

5/12/2019

Today's a very special day set aside for honoring all the women in our lives who God used to help us know love. We all have stories of special women who shape our lives in difference making ways! What special women are you remembering today? Are there women from this church you remember? I've heard stories of Gerry Scherer, Gloria Mason and Betty Feely. I was personally impacted by Alice Rowe, Gen Hall, and the Linda's: Linda Wolven and Linda Dulian. Who else? Because today's Mother's Day, I wanna share a couple stories of women in my life who I'm remembering. We had only 13 short years mom and me: but, something my mom said has stuck with me. Like part of my DNA it's guided my life. A mantra I've tried my best to live because I'd betray her if I didn't. She always said: Cheri, you can learn something from EVERYONE. YES EVERYONE. That mantra's partly responsible for my 1st career in Speech/ Language Pathology. I learned so much helping young children with special needs communicate. That mantra's part of God calling me to ministry, my 2<sup>nd</sup> career. Doesn't Jesus show us how to learn something from EVERYONE? Fond are my memories of cooking, gardening, sewing, and cleaning with mom. Because we farmed and gardened; we practically lived in the kitchen. Think that's why I love to cook with our kids when they're home. Every spring mom turned our house upside down. We slept on mattresses on the floor! Spring cleaning! Every room! The kitchen got a fresh coat of paint every Spring. So much so the kitchen got smaller every year. She also made me new Christmas and Easter dresses every year. Mom fussed to find just the right figure-flattering pattern (always been on the chubby side!) We'd go to the fabric store. She'd almost always overrule my fabric choice. I'd leave upset; but, looking back, I always ended up with a dress I loved! (Pink) Good thing, mom had the last word. She didn't do it to be mean or controlling; she did it out of love and devotion! She wanted me to be my absolute best and learn something from everyone. My mom wanted to be a nurse but got married and had the 3 of us instead. Knowing she wanted to go to college but didn't and losing her at such a young age; motivated me. Her suffering and death rocked me to my core! Totally disrupted my sense of security but drove me to go to college. To secure a good career to support myself. Today, I'm also remembering my grandma! Grandma was grace! Grandma went to seamstress school instead of High School. She operated a sewing and alterations business from her home. I spent lots of time at Grandma's. Always customers dropping off and picking up their garments. Most transactions ended at my Grandma's dining room table over a cup of coffee. Grandma patiently listened to her customers. Sometimes it'd be a family difficulty shared. Sometimes a family celebration. Some of her customer's appeared poor, some wealthy. Grandma listened just the same. She'd acknowledged their feelings with compassionate comments, waiting til they finished to say some wise, supportive, caring comment. Our daughter Emily's just like her. Looking back, I wonder if her sewing business success had as much if not more to do with her expert listening than her expert sewing skills. Grandma listened with love. Her love lives in me. My 89 year-young, Aunt Mary Cheryl's just full of grace! Her faith's so strong she doesn't have to say a word. Being around her is calming. Her every word is a wisdom that can only come from God. I also remember my Sunday School teacher, Elsie Houck. She gave me so much more than my first Bible. All this to say; God blesses us with so many faithful women role models. I wanna share another story. It's a true story about a young, faithfully devoted mom. Her story's told by the young mom's nurse, Nan.

