

Five Things Our Mothers Taught Us

Mothers. None of us would be here if they weren't around. Am I right or am I right? But our moms are so much more than just the person who brought us into the world. I don't know about you, but there is a universe of knowledge I gleaned from my mom. For this Mother's Day, the REO team wanted to honor our moms by relating five of the important lessons we learned from them.

Vickie Speer

When I was around 6 years old or so, I was at the supermarket with Mom, and we had finally made it to the checkout line. I asked her if I could get some Starburst candy, and she flat out said "No"...but I just couldn't take that for an answer. When she wasn't looking, I wedged the Starburst in between a few other items on the conveyor belt and hoped she wouldn't notice.

My devious plans were foiled, but not before the cashier had already scanned the candy into the register. My mom held her up from her scanning, and the cashier asked if she should take it off and shelve it. For some reason, mom left it on the bill and bought it. And then, she didn't let me have the candy. Oh man, it was so much worse knowing for weeks that the candy was in our possession, sitting alone up in the cupboard. The poor, lonely candy. The poor, deprived child.

I probably learned my lesson: No means no. At the very least, I haven't forgotten it. Still, once enough time had passed, I snatched the candy out of the cupboard and asked Mom if I could have some, and she just hurriedly unwrapped it and let

me eat it. I think she forgot about its significance. I ate it with the weight of shame upon me. How could something so sweet be simultaneously so bittersweet? Cast your pejorative gaze upon my childhood shenanigans and learn, O reader. A Starburst eaten with a clear conscience is worth 500 eaten in shame. (D.A. Speer)

Betty Lou Plunkett

When we were kids Mom told us that “Here at The Rock, we have two basic rules. The first rule is: obey all rules. Secondly: Do not write on the walls, as it takes a lot of work to erase writing off of the walls.” Just kidding. That’s Barney Fife. Though she kept decided discipline and order, Mom was definitely not a Barney Mom, constantly spouting off rules, regulations, and long rants of “wisdom.” Mom was not one to dole out a lot of such talk and sage quotable diatribes. Her wisdom was largely displayed through how she lived. Most of what I learned from her I learned by watching her live life and interact with those around her. And I learned so much. One of the ways she most impacted me was via her enduring innate joyfulness and contentment in all situations no matter how dark. Mom had been through a lot of heavy moments in her life: Months in the hospital as a child after accidentally drinking a glass of lye soap; months worth of hours spent in the hospital with me for various reasons; raising four kids; years of serving as a home missionary, foreign mission, and teacher; and finally lymphatic cancer. Yet, for as long as I knew her (since 1973) she always maintained her contented spirit. This is not to say she never got sad or anything like that. Yet even in sadness, there was always that feeling of joy radiating from her. No matter how dark situations got, she had a way of making it feel like matters weren’t that bad. This was even true with her final battle with cancer. Like Paul the Apostle, she had learned the secret of being content even in

the darkest moment. That secret was their hope in Jesus. Her contentment and joy came to a head just minutes before she died. During those moments she expressed an almost rapturous joy in Jesus, and we who were present could almost see heaven itself. (Ben Plunkett)

Yvonne Cannon

I remember once my senior year in high school my best friends Wade and John came over one afternoon on a school day – I don't recall why – but they ended up staying for dinner even though we hadn't planned for them to do so. My mother cooked extra without even a second thought. Then, again without really planning it, they slept over. On a school night.

The reasons these things happened is because my mother created a home environment where people felt welcomed to treat it like it was theirs. My living room was often packed with our friends on weekend nights when we were teenagers. Some of our friends didn't even knock when they came over. People of other races and ethnicities were welcomed into our home. My dad's hunting buddies, Super Bowl parties, Seinfeld finale parties, Bible College visitors, church prayer times...our house was (and still is) constantly being used to host people. Even though our house was well kept, even when my mother worked full time, we worried far less about stains on the carpet and spills in the kitchen than we did about making sure everyone in Turbeville, SC knew there was a place where all were welcome. My dad is a great man, but my mother was the main reason this was so.

