

Mother's Encouragement Group
January 9, 2014
Plant Them and Let Them Grow #5

I want to begin today by telling you a funny story of something that happened in St. Louis over Christmas that gave me a renewed respect for the place that all of you are in with multiple little children in your care! As you know, we went from six to ten grandchildren this summer within the space of one month and all of them were gathering in St. Louis for Christmas to be together for the very first time. We were to fulfill the ratio: one adult, one child, missing only our two sons. A beautiful home was lent to us for our use by two of Jamie & Arrika's lovely friends from their church. The Wykoffs spent all of their nights and days there, becoming, more or less, the hosts as the other families gathered for the Christmas meals and celebrations. On the morning after their arrival they had some shopping to do that Rob was going to help with so I offered to pick up the older Dey boys and babysit them with the three Wykoff kids. I thought, "I know my grandchildren; they know me; they'll enjoy being together for the first time; we'll be fine." With baby Maggie on my hip and four little toddlers around me wondering what the new rules would be--in fact, I could see that some of them were wondering if there *were* any rules--I suggested, since the house was new to us and big, that we go "on a lion hunt," thinking we would all go exploring together. Well, little Bryonie (who, you understand, is the oldest and just had had her fourth birthday) loved the idea but had her own interpretation: she immediately ran down the long wooden staircase (we were on the landing outside the bedrooms), turned around on the landing below and started roaring at the top of her lungs! She was the lion and we were all supposed to track her down. Only she kept roaring and roaring, waiting for the rest of us to do something. Peter, used to her antics, went down the stairs, turned around and did the same. Charlie, not wanting to be outdone, followed suit until all three of them were roaring at the top of their lungs. Maggie began to cry and Jacob looked up at me--scared--and wanted up! Oh dear.

Somehow we got through that moment--I can't exactly tell you how--and Maggie went down for a nap and I put all four of them up on the island in the kitchen and began shamelessly to feed them cookies and pumpkin bread! Bryonie wanted a story while they were eating and they all perked up at the suggestion so I began to tell them the Christmas story without telling them who the characters were to see if they might recognize it: "Once upon a time there was a lovely young woman who was going to have a baby." "Was she married?" was Bryonie's immediate question. When I said "No" her eyes got big and she said, "She was going to have a baby and she wasn't married?!!" I said, "Well, an angel told her it was OK. Now you see if you know who this story is about" and Jacob said, "Jesus!" That was pretty much the end of that!

The thing that worked the absolute best with them was playing "ring a ring o roses" which they loved, and my heart warmed when Bryonie burst out with, "I love you, Grandma!" But then I tried to teach them "duck, duck, goose" and whenever we got to "goose" they ALL got up and ran around and around the house and then back; this was Charlie's influence, I dare

say, but at least he led them back again. Needless to say I was glad when their parents came home; I was tired!

Then there was the Christmas Eve service at Memorial Presbyterian Church. Courtney was invited to sing in their 5:00 service but had already committed to helping lead the worship at their own church, Crossroads, at 6:30. Rob & I said we would keep the children, bring them home after the service and put them to bed so the parents could enjoy their evening. So we all descended upon the place and, of course, sat right down in front--where else do singers sit who have to be inconspicuous and leave immediately after? So Jordan, baby Robbie (in a car seat), Charlie, Jacob, Courtney, and Henry (in his car seat) were in the pew in front of Rob, little Charlie, Bryonie and me with Timothy (in his car seat). Behind us were John, Vange, Peter and Maggie. We got through the first half of the service (it was beautiful--candles and all) and Courtney sang beautifully while Arrika played for her. (It was fun to see Arrika singing in the choir too.) It was getting hard to keep Timothy quiet since I was getting whiffs of a needed diaper change, so he came out of his car seat. When Courtney was finished she left through a front door on the side, Charlie handed Jacob to Rob who immediately began screaming for his mother (Jacob, not Rob)! So out of the service went Rob with his hand over Jacob's mouth and Charlie following. I exited shortly after with the diaper bag and Timothy who was also beginning to cry. I met Rob in the "nursing mother's room" to find another father(!) changing a diaper and Jacob quietly sitting on Rob's lap, both watching the service on a closed-circuit TV. We had left little Charlie and Bryonie sitting by themselves in our pew! and when we got back Jordan had two babies on her lap. Wykoffs all still intact. Where were the Moons you ask. They didn't come until Christmas day. Thank goodness? Well, I don't know--what's two more kids when you have two more adults to go with them?! The ratio at that particular time was: one adult to one and two-thirds children!

