

Mothers Encouragement Group
January 12, 2017
The Process

A review of some principles of raising children that we have spoken about: 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 will always choose to sin if left alone; 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—not less and certainly never more; 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; 9) the dialectic: the discussion of how seemingly opposing things in the life of children are addressed, such as the fact that they are born with Adam’s nature, full of sin and prone to it, yet they are required to live according to their saved nature, which is Christ’s; and 10) 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.

I’d like to start today with one of Bryonie’s old blog entries when she was a little over a year into her mothering life:

All about...the journey? (February 2012)

Maybe you have heard this like I have: “I’m all about the journey.” I have had this said to me before and in years gone by I would nod sagely and say, “Yes. All about the journey. It’s not about the end. It’s about HOW you get there.” It sounded so, well, romantic, to be all about the journey even if I had no idea what that meant or looked like.

But there’s a problem -- one that is becoming increasingly clear to me: I’m NOT all about the journey. In fact, I’m so not about the journey I would happily skip it just to get where I want to go. I am a self-avowed task-oriented, git-her-done, tick-it-off-the-list, drive-you-crazy kind of person. And I do! Drive you crazy, that is. At least I drive my poor husband crazy with my lists and my plans and my “just this last thing.” I can’t be happy until the job is done.

You probably can see where I’m going with this. Parenthood is, at least in my own very limited experience, all about the journey, all the time. I could make lists like “change diaper; make lunch; clean up lunch; play; nap; feed; clean up; play.” Seriously? Or the list could say, “Keep Judah alive today.” Or, better yet, “Keep Judah happy and keep myself sane.” Not bad, but not exactly catering to my tendency to organize my life and everyone else’s lives into neat little lists of tasks and achievements.

It’s becoming clear that I have to change myself on some fundamental and vitally important level. I have to become “all about the journey.” I have to re-center my energy and commitment

to learning a person: a person who is not a list of jobs or a checklist to be completed by the end of the day; a person who has his own challenges, his own gifts, his own personality and whose parents have the mind boggling job of figuring out those challenges and gifts and personality. And I'm starting to get the feeling I'm never going to have it all figured out. ~~"Figure out parenting."~~

All about the journey. Well, yes, I guess I have to be. So, now I tell myself that if, at the end of a long and tiring day, I know my son just a little bit better; if I understand him a little more; if I loved him at least as well as I could, then I can check the box on my list. The only thing is, tomorrow it's the same list and the same box. "Love Judah." (Maybe I should add something and make it a list of two: "Love Josh.")

I have had it said to me a million (A MILLION) times, "Enjoy these early years. They go by so fast." OK. So add that to the list. "Enjoy. Love. Change a diaper. Learn. Change another diaper." If I can be all about the journey now, I'll end up at the end of it probably wishing the box wasn't ticked and the list wasn't completed. But journey or not, it will be nice to be done with the diapers.

Eleventh Principle:

We need to 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 and, it is a process.

Ecclesiastes 2:14: "The wise person has his eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness." We need to 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. Why does the Bible compare us with sheep? I'm guessing it's because sheep are stupid and if left to themselves would never choose to stay on the right path but would be constantly wandering off it. Our children need absolutely everything we can think of to push, pull and guide them into right thinking; they will never learn that on their own; they simply are not capable of it and if you love them you will hear this advice from the Word of God: don't be lazy in your thinking and in your doing on their behalf. Open your mouth and begin that "journey" that seems endless right now but will be over—trust me in this—sooner than you want it to be.

When I hear parents say (and I have heard this even, tragically, from some Christians), "Oh we don't believe in imposing our will on our kids; we're going to let them choose when they are older" I know without a doubt that their kids, without the Spirit's intervention, will be lost to the Kingdom of God and very possibly even to them. This is an illustration of the **"fool walking in darkness"** and when their children have turned out badly they will surely say to themselves, "What happened?" This is the worst kind of tragedy since all those early years when they had a chance to influence their children are now gone and can never be gotten back. Don't be like these

parents, Girls! Be like the **“wise person who has his eyes in his head.”** Use everything you can to teach and to nurture them, using force when necessary, to turn them away from sinful paths.

