

Mother's Encouragement Group
May 23, 2013
Our "sealed and sacred relationship"

After almost a year of meeting together and talking about the most important calling that a woman can have, should the Lord give it to her, that is the raising of her children for Him, I thought it good, as we break for the summer, to make a more extensive review of the things we have talked about and I'd love to get feedback from you to see what things were most helpful to you in helping you face the daily, exhausting tasks this important work involves. If you remember we started with a list of "hard things" that we all have had to face as mothers and basically I want to know if you feel that the things we have talked about have helped you in adjusting to, and living with, those hard things. It is surely true that "Children tie a mother's feet" and that your job is exhausting, often confusing and certainly complicated! To use some of G.K. Chesterton's phrases, I'm hoping that this year has encouraged you in this "mysterious and momentous business," grown up your "vigilance and loyalty," and nurtured your "sealed and sacred relationship" with each other as you carry on together and I want to say that I have felt it a keen privilege and pleasure to have been part of watching you grow together. I am very proud of you all! Each of you has a lovely wealth of mind and heart to offer your children.

So tell me what you think and as we part for the summer let's remind ourselves that a key ingredient in forming and nurturing this "sacred relationship" is prayer. We pray for you, you pray for your children, asking the Lord for insight into their little hearts' needs and for ways that you can meet those needs. Of course, if you want to pray for each other we won't stop you!

Hard things:

I looked over the list of hard things that I put together at the beginning of our year together. Here it is:

1) Physical exhaustion because of interrupted and shortened nights and the knowledge that the relief that comes when the children are in bed for the night is short-lived even if they sleep the whole 12 hours: it's going to start all over again in the morning!

2) Mental fatigue because of the childrens' constant and varying needs: clothes, cleanliness, comfort and hunger, both real and imagined.

3) Spiritual fatigue because of constant watchfulness: the need to make them obey; to teach them how to live, being cheerful, truthful and unselfish.

4) Nagging self-doubt, wondering whether the techniques being used are the best for accomplishing these purposes in each child's life.

5) Very little, if any, personal time: this job is 24-7!

6) Strain on the marriage: there is less time for intimacy; there may be conflict of opinion on parenting issues since mom and dad come from two different parenting traditions and styles and joining them may be difficult. The financial sacrifice of providing for all the children need can also be a pressure on the marriage.

7) Loneliness: this is a job done by yourself (often, and typically, dad is not there) in the privacy of your home when no one is watching so the motivation to do it must come from your own mind. There is very little public recognition and praise for what you do; in fact, folk are more likely to criticize than complement.

8) Discouragement while signs of learning and spiritual growth in the children are slow to appear. The children often get up in the morning and seem to wonder, “Are the rules still the same today? I think I need to find out!”

9) The feeling that you are at cross purposes with your children as you seek to keep order and create beauty in the home and they seem only interested in destroying it. This may be especially true for mothers of boys.

10) The feeling that life is passing you by: all the education and development you’ve struggled to achieve in your own life and heart and person is hidden away in your home while your husband gets to be out in the world using his gifts on behalf of others and enjoying the kudos and compliments of those he serves.

Our Motto: Love Them Into Heaven!

We take our cue from the Lord: we love because He loves. He loved us first, made us like Himself and so we love the ones He has given to us. Our parenting style should mimic His. Everything that happens in our children’s lives, happy things and hard things (maybe especially the hard things) and everything we teach them, is a vehicle for loving them, drawing them to ourselves and so to God and to godly behavior. **Psalm 136** shows us how the Lord loved Israel through thick and thin: “...for His steadfast love endures forever.”

Our First Principle:

The Lord has suited us, more than He has our husbands, for the task of caring for, teaching, nurturing, raising our children because *we are there!* Deuteronomy 6:4-9: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise...”

Our natures suit us for the understanding of weakness and the caring for details. Patience in suffering (physical and otherwise) is typically a virtue that women learn more readily than men. (How does your husband manage illness? In our house all life that he is responsible for simply STOPS.)

