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## The Mother-Daughter Dance

WHEN I WAS THREE YEARS old, my mom enrolled me in a dance class. I grew up learning the art of dance in a small basement studio, with a floor-to-ceiling mirror and a worn, chalk-dusted warm-up bar that stretched along one wall. As a little girl and a true introvert, I was always nervous to walk into a room of people. So, when it was time to line up at the warm-up bar, I was self-conscious and nervous to walk through a crowd of other mothers and daughters. My mom gave me every reason to believe I belonged there and that everything would be okay.

When we arrived for each ballet class, she would sit on a long wooden bench in a narrow hall, tightly packed with other moms. She had the best, but most uncomfortable, seat in the

house. Knowing she had a full view of the dance floor encouraged me to walk in with confidence and to have fun. I loved my ballet shoes and wore them with pride. When I'd see my mom's face reflected in the huge mirror, my insecurity would fade. She would smile and nod affirmingly, even when my confidence was shaky, and I was unsure of my poise.

I loved dance class because I felt like the only dancer on the floor, seen and loved. As I grew in confidence, I stopped looking for my mom's gaze in the mirror but even so, she was always there. When my fears were gone, I began to focus on my form and poise. Even to this day, I remember the day I looked back in the mirror after a class routine, and my mom wasn't on the bench anymore. For a quick moment, my heart skipped a little beat, but I didn't stop dancing. She wasn't there, but she knew that it was time. You see, my mom stayed on that bench until she knew I wasn't looking for her in the mirror anymore and was confident to dance without the assurance of her presence.

There is a special dance that every mother and daughter will experience. I like to think of mothers and daughters as dance partners. Often, the mother is the lead, and the daughter follows. We spend the first part of our daughters' lives teaching them and leading them, all while learning new and important lessons ourselves—like two people who never took dance lessons and yet spend their whole lives trying to keep in step. Just when we think we have the tempo and the balance and have learned to read one another's moves everything changes. We grow, pivot, and learn together. No one ever teaches you the choreography, but here is how it goes: For every move a mother makes, her daughter is watching. She will choose to copy, repeat, or choose her own way. A mother's reaction will dictate the next move. Every mother sets the tone of her relationship with her daughter.

She can lean in gently to the process of the steps it will take to learn who her daughter is, carefully considering what her daughter sees in the mirror. This dance is unlike any other, requiring sincerity, humility, genuine respect, and unconditional love.

This full-length mirror is an image to always keep before you as you raise your daughters. The mirror always reveals the truth, reflecting our actions, and our motives. Our girls will know and see us for who we are. The moment you first hold that little girl in your arms is the day you begin your beautiful dance. At some point in your relationship, everything you have ever taught them will give them the confidence and the strength to dance on their own. Then we will be the ones to notice they are not looking for us in the mirror anymore.

### *Your Value Is in Christ*

There will be seasons in your dance when you will step on one another's toes, forget your moves, and be out of sync or rhythm. Sustaining your relationship will require you to practice the moves, fix the problems, and focus on the potential. Those three habits will allow you to stay connected, even when you may think they do not need you anymore. After years of trying to stay in step with my girls, I think we have found a good rhythm. I have spent a lot of sleepless nights praying my way through how to fix small conflicts with my girls, asking the Lord to help us get through seemingly small misunderstandings, so we can maintain a strong relationship. We had to fix our attitudes, be honest, and committed to keeping current in our communication. Most importantly, we stay focused on the person we know one another to be. Always thinking the best. My own childhood did not lead to a sustainable relationship with my mom. These experiences seeped into my own identity

and how I approached my first years as a mother to my own daughters.

I come from a long line of broken mother-daughter relationships. My mother has walked in and out of my life for many years. I have learned the dance steps of avoidance, fear of abandonment, and pleasing others. It wasn't until I took a long look in the mirror two years ago that I saw where my own brokenness was inhibiting my deep connection with my daughters. For every lie I believed about myself, I would hesitate to reach into the deep recesses of my own girls' hearts because I couldn't believe or see the truth of my own value or identity. I believed the lie that I wasn't a good mom, a great mom, or a loved mom.

