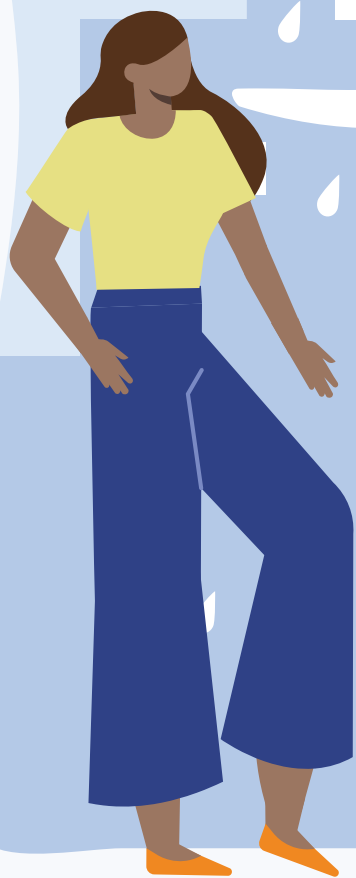


A Single Testimony Changes Generations

By Natasha Sistrunk Robinson



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It is true, we become like what we see. Growing up, what I saw was my mother, Sallie. She worked hard and gave everything she could so my sister and I had opportunities to thrive. She served in the church and in the community. She loved family and was always

hospitable to strangers. She was a humble woman who led—a woman of influence.

When she married the strong man who raised me, she made him believe that his contributions in this life were

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valuable. He was an ever-present father, and together they started a business. He labored earnestly and built his team. She was the keeper of the books and office administrator. They cooked and cleaned and did yard work together. Sometimes he braided my hair. They welcomed another child into our home, this time a son. As our family and business grew, so did my mother's faith. She was like Lydia—when she committed her life to Jesus (I mean *really* committed her life) she took the whole family with her. Sallie and her household were baptized. There we stood at the pulpit in our swim caps, white robes, and new Bibles with my mother sanctifying our home.

Because my mother was committed to serving and was free to do so, nonvoters were registered, students were taught, young people remained in college, girls walked away from bad situations, families stayed together, friends found comfort, and expectations were raised. She did not have the best pitch, but she sang on the church choir to make a joyful noise unto the Lord. "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine!" she used to sing. My pastor wanted to know when she was going to get her minister's license. We all saw the light.

This woman was liberated in her spirit and in her mind, and all who knew her were better for it. I was twenty years old when she went home to glory, but there are certain things I will never forget. I will not forget

that this woman knew exactly who she was and was unwavering in living out that calling in her life. She was not a flawless woman. Like the rest of us, she was broken and had cracks. In her final years, I watched intently as Christ and the church refined those broken spaces.

I will not forget that her very presence was valued and her identity affirmed by the men in our lives. I first observed this when she cared for her father as his mind and body deteriorated. Then I bore witness to it as she partnered with my father in their business and in our home, even when things were not going well, when they were sick, and when the business failed. If you ask him today, my father will tell you that there isn't another woman like my mother and he is a better man because of her. He remains unmarried. Male teachers, counselors, community leaders, politicians, and pastors all spoke well of her.

I am my mother's daughter, an African American woman from South Carolina who loves the Lord and his church. I am a leader, learner, teacher, servant, advocate, wife, mother, and friend. It is my prayer that I continue to grow in wisdom, discernment, and boldness about the calling, ministry, and work God has assigned me. By God's grace, I will continue in faithfulness so people will see my good work and glorify my Father in heaven.

There was a time in my adult life when well-meaning Christians wanted to close my mind to the possibilities of what women could do to advance the kingdom of God. Some of my white sisters led me to believe that my most important contributions would be inside my home and to my family, and everything else was less important work. For a couple years, I struggled to understand my identity, purpose, and calling as a woman, wife, and mother serving on active duty as an officer in the US Marine Corps. Were my service to my country and my work raising up future world leaders less important than my commitments to my family?

I grew tired of the gender debates within the church; debates don't always win people over. I decided to stop

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comparing myself to the choices and expectations of other women and their spouses. Most of those women did not have the same work assignments as I did. Finding my way through the fears and uncertainties led to personal acceptance. The affirmation of my spiritual gift of leadership meant coming back home to my foundation.

My foundation was in the arms, on the lap, through the voice, and at the hand of a woman—my mother—who transformed lives, churches, and communities because she daily joined in the work God was doing. I watched as women and men partnered with her on the journey. I came back to the reality and testimony of Jesus. In Christ, we have been made new. He has come to proclaim freedom for prisoners and to release the oppressed. In Christ, I am free. Together, we overcome by the blood of the Lamb and through the power of the testimony of changed lives.

The gender debate, like most other debates, is won through powerful witness and the testimony of a single life. I am Natasha Sistrunk Robinson, one who is created in the image of Yahweh and in the image of Sallie. I am mother of Ashley, a fearless and free girl who will praise God, silence the enemy's voice and schemes, proclaim the gospel to her generation, and have the work of her hands forever attached to the gospel. She will walk in the spirit of Mary of Bethany; her grandma, Sallie; and me; for these are my prayers for her. My prayer is that she will fulfill her mission in unity and missional partnership with her sisters and brothers everywhere who have a "not my will, but thine be done" attitude of submission to God.

The powerful proclamation of the gospel lived out and the testimony of lives changed through the blood is how chains are broken from generation to generation. This is how the church continues to reform herself. This is how we are all transforming, growing, and changing until he returns or calls us home. This is how we honor the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This is how we honor the God of Sallie, Natasha, and Ashley.



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