

Mothers' Encouragement Group
May 24, 2018
Plant Them and Let Them Grow #12
You shall not bear false testimony against your neighbor
You shall not covet

Deuteronomy 6:20-25: "When your son asks you in time to come, 'What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the rules that the LORD our God has commanded you?' then you shall say to your son, 'We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt. And the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. And the LORD showed signs and wonders, great and grievous, against Egypt and against Pharaoh and all his household, before our eyes. And he brought us out from there, that he might bring us in and give us the land that he swore to give to our fathers. And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as we are this day. And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us.'"

This is the business of what we are about; this is the work we are given to do as parents: we are not only to be learning ourselves how we should be obeying the Lord more and more carefully and thoughtfully as we live but we are to be teaching our children, drawing them into our own lives, into our own hearts, as we are drawn into our Lord and Savior's life and heart. We are to be talking to them, rewarding them, punishing them, disciplining them, teaching them, loving them, living before them **"when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise."** Dt. 6:7 God's law is to permeate your own thinking so much so that you cannot make a single decision—about anything at all in your life, whether it is how you spend your time, what you're going to wear, where you're going to go, who you're going to interact with—without relating that decision to what the Lord would think about it. And when your children see you "thinking out loud," so to speak, and ask you why, you are to tell them something like what the Israelites were to tell their children: what happened in Israel's physical history is what has happened in our spiritual history; we were lost, we were slaves, we were miserable, we had no helper, no ally, no power, no joy and no way to get out of the mess we were in *and then the Lord intervened*.

Picture a dead body and imagine that picture when you hear Paul say this in **Ephesians 2:1-2: "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air..."** A dead body, in its very nature cannot *do anything or know anything!!* I remember when my father died I was not with him but came soon after to see him and to be at his funeral. Irrationally, I said to myself, "I will touch him one more time and say 'good-bye;' we'll have one more moment together and then I can let him go." But of course when I touched him, he was cold and unresponsive—there was no "together" about it! He was gone and I could not make him know that I was there. As odd as it may sound, it was a shock. **"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ..." Ephesians 2:4-5** Israel's "Egypt" is our sin, our deadness, the mess, if we are honest with ourselves, that is in our hearts from which God saved, and is saving, us "with a mighty hand" in order to love, to bless, to give us life and happiness. This is the GREAT THING that we

need to understand about ourselves and what needs to be in our minds and in our mouths all the time; it not only needs to be the content of what we say to our children but it needs to be the flavor and the grace with which we tell them anything at all. This is high and holy business, and it is desperate! We are we to obey God's law—which is, after all, an expression of love—love for God and love for each other—**“that he might preserve us alive,” “that it may go well with us,”** that we might be happy and holy, that we **“might live long lives and prosper.”**

Keeping the law is not meant to be burdensome but a blessing; it is only our own deep sin and a sign that Satan has done his work well that makes us feel that God's commandments and His demand of obedience are unreasonable. Let us keep reminding ourselves, reorienting our thinking around the truth every day and all the time. This is one reason of many why a Christian needs to be in church every week; it is like a chiropractic adjustment to one's body to be weekly renewing our covenant with our Lord, remembering who we were, who we are, who He is and what He has done and is doing for us—and will do until we are safely home, where He is.

In other words, we are to be reminding ourselves of *the truth*: telling the truth with our mouths: the ninth commandment:

IX. You shall not bear false testimony against your neighbor.

The **Westminster Shorter Catechism** says: “The ninth commandment requires the maintaining and promoting of truth between man and man, and of our own and our neighbor's good name, especially in witness-bearing.” And, “The ninth commandment forbids whatsoever is prejudicial to truth, or injurious to our own or our neighbor's good name.” These proof texts are given to show us that this is a subject close to our Lord's heart:

Zechariah 8:16: “These are the things that you shall do: Speak the truth to one another...”

Proverbs 6:16-19: “There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers.”

Psalms 15:3: “O Lord, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill? He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart; who does not slander with his tongue and does no evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his friend.”