Nurse Nan met Rebekah when Rebekah was admitted for cancer treatment. Rebekah was 32! She had breast cancer and needed chemotherapy. Nan said, "When I introduced myself as Nurse Nan, Rebekah's eyes sparkled with a warm love. She introduced me to her husband, Warren, and their 3 daughters: Ruthie, 6, Hannah, 4; and, Molly age 2. Rebekah unpacked while I filled out forms. She unpacked her grandmother's comforter, a cheery poster from her church women's circle, a family picture and a very well-worn Bible. By then it was time for her family to leave for the airport to pick up her Grandma. I explained; "I need to start your IV in your arm." Rebekah's voice shook. Her eyes filled with tears. "I'll do anything to get well for my husband and my girls. I'll throw up. I'll lose my hair. I'll be tired; but, I'm absolutely terrified of needles." I said; "Cry, it's OK, just please don't move. On the count of three, 1, 2, 3 and I smoothly slid the needle into her vein. I could hear Rebekah whispering "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." Her IV successfully inserted, Rebekah looked at me and asked, "What's your favorite Bible verse?" I immediately answered: "John chapter 11 verse 35." "Jesus wept." She said: "That's sad and short." "I explained how the verse comforts me. I know Jesus feels sad for the sick people I treat. I also know only Jesus can heal them. And, sometimes that healing means sadness. But, I know Jesus supports me in the sad times so I can support my patients." Rebekah was quiet. I could tell she was thinking about what I'd said. For the next 18 months, I saw Rebekah regularly for chemotherapy. She needed radiation, too. Sadly, her chest X-ray showed the cancer had spread. Our arsenal had no more chemical weapons to fight her cancer. She was dying! That was a hard day. I walked into Rebekah's room. There were papers and cassette tapes everywhere, and a tape recorder. She said, "Nan, I'm making tapes for my daughters. They're going to grow up without me. I want them to know how I feel about them. I want to give them advise for important times. I don't want them to forget me. Have any suggestions?" I looked over her list — their first day of school, confirmation, turning sweet 16, their first date, graduation, their wedding. She let me listen to parts of the tapes. Even though she was very weak, Rebekah's devoted love filled those tapes. Finally, one day Rebekah told her daughters about the tapes! She told them she was going to die. She told them she would live with God in heaven. And, she promised to help God prepare a place for them to be together again when they were very old. We all knew the end was near. That night, I went home after my shift only to be surprised by a frantic phone call. It was Rebekah's night nurse. Rebekah was begging me to come back with one more blank tape. I couldn't imagine what she'd forgotten. As I entered Rebekah's room, I noticed her breathing. She very anxiously gasped, "Nan, tape?" I assured her I had it; and, I very quickly set up the recorder with the microphone close to her mouth. Rebekah whispered, "Ruthie, Hannah, and Molly, some day daddy will bring home a new mommy. I want you to make your new mommy feel very special. Please make me proud. Show her how kind, and patient you are. Help her learn how to take care of you. Help her set the table. Bring her dandelion and violet bouquets, too — but, most important, give her lots of hugs; and the last thing I want to tell you is: even 'Jesus cried.' He knows you're sad. He also knows you'll be happy again. I love you so much, Hannah, Ruthie, and Molly. Big hugs! Lots of love, Your 1<sup>st</sup> mommy." I turned off the tape player. Rebekah thanked me. We hugged. I knew my job was done and so was hers. Two hours later; she died. The mom in the video, the women in my life; the young mom with breast cancer, the very special women of this church

