

**Mother's Encouragement Group**  
**February 13, 2014**  
**Plant Them and Let Them Grow #6**

I want to take a small break today from discussing the soil into which our children are planted to talk for a moment about how we need to just “let them grow.” What I mean by this is that children need to be allowed to be children. Childhood is a time full of development: growth, learning, putting the pieces of life together one by one. We all understand that if a baby is born too soon there are things in his body that may not have developed well enough for him to survive and emergency measures may need to be taken to help that development along. So it is with childhood: so many things in a child's body, obviously, must be allowed to grow, strengthen, just plain getting bigger in order to survive in the world. But this is also true in regard to his spirit, his mind, his heart, his soul, if you will. We have said before that human beings are complicated right from the get-go and of course no one understands this complication better than our Lord who created us all in the first place, which is why we take our cue for raising our children from Him, that is, from His Word and from the example of the way He parents us with intimate knowledge of who each of us is and what we need at any given moment.

We were created to be happy! The first chapters of **Genesis** which describe the creation of the world and of the different kinds of life God put into it teach us that this was all a wonderful thing. God Himself said of it that it was “very good” by which we know that it was all entirely beautiful and happy. I have sometimes tried to imagine what that life must have been like before the Fall: Adam and Eve living in that beautiful place with no troubles whatsoever--no worries over wild animals, no need for clothes since there was no shame, no need of keeping warm against cold or of cooling against too much heat, no fighting with each other, no tears about anything sad--only delightful new things to see, to taste and to enjoy every day. This is how God meant life on earth to be and this is how I imagine Heaven will be when He finally gives us the “new earth” at the end of time. It was the entrance of sin--that first act of not trusting and not obeying--that brought an end to that perfect happiness and made mankind acquainted with pain, sorrow and suffering. It did not, however, change that thing for which we were created--that desire for happiness--that is still imbedded in the human heart. This is one very real way that we know that what we experience here on earth is not the permanent thing, that God is not finished and that He has plans to restore what sin has ruined.

**“Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him....For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them [meaning us!] brothers....Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, [I think this means that, just as children who are born to us have our DNA so Jesus took on our DNA] that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.”** parts of **Hebrews 2:8-15**

From this and many other places in the Bible we understand that our suffering is unnatural, that God hates the sin that caused it and still causes it and that He had such an overwhelming sympathy with the plight into which sin plunged us that He started in motion, the very instant it happened, the means by which we might be saved from it and restored to the happiness He intended for our lives. (I try to remind myself when I'm tempted to think that God doesn't care or that He isn't listening that He could have--right there in the Garden of Eden--just gotten angry and thrown the whole experiment out! But God is not only angry; God is love; His heart was full of sorrow, not irritation. He hated the sin but loved the sinner and punished most severely the one by whom the sin came into His beautiful, happy world.) Interesting that in this same **Hebrews** passage we read that Jesus was "made perfect" through suffering: **"For it was fitting that he [that is, God], for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers..." Hebrews 2:10 & 11** What?! Christ our Savior had to be "made perfect?!" This is too much for my brain but whenever I think of how hard life can be for so many of us from time to time, how hard life has become for us right now, I am grateful to remind myself of these things: that suffering and pain are unnatural and not the state that God intended for our lives *and* that Christ himself suffered--our God suffered--just the way we do and so much worse. We only bear the shame and difficulty of our own sin; He bore the shame and punishment of all of us who are being saved. We can trust Him because *He really knows* from experience what we are going through.

Back to our children being children and ourselves being made for happiness. A lot of what parents must provide for their children, then, is the atmosphere in which they can be happy. Some of this is obvious and we all know what it means because of the "mother bear" in each of us: we are there to protect them, to keep their bodies safe and healthy, providing all the nutrients they need for proper growth. We need to teach them about safety as they are able to understand and to instill in them a healthy fear of physical things that will harm them. It is obvious to us that we need to protect them from harmful things outside themselves.