This is how the Lord taught Israel; God Himself is our example in this. **Deuteronomy 27:9-26: “Then Moses and the Levitical priests said to all Israel, ‘Keep silence and hear, O Israel: this day you have become the people of the Lord your God. You shall therefore obey the voice of the Lord your God, keeping his commandments and his statutes, which I command you today.’ That day Moses charged the people, saying, ‘When you have crossed over the Jordan, these shall stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin. And these shall stand on Mount Ebal for the curse: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali.’”** Then follows a long list of curses: **“Cursed be the man who makes a carved or cast metal image....cursed be anyone who dishonors his father or his mother....cursed be anyone who moves his neighbor’s landmark....cursed be anyone who misleads a blind man....cursed be anyone who perverts justice....cursed be anyone who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them. And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’”**

But in the very next chapter comes the promise of amazing blessings. **Deuteronomy 28:1-6: “And if you faithfully obey the voice of the Lord your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you....Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground and the fruit of your cattle, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock. Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out.”** And then comes a long, wonderfully sweet, paragraph of the Lord telling them how they will become His holy people, how He will delight in them, defeat their enemies before them, prospering them and making them the envy of all. Wouldn’t you, if you heard the Lord say that to you, respond by saying, “Oh, I want that; choose me, Lord! I’ll do anything to have that blessing and that protection from you!”

But then the Lord says, **“But if you will not obey the voice of the Lord your God....The Lord will send on you curses, confusion, and frustration in all that you undertake to do, until you are destroyed....The Lord will strike you with wasting disease and with fever, inflammation and fiery heat....The Lord will strike you with madness and blindness and confusion of mind, and you shall grope at noonday, as the blind grope in darkness and you shall not prosper in your ways....”** Deuteronomy 28:15-29 And then comes a long passage of several paragraphs of how the Lord will let their enemies rule them and bring misery into their lives, letting their families be broken up and letting such severe famine come upon them that they will actually eat their children. All this God promises them if they **“are not careful to do all the words of this law that are written in this book....”** Again He says, **“Your life shall hang in doubt before you. Night and day you shall be in dread and have no assurance of your life. In the morning you shall say, ‘If only it were evening!’ and at evening you shall say, ‘If only it were morning!’ because of the dread that your heart will feel, and the sights that your eyes shall see....”** Why does the Lord say all this to them? Just so that they **“might fear this glorious and awesome name, the Lord your God.”** Deuteronomy 28:58-67 Which one of us, on hearing our Lord say these things to us would not say, “Oh Lord,

no; I don't want that! I beg you to help me choose obedience; help me to fear your glorious and awesome name."

Our God knows us inside and out; He knows what is in our hearts—He made those hearts! He knows that we need to be afraid of bad consequences as well as to be able to look forward to wonderful rewards. You noticed, I'm sure, how He did not soften any of His language in speaking to Israel: He *wanted them to be afraid* so that they would be highly motivated to choose obedience. So with our children: *they need to be afraid* of the consequences of not obeying and we must not be afraid to make them so! If we truly love them we will be seeking every day to drive the foolish choosing out of them and then to reward them for the right choosing *you have guided them* into.

Notice I said "you have guided them" into right behavior. Remember how we have said that children are born foolish and stupid? They will not know how to speak or to behave unless you first model it for them. "Please, Mommy, may I?" should come immediately out of your mouth with a sweet tone of voice when your child says, "I want...." with a demanding one.

Proverbs 15:1: "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."

Children need to be taught everything and you need to model for them what they should say and how they should say it. A harsh response from you may be called for on rare occasions: when danger to themselves or others is at hand or when they respond with anger and rebellion. But most of the time you can correct them by repeating what they have demanded in the way you want them to ask with politeness and humility. You show them how to be kind to siblings by modeling that kindness and teaching them what to do. You show them how to apologize by putting the very words in their mouths.

Does this sound like a contradiction to being willing to make our children afraid? It isn't really: both things are needed. Our parenting should never be only one side of this coin. We have said before that the strength of a child's rebellion must be met with equal parental strength. Yes, this means that when there is a tantrum it should be dealt with swiftly, strongly and without compromise but it also means that, if you can, you should teach gently, sweetly and winsomely so that we "make the Gospel bonnie" even to our children. If we are overly harsh and are too often angry and out of patience they may learn to obey when you are standing in front of them but when your back is turned they will look for other ways to make themselves "happy." The Lord made us to be happy—that's the kicker—and if obeying you does not bring them happiness they will always be looking for another way to find it.

Our goal is to motivate, to draw, to demand a high standard of behavior but to make that standard something desirable & wonderful. To that end discipline can and ought to be creative, not simply forceful. Sometimes it must be forceful—and should actually hurt, hello!—but often it can more effectively "fit the crime" by being creative.