Was it worth it? Absolutely! First of all, the children were enthralled with the beautiful candles and the older ones got to hold a burning one during the singing of Silent Night just like we do here at Faith. (Grandma's heart stopped a few times during this moment!) But secondly, besides all the beautiful carols they heard sung, they were learning that Christmas is also about church. They will learn year by year that the sacred reality behind all the presents, the tree, the food and the family celebrations is what is real, true and most important, and it is these things that can never be forgotten. Just like the Israelite children celebrating Passover and asking their parents, "what does this mean?" Which truth brings me back to the discussion of planting our children in the Word of God, in the only soil that will give them all the nutrients they need to grow into godly, obedient children and finally into well-adjusted, godly adults.

Today we discuss the second commandment:

II. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children

to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. Exodus 20:3-6

We start with Edith Schaeffer: “The first commandment had to do with God’s *being*, His existence, His place in the whole of the universe and in all of time as the one and only God. Only God is the Creator; all else is created. The first commandment establishes the fact that there is no other God. All others called by the word ‘god’ are false.

“The second commandment deals with the worship of God as contrasted with the worship of false gods. God, who has made human beings, knows that the answer to Who am I? and How can I be fulfilled? includes a need to bow in worship to Himself. We have a *need* to worship the Creator as well as a capacity to worship Him. We have a *need* to love the Father in heaven who has made us as well as a capacity to love Him. To be living without this fulfillment is to be unfulfilled indeed.” God made us this way.

“Because we are human beings made with these capacities, to turn away from the true God, to reject Him, to ignore Him, to rebel against the true God does not leave anyone in a vacuum of neutrality. There is also a turning to, an accepting of, an attempt to obey someone else in His place, a false god, an idol. This was true when Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments; it was true many times in Old Testament history; it has been true at every turn of history; and it is true today. It has never been more true than today.” [*Ten Things Parents Must Teach Their Children* by Edith Schaeffer p. 46] We were created to worship; man is a worshiping being and when we don’t worship God we are, in the nature of the case, worshiping something else, whether it be ourselves, our appetites or something outside ourselves.

When this commandment was given to Israel it was revolutionary to them; the people knew exactly what the command was about since everywhere around them people worshiped gods that they had made out of stone, wood, gold, silver, whatever. They, in fact, had just done it themselves in the shape of the golden calf. They knew, good and well, what this commandment meant. Their almighty, unseen, all-knowing, infinite and completely powerful God was not to be made into something small that they could see, touch and manipulate. They were to leave Him alone--like untamed Aslan--to be scary, wild, uncontrolled by them and so worshiped. Only this way would they know their complete dependence, their utter insignificance, the ridiculousness of being proud before Him. Add to this that He is utterly holy and cannot stand sin and they would finally have the recipe for obeying this second commandment.

Today it is harder to see this commandment as revolutionary since we are not in the habit of making things to worship but we heard Sunday night that *anything*, whether of self or of nature or of selfish desire, that takes God’s rightful place in our hearts is an idol. Human hearts are “idol factories.” **“Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.” Colossians 3:5 “For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.” Ephesians 5:5** Any way in which we prize the created over the Creator, seeking to find

happiness there, or help, or comfort, is idolatry. We want to control, don't we, to be comfortable, to be happy. We love ourselves and, if the truth be told, we love ourselves more than we love anyone else, including the God who made us.

In reality it is hard for us to believe in the spiritual world that we cannot see, isn't it? Our minds are too small to grasp that world and our bodies are too important to us, through which we perceive all the reality we have ever experienced. To understand what we cannot see, to trust in one we can only know by faith is what we need to do in order to keep ourselves devoted to Christ, turning constantly to Him and away from things--idols--we hope will bring us immediate relief and pleasure. How do we cultivate such a faith? When we began talking about the issues of parenting children I told you that our parenting should model the Lord's parenting of us. If this is true, and I believe it is, we can turn that principle around and look at what we do with our children, what we desire from them, and begin to understand our Heavenly Father's heart and just how He deals with us, His children.

We want our children to talk to us, do we not? We want them to tell us what is going on in their little minds, what makes them afraid and what delights them so that we can motivate them to right living and teach them to trust that what we tell them is true and then to happily give the obedience we ask for. So with our God. He wants us to talk to Him; we know this because it is everywhere commanded and exemplified in His Word. But this is hard! Talking to someone we cannot see? Loving someone we cannot touch? Prayer is more purely an act of faith than anything else we do as Christians and a more spiritual one. This is something we should be modelling for our children right out of the box and teaching them when, where and how to pray; they cannot be too young to hear your prayers and to begin to pray themselves. This will help them when they come to their own spiritual trials because they will have the habit of prayer already built into them.

