

Mother's Encouragement Group
February 9, 2017
Deep Mystery: why did the Lord give us this heavy task?

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 naturally 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; 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; 11) the work we do in the lives of our children is a process—a long one; and 12) Showing hospitality or, cultivating a loving heart, is the best of all schools for your children. When hospitality permeates the atmosphere of a Christian home it so influences its children that as they grow up, the habit of it becomes ingrained in their minds and hearts.

Thirteenth Principle:

Children should learn about sex from their parents, but hardly ever do! Song of Songs 1:2: “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! For your love is better than wine....” Today's subject is delicate and dangerous, wonderful and scary, full of mystery, joy and above all, pleasure. I am speaking about sex and the teaching of it to our children.

We have said that marriage is the backdrop for family life and the context in which the nurturing of our children takes place. It is the underlying pleasure, the fun, the security and happiness for all that goes on in our home. It is the model that children see, the place they will want to go; it is natural for them to want to be “just like mommy & daddy.” Marriage is many things and the further we go into life's journey together the more facets of marriage we see and enjoy: conversation, shared tastes and experiences, hobbies, humor, prayer, and work and all of it is much more fun because there are two of you sharing it. Human beings are so complicated that it's not hard to learn something new about one's spouse even after years of living together. But there is one thing that, if it is not present, there is no marriage at all and that, of course, is sex. All the other stuff is gravy—fun and wonderful—but if there is no sex the heart of what marriage is all about is missing. Our Creator made us this way and we see it treated and talked about everywhere in the Bible. It is the way God thought to make more human beings after the first two He had made “from scratch.” **Genesis 2:25: “And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.”**

Rob and I have watched from time to time some episodes of *Planet Earth*, the BBC series that explores so many amazing things about our planet that are very little known and very often not understood. One of the things that has impressed me is that every species has its own particular way of pro-creating: a rare kind of camel on the China steppes bangs his bottom with his stubby little tail in an effort to attract the female; an amazingly colorful bird in the Amazon jungle fans his feathers, hops up and down and screams like a banshee to attract his mate; frogs and insects have habits peculiar to each to fulfill their mandate to have babies and raise young just like themselves; even plant life has its male and female interactions. Rob has often said that God could have made man just like the animals in so many ways: He could have made us to eat grass like the cows and get our nutrition that way instead of giving us complicated taste buds and then providing wonderful things to experience while giving our bodies what they need to live on. In the area of sex, too, He could have made it all so much more mechanical, straightforward, over quickly and on we go. But He didn't. He made it a wonderful experience: intimate and full of pleasure, meant to increase our love for one another. Animals do not "love" one another and there are very few species that actually find *one* mate and stay with that mate while the little ones are hatched and raised. Man, on the other hand, was made for relationship; God put a hunger in our beings for one another: hunger in our souls and hunger in our bodies and He made that hunger *strong!* This is wonderful but can also be dangerous and hard to control. Yet we know that everything God made *was very good* and that He was happy with what He had made.

When sin came into the world it spoiled what God had made. **"Then the eyes of both [the man and the woman] were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths."** Genesis 3:7 For the first time Adam and Eve were ashamed and one doesn't have to read very far into Genesis to find that all kinds of sin, and sexual sin, began to grow everywhere. In chapter 4 we see the first recorded instance of polygamy by a man who bragged about his own violence. By chapter 6 God was getting so put out with the behavior of men that He put a drastic limit on how long a man might live—120 years instead of the usual 700, 800 or 900 years! **"When man began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose...."** and **"The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart."** Genesis 6:1-6 It is important to remember that it is not our God's creation that is bad but the sin that corrupted it and when the Lord gave us His law we need to see it for what it was—kindness and grace, showing mankind how to move forward, how to live happily in the world He had made and how to understand how He made us. I find it amazing that the *only* law God gave us about sex is that it should be within the bonds of marriage. **Exodus 20:14: "You shall not commit adultery."** We learn elsewhere that a man should only marry a woman (amazing that we should have to take a stand like this but in today's world it must be said)—one woman—and that those marriage vows ought only to be broken by the death of one of the partners. One might think, with something so powerful in human life that God would have given us a bunch of regulations regarding what may be done and what may not be, but He didn't. Instead He gave us a whole book of the Bible that does nothing but celebrate sexual love yet does so in such a chaste manner that theologians have argued about its meaning for probably centuries. Put yourself in the place of an Israelite family when the **Song of Songs** was being read out: there are the children delighting in the story of a wonderful garden and there

are the parents nudging each other and whispering and turning red in the face! All the aphrodisiacs known to them not only mentioned but celebrated.