We also need to protect them from outsiders who may harm them either on purpose or out of ignorance. It is of growing importance as well, especially in our day and age, to keep them innocent in all things sexual. We read in the **Song of Songs**, **"that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases."** **ch. 2:7** This didn't used to require the measure of vigilance that it does today! Be *careful* that you always know where your children are and what they are doing, that you entrust them only to people who you know have these same convictions. Be wise about childhood play with siblings, friends and cousins, that is, be there enough to know what the play is all about--never let them be unsupervised for hours on end, or even for one hour. If you do not know what is happening in their play you cannot speak into it, guiding it into healthy and holy things. If your child is in someone else's care you obviously can't know what influences they are being subjected to and should they experience something harmful, something

they don't understand but have an instinct about, most children will hide it from you. Now you realize, I'm sure, that I'm not talking about them learning about sex from you little by little, as they are able to understand, but rather about them being plunged head-first into images and experiences that may be only meant for "adults," things that even adults ought not to indulge in, things that are only rightly enjoyed between a husband and wife behind closed doors. Children become ashamed when this happens but in their immaturity cannot possibly know why they are ashamed and the shame makes them afraid to tell you what it is they have experienced. Talk about happiness ruined; these things will do it in a heartbeat and will often ruin a life for a long, long time.

We also need to protect our children from ourselves in a certain way. What I mean is that they ought not to suffer from our own distemper, fatigue, sadness, desire to find our own happiness anywhere else than in our care of them or anything else that may distract us from mothering them well, i.e. selfishness. HA! Now obviously this is a tall order and there is no one who can possibly do this. But it is the standard we need to strive for. Our Lord said, **"You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."** Matthew 5:48 So, we throw up our hands in the air and say, "I give up; there is absolutely no way!" That is true. But I believe that if you are transparent with your children, that from time to time you tell them how tired you are, how angry you are, how sad you are and as much of the why as they are able to understand then you have given them a gift of seeing that their own anger and sadness is "like mommy's." And, if you ask for forgiveness from them from time to time their little hearts are so ready to forgive and then they also begin to see that they themselves can be forgiven and often need to be.

If you are not naturally the "fun-loving," game-playing kind of mom, like I wasn't, you need to find other ways of making their lives full of fun and enjoyment. This is why I loved reading books to them; one doesn't have to come up with originality to read books. We went to the library often when my kids were little (such a shame that libraries are disappearing nowadays!) and on Tuesdays and weekends we would also get movies to watch as a family. (I remember when my parents bought us our first VCR! What a change that made in our lives.) The kids remind me how they loved it when we'd get back in the car and I'd say, "Well, Kiddoes, we have some heavy movie-watching to do!"

We must also be careful never to treat our children as objects. This is surprisingly easy to do when they do funny things that make us laugh. I was cleaning up my email Inbox last week and found a blog posting that Vangie sent. She sent it because sometimes it is important just to laugh about the stage of life we are in--helps to make the difficulties a little more bearable. The blog is called A Musing Maralee:

### **Things My Toddler Thinks**

November 6, 2013 by Maralee

Mom sure gets lonely in the bathroom. I can fix that.  
Make-up is meant to be enjoyed. By eating.

A wall really isn't complete without a Crayola mural or spaghetti handprint.

The church nursery is run by monsters who want to eat my face as soon as my mom walks away and I have no choice but to try and communicate that reality in whatever way I can.

All food tastes better when eaten with your hands. Off of the floor.

Dogs are walking napkins.

Screaming is the only way anyone can hear you.

The best part of a bath is the part where you dump as much water as possible onto the floor.

It's really hard for adults to brush their teeth without me putting my head in the sink.

The best toy is whatever toy my brother is currently holding.

Sometimes in the middle of the night I worry that Mom is sleeping, so I randomly cry for 30 seconds and then go back to sleep. That ought to fix it.

Chairs were made for me to stand on.

Snuggling is for babies. And I am not a baby. Unless Mom is holding another baby, in which case I am THE ONLY BABY.

Light switches are just toys placed a little out of reach.

Mom doesn't know how to cook unless I get all the pots and pans out for her to choose from.

Dinner is disgusting. However, my own boogers and dirt from the backyard are delicious and I will not stop eating them.

The carseat is a torture device that surely has been banned by the Geneva Convention, but nobody has told my mom yet.

The telephone has interesting friends inside it. I call them when you aren't looking.

I don't want to use the potty unless I am fully dressed and about to be buckled in my carseat.

My desire to be held by a relative is inversely proportional to how much they like me.

I have many amazing skills. None of which I will perform on demand for Grandma.

I could listen to books all day. Unless we go to Library Story Time. Then I only want to run in circles and cry because another kid looked at me.

I will wait until a quiet moment when you have friends over to loudly declare that I have "POOPIE".

