

Mother's Encouragement Group
October 6, 2016

I watched *A Man for All Seasons* last night while Rob was away and was arrested by a remark that Sir Thomas More is supposed to have made to his daughter in the moment when she told him about the oath that Parliament was requiring its officers and churchmen to take, declaring Henry VIII the head of the Church instead of the Pope. Sir Thomas asked her how the oath was worded, saying that any oath is made of words and that if he could possibly take the oath he would certainly do it. She was appalled, knowing how he felt about the Church and knowing the consequences of both taking and not taking the oath. He said to her in that moment, "Meg, God made the angels for their splendor, the animals for their innocence; the plants for their simplicity, but man He made to serve Him with his wit in the tangle of his mind." It occurred to me, whether he actually said this or not—and I haven't been able to find out—that there is much truth in this statement; we are meant to *think* our way through life, applying the convictions of our faith everywhere we can, for ourselves and for our children.

Last time I read to you from Glennon Doyle Melton's book Carry On, Warrior which is the setting out of her own story, the facing of and learning to deal with her addictions and becoming the Christian woman she wanted to be. The discussion we had, which included whether or not to share our own stories, which may seem boring in comparison, with each other—how much and when and how—seemed to me to fit right in with the next topic in the principles of child-rearing that I have been giving you from time to time, that is, the "dialectic." I do plan to read more of Glennon's story to you but today I want us to use our "wits in the tangle of our minds" to address several questions that trouble us as mothers of little children. Be thinking of how you would respond to issues like these:

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

2) Your life IS your children right now but they are not the center of the universe and ought not to feel that they are.

3) 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?

4) 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, teaching your children, caring for them all the time takes every brain cell you have?

5) Children need to learn to fear God as well as love Him and to love Him as well as to fear Him. How do we do that?

6) You need to keep your children quiet in church but you don't want them to hate being there! In fact, they must learn gradually to participate in worship.

7) YOU are the source of all life, health, happiness, nutrition, education, inspiration, safety and JOY: where is all that going to come from?

A quick review: 1) the Lord made women—and suited them—for the job of mothering children; 2) our children, who belong to Christ *because they belong to us*, are born foolish and

stupid, that is, they are prone to sin; 3) we must love our children so that they know that we are *absolutely* and *unquestionably* on their side *all the time*; 4) obedience is the first and most important rule for our children; 5) if your children do not fear you they will not fear God either; 6) we should keep to only a few rules of the household—rules of principle—that ought never to be transgressed; 7) the strength of a child’s rebellion must be met with equal parental strength; and 8) 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.

Today, the 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.” Part of the dictionary definition of ‘dialectic’ is, “the science or art of discriminating truth from error.” The Bible often teaches us truth by giving us both sides of any particular issue—true sides—that we are meant to take hold of and work out in our attitudes and behavior.

For example, we know that there is only one God. **Deut. 6:4: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.”** We also know that Jesus said **“I and the Father are one.” John 10:30** Then we hear about the Spirit going here and there, doing this and that and that the sin against the Holy Spirit is the one that will not be forgiven. Now are there three Gods? or is each of them ⅓ of God? The Bible says three persons, but one God. How are we to understand this?

We know that Jesus was completely God but also completely man. His birth was an ordinary birth of an ordinary woman *but* she had not had sex with anyone—He was an ordinary baby but his mother was a virgin. His childhood was ordinary in that He had “to learn obedience” like any other child but He didn’t sin like every other child—what did that look like? He learned things no ordinary child would be interested in learning as demonstrated by His conversation with the scholars in the temple when he was twelve and as an adult he performed miracles, overcoming the power of nature in order to benefit those he loved. And, he was thirsty, hungry, tired, even angry, sad and depressed. He didn’t know things we would have thought he should have known. When talking to his disciples about the end times he said, **“But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.” Matthew 24:36** How are we to understand that when we would have thought He had the entire universe at his command?

