

Mother's Encouragement Group
October 10, 2013
Plant Them and Let Them Grow #1

Girls, I've missed you! I feel as though I've been away a LONG time--probably because I have! I have experienced so many things, both wonderful and hard, all of them exhausting; I have learned a number of things and had many things impressed on my mind since I saw you last and I am determined that, like it or not, you shall be the beneficiaries of what I have learned. So get ready!

If we are in the middle of spiritual warfare--and we are--then you girls are "in the trenches," so to speak, and everything you do and say every single day with your children matters. You are training little soldiers and it is serious work. I do not want to overwhelm you but I do want to impress upon you that what you are doing with and for your children every day is not only observed by Heaven (and other spiritual beings) but has eternal significance. Are our children going to be ready, when they are adults, to stand for Christ, to defend the honor of His name in a world that increasingly despises it? Will they be able and motivated to keep themselves from worldly pursuits? What you do for them now will either prepare them for these things or not so get ready for some serious discussion!

Not forgetting our motto from last year: "Love them into Heaven," I decided to entitle this year's considerations, "Plant them and let them grow." It may not seem an appropriate title for the introduction I just gave you but bear with me; I think you will see what I mean by it.

I. There is unseen life behind our life. Satan is at work everywhere but our God, while giving him much freedom, puts limits on what he does.

a) We do not think of this very much, do we? Being the physical, finite creatures that we are this is something we need to remind ourselves of all the time else we would forget it. We DO forget it! This is why worship is so important to a Christian; it is the one place and time in the week when we come as a body to our unseen God, acknowledge His existence, His perfect rule over our lives and His demand of the loyalty of our hearts. **Jude** reminds us of the battle that goes on in the unseen world: "**Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe. And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day....When the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, was disputing about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a blasphemous judgment, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you.'**" (vss 5, 6, 9) In the rest of his book Jude is very frank about the effects of the unseen battle on the people of God and how sin can and does easily creep into the Church. "**For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace**

of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.” (vs 4) We need to remember that not only is Satan tempting us but our God is watching to see how we respond to his temptations. Jude says it is Jesus, our very own Savior, who **“afterward destroyed those who did not believe.”**

C.S. Lewis, in thinking about that unseen world and all that goes on in it, that is, what Satan is busy doing behind our backs as it were and what God doing about it, put his ideas down very cleverly in his *Screwtape Letters*. Here are some parts of the first letter. Remember, he is writing as though he is teaching a younger devil the art of tempting a particular man.

“My Dear Wormwood, I note what you say about guiding your patient’s reading and and taking care that he sees a good deal of his materialist friend. But are you not being a trifle *naïf*? It sounds as if you supposed that *argument* was the way to keep him out of the Enemy’s clutches. That might have been so if he had lived a few centuries earlier. At that time the humans still knew pretty well when a thing was proved and when it was not; and if it was proved they really believed it. They still connected thinking with doing and were prepared to alter their way of life as the result of a chain of reasoning. But what with the weekly press and other such weapons we have largely altered that. Your man has been accustomed, ever since he was a boy, to have a dozen incompatible philosophies dancing about together inside his head. He doesn’t think of doctrines as primarily “true” or “false,” but as “academic” or “practical,” “outworn” or “contemporary,” “conventional” or “ruthless.” Jargon, not argument, is your best ally in keeping him away from the Church. Don’t waste time trying to make him think that materialism is *true*! Make him think it is strong, or stark, or courageous--that it is the philosophy of the future. That’s the sort of thing he cares about.

“The trouble about argument is that it moves the whole struggle onto the Enemy’s own ground...By the very act of arguing, you awake the patient’s reason; and once it is awake, who can foresee the result? Even if a particular train of thought can be twisted so as to end in our favour, you will find that you have been strengthening in your patient the fatal habit of attending to universal issues and withdrawing his attention from the stream of immediate sense experiences. Your business is to fix his attention on the stream. Teach him to call it ‘real life’ and don’t let him ask what he means by ‘real.’