These texts are part of the grand tutorial from God about how we are to love one another. We all know what power there is in the words that come out of our mouths—power both to bless and power to destroy, to lift up and to tear down, to speak truth and to deceive. We tell our children, “tell me the truth and it will go better for you; it is one thing to disobey but quite another to disobey and then to lie about it.” Why do we say this to them? Because lying breaks trust between parent and child; between brother and sister; between friend and friend. If once there has been a lie between friends, the next time there is communication between you you're going to wonder, “now is he telling me the truth? Does he really mean

what he is saying? Can I trust him to tell me what he really thinks?” and you know, within your own heart, that you begin to remove your true self from that relationship, wondering whether or not you can be “safe” again, whether that friend will love you back the way you once loved each other. The lie has destroyed the trust, the security that was once your friendship. Lying also moves us further away from where the Lord lives, from who He is and who He wants us to be. God is nothing if He is not all about truth; He is the *author* of truth. The Devil—God’s enemy—is called “the father of lies,” “the great deceiver,” and he has been at the work of trying to get us all to believe that his lies are true ever since that fateful day in the Garden of Eden when Eve believed that very first one and Adam didn’t bother to correct her. There is beauty in truth that Satan hates, that he is trying to destroy and in the end the choice for us is simple: who are we going to believe, God or Satan?

The Bible is chock-full of the Lord’s pleading with us to hear HIS voice and not to believe what Satan is constantly whispering in our ears. **Jeremiah 4** is one long pleading of the Lord, promising His people blessing if they would turn back to Him, urging them to avoid the disaster of His punishment until finally He says: **“For my people are foolish; they know me not; they are stupid children; they have no understanding. They are ‘wise’—in doing evil! But how to do good they know not.” Vs 22.** Hear what **Jeremiah** was sent to say in chapter 6: **“Flee for safety, O people of Benjamin, from the midst of Jerusalem!...for disaster looms out of the north...for I will stretch out my hand against the inhabitants of the land...for from the least to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for unjust gain; and from prophet to priest, everyone deals falsely. They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, ‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace.” Jeremiah 6: portions of vss 1-14** If that isn’t Satan’s lie I don’t know what is—he uses prophets and priests to tell the people that all is well when the Lord is trying to rouse them, to wake them up, to respond to Him before disaster overtakes them. Reading the whole passage gives us an indication of how passionately the Lord hates lying, selfishness, putting ourselves forward, trying to get ahead of someone else, shifting blame, making the word of the Lord **“an object of scorn,” “taking no pleasure in it.” vs.10** But then we hear the Lord pleading, **“Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls.” Vs.16** Our God does not want us to disobey, to believe the lies Satan is trying to make us accept, because He wants us to be happy, that we might have life and that “more abundantly.” He does not want us, or our children, to go peacefully, blithely through our lives, sliding straight into Hell.

So let’s talk about the business of telling the truth and of “preserving our neighbor’s good name.” **James** tells us just how difficult it is to bridle our tongue: **“How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of god. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.” James 3:5-12** Girls, I have to say that I

believe women—generally speaking—have a greater trouble with this than men do. Who is it, usually, that spreads gossip in a congregation? I doubt it's the men. Perhaps this comes from our love of details; it may come from our good, nurturing instinct gone awry—after all, we're just trying to figure out *what's wrong with whatever it is so we can help fix it!* It may come also from feeling powerless in and upset about a particular situation and want to make ourselves feel better by tearing someone else down or “spreading around the ‘joy’.”

