

Monkey See, Monkey Do

by Nancy Eichman

For most girls, the mother-daughter bond is the first and strongest bond they will experience with another female. The way mothers and daughters interact can impact how they connect with women throughout their lives.

Of all the animals of the jungle, monkeys are some of the most fascinating. For example, if you give a monkey a parasol or a stocking, what will she do? Probably she will open up the parasol and pull on the stocking. She will act just as if she were mimicking a human's

actions. Although psychologists differ on explanations for this behavior, it appears to us to be a case of monkey see, monkey do.¹

Some people act like monkeys! They do just what they see other people do. It does not matter how ridiculous or stupid or evil it is; they just do it. The Bible tells us of a daughter who followed her mother's lead to

commit evil. It was a deadly case of monkey see, monkey do.

An Unhappy Birthday Party

Women today look for unique and unusual entertainment ideas for birthday parties for their families. They might plan a huge surprise or rent a limousine for the night. They might even get a little wild and crazy. But

few stoop to the moral depths that Herodias reached on her husband Herod's birthday (Mark 6:14-29).

Herodias had been married to Philip, Herod's brother, but Herod took Philip's wife for his own. The affair of Herod and Herodias was so well known that John the Baptist boldly denounced them for violating the Jewish Law (Leviticus 18:16; 20:21).²

Herodias did not like John telling her she was living in sin. She wanted to kill John. Herod feared the people's reaction to such an act because they considered John a prophet. Instead Herod threw him into prison. Strangely, although John the Baptist puzzled him, Herod liked to listen to the prophet preach (Matthew 14:3-5; Mark 6:17-20).

Just like a viper, Herodias was ready to strike, and her opportunity finally came. At Herod's birthday party, Salome, the daughter of Herodias and Philip, danced before Herod and his military commanders, high officials, and the leading men of Galilee. Herod was so enthralled with her performance that he promised her up to half the kingdom. Probably he was drunk when he made this offer, for as a vassal of the Roman government, he really did not have the authority to offer her any part of the kingdom.³ But because he had made an oath before such an audience, he had to carry through with her request.

With such an overwhelming offer, Salome asked her mother what she should ask for. Maybe she was too young to decide, or perhaps she just wanted her mother's input. Herodias told her to ask for the head of John the Baptist. Herod, although genuinely distressed at her answer, nevertheless ordered John's head to be brought just as Salome had asked – on a platter, a grisly dish for a birthday feast!

A Mother's Evil Influence

Whether Salome felt constrained

to follow her mother's directive or willingly played a part in her devious plan, she was definitely influenced by Herodias. Her mother's evil influence can be seen in several ways:

- **Marriage.** Salome and Herodias became intricately entangled in the matrimonial web of Herod's family. Historians tell us that Salome married Philip the Tetrarch (a different Philip from her father), who at the same time was her uncle and great uncle! This Philip is mentioned with Herod in Luke 3:1. She followed the course of her mother, Herodias, who first married her uncle Philip and later another uncle (and brother-in-law) Herod! No wonder John the Baptist was so vocal in denouncing this family's relational intrigue!⁴

- **Morality.** Salome discarded all appearance of decency as she danced alone before the men at Herod's party. Such performances were vulgar pantomimes with sexual connotations, usually performed by prostitutes.⁵ Even if Salome was a young girl of 12 or 14, as some commentators suggest, virgins at that age could be married in Jewish Palestine. Certainly, men in the audience were no doubt pleased with what she provided. But Herodias allowed and perhaps even encouraged her own daughter to go in alone to dance!^{6,7}

- **Manipulation.** We do not know how much Salome knew of her mother's hatred for John the Baptist and desire to kill him. But we do know Salome seemed willing to carry out her mother's request. "At once the girl hurried in to the king with the request: 'I want you to give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a platter.' ... an executioner ... presented it to the girl, and she gave it to her mother" (Mark 6:25, 27-28, author's emphasis). If she were younger, it makes it all the more tragic that a young girl could be caught up in her mother's foul scheme.

The Mother-Daughter Relationship

Herodias and Salome vividly demonstrate how our mothers and mother figures can influence us as daughters. Whether she was a young girl or young adult, Salome was shaped by her mother's wicked actions and words. Salome learned about aggression and cruelty firsthand from her mother. We can only imagine how much Herodias affected her daughter for evil during her lifetime. Mothers (and later sisters, if we have them) teach us many lessons on relating to other women. Speaking of mothers and sisters, author Susan Shapiro Barash points out: "They teach us to envy and compete, to support and nurture, or a bit of both. And whether we embrace or reject their lessons, we often spend a lifetime coming to terms with them."⁸

For most girls, the mother-daughter bond is the first and strongest bond they will experience with another female.⁹ This is a loaded relationship. It can be full of complicated and conflicting feelings of love, resentment, worry, need, anger and envy.¹⁰ This relationship can make a tremendous difference in how the daughter relates to other girls and how she sees herself. The way mothers and daughters interact can impact how they connect with women throughout their lives.¹¹

Striking a Balance

Seeing how strong that initial mother-daughter bond can be, it is sad to see that some women today feel they must emotionally pull away and stay away from their mothers. They think they have to permanently break away to be independent and strong. Afterward these daughters find they miss the support their mothers could provide.¹² Our mothers may untie the apron strings, but it does not mean we cannot come back and visit the kitchen!