“Remember, he is not, like you, a pure spirit. Never having been a human (Oh that abominable advantage of the Enemy’s!) you don’t realise how enslaved they are to the pressure of the ordinary. I once had a patient, a sound atheist, who used to read in the British Museum. One day, as he sat reading, I saw a train of thought in his mind beginning to go the wrong way. The Enemy, of course, was at his elbow in a moment. Before I knew where I was I saw my twenty years’ work beginning to totter. If I had lost my head and begun to attempt

a defence by argument I should have been undone. But I was not such a fool. I struck instantly at the part of the man which I had best under my control and suggested that it was just about time he had some lunch. The Enemy presumably made the counter-suggestion (you know how one can never *quite* overhear what He says to them?) that this was more important than lunch. At least I think that must have been His line for when I said 'Quite. In fact much *too* important to tackle at the end of a morning,' the patient brightened up considerably; and by the time I had added 'Much better come back after lunch and go into it with a fresh mind,' he was already halfway to the door. Once he was in the street the battle was won. I showed him a newsboy shouting the midday paper, and a No. 73 bus going past, and before he reached the bottom of the steps I had got into him an unalterable conviction that, whatever odd ideas might come into a man's head when he was shut up alone with his books, a healthy dose of 'real life' (by which he meant the bus and the newsboy) was enough to show him that all 'that sort of thing' just couldn't be true...

"You begin to see the point? Thanks to processes which we set at work in them centuries ago, they find it all but impossible to believe in the unfamiliar while the familiar is before their eyes...."

You see what Lewis, in his very clever way, is trying to get across and don't you find this true in your own heart? When you're doing laundry, cooking meals, wiping mouths, changing diapers and everything else we are constantly, all the time, responsible for it is hard to remember the unseen world and very hard to remember that what we do, and how we do it, matters there--in the unseen world--as well as here, and has consequences that will last forever! Scary thought!

b) So how can we bring this truth to bear on our children's minds? How can we teach them the importance of the unseen world and of a God who controls it all? With our mouths, first of all, talking to them all the time about God as Creator, Controller, Lover, Friend, Helper, Savior--all the things they need to know about who God is, what He cares about and what He expects of them. These things should be in your mind and come readily to your tongue at every turn of the day's activities. The subject of Satan and his destructive work may be introduced as they are able to bear it but it is *more important* for them to know our God and since we know that Satan will not win in the end, we need not worry about their ignorance of him until their little souls are strong enough to bear such knowledge. Then, they will be able to understand that though he is powerful he need not have even the tiniest foothold in their lives.

Second, *take them to church!* and teach them there that we are meeting with God Himself and that He is meeting with us. Teach them about what we are doing at every moment. Do not let them leave to go potty; do not let them dream or play or read something that has nothing to do with our worship. Teach them the discipline of

quietness, of reverence and of participation in what the people of God are doing. Even the youngest of children can begin to learn these things. If we cannot have a sense of the Presence of the Living God in church where in the world can we?

Third, live *sacramentally*, that is, embodying the truth of the unseen in flesh and blood. We feel the water of baptism that conveys to our minds the unseen seal that God places on the heads of our children. We smell, touch and taste the bread and wine of the Supper that conveys to our minds the spiritual, unseen nourishment we need to live that Christ gives us every week. We wear rings that remind us, and show the world, that we are married. We put candles on the dinner table to remind us that this is a time when the Lord is near, listening and caring about the interactions that take place there. Oswald Chambers called his wife Bidy a sacrament: “As for Bidy, I love her and I am her husband but I do not believe it is possible to exaggerate what she has been *in the way of a sacrament* out here (they were in Egypt during WWI)--God conveying His presence through the common elements of an ordinary life. The letters she has received from mothers and wives and sisters and fathers and brothers are in themselves a deep testimony to a most unconscious ministry of wife and mother and woman.” [*Abandoned To God*, p. 250-251] Chambers, by calling his wife a “sacrament” was saying that she made the invisible reality of God’s grace visible to others. She *embodied* grace and holiness, that is, she made it something that people could see and touch and hear. So with us with our children, embodying grace and holiness to them with our words and especially with our behavior.

Fourth, the value of ritual, that is, doing things that are solemn and ceremonial in nature as a part of everyday routine, can be powerful in a child’s mind (good for the adults too!). Family devotions, bedtime songs and prayers, the regular reading of books, the memorization of Scripture all fall into this category and convey to the inmates of the household just what is most important in life and what absolutely must be attended to at all costs. Kneeling together when talking to God conveys powerfully to children, as well as to our own souls, the humble submission we owe to our Lord and Savior.