When my grandmother was raising her eight children—my dad was her fifth, but her first son—times were very hard and they were poor. Dessert was something rare and special. On one special occasion the table was set for their supper and there were ten desserts, one at each place, set out and waiting for the family to gather for the meal. My dad came in and saw the little dishes of pudding, took one and ate it, trying to disguise the fact that now there were only nine. My Grandma was no dummy and he did not get this one past her, though she did not let on until, after the meal, it was time for dessert. Then, in front of the whole family, she made him eat *her* dessert while she went without. Watching his mother sacrifice her own dessert for him after he

had stolen one ahead of time was something he never forgot as evidenced by the fact that he told me about it many years later. I remember him saying to me that he could hardly choke that second dessert down.

My boys reminded me of a time when they were fighting about something and I had come to the end of my temper with them. I think they were teenagers when this happened and they should have known better. I yelled at them from the bottom of the stairs to stop and when Jamie said that it was Robbie's fault I, in Jamie's words, "exploded and said, 'I don't give a DAMN whose fault it was!' Rob and I were both stunned," he said. "It was awesome." You get the point; that was a shock for them since I was NOT in the habit of swearing! It was a way to get through the funk they were in and make them stop and think about what they were doing. I remember James Dobson saying that using big words with small children ("Honey, I am so incensed at your behavior!") can have the same effect on them and, at the same time, build their vocabulary—hopefully not with swear words!

The Lord died to save us, body and soul. The Greeks thought that everything to do with the body was bad and evil and everything to do with the spirit was good. I was raised with this idea, though I believe unwittingly. The idea that a Christian girl should think about her appearance in an effort to make it more lovely was frowned upon. Compliments about anything, but especially about our appearance, were rare since my parents (Rob's too) were afraid we might "get a big head." Dancing was, oh my, so very dangerous and simply should not be done! Nowadays the fact that more and more bodies are being cremated after death shows this Greek thought creeping in again—the body does not matter; it is less important.

Christians do not—ought not—to think this way! The body houses our spirits; they are the "temple of the Holy Spirit," ought to be treated with respect, dignity and care and therefore should be brought under the influence of all that is right and good. Bodies can cause great trouble and great harm, getting us involved in much sin—hence the fear of the body I was raised with—but they are also our only vehicle for doing good, obeying the Lord, helping His Kingdom to grow on earth and then bringing us to Heaven. The way to a child's heart is through his body....don't be afraid to spank that little bottom if the situation calls for it. But also be sure to be hugging that little body *all the time* with sweetness & affection, kissing, tickling, holding firmly. This communicates to them our protection and love.

Often Rob would come home at the end of a day to a house full of tired, grumpy children and a wife at the end of her rope. He would take them up in his arms one by one or wrestle them to the floor saying as he did, "Does the tickle monster need to massage your grump glands again?" It didn't take very long before unwilling little ones would be laughing. Fortunately for me I was usually able to fix myself before the tickle monster got to me—but not always!

If our body is the "temple," the "home," for the Holy Spirit the brick, stucco or wooden houses that we live in are the "temples," the "homes," for our families. This makes the organization, the order, of these homes not unimportant. Just as a happy marriage provides an underlying joy and pleasure in the relationships of a family, so the beauty of the home provides a desirable place for the children to be, a place, when they are older, they will be happy to come back to. This also is a reflection of God Himself who created an organized, beautiful world and made us with the desire for, and appreciation of, beauty.

We all know that when children enter a beautifully appointed nursery with accessible toys all neatly stacked and put away they *love* to enter it and begin making messes everywhere; they are happy! Lazy mom that I was I tried this experiment with our play room downstairs. I thought, “Why should I bother cleaning this up every single day? It’s just going to get messed up tomorrow!” So I didn’t and guess what? My children really didn’t like playing there the next day and grew tired of it almost immediately. I shot myself in the foot—duh!

This principle is also why I grew to appreciate and even be glad about living in the neighborhood where we are. All around us was disorder in varying amounts, ugliness and trash mixed with irresponsible behavior but when the children entered our home I worked hard at making it a place of order and beauty (not that I was altogether successful especially in the early years...I had to learn gradually). It was easy for me to talk to them about the difference between Christians and unbelievers because it was so obvious on the outside. In prettier neighborhoods the differences are not so easy to see and are more subtly discerned.

I am not saying that Christians never have messy houses—please don’t hear me say *that!* I remember very well the mountains of laundry in our basement when our children were young and if our house was ever “clean” and/or neat it was only for one moment late on a Saturday night! But I think the difference is that Christians *care* about the order of their homes and do what they can to make them and keep them as beautiful as the resources of time, energy and money will allow *while so many of those around us truly do not care* (at least in our neighborhood this is often true) and often it seems as though there is more interest actually in destroying what order there is. If that is not a picture of lostness I’m not sure what is.

