

Mother's Encouragement Group
November 7, 2013
Plant Them and Let Them Grow #3

I cannot remember a time when I did not believe in God or love my Savior, Jesus Christ. The first spiritual memory I have is as a five year old when I thought about eternity as I lay in bed at night: what does “everlasting” mean? Being in Heaven with God and living forever and ever and ever and ever...that was spooky! I can still remember something like shivers running through my body. I could not understand it and did not want it to be true. My immature mind even then considered the options: if life did not go on and on and on then it has to stop at some point; what if life stopped? That would be terrible--worse than living forever and ever and ever: not to exist anymore? Shucks! I knew that couldn't be right; eternity was already planted in my five-year-old heart. What then? Living forever in Hell, not only without God but in agony and pain was something my active imagination conjured up and washed over me in more shivers of realization *but* almost in the very same instant came waves of relief because I knew I belonged to Jesus and He would never let that happen to me. So how is a five-year-old able to think thoughts such as these? This is a testimony and a tribute to my mother who, though I don't remember all the “hows” and “whens,” taught me my faith, and to my grandmother who taught me to pray on my knees and told me that as far back as she could remember all her parents, grandparents and great-grandparents were Christians going back to the “old country,” that is, Holland. My life is a testimony to the promise of the covenant, even as yours are, showing the Lord to be gracious to generations of His people. I am, Lord willing, in the middle of many generations of believers thanks to my parents and their parents and their parents before them who planted their children in the Word of God and in the Christian faith. My testimony is one of parents teaching their children to know, to love and especially *to obey* the Lord from the moment they are born.

We saw last time that the Word of God is the *absolute only* soil that is right for our children to grow in; the Bible is the only source of health, nutrients, wisdom and understanding both for us living as adults and for our developing children. We read a long passage from one of Edith Schaeffer's books in which she sought to describe just who we are as human beings, how we got here and how our “here” got here! She asked and answered the questions “who am I?” and “how can I be fulfilled?”

What I loved about the Schaeffers' ministry was that neither of them was afraid to engage anyone--whether he or she be a struggling student, an adult who had messed up his or her life, a high-ranking government official or the poorest of street bums--in the discussion of the state of his or her soul. Their confidence in the Almighty, the ever-present, eternal, loving and all-powerful God, that is, in His existence and in His love for mankind, was so unshakable that they knew that whoever was standing in front of them needed only to know God and what He requires of them in order to be happy. They also--each of them--knew how to reflect that all-powerful, loving character of God by meeting that person standing in front of them just where he

or she was. They were not afraid to “get dirty,” so to speak, by inviting these folk and all their sin into their lives. Dr. Schaeffer would sometimes dramatically say, “If you have not had a drunk throw up on your living room floor you have not really understood what it is to show the love of Christ to the world.” The ministry of L’Abri grew out of the open hospitality of their home as they unabashedly, fearlessly, engaged the minds of sinners of all walks of life who needed to hear that the only medicine they needed was in the Word of God. I think I mentioned to you how Edith complimented us for living in the neighborhood where we do, saying that she had always wanted to do this herself, that is, to move into a neighborhood full of ugliness and brokenness and messed up lives and then to bring into it something orderly and beautiful about which questions might be asked and seeds of the Gospel sewn.

This is a picture of how we need to be with our children whom we already love probably as much as, if not more than, we love ourselves. We need to *meet them where they are*, in the middle of their wretched sin, immature and thoughtless, full of selfishness and rebellion. (This is no comment on your particular children; this is the way we were born and the way they were born; it is the nature we inherited from Adam.) We meet them there because that is how we show our love for them. It requires thoughtful work to love and engage the world the way our Lord wants us to but He has placed an undying love and commitment in our hearts for our children making that part of the work already mostly done before we even start; this is God’s wonderful gift to us as mothers. However, it is not loving them to leave them in their wretchedness, to let them remain immature, thoughtless, selfish and rebellious and the other half of our job is to teach them how *not* to be the way they were born but to learn how to be unselfish, godly and obedient, which is what God requires of them. This is where we need to engage our minds and our wills: what does a godly loving of them look like? How can we best suit them for the life they will need to live in an ever increasingly hostile world? to make them into the little soldiers they need to be? and, to make them happy? I submit to you that we do this in two parts: first, that we build our own unshakable confidence in the Lord our God and in the fact that what He has told us about ourselves and the world we live in as well as about Himself is true. Second, that we fearlessly engage the minds of our children no matter how old they are or what their issues are and then gently, lovingly, but firmly influence them with the life-giving principles of truth.