We know that God is completely sovereign over everything: He made everything, understands how everything works from the tiniest cell inside an eye or an ear or a kidney to the important relationship of the sun to our earth and to the millions of other stars placed in Space. I love to imagine Him, during the events of Genesis 1, thinking, musing, enjoying just what He might do next: “how much more complicated and intricate can I become and who is there that might enjoy what I have made?” I can imagine the fun He must have had just bringing it all into being and then making a creature that could actually *think*, one that would be able to appreciate the things that He had made. He gave that creature—man—powers of his own, made him king, as it were, over the rest of what He had made and then gave him the power to choose right or wrong, to go here or there, doing this or that. Yet with all of man’s choosing God has not given up His own control over every single thing that happens on the earth or out of it. How does all of that work together? How is it even possible? I have no idea!

On a more practical and personal level we know that women are to dress modestly, not caring about their outward appearance yet over and over the Bible celebrates feminine beauty. We also know that we are not supposed to care about putting money in the bank in order to hoard expensive things; we are supposed to provide for those we are responsible for. But does that mean we are not to fill our homes with beautiful things, simply because they are beautiful? Yet the Lord created beauty all over the place—not only in nature but in the talents and gifts that He put into His creature, man. He gave us the ability to appreciate beautiful things; why did He do that, if not for our pleasure as well as for His?

The point is that it is easy to understand any part of each truth by itself: we pray to “God” without worrying about which of His personalities is listening, helping and answering because our minds are too small to figure it out. We can easily think of Christ as a sort of “superman” knowing things before they happened and able to rule over nature but we really don’t get his *not* knowing things, do we? We can easily understand that we shouldn’t care about our outward appearance but how do we also do justice to the Bible’s teaching about beauty? We know that “sex outside of marriage is wrong” but does that make *sex wrong*? If not, how do we learn how to embrace and appreciate this amazing thing—which can be amazingly dangerous—that the Lord Himself created when He created man? I say, it is easy to cling to one side of each of these truths, and simply not think about its seemingly opposing truth, but it is hard and takes real skill—wisdom—to embrace *all* of the Lord’s teaching.

The Proverbs passage we started with sort of “rubs our noses” in our problem of finiteness and having such little brains and, worse, often having little hearts! We are told to **“answer NOT a fool according to his folly”** and then we are told to **“answer a fool according to his folly.”** What is the writer of Proverbs trying to say? It seems to me to be telling us not to engage in the foolishness of the one making foolish choices but rather, by speaking just like him, show him how very foolish he is being. This can be a great tool when you’re trying to show a child how silly or selfish he is being. But it takes a bit of pondering to figure it out, doesn’t it?

Now to the issues of raising children that we mentioned first. There are a couple of broad, underlying principles that I believe will help us in thinking about these things: first of all, I want to remind us that love—that unconditional acceptance of, and loyalty to, our children—is the backdrop, the atmosphere, the context in which the obedience of your children is demanded. It is what makes the obedience palatable and possible. You win obedience from the heart of the child you love by making him feel safe and giving him a goal and a purpose in his little life. The discipline you give him in this atmosphere of love brings him up short, stops him in the direction he was going and starts him in a new one, tweaking his thinking each time it happens.

This was clearly illustrated to my mind early on in our years at Faith when, as a young mom myself (and often pregnant) I would take my turn in the nursery care of our babies and toddlers. I remember being so convinced and convicted that a certain child needed a spanking and I remember administering it and then living with difficult fallout the whole rest of the time we were together. The child became afraid and unresponsive. I had a very thick skull in those days and it took me awhile to realize that though I had love and concern for this child and so had done what I thought was best for him, *he had no reason to believe* that I loved him since we had had no previous relationship or interaction. He did not know that I loved him and after the discipline that I had administered it was very hard to communicate that to him! That experience has made me very cautious in my treatment of other children: they, *in the very first place*, need to

know that I love them before there can be any helpful discipline. (This is the great thing about grandmotherhood: you get to love the little buggers, sin and all!)

