

Mother Your Mother

by Jessica Jensen
(names changed to protect identities)

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Roots of Family Dysfunction

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Ephesians 6: 2-3 (NIV)

Restored by Touch ~Reaching deep with gentle touch.

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When Leo went to Heaven, Mom and Dad checked out emotionally. Mom’s childhood tragedy compounded her pain. The death of her own mother left her and her 10 siblings parentless. Her father couldn’t manage the children alone, so he placed Mom in a Catholic orphanage away from her siblings. There they were separated due to gender and age differences. But her six-year-old understanding couldn’t grasp this divide.

With the death of her own son, Mom’s heart hardened toward an already distant God. Family chaos resulted in screaming-fights. I took the brunt. “Why can’t you make ‘A’s’ like your brother? Stop arguing, you witch! Look what you’ve started; your baby brother bites his nails like you.”

Mom’s words pierced like daggers, especially when I overheard, “I can’t stand that little girl. Let’s put her in an orphanage!”

At best Mom tolerated me. Dad drowned his sorrows in work and alcohol. Their depressed behavior and lack of parenting skills caused my feelings for them to deteriorate into something worse than hatred—complacency.

Visions of life away from my parents beckoned me since my earliest memories. At age 18 friends invited me to join them in an apartment about an hour’s drive away. I left home on good terms and kept in polite contact, but, I never enjoyed return visits home. I drifted in and out of various social circles until, by God’s grace, I encountered people who lived lives of prayer and devotion.

God Parented Me

At age twenty-two, Christ broke through. Nurturing Christians showed me the love of God, as my despair developed into destiny. They knew the way to restoration. They affirmed me as deep called to deep. I devoured sermons, Bible studies, and Christian fellowship. Days sprinkled with prayer became my way of life.

God’s message came through. “Come in. I’ll give you shelter in the storms. Come in and enter My Joy. Rise above circumstances. Enter My Peace. Come into My Holiness, Love, Compassion, and all I am. Come in, child.” These were the words I longed to hear.

God continued to speak into my soul. “Sacrifice your will for My will. Experience My Love. I restore your wholeness. Nobody can steal this, but you must continue to choose My ways and guard our relationship as a great prize. Ask and I’ll refill you with the Holy Spirit—the true sustenance and empowerment for godliness. From fullness, My Fullness, love. Submit all your relationships to me. Pray and watch change come.”

Loving Mom with God’s Love

From this place of personal completeness came the prayed for restoration of family relationships. It started with Mom. I accepted her brokenness and stopped expecting her to meet my needs.

Her salvation became one of my most urgent prayers: *__Lord, surround Mom with Christians. Reveal Yourself to her. May Your kindness bring repentance.__*

I prepared for each of our visits with related prayer: *__Father, in Jesus name, stop the power unforgiveness has over Mom. Stop criticalness, fear of rejection, and hatred that plague her. Release forgiveness, approval, peace, and love. Help me love her and allow her to receive it.__*

As I prayed, God changed me. I never condoned Mom’s unkind words, but I focused on her strengths and minimized her weaknesses. For example, she faithfully fulfilled the tasks of motherhood. Her skillful mending made old clothes look new. She sewed beautifully crafted clothes for me. Prayer opened my eyes to her similarities with the Proverbs 31 woman: hard worker, resourceful, and organized. I gave her greeting cards reflecting her best qualities.

In love, I confronted Mom’s tendency toward verbal slurs, “It’s not *okay* for you to speak to me like that.” She made angry excuses, but in time her words softened.

For at least a year the verbal slurs and condescending attitude started within fifteen minutes after my arrival. I prayed more—at least the full hour drive to their home. I also recruited others to give prayer covering during my visits.

Though I set the boundaries with her, I yet said, “I’m proud of you.” Her accomplishment might be as small as getting through a maze of automated phone messages. For an elderly woman mastering computerization, I applauded her. She glowed, and I saw her gain confidence for other new endeavors.

Though complacency took years to overcome, my main motivation rested in pleasing my beloved Jesus. I knew His love for Mom long before I felt warm toward her.

One of the most dramatic manifestations of God’s love seemed so slight I almost missed it. I had come from out-of-town for a two-week visit with Mom and Dad at Christmas. As I prayed in preparation for my our time together, something roused within me, and the words, *__Stick close to home__* invaded my mind. Almost like the nagging one might feel about whether she turned the stove off. As I talked to God about it, His prodding grew. At the Christmas Eve church service, it increased so that mid-sermon I slipped out and returned home.

Watching TV with Mom and Dad made no sense. I could have enjoyed friends and festivities, but inner peace confirmed God’s pleasure in my choice. The “a-ha” moment came on my last vacation day.

“I’m thinking of leaving Dad,” Mom blurted.

Had I stayed away, she would have squelched her secret, and I would not have heard her desperation. I don’t remember exactly when the love feelings grew between us, but that day Mom and I shared tears and I told her about God’s love and power to work in lives submitted to Him. She didn’t begrudge my refusal to take sides. In time Mom and Dad’s relationship mended.

Laughter and camaraderie also snuck up on Mom and me as we shared spontaneous humor, yummy recipes, fitness tips, politics, and other interests. Before long, Mom became one of my dearest treasures. She’s my strongest supporter as I pursue the call of God to write. She frequently says how proud she is of my hard work and accomplishments.

