shame, tough to feel close and safe with God.

To repair – you need experiences that affirm that you do not have to be perfect to be loved – the truth is we lost perfection in the garden; gather with people who will accept us for who we are and love us into who we need to be; a relationship with our God – who is a god of grace AND truth, process negative feelings and losses that we have been stuffing. Acknowledge your mom was not a villain – she probably parented the way she was parented – perhaps she never worked through things and just repeated them. Accepting - this allows you to love her as she is – and forgive. Forgiveness is not denying what has happened – but acknowledging what happened and choosing not to let it have power over you in the present, you can set limits to your exposure to her: “Mom if you are going to criticize me for not coming more often – I am going to have to leave now – so can we change the subject?”

5. The Still the Boss Mom – becomes critical and unsupportive when child challenges her opinions, demeans child's opinion (Pers. example: In one of my former lives I was a government teacher – I've had 3 kids take gvt and have allowed them to explore their own views. I could have said what could you know about politics – I've done all the research). We do this with scripture too – it injures the child's ability to become an autonomous functioning adult. The good mom sees that challenging opinions are attempts to work out his readiness for adult life.

We must teach our children to think for themselves – think critically with “why muscles.” At adolescence we need to change from parenting by control to parenting by influence.

Results of Still the Boss Mom in Adulthood: difficulty relating to others as equal adults, feels inferior to others, incapable of making competent adult decisions in life and defers to others, feels “less than” so seeks to control others, taking on parenting role to manage her childlike feelings, has to have the last word, become an advice giver, others become rebellious and resist all types of rules and authorities; relationship with God is based in fear, remain a permanent child.

What to do: Find an adult peer group where all are equal members where members think for themselves and have opinions, evaluate beliefs and choose your own church, politics, childrearing techniques, career, make your own decisions, give yourself permission to be equal with your parents, and it is ok to fail – see it as an opportunity to learn.

Forgive.

The Still the Boss Mom is not good at passing the baton – you can still attempt to connect with her by affirming her and the parenting job she did. Thank her and focus on the fact that you want to be friends as an equal adult and discuss roles and expectations, try doing new things together so you are not caught up in old rigid roles, do not respond to her in anger. Her ability to make you angry means she still has control – don't say “stop controlling me” – simply say, “that is what I think I will do” about a decision. Set limits about what you will and won't talk about. She can bother you the least when you love her and honor her, but be in charge of your own life.

6. The American Express Mom – (don't leave home without her) doesn't want the young adult to leave for college or job. But children need to leave in the governmental sense in order to be full-fledged adults. It has nothing to do with geography; it is emotional leaving. Ideally it should start small and expand over adolescence as they become community-oriented rather than parent-centered. This mom has set herself up that the only source of love and truth is the mother, keeping the child in a dependent fashion.

Results: unhealthy dependency, codependency (you get someone else to mother you, who then realizes they have a child not a mate), avoid intimacy and relationships, idealize mother, problems dealing with finances, live out mother's dreams for life and career, struggle for mature sexual identity.

What to do: take ownership, manage your money well, make your spouse's welfare more important than your mother's, delay gratification, talk to mom if she is open, buy your own stuff, get to know other babysitters other than her, develop your own talents.

Bottom line: Take care of your own stuff.

So much depends on being able to forgive. Let's look at forgiveness for a few minutes.

The Consequences of unforgiveness:

Depression
Bitterness and negativity
Hurt those around us
Physical, spiritual & Emotional sickness
Loneliness

The Benefits of forgiveness:

Freedom to move on
Healing
Antidote for resentment & anger
The situation no longer has power over me

Forgiveness is not:

A feeling
Minimizing the offense
Condoning the other person's behavior
Trusting the other person
Letting the other person off the hook
Expecting an apology
Forgetting

Forgiveness is:

To Forgive means to cancel a debt (the person no longer owes us) which frees us from bitterness, anger, rage, hatred, and other destructive emotions.
Life changing
A decision only I can make
Obeying God
Freedom & Release
A process
Living in a higher realm
Unilateral (not the same as reconciliation)
A reflection of maturity

The process of forgiveness:

Ask God to forgive me
Transfer hurts and offenses I've been carrying
Turn the other person over to God
Effect of Forgiveness
Matt 6:14-15 – If we don't forgive others, the Heavenly Father will not forgive us

God is in the ministry of reconciliation:

First told to us in Jesus Christ

2 Cor. 5:18-19 All of this is from God who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ – not counting men’s sins against them. And He has committed to us the ministry of reconciliation.

Examine your sin, confess and stabilize with God before initiating with your mother (or any other relationship that needs help)

And as James 1:4 says: Let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

As mothers, let's give up the super-mom model of motherhood – it is not possible. So why do we keep kidding ourselves? Let's be real and share our struggles with the other women God has allowed to be in our lives. Let's pursue excellence and be good enough. Let's be emotionally present with our kids, support their separateness and realize that mistakes can be successful failures when we learn from them. We can model ownership and forgiveness.

The truth is our mothers live with us every day in the present. Although my own mother passed away in July of last year – she goes with me everywhere I go. We all have an internalized mother no matter where she physically is today. What are you going to do with her? I will take the best qualities she offered and live up to God's expectations for my life.

Discussion questions:

What is the greatest gift your mother gave to you?

Did you recognize your mother in one of the Mom-Types described?

What positive quality/qualities of your mother have you carried forward in your role as a mother (or friend if you are not a mother)?

Are there things that you have yet to forgive your mother for? What is stopping you?

Are there things you need to ask your children to forgive you for?