

# “Your Guidance System”

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*I Timothy 1:1-5, 18-2:6*

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It's only fitting on Mother's Day to begin by sharing some of the wisdom mother's over the ages have taught their impressionable children.

- Mother's teaching about one's roots... “Do you think you were born in a barn?”
- Mother's teaching about humor... “When that lawnmower cuts off your toes, don't come running to me.”
- Mother's teaching about thinking ahead... “If you don't pass your spelling test, you'll never get a job.”
- Mother's teaching about justice... “One day you'll have kids, and I hope they turn out just like you...then you'll see what it's like!”

How about things Mom would never say to her children.

- “Yeah, I used to skip school a lot too.”
- “Let me smell that shirt – yeah, it's good for another week.”
- “Well, if Timmy's mom says it's o.k. that's good enough for me.”
- “The curfew is just a general time to shoot for. It's not like I'm running a prison around here.”

Within this humor is a presupposition, a taken for grantedness about Moms (Mothers)...

- They provide guidance for their children.

Sadly, there are exceptions to good mothering, but generally – mothers are protective, nurturing, loving and providers of guidance. (Yes, Dad has a part in this too – but today is Mother's Day.)

Recall the Reading from Proverbs this morning, “...regret not your mother's teaching.” Rather straightforward and to the point. The writer of Proverbs takes it for granted that the teaching that mothers provide is good and worthy of adherence. Of course, it is also a reminder to mothers to take great care in what she teaches her children; both verbally and by example.

Of major importance for our children is what guidance they are given! From birth, through childhood and adolescence to teenage years to young adulthood our children are learning about life, and forming a view of life. They are receiving guidance, especially from mom and dad, but also from others in their community, their society. And some, but not nearly enough, are receiving guidance from the church. (Yes, I know – some churches are better guides than other. That decision is in mom's and dad's hands. Another important guidance.)

As Christians we believe in good and evil, right and wrong. There is a universal morality, in that there is objective good and evil. They are not just human constructs, just human opinions. Now with that said, there are many shades of grey in our ethical decision-making.

We believe there is a moral guidance system implanted within us, to weigh issues and to make the correct, good decision. Conscience is often the term we use. Conscience is you thinking morally, evaluating the goodness or badness of one's actions. Living in such a relativistic world, makes this very conception difficult to articulate. So much of our culture takes for granted that what one believes is personal to the nth degree. We have gotten sloppy and lazy in our moral and ethical language and applications. Please, I'm not talking about a return to the inquisition, or using Puritan stocks, but a re-recognition of taking seriously "conscience" and what guides conscience, is needed. What values are being taught to our children? Are they values that transcend particular groups, or are they tribal and only function within one's community?

We have the mental and spiritual tools to aggressively engage in pursuing a moral system. The Judeo-Christian tradition contains immense insight into how to live integrated, whole, and purposeful lives. But there has been neglect of the guidance system.

Last Sunday I had the honor and joy to preach at Shawn's installation service in Pleasant Valley, NY. It was a wonderful service! And I relayed to Shawn your heartfelt congratulations. Later, driving back to Wilkes-Barre. Wait, before that Heather, also at the event, she drove up. Well she wanted my GPS (Global Positioning System) to go into NY City. I gave it to her. Well, on Monday Shawn and I went to lunch and she placed her GPS in my car (so we wouldn't get lost). Later when I was leaving to return to Wilkes-Barre, my mind "knew" that Heather had my GPS, so I needed directions to get back. In fact, a member of Shawn's church said, "I'm going your way, follow me," so I'm following a car, for several miles, and I have printed out directions. I made it home unscathed!

But later, Heather brings my GPS. I'm sitting in my car about to put it back on the front window when I "see" another GPX already there! I'm confused! Here we forgot to take Shawn's GPS out. But, I drove 150 miles with that GPS right in front of my face – not knowing it was there! I had a guidance system right there, ready to be used – but oblivious that it was in my car. I had practically unlimited guidance at my disposal – but was unaware it was there. Besides confused, I felt rather dumb.

The Bible takes it for granted that, as being created in the image of God, You have a "guidance system" within. You have great capacity to reason, to make decisions, and the right, good decisions! It matters what you decide!

The elder Paul is guiding young Timothy to aim toward a "good conscience" notice Paul isn't value neutral here – aim toward a "conscience." No, he takes for granted – we all have a "conscience," a "guidance system" whether we recognize it or not. What is of paramount importance is – what kind of "guidance system" is operating within you? And what kind of "guidance system" are we implanting within our children.

Do you remember "The Adventures of Pinocchio"? It's about growing up. A wonderful morality tale. Young Pinocchio, made of wood, wants nothing more than to be a "real boy". But, first he must become "good". And that isn't easy! At one point he meets the "talking cricket", later named "Jiminy Cricket" (by Walt Disney).

The Blue Fairy speaking to Pinocchio: "You must learn to choose between right and wrong."

Pinocchio: "Right and wrong? But how will I know?"

Jiminy Cricket: "How'll he know?"

Blue Fairy: "Your conscience will tell you."

Pinocchio: "What are a conscience?"

Jiminy Cricket: "What are a conscience? I'll tell ya! A conscience is that still, small voice people won't listen to. That's just the trouble with the world today."

Jiminy Cricket becomes Pinocchio's conscience – to guide him “along the straight and narrow path.”

An 18<sup>th</sup> century philosopher talked about the “sense of ought” that is universal. All humans carry this sense of ought it be this way, or not this way.

Conscience needs a cultural vocabulary to reason with, and through. We need to guide our children in the Christian Faith!

Later in I Timothy Paul speaks about a “clear conscience.” In Romans 2:15 Paul referring to non-Jews (those without the Law, Torah), still have a sense of what is morally required, “written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness...”

In Romans 9:1 Paul declares, “I am speaking the truth in Christ, I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit...”

In Acts 23:1 Paul defending himself before the council, “Brethren, I have lived before God in all good conscience up to this day.” And later in Acts 24:15 declared, “So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward God and toward men.”

These are a few of the Biblical texts that uplift the need, the necessity of a good conscience, a good guidance system!

I worry about the families, the children who are not receiving the guidance of faith. We human beings are narrative beings. Stories – teach us much about life, and how it is to be lived. For millennia Judeo-Christian stories have fed, nourished and guided millions upon millions of children. There is a wealth of stories in our bible and in our tradition that provide immense guidance in the living of our lives. From the Genesis story of a good creation, to the story of eating the forbidden fruit, to the story of Israel's deliverance from slavery, to the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and the culmination of renewal and purpose in the future – these and a plethora of others – give guidance on how to live our lives forward!

I am forever thankful and grateful for my mother – who guided me from birth; through love, information, trust, security and yes, even discipline!

Today, we give thanks for faithful and loving mothers.

And also today, consider your inner guidance system, and your contribution to the guidance system of your children, or other children you have an impact on through the days.

Remember – Your Guidance System is right here. Don't neglect it.

Amen.