Second, marriage is the backdrop, the atmosphere, the context in which family life is managed. After all, if there were no marriage there would be no children! Marriage 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. This is, and ought to be, a happy thought! It is an amazing thing that happens when all the busyness of the heavy traffic in your home is suddenly quiet (it's not really that sudden, but it feels like it!). When that happened to us Rob and I looked at each other and said, "Oh, you're still here! That's good!"

A happy marriage provides the lovely atmosphere in which the discipline, education and nurturing of children takes place. Conversely an unhappy one we know can and does color everything else in life. We women especially know that if we are unhappy at the bottom everything else becomes harder to do, harder to bear, harder even to think about. But when the marriage is happy it is the source of the joy—the underlying pleasure—in the household. When father and mother delight in one another children relax and are allowed to care about their own little issues and troubles. But when sweetness is gone or strained, temporarily or permanently damaged, children unconsciously grow up into worries that should never be their problem—it is too much for them. "Why are Mommy & Daddy fighting? Is it my fault? What's going to happen?" At the very least, compassion for our children would dictate that husbands and wives should keep their disagreements and arguments in private. However, if the children should see affection between the two of you, well there are not too many other things that can give a child's heart more delight. Our granddaughter, Bryonie, is so in love with love; her imagination is already captured. A number of years ago now, after having watched Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* she asked her mother why Aurora longed for a handsome stranger. Vangie told her that's what happens when you get a little older. You fall in love. Then she said, "When I'm a woman I'm going to long for a handsome stranger. Did you long for a handsome stranger?" Vange said, "Yep, it turned out to be Papa." So, it is important that we spend a good deal of time and energy nurturing, enhancing and deepening our love for one another and that the children see evidence that we are doing it. And may I say that dressing for our husbands, on purpose to please them, and according to their taste, helps a lot towards keeping the fun, romance and excitement in our marriages. The Lord made us for sweet relationship with each other and with Himself and He made the intimacy of one man and one woman to be the foundational joy that begins at the beginning of adulthood and grows until the end of life on earth. We can certainly kick against what the Lord has made or we can "get with the program" and embrace the joy the Lord intended for us to have. It takes some *thinking* from time to time as well as effort....

With these two things in mind—that love of our children and love of our husbands are the underlying principles that help us to work out the "dialectics" in life—how would you respond to the issues we mentioned above?

1) How do we love our children unconditionally while uncompromisingly demanding that obedience that is required of them?

2) How can your life center around your children without making them think that they are the center of the universe?

3) 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?

4) 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 your children, teaching them, caring for them all the time takes every brain cell you have?

5) How can you teach your children how to fear God as well as love Him and to love Him as well as to fear Him?

6) How do you keep your children quiet in church without making them hate being there! How do you help them gradually to learn to participate in worship?

7) YOU are the source of all life, health, happiness, nutrition, education, inspiration, safety and JOY: where does all that energy come from?

In conclusion, caring for our children *is* the obedience we offer the Lord and shows the commitment we have to Him. The Lord is so gracious as to accept the work we have to do for them as though we are doing work for Him: there is no competition here! We can know that all of what we do for them we are doing for Christ; they are Christ's children too! In point of fact, they belong *first* to Him and only afterwards to us. This is true with the gifts and talents the Lord has given to each of us; we give them back to Him to use on behalf of our children and on behalf of our extended family, our church family, folk in our neighborhood and others the Lord may bring across our paths. Your children will see you living this way—spending yourself on behalf of others—and may even take part in your service to others. When you use your gifts on behalf of the people of God it will make an impression on your children. It will teach them to live that "other-centered" life and shows them that the life of the Church is just as vital and important to you, and ought to be to them, as their own family life is.

I offer you a poem written by a woman *who grew up in church*. It expresses the things she remembers feeling when she was there.