II. The Church, especially in the U.S., is getting weaker all the time which makes our warfare more fierce and scary since as the Church gets weaker Christians also get weaker.

a) Some of the things I experienced this summer brought this reality home to my mind. The loss of the evening service is growing and, intended or not, is weakening a serious approach to the Sabbath Day; when one has worship in the morning (or possibly even Saturday night) and Sunday School then *maybe* a meal with other church folk but no other commitment for the rest of the day it is inevitable that one begins to think, “Ah, now I can relax and really enjoy my(!) Sabbath.” But that may also begin to include things that “need to get done” before Monday rolls around and, not so suddenly, we have lost the notion that we end the Sabbath, as we began it, with our Lord.

The beautiful evening hymns of the Church are not being sung by a congregation together and if the children are going to learn them Christians must be intentional about teaching them at home. There is very little theory of worship out there; it feels as though everyone does “what seems right in his own eyes” which often means that the music is not overseen by the minister but given over to those who are “gifted.” Often this means that what is sung is what is popular--which feels to me (and you all know who I am!) like a Christian version of what the world is doing. Our beautiful hymns, if they are sung at all, are often sung to different tunes that are more upbeat and “accessible.” I met an elder of one of our churches who had never heard “Jesus, I am resting, resting, in the joy of what thou art...”--he did not know the tune and had never heard the poetry. Churches are not having prayer meetings which our old Scottish minister, Mr. Still, used to call “the powerhouse of the church.” These are being replaced by small groups, choir rehearsals or nothing. When there is no midweek meeting and no evening service it is harder to teach children that their lives ought to revolve around the church and what is happening within her walls.

There is a lot of talk of “brokenness” as though this is something we should seek and glory in, seeming to admit that we really don’t have all the answers. Of course the Lord is pleased by a “broken and contrite heart” but there is also, “my strength is made perfect in weakness!” There is also talk of “giftedness” in the sense of “oh, that’s not my gift” and showing no responsibility to acquire it. I heard a deacon say this summer that he really didn’t have the gift of mercy! Astonishing. It did not come out sounding like a confession of weakness but rather a statement meant to help others understand “who he was” and “who he wasn’t!” This kind of talk surely weakens the church as a body when its individuals either feel defeated before they start or take no responsibility for growing in sanctification, nor are they exhorted to this from the pulpit.

b) Yesterday we received in the mail an update from Presbyterian and Reformed Commission on Chaplains. This organization is headed up by Doug Lee who, many years ago, was a minister in our own presbytery here in the Northwest. He became a chaplain in the army and having retired from active duty has formed this commission to help our chaplains serve in an increasingly hostile environment. These are some of the recent incidents he brought to our attention:

- A navy chaplain sent out a VBS invitation email to his base only to get a response from an irate Sailor who said that the email was “illegal.” He said if he received another such email, he would consider it harassment and would deal with it accordingly.
- A prison chaplain was charged with discrimination because he would not allow a homosexual to help lead worship.
- An experienced hospital chaplain recently lost his job because he said he would “share the Gospel with the patients if they asked.”

- An army nurse was challenged in some training with very inappropriate questions such as “How many of you are Republican? Democrat? Pro-life? and how many of you are for gay marriage?” She answered and spoke truthfully and was later removed from the course because she “was too outspoken.”

Granted these things are not yet happening in the Church--at least not in our Church--but they are happening to Christians who are ministering in our American world, proving it to be more and more opposed to all we cherish as followers of Christ.

c) The Church in Russia is weak for different reasons. The Greek Orthodox Tsars may have been religious but it was an empty, self-serving religion, believing in their God-given authority to rule. I was inspired by our recent trip to read a book about Tsar Nicholas II, the last Tsar of Russia. His religion is just what I have described and it made him cruel and thoughtless of his people. The Greek Orthodox faith is mystical and superstitious today and it was then too. The Tsars lived in sumptuous palaces (of which St. Petersburg is full) while the people were often starving; it is no wonder when these conditions were crowned with one bad decision after another that revolution would come. And when it did come Communism did everything it could to destroy both religion and the family. Steeples of churches were lopped off and the buildings used for other things; a ten day work week was enforced, trying to do away with anything having to do with a Christian view of time; Christmas was turned into a secular holiday and moved to New Year’s Eve; Easter became a time to eat cake, make beautiful eggs and drink too much vodka; other holidays were done away with; families were broken up as the people were moved to communes and marriage was discouraged. People were encouraged to have children but when they came they were to be cared for and educated by the state. This last effort did not work since there came to be so many children who were running and rioting in the streets. The Communists gave that up and began to encourage marriage so that the mothers would take care of the children! The work week did not last either because people continued to take Saturday and Sunday off. When Communism fell Russia began to recover economically but there still remain residual effects on the population. It is a “me first” kind of place where there is no compunction about pushing in front of others on a bus or in a store.

