

**Mother's Encouragement Group
February 28, 2013**

To recap:

Our Motto: Love Them Into Heaven!

We take our cue from the Lord; our parenting style should mimic His.

First Principle:

The Lord has suited us, more than He has our husbands, for the task of caring for, teaching, nurturing, raising our children.

Second Principle:

Children are born foolish and stupid; they have Adam's nature just like we do.

Third Principle:

Your child should know that you are absolutely, *unquestionably, unconditionally* on his or her side--you are FOR him.

Fourth Principle:

Obedience is the first and most important rule of the day. You stand between God and your child. If your child does not learn to obey you he will not learn to obey God.

Fifth Principle:

If your child does not *fear* you he will not fear God and, if you do not fear God he certainly won't.

Sixth Principle:

The strength of a child's rebellion must be met with equal parental strength. Our goal is to reach our child's heart in order to form the character but we begin by reforming his behavior--at the outset it's all we have!

Seventh Principle:

Make only a few rules--rules of principle--but those rules must *never* be allowed to be transgressed.

Eighth Principle:

Your children ARE your life right now and they are the means the Lord has chosen for your sanctification even as He has chosen you as the means for theirs.

Ninth Principle:

The "dialectic." Proverbs 26:4 & 5: "Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes."

Tenth Principle:

Marriage is the backdrop, the atmosphere, the context in which family life is managed and it must be nurtured above all else save one's own relationship to, and worship of, our Lord. It is the most basic and permanent of human relationships that the Lord has created; it is the one we leave our parents' home for and it is the one that remains when our children grow up and leave our home.

a) Our Creator said in **Genesis 2:18**: **“It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him,”** and then He went “looking” for someone to live with Adam. Actually, God had Adam looking for himself to see if there was a creature He had already made that would suit him--someone to talk to, someone to share life with, someone to procreate with. We all know what lovely companions dogs can make, don't we, but a dog is forever dependent and limited in understanding and in what he can share, what he can do and very different in what he cares about. (Dare I tell the story that Vange just told me about their dog?!) His life is not human; he has no soul that will spend eternity in Heaven or Hell. How gracious of the Lord to bring Adam along in the understanding of his need and then how wonderfully ingenious and gracious of Him to supply that need: **Genesis 2:21-25**: **“So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, ‘This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.’”** Then the Lord pronounces the “evaluative statement” which tells us all what we are supposed to think about what had just happened: **“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they two shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.”** In the chapter before this one we are told: **“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’”** **Genesis 1:27 & 28.**

This is the basis, the foundation, of our life in this world which we as Christians understand--or ought to--and which our society is gradually doing away with, seeking to destroy. I'm sure the Devil is behind it all, planting seeds of doubt, seeds of disbelief and discontent, trying to get us to destroy ourselves by thinking we can do things better than what God has done for us. This was his very tack with Eve, wasn't it? **Genesis 3:1-5** **“Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden’?”** **And the woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’”** **But the serpent said to the woman, ‘You shall not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’”** We all know what happened then; Eve listened to Satan, looked at the fruit, thought about how beautiful it was and began to doubt the truth of what God had told them. I have often wondered why the Devil started with Eve and not with Adam. Was it because he knew that she had a nature prone to discontent? one that was bound up in the consideration of details rather than of broader principles? I think it is worth pondering since that is what

Satan did, feeling or knowing, that he could have better success with her than with Adam. Or was it simply that he knew, if he had success with her, that she would do the rest of his destructive work for him? Kind of like the Philistines knew that if they could get Delilah on their side they would have Samson in their pocket!

