

Me? A Model?

Me? A model? I look in the mirror every day and I can assure you I am not model material! But looking at other mothers and daughters and observing my own relationships highlights an important fact: I'm a model whether or not I want to be.

We may not be in fashion shows or on the covers of magazines, but we are models because others—especially those we live with—observe us and imitate us. “Since children copy the behavior of those around them, you have a powerful influence on your children’s learning . . . You



are their model,” says Sal Severe in *How to Behave So Your Children Will, Too* (Viking Penguin, 2000).

Wisdom about mothers and daughters is as ancient as the prophets. In a stormy passage about God’s judgement, Ezekiel tells us, “Everyone who quotes proverbs will quote this proverb about you: ‘Like mother, like daughter’” (Ezekiel 16:44).

From the little girl who dresses up to look like mommy to the grandmother who bakes cookies because her grandmother did, our lives often reflect the spirit and behavior of others.

Paul praised the Thessalonians for being “a

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model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia” (1 Thessalonians 1:7). Mothers and daughters can be models for each other as well. The word MODEL can be a helpful acrostic for our relationships.

Mercy

James addressed the importance of mercy: “Because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment” (James 2:13).

Most of us find that pretty frightening. How many times do we mothers and daughters allow mercy to triumph over judgment? Judging often seems inherent in mother-daughter relationships.

Before my husband and I had children, we volunteered to stay with our friends’ three children while the parents were away. We were cleaning the house in preparation for the parents’ return when the teen daughter said, “Well, no matter what we do, Mother will find something wrong with it! Even if she says something nice, she always has some criticism. You can never please her!”

When I told my friend what her daughter had said, she was shocked. She said, “But I always thought it was helpful to tuck in a little constructive criticism between two compliments!” She said. In this case, her children did not see this as positive; they focused mainly on the negative. Child psychologist Sarah Chana Radcliffe says that in a child’s mind it takes four positive statements to offset one negative comment.

As my mother and I were eating out together, she remembered that she’d left her cell phone at the beauty salon where I picked her up. Aggravated, my first impulse was to invoke every chastisement I remembered from childhood: “How irresponsible can you be? Couldn’t you have checked your purse before we left? Do you think I have all day to bother with this?”

But then I remembered her tolerance of my late arrival, her sympathy over my spilled tea, and her willingness to wait in the car while I ran extra errands. “Why don’t you just sit here while I go back and get it?” I said. “It will only take a minute.” Immediately we both felt better about the situation.

Outreach

“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (Galatians 6:10).

Sometimes we get so caught up in our own affairs we forget to think of others. Since it’s always easier to notice what someone else should be doing, we can be open to reminders of ways to help others:

“I noticed Miss Eva looks down. Maybe we’d better go visit her.”

“Jenny hasn’t been at church on Wednesday night in two or three weeks. Why don’t you give her a call this afternoon and encourage her to come tonight?”

“I’m going to give my black coat to the church coat drive. You never wear that red jacket anymore. Would you like to donate it?”

When I was little, “Wave at Miss Velma.” was always my mother’s reminder when we passed a certain house in our neighborhood. Later I found out that Mother, as

Velma's son's teacher, had punished him and Miss Velma had cursed her before an entire store full of people. Mother regarded Miss Velma as someone who needed to be loved. She provided a wonderful model of how to reach out to others. After many years of effort, Miss Velma finally accepted my mother's friendship and also became a Christian. Now when I have problems with difficult people, I remember what my mother's example taught me.

Dependence

As an infant, the daughter depends on the mother. Gradually she gains independence. As time passes, the mother begins to rely on the daughter for small things like watching the baby, answering the phone, and running errands.

Later they depend upon one another as friends.

Later still, the mother begins to count on the daughter more and more until dependence has come full circle. In the latter years of her life, Mary Purvis sold her home and went to live with her daughter Ruth. Ruth and her husband bought a larger home so Mrs. Purvis could have an area of her own in which to keep her favorite furniture and to host visitors. Ruth cared for her mother for several years, and often one or the other could be heard muttering, "She's driving me crazy!" Still their love and devotion to each other was obvious.

Encouragement

Solomon tells us, "A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver" (Proverbs 25:11).

Mothers can encourage daughters in their educational, spiritual, and social relationships.

"You've studied so hard for that test, I know now you'll do well," or "That was nice of Janna to call. I can see you're getting to know new people at school."

Mothers and daughters can encourage each other to try new things. Once when we were in the Great Smokey

'I wish you were my mother.'

'Why is that?'

'Because you listen to me.'

Mountains, our family took a four-mile hike to Ramsey Cascades. Fairly close to our destination, I began to tire and told my family to go on ahead. In spite of husbandly teasing about being "over the hill," I sat down, welcoming a scenic respite while I waited for the rest of the family to return. In just a few minutes, my daughter Kelsey came bouncing back down the trail saying, "Come on, Mom, you can make it. It's not too much farther and when you

get there, it's great!" That encouragement from my daughter was just what I needed.

When my mother was 79 years old, she asked my opinion on whether or not she should run for county commissioner, having never run for office before. I encouraged her to do so, and the campaign turned out to be one of the most joyful and rewarding experiences of her life. As she returned to friends and family after losing by a narrow margin, she smiled broadly and said, "Haven't we had fun?"

Listening

James tells us, "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry" (James 1:19).

For a while one summer, my friend Carol had a daily visitor. A neighbor's child would come to Carol's house every morning and follow her around as she was doing her housework. When the child finally followed her into the bathroom, Carol was thinking about a tactful way to tell the little girl to stay at home. Just then the little girl said wistfully, "I wish you were my mother."

"Why is that?" Carol asked.

"Because you listen to me," she answered.

Carol didn't send the little girl home. But her story has stayed with me for years because of the message it gives me as a mother.

As mothers and daughters, we can give each other material gifts for Mother's Day or birthdays, but one of the greatest gifts we can give is attention.

My grandmother was a very special Christian whose priorities were clear. As soon as any of us walked into her room, she'd lay aside her needlework or turn off the television. If we'd say, "Oh, don't let us interrupt what you're doing," she'd just wave off the comment. "I'd much rather talk to you!" she'd respond. Of course what she really did was listen, which was very flattering.

How often do we turn off a television program to listen to a daughter or mother who is upset? How many times do we cut short a telephone conversation because a family member wants to talk? How often do we ignore the long distance expense when a mother or daughter needs a listening ear?

Of course there are many things mothers and daughters can do together that give them good talking time—traveling, cooking, sewing, listening to music, even shopping. But the important thing is to listen.

Although Jesus Christ is our primary example, we also find ourselves imitating the examples of those around us. As we go through life, let's be delighted to hear, "Like mother, like daughter!" ■

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