The internet world is a particularly easy place to tear others down because the words go out into space, to no one in particular, not having to look anyone in the eye. Of course it can be a place of blessing too, depending on what kind of “tree,” what kind of “pond,” the person is who is writing. We have read many blog entries in this very room that blessed and edified us, spurred us on to doing good but there have been others that have done the Lord's Church much damage. During the time when the Federal Vision controversy was raging in the PCA at its height many men were telling my husband about this blog or that one which was highly critical of him. I happened to see one that used portions of his own speech, taken out of context, to make him look ridiculous. I, of course, was mad, hurt and offended. Rob has made it a policy never to look at blogs *in order to keep his own heart* free from rancor and he advised me to do the same. You may remember the trial we had in our presbytery over this matter and my husband was the defense attorney—he would have made an amazing lawyer! Others wondered aloud why we hadn't had more trials through the years to clarify issues, defend certain convictions of this one or that one—seems like a good idea when what we're after is the truth. But when it was over and all was said and done Rob realized why trials are not good for the church: things are said and done in a trial *in order to win* the point—things that would never be said to a brother in an ordinary conversation, pointing out his inconsistencies, showing him the weakness in his thinking, even pointing out sinful attitudes. Once said, trial or not, these things cannot be unsaid and try as you might those relationships will never be the same.

Paul tells us in **I Timothy 3:11** the qualifications of officers in the church, mentioning that **“Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things.”** And why do you suppose Paul addresses wives specifically unless he knew there was a particular penchant for women to stir things up. When Rob & I first arrived in Tacoma there was a particular woman in the, then very small, congregation who was on the phone every day talking to this one and that one about this or that in someone else's life, spreading information that wasn't hers to spread, criticizing this decision or that which the elders were making and generally stirring up ill-will and unhappiness among the women of the congregation. I really don't think she *intended* to stir up ill-will and I think she may have been truly worried about things, not trusting those who were placed in authority over her and needed to find comfort in expressing that worry to others. There weren't that many women here in those days but, my, what a lot of trouble they made! Rob actually had to call her into his office, because he had heard complaints from so many, to tell her to stop calling people on the phone! When she and her husband left for another church it was amazing how peaceful things became.

Jeremiah again: “Oh that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!...They bend their tongue like a bow; falsehood and not truth has grown strong in the land; for they proceed from evil to evil, and they do not know me, declares the Lord. Let everyone beware of his neighbor, and put no trust in any brother, for every brother is a deceiver, and every neighbor

goes about as a slanderer...no one speaks the truth...heaping...deceit upon deceit, they refuse to know me, declares the LORD. Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Behold, I will refine them and test them, for what else can I do, because of my people? Their tongue is a deadly arrow; it speaks deceitfully; with his mouth each speaks peace to his neighbor, but in his heart he plans an ambush for him. Shall I not punish them for these things?' declares the LORD..." chapter 9:1-9 Again, we hear the Lord's anguish over this sin of not telling the truth, concealing what is really in our hearts and of wanting to make ourselves more powerful and important than another.

So when we are thinking about sharing information we have about someone else with others—perhaps under the guise of it being a “prayer request!”—after all, we need to be able to “pray intelligently!”—ask yourself these questions: First, is it TRUE? Do you know it firsthand or have you heard it from someone else? Have you stopped to find out whether it's true or not or is it something you cannot find out? Second, is it KIND? Is it a loving compliment, something that will build up that person's reputation or something that will pull it down? And third, is it really NECESSARY for you to be the one to pass this information on? What good will it do—is there good that it could do or are you just wanting to be the one who has the power to tell it? **Proverbs 11:9, 12-13: “With his mouth the godless man would destroy his neighbor, but by knowledge the righteous are delivered....Whoever belittles his neighbor lacks sense, but a man of understanding remains silent. Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets, but he who is trustworthy in spirit keeps a thing covered.”**

God has given us a way to live without cruelty to one another even after the believing of Satan's lies plunged us into hateful sin. The tongue can be choice silver and with our believing in the Lord's truth, trusting in the work of His saving love, we can, in submitting ourselves to Him have that lovely Spirit's influence on our tongues. **Proverbs 10:19-21 “When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent. The tongue of the righteous is choice silver; the heart of the wicked is of little worth. The lips of the righteous feed many....”** I know some women whose tongues are “choice silver”—one in particular comes to mind as one who is always complimenting others, making appreciative comments and making them in clever and unusual ways so that when you hear her comments it not only makes you feel really good inside but you know that she has thought about what she is saying, thought about that person, and *really believes* the compliment she is giving! She is loving that person with her mouth. I get a lift when I hear her speak, though sometimes I admit to feeling rebuked that I did not think to say such things. This woman's speech is always loving even when there does not appear to be much in the way of loving material! Her tongue is “choice silver.” I want to be like her!

