

Mother's Encouragement Group
October 24, 2013
Plant Them and Let Them Grow #2

1) PLANT THEM SOON and plant them deep; waste no time! "Through your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way. Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." Psalm 119:104, 105

a) We all know what happens when little plants are purchased in the spring for a summer garden and we don't get around to planting them for a while. They survive in their little pots for a good long time but then begin to languish; their roots, that are trying to spread out, have so little room. We know what happens if we begin planting them, taking them out of their little pots, but get interrupted by something more urgent only to come back to them several hours later to find the poor things wilted and shrivelled and if the sun has been shining hot on them the effect is worse. So it is with our little Christian children. If we do not take care to plant them as soon as may be, that is, from day one, to train them in the ways of our God and to fill their minds with His Word their little hearts for God will not only not grow but will actually begin to die before they have had a chance to begin.

Or perhaps some wind comes along and takes a seed from an unwanted weed out there--I have been battling Nightshade in our yard for years!--and drops it in your precious garden, stealing nutrients that belong to our lovely flowers. You allow those weeds to grow and sooner than you realize the flowers are choked out. Sometimes I have not been sure that what I am looking at *is* a weed: have you noticed, as I have, that for every lovely plant there is a weed that looks very similar to it? It can take some clever gardening to keep the unwanted weeds out and cultivate the plants that will eventually bear the lovely flowers. In this instance I liken the weeds to foreign ideas--bad "theology," if you will. Do not let these get a foothold anywhere near your precious little ones!

We see the effects of "not planting" all the time in our neighborhood--children out and about unsupervised and uncared for. This spring I was outside pruning my roses, digging around them, pulling weeds and planting annuals and perennials when a darling little girl with beautiful, wild hair, probably four years old, approached our fence and was watching me. "What are you doing?" she said. I answered, "I'm just working." "Oh. My Mom is watching TV but my Dad is cleaning the bathroom." I gave her a flower and we chatted some until her parents called her in. I knew from an earlier conversation Rob had had with the folk next door that she was the daughter of one of her parents but not of the other and that the little boy in the home is the son of the other one; whether the adults are married or not I don't know. They did not like her receiving the flower from me and sent her back with it. She is growing up like a weed and I hope very much that her little life is not over before it has begun.

I told you last week about one of the wives in Russia who lost her 17 year old son to drugs after his father, now a converted, committed Christian, had caused so much suffering because of his addiction. Another wife watched her husband get caught up in the mafia. He let his life be ruled by its members and their frequent drinking parties, causing so much misery that she divorced him. After he became a Christian he came back to her and when she became a Christian they remarried. I think they have one son. Another gal grew up in the Communist schools, had a daughter out of wedlock and moved around Russia aimlessly looking for something--what exactly, she didn't know. She saw a sign advertising a church meeting that offered "happiness!" That, she thought, would be great. She went. It was a charismatic meeting if I remember, a cult denomination, but through these people she became a Christian and met her future husband who had spent 6 years in prison and had come to Christ through the witness of another inmate. They were both older when they married and she lost four babies. Heartbroken, they took the long, arduous road to adopting a child which, I understand, is even more difficult than here in the U.S. After more years they were able to adopt a baby girl who is now four but when some months later they were offered her little brother they had to refuse because they live in a one-room apartment and cannot afford anything else on a pastor's salary. Her older daughter is also part of that household. Another dear couple, also raised in the Communist system became Christians late in life. Their daughters who also became Christians married non-Christian men and now there is much tension between them all and they rarely get to see their grandchildren.

Do you see the point? Much healing, happiness and restoration has come because the Lord brought these dear ones to Himself--and we're going to be exploring just why that healing restoration came about in their lives when they began to know Christ--but there is also so much that has been lost because they did not know Him sooner in life. You have a wonderful gift in being able to teach your babies about the Lord NOW. Don't squander it! Open your mouth and teach, teach, teach! Tell them what to think about everything that happens in their lives which, of course, means that you must know what is happening in their lives and you need to find out what they are thinking about it. Remember the mandate from **Deuteronomy 6:4ff: "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."** Now if "these words" that God commands are not first on *your* heart then you will have nothing to teach your children so take care that you are cultivating and feeding your own soul as well as theirs! (A large topic for another time!)

2) Plant your children in the *only* soil that is right for them because *they are God's children before, and after, they are yours.* Ezekiel 16:20-21: " And you took your sons and your daughters, whom you had borne *to me...*" God says they are "*my children.*"

a) The Word of God, and more specifically the law of God, is the only soil that our children will thrive in. Our beloved ten commandments that are God's most precious gift to us encapsulate His whole law and His desire for our lives. I hope to be talking about each of these commandments in subsequent weeks, relating them to our task of teaching our children about them, showing them how to conform their lives to each one. But first we talk about why. Why is it that the law of God is not only the best but actually the *only* soil that will give our children the life-giving nutrients they desperately need to grow into happy, God-fearing adults?