Distance or silence threatened my assurance that my relationships with my daughters were okay or secure. I feared what they thought of me or that I was always disappointing them. The chain of lies continued to affect a relationship I had invested everything into with the goal to not carry the brokenness into one more generational line. What was I missing in this pursuit? I was working so hard to be sure I didn't repeat the patterns of broken relationships, but while doing so, I hadn't taken the time to see where those actions were coming from.

The mirror always tells the truth, and the truth will set you free. For me to fully receive the love in these relationships I had given my life for, I had to first believe I was loved, no matter what. I found freedom when I stopped living in the fear that I would not be a perfect mom. Looking in the mirror, I had to stop waiting for my mom's presence and remember who God created me to be. I am His daughter, fully loved, never abandoned, and once I was clothed in this full assurance, I could break and release the broken chains that have held our long line of women captive. I will always grieve my mom's absence because she is

my mother. Though I grieve the brokenness, I have been made whole through the process.

### *There Is No Perfect Mom*

The world has created idealistic versions of what being a mom is. Women seem to be given choices of which version of mom they would “like to be.” Stereotypes come in all shapes and forms: working mother, stay-at-home mother, helicopter mother, soccer mom, devoted mom, and cool mom. Sure, we find our people, our style, our groove. We can choose to stay home or a career, and yet, we are and always will be “mother”—the woman up at night cradling her baby, wondering if she will ever see a full night of sleep again. A mother bears heartache and carries pride when her children do hard things, overcome obstacles, win an award, or make new friends. A mother feels every fiber of her child’s pain and celebrates every milestone because her children are not only part of her, but they are also a major part of her life.

With seven daughters, I have learned that there is no one way to be the best girl mom. Because my daughters are so very different, my relationship with each of them is unique as well. From the moment I held them in my arms, I knew they would each need me uniquely, and I would love them all so differently. When I learned to see myself the way God sees me, I was able to give my girls a gift I am not sure they are even aware of yet. I gave them the gift of acceptance and uninhibited love. I began loving them without expectations. I thought the best of them when they were silent or busy. I rediscovered how I love and need to be loved. I cheered them on, was present when I could be, and didn’t function out of guilt when I couldn’t be. As exhausting as it sounds to lavish attention on your daughters,

it is also just as suffocating to them, and your relationship. Your daughters want you to be happy and whole. This is how you break the chain of broken relationships. It is not just your actions that are important. You need to heal the wounds and lies you've believed about yourself.

Your family may not have a line of broken mother-daughter relationships, but some of us do. Right now, whether you are raising little girls, middles, teens, or young adults, your future is in the mirror. Your young girls have the potential to be your best friends someday. The trajectory for your relationships is being set in your everyday moments. Do not underestimate the impact your own identity and personal healing will have on your future.

### *Motherhood Will Transform You*

Are you ever prepared for the moment you become a mom? Books and experts tell us what to expect, sometimes through negative stories or fear-based advice. Motherhood is also celebrated with well wishes and gifts. Whether planned or unexpected, the journey to becoming a mother never really prepares you for the moment you hold your child and realize that this, in fact, is forever. Nothing will ever be the same, including yourself. Your body has been changing, your time is not your own, your thoughts will always be interrupted, and you are now in charge of a precious, beautiful life.

My older girls and I basically grew up together. Looking back, I recognize how different I was when they were born. They watched me learn how to mother them. I made mistakes and experienced small victories. They watched me learn so many “girl” things—from braiding hair to putting on makeup. I learned and they watched, as I taught myself how to cook

from scratch, plan and grow a garden, and fill my shelves with healthy food for my family. I studied midwifery and took courses with two toddlers in tow and a baby strapped to my chest. I learned how to manage a home and create community. I discovered the importance of my health, skin care, and nurturing my femininity. Everything I did and learned turned into a teaching moment for my daughters.

Being a mother of daughters reminds me of the intricate beauty woven into our DNA as women. While I watch my own youth fade away, I behold the beauty of my daughters unfolding before me. I see them learn and lean into their womanhood.

Being a mother has pushed me to get out of bed, and some days, to embrace rest so my daughters know it is okay to choose which they need most. Being a mother to daughters has brought me to my knees, realizing how selfish I can be. Because, yes, I do want some days and some moments to be about me. Don't we all? We want to be present yet need a break. We want to teach them everything they may need to know, but they may make it difficult. They ask for our help, but only when they are ready to receive it. They want to hang out, but only when it's convenient. We must learn how to be both friend and mother. We know their fullest potential, but they cannot see what we see, and so our words must be careful, timely, and sensitive to their seasons.