and all the women you're remembering today. What do they all have in common? It's not that they're all happy, joyful stories. Some are very hard, difficult stories. Some stories are stories of struggle and heartache. BUT, what they all have in common is LOVE real, unconditional love. We honor them for that faithful love and devotion that creates for us this strong sense of security NOT dependent on our circumstances, good, bad or otherwise. True unconditional love. The kind only Jesus can inspire. Unconditional, sacrificial love! It's a love that never leaves you. Real, unconditional love is this warm sense of security in life, in death even after they die! Love's why Jesus said, "If you love me, you'll keep my commandments." Jesus understands that love's the reason we keep his commands! Children obey your parents. Love your parents. Honor your father and mother. Jesus didn't say this to be mean or controlling! He's not twisting our arm or guilting us into who God created us to be. He said what he said with a sense of conviction and expectation. "If you love me; then you'll love. Then you'll honor your father and mother so that it may go well with you and you may enjoy long life on the earth." That's why we're honoring God for our very special women who live to love like Jesus! Yes, we're focused on the women in our lives; but love's the key to being a good person. Love's the power that heals all wounds, binds people together, and creates beautiful relationships. My friends, in our life and in our death, what will be remembered is our love! And, Church is the place we grow in God's love. Every activity of this church needs to help us know love. Shouldn't that be THIS church's priority alpha? So, what's real, unconditional love look like? Sometimes it helps to know what real love isn't. "Unconditional love" can't be bought. It doesn't owe anyone anything. It doesn't have to be proven. It's not selfish. It's not expecting anyone to do exactly what we want. Unconditional love doesn't play games by withholding love, attention or affection to get what we want. It's not "enabling." It doesn't let someone walk all over us, discount us or abuse us. Unconditional love's rare. We're conditioned to be conditional, to expect something in return. We're conditioned to love only when our love's been reciprocated. Unconditional love's NOT a decision about who's worthy and who isn't. Unconditional love's not a loan of love needing to be repaid. Unconditional love's a string-less gift of our heart, vulnerably extending ourselves into uncharted emotional territory. We go there believing regardless of the outcome, we want others to benefit. It's pure, selfless emotional generosity that sets aside our ego and expectations. So, it's not always easy or comfortable especially when people make poor choices or try to sabotage our happiness. It's really hard to love someone who's hurt us or addicted. In those situations, unconditional love sets a boundary that says no more. Love speaks their reality. Love protects ourselves and them from the harm they inflict on themselves and us. "Unconditional love" is never a reason to stay in an unhealthy relationship. Healthy boundaries are essential. Unconditional love loves regardless of their circumstances, but not regardless of how they treat us. Unconditional love speaks the truth with gentle kindness, helping them to see the pain they're causing. We can only love unconditionally from a place of knowing we're loved, respected and valued. That God's beautifully and wonderfully made us. Unconditional love forgives. Ever been wronged, neglected or taken advantage without an apology? The most loving thing we can do is to choose to let go of the anger and resentment. Harboring negative energy hurts our spirits and our bodies. But, KNOW THIS forgiveness never allows the perpetrator to continue to hurt us.

Unconditional love sets a boundary so it doesn't happen again. It just chooses to consciously to let go of the negativity so true healing can happen. So, how will we know if we've found it? Here's how you know unconditional love! Unconditional love admits mistakes. Unconditional forgives freely and actively pursues restitution to rebuild trust. Unconditional love doesn't pick petty fights or hold grudges. Even when arguing, love respects other's opinions. Love seeks healthy resolutions. Love calms our fears. Unconditional love tells another the truth — even when it's uncomfortable because we're our real selves. Unconditional loves sees the best in us and celebrates our successes. Unconditional love sets us free to pursue our passion. It risks because we know we're in each other's corners. We feel safe. We feel "at home" when we're loved unconditionally. Unconditional love respects even when we disagree because healthy communication and compromise is valued. Unconditional love extends extra patience especially through rough times. Unconditional love doesn't shield us from pain. Instead, it supports and helps us through the pain because we know we're in life together for the long haul, growing old together no matter what the future holds. Unconditional love is this incredible sense of being valued, an unforgettable treasure. My friends, our world needs men, women and children who love unconditionally. Doing our best to learn something from everyone and love unconditionally: at HOME, at CHURCH, SCHOOL, WORK and in our community COMMUNITY! CREATING more places where faithful love is known so all will feel secure. I'm challenging us as a church to build unconditionally loving, secure environments. To love selflessly with an "other's oriented outlook" just like all the special women we're remembering today. God used their faithful, devoted love to create safe, secure environments. Could God use our faithful devoted love to create safe, secure homes, churches, schools and workplaces? O, that we could be so faithful, so loving, so devoted so filled with God's grace; that it would overflow into our community. Into ALL the places of pressure, stress, pain, heartache and difficulty! We need spaces and places that are safe and secure! In a world filled with hateful violence we need places of unconditional love! The best gifts we can give our world is the same gift God and the very special women in our lives give us. Unconditional love! It is the security of warm love, of a devoted faith. My friends, yes, today's focused on women; but no matter what sex we are; life really is all about unconditional love! Love always leaves a lasting impression! Love's remembered! Let's be strong faithful men and women who show God's faithful love that helps our everyone, especially our children know the very truest love and security found only in a relationship with Jesus. I wonder? In what ways can we be that faithful and unconditionally loving?