Fortunately, many women are seeing that they need to develop closer-knit relationships with their mothers and daughters. They are discovering that they need each other, even after daughters become adults and leave home. The key to such a relationship is a balance in independence between smothering each other in over-attachment and abandoning one another in total separation. Daughters can feel stronger because of their mothers' support. Mothers can be there for their daughters without being made to feel they are intruding.¹³ Each can find real blessings through their bond together.

Cementing the Bond

In our busy lifestyles, making time to strengthen our mother-daughter bonds is not easy, but there are some ways we can try:

• **Find ways to connect.** Whether we are out of town or out of touch, we need to discover activities of interest that we can enjoy together. We

could take in a movie or enjoy an afternoon of shopping. Time spent traveling in the car provides precious opportunities to talk. Eating out together provides just-the-two-of-us time that we do not always have with the family at home. Who doesn't love a funny or sentimental card or goodies delivered to her door? Even with the convenience of technology, an aged mother still enjoys getting "snail mail" in the mailbox from her adult daughter. Above all, we can be generous with hugs to let her know she is loved!¹⁴

• **Mend the rifts.** At times mothers and daughters have misunderstandings. Sometimes teenage daughters want to push their mothers away at a crucial time in their lives. Sometimes mothers are hypercritical of their adult daughters. Pray that we can keep talking even when we do not always agree and keep involved in each other's lives even when we resist. If there is a rift between us, we need to try to talk about the problem.

Sometimes a letter between a mother and daughter can offer an effective way to communicate if face-to-face conversation is difficult. We need to be humble and willing to forgive, as well as ask forgiveness for any wrongdoing on our part (Ephesians 4:32).

• **Make her a priority.** Author Mary Farrar reflects on the special relationship she had with her own mother:

"We often talked for hours, debating and discussing the issues of life. She was always honest, open, and willing to listen at the drop of a hat. She mentored me by listening as often to my heart as to my words. I never went through a struggle that Mom did not sense it and offer wise input and encouragement. Most importantly, Mom mentored me by living in the Scriptures herself. ... When life was unclear, Mom always seemed to know where to go in Scriptures to meet and address my needs. She had a firm grip of the teachings of Scripture when I most needed to hear them."¹⁵

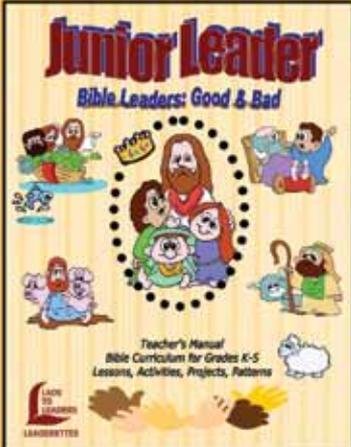
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What an incredible impact that mother made on her daughter! This mother-daughter relationship seems rare but certainly worth striving for. This daughter's life will always bear the loving imprint of her mother's touch and guidance because her mother made her a priority.

Although we are all daughters, we might not be blessed with such a loving relationship with our mother. In fact, a close bond might not even be possible. But God calls us to make the best of that relationship. Sometimes we will have to be the one to take the first step to make it better. One thing is certain – we will never know the richness of relationship we could enjoy until we try.

What Will They See?

Many of us have opportunities to be a mother to young girls who do not have a mother in their lives. You might be the mother figure whom they could look up to. It might be a neighborhood child or a teen in your class. It could be one of the girls on your team or in your troop. Always be aware that young eyes are looking to you as an example. In a real sense, monkey see, monkey do!

Nothing speaks louder than our lives. What are we modeling to those younger girls who will imitate what we do? Do they overhear us bad-mouth someone in private and then treat her sweetly to her face? Do they catch us rolling our eyes when we see someone dress differently than we do? Do they hear us whispering when we see a woman who has a bad reputation walk by? Do they hear us say we are not angry after a conflict when we are visibly upset?

Genuine behavior starts with us as Christian ladies. If we are phony, we will eventually show up like a counterfeit dollar. We need to strive toward an authentic life as we relate to other women. Only then can younger women see the best of what real relationships between women can be.

Let's ask ourselves: How are we

as mothers and/or mother figures touching the young ladies in our sphere? What kind of examples are we demonstrating in getting along with other women? Are we demonstrating how to cultivate genuine friendships with others? What can we do to show them how to create healthy female relationships?

Whether we are a mother or a daughter or mother figure, we just need to begin. We can make an eternal difference in each other's lives – one relationship at a time. □

Nancy Eichman is the author of The Road to Forgiveness and Seasoning Your Words, both published by the Gospel Advocate. Her new book is titled Getting Along: Exploring the Jungle of Women's Relationships. It will be available this spring.

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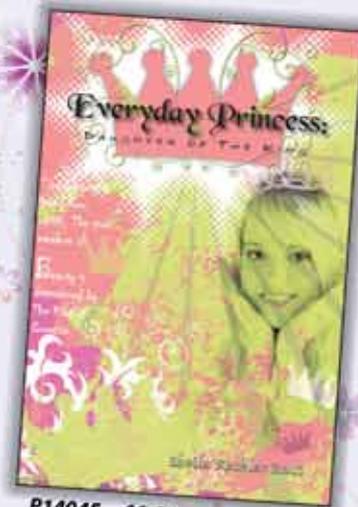
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