In the book *Ten Things Parents Must Teach Their Children (And Learn for Themselves)* Edith Schaeffer has written about each of the Ten Commandments and their implications for family life. In the chapter entitled *You Shall Not Commit Adultery* she has this to say: “People have separated sex from the oneness of two people, man and woman as husband and wife. They have done this through all history, just as they have separated worship and spirituality from oneness with the true eternal God, the I AM. The rebellion of mankind, human beings, has always existed in these two areas. Both are adultery.” [chapter 7, p.149]

So how do we communicate all the loveliness, wonder *and danger* of sex to our children without scaring them or making them feel guilty about things their bodies will inevitably feel? First of all, it is of utmost importance that your children see a happy marriage that is full of a communication that does not belong to them, that is above them and all around them. The older they become they gradually see evidence of a life in the home that does not include them and if it is a happy life it will make them happy too, eventually desiring it for themselves. Of course this makes it important that your sexual life with your husband is never abandoned, put on a shelf until later but actually cultivated, thought about and cared for. **Proverbs 5:18-19: “Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love.”** Rob has often said that there is nothing the world knows about sex that the Christian shouldn’t also know and, in building a wall of resistance to any particular sin one must cultivate its opposite virtue. The **Proverbs 5** father says: **“Why should you be intoxicated, my son, with a forbidden woman and embrace the bosom of an adulteress?” (vs. 20)** If one has a temper problem, getting angry easily with others, it is patience and forgiveness that must be cultivated. So in the area of sexual desire and fulfillment, if one’s own cup is full, so to speak, the desire to go elsewhere to satisfy this dangerous drive becomes a whole lot weaker. Edith Schaeffer says, “... ‘To avoid having your children steal buns from the bakery, have fresh baked buns waiting for them at home after school.’ It is the same kind of practical warning that if marriage is indeed to help people stay away from immorality, then there should be a responsibility taken by each of the two to fulfill each other’s needs as much as possible.” [ibid p. 159]

This is not to say that there are not seasons of growth, seasons of abstinence and seasons of simply maintaining and even seasons of trouble. This is inevitable when one has small children that place such a drain on one’s energy *all the time!* or when nursing makes one’s desire for sex plummet or when finding privacy in a small house is difficult; or when other problems, brought into the relationship, exert their influence on the marriage. Still, Paul has this to say in **I Corinthians 7:1-5: “Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman. But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.”** Taking what the Bible says altogether then, sex between a

husband and his wife should be explored, cultivated and cared for “as long as you both shall live.”

Second, to be silent about sex to our children is, simply put, foolishness. This leaves the feelings that happen in our bodies—and will certainly happen in our children’s bodies—unaddressed and therefore accompanied by a feeling of “wrong” especially in children of tender conscience. Not to be talked about? Then surely it ought not to be felt; and if I feel it what’s wrong with me? Sex becomes a kind of delicious, mysterious, forbidden subject that begins to carry with it guilt and fear, even shame. How can our children possibly know what to do when this comes upon them if their parents have not given them, first of all, the knowledge that these feelings are all part of the way the Lord made us and then provided an open door that welcomes conversation? The danger of the misuse of the gift of sex is not lessened with silence but only becomes greater the closer children get to adulthood. I wish I could tell you that we handled this area of child-rearing very well. The fact is, I was raised with silence and therefore had little understanding of myself, basically blundering through my young adulthood. (This was the old “greek” idea that everything to do with the body is bad and therefore should not be talked about. What?! This is not even logical since my parents talked about plenty of other sins that ought to be avoided—lying, for instance, and stealing.) My mother trusted me by the time I was through high school because she knew that my commitment to Christ was solid. But in the area of sex she really shouldn’t have trusted me, given the fact that she had given me very few tools with which to face that part of life. (I might add here that *her* mother gave her even less knowledge and *no tools* at all! I was horrified to hear my mother tell me that she did not know how her baby would be born *after* she became pregnant with my brother!) I think there are many in my generation who were raised this way. In my case, the Lord was gracious to me, did really help me and finally gave me a wonderful husband that was right for me but we ought not to presume that this will always be the case. Earlier in **Proverbs 5** we see the father taking his son right down into the Red Light district and showing him the powerful attractions that are there and then telling him that *those* attractions must be resisted **“For the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil, but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps follow the path to Sheol....Keep your way far from her, and do not go near the door