Second Principle:

Children are born foolish and stupid; they have Adam’s nature just like we do. Psalm 14:2 & 3: “The Lord looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they

have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.” Proverbs 22:15: “Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.”

It is your job to teach him that this nature is sinful and wrong! You must insist on having your way--Christ’s way--in their lives, not letting them have their way in yours.

Third Principle:

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

You defend your child against all comers whenever you can, letting him see that you are on his side. But when he is wrong you will show him, not defending his sin, but letting him know how important he is to you--so important that you can’t stand it when his behavior is not right and is not pleasing the Lord.

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. “Obey right away; all the way; with a cheerful heart!” Proverbs 13:24: “Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.” Proverbs 19:18: “Discipline your son, for there is hope; do not set your heart on putting him to death.” This discipline teaches him to obey *and gives him a teachable heart.*

This is a God-given role; you do not have it because you are perfect and without sin!

Children need teachable hearts so that they can learn, first from you and then from the Lord all their life long.

Any discipline needs to be carried on until the behavior is learned, until obedience has come and the child is acquiescent. *You have got to have courage for this!*

Ephesians 6:1: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.”

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.”

There needs to be an element of real fear--being afraid--of the Lord and of the consequences He deals out for our sin, else why would we ever stop sinning? We long for Heaven but we fear Hell.

Part of communicating the concept of the fear of the Lord is the reverence shown when the family comes to church for worship. No child should be allowed to disrupt any worship service any time: get up and leave *before* the problem erupts.

Your own attention needs to be on your own conversation with the Lord, communicating to the children that they are not the most important thing just then.

Worship is for *everyone!* Children need to learn to worship right alongside their parents so you must also teach them to participate as they can.

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!

We start with the outward behavior and move to the inner: it's a bit like kneeling to pray; we kneel to express our humility before God but the act of kneeling also increases the humility in our hearts before the Lord. We do with our bodies what needs to happen in our hearts; so with children: we do with their bodies what we want to develop in their hearts.

No child should ever have more than *one* tantrum in his life: self-control is the rule of the day and rebellion in your child should be dealt with swiftly and painfully enough so that he never wants to do that again!

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.

If what you say must be law in your children's life--i.e. they need to obey or suffer consequences for not obeying--then having a lot of rules is simply a pain in the neck and makes everyone's life miserable.

Let me pause here a moment to say that if there is a weakness in parenting today that I have observed more often than any other weakness it is the failure of parents to impose their will on their children, that is, *absolutely to insist* that they do and say only what their parents want them to. No argument, no discussion, no rebellion--just obedience and that happily given. This is the ultimate goal *all the time* and parents have to learn to achieve this goal no matter what the cost, no matter what is required. The failure to do this may come from a lack of confidence in oneself, a fear of one's children ("I want them to love me!") or an underdeveloped understanding of the role the Lord has given them in the life of their children. Whatever the reason, parents are not doing their children any favors by not insisting upon obedience; children desperately need this skill and will need it all their life long. So, whatever it is you want your child to do in any particular moment, whether it is sit still and be quiet, stop and listen, respond sweetly to someone else--whatever it is, you *must not stop* until he has obeyed. This takes courage and determination. I see parents all the time caving in to the will of their children rather than taking the trouble--and often it is trouble--to mold their children's wills to their own.

When I am teaching a child to play the violin he does not get to "do it his own way," whatever way *he* thinks is easiest and most comfortable. He must follow the rules of learning to play and the better he obeys those rules the more freedom--and pleasure--he will find in playing that instrument. So with building the character of our children through their obedience: the better they learn to obey the happier they will be.

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.

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. (WCF, Shorter catechism #35)

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! 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!