I swell with adoration when I’ve seen her courageously venture into new arenas like becoming a political activist, and again when she enrolled at a health spa and made many friends as she worked out daily. Some of them credit her with motivating them to keep their fitness routines because she calls to encourage them when they miss.

The physician calls her his poster child; I call her my role model. I’ve seen her soften toward God—especially the six months before the doctor diagnosed her with brain cancer. Her typical bitter words about God disappeared. In the past she rarely failed to make a dig when she saw a tragedy unfold on TV, but now she may comment on how God will provide help.

About three months ago, we learned Mom's battling brain cancer—a glioblastoma. This fast growing cancer would have killed her within a month if not treated with brain surgery and radiation.

The question of her salvation weighed heavy on me. When I voiced my concern to her best friend, she said, "What? We pray together and discuss God all the time. I'm sure she's saved."

"Well, she's never mentioned it to me. Until recently, she badmouthed God more often than not. Yes, she seems more open now, but she's never confessed any change in her relationship to God," I said.

"She's one of the most godly people I know," Her friend sought to reassure. "When I ask her about how she can forgive the nuns for the horrors of her youth, she tells me there is a difference between religion and relationship with God."

"Wow! That's been my mantra to her for years. She listened! I'm still unsure because I've seen her pretend to be saved with others."

For about seven years, Mom had been attending a Bible believing church and seemed curious about spiritual things. But, she dismissed the message of the preacher whenever I tried to discuss it with her, and appeared to go for social reasons alone.

When Mom and Dad relocated, I prayed for all details surrounding the move—godly neighbors and friends who could identify with my parents and pave the way to salvation. Also the prayers for Mom's safety and development of a strong social network especially after Dad passed.

As I help her battle cancer, I am given the quality time with Mom I need to see more changes. I marvel as my mother, who hated reading books, is now engrossed in C. S. Lewis' deep work *Mere Christianity*. The times she scoffed when she walked in the room to find me watching a preacher on television are but a memory. Though I'd changed the TV channel immediately without complaint when she'd grumbled or seemed uncomfortable, I now know she learned my favorites and watched them in secret. She now suggests we watch them together. After seeing so much evidence of her salvation, I said, "I'm glad to see you've found peace with God."

She responded, "Yes, and I even forgave the mean nuns." Pastor Allen's "Mother Your Mother" sermon magnified the years of change Mom and I have experienced with each other. God brought me to Himself, restored me, and then empowered me to prayerfully love Mom into His Kingdom. I often choke back tears of love as I now nurture Mom while losing a little piece of her everyday to weakness and memory loss. Today, I am her 24/7 caregiver providing custodial care. This bittersweet adventure demonstrates how prayer changed both of us. After three months of my cooking, cleaning, managing her calendar, giving physical therapy, massages, and all other tasks, we have not had one cross word. She calls me her guardian angel; I call her my inspiration. I am privileged to take a leave of absence from my work to help Mom fight for her life.

So far, Mom is wowing all her medical care providers. They have never seen anyone with her diagnosis remain as strong and lucid as she is. We can feel the multitudes of prayers from all those whom my past prayers ushered into her life. Between her connections and mine, we have an army of people offering daily prayers for us.

We are looking forward to the day this battle is behind us, yet we treasure each moment we share. With this uncertain future, we are a formidable team—she and God and me. Most of all, we know prayer works. God will be with us as we live out another principle I've repeated through words and life events more times than I can remember, "God never promises we won't have hard times; He promises He'll be with us in them." Detailed prayers permit us to see His signature as His answers manifest in life events no matter how daunting.

Jessica Jensen - a freelance writer, speaker, and entrepreneur. Her mother passed to heaven after a six-month battle with cancer. The things this final journey taught her about her mother made her rejoice that she was faithful to build a foundation of unconditional love. The most importation thing to her mother was loving her children—she just didn't know how to nurture when she had never been nurtured.

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* All names and inconsequential details have been changed to protect the guilty

Related Scriptures NIV version

Ephesians 6: 2-3

Honor your father and mother"—which is the first commandment with a promise—that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."

Ephesians 4:29

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

Mark 12:33

To love him [God] with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."

1 Peter 4:10-11

Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

2 Corinthians 1:3-5

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.

Romans 12:1-2

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Other Resource Materials:

A Daughter's Journey Home by Linda Mintle

The Gift of Forgiveness by Charles Stanley

Forgiving the Unforgivable by Dave Stoops

The Blessing by John Trent and Gary Smalley

The Language of Love by Gary Smalley, John Trent

The Five Love Languages for Singles by Gary D. Chapman (addresses parent and adult-child relationships)

How to Have a Creative Crisis by H. Norman Wright

Forgiving Our Parents, Forgiving Ourselves: Healing Adult Children of Dysfunctional Families by David A. Stoop

Who's Pushing Your Buttons by Dr. John Townsend

Book about caregiving: *AMBUSHED BY GRACE: HELP AND HOPE ON THE CAREGIVING JOURNEY* by Shelly Beach (Oct 1, 2008)

[PRECIOUS LORD, TAKE MY HAND](#) by [Shelly Beach](#) (May 1, 2007)