So of the million things I have learned from her, most of them from observation and not words, hospitality rises to the top. It takes humility and sacrifice to open up your home to so many people. It's supremely inconvenient. I wish I could say I appreciated it back then, but I do now. It's one of the most

Jesus-like things about my mother's life. And one I hope to emulate here in Chicago. (Gowdy Cannon)

Judy Lytle

There is nothing more empowering than hearing the words "you are good at..." It may even be more important for a parent to affirm the things their children do well than to correct their short-comings. As a teen, I more or less floated through life. I am not particularly athletic, musical, or creative. I was fairly shy and just starting to take an interest in academics. Some people can do well just about anything they attempt. Well, I had (have) very few skills. I just was. When I was in high school, my mother told me that I would make a good history teacher or perhaps a good chef. Studying history and cooking were two things I did well and loved doing. That conversation with my mother established the trajectory of my life. This morning I got up early to pray with 30 of my students before taking their AP United States History exam. I also baked them homemade cinnamon rolls. It has been 20 years since my mother said, "You are good at..." but I am living out the empowerment from that conversation nearly every day. (David Lytle)

My mom is the hardest worker I know. If there is a job to do, she does it. If there is a meal to make, a person to visit, a floor to tile, a room to paint, a class to teach... You get the point. Unfortunately, I did not inherit that impressive work ethic from my mother. In my defense, no one in the history of the world has a work ethic like my mother, but it would have been nice to get even 50% of the inner drive she possesses. Also in my defense, I do work very hard if it is for something I love. But my mom works hard period. Full stop. Love or no love, she jumps into every task as if it is the most important

thing in the world. And while I don't have that same character trait, I do have the best example anyone could ask for to push me, nudge me, and even unintentionally shame me a little into working harder on things that I don't love that much. (Phill Lytle)

The Five Turns 100: Remembering the First Five Fives

It started with Ben.

He had an idea to list Five Reasons Not to be Scared of the Monsters Under Your Bed. It was an article to be released on a Friday when REO was just a few weeks old. And it was quite hilarious.

Then, Amy had the idea to try to do something similar the next Friday and thought it would great to keep it going. She told Phill, Phill told it to us and we loved it. And out of this, the REO Friday Five was born. We have tried every week on Friday the last two years to publish a list of five entries that have something in common. Some have been funny. Some have been deeply theological. Some have been sports-related. They all have been an expression of the DNA of Rambling Ever On. A few times we came up short ([here](#), [here](#), and [here](#) if you are curious) of a weekly Friday Five, but 97% of the time we have succeeded.

And today we celebrate our 100th effort at the Friday Five by looking back on the Five Fives that started it all. All the way back to January and February of 2016. These Five Fives are

the pioneers so to speak of this longstanding REO tradition. And we appreciate them very much. And today we acknowledge them and reminisce about our beginnings and how each of these Fives foreshadowed what REO was going to be like, not just on Friday, but all the time. I mean, even the best sitcoms had good clip shows! – Gowdy Cannon

Ben Plunkett's "5 Reasons Not to Be Afraid of the Monster Under the Bed"

[5 Reasons Not to Be Afraid of the Monster Under the Bed](#)

This is what separates Rambling Ever On from other sites out there. Sure, we could spend all of our energy and time writing about spirituality and theology. Or, we could have article after article about music, movies, or current events. Frankly, we aren't interested in limiting ourselves to that standard stuff.

Enter Ben Plunkett. If you have been reading REO for any time at all, you know Ben follows the beat of his own drummer. When others write about the latest political scandal Ben says, "Nope. Not for me." Instead, he delivers some new form of insane genius. Take our very first Five as the perfect example. Who else is going to write with any sense of intelligence or articulation about monsters under the bed? Ben brings wit, humor, and just a dash of absolute madness to his writing and we are all better off for it. The Five on REO got started right and we have Ben Plunkett to thank for that. It is a philosophy that has guided us ever since. – Phill Lytle

Amy Lytle's "Five Steps to Become the BEST Facebook Mother of

All Time”

[5 Steps to Become the BEST Facebook Mother of All Time](#)

One of the things I appreciate about REO is the creative and appropriate use of sarcasm. It was the REO staff that convinced me that using irony this way can be an effective way to communicate and not always mean-spirited.