Remember the passage from **Jeremiah 4** where the Lord calls His people “stupid children?” This is something we need to remember about our children: *they are stupid!* They were born that way, every single one of them, and it is up to us to teach them, well, *everything!* AND while we remember this very important thing about them, *at the very same* time we need to be treating them with the utmost seriousness, that is, with truth; this is the “flavor” with which we speak to them, if you will, and it reflects the truth that they are persons with just as much value to the Lord as anyone else. They are not objects to be laughed at or even to be admired because they are so darn cute! Of course they need to learn to laugh at themselves—

we also need that skill!—but they ought *never* to be teased insensitively in moments when they are vulnerable and not able to understand, appreciate or participate in the joke.

Mrs. Schaeffer has said that breaking, or keeping, the commandments is like playing a game of *Pick Up Sticks*: it is very difficult to pick one up without moving all the others. So it is with the commandments; they are so intertwined that to break one is to break them all; to truly keep one is to keep them all. We might also add, by the way, that *Pick Up Sticks* is a game that requires great honesty—to admit that one has moved a stick when no one else saw it move is to develop an admirable trait! My husband reminds me that golf is called “the gentlemen’s game” since one must report that his ball has moved when no one else is there to see whether or not it has. When we report such things about ourselves we are putting others first, before ourselves. We need to be clever in thinking of ways to teach our children this principle, teaching them what is truth and what is not; what is play and what is real *and* that the truth not only *always exists* (since God *always* exists) but is *always* to be respected and desired.

The tenth commandment: **X. You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.**

Westminster Shorter Catechism: “The tenth commandment requires full contentment with our own condition, with a right and charitable frame of spirit toward our neighbor, and all that is his.” “The tenth commandment forbids all discontentment with our own estate, envying or grieving at the good of our neighbor, and all inordinate motions and affections to anything that is his.”

This sin happens inside ourselves, in the place where only God can see, in our hearts. If the first commandment is the basis for all the other commandments this last one is the beginning of the breaking of them all and narrows down just exactly where the real work of our lives should be—in our hearts and in the hearts of our children—the place where thoughts begin, that no one in the world knows about unless and until we open our mouths to speak. The beautiful thing about our young children is that they are still unsophisticated and transparent; most of the time as parents we really *can* see what they are thinking because it comes out in their behavior all the time. This is why correcting their behavior is so very important; what we are really needing to do is to teach their hearts and inform their minds how to think right and godly thoughts but we can only get there—especially at first—through the outside. **Proverbs 23:13-14 “Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die. If you strike him with the rod, you will save his soul from Sheol.”** For little children it is all the same because they have not yet learned how to be one thing and think another. I might add here that this work should be done diligently, lovingly and *soon* in a child’s life because they do not stay transparent forever and you will not always have that place of “Mommy knows everything.” They will begin to learn from others and from other experiences and, trusting you less, may even learn to hide their sin from you and from others too. If there is not already the counter pressure in their minds—that you have put there—of **“you shall not**

bear false witness,” that is, “you shall not lie,” the hiding of sin may go unchecked and in an instant he or she will be in a world of hurt.

Let me add here as an aside that if you think you can protect your children from “the world,” that is, from outside pressures and influences, you are sadly mistaken and trying to keep your family in its own little bubble is just plain impossible, as well as a dumb idea. What your children need are the skills to be “in the world but not of it,” to know what right choices are and to have the desire to make them. This is not done by depriving them of outside friendships and experiences but by “going with them” into those experiences, sharing the pushes and pulls of each friendship. If you have shown a son or a daughter that he or she is “safe” with you and will be loved and welcomed no matter what he has done or seen or who he has done it with, then you have gained the possibility of helping him to think godly thoughts, making godly repentances and decisions about whatever it may be.