Let me reiterate that whatever you are trying to achieve in any particular moment in any particular mind make sure that you reach the heart of your child before you stop the teaching or the discipline. You must win your point inside that little mind, whether it is easy or difficult, whether you can do it in a minute or whether you have to take an hour. You should be gentle with the tender ones and you must be courageous with stubborn ones (or ones who are just slow to catch on). The younger you start the easier it will be since whatever you tell your child while he is young will be the gospel truth to him. (Yikes!) I don’t believe you can start too soon in teaching him or her the principles of Christian living. Even babies can—and should—learn that they are not the center of the universe and need to fit into the life they were born into. It’s not too hard to make a two-year-old afraid of you since you are so much bigger than he is! But when he’s 12 or 13 or even 6 or 7 he’ll be much harder to convince that you have wisdom and he doesn’t.

Also remember this: a life is not changed, a behavior is not modified with one spanking or one correction. This is a lot like preaching (or teaching the violin): line by line, precept upon precept, little by little, creating a culture of thought and of life. Often in our early years here at Faith Rob would preach powerful sermons that convicted my heart but I would look around and realize that there were others whose hearts did not seem to have been convicted or, if they were, had not drawn the same conclusions for behavior that should be changed. I asked him if this bothered him and he answered me that it didn’t because he didn’t expect lives to change overnight. He would say to me that after a while—who knows how long?—one realizes that more and more the congregation is thinking like he is. It is the “drip, drip, drip” of constant influence that does it. It is a process.

So it is in our homes and with the discipline and training of our children; we apply constant pressure here, influence there, prodding here, guiding there, seeking to create a culture of obedience and happiness. The work we do is sacred since it is done on behalf of our Lord; our children *belong to Him* and we are merely the tools He is using in their lives to bring them home at last. This is a subtle difference in our thinking but a powerful one. Our responsibility for them is at once made more intense and it is also made easier. Yahweh angrily berated Israel through Ezekiel, saying, **“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)....and He says, **“was it so small a matter that you slaughtered my children...?”** Ezekiel 16:20, 21 If we don’t do this work in our children’s lives as faithfully as we possibly can this is what the Lord thinks—it is the same as slaughtering them. Our responsibility is all at once increased. However, since they are first of all the Lord’s, we realize that the final result is the Lord’s own work in their lives. This we pray for but cannot bring about—it is God who must do it. Truly loving our children is realizing this from the time they are small: each has the gifts, the intellect, the body, the soul that the Lord put together to form a unique person. We are caretakers and nurturers of those unique bundles of characteristics providing a safe, healthy environment in which each may grow into maturity. So when your children sin you need not feel the shame of its being a reflection on you; they *certainly will* sin; they are Adam’s children! Your job is teaching them what sin is and why it is so offensive to their Creator/God. If we don’t do this work as faithfully as we are able it is God that we will answer to and, after all, they will stand before the Lord in the same way you stand before Him. We are in the same process as they, are we not? Our teacher is the Lord God Himself.

HYMN:

Here are two little songs that I remember well learning as a child. I distinctly remember my mother telling me that even children can please the Lord—or not—with their thoughts and their actions.

Little Feet, Be Careful

Mrs. L.M.B. Bateman/J.H. Rosecrans
#111 in *Let Youth Praise Him*

I washed my hands this morning, O very clean and white,
And lent them both to Jesus, To work for Him till night.

Chorus: *Little feet be careful, Where you take me to,
Anything for Jesus, Only let me do.*

I told my ears to listen Quite closely all day through
For any act of kindness Such little hands can do.

My eyes are set to watch them About their work or play,
To keep them out of mischief, For Jesus’ sake, all day.

Oh, Be Careful!

Alfred by Smith/Old Melody arranged by H.D.L.
#112 in *Let Youth Praise Him*

Oh, be careful, little eyes, what you see,
Oh, be careful, little eyes, what you see,
For the Father up above is looking down in love,
So be careful, little eyes, what you see.

Oh, be careful, little ears, what you hear,
Oh, be careful, little ears, what you hear,
For the Father up above is looking down in love,
So be careful, little ears, what you hear.

Oh, be careful, little tongue, what you say,
Oh, be careful, little tongue, what you say,
For the Father up above is looking down in love,
So be careful, little tongue, what you say.

Oh, be careful, little hands, what you do,
Oh, be careful, little hands, what you do,
For the Father up above is looking down in love,
So be careful, little hands, what you do.

Oh, be careful, little feet, where you go,
Oh, be careful, little feet, where you go,
For the Father up above is looking down in love,
So be careful, little feet, where you go.