

Mother's Encouragement Group
January 24, 2013

To recap:

Our Motto: Love Them Into Heaven!

We take our cue from the Lord: we love because He loves. *Our parenting style should mimic His.* Everything that happens in our children's lives is a vehicle for loving them, drawing them to ourselves and so to God and to godly behavior.

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. Proverbs 1:7: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction."

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 one begins 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. Jesus said in Matthew 22:37b-40: "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." Everything else is just detail.

Today we start with Chesterton again, quoting from his essay "Emancipation," in *What's Wrong with the World*:

To put the matter shortly, woman is generally shut up in a house with a human being at the time when he asks all the questions that there are, and some that there aren't. It would be odd if she retained any of the narrowness of a specialist. Now if anyone says that this duty of general enlightenment... is in itself too exacting and oppressive, I can understand the view. I can only answer that our race has thought it worth while to cast this burden on women in order to keep common-sense in the world. [This a high compliment indeed!] But when people begin to talk about this domestic duty as not merely difficult but trivial and dreary, I simply give up the question. For I cannot with the utmost energy of imagination conceive what they mean. When domesticity, for instance, is called drudgery, all the difficulty arises from a double meaning in the word. If drudgery only means dreadfully hard work, I admit the woman drudges in the home, as a man might drudge at the Cathedral of Amiens or drudge behind a gun at Trafalgar. But if it means that the hard work is more heavy because it is trifling, colorless and of small import to the soul, then as I say, I give it up; I do not know what the words mean.

To be Queen Elizabeth within a definite area, deciding sales, banquets, labours, and holidays; to be Whitely within a certain area, providing toys, boots, cakes and books; to be Aristotle within a certain area, teaching morals, manners, theology, and hygiene; I can imagine how this can exhaust the mind, but I cannot imagine how it could narrow it. How can it be a large career to tell other people about the Rule of Three, and a small career to tell one's own children about the universe? How can it be broad to be the same thing to everyone and narrow to be everything to someone? No; a woman's function is laborious, but because it is gigantic, not because it is minute. I will pity Mrs. Jones for the hugeness of her task; I will never pity her for its smallness.

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.

a) Let's start with our catechism, question #35: Q. What is sanctification? A. Sanctification is the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.

A single young woman in our society today is among the most worshiped of creatures on earth and, as a result, has become one of the most self-centered and selfish beings in existence! Photographs on billboards and in TV ads; the entire world of fashion, jewelry, make-up; movie productions and malls all aimed primarily at the outward

appearance and the immature thought-life of the American teenage girl. (I won't speak for the rest of the world but I'm pretty sure Europe, at least, is no different.) No matter how wisely the Christian family approaches these things some of this is bound to rub off on our children and, please hear me now, there is a right way to approach this emphasis on the outward appearance, but I digress.

Childhood is by nature a selfish time. Some of this is good: it is a time when his or her little self must be cultivated and developed; and some of it needs to be rooted out and killed little by little as he or she learns to live in the world with others. The Lord uses marriage and motherhood to continue rooting out the selfishness of women after they leave their parents' homes and, as we know, no sanctification is easy to come by no matter what the stage, but hard and difficult! **Hebrews 12:11: "For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."** If sanctification is "being renewed...after the image of God," and if, as we were reminded last time from **I John** that "God is love" what better way to be killing our own selfishness than to be loving and living for our children. **Hebrews 12:2: "...looking to Jesus...who for the joy that was set before him [this is us--we are that joy!!] endured the cross, despising the shame..."** This is love indeed. He set aside the glory He had with the Father to become a weak, vulnerable human being; He set aside all kinds of personal comforts, including privacy and *sleep*, hello; and He chose to let stupid, ignorant creatures hurl insults at Him in order to save those He loved from eternal and everlasting punishment. This is our model, Girls; when you think your life is hard, and I would be the first to agree with you that it is, reflect on our Savior's life and be inspired to carry on!