I am perfectly capable of walking, unless your hands are full.

I would love for you to carry me, unless we are walking in a potentially dangerous situation (i.e. a parking lot, where I would really like to run free).

I invented a really fun game: Hide that thing. When someone asks me if I hid that thing, I nod, then lead them to random areas of the house where they frantically search. But I'm the only one who knows I have no idea where I hid that thing. Endless hours of entertainment.

Restaurants are the best places for screaming, running in circles, and throwing food. Although church and the library are good places, too.

I can't put on any clothes by myself, but I am really good at taking them all off. At inappropriate times.

If you ever manage to get your hands on a choking hazard, the best thing to do is wait until somebody notices and then run through the house with it clenched in your fist.

The only time to play quietly is when your mom is looking for you.

The pediatrician's office is a good place to yell all the names of candy and tv shows you can think of.

My Mom secretly hopes I'll have a major dilemma while she's on the phone so she can quit talking to friends and get back to parenting. I do what I can to help.

I am totally potty-trained. Unless we are in public and Mom forgot a change of clothes.

The only stuffed animal that can comfort me is the one you can't find right now.

Of course, I'm sure you all realize that the laughing at these things ought to remain in your own head, helping you to keep a good humor, and never shown to your children *unless they are in on the joke!* Laughing at their behavior can make them feel that you are laughing at *them* and even if they enjoy the fact that you are laughing this really does not meet their little souls in a healthy way; they don't know how to respond to that: "should I do it again so that Mommy will laugh again?" This is not the utterly serious way they need to be dealt with; every decision they make is important to who and what they become. But if you say to them, "Now that was funny, don't you think so?" and then explain why if you can (and if you can't, then possibly you shouldn't have laughed at all), then you are including them and you end up sharing a sweet moment of laughing together. And, of course, the ability to laugh at oneself and one's own foibles is very healthy for everyone--very few adults actually have this skill! But when you talk to your children with the utmost seriousness of one human being talking to another you are giving them the gift of the ability to take responsibility for themselves. Another way of saying this is that your mind must be in their mind all the time, trying to understand what they are thinking and why they are thinking it so that you can guide that thinking into godliness. As they grow in understanding and sophistication your involvement is relinquished little by little. However, *some things*, I know you know, should never be laughed at at all, like the one about screaming and running around in restaurants, libraries and churches!

Children also need to be protected from themselves, from their own sin which steals the joy from their lives. This is, truth be told, the major part of our parenting of them isn't it? Here's another blog entry Vange sent a while ago. This one is from Nancy Wilson and is entitled "A Mother's Law."

Published by [Nancy Ann](#) on August 5, 2013 in [Mothering](#)

When you have small children, and you want to train them up in a way that pleases God, you're going to need to remind yourself of some basic principles pretty often. I still remember going over these and going over them again to keep my bearings.

1. Pick your battles carefully and always win. I can remember talking with Doug about some little habit or behavior in the children that I was concerned about, and we would decide together whether it was really worth making an issue over it. Let's say nail biting. If I say, "You may not do that," I have to be willing to enforce it now. What happens if the nail gets bitten after I have issued a command? If nothing happens, then I have just undermined my own authority. We decided to let that kind of thing go, and teach on it without laying down any law. But if it was an issue of more importance, like hitting your sister, that was a battle I had to win.

2. Obedience must be in the little things and the big things. This goes back to being very careful about issuing commands. If I say, "Pick up your toys," but the child wanders off and I forget about it, I have just taught the child that obedience doesn't really matter. It is so easy for parents to fire off commands one after another and then ignore whether the children are obeying or not. Better to not issue any commands! If you don't establish your authority clearly, you won't have any.

3. Mothers can be tempted to go soft. You issued a command, the child disobeyed, and then you start making excuses for the child. When you told the child to do the thing, you did not take into account what you would do if he didn't obey. And now you're sorry you said it! Either quit issuing the commands or follow through. Better to give the child one command and see that he does it, than give three commands that he ignores.

4. Don't get into an adversarial relationship with your children. You are in authority over them. Don't argue with them! "Yes, you did!" "No I didn't!" Certainly you can answer questions and discuss things. But arguing undermines your authority. Listen. Think it over. Make a decision. But don't argue.

5. Don't take disobedience personally. If your child disobeys, don't get your feelings hurt. You are the adult! Don't attribute motives to the child.

