

FAMILY HEIRLOOMS

2 Timothy 1:5

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First Baptist Church
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The old rocker cracked and popped as Jenny set it in motion with a push of her hand. The springs poked their wire heads above the faded horsehair covering. Even in the dimly lit attic she could see the wood was scarred and the varnish worn away. She tugged the relic to the stairwell and slid it, one step at a time, carefully balancing the awkward weight against her watermelon belly. At the bottom of the stairs, she rubbed the muscles at her lower back.

**“Jenny Lester, what did you do? You shouldn’t have brought the chair down by yourself,”
Audrea Lester scolded.**

“I’m all right, Mother Lester.”

The baby squirmed and kicked its objections. She laughingly rubbed the rebel pushing from within. “You just wait. Soon I’ll rock you in Grandmother Lester’s chair.”

Clara and Harry Lester bought the chair shortly after their wedding in 1889. They moved it by horse and wagon from the second-hand store in Lincoln, Nebraska, to their farm outside of Fairbury. Harry refinished the wood. Clara upholstered its back and seat with fashionable horsehair material. Only special, come-into-the-parlor company like Reverend Jorganson used it until the babies came. Then Clara niched it between the wood stove and table in the all-purpose kitchen.

As she soothed babies with its cadence the chair became hers. She’d touch down between stirring the stew and slopping the sows they raised. Tea towel harnesses secured toddlers to the chair while she canned and preserved.

She anxiously shuttled the chair to and fro when scarlet fever made her third born delirious. “God, if you’re really out there,” she railed, “help my little one.” When healing came, tears of relief sprinkled her apron. “God, I believe you are real. You heard me. Thank you for saving my son. He is yours now, Lord, and so am I.”

The chair became her alter and her podium. She tucked her feet up on it and leaned toward the lamp to read her Bible, then faced it into the corner to form a prayer closet.

The chair kept rhythm with the songs she sang from quiet lullabies to joyous hallelujahs.

The chair sat by the four-poster bed as Harry wrestled with cancer. Clara sat vigilant at his side and held his hand. After he died she pulled the chair close to the stove and wondered if she would ever feel warm again.

Taxes grew but funds didn't. Clara's resources diminished. The farm had to be sold. She rocked and watched as piece-by-piece, equipment and furnishings were auctioned. It was like tearing strips from her life to see them go. Clara kept only the chair. She took it with her when she went to live with her youngest son, Robert, and his wife Audrea.

Then Jimmy was born. The last little grandson to rock in her arms and tug at her hair. As he grew, she shrank. Low oxygen days fogged her mind. Only her God and her chair remained familiar. Alien noises — fire engines, horns and squealing brakes — interrupted her sleep. Clara endured restless hours wrapped in a quilt, rocking and praying and waiting to go home.

After her death the worn old chair was relegated to Jimmy's room. He was delighted to have it. He used it to hunt tigers. He drove horses from the chariot it formed. He did homework in it as he kept time to his upbeat radio. He dreamed dreams and planned his future within its circle.

The chair developed a popping sound under the weight of a boy turned man.

When he went away to college his old room became a guest room and den. The rocker disappeared.

A freckled coed caught Jimmy's fancy and he courted her his senior year. They married. Jenny worked while he went to seminary. He got the call to his first church hand-in-hand with the call to fatherhood.

Their first child grew and stretched beneath Jenny's heart. "I wish we had my grandmother's chair," Jimmy said as he lightly touched Jenny's bulging front. "You could rock our son in it."

"Or daughter," Jenny countered.

"That old rocker was special. I felt so proud when the chair was given to me. I wonder where it is now?"

"Mother Lester," Jenny asked the next time she saw her mother-in-law, "What ever became of that rocking chair Jimmy used to have in his room?"

"It's in the attic," Audrea answered.

"I'd like to see it. I have an idea."

"Come on, I'll show it to you. It's in bad shape. You can see the stuffing is coming out and the wood is marred," Audrea said as she switched on the attic light.

Jenny rubbed her hand across the back of the rocker. “The scars aren’t deep. They just add character. It will take work but I think it can be fixed. Can I try? I’d like to surprise Jimmy. It would be a terrific anniversary gift.”

“You can if you want to. In fact, you can work on it in Jimmy’s old room.”

As Mother Lester readied the spare room Jenny brought the chair down from the attic. She was so anxious to begin.

Beautiful oak came out of hiding as Jenny stripped the old surface and sanded it smooth. The wood glowed softly under new varnish. Jenny tied down the old springs. They were snug and comfortable under the new coverings. It looked very handsome with clean claw feet and trimly tucked back.

On celebration day Jenny draped a ribbon, Miss America style, across the chair’s shoulders.

“What are you up to, Jenny Lester?” her husband asked as she led him up the stairs to his old room. “Your grin gives you away.”

“Close your eyes while I open the door. Better put your hands over them too.” He dutifully covered up. “Now, no peeking.”

“You act like an excited little kid,” Jimmy chuckled. “Are you sure you’re old enough to have my son?”