b) In our aggressively feminist society today it is the children who lose out over and over. Day-Cares abound, abortions happen all the time, children living with one parent or a grandparent or maybe even none at all. Summer time in our neighborhood always reveals what is really happening all around us since it is warm enough for folk to be outside. We often see and hear children out in the streets until 11pm or midnight and teenagers are often out until 3 or 4 in the morning. Who cares? It seems no one. In the end all this is nothing but selfishness, an unwillingness to be bothered for the sake of those who cannot defend themselves. So children are killed before they are given a chance to live or, if they aren't, they are not cared about enough to give them the tools actually to live that life.

I just finished reading *The Blind Side*--fascinating book about Michael Oher: black kid, one of maybe 15 children that his mother had by a number of different men, who became one of the most gifted of football players now playing for the Baltimore Ravens. (In fact, he will be playing in the Super Bowl this coming Sunday! NOT that we will be watching, of course!) Long story short, he was rescued off the streets of Memphis, TN by the Touhy family. When Mrs. Touhy went looking for a baby picture of Michael to put in his high school yearbook the absolute earliest one she could find was when he was 10 years old! His life up to that point has no recorded history because his mother, though she did not abort him, was so deep into her own miserable life and preoccupied with just plain survival (Michael was her sixth baby) that she

just couldn't care for him or about him. He slept where he could, ate what he could scrounge and learned to survive on the streets. His body got bigger and bigger while his mind stayed undeveloped since he almost never actually went to school--he didn't usually feel like going!

There may have been extenuating circumstances for Michael's mother and many others who are poor and trapped by their poverty but that does not change the fact that the Lord made mothers for the protection and the nurture of children. We are to spend our bodies for them, use our intellect on their behalf and give them all our hearts' commitment: in other words, our entire life is given over to them for that period of time when they are the most needy.

c) Girls, your life is not small or boring! Your tasks are many and varied. Yours is the life of a caregiver, providing basic needs for the health and comfort of your children: this can feel ordinary, unimportant and unending but if you don't do it, who will? Love sweetens these tasks, doesn't it? I recently got back from babysitting Courtney's boys for a couple of days and, granted I only do this occasionally, but I found it real pleasure to keep them clean, changing yucky diapers even when they themselves didn't seem to care! No one did even this basic thing for Michael Oher.

Yours is the life of a teacher which requires the ability to meet the pupil WHERE HE IS and then improve his mind, his character or any other skill he will need to live his life happily and successfully. Mrs. Touhy taught Michael a host of things she thought he needed to know just to live in the world. She would take him to an Italian restaurant and order everything on the menu just so he could learn what the rest of the world already knows--what's a marinara sauce; what's chicken alfredo, etc. She once told him, when the family was all out in the car getting ready to leave, to go back in the house and get his backpack since he would have some time to study while they were out. She told him it was hanging in the foyer. He got out and went into the house and was gone so long that she went in after him thinking that perhaps she had misremembered where it was. No, there it was, hanging in the foyer right where she said it was but Michael was wandering through the back of the house trying to figure out where the "foyer" was! She told him, pronouncing the word in both the ways he would hear it pronounced in the South.

Mothering is a complex, complicated business posing a seeming infinite number of problems (and variations thereof!) and requiring the exercise of one's intellect as well as skill in discerning just what is going on in those little minds and hearts. It is partly for this reason that Rob and I insisted that our girls have many experiences that included finishing college before they married. I spoke to them all the time about discovering their personal gifts, graces and loves: what were they good at; what gave them pleasure? When one is single, that is the time to explore these things and get good at them and I pushed my girls to think this way and to be ambitious for themselves (the boys too, of course, but with a different twist). But one summer as we drove to Colorado and the girls and I were up driving while the guys slept I realized that I had only told them part of what they needed to know. Bryonie told me about a young woman we knew who, even after she was married for several years, was pursuing her own career and

putting off having children for its sake. She thought I would approve and be proud of her for doing that. I wasn't! Yes, it is important to develop oneself as much as one can but this is not only for our own enjoyment but also *for the sake of those the Lord puts in our lives*. When the Lord gives you a husband your life belongs to him and your job is to be his helper; and when the Lord gives you children you get to bend all your skills, whether they be physical, mental, musical, literary, culinary, whatever, on their behalf and the more you have in your head and in the ability of your hands the richer their lives will be and the better able you will be to guide them through the troubles that their little lives will bring them.