C.S. Lewis has a wonderful treatment of prayer in *Screwtape Letters*. This from number IV: "The best thing, where it is possible, is to keep the patient from the serious intention of praying altogether. When the patient is an adult recently re-converted to the Enemy's party, like your man, this is best done by encouraging him to remember, or to think he remembers, the parrot-like nature of his prayers in childhood. In reaction against that, he may be persuaded to aim at something entirely spontaneous, inward, informal, and unregularised; and what this will actually mean to a beginner will be an effort to produce in himself a vaguely devotional *mood* in which real concentration of will and intelligence have no part. One of their poets, Coleridge, has recorded that he did not pray 'with moving lips and bended knees' but merely 'composed his spirit to love' and indulged 'a sense of supplication.' That is exactly the sort of prayer we want; and since it bears a superficial resemblance to the prayer of silence as practised by those who are very far advanced in the Enemy's service, clever and lazy patients can be taken in by it for quite a long time. At the very least, they can be persuaded that the bodily position makes no difference to their prayers; for they constantly forget, what you must always remember, that they are animals and that whatever their bodies do affects their souls. It is funny how mortals always

picture us as putting things into their minds: in reality our best work is done by keeping things out.

“If this fails, you must fall back on a subtler misdirection of his intention. Whenever they are attending to the Enemy Himself we are defeated, but there are ways of preventing them from doing so. The simplest is to turn their gaze away from Him towards themselves. Keep them watching their own minds and trying to produce *feelings* there by the action of their wills. When they meant to ask Him for charity, let them, instead, start trying to manufacture charitable feelings for themselves and not notice that this is what they are doing. When they meant to pray for courage, let them be trying to feel brave. When they say they are praying for forgiveness, let them be trying to feel forgiven. Teach them to estimate the value of each prayer by their success in producing the desired feeling; and never let them suspect how much success or failure of that kind depends on whether they are well or ill, fresh or tired, at the moment.

“But of course the Enemy will not meantime be idle. Wherever there is prayer, there is danger of His own immediate action. He is cynically indifferent to the dignity of His position, and ours, as pure spirits, and to human animals on their knees He pours out self-knowledge in a quite shameless fashion. But even if He defeats your first attempt at misdirection, we have a subtler weapon. The humans do not start from that direct perception of Him which we, unhappily, cannot avoid. They have never known that ghastly luminosity, that stabbing and searing glare which makes the background of permanent pain to our lives. If you look into your patient’s mind when he is praying, you will not find *that*. If you examine the object to which he is attending, you will find that it is a composite object containing many quite ridiculous ingredients. There will be images derived from pictures of the Enemy as He appeared during the discreditable episode known as the Incarnation: there will be vaguer--perhaps quite savage and puerile--images associated with the other two Persons. There will even be some of his own reverence (and of bodily sensations accompanying it) objectified and attributed to the object revered. I have known cases where what the patient called his ‘God’ was actually *located*--up and to the left at the corner of the bedroom ceiling, or inside his own head, or in a crucifix on the wall. But whatever the nature of the composite object, you must keep him praying to *it*--to the thing that he has made, not to the Person who has made him. You may even encourage him to attach great importance to the correction and improvement of his composite object, and to keeping it steadily before his imagination during the whole prayer. For if he ever comes to make the distinction, if ever he consciously directs his prayers ‘Not to what I think thou art but to what thou knowest thyself to be,’ our situation is, for the moment, desperate. Once all his thoughts and images have been flung aside or, if retained, retained with a full recognition of their merely subjective nature, and the man trusts himself to the completely real, eternal, invisible Presence, there with him in the room and never knowable by him as he is known by it--why, then it is that the incalculable may occur. In avoiding this situation--this real nakedness of the soul in prayer--you will be helped by the fact that the humans themselves do not desire it as much as they suppose. There’s such a thing as getting more than they bargained for!”