In any case, we need to remember, Girls, that what the Lord created was perfect, pure and happy--blessed by Him--and meant to be a blessing, a source of joy and happiness--for mankind. Adam and Eve knew perfect companionship: the complete and lovely sharing of their mental, emotional and physical lives. **"...they were both naked and were not ashamed."** It was so great and so wonderful that the Devil was angry and jealous of what God had made and so did all in his power to wreck it--and, he did a bang-up job! Why the Lord didn't prevent him I do not understand; why God let Eve and then Adam be subjected to Satan's vitriol as though He were watching from on high, hoping against hope, that they would not listen but would instead obey....but how can we even speak about our holy, completely wise, perfect God this way? In the book of **Isaiah** the Lord tells us, **"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."** **Isaiah 55:8 & 9** For His own inscrutable reasons God let Satan do his dirty work and then He let Eve and Adam make their own decision and live--and die--with the consequences. But then what He did do? Praise Him forever! He sent a Redeemer--in fact, He sent Himself--to clean up the mess the Devil and mankind made of His beautiful creation. The Lord obviously was delighted enough in what He had made that He considered it worth keeping and saving.

This is what we must remember when we think about our marriages: they are good; they are meant for our blessing and happiness; they are ruined because of our sin and they are redeemed because of our Savior. Of course the mess we made, with the Devil's help, will not be completely cleaned up until the salvation God has planned for us is finished, that is, when the End of Time comes and the Lord gives Satan his final comeuppance for his sinful jealousy.

b) The application of ethics to the marriage relationship as well as to our relationship to God was revolutionary in the ancient Near East; the Hebrew Bible was the *only* one that required love and faithfulness, as well as obedience, to a deity and the only one that required love and faithfulness in human relationships as well. We have seen how our Creator created marriage out of His own heart of love and desire to bless mankind with happiness. In **Matthew 22:37-40** Jesus tells us everything that the Lord requires of us in just a few short sentences: **"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."** Other religions

required, and do require, the obedience of sacrificial rites which often included very immoral acts. For example, temple prostitution and the sacrificing of children were common in the days when the Old Testament was being written but only in Israel were these things not only forbidden but deplored by her God. **Psalm 106:34-40: “They did not destroy the peoples, as the Lord commanded them, but they mixed with the nations and learned to do as they did. They served their idols, which became a snare to them. They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons; they poured out innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan, and the land was polluted with blood....Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against his people, and he abhorred his heritage....”** To love one’s god was unheard of in the cultures surrounding Israel; can you imagine the prophets of Baal or Chemosh commanding their followers to *love* them, preferring obedience over their sacrifices? Yet we read in **I Samuel 15:22: “Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice...”**

The treatment of women, too, was revolutionary in the Hebrew culture and in that time. In the cultures of other religions women still have very little to say about their own lives. I will never forget the feeling created by the way women are required to dress in the Arab part of old Jerusalem. The white gal who attended the desk in our Arab hotel was a convert to Islam and wore black robes, head coverings, even a veil and gloves which covered her hands. She had married the owner’s son and had no children yet and we overheard her remarking to some British guests that she thought she would achieve more standing with her mother-in-law once the babies started coming! It was oppressive to walk out in the narrow streets and see nothing but black until the line when one crossed into the Christian section or the Jewish one. That was just a few years ago!

We just recently watched the movie *Far Pavilions* which is a picture of life in India under British rule and based on a novel by M.M. Kaye. It was a man’s world in India then whose religion was primarily Hindu and women were treated as objects. The princesses that feature in this film were given in marriage to a man they did not know or want. He was a hardened, old and cruel ruler in another city-state and they were given to him by their young Raj brother without any consideration of their own desires. They were as good as slaves. Not so in Christian Britain where the young debutants were wined, dined and sought after, making their own choices for marriage. The practice of “suttee” (the burning of wives with their dead husband’s body) was outlawed by the British rulers but still held onto and practiced in the Hindu culture for a very long time.

We know that the Bible gives great significance to women. After all, Eve’s sin was treated just as seriously as Adam’s and punished separately with a punishment suited just for her. Debra was a judge; Hulda and Anna were prophetesses, both positions of authority; Miriam held a place of leadership along with Moses and Aaron in Israel. The **Song of Songs** is largely about the inner life of a young woman. **Proverbs 31**, of

course, celebrates the skills and the importance of the life of a woman whose household, including servants, children and husband, depends on her and whose personal ministry reaches beyond that. Mary, of course, was chosen to be the mother of our Lord--could not Jesus have found another way to come to earth, without deigning to become a baby in her womb, being raised by her and trained in her house? In **Acts 16:13** we learn that Paul, Silas and Timothy **“went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together.”** Only in Christianity would it happen that women were considered equal in importance to men and so worth talking to! Lydia, a businesswoman, was converted that day and was baptized, **“and her household as well.”** Was she the head of that house? There is no mention of her husband and later on in the chapter we read that after they were let out of prison Paul and Silas **“visited Lydia”** before they left town.