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 not only building the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, brick by brick, but you are losing your life for Jesus' sake and we have heard Him say, **"Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."** **Matthew 10:39** You are then 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!" You can "take this to the bank!" Unfortunately, this is not an emphasis that our self-indulgent culture will help you with--that toughness of character is gradually disappearing.

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." Here we seek to address not any one thing but rather the antithesis of things that seem to contradict one another.

--We ought to love our children unconditionally but we know that obedience is the rule of the day which must be uncompromisingly demanded.

--Your life IS your children right now but they are not the center of the universe! Really?

--Both your husband and the Lord should take precedence over your children in the commitment of your mind, your heart and your life. But how does that work out "design-wise" when living with children all the time takes every brain cell you have?

--Children are born with Adam's nature, full of sin and rebellion, yet we insist that they act like the saved little Christians that they are. How are they supposed to have the ability to do this?

--Children need to learn to fear God as well as love Him and to love Him as well as to fear Him. How in the world do we do that?

--And what about you--you who are the source of all life, health, happiness, nutrition, education, inspiration, safety and JOY? Where is that going to come from?

Love--that unconditional acceptance of and loyalty to our children--is the backdrop, the atmosphere, the context in which the obedience of our children is demanded; marriage is the backdrop and the context in which family life is managed; caring for our children *is* the obedience we offer the Lord and shows the commitment we have to Him.

We figure out when to cuddle, when to discipline, when to spend time with husband, when to be involved at church and when to say, “No, I must be with my children today” or “Oh, thank you, dear; I really just need to get out and go shopping!” by looking at the motives of our hearts which the Lord sees and knows even better than we do ourselves. Are we pleasing ourselves when we make our choices or are we seeking to please the Lord? Are we needing to refresh ourselves so that we can carry on or are we simply indulging in a selfish pleasure?

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.

We need to remember 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. **Genesis 2:25 “...They were both naked and were not ashamed.”** So with the backdrop of a happy marriage 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.

Eleventh Principle:

We must bend our wills, spend our bodies and use our minds, bringing everything we know to bear upon the lives of our children in order to turn them away from their natural path to Hell and draw them happily into the (narrow!) path to Heaven. There is nothing in the world more important than this!

Ecclesiastes 2:14: “The wise person has his eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness.” We must be wise so that we can impart wisdom to our children.

The Rod and the Carrot! Discipline and reward. Punishment and praise. These are two sides of the same coin and both very necessary and motivated by love. The sheep dog nips at the heels of the sheep while the shepherd leads them into rich pastures. We bring everything we know, everything we can do, to bear on those little lives in order to achieve that godliness that each is capable of at each stage of life. Is this important? There is nothing that is more so. Is it hard? Indeed it is but who will do it if you don’t?

This requires a certain tough-mindedness, understanding and determination that I have often seen absent in today’s generation of mothers. I’ve told my girls the story of when, after my fifth baby was born and my oldest one was seven; I was nursing, carpooling back and forth to

school, and waking up toddlers from naps to do it; I was really at my wits' end trying to figure out life again. I was talking on the phone, one of those wretched days, with my mother who was in Iowa and telling her my woes--how difficult life was and how basically there was only about one hour in each day when I got actually to *decide* what to do; the rest of the time was completely dictated by the needs of my children. I expected, and hoped, that she would say, "Oh Honey; I know just how you're feeling" with that sympathetic voice every daughter wants to hear from her mother. But what she did say was, "Well, if that's the case, you better put down the phone and go do it!" Huh. I think I cried for a while afterwards but in the end it was the best advice I could have had; I got up and did what I had to do, trying to ignore how I felt about it!

Twelfth Principle:

Showing hospitality or, cultivating a loving heart, is the best of all schools for your children, teaching them to be unselfish and thoughtful of others. Hebrews 13:1-2: "Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."

Leviticus 19:33-34: "When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God."