This is the crux of the issue, isn't it? Knowing, trusting, worshiping the REAL God, not the God we thought Him to be, the God we hoped He was, the one who answers our prayers the way we want Him to answer them, the one who makes only easy demands on our lives, in fact, the idol we made to replace the real Creator who is not only "out there" but here and everywhere doing what He has in His own mind for us, for our world and for His Church--that is, the God we cannot control! How do we increase our faith and trust in *that* God? I admit to you that there have been many times in these last months when I prayed on my knees, trusting in the goodness of my Savior and in His ability to bring about His will in the world and He not only seemed not to answer but actually to make the situation worse than it was before I had prayed. He seemed to be saying, "No, no, no, not now." Sometimes I could only tell Him, "I don't want not to believe; I don't want to be faithless; please, keep me from sinning." An idol is easy to pray to because it does for us what we want (we only *think* it does!) and makes us feel good but our almighty God is a real person and does what He wills. So why pray if He does what He wants anyway? Because it is one of the ways that we learn about who He really is. As Lewis said, "...to human animals on their knees He pours out self-knowledge in a quite shameless fashion."

So how can we increase our knowledge of our real God? Think about what we do with our children when we want them to obey, to trust, to love us and to live their lives without fear? We draw them into ourselves, into who we are. We teach them, we talk to them, we read to them, we share our feelings with them and we insist on their seeing things the same way we see them. We also enter into their lives and show them why they do not need to be afraid and we bring them up short if they are treading a dangerous path. I have pictures of Vangie and little Bryonie climbing up the steps to a slide on a playground the girls and I had taken the children to one very cold afternoon. She was afraid to go up by herself so her mommy went up (in heeled boots, I might add!) and came down with her, teaching her that there was nothing to be afraid of especially if her mommy was with her. The other mommies were coaching and praising their more courageous boys from the sidelines. Little Evangeline stayed warm and safe in her mama's arms. So the Lord with us: He wants us to know Him, to talk to Him, to learn from Him, to walk with Him, to trust Him. And how do we do that except by reading the book He has written about Himself and by praying with real desire for Him. Paul prayed first, **"For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith--that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."** **Ephesians 3:14-19** I can rest in that prayer and know that Paul prayed it for me.

Edith Schaeffer again: "Frightening? It is solemn and serious. To be flippant about being a Christian as if it were a thing of outwardly sticking up one's hand in a meeting, with no inward turning away from--and turning to--and recognition of some of the sin that is present and needs

confession to the Lord, to go on day after day with no change taking place as walking in the light replaces walking in the dark, is to be in a frightening place indeed. It is marvelous to know the truth of the effectiveness of Christ's death in washing away our sins. This same Word of God, however, tells us to be conscious of the battle that is taking place as Satan tries to tempt us in one way or another to stop trusting God, to turn away from Him. The end of I John 5:21 is 'Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.' This comes directly after verse 20, which tells us that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true, right after telling us that the world is in [the] control of the evil one. Satan is not yet vanquished, the battle rages, and we are being utterly stupid if we do not realize that it is an active battle. Therefore, John admonishes us, 'Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.' We can't take for granted that we will. We need to ask daily for the Lord's help both in recognizing where the danger lies, and in turning away from the pitfall." [ibid. p. 54]

You all know that my prayers have been focussed on our son Jamie and that the turns in his life have caused me much self-examination as well as the examination of my faith. His own walk has strengthened mine. This letter was waiting for us when we arrived at his home in St. Louis, dated December 13, 2013:

Dear Mom & Dad,

I have been reading Rutherford's Letters and have found them to be a comfort beyond comfort. But two things primarily grabbed my attention. The first was "whether God come to His children with a rod or a crown, if He come Himself with it, it is well." The Lord has been impressing this on my heart for the last month, that it does not matter where I am or what I am going through if I have Jesus beside me. He has begun His work of filling my heart with a passion and desire for an intimate relationship with Him, hitherto unexperienced or even imagined. I did not desire the Lord, I desired the benefits that come from being His child, but I had little love in my heart for the man/God Himself. He is turning a heart of stone into a heart of flesh, a man afraid and cowardly to a man of faith and courage, relying on the true promises of God, believing in His goodness, and resting on His everlasting arms. I have found myself becoming a different person altogether. Obviously I still wrestle with sins that have always plagued me, but now I wrestle with hope and confidence, rather than despair and hopelessness. I have begun to know a level of self-discipline that I have never experienced before. Being able to consistently read my Bible and pray and work out everyday is something I have never been able to do. Primarily because I was relying on my own strength and understanding to accomplish it, whereas now the Lord has humbled me so low it is obvious I have no strength and understanding....It is almost like the Lord has given me a break so that I can rest, rebuild, and strengthen my defenses. He has cleared out the demon and now I am rushing to fill my house with good things so that it is full when the demon returns with his seven friends. They will find it an uncomfortable place to inhabit!