Here's part of a conversation I had with Courtney some time ago: "Mom, you said that my education blesses my children and they are my life from now on anyway. You're absolutely right! But that in itself is what I'm talking about. THEY are my life. Not singing. Not performing. Not [fill-in-the-blank]. I want to be the first one to say that this is a selfish attitude, but I think it's more common than you may think in an age of women's so-called 'equality'." She was right, of course, and I know she was missing the joy of using her voice in that satisfying, skilled sort of way that she had spent hours and hours learning to do--I understand completely what she was feeling! My answer was that I knew exactly what she was talking about: to feel that you prepared yourself for something and then to have to put it on the shelf for a later time that may never come is hard, but that's all part of the self-denial that begins when we marry and that continues as children come into our lives. This is the "losing our life" for the Lord and for the advancement of His kingdom and this is one of the primary tools that He uses in our life to sanctify us. It's not particularly fun or easy; it's painful in fact, but the Lord says it's necessary for our souls' well-being, which we must believe because our Good God said so. Obviously, we can see how necessary it is for our children. (I might just insert here that as a mother--grandmother--advising my daughter it is hard to advise her to give up those things since *she* was once *my* child and I do delight in the gifts she has, as I do every one of my children.)

Yours is the life that will, eventually, inspire your children. Robbie once said to me when he was in high school that he admired the way I lived my life. I really didn't know that he was watching! Yikes! Remember that your choices, your words, the life you live with your husband, are all being "caught" by the little ones who share that home with you. How about that for pressure?!

You need to be clever and discerning--smart, if you will! **Proverbs 9:1-6:** **"Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn her seven pillars. She has slaughtered her beasts; she has mixed her wine; she has also set her table. She has sent out her young women to call from the highest places in the town, 'Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!' To him who lacks sense she says, 'Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Leave your simple ways, and live, and walk in the way of insight.'" But then we read in the same chapter later on: Proverbs 9:13-18: "The woman Folly is loud; she is seductive and knows nothing. She sits at the door of her house; she takes a seat on the highest places of the town, calling to those who pass by, who are going straight on their way, 'Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!' And to him who lacks sense she says, 'Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in**

secret is pleasant.’ But he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol.” Our children will only know the difference between wisdom and folly if we know it first! and then are wise, thoughtful and clever in their instruction. No one did this for so many of Michael Oher’s peers who shared his life on the street but were not rescued as he was; they ended up dead, in prison at an early age or addicted to opiates. All your gifts, all your education, all your experiences and all your understanding of your own life as a child of God need to be used to enrich your children’s lives and to teach them all you know. Now you bend your will to the making of their lives just as full, interesting, fun and godly as you can.

d) Is this hard? You bet! Is the pressure great with seemingly endless and constant demands? Absolutely. Are you constantly tired? No doubt about it. But when all of this comes crashing in on your spirit try to remember just a few things: first, something my grandmother used to say (who had eight children before she was 32 years old!), “This too shall pass.” This is something you must take on faith because right now I know good and well that it feels as though your life will look like this forever! and when you give in to these feelings it is very hard to bear, but if you can look at those of us who have lived through a similar time and listen to us say, “This is a time that, when you look back, will seem very short.” One day you’ll look around your table at all the faces there and listen to the cacophony of conversation and say to yourself, “Where did these people all come from?!” And they will be company for you and a pleasure to have around--provided you’ve done your work well!