As you have heard the Christians we met there, to a man, are all converts; not a single one of them was raised in a Christian family. This means that *everything* about the Christian life must be learned from scratch. This means that everything they learn is fresh, new and wonderful but it also means that, unless they were converted very young, they have not had time to raise their children with strong Christian habits, even if they could gather what those habits should be. Many of these dear ones are worried about their teenage children, whether they are really the Lord’s and if they are, who in the world are they going to marry? There are so few Christian young people. One mother whose

husband was a drug addict before he came to Christ also lost her 17 year old son to drugs. Weeping, she told us, "I never thought I would have to go down that road again." The Lord brings wonderful reconciliation and restoration to a life but some things can never be retrieved.

d) I learned this summer that last spring Germany outlawed spanking children. One of our own, married to a German man, is afraid to go back there to live since if a foreigner is caught spanking his child he will simply be deported but if a citizen is caught his children may very well be removed from his household! Circumcision is frowned upon so much that our daughter-in-law must take her son to an American base to get it done for him. In fact, it would also have been outlawed but for the outcry from the Muslims and the Jews! We have also heard that several books have been banned, among them *Shepherding A Child's Heart*. What in the world?! We all heard in the news of a German family who, several months ago, sought asylum in the U.S. in order to be able to home-school their children because in Germany, when a child turns two he is *required* to be in a German Kindergarten, being taught what the state wants him to learn. Scary stuff.

e) The Church in Africa, we heard at prayer meeting last night, is "5,000 miles wide and one inch deep." The problem there is a lack of understanding and the countries are so poor that Satan has made the "health and wealth" doctrine very attractive--not a great faith to have in the face of difficulties and hardships.

So what is to be our response to all this doom and gloom?

III. Plant them and let them grow.

a) You have a gift, a wonderful opportunity to make of your children what they are going to need to be in a darkening world. You have time--right now--to mold them and teach them. Don't squander this wonderful gift by letting them grow up like weeds. They are, each of them, lovely plants that need cultivating, watering, fertilizing; they need sun and water and protection from wind and bad weather; and they need time to mature, each at his own pace, each with his own personality, not trying to make them all the same or to make them like yourself. Each is uniquely who God made him to be so when you have planted them, let them grow.

b) The understanding in your own mind of what we are about, of what we are trying to accomplish for our God is of absolute necessity. We are not in a fairyland but in a War. We march from one battle to another and we need to strengthen each other for the fight while we--tenderly--teach our children that they too will be fighting battles. In point of fact, they already have battles to fight don't they? Teach them about their sin and how to fight it. You must know in your own mind that there is no sin that each of us is not capable of committing; we are not immune to sin of any kind and so we know that our

children are not either and we need not be surprised to find all kinds of sin in their little lives. Root it out! Make them thoughtful; teach them truth; cultivate each personality, sanctifying as you go.

c) Remember that none of this is a surprise to our great, infinite, almighty God and that when we work these things in our children's lives He is not only pleased but comes quickly to help us. We need only ask Him. **Jude** again: **“But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. They said to you, ‘In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions.’ It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit. But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, *waiting for the mercy* of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. And *have mercy* on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire, to others *show mercy* with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.**

“Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.”

Take THAT you devil!

HYMN

The hymn I want us to sing today is the one we began with last year; it assumes the truth of the unseen and the power of our God to be in control of it all as well as His willingness to come quickly to our aid when we need Him, which, in fact, is *all the time!* It is a prayer for “minds to blend with outward life while keeping at His side.”

Father, I Know That All My Life

#559 in *Trinity Hymnal*, poetry by Anna Waring, 1850

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.