The second thing that stood out to me was this, "Now is the Lord laying, in the one scale of balance, your making conscious submission to His gracious will; and in the other, your

affection and love to your [son]. Which of the two will you then choose to satisfy? Be wise then; and as I trust you love Christ better than a sinful woman, pass by your [son], and kiss the Lord's rod." This made me think of you and hope that throughout all of our pain and sorrow our love for the Lord never wavers. "His steadfast love endures forever." I am sorry to be the cause of so much pain, so many trials. It hurts me to think of what you must be going through. But the Lord has shown His mercy and demonstrated His goodness. He is determined that our family pursue Him with urgency and passion, not content to meander across the finish line. He wants our all! And I was the one paying the least attention to His call. He needed to wake me up. For my wife and for my family I am so desperately sorry, but for myself I rejoice in the wondrous power of my Almighty God and Savior. He has made His presence known and laid low the idols in my heart, sweeping them aside in an instant and in their place lighting a fire that grows in strength and intensity with each passing day. His mighty deeds and His goodness echo off the walls, even these dark, awful walls. His Spirit whispers comfort, peace, courage, and forgiveness into my ears all day long. I am eternally grateful to Him for His love and mercy....

Bryonie wrote this to the family just this morning: "The last time Josh and I got to talk to Jamie we discussed the Lord's promises and how difficult it is to believe He really does want our good when our prayers are denied one after another after another. Jamie told us that what he was determined to do was simply start with what the Bible says about the Lord - what the Lord says about Himself - and believe that. That, at least, is Truth.

"All I am praying for these days is a heart that loves and trusts. I can't seem to pray for much more than that. I'm wondering if that's really all God wants from me anyway. When I think about Judah and all of his obedience problems these days when it comes down to it all I really want from him is to trust me enough to obey and to obey willingly and lovingly.

"I read this just now. "Faith is not a sense, nor sight, nor reason, but a taking God at His word" and, "Abraham believed God, and said to sight, 'Stand back!' and to the laws of nature, 'Hold your peace!' and to a misgiving heart, 'Silence, thou lying tempter!' He *believed* God."

And this from Jamie's last letter: "I can tell you that I have every confidence in the goodness of God and every hope in His promises, even though I cannot understand how they work. I have to stop thinking about how all of my prayers are answered in the exact opposite way that I asked for, and instead simply believe in the truth of the Bible when it says ask and it will be given to you and leave it at that. Perhaps we will never fully understand this side of eternity, and it would probably be good form for me to stop trying to treat the Bible as a means to get what I want or prayer for that matter. All I can do is keep praying because there is nothing left for me to do, nowhere else to turn." And isn't this exactly what our Lord wants from all of us? He wants *no competition* in our hearts with anything or anyone.

I finish with Edith Schaeffer again: "Old homes, new homes, tiny cottages, magnificent palaces, little huts, big tents, a sleeping bag on a wanderer's back, or a trailer, [or a jail cell]--

whatever the home of the believer, the astonishing and breathtaking promise is that God will live with us, and walk with us, and will be our God, and we will be His people. How very appropriate is the next sentence we read as we turn away from all forms of other gods and idols, as we prepare our homes and our walks to be visited by such a One: **‘Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.’ II Cor. 7:1.**

“Rather than putting anything at all in His place in our lives, rather than asking what benefits we can get out of being a Christian, our own question should be, How can we properly reverence Him and bring joy to Him?” [ibid. p. 61]

“What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, ‘I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.’ II Corinthians 6:16-18

Lord, I believe, please help my unbelief!

HYMN

O Worship the King

Sir Robert Grant/J. Michael Haydn

Trinity Hymnal, #2

O worship the King all glorious above,
O gratefully sing his power and his love;
Our shield and Defender, the Ancient of Days,
Pavilioned in splendor and girded with praise.

O tell of his might, O sing of his grace,
Whose robe is the light, whose canopy space.
His chariots of wrath the deep thunderclouds form,
And dark is his path on the wings of the storm.

The earth with its store of wonders untold,
Almighty, your power has founded of old;
Has ‘stablished it fast by a changeless decree,
And round it has cast, like a mantle, the sea.

Your bountiful care what tongue can recite?

It breathes in the air; it shines in the light;
It streams from the hills; it descends to the plain;
And sweetly distils in the dew and the rain.

Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail,
In you do we trust, nor find you to fail;
Your mercies how tender, how firm to the end,
Our Maker, Defender, Redeemer, and Friend!

O measureless Might! Ineffable Love!
While angels delight to hymn you above,
The humbler creation, though feeble their lays,
With true adoration shall lisp to your praise. Amen.