Let’s be clever about what this means, Girls; even as it would not be loving to let that drunk who just threw up in your home to keep drinking so it is not loving to let our children keep sinning in whatever way it is. They need to know, as does the drunk, that the absolute *only* way to happiness is to conform themselves to what God made and to what He said. This is what teaching is: first you must find a way in and then you get to speak; you meet the child “where he is” and then seek to raise him higher. That “way in,” that getting of their attention, is what I think we all came here to talk about and encourage each other with. You cannot talk to your child unless you first have his attention, hello! Every child, every age, every situation calls for a variety of “ways in,” if you will, but that you must not stop until you have found one is of utmost

importance! If a look or a word or an arm firmly held does not work then, more often than not, it will be a spanking that opens the door but occasionally it may take something a little more drastic (what could be more drastic than a spanking, you say?!). Let me tell you!

This July when I was living with the Deys in St. Louis, helping Courtney with life and waiting for her twins to be born, Jacob had a serious meltdown. Now he's an emotional little guy anyway and in his almost-two-year-old brain was the knowledge that their family life was about to change and I suspect he was not sure he would like the changes. At any rate, he began to cry about something. Neither Courtney nor I remember what it was and she was in the middle of it before I knew anything was going on. He simply would not be comforted no matter what she did. Soon he was hysterical and Courtney was at her wits' end to know what to do; she had to find a "way in" in order to calm his little heart and teach him some self-control. Well, she remembered a story I told her about Erika putting little Ezra in the shower in order to make a strong point with him so that is what Courtney did--clothes and all--she put him in the tub and turned the cold water on him. And guess what? the shock of it brought a new, unpleasant reality into his mind and he finally heard her words. She was able to take him out, take off the soaking clothes, wrap him in a lovely towel and sit with him on her lap. He learned one more piece of self-control in that moment. Now there were certainly a variety of reasons why the poor little guy was behaving this way--reasons that our sympathetic mothers' hearts would understand or at least guess at--but the fact remained that Courtney was not able to talk to him about any of those things until he was reasonable enough to listen to her, to allow himself to be loved by her. The shower was the "way in" and I salute you girls, Erika and Courtney, for finding it and having the courage necessary to use it.

This is all part of "planting and cultivating," weeding out sinful ways and encouraging godly ones. Planting and cultivating takes vigilance, consistency and commitment, an "all the time" doing and thinking, bringing to bear on those little minds the pressure and influence of the only right soil for them, the Word of God. Our mantra: **"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and 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. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."**
Deuteronomy 6:4-9

HYMN

My Wykoff grandchildren love to sing this one that I remember singing as a child from my old Sunday School hymn book. It's perky rhythm appeals to the very young.

How Shall the Young Direct Their Way?

George Coles, 1835/based on Psalm 119:9-16

Trinity Hymnal #148

How shall the young direct their way?
What light shall be their perfect guide?
Your Word, O Lord, will safely lead,
 If in its wisdom they confide.
Sincerely I have sought you, Lord,
 O let me not from you depart;
To know your will and keep from sin
 Your Word I cherish in my heart.

O blessed Lord, teach me your law,
Your righteous judgments I declare;
 Your testimonies make me glad,
For they are wealth beyond compare.
Upon your precepts and your ways
 My heart will meditate with awe;
Your Word shall be my chief delight,
 And I will not forget your law.