An example of the Lord’s own ethics and His demand for integrity in us is found in **II Samuel 21** when the Lord sent a famine for three years to Israel because Saul had broken the vow made to the Gibeonites. One might have thought that Saul was acting rightly when he killed them and tried to drive them out since that was what Israel was supposed to do to the people living in Canaan but Joshua had made a promise to them early on in their conquest of the land when they had deceived him about just who they were. God was angry *because Saul did not keep the promise Joshua had made* even though it was made foolishly without consulting the Lord first. God said to David, **“There is bloodguilt on Saul and on his house, because he put the Gibeonites to death.”** After David took care of this **“God responded to the plea for the land.”**

So, when Rob counsels a gal in deciding about a husband he tells her that the only thing she must *absolutely require* in the man she is looking at is that he have a Christian conscience. When he sins is he sorry? Is it easier for her to forgive him than it is for him to forgive himself? Does he show signs of repentance, that is, of seeking to change and conform his life to the demands of the Christian life? If he has this all else will work itself out: he does not need to be smart or handsome (although that certainly helps!) or full of personality or even drive as much as he needs to *want* to be godly. It is the tool everyone of us needs in order to grow in our love for and obedience to God and in our love for each other. Without it a marriage is not only not all it could be or should be but often can be doomed to failure. We must not let our daughters, or our sons for that matter, choose spouses who do not have tender hearts towards the Lord and are not already exhibiting that tenderness in their lives.

c) Children can, and often do, bring pressure and stress to the best of marriages. Often? Who am I kidding? Children *always* bring stress! No matter how well you’ve learned to love one another before children are born there are brand new issues to face afterwards. The reasons for this are many. Now, all of a sudden, you have a life that is not shared with your husband; your life has new responsibilities while his retains the ones

he had before. When this happened in our life I remember thinking, “Oh my, I need to grow up--fast! I am mother now and there is no one else here to tell me what to do!” This actually affected our marriage quite a bit since I had spent our whole time in Scotland and our early days in Tacoma--nearly four years--trying to figure out how to be a wife and how to be the one that would please my husband most. Suddenly this other identity was added to the person I had become; I had more opinions; I had to make more decisions on my own; I certainly had more needs and felt like I had less help and less understanding coming my way. Then, the more children we had the busier I was. Our lives felt parallel, only intersecting here and there. We could no longer “drop everything” and go out together on a whim. Truly “children tie a mother’s feet” and they certainly tied mine!

Time alone together is diminished and your intimate life is shoved into the privacy of your bedroom. This is not so terrible when you have only one baby or when your children are small but as they get older and their understanding increases your conversation either needs to include them or at least be about things that will not trouble them. Your’s husband’s need for you to be sexy and alluring seems to remain constant, but your own desire for him can fluctuate a lot with all the changes your body experiences during pregnancy, birth and nursing and sometimes sex can seem positively distasteful or just plain too much work.

There is perhaps less money to live on if you’ve ever been in the place of both of you bringing in income or if suddenly you’re buying a house and payments are larger than your former rent was. Children bring bills too--often big ones: dr. bills, hospital bills, midwife bills. This never stops; it just changes. Soon it will be dentist bills, orthodontist bills and Christian education bills. Then it’s college bills, car bills, new appliance bills--truly, this never stops! Sorry to tell you but there it is.

The handling of discipline is something that must be faced together if you are to present a united front to your children and this can be difficult depending on how different the parenting styles were that each of you came from. If one of you, for instance, has a conviction against spanking that can be a real problem.