Hospitality is not only a gift, meaning that it may be easier and more enjoyable for some than for others, but it is also an obligation. It is not only an act but a state of mind. It is not only a loving heart but merciful acts that flow from that heart. Our children will catch this from us, whatever our attitude is: whether we are hospitable or whether we are not; they will be as we are.

Thirteenth Principle:

Children should learn about sex from their parents, but hardly ever do! Song of Songs 1:2: "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! For your love is better than wine...."

Sex is an amazing invention that our God created and gave to mankind for our enjoyment and pleasure. It is important to remember that it is not God's creation that has become evil but the sin that corrupted it. The Lord gave us His law which regulates our lives, including our sexual lives, as an act of kindness and grace, showing us how to live happily in the world He made for us and how to understand how He made us.

We need to be demonstrating a happy approach to sex in front of our children as they are enveloped in the love their parents have for one another and, we ought not to be fearful or embarrassed about talking to our children about their bodies at each stage of their growing up.

Fourteenth Principle:

This is all very mysterious: why does the Lord entrust to us who are sinful and flawed the raising up of HIS children whom loves even more than we do? He has given us the responsibility of a caretaker's job and expects us to make a success of it. The Lord says

to Israel through Ezekiel, “And you took your sons and your daughters, *whom you had borne to me*, and these you sacrificed to [other gods] to be devoured. Were your whorings so small a matter that you slaughtered *my children* and delivered them up as an offering by fire to them?” Ezekiel 16:20-21 When we fail to teach our children the ways of our God and to teach them to obey those ways this is really what we have done: we have offered them up to other gods.

I’ve told you before that it is not our Lord’s sovereignty over us and over everything that happens in this world that amazes me more and more the older I get; it is rather the amazing freedom He gives us to decide what we want about how we live, where we go, who we love and what we do with the time He has given us. Doesn’t He realize that we make wrong choices all the time, that we can so easily, and so often do, mess up our lives, sometimes irretrievably so? Yet He gives us children to raise--precious individuals He thought up before He made the world! We get one shot to teach them all we know, one life to live in front of them, one childhood in which to acquaint them with their sin, their Savior and to place them on the path to Heaven. *And He will hold us responsible if we do not.* This can be a paralyzing thought--perhaps it shouldn’t even be attempted. But the fact that He put the desire for children in our hearts and that He holds us responsible for their upbringing can and should give us the courage to do what must be done for them: if my God wants me to, and thinks I can, I will do what He commands. But I have often pondered why the Lord chose to get the next generation of believers this way. Some things I know and some things I wonder about.

a) First of all, it is a way to understand our Heavenly Father’s parenting of us which then improves our ability to parent our children. He gave us His law *which is meant not to be transgressed!* These are principles we are to obey, by which we are to live, governing our own lives and the lives of our children. Period. **Deuteronomy 29:29: “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”** God’s law is full of “thou shalt not’s” that teach us what it is that God hates, that is, what sin is. But He also gave us a lot of freedom within that law to grow our personalities, to use our gifts for the good of others, to express our thoughts and to have relationship with our God. He made us, as the catechism says, “for His own glory,” that is, to bring Himself joy. We know, don’t we, that when our children obey of their own accord for the first time and we have not *made them do it*, what joy we feel and even pride in who they are becoming. So I believe with our Lord: when we make right choices, choosing to teach our children the path of wisdom and holiness, that must bring Him joy, the “glory” we were made to bring Him.

b) Second, parenting children is a way, I believe, to explore and understand personality and personalities. God made us each different, unique and *complicated!* He made your children different from you and from each other. We often looked around our

table when our five babies were beginning to be teenagers and said to each other, “Where did they all come from?!” Each one had the same gene pool to draw from and though they shared similarities in appearance and personality they were all very different (and very loud!).