Motherhood has changed me from the inside out. With every child I had, I became more and more aware of the transformation taking place in me. I found courage where I once felt fear. My love expanded, and my ability to listen, rather than always speak out, caught me off guard.

Raising girls is also a daily look in a full-length mirror. You

will hear your own words when your daughters speak and your actions when they react—from the tone of our voice, the attitudes you display, the pace in which you live, and the choices you make. Daughters remind you who you are, as you watch them live out what they've observed you do. There is a raw and revealing vulnerability in raising girls because you cannot hide your insecurities or your doubts.

How do we raise strong, independent, sensitive, and well-rounded daughters without losing sight of who God called us to be as individuals and not only mothers? Choose to press in and prepare them to steward all they have been given. Give yourself grace in the learning and enjoy the teaching moments. Don't see everything as a task, but instead as an opportunity to learn together. Let them see you flourish and thrive. Let them see you smile and laugh. Embrace womanhood, and all the changes it brings. Speak with wisdom, let them see you fail with humility and get back up with perseverance.

### *Let Them See Jesus in You*

Sometimes, we will lose sight of who we are while living out our role as a mother. We forget that we are growing, changing, and becoming someone as well. Deep within the confines of our souls—who we believe we are, how we see ourselves—those are the pieces our children see when they see their mothers. They get the best and the worst of us. They watch us change and grow. They witness the sacrifice, the testing of our patience—our words rolling off hasty tongues—and the sanctifying work of growth that is only seen by those closest to us.

As a mother of seven daughters, I haven't been a perfect girl mom. Each of my girls would tell you that I lost my cool, forgot to teach them things, and didn't "do" everything right. I have

had seven opportunities to get this dance down, and yet, there were so many days I was clueless, tired, and giving it the best I could. There were moments I would find myself striving to create the perfect mother-daughter relationship, and yet, I felt like I couldn't quite figure out what I was doing wrong. Mother-daughter relationships can be tricky and personal. From the beginning, we are responsible to train, teach, love, laugh, show up, give space, and prepare them to be women, while at the same time, we are evolving and changing ourselves.

But, at the end of the day, realizing my missteps and knowing I can talk to my daughters about hard things became a life-line for us. Our daughters are looking in a mirror every day and at the end of the day, all I want is for my girls to see Jesus. We cannot hide who we are from our daughters. The biggest gift you can give to your daughters is to not make the story about you but to stay focused on what God created you to be—a daughter of the King.

Raising daughters is a divine gift to show them Jesus. Be the reflection of Him they see clearer than any other. We have been given a rare and amazing gift to raise the next generation, lead families in a legacy of faith, and to be called a woman of God. Let's reclaim our mother-daughter relationships, so we can raise faith-filled daughters who can confidently know they are loved.

### A MOTHER'S REFLECTIONS

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- What are my hopes and dreams for my relationship with my daughters?
- How does being an image bearer of Christ relate to my role as a mother?

- When I look in the mirror at the end of the day and my personal relationship and investments into my daughter, what do I see?



## WHAT'S A GIRL MOM TO DO?

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- Discover the beauty in your own womanhood and how God delights in *you*. What is unique about the way He made you?
- Make a list of the fears you have about raising daughters. Are there generational lies or conflicts you need to identify and give to the Lord?
- Write a letter to yourself and address it, “Dear Daughter.” Speak truth to yourself as a daughter of Christ, loved and cherished. Encourage yourself to be open to transformation, with reminders to be an image bearer of Christ to your own girls. Pour your heart out when it comes to your fears of raising girls, your hopes and dreams for your future, and save your letter to read when you need a reminder that you are loved.



## A MOTHER'S PRAYER

*Dear Lord, I am in awe of Your creation. You have given me the name “Mother,” and You call me Your beloved daughter. I seek Your presence as I understand my purpose. I am inclined to doubt my womanhood as beautiful and hover in the shadows of doubt in my motherhood. I know Your Word to be*

*true, Your plan to be perfect, and Your purpose for my life to be worthy of praise. Help me shake off the lies, doubts, and fears as I step fully into Your purpose and womanhood as a daughter and mother to the next generation. Help me to receive and believe Your steadfast love and faithfulness and to see who and whose I am every day. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

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