Edith Schaeffer's book Ten Things Parents Must Teach Their Children (And Learn For Themselves) addresses all of these subjects and her introduction answers this first most important question of why the law of God is not only important but vital to our understanding of "who we are" as human beings made in God's image. Rather than "re-inventing the wheel" I am going to read it to you.....

"Eighteen-month-old Debby bent over lower and lower beside her kitten, tucking her knees under her, but back a bit so that gradually she could parallel kitty's curve to the dish. Slowly, as Debby watched kitty's movements, she carefully duplicated them as exactly as she could until suddenly her tongue was making an exact copy of kitty's fast, rough tongue lapping up the prescribed cat food with deft little jerks. It wasn't many seconds before Debby's mother put aside her astonished interest in what was going on and gathered her growing child lovingly into her arms to sit down and explain something. 'Darling, funny little person, you are not a kitty cat, you are a little girl. That is cat food, made especially to be good for cats, but is *not* what Mummy wants you to eat. Look, you have a lovely poached egg on toast, orange juice, some nice toast fingers, and raspberry yogurt. Let me put you in your chair and you can eat it now--with your fingers or with these nice spoons and forks. You can have a flower on your table because you like to look at something pretty as well as to eat something that tastes good. Do you want Mummy to put on this music, or to read you a story? See this book? would you like to listen to this story while you eat? Good. MMMMmmmm--that was a big hug and kiss. You are such a nice little girl, and there are lots and lots of things to learn about *who* you are, and *what* the differences are between being a little girl and a kitty.'

"'Who am I?'

"'How can I be fulfilled?'

"These questions come in wailing whines, wistful voices, screaming anger, honest confusion, in frustrated search, in determined research, or in willful rebellion. How are people supposed to find the answers? How are people supposed to know who they are, and how they can be fulfilled?

"Patterns for people and their behavior are being purposely twisted by some who want to stamp out the truth of what is, who want to hit their heads against the stone wall

of what really exists as they shout that the wall and the stone and even their heads--are not there! Sitting on a bench outside the Roman baths in Bath, England, a group of punks (with no two alike) displayed heads shaved in various patterns, faces painted shades of green or purple, eyebrows shaved off or safety pins in their cheeks and rings in their noses. They were, after all, not so original, because through the centuries there have been rebels against behaving, looking, speaking the truth of what the world really is, and who human beings really are. Through the centuries people have turned away deliberately from the true and living Creator who has told them who they are and have turned to gods who did not make them, but who are as Jeremiah tells us, 'like scarecrows in a melon patch.' If people are going to make false gods and then fool themselves and others into believing that they exist and then worship them, meditate about them, talk to them, and sing about them...then they are going to be *like* these gods in their behavior and even in their twisted lack of understanding as to who they are. Just as acting like a kitty cat does not make a child into a cat, acting like something other than a person really is does not make that person able to be fulfilled by another set of things. What is, is. This is not only a profound statement; it explains why the psychiatrists' offices are full in country after country, as well as explaining many other kinds of misery and frustration. People are trying to be what they are *not* made to be, and relate to what does *not* exist.

"God has said the He made people. He knows who they are. He made them male and female--two kinds, with gorgeous diversity and endless variety to be enhanced, tenderly cared for, creatively developed, not erased. He made them in His image, to think and act and feel, to be able to have ideas and choose among them in order to create, to love and to be compassionate, to understand other people as well as themselves, to communicate abstract ideas as well as concrete ideas, to write as well as verbalize audibly, to relate to other people on a horizontal level as well as to relate to Him, the Infinite One. He made them with the capacity to be parents, knowing tender compassion and love toward children, experiencing the relationship of generations, having a capacity for continuity. God made people in His image with endless capacity; yet they were finite and limited in comparison to His infiniteness. God had no beginning, He was there, is there, will be there. He is the Creator. He had to be there to create. The very statement that He is the Creator says He was there. He made people to live forever, but He did not make them as programmed computers, or puppets to be manipulated. He gave them choice, and choices have results.

"There is cause and effect history. That history is real, and we are affected by the past, as well as the present and our knowledge of something of the future. We live in the midst of history; our feet dangle in the stream of history. It does not pass us as a river that we never put a foot in: we swim in it, we boat in it, our feet dangle in it we get wet in it. History surrounds us, and we affect history. History is *our* history, at least the period we have been born and live in, as well as the period that affects us before our birth, and the period we are affecting after our death. People need to know all this to know even the

tiniest beginning of an answer to Who am I? and How can I be fulfilled?