The Lord was not content with one kind of tree, one kind of fruit, one kind of animal or fish or bird, one way for a snowflake to look and so He made a wonderful and infinite variety of things, expressing His own infinite and wonderful personality. Just so, every mother’s mothering is different--suited to the particular children God gave her. It’s like what Rob says about preaching: the word of God mediated through personality. The same text preached by 10 different preachers will produce 10 different sermons, all helpful and useful for the Lord’s people. So with mothering: every personality is different, every child is different, every circumstance is different, boys are different than girls and so on.

But the principles, that is, the Law, remains the same for each of us and for each and every child. We have said before that obedience is the child’s first and foremost obligation and that is what each and every mother must teach and insist upon no matter who you are or what is going on and, discipline must be tapered not only to the circumstance, the severity of the infraction and the strength of the rebellion but also to the particular personality and makeup of each child. Does this take the wisdom of Solomon? You betcha! But who gave Solomon that wisdom and who is waiting for us to ask so that He can give it to us? This is the kind of prayer our Lord *loves* to answer and, since He is the one who made each child He is the one who can give you perfect insight into each little heart so be on your knees asking Him for help; He will always give it.

c) Third, parenting increases our faith and is a woman’s particular path to sanctification. **I Timothy 2:25: “Yet she will be saved through childbearing--if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.”** Faith first asks and then *behaves as though it has the answer!* We need to trust the Lord and not question His ways. **“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** Instead we concentrate on what we do have responsibility for: obedience in our own lives and in the lives of our children. **Deuteronomy 29:29: “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”**

So the Lord is doing all kinds of work through you! He not only is raising a new generation of Christians but is working in the lonely privacy of your own heart where no one else can see, not even a most beloved husband. The Lord is working and you are working, hand in hand, to do something you cannot see but must trust will come to pass because of the blessing God has promised on that work.

Bryonie verbalized something of this in one of her blog entries back in October of 2011. Judah was two months shy of his first birthday. She called it, “Kingdom Work.”

“I was unprepared for how intensely private mothering is. So much of it is just you and your baby, behind closed doors. When I go grocery shopping I love to push Judah around in the cart, taking pleasure in the passing glances he gets from admiring strangers. They see a happy, (mostly) organized mama and a happy, (sometimes) calm baby.

“There are so many private battles within our home that seem to determine the nature and character of my work and life. I’m not talking about my battles with Judah (although there are some of those, of course!). I’m talking about all the battles I fight in my own heart to be the person I’m supposed to be and the mother Judah needs. I face a million opportunities, all day long, to choose life or choose death. And all day long Judah is directly affected by my choices. He is completely helpless in this. He is not only unable to remove himself from my choices, but he is also entirely unaware of his position of helplessness. If I choose not to love him the way he needs to be loved he suffers, whether he knows it or not.

“I am sobered and humbled by this reality. I know I can’t change it. That’s the way God made parenting. What else can I do but pray for mercy, over and over and over?

“It occurred to me that being a parent, though perhaps a more stark reality, is no different than any other calling. We fight battles in our hearts every day, all day long. We either choose life or death and others are always affected by our decisions, whether we like it or not.

“Sometimes I live in the big questions of calling and career and my place in this world. I will probably always wrestle with those questions from time to time. Now, however, I’m living in the day to day battles -- a different sort of calling, just as important and just as tiring in its demand for perseverance. My mom would say, ‘Honey, you have to live there and you have to live here.’

“I came across a quote this morning. You know how sometimes a sentence or paragraph will suddenly shine a big spotlight into your heart and something that was dark for so long is suddenly illuminated? This simple paragraph helped me to see where I should be living, as a rookie mom.

“Every kingdom work, whether publicly performed or privately endeavored, partakes of the kingdom’s imperishable character. Every honest intention, every stumbling word of witness, every resistance of temptation, every motion of repentance, every gesture of concern, every routine engagement, every motion of worship, every struggle towards

obedience, every mumbled prayer, everything which flows out of our faith-relationship with the Ever-Living One, will find its place in the ever-living heavenly order which will dawn at His Coming.”