The terrible and wonderful thing about this work—that we must do in our hearts and in the hearts of our children—is *that the Lord already knows what is in those hearts; He sees everything that is there.* Remember what God told Samuel when he was looking at each of Jesse’s sons: “**‘Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.’**” **I Samuel 16:7** From this passage we learn that terrible thing about God, that He knows how to judge us rightly because He can see down to the very bottom of every thought as **Proverbs 24:12** eloquently expresses: “**If you say, ‘Behold, we did not know this,’ does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it, and will he not repay man according to his work?’**” Scary thought! But the flip side of that terrible knowledge is the wonderful fact that our God also knows just exactly what each of us needs. In **I Kings 8:38-40** we hear King Solomon praying for his people with real understanding of this truth: “**...whatever prayer, whatever plea is made by any man or by all your people Israel, each knowing the affliction of his own heart and stretching out his hands toward this house, then hear in heaven your dwelling place and forgive and act and render to each whose heart you know, according to all his ways (for you, you only, know the hearts of all the children of mankind), that they may fear you all the days that they live....**” Our God knows the complication of our hearts because *He made them* and, knowing all things, He knows exactly what is best for each one.

So what exactly is this sin of covetousness? I cannot say it better than Mrs. Schaeffer: “Is it any wonder we are told that if we break one commandment, we are guilty of all? The commandments are tied together, woven into one pile of sticks leaning on each other; and all of them begin inside in the thought-world, in the mind and heart. Covetousness is the beginning, and it takes many, many forms.

“In **Colossians 3:5**, in a paragraph urging us to ‘**put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator,**’ we are told, ‘**Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed [or covetousness], which is idolatry.**’

“So here we are back in the second commandment! We have a definition now which helps us to see that when we begin to covet a three-thousand-acre ranch, or gorgeous race horses, or a jet plane, or an attractive young woman or man, or someone else’s lifestyle, or a

perfect house whether a two-hundred-year-old one filled with historic antiques or an amazing modern one with a push-button possibility of living in ease, we are at the same time putting something else in God's place, we are bowing before an idol. The ranch, the horses, the plane, the woman or man, the lifestyle, the house, or whatever it is has slipped into the place of God. We are in the midst of idol worship without recognizing it or admitting to it. This is a subtle temptation indeed and one which reminds us again of Satan's wheedling temptations to Jesus, 'Just bow for a minute, and all this will be Yours.' Satan tries to put anything he can in the place of our constant faithfulness to putting the Lord first. He attempts to put a great diversity of things there, especially things we won't recognize!" (Ten Things Parents Must Teach Their Children p. 208-209)

"Coveting peace and affluence, coveting constant happiness at the cost of breaking up a home to find a 'better' husband or wife, with children paying the price, coveting sexual fulfillment with no thought of God's commandments, coveting power whether the power of a great political leader or the power of being the president of a church society of ten people, coveting spiritual experiences for the excitement or the feeling or the possibility of reporting something to a group, coveting leadership of a group large or small with authority to tell others what to do—whatever the coveting consists of, it is sin, and the results when the coveting becomes action are multiplication of that sin." (ibid. p.214-215)

We might call it envy. Not simply admiration for someone else's personal or spiritual gifts, possessions or opportunities but an envy that wants to take away from that one in order to have those gifts, possessions or opportunities for ourselves. It is putting ourselves and our own desires above and before others. It is, as the catechism says, an unhappiness and discontent with what the Lord has given us, wanting some other life, some other situation, instead. It is a failure to be glad for someone else the things the Lord has given him. It is exactly *not* loving our neighbor as we love ourselves and it is certainly placing our own judgment and desires in place of God's who decided the distribution of gifts and goods among His people in the very first place. It is the most supreme kind of selfishness and we need to take great pains to root it out of ourselves and, when we see it (all the time!), in our children.