Our very second Five falls into this category. Amy’s REO articles have been some of our best-performing articles based on the number of views and this one is no different. Because I think people appreciate the humorous take on the reality of how people use Facebook. We have seen many other articles follow suit, including a whole Five on trash talk, but this was the one that set the tone. Superbly done and still relevant (and probably will be for years to come), we are very proud of this entry into our annals. – Gowdy Cannon

Collaborative “Five Romantic Movies Even Men Can Love”

[Five Romantic Movies Even Men Can Love](#)

This was the first collaborative Five. Often, we come up with a topic that many of our contributors care about and we figure the best way to make those articles work is to make it a team effort. As REO is primarily a male-driven website, we knew that Valentines Day was not going to be high on our priority list. But, we did not want to completely ignore it, so we opted to write about movies with a strong romantic theme that even men might enjoy. It was a perfect fit for what we do and it was the first of many collaborative articles on REO. It was also the beginning of REO trying to make our reader’s lives better – something we continue to do even to this day. You’re welcome. – Phill Lytle

Gowdy Cannon's "Five Times Harry Potter Made Me Reflect On Real Life"

[Five Times Harry Potter Made Me Reflect On Real Life](#)

This was the fourth Five and offered a look at some wise and biblical advice from the pages of the magnum opus of J.K. Rowling. The Harry Potter book series is a truly classic children's fantasy line of literature. And it's more than just the storyline itself that makes it great. Much more. It is multi-faceted and many-layered in its meaning and depth. It does not take a lot of study to show that there are actually quite a bit of Christian truths that can be gleaned from its pages. Mega-Potterite, Gowdy Cannon, has delved into its pages many times. Here he lays out five great truths he has learned from Harry Potter (the book series not necessarily the character). In Five Times Harry Potter Made Me Reflect on Real Life he does exactly that. He considers five very insightful quotes from various characters that taught him certain lessons about life in our real-life Muggle world. We learn from the faithful House Elf, Dobby, about greatness and goodness; from Harry's adoptive father, Sirius Black (in two quotes), about judging the true quality of a person and the true face of evil; from the great and inimitable wizard, Albus Dumbledore, on the surest way to wreak damage upon an individual: indifference and neglect; and from best friends Ron Weasley and Harry Potter on the nature of repentance and forgiveness.

– Ben Plunkett

Phill Lytle's "Five Words and Phrases That Need to Go Away"

[Five Words and Phrases that need to go away.](#)

I confess this is one of my favorite articles and one of the finest things we have done in my opinion. The content is exceptional on its own—clever and with a pulse on our culture’s extremely odd popular jargon. To paraphrase Ben, I cotton especially to the one about “Loving On” people because in the American Church this gets said all time. And it keeps getting said even though Phill and others—including some popular comedians—have called it out. It’s like a massive freight train of geeky Christianese. But Phill’s take on it is the best I’ve seen. And the conversation about “it is what it is” makes me cry laughing. It’s like a modernized Abbott and Costello routine.

But beyond the writing, the illustrations are LOL funny, so much that I’ve laughed while reading it for the 4th or 5th time. The simplicity of the way the searing logic is presented...the faces of the “men”...the exploding head...it’s all gold.

I bet I’ve referenced this article in public as much or more than any other in REO history. And we reference it yet again today, as being a Five that let the world know how acute our web site’s humor was going to be. – Gowdy Cannon

REO Pays Tribute: Marie Lytle

On September 18, 2007 my mother, Marie Eula Buchanan Lytle was called home to Heaven at the age of 87. We had watched Alzheimer ravage her mind and body for eight years, and it was a sweet release to see her go.

Coming up on another Mother’s Day, this tribute is in memory of her, and in her honor. I owe much of the man I am today to her influence, teaching, and prayers.

I saw her kneel at the altar of the Swannanoa Free Will Baptist Church in the fall of 1961 during a powerful revival meeting that swept our church, where she wept as she repented and rededicated her life to Christ. From that day forward, she was a changed woman. We were in church every time the door was opened, and we were not permitted to miss. She prayed, she talked about the Lord to us kids, she walked with God. I saw her more than once on her knees in her room praying for her family.