“There was a list of one commandment in the beginning. It was made to Adam before Eve was made. First it was one commandment for one person; then it was one commandment for two persons. It could have been the only commandment, or rule for behavior, or regulation for living, if only it had been kept, observed, obeyed, believed, respected. But it wasn't. God had said that He was giving all kinds of freedoms: to be fruitful and increase in number, to rule over the fish and birds and animals, to eat a stupendous variety of fruit, vegetables, melons, and so on. But He had given one strong negative commandment: ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.’ If Adam and Eve had not eaten, there would have been no death, no deterioration. If they had obeyed and respected and believed the Word of God in that commandment, there would have been no abnormality. But they did eat, and the world, people, animals, all nature has been spoiled, devastated. God's perfect creation has been vandalized and spoiled. Death has come in like a flood spilling out of a broken dam. Ugliness has blotted out much that was beautiful. None of us has ever seen perfection in nature, in human beings, or in relationships and situations. Since the breaking of that first law, people have needed some kind of explanation about how to get along with each other, as well as fulfilling what God made them to be.

“So God gave other directions, through His prophets and His servants, at different times of history. When God gives directions, they don't clash. They are true to what is, because He is the Creator. When the rules and regulations are made by changing religions, changing cultures, changing periods of history, they are all some form of directions coming from man-made gods. Thus they clash with what is, and they clash with the questions, Who am I? and What will fulfill me? and What can I do that will fit into the framework of what really is true? Men and women have made up their own rules, or they follow someone else's made-up rules, and it simply does not work. It is like banging your head against a wall that really is there while singing a song that goes, ‘It isn't there, ouch...it isn't there, *ouch*...it isn't there at all, at all, ouch, OUCH!’

“Jeremiah explains it like this:

‘Hear what the Lord says to you, O house of Israel. This is what the Lord says: “Do not learn the ways of the nations or be terrified by the signs in the sky, though the nations are terrified by them. For the customs of the peoples are worthless; they cut a tree out of the forest, and a craftsman shapes it with his chisel. They adorn it with silver and gold; they fasten it with hammer and nails so it will not totter. Like a scarecrow in a melon patch, their idols cannot speak; they must be carried because they cannot walk.”...But God made the earth by his power; he founded the world by his wisdom and stretched out

the heavens by his understanding. When he thunders, the waters in the heavens roar; he makes clouds rise from the ends of the earth. He sends lightning with the rain and brings out the wind from his storehouses. Everyone is senseless and without knowledge; every goldsmith is shamed by his idols. His images are a fraud; they have no breath in them. They are worthless, the objects of mockery; when their judgment comes, they will perish. He who is the Portion of Jacob is not like these, for he is the Maker of all things, including Israel, the tribe of his inheritance--the Lord Almighty is his name.'

Jeremiah 10:1-5 & 12-16

“What a clear picture God gave to Jeremiah and to the people in His time! And God has preserved it for us so that we can understand something of our time. The punks are following a scarecrow in a melon patch, so of course they come to look like that. This is true of all who rebel against the Creator of the universe, the Judeo-Christian God of the Bible who made all things, and made people so that they could be in relationship with Him as well as with each other. The rebellion against Him ends in rebellion against what He has designed people to enjoy and to be fulfilling to them.

“Jeremiah prays later in that same chapter: **“I know, O Lord, that a man’s life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps.”**

“Many different kinds of direction are needed because there are many different ways to be lost. Physical direction is needed by people who have lost their way in a city, in the woods, on a lake or river, on the high seas, in the mountains, crossing deserts, in rocky places, or in endless fields of corn. Philosophical direction is needed to understand something about the meaning of life. Moral direction is needed to understand how to act toward other people and toward God.

“When God gave that first commandment, our first parents were surrounded by all the positive things of that perfect garden with its endless provision of everything that was needed for life and creativity--love, family, fulfillment, and a daily possibility of communication with Him. When it came to the time of Moses and God gave what is known as the Ten Commandments, they were given in the midst of the marvelous experiences of going through the Red Sea, of seeing the water gush forth from the rock in a time of thirstiness, of being fed balanced food that fell each day for their need of nourishment, as well as in the midst of promises for the future. God gave explanations along with the Ten Commandments and placed them in the framework of His Word, the Bible. This framework kept filling out as a house that is first a frame, then filled in with wood, stone, glass, plaster, brass, tiles, and so on until it is complete. The frame is always needed; the understanding increases gradually as to what part each portion of the ‘house’ has in the completed whole.

“If the people of the world, after the fall, had not turned to false gods, they at least would have known what was right and wrong. Had there been no rebellion and turning from the true and living God to a variety of ‘scarecrows,’ everyone would have known about Him, His existence, His commands, His explanations, His directions, His promises, and His preparations for our future. Everyone would have known what things are really wrong. Everyone would have had the right kind of ‘mirror’ to see the dirt on his or her face and would have been aware of the need of a ‘bath,’ a ‘wash,’ to be clean. Everyone would have had God’s explanations as to what is right and what is wrong.