So, a mother’s own spiritual life is deepened and strengthened by her teaching, correcting, nurturing, pushing, pulling, guiding of her children every single hour of every single day. Her dependence on the Lord and her need of His help becomes more and more evident to her as she goes further and further into the task the Lord Himself has given her and if it does not, and if her life of prayer does not increase with every addition of a child, with every new demand upon her time and personal resources, with more and more understanding of the seriousness of that task and the consequences of its outcome, then she has not fully grasped her own self before the Lord and the weakness she begins with, both in a character flawed by sin and in her desperate need of wisdom from on high.

We must keep at bay the feelings of frustration and discouragement while signs of learning and spiritual growth in the children are slow to appear. It may seem that the children often get up in the morning and think on purpose, “Are the rules still the same today? I need to find out!” but here again mothering is like preaching: a life is not changed, a behavior is not modified with one sermon, nor is a child’s life changed with one spanking. It is line by line, precept upon precept, little by little, creating a culture of life. After a while--how long? who knows?!--you realize, “Oh, they think like me!” and, hopefully, that’s a good thing! Obedience, consistency and happiness are the goals of the day. It is the drip, drip, drip of constant influence that will finally bring about the changes you want to see in a heart or a behavior.

d) Fourth, parenting brings us joy, doesn’t it? The Lord made us to take joy in the birthing and raising of children. This is mysterious, isn’t it? But there it is, right down at the bottom of our hearts. When you look at your baby for the first time or anytime after--even in the cloud of fatigue, sleeplessness and the feeling of being overwhelmed; when you talk with your toddler and find that there is something in there that you did not put there; when you read a story or a poem and find someone else enjoying it the same way you are; when, after years of your own singing in the car there is someone else who starts up a song; and finally when they begin to show who the Lord made them to be with their own gifts, strengths, weaknesses and ambitions for life. How absolutely wonderful that the Lord made a man out of that little boy, a woman out of that little girl--and you got to be a part of it!

Do they sometimes bring you sorrow? Oh yes! Is it often hard, exhausting, confusing, full of sleeplessness and sickness? All the time. But is that because what God made is somehow faulty? God has never been at fault; we have done it to ourselves. No, even as sex was created wonderful, and still is, but now is also dangerous; bodies were made strong, healthy and beautiful but now are not always so and too soon get old, shriveled and sick; even the natural

world was made full of harmony but now is not, it is sin that has brought it all and it is sin that we must understand, live with, fight with and pray against until at last the Lord brings us to the world where sin will be no more, where our joy will be perfect and will never end. And if we have done our job--not perfectly but as faithfully as we know how, the Lord has promised that our children will be there too and with us will also live and praise our perfect God with perfect hearts enjoying His own "fullness of joy."

Deuteronomy 29:29: "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."

HYMN

We end the year with the hymn we began with. In it is a reminder that God is our Father, our parent. The poem expresses the childlike attitude we need to have towards God that we want our children to have towards us. I love the line: "a mind to blend with outward life, while keeping at Thy side." Even our children's lives can be a lovely picture of this each day in their play and interactions with each other. **Proverbs 20:11: "Even a child makes himself known by his acts, by whether his conduct is pure and upright."**

Father, I Know That All My Life
by Anna Waring, 1850, Trinity Hymnal #559

*Father, I know that all my life
Is portioned out for me;
The changes that are sure to come,
I do not fear to see:
I ask thee for a present mind,
Intent on pleasing thee.*

*I would not have the restless will
That hurries to and fro,
Seeking for some great thing to do,
Or secret thing to know;
I would be treated as a child,
And guided where I go.*

*I ask thee for the daily strength,
To none that ask denied,
A mind to blend with outward life,
While keeping at thy side,
Content to fill a little space,*

If thou be glorified.

*In service which thy will appoints
There are no bonds for me;
My secret heart is taught the truth
That makes thy children free;
A life of self-renouncing love
Is one of liberty. Amen.*