I remember in January 1967 when the first Super Bowl was being played. I begged to stay home and watch it that Sunday evening, but she was adamant in her refusal. Never mind that it was the biggest game in history in the mind of a 16 year old boy. We were going to church. You didn't miss church for anything.

Much of Mother's life and special influence revolves around music. In my mind I can still see her standing at the kitchen sink and singing. You have to understand this; she was not a good singer. She never sang a special in church; didn't even sing in the choir. But her music and her heart, above all, touched the heart of God – and it touch me deeply.

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The first song I can distinctly remember Mother singing was "You Are My Sunshine," a very popular tune in the 1950s. The first Christian song I recall was the lovely "How Beautiful Heaven Must Be." I suppose that was around 1956 or 1957.

*We read of a place that's called Heaven
It's made for the pure and the free
These truths in God's word we are given
How beautiful Heaven must be.*

*How beautiful Heaven must be
Sweet home of the happy and free
Fair haven of rest for the weary*

How beautiful Heaven must be

Mother loved to sing "Is Not This The Land of Beulah?" Number 27 in the old Baptist Hymnal. She would sing it with strong emotion, especially the second verse. It might have been her testimony:

*I can see far down the mountain where I wandered weary years
Often hindered on my journey by the ghosts of doubts and fears
Broken vows and disappointments, thickly sprinkled on my way
But the Spirit led unerring to the land I hold today.*

I have to believe that it was, at least in part, her love for that song that birthed the same love in me; it has been a favorite my whole life, nearly 60 years now. In fact, I don't doubt for a moment that my love for music and song stems from my earliest recollections of how certain songs impacted her.

There was a time when I was about 10, and we had just moved to our new home in Swannanoa. I had been saved that summer in Vacation Bible School, and after we moved – probably around October or November, I crossed the little branch by our house, walked out to the woods, and sat down on a fallen tree. I started singing:

*He never said I'd have silver or gold
Yet He has promised me riches untold
He never suffered a life without care
Yet He relieves every burden I bear.*

*Sin stained the cross with the blood of my Lord
Yet He permitted it without a word
Why, tell me why, He redeemed you and me?
Love is why you and I are free.*

Life wasn't easy for Mother. She worked very hard at a local factory. My dad did not follow Christ for many years; for ten years he did not darken the door of a church, and was very bitter and angry. My parents argued frequently and there were attitudes and undercurrents in the home I never understood.

Yet for the most part, we had a happy childhood.

Mother didn't drive, and so for several years until I got my driver's license, we were dependent on folks in our church for rides to church on Sundays and Wednesdays, revival meetings, and special activities. Several families, including a couple of Mom's best friends, were so good to come and pick us up, and there were four of us! Through the years, we rarely missed a service. Mother was determined that we be at God's house, hearing the Word preached and taught, and singing His praises. She loved the old hymns and she loved gospel music, and as a result, so did I.

My dad came to the Lord in 1971, and for the last decade of his life – he died in 1981 – he, too, was faithful to church.

By then, I had finished Bible College, gotten married, and began preparing for the mission field. Judy and I, along with baby Michael, said goodbye to my parents in Asheville, North Carolina as we boarded a plane to fly to Costa Rica to begin Spanish language school in August 1976. Standing there as the flight was announced, and seeing Mother's tears flow as she kept hugging Michael, Judy, and me is a powerful memory. Also powerful is the memory of my parents and sister coming to Panama to visit us, and our pride and joy in introducing them to the country that had become our home.

After my dad passed away in 1981, Mother lived for 26 more years. Church attendance, ministry (especially to nursery age kids), and caring for family remained her heartbeat. As her mind began to deteriorate in the late 1990s, followed by full-blown Alzheimer's in the early 2000s, life changed for her.

She always enjoyed music, though, up until the final couple of years. My brother would go see her in the nursing home every day, and took a CD of praise and worship music for her to hear. We gave her a Gaither Homecoming CD.