“Now don’t misunderstand. Because of the cause and effect history following the rebellion of Adam and Eve, *no one could perfectly follow God’s commandments*. But there is a big difference between *seeing that you have done wrong* and *not knowing that there is a wrong*, and thinking there is no standard for right and wrong at all, or following the rules of one of the false gods, one of the scarecrows, one of the idols made with men’s hands or with people’s imaginations. God spoke very strongly about how to make it possible for people to know the law, to know not only the Ten Commandments but His full Word, including all He has done to help people know He is indeed God, and that He is all-powerful and infinite and compassionate, and that His law is worth knowing, remembering, thinking about, and talking about.

“Come to Deuteronomy. Moses has given the law to the people, the Ten Commandments God wrote on the tables of stone. Now Moses is telling the people how extremely important it is to explain these laws to the children, and also to answer their children’s questions, and to discuss and talk with them about all that God did in the time before they were born, as well as earlier in their own lives. These parents were to keep their communication with God and with their children current, so that it did not become a stale repetition. Listen:

“These are the commands, decrees and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the Lord, the God of your fathers, promised you. Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.” Deuteronomy 6:1-7

“This is crystal clear: Children are not to be told ‘run along and don’t ask questions.’ Children are to be included in family discussion concerning the law of God and past history related in God’s revelation. They are also to be included as the family studies God’s Word as it relates to current things that are discussed during breakfast, as the morning paper is being read, or on a walk as the day’s events are thought of in the city streets, or in fields, burning up with too much sun or covered with volcano dust or rotting with too much rain. God’s law, God’s Word, the Ten Commandments are to be related to the present moment of history, because these are the Living Words of God and applicable right to the very end of the age when the big change comes. And they should be a natural part of conversation. However, families also need to discuss realities of answered prayer that are not as startling as the Red Sea rolling back, but are part of their family history of living as sheep of His pasture.

“Today, many people say there is no absolute, there is no God who has ever spoken. Others feel that even if He does exist, whatever His Word was centuries ago, it must be changed now. It is outdated in our day of computers, electronic devices, packaged meals, instant gratification, throwaway plastic or paper products.

“Words like ‘continuity’ and ‘lasting’ and ‘unchanging’ seem to be blurred with dust, only to be thought of as some antique concept to be a bit nostalgic about, but not to be taken seriously.

“When things from the past are discarded and God’s law is spurned, the Ten Commandments are thought to be obsolete. Unhappily, even believers who reverence God’s Word sometimes feel that the Ten Commandments can be pushed aside and forgotten, with no recognition of the balance of the whole of God’s Word, the entire teaching of the whole Bible.

“*What have we missed in not studying the Ten Commandments?* As an introduction to the Ten Commandments, **Psalm 19** presents a vivid picture of what God would have us understand and ‘feed upon’ as well as live by and be refreshed with.

**“The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul.
The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple.
The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart.
The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes.
The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever.
The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous.
They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold;
they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb.
By them is your servant warned; in keeping of them is great reward.
Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults.
Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me.
Then will I be blameless, innocent of the great transgression.**

**May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be
pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.”
Psalm 19:7-14”**

Do you see what Edith took a (very!) long time to say? That we know what we are, who we are, where we are, what is wrong with us, what we are to do about it and why--in short, we know everything we need to know to live happily--because our Creator God has told us in His Word, our precious Bible. Our children need this knowledge just as much as we do, maybe even more so as our world becomes more and more antagonistic to the things we hold dear. *Now* is the time to begin, while they are young, impressionable sponges--don't waste any opportunity to pour that knowledge into them!

b) Back to **Ezekiel 16:20-21**: “**And you took your sons and your daughters, whom you had borne to me, and these you sacrificed to them** [that is, to other gods] **to be devoured. Were your whorings so small a matter** [that is, our own dabbling with things in our lives that compete with our loyalty to Christ] **that you slaughtered my children and delivered them up as an offering by fire to them?**” We must work to be faithful, Girls, to let NOTHING compete with Christ in our own lives and to be constantly planting our children in His Word.

HYMN

This little song is one I grew up with that teaches children why the Bible is important and why it ought to be important to them. The language is old and the tune is sentimental but the poetry speaks truth.

Holy Bible, Book Divine

by John Burton, tune by Wm. B. Bradbury

#31 in Let Youth Praise Him

Holy Bible, book divine,
Precious treasure, thou art mine;
Mine to tell me whence I came,
Mine to teach me what I am.

Mine to chide me when I rove,
Mine to show a Savior's love;
Mine thou art to guide and guard,
Mine to punish or reward.

Mine to comfort in distress,

Suffering in this wilderness;
Mine to show by living faith,
Man can triumph over death.

Mine to tell of joys to come,
And the rebel sinner's doom;
O thou holy book divine,
Precious treasure, thou art mine.