This is battle, isn't it—war within and without—and the sooner we can help our children to see that we are in this conflict with all sincerity and earnestness the better it will go for them in building the habit of fighting and resisting the sin that comes upon them so easily. We can find comfort in what Paul says about the battle in his own heart. **"So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!..."** Romans 7:21-25

Do you think to yourself from time to time, "This task of raising—teaching, guiding, nurturing, correcting—my children is too hard! I'm not up to it; I don't have the skill I need; I don't have the love and patience I need; I don't have brains enough; I don't have even—or maybe even especially—the physical resources to do this job and my children are going to suffer because of it!" Sisters, we, who have had children before you, have all been there; we have felt these things and we have felt them to be true. It is undoubtedly one of the hardest

times of life when you have little children depending on you for everything. Every child is different; every mother is different; every situation is different requiring so many nuances of response that life can become confusing, complicated and exhausting. Add to that the demands we feel from the Lord to bring them up in *HIS* way, giving them all the skill and understanding that each will need to live the life the Lord has for him or her and it can be absolutely paralyzing. I know; I've been there. And now I'm here to tell you that this feeling of being inadequate for what is required doesn't really ever leave—as that early stage of life comes and goes the next stage brings with it its own challenges, pressures and demands and the bottom-line feeling of, "This is too hard! I'm not up to this; I don't have the skill, etc. etc." is always there. As children grow the challenges change, but the worry about how those challenges can be met never changes. (How's that for encouragement?!) *AND* it is in the acknowledgement of your weakness where the Lord will show you His strength.

We know that our children are just as important—no, more so—to the Lord as they are to us and He, of course, knows them down to the bone and therefore He knows exactly what each one needs in any particular moment. Our own weakness then pushes us to be on our knees *all the time* asking Him for insight, help and courage to do what is right by each one. And because we are asking for something He wants to give we can be confident of His help if we are ready to receive ideas and guidance from that *REAL PERSON* that is our God who says: **"For this commandment that I command you today is *not* too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' but the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it."** Deuteronomy 30:11-14

Mothers, the encouragement lies in *trusting our God* to have told us everything we need to know and to have given us every skill, every necessary thought, every bit of energy we need to fulfill the job of living life in a way that pleases Him. What is the bottom-line, primary, message of God's law? It is to *choose* Him instead of *following other gods*. Remember the very first commandment: **"You shall have no other gods before me"** which is the basis for all the others. Paul tells the Corinthians, **"For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness....Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not be *idolaters*..."** Paul is also warning us in this passage that Israel's life did not turn out like they expected it would—God was not pleased with most of them—and I am here to tell you that your own life and the lives of your children may not turn out the way you picture them turning out, whether from failure on your part—and don't suppose there won't be any of these, possibly even failures you won't recognize until much later; unresponsiveness on the part of one or more of your children—which is something you may not even see or if you do may not know what to do about it; or from some other—outside—unexpected event coming upon you, like a death. I am not trying to scare you but I do want to solemnize you, to encourage you "to walk humbly with your God" since all these things belong in the category of "secret things" that only our God knows. It is in the moments of these hard realizations like this when your faith will be tested:

will you still believe God and love Him? In the midst of confusion and pain will you still choose to obey Him in whatever hardship He sends you? Even if the pain involves one of your precious children? Paul says, **“No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”** I Corinthians 10:1-13 And when you endure it and remain faithful to Him your children will know it and your life will be a powerful witness to them that they cannot deny.