The final two years of her life, Mother was totally unresponsive. She didn't know us, she couldn't speak, and her

body was twisted and drawn up as she simply lay there on the nursing home bed. We had prayed many times that the Lord would take her home, yet we didn't know it was imminent on September 15, 2007, the last time we saw her. I was alone with her, speaking softly, and just watching her, when the idea occurred to me that I would sing to her.

Undoubtedly her favorite song, at least for the last 25 years of her life, was Squire Parson's classic "Sweet Beulah Land." Now I'm not a singer at all, and my best singing is done in the shower or in the car with no one else around. But I began to sing:

*I'm kind of homesick for a country
To which I've never been before
No sad goodbyes will there be spoken
And time won't matter any more.*

*Beulah land, I'm longing for you
And some sweet day on thee I'll stand
There my home will be eternal
Beulah land, sweet Beulah land*

Would you believe it? My mother, totally unresponsive for two years, lying in bed like a vegetable, began to respond to the song! While I couldn't understand the words she spoke – it was more like mumbling – it was evident it had touched her and that she was trying to sing along. That was a precious moment.

Two days later my brother called to say that she was gone.

Happy Mother's Day to my precious mother. Thank you for your godly influence.



Present Tense Parenting

Being a father is one of the biggest challenges that any man will face. Having that kind of influence over another human being can be daunting. Yet, even with all the hard work and long days, the job is not without its rewards. In fact, the rewards far outweigh the responsibilities.

Too often though, we tend to lose focus of the present. We look back and relive the great moments when our kids were younger, sweeter, and cuter. Or, we look ahead, longing for a day when our kids will be more independent, less needy, and not as annoying.[1. Don't roll your eyes. Your kids annoy you sometimes. I'm just willing to admit it publicly.] We romanticize the past, and we idealize the future. The present is when all the hard work happens. This makes it feel worse than what has come before, lost in the haze of the past, or not as blissfully idyllic as the far-off future. It can be so easy to overlook the great stuff that is happening right in front of us.

We romanticize the past, and we idealize the future. It can be so easy to overlook the great stuff that is happening right in front of us.

When they are young, your children think you are hilarious. I can make my eleven-year-old son laugh at any moment.[2. My wife can say or do the exact same thing and it might produce a smile.] My jokes cause uncontrolled laughter, falling down on the floor giggling fits, and pleas for me to say or do that funny thing again. As they get older, your children will find you less funny. Your hilarious jokes become "Dad" jokes. You might even get an eye roll or two. Don't let that discourage you. Embrace each stage. Be the comedian when they are laughing. Be the embarrassing dad when they are not. The most important ingredient here is you. Even if your kids are too

old and “sophisticated” to laugh at your jokes, they will see your heart and feel your love for them simply because you are present.

On the flip side, your kids will make you laugh. A lot. My kids are hilarious. Sometimes, when they are attempting to be funny, it falls flat. Particularly my youngest child who just turned seven. But when he is simply himself, he makes me laugh more than almost any person I know. My eleven year old son makes me smile more than laugh. He is funny, but his honest and pure love of life comes through often, and it is infectious. And my oldest son, all of thirteen years, is developing a great, sarcastic sense of humor. His mother and I are extremely proud. Take time to enjoy it all. Enjoy the awful jokes your younger children will tell.[3. Trust me. It gets better. But you are going to have to perfect the fake smile and laugh. Work on those in private when your children are sleeping.] Enjoy the early, faltering attempts at sarcasm and wit your middle-school aged kids will attempt. Enjoy laughing at every little thing your little ones do when they aren't even trying to be funny. But don't get stuck looking back on those great times, wishing you could relive them. And don't look ahead during those awkward phases when their sense of humor seems to have taken 10 steps back. Appreciate each one for what it is: a chance to watch your children develop their personalities.

Your kids are asking questions and pushing back because they are trying to form their identity. They are looking for answers. Guide them to those answers. Don't get frustrated because they don't accept everything at face value.