6. Decide which things are most important and work on those. Don't try to do everything at once! Think of how overwhelming that would be to your child. If he is getting in trouble with you all day long, it's time to reduce the commands and restrictions. Simplify!

7. Assign a name for the particular disobedience and call it that consistently. If you are always calling it by various names, they won't get what it is you are trying to correct. Example: fussing, grumpiness, complaining, arguing, disrespect. Which is it? Call it that each time so they get the picture.

8. Keep a minimum of rules. My husband's house had three rules: no disobeying, no lying, no disrespecting Mom. Disobedience goes back to my earlier points. Keep the rules simple so they know when they are disobeying.

9. Try reproof before you resort to the rod. Be wise and firm, but never angry. If you are angry, you are in no condition to administer discipline to a child. Get your own heart disciplined first. Remember that discipline is not for your benefit because you are annoyed and have had enough. Discipline is for the child because you love him!

10. All discipline should be judicial, calm, and righteous. I remember giving my son some well-deserved swats once and thinking, “I’m pleasing God!” You can’t say that if you are fuming mad.

Charles Bridges says, “Awe of parental authority is the foundation of the utmost freedom of childlike confidence. It is a valuable safeguard against a thousand follies of uncontrolled waywardness.”

Did you hear that last quote she gives? Let me read it again: **“Awe of parental authority is the foundation of the utmost freedom of childlike confidence. It is a valuable safeguard against a thousand follies of uncontrolled waywardness.”** This is a place where parents nowadays fail a lot I think, but those of us who are Christians understand why we can and ought to make demands on our children, that we have God-given authority to do so and why, if we don’t, our children become miserable. A tall order indeed.

I picked up The Secret Garden by Frances Hodgson Burnett a little while ago just to give myself something pure, fun and light to think about and I felt the health of that little exercise almost immediately. It is the story of two ten year olds who, neither of them, was allowed to have a real childhood without troublesome, adult cares in it. Mary Lennox was raised by an Ayah in India who did everything for her and never corrected her in anything; her parents, especially her mother, were absent from her everyday life. Colin Craven, her cousin, was treated as an invalid and kept in a dark room in bed his whole life, certain that soon a lump would begin to grow on his back and he would end up a hunchback and die young. Both of them were spoiled and selfish, though neither of them knew it. As the story unfolds the influence of a wise Yorkshire mother of twelve who insists that what children really need is to play outside, gradually causes each of these children to become children again, not the little adults shouldering troubles that only grown-ups are ready to bear. Martha, this Yorkshire mother’s eldest daughter told Mary one morning, “Mother says as th’ two worst things as can happen to a child is never to have his own way--or always to have it. She doesn’t know which is th’ worst.” She is saying that a child must be met in his heart where he needs to be met (that is, to sometimes have his own way) but, once there, guided into right thinking and doing (that is, not giving it to him all the time). I want to read a chapter from this book to you that illustrates a wonderful turning point in the growth of each child as well as in their relationship. It is called *A Tantrum*:

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The message I want to leave with you today: let children be children. Protect them from others; protect them from yourself and protect them from their own little selves. Let them play; that play is their work right now and the happier, the more wholesome is the atmosphere you provide for that play the more they will become the holy, Christian children the Lord expects them to be. **“A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.”** **Proverbs 17:22** Don’t crush the spirits of your children by either *never* letting them have their own way or by *always* letting them have it. Love them the way the Lord loves us, with true

knowledge of who they are and of what they need in any particular moment: both the rod and the carrot.

## HYMN

This hymn I learned when our children went to Heritage and came home singing it. It is full of the joy of belonging to Jesus.

**Praise the Savior, Ye Who Know Him!**  
**Thomas Kelly, traditional German melody**  
**#677 in *Trinity Hymnal***

Praise the Savior, ye who know him!  
Who can tell how much we owe him?  
Gladly let us render to him all we are and have.

Jesus is the name that charms us;  
He for conflict fits and arms us;  
Nothing moves and nothing harms us while we trust in him.

Trust in him, ye saints forever;  
He is faithful, changing never;  
Neither force nor guile can sever those he loves from him.

Keep us, Lord, O keep us cleaving  
To thyself and still believing,  
Till the hour of our receiving promised joys with thee.

Then we shall be where we would be,  
Then we shall be what we should be;  
Things that are not now, nor could be, soon shall be our own.