Deuteronomy 29:29 “The secret things belong to the LORD our God but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever that we may obey all the words of this law.” This verse was my motto all the years that my children were little—I put it on my wall in a place where I could see it and remind myself of what I was supposed to be about and, more importantly, *what I was not supposed to be about!* I need the message of this verse even more now than I ever did; it is a timeless reminder to leave the “why’s” and “how’s” in the hands of a loving Savior, the Almighty God, and to take up the only thing that I really am able to, and that, I’m afraid, not very well, which is to **“obey all the words of this law.”** I cannot tell you what relief, what comfort, what inner relaxation this has often been to my soul and at the very same time what renewal of focus and ability to “do the next thing” it has given me through the years. I am not saying it is easy; I am only saying it is *possible* and something that our small resources can strive for. Our God is a *perfect parent!* He knows exactly what we can do and what we can’t, what we can understand and what is impossible for us to understand, and if we would but trust Him we can easily take up our little duties and leave the great big ones to Him.

For example: for me this has meant the breaking down of my life into moments. What does this moment require of me? A word spoken? A prayer lifted? A standing firm? An adjustment in my thinking? A meal prepared? The laundry done? A trip to the gym? The bathroom cleaned? I remember asking my husband, years ago—I know I’ve told you this story many times—“What is more important to you, me or the church?!” His answer was, “It depends on the time of day.” More wisdom there than I cared to admit at the time, but he was absolutely right and so it is with us—each moment brings with it the one thing that the Lord would want you to do and it is in that constant desire to know what that one thing is—that is found in communication with Him—that sweetens our lives, makes them bearable, livable, possible and even lovely. Carry on, Mothers; you can do this, because God has done it and is doing it in you! And He has shown us a lovely principle we can and ought to use with our children which is to remove from them the worry of things they are not yet able to think about; take away all decisions that are too much for them—the “why’s” and the “how’s” of life—and leave them with those things that they are perfectly able to manage which is to trust their parents and to obey them.

Let us take the Lord’s own parenting style to ourselves and use it with courage and strong conviction with our children: when the Israelites were about to enter Canaan the Lord divided the tribes and put them on two different mountains, facing each other. On one mountain—Gerezim—the Lord gave them all the blessings they would have if they obeyed His law and on the other mountain—Ebal—He told them the curses He would bring upon them if they disobeyed and each time a blessing or a curse was given out the people were required to say “Amen.” This is the kind of thing we need to do with our children all the time—pushing,

pulling, spanking, rewarding, talking, praying, encouraging until they are glad enough to say “amen” with their actions, with their attitudes and at last with their mouths.

Mt. Gerezim

Blessings

Rewards

The carrot

Mt. Ebal

Curses

Punishments

The rod

Teach them about the heart, about its dangers and its strengths. Teach them early that the Lord knows everything about them and can see into their hearts even when you can't and teach them both the scary as well as the wonderful sides to that truth: that God is not pleased with sin and can see it even there in their little minds but also that He knows them so well that He will take care of them in the best way possible—they need not be afraid in scary situations. Teach them to **“delight themselves in the Lord and He will give them the desires of their hearts.” Psalm 37:4**

God Himself said through Moses, **“See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.” Deuteronomy 30:15-20**

I find it remarkable, all the time, that we are told over and over in the Bible to *choose* to obey, to love the Lord, to follow Christ, and the fact that we are to do so means that we also have the choice *not to!* The real battle, I find, is in the *wanting* to obey, the willingness to trust that all that the Lord has given us to do and to bear is just that—what *the Lord has given us* and because it is He that has given it to us He will also give us what we need to respond to, and to fulfill, whatever our life demands. Trust and submission, submission and trust build the faith that God is who He is and that He knows what He is doing with us, with His Church and with His world. This is all we need to know—that our God is good and that He controls it all. Choose Christ, choose the one true God and choose obedience to Him and to His law, choose *life* and of one thing we may be certain and that is that when we pray according to God's will—that is for things that He also wants—we can surely bring down Heaven's power into our lives. We do not stand alone; our God stands with us when we *choose life*. **“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.” James 7:7-8**

We read that when the people of Israel, under Joshua's leadership finally did cross the Jordan and came into the Promised Land they did what Moses had commanded them to do. They stopped and gathered to listen to the reading of the law of God. They were to gather

every year at the time of the feast of booths to hear the law read and to remind themselves of the Lord's commands, of His blessings and of His curses. They were to remind themselves of the *choice* they continually had to make—to love and serve the Lord—and to bring to bear on their own minds and hearts all those things that would help them to make the right choice and not the wrong one. God did not leave them in a vacuum with no communication and no data by which to make an informed decision one way or another; He told them all His heart concerning them, drawing them up into Himself. We are to do the same, reading His law, reminding ourselves of His blessings and His curses, renewing our commitment to obey and to love our God and teaching our children to do the same—that is, how to love the Lord their God with all their heart and to love their neighbors as themselves.