Your children will look to you as the ultimate authority in all matters when they are little. That will seem like heaven when they are older and are questioning EVERY THING YOU SAY. Take a step back and you might see how irrational it is of you

to long for those days of total trust. You know you don't know everything. You know you make mistakes. You know you are wrong from time to time. As your children grow and mature, they are going to realize that as well. If they don't, you are doing something wrong. Accept that. Use that. If your children are asking you questions, that is a wonderful opportunity to engage with them on a deeper level than usual. You will have the opportunity to explain what you believe, why you parent the way you do, and why you live the way you live. Your kids are asking questions and pushing back because they are trying to form their identity. They are looking for answers. Guide them to those answers. Help them find their identity. Don't get frustrated because they don't accept everything at face value.

And even when it doesn't feel like your children love you very much, you just need to trust that the love and hard work you poured into them will win out.

Perhaps the most difficult area to truly live in the present is in how your children show you love. It's not hard to see their love when they are young. They hug, they kiss, and they hold your hand. They say "I love you" all the time. Brace yourselves. That phase will end. You might go months between "I love you" from your teenage son. It might be even longer. That's okay. They will show how much they love you in other ways. Those ways will vary depending on your child, but keep your eyes open for them. And even when it doesn't feel like your children love you very much, you just need to trust that the love and hard work you poured into them will win out. They will come around. My seven year old tells me he loves me every day, usually unprompted. My eleven year old tells me he loves me most days, but usually after I have said it first.[4. Yes, I am one of those weird dads that say "I love you" to my kids every day.] My thirteen year old rarely says it. Not even when I say it first. I could let that break my heart. But that

would be suffering for no reason. I see how my son behaves. I see how he interacts with me and with his family. I see his heart at home, church, and everywhere else. I KNOW he loves me. He uses everything but words to say it. And that is just fine with me.

When is the best time to be a dad? Right now. Don't miss the joys of today. Don't get stuck in your past, wishing you could somehow go back. Don't look ahead to when things will be "easier." Be here now. That is the most important thing.

5 Steps to Become the BEST Facebook Mother of All Time

1. Be sure and document everything on Facebook without actually doing anything. Kids don't remember parents participating in activities or listening to them. They only remember when there are pictures of their activities to share with others. Especially when The Others are people you don't really know or connect with on a personal level. (Cue the theme music of *Lost*.)

2. Include photos, videos, and stories that will embarrass your children as much as possible when you post. This ensures that our children will never feel comfortable to be themselves for fear it will be on Facebook. Living in this fear within their own home prepares them for the world outside of it. We certainly don't want freedom of expression, opinion, discussion, etc. in our families.

3. Constantly post about your greatness as a mother, especially when it comes to your children's spiritual development. If they pray a prayer of repentance, or give a

toy to a sibling, or eat all their vegetables, or (wait for it...) mention the Death and Resurrection of Jesus, then post the mess out of it. (Be certain that the post does NOT include what happened before this event, e.g. your child punched another child before the sharing took place, you irrationally screamed about dirty socks being left in the middle of the kitchen floor, etc. Only posting the positive shows how great your child is and how great you are as the mother who taught him. Win-Win.)

4. Always share how terrible your life is; be a Mommy Martyr. (It's especially important if you have no moments of greatness to post as mentioned in #3.) This should be your mantra when considering what to post: "No mother in the history of motherhood has ever had to endure {fill-in-the-blank-hardship} like I have." Seriously, fill in the blank with whatever is difficult. It could be taking the kids to the grocery store, or fixing dinner with a baby on your hip and a screaming toddler, or having the flu while still caring for young ones. No matter how small, it's actually BIG. You are a Martyr. You are a Mom. You are **Mommy Martyr**. Your adult children will look back at this digital footprint with immense appreciation for your great sacrifice, I am certain.

5. Never forget your success at mothering is directly proportional to the amount of "likes" you get on the posts mentioned above. It's a proven formula for getting that coveted Mother of the Year Trophy. Number of likes (L) is equal to or greater than the relative success (S) of the mother of the children. ($L \geq S$) For you non-math people, that means the more likes you get the more successful you are as a mother. Your worth depends on it.

I suppose you could completely ignore these sure-fire ways to be the best, and do things like listen to your kids, consider their ideas, participate in activities with them, and ignore the interwebs' opinions. But then what else would you do with the empty space on your mantel, the spot for the coveted

Facebook Mother of the Year Trophy?