At Six, I Feel the Sacred

The solid pew, first cool, then warm
The shared weight of the Psalter hymnal
The small cross embossed on its cover

In heat of summer, window breeze
In winter, my body's heat inside my coat
The heavy prickle of my feet asleep

The calluses of my father's hands
His jacket's coarse wool, his handkerchief
knotted and folded for me, a soft doll

And my mother's gloves of soft soft leather
The eternal circles of her buttons,
Her nyloned knees

And valleyed lap where I lay my head
Her fingers stroking over my ear
Over and over, stroking my hair

by Lynn Otto

This is her testimony: she learned from her parents' example that there were things much bigger than herself that demanded her thought, her understanding and, finally, her commitment. This is what we want for every single one of our children: the relaxation of knowing they are not the center of all things but are an important part of something much bigger than they, whether it be their parents' marriage, their own little family or the larger church family—all of which flow from their very BIG Creator/God!

So how do we figure out when to cuddle, when to discipline, when to spend time with husband, when to be involved at church and elsewhere, 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!" I believe the key is the heart, which only the Lord can see—what is the motive of the heart when we choose how to spend our time, what we do with our children, what we put in our minds? 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 for its own sake? The Lord told Samuel who at first admired David's older brother: **"Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."** I Samuel 16:7 This ought to make us scrutinize our motives with great care. We need to be thinking, using our "wits in the tangle of our minds" to help us decide what is right, what is best in any particular situation or area of life, not just falling into it *only* because that is how your mother did it. Or even rejecting something just because your mother did it. Make every effort to find out what is right in the eyes of the Lord who sees all, knows all and knows the motivations of your heart better than you do yourself! THINK ABOUT IT and pray for the Lord's own guidance as you think.

Here is how one mom described the motive that kept her going. A Musing Maralee:

[Hope in Pajamas](#)

I think the secret to surviving motherhood with grace and dignity may be living with hope. You may think the mom who is still in her pajamas at two in the afternoon is a woman who has lost all hope. But I feel she is a woman with great hope! Hope that maybe at some point today she will be able to get back in bed for a couple more minutes of rest. And if that moment comes, she will be ready. Great hope, indeed!

While that may be a small example, SO much of what a mom does is motivated not by what she's seeing in her day-to-day life, but in the hope that God is using her efforts to make a difference even many years from now. It is difficult to be consistent day after day to the work God has called us to- making the oatmeal, changing the diapers, doing the laundry, reading the

storybooks and kissing the boo-boos- but we do it because our hope is that the love and care we're expressing in these simple acts will matter long after our kids are grown and gone. We hope they saw the love and tenderness of Jesus in our acts of service for them. We hope that love will live on in them and motivate them to care for and serve others. The hope that our efforts will result in life-long character development and spiritual growth is what keeps us faithful to our calling- even if we're doing it while still in our pajamas.

I would add that our "hope," which is the highest of motives, is so much more than wishful thinking; it is absolute confidence in who God is and in what He is doing in the lives of His children and ours. We end with Paul: **Ephesians 1:15-21: "For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, [interesting that Paul call the Father Jesus' God!] may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is *the hope to which he has called you*, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come."**

HYMN:

Praise the Savior, Ye Who Know Him!

Thomas Kelly, 1806/traditional German melody called Acclaim

#677 in *Trinity Hymnal*

Praise the Savior, ye who know him!
Who can tell how much we owe him?
Gladly let us render to him
All we are and have.

Keep us, Lord, O keep us cleaving
To thyself and still believing,
Till the hour of our receiving
Promised joys with thee.

Jesus is the name that charms us;
He for conflict fits and arms us;
Nothing moves and nothing harms us
While we trust in him.

Then we shall be where we would be,
Then we shall be what we should be;
Things that are not now, nor could be,
Soon shall be our own.

Trust in him, ye saints, forever;
He is faithful, changing never;
Neither force nor guile can sever
Those he loves from him.