

Voices: Grandma: The mentor whose leadership I follow

February 2, 2021

During Black History Month, we observe and pay homage to African Americans who have made an impact and left an indelible print in the hearts and minds of many.

While I look forward to this month coming, there also is sadness in watching it leave. Sadness, because one month simply is not enough time to appreciate the achievements and accolades of the Black community.

Many Februarys will come and go, but my applause can never be silenced, or my excitement extinguished. Many names will be mentioned in the media this February—some who still are with us, and many who stand on the balcony of heaven.

I would like to celebrate a woman who was not famous by any means. She was not a television star, but was known all over Central Texas and beyond. She completed the sixth grade, but was well educated. She did not have a seminary degree, but knew God and *the one way* to get to him.

She was a queen who never needed to wear a crown, because she had the respect of many regardless of race. Many called her, “Big Mama,” but I called her “Grandma.”

Isabella Gage Tarver Meshack

Isabella Gage Tarver Meshack was my maternal grandmother. Actually, my mother was her oldest child.

Grandma folded up her tent on July 1, 2015, at the age of 103. She was not

sick; she just fell asleep after speaking with family and eating dinner at the hospital where she was admitted two days earlier for observation.

This centenarian was an independent woman until her last few years on Earth. How many 100-year-olds do you find baking tea cakes for the neighborhood kids and cakes for the birthdays of five generations?

Her first visit to a hospital was when she was diagnosed with breast cancer at the age of 81. According to her, the lump she had was first noticed in the 1970s. She attributed her longevity to daily prayer, never getting in a hurry, eating a balanced diet, and getting the proper rest.

Grandma was a domestic worker for many years in my hometown of Bastrop. The fondest memory I have is waiting at homes of affluence until she completed her tasks for the day.

Grandma was a mentor

Grandma was good at mentoring. When I say she was a mentor, she was a mentor. She led by example and never did anything to harm those who followed in her footsteps. She was a sermon many saw; sometimes, she used words.

Christianity was not an unusual word to her. She read her Bible daily and explained what she read after observation and interpretation of the text.

My leadership as a pastor and in general is a result of her unceasing prayers and encouragement. Of course, I come from a praying family where I had a praying mother and father, but I also had a praying grandmother. Like Timothy's grandmother Lois, Grandma's faith was sincere.

Grandma had a dream during the time I was wrestling with answering my call into the ministry. I was at the tender age of 11 in 1987. I started pastoring six months after my high school graduation in 1993, and

currently am serving in my third pastorate.

Grandma would remind me never to forget where I come from and what I have been taught in life. She also said there was more to learn and to make her proud by being the man God called me to be.

She would say: “Eric, be honest while you lead, be strong as you are leading, and remember you are not Superman. People will follow you when you follow God, and it is OK not to be right all the time.”

Honoring my grandmother

While I can’t share everything about my beloved grandmother’s impact on my leadership, I will say you don’t have to be famous to be acknowledged and recognized, especially by God.

It was not my desire, but my honor, to stand and preach Grandma’s funeral a week after the Lord called her from labor to reward. During the preaching moment, I mentioned the lives she touched and her many sayings I use to this day. I definitely mentioned her labor and love for God.

“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.”

“Blessed indeed,” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!” (Revelation 14:13 ESV)

NOTE: Photo provided by Meshack family friend Dock Jackson.

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