“Okay,” she said after positioning him in front of the rocker. “You can look. Happy anniversary.”

“Grandmother Lester’s rocker! Oh honey, it’s wonderful,” he exclaimed as he draped Jenny’s torso with the Miss America ribbon.

It almost has a life of its own,” Jenny mused.

“It certainly has a heritage,” Jimmy said. “When our son is born I am going to tell him about the heritage of faith that began with Grandmother Lester and came down four generations to him.”

“Or her,” Jenny countered sleepily.

(Sally J. Knower, *Stories for the Heart*, compiled by Alice Gray, p. 216)

The old mantle clock – a quilt – a rocking chair. These are all things that we pass down to our children. Our bedroom is adorned with the one thing that I asked my MaMa Howard for. It was an old clock with a lion’s head carved in the top and beautiful maiden’s picture on the swinging pendulum. I not only love the clock, but I love the noise that it makes. It makes the noise of MaMa Howard’s house – the tic toc, tic toc, tic toc. I remember hearing it as I spent the night and

tried to sleep. Likewise, Lisa has her mother's antique clock on an adjacent dresser. We don't use them to tell time; we let them tell stories.

But there is something so much more important to pass down to our children. It's not something that can be found at an antique and collectible store. It will never be auctioned off to the highest bidder. Most importantly, to our children we must hand down our faith. We must give to them the stories of the Old Testament – the stories of hope, the stories of challenge, the stories of sin, the stories of forgiveness, the stories of healing and the stories of disappointment, the sayings of the wise sage that tell us how to live life, the songs of the Psalter that teach us how to rejoice and how to worship. Yes, there are many things that we can hand down to our children. But it matters not the size of the purse that you leave behind if you have not left your children your God, your faith, your faith stories.

Sometimes, as modern-day parents living in Western Civilization, a civilization of affluence, I think we have failed to remember that the family is not just some social organism, but it is, within itself, to be a type of religious community. The family was ordained by God to be the basic unit of human organization. The family was never intended to be just the means of propagating the human race, but was meant to be a school of instruction focusing on the Lordship of Christ and our commitment to Him. Parenting is the most important job that you will ever do. We might add grandparenting is the most important job you'll ever do, as I know that grandchildren are spending more and more time, sometimes even living with their grandparents.

Have you heard of Warren and Patricia Simpson of Montclair, New Jersey? They announced (in April, 1996) that they were giving up their three children for adoption. The couple said they had become increasingly disillusioned with family life. “Between the crying and fighting, and the asking for new toys, it is getting very discouraging,” Mrs. Simpson said. “We’re both still young. We have a lot of other interests. We started to question whether this was where we could be most effective.” The Simpsons said their decision was a difficult one. “We had a number of long conversations with friends and advisors,” Mr. Simpson said. “What it finally came down to was – after seven years of parenting we were ready to move on.”

Wow. Not many of us would be as blatant as Warren and Patricia Simpson. But many of us, nonetheless, fail in our primary responsibility as a parent – that is, giving our faith to our children.

Early Jewish families gave primary emphasis to religious instruction, especially in the home. It wasn't just the responsibility of the priest, the rabbi or the synagogue to carry out these responsibilities. They saw it as being established in the home and sustained in the home.

You need to give your faith to your children.

Some modern-day parents might say, “That's not my right. I shouldn't try to influence my child in any way when it comes to religious faith, values or morals. The children must create their own values.” But the reality is that our children have precious little chance to do that because the rest of our society has no reservations about imposing its values on our children. It makes absolutely no sense at all for parents to sit back as neutral bystanders while everyone, from legislators to sex

educators to script writers to advertisers, insist on selling their values to our children. There is no greater responsibility that God has given to us than the passing on of a heritage of faith, to mold and make our children into what God would have them to be.

Sometimes it's frightening to think that the greatest influence or example that our children have of a godly life, of knowing God's love in action, is the example that we give them with our own lives. The home is either the greatest witness for Christ or the worst. **One little boy received a message from his parents, loud and clear. When he was 14 he noticed his father wearing a grin when he came in from work – hearing his father telling his mother that he'd gotten a ticket for speeding, but Joe Peterson down at City Hall was going to take care of it for him. When the boy was 15, he was with his mother in the family car when she backed into a tree, doing extensive damage. The mother said, "We'll say someone rammed into us and then drove away while we were parked downtown. Then we can collect the insurance for it." When the boy was 16, he listened to his grandfather reminiscing about the good ol' days of rationing, when he made \$100,000 black-marketing cars. The same night, Uncle John was bragging that in his business he sent no bills and received only cash. "Why let the IRS have all the money?" he said. When the boy was 18, the family pulled every possible string to get a scholarship at an Ivy League school. They even lied about their family income to make it seem their son needed financial aid. When the son started struggling in school, he bought the answers to a calculus exam from an upper classman. He was caught and expelled. When he returned home, his mother went into hysterics over the disgrace he had caused. "How could you have ever done this?" she asked. "We didn't raise you that way."**

In fact, she did raise him exactly that way. The young man got the message of his family loud and clear.