“At that time Joshua built an altar to the LORD, the God of Israel, on Mount Ebal...of uncut stones....And there, in the presence of the people of Israel, he wrote on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written....And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law. There was not a word of all that Moses commanded that Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, and the women, and the little ones, and the sojourners who lived among them.” Joshua 8:30-35

What is this Law, these Ten Commandments? It is surely God's gift to us, the expression of His heart. I finish with Ann Voskamp speaking about that heart of God as He gave His law, drawing us into a covenant promise with Himself. We can see ourselves with our children in that relationship with Him. God gave us a wonderful picture of this covenant when He gave us children to raise for Him.

“God gives His people this gift, these two tablets of stone with His handwritten commitment to love, and He aches. ‘Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands.’ *Oh, that their hearts...Oh, that*—this expression of unfulfilled longing in the Hebrew. God longs: ‘Oh, that your heart would obey me not because of Law, but because of love.’ God knows how we say I do—but don't. God longs that our hearts would be inclined to be in wonder and in awe of Me, enraptured by Me—that is what fear means in the original Hebrew. God knows how we say we wonder and we worship—but don't.

“God knows we wander, and He woos again and again, all through the commandments: ‘I am the Lord *Your* God, the Lord *Your* God, the Lord *Your* God.’ *You are mine. Make me Yours.*

“Am I yours?”

“God gives the Ten Commandments as more than Law—He gives them as a true commitment to love. God gives the Law—because He wants there to be love.

“He gives his plea: ‘Oh, that you would obey Me—that's you giving Me love, and that's Me giving you love because this commandment to relationship fulfills your longings and your love and your being.’

“The Ten Commandments are a command to relationship.

“To love vertically, to love horizontally, to love relationship—and it's not a suggestion.

“Oh, that.

“God's unfulfilled longing spills through time.

“Till a voice echoes over Jerusalem: ‘Oh that at this time thou hadst known—yes even thou—what makes peace possible!’ (Luke 19:42 Weymouth New Testament).

“Jesus.

“Jesus, the Love who seven days later went to the Cross to fulfill the unfulfilled, to pay the price for our broken love like we never could, to love God for His unbroken love like we never have.

“Jesus, the Love who hangs on a Tree, who cries out our yes to the covenant: ‘My God, my God.’ Yes, You are mine. I am Yours. Yes, You are the Lord my God, the Lord my God, the Lord my God. Jesus, the Love who doesn’t just die the death we deserved to die; He lives the love we’ve desired to live.

“God gives the commandments to us—and God gives God to keep the commandments for us. God gives us the commitment of love at the top of Sinai, and He staggeringly keeps our commitment to love at the top of Calvary....

“They say that to this day Jews dance when the Ten Commandments are recited. Wooing love that makes the feet and the lights dance and the beloved weep.” Ibid. pp 90-92

You Cannot Hide From God

by B.D. Ackley

#2 from *Let Youth Praise Him*

You cannot hide from God, You cannot hide from God,
Wherever you go, Whatever you do,
You cannot hide from God, His eye is fixed on you,
You cannot hide from God.

and

God is Always Near Me

Wm. J. Kirkpatrick

#3 from *Let Youth Praise Him*

God is always near me, Hearing what I say,
Knowing all my thoughts and deeds,
All my work and play.

God is always near me, In the darkest night,

He can see me just as well
As by morning light.

God is always near me, Though so young and small,
Not a look or word or thought,
But God knows it all.