The things that are in your mind all day long are often very different from the things that are in his. Not only did the Lord make each of you to care about different things but the practicality of living fills them with different things and when you come together at the end of the day you both need to find a way to be interested in the other, often when your personal resources feel depleted--you’ve had to give your best moments to others throughout the day.

Sleep deprivation complicates everything. Some can manage better without sleep than others. Swing shift demands can be a killer--Tina can tell us about that one.

d) So what can we do about all these pressures and stresses? The first thing, I think, is to realize, and to remind yourself, that *neither of you is going anywhere for the duration!* This is the first place where your Christian conscience needs to kick in.

Divorce is wrong and no matter what happens or what troubles we may face we are not going to open that door. Hear what our Lord says: **Matthew 5:31 & 32: “It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”** This may seem like a pretty outrageous thing to say in this company where it seems we have all made happy choices and are married to strong Christian men, but it is still amazing how freeing this thought can be when we are going through difficult times and unhappy things, even things that spring from our own personalities--or theirs. **Matthew 19:3-9: “And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, ‘Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?’ [Jesus] answered, ‘Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”’ They said to him, ‘Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?’ He said to them, ‘Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.’”**

Strengthening this conviction from the outset frees you up to think, “Well, I got some things in my husband but not others. He’s wonderful in this area but weaker somewhere else. So what? He got some things and not others in me as well.” And, it forces us each to live with thoughtfulness, cleverness, humility and prayer, seeking the ability to make our conversations and interactions sweet and to keep our minds focused on the wonderful things you got, minimizing the effect of the weaker ones. Humility says, “Why should I have everything? Who am I that the Lord should make my marriage the one that has no weaknesses?” Submission is thankful and glad for the leadership that is provided no matter in what form. **II John vss. 5 & 6 tell us: “And now I ask you, dear lady--not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning--that we love one another. And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments....”** Love is action even more than it is a feeling. Obedience to the Lord’s commands is the expression, and the cultivation, of love. Apply your ordinary obedience to your relationship with your husband: kindness, sympathy, forgiveness (that’s a big one!) and especially respect, which is what the Lord specifically requires of women towards their husbands.

Second, don’t compare your marriage with anyone else’s! Each personality is different and each combination of personalities is different. Just because you think your marriage doesn’t have the “zing” someone else’s has doesn’t mean yours is less faithful or less fun or less happy or fulfilling. But, for the sake of argument let’s say it may

be less happy and fulfilling (though how exactly this could be measured is really not possible to say). I still say, “So what?” Your job is to remain where you are and to be faithful with what you have, working on your own heart to be content *with what the Lord gave you*. And the Lord will honor that faithful obedience and just maybe He will give you your heart’s desire after all is said and done.

Third, honor the roles the Lord has set up between you. Let your husband be the head of your household and do not try to take from him the responsibility that belongs to him. Remember the famous passage that addresses this in **Ephesians 5:22-24**: **“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is *himself its Savior*. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.”** Submitting does not mean we stop thinking or speaking or doing things on our own--remember how much value--equality--the Lord places on women in His Word; it only means that this is the way the relationship between men and women is sanctified, made holy again, happy, blessed and wonderful. This is the order that God set up for us in the very first place and the more we adhere to God’s plan the happier we will be.

If it is true that you stand between your children and the Lord while they are young it is also true that your husband stands between the Lord and you; he is responsible for your life--spiritually and in every other way--as well as for your children. Remember how **Ephesians** compares the husband to Christ **“who is [the church’s] *Savior*”!** In the same way that Christ laid down His life for the church, husbands are to live their lives on behalf of their wives and children! The rest of that **Ephesians** passage says: **“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her....In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies....and let the wife see that she respects her husband.”** **Ephesians 5:25-33** Would you really want to have that responsibility? Let him have it and be grateful that you don’t! Interesting that we are not commanded to love but to respect. Perhaps because loving comes more naturally to a woman’s nature and respect is harder for her to manage?