As Paul pens this epistle to young Timothy, he says candidly to his son in the faith, "I am glad that you are a third generation believer." Notice, in this case it's the grandmother and mother who are most influential. They had preceded him in the faith. Lois had told Eunice the story, and Eunice had told Timothy the story of faith, of being God's people and, yes, now of being a follower of the Messiah Jesus. Have no doubt about it – it's a faith that first dwelt in the grandmother, and then dwelt in his mother. It was also the faith that was within him.

In the book of Deuteronomy, in that great passage in chapter 6:

"Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart; and you shall – listen – teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up." Later in the passage he says, "When your son asks you in time to come, saying 'What do the testimonies and the statutes and the judgments mean which the Lord our God commanded you?' then you shall say to your son, 'We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt; and the Lord brought us from Egypt with a mighty hand. Moreover, the Lord showed great and distressing signs and wonders before our eyes against Egypt, Pharaoh and all his household; and He brought us out from there in order to bring us in, to give us the land which He had sworn to our fathers.'"

Give your children your faith, says the writer of Deuteronomy. Know Yahweh, the Lord, the God of the Covenant, and explain the stories of faith to your sons and daughters. When they ask what is this all about, tell them there was a time when we were slaves, there was a time when we were an oppressed people. But then God came, and God delivered.

Ours is the same story to tell. There was a time when we were oppressed by the blackness and the sadness of our sin, a time when we were a people in bondage to our own Adamic nature – our own sinful flesh. And then came the Moses of the New Testament – then came Christ, the Son of God, who was our Deliverer, who set us free because He, Himself, died on the cross in our place. Tell this to your children – to your sons and to your daughters.

Are you giving your faith to your children?

When James Dobson was at the point an exploding career, he was eating away at the time he had for his own family. He was having professional advancement and all the trappings of financial success. But his own dad was not impressed. He watched Dobson's hectic life-style and felt obligated to express his concern. He did so in a lengthy letter which included the following paragraph:

I have observed that the greatest delusion is to suppose that our children will be devout Christians simply because their parents have been or that any of them will enter into the Christian faith in any other way than through their parents' deep travail of prayer and faith. But this prayer demands time, time that cannot be given if it is all signed and conscripted and laid on the altar of career ambition. Failure for you at this point would make mere success in your occupation a very pale and washed-out affair indeed.

Yes, the greatest delusion is to suppose that our children will be devout people of God simply because we are. What a powerful statement.

The greatest gift that my parents ever gave to me was what their parents had given to them. You see, Thomas Batson, my great grandfather, whom I never knew, gave the story of faith to H. B. Batson. And H. B. Batson gave it to Hugh Batson, and Hugh Batson gave it to Howie Batson. And Howie Batson has given it to Ryan, Jordan and Chandler. And Ryan and John, Jordan and Delton, and Chandler will give it to Rawlins, Spencer, Raines, Charlie, and....

The story of faith is for families.

My parents raised me attending a place of worship, and we went every Sunday – not simply when there was nothing else going on in the community or haphazardly. It was part of our life. And, thus, I grew to know church not as something that was done with the other activities, but, rather, it was something sacred, different, something special – something above anything else that might be taking place on God's Day. And my number one responsibility, even above pastoring this great church, is to give those stories of faith to my family.

Katherine Hankey wrote the words in 1866. The third stanza reads:

I love to tell the story;
For those who know it best
Seem hungering and thirsting
To hear it like the rest;
And when, in scenes of glory,
I sing the new, new song,
'Twill be the old, old story
That I have loved so long.
I love to tell the story,
'Twill be my theme in glory
To tell the old, old story
of Jesus and His love.

Your children need God. Your children need a Savior. Your children need a faith system. Your children need values by which to navigate life. You must make every effort – of course, it can't be forced upon them, but you must make every effort to introduce your children to the Gospel story of God's love through Christ Jesus. You must introduce them to being a part of the family of God, the church. If you make church a priority – not in word, but in actions – they likely will, too.

We want our children to have the best education possible. We want them to be all that they can be athletically. We want them to have the material things that they need. And yet, if we have not made a consistent effort to give our children our God, we have robbed them of the greatest gift with which they can do life. The soccer balls and basketballs will fade away, but Sunday Faith will last forever.

Timothy, when I think about you – your faith makes sense. Your grandmother, Lois – my, what a godly woman of faith. She told the story of Jesus to more than a few people. Eunice – just like her mother. Eunice was the epitome of faithfulness to the body of Christ. Timothy, you remind me of your grandmother and your mother. Your family has been a family of faith.

I realize today that your children must ultimately make their own choice. They can choose to go with the story or without the story. They can choose to trust in Jesus, or they can choose to reject Him. Ultimately, it's their decision. But it is your task to put before them the faith of their forefathers and foremothers.

Yes, to be sure, I like the familiar tic toc of MaMa Howard's mantle clock in my bedroom. And I cover up with a quilt made by her hands every evening. But most of all, she gave me her faith, her God, her Jesus. And I'll do the same for my kids who will do it for their kids and grandkids.