Second, the Lord has all the resources that you need at His fingertips and He will give you all you need just for the asking because He loves you and He loves what you are doing for Him. Afterall, these are *His* children that He has entrusted to you to teach and to train. **Proverbs 8:22:** wisdom *resides* with the Lord: **“The Lord possessed me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth.”** The Lord is very practical in the help He gives. **Psalm 127:2:** **“It is in vain that you rise up early [I love this!] and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep.”** This is the same Psalm that tells us that children are a “heritage from the Lord” and a “reward,” **“Like arrows in the hand of a warrior....Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them!”** Oh dear!! **Psalm 104:14 & 15:** **“[The Lord] causes the grass to grow for the livestock and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth and wine to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine and bread to strengthen man’s heart.”** Even Paul tells Timothy to **“No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.”** **I Timothy 5:23**

Third, when you turn your thoughts away from how you feel, and think about what your children need (not necessarily what *they* think they need but what they *truly*

need), you are building the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, brick by brick; you are losing your life for His sake and we have heard Jesus himself say, **“Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” Matthew 10:39** You are placing your treasure in Heaven and, **Matthew 6:21: “...Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”** Your life will be full of moments when you need to decide to live according to “what you know” and not according to “how you feel!” I can pretty much guarantee this. Unfortunately, this is not an emphasis that our self-indulgent culture will help you with!

e) But is this work just simply too hard to figure out? too complicated, too demanding, too impossible? The Lord says no it is not too hard; see what He says to Israel before they go into the Promised Land. **Deuteronomy 30:11-20: “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.**

“See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil...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.*”

Truly, to have the Lord fill up all those empty, depleted places in your heart and life is the best of all rewards and yields the greatest return of happiness and joy. The trouble is no one can really tell you how this happens; it is done in the privacy of your own mind and heart and, it may have to happen in the midst of busy-ness since small children rarely are understanding of a mother’s need for “quiet time!” I remember actually being angry with my little ones because they kept me from reading my Bible! What? Well, they weren’t going to keep me from praying, by cracky! and I did pray--all the time--though not in an organized, quiet sort of way that refreshes your spirit and makes you *feel* wise; it was more like, “Oh Lord, help me! I need to know what to do *fast!*” I love the line in Anna Waring’s poem, “A mind to blend with outward life while keeping at thy side.” What better way to express our dependence on the Lord and our desperate need for Him to be helping us think only things pleasing to Himself and helpful for our children?

f) Wait a minute! Does all this mean that we *never* have any “outside” interests? Never have responsibilities or projects or ministries or obligations outside our homes that do not involve our children? Tune in next time. But for now we work on that battle in our own hearts, that place where we want to rule instead of the Lord, where we want

to indulge ourselves instead of serving our children, where we are being sanctified daily, being “renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.”

HYMN:

The hymn today, like *Father I Know That All My Life*, is for you more than it is for your children. However, the little buggers, I mean *darlings*, will certainly benefit if you have this prayer in your mind!

O God, My Faithful God

Johann Heermann, 1585-1647, translated by Catherine Winkworth, 1863
Darmstadt by Ahasuerus Fritsch, 1679, arranged by J.S. Bach
#602 in *Trinity Hymnal*

O God, my faithful God, true fountain ever flowing,
Without whom nothing is, all perfect gifts bestowing:
Give me a healthy frame, and may I have within
A conscience free from blame, a soul unstained by sin.

Give me the strength to do with ready heart and willing,
Whatever you command, my calling here fulfilling--
To do it when I ought, with all my strength; and bless
Whatever I have wrought, for you must give success.

Keep me from saying words that later need recalling;
Guard me, lest idle speech may from my lips be falling:
But when, within my place, I must and ought to speak,
Then to my words give grace, lest I offend the weak.

When dangers gather round, oh, keep me calm and fearless;
Help me to bear the cross when life seems dark and cheerless;
Help me, as you have taught, to love both great and small,
And, by your Spirit's might, to live at peace with all. Amen.