Your husband’s life, his integrity, his convictions are the basis for the principles your family must live by (this is the bottom line argument why Christians ought only to marry Christians) and it is your job to take those principles and work them out in the lives of your children day by day. When your children need discipline and you are the one there you must do it right away not “waiting until Daddy gets home.” But if Daddy is home he should be the one to administer the discipline, showing the children your deference to him and giving him the respect due him. If he doesn’t do it for one reason or another--he didn’t see the problem, he didn’t think it was serious enough for action or inexperience made him doubt himself--you can talk about it in private but stepping in and doing it yourself is not wise and will make it more likely that he never will. Why should he if you are already doing it? Trouble is, that will make your family feel like a

“matriarchal” not a “patriarchal” one. Boys especially need to see a godly, manly strength exhibited by their fathers.

You cannot change your husband and shouldn't try but you can talk together and you can do the work necessary in your own heart. You can trust him, and ought to. Trust him to the Lord and to his Christian conscience and, of course, pray for him as you pray for yourself since the Lord alone knows how the both of you are put together. David says, **Psalm 51:6: “Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.”** Who is it that knows all about your “secret heart” as well as your husband's? The Lord who made both of you, **“forming your inward parts; knitting you together in your mother's womb.” “I praise you [David says], for I am fearfully and wonderfully made....My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret....your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.” Psalm 139:13-16.** THIS God can be trusted to make of the both of you together a beautiful thing: He has all understanding, all love and care and all power to do whatever He wants. You can relax and trust Him; He's probably just waiting for you to ask!

Fourth, remember that there are sins that belong to the personality of each sex and if you can remind yourself of these things you know how to work on your own heart and you know how to forgive your husband. The sin that generally belongs to men is irresponsibility and the sin that generally belongs to women is discontent. You ought not to try to fulfil or take the responsibility that belongs to him whether you see him taking it or not. After all, governing your own heart is a full-time job so don't be “biting off more than you can chew,” as my mother used to say. Work on your own discontent by speaking to yourself: would you *really* want your children to go away so you can sleep more, be queen of your own life again? Would you *really* want not to be married or to be married to someone else? Is there not gladness for *who you are, who your children are and who your husband is* down at the bottom of your soul? Remind yourself of these things in those tired moments when you feel you're done for.

There is a lot, frankly, as a woman, that you can do very little or nothing about. For instance, the romance in your relationship is really up to your husband: you can't make him be romantic but you can certainly make yourself into someone he would be delighted to be romantic for! and you can be sweetly responsive when it comes instead of criticizing because it didn't come sooner or in a different way. Use your mouth to speak words of appreciation and encouragement. RESPOND and receive with gladness what is given. Don't set up expectation in your mind and then allow yourself to be disappointed.

e) Home life is meant to be happy: a place of spiritual education for children; a place of protection against sin for the adults; a clean and safe refuge for all its members. (My mother-in-law always said she *wished* the Bible said, “cleanliness is next

to godliness.” This after she found out that it actually didn’t!) **I Corinthians 7:1-5 “...It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman. But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.”** Whatever else home life may be it should provide these things for those who live within it and, as we said last time a happy marriage provides the lovely atmosphere in which the discipline, education and nurturing of children takes place and is the source of the joy--the underlying pleasure--in the household. An amazing and wonderful invention of the Lord’s isn’t it?

HYMN:

This little song comforted me a lot when I was a child and even into my adulthood. It is easy for youngsters to learn and helps them to think about who they are before the Lord and their own relationship to Him and, it reminds us that God has complete and loving control over all our lives.

He Loves Me Too

Maria Straub/music by S.W. Straub
from *Let Youth Praise Him*

God see the little sparrow fall,
It meets His tender view;
If God so loves the little birds,
I know He loves me, too.

Chorus: *He loves me too, He loves me too,
I know He loves me too;
Because He loves the little things,
I know He loves me too.*

He paints the lily of the field,
Perfumes each lily bell;
If He so loves the little flowers,
I know He loves me well.

God made the little birds and flowers,
And all things large and small;
He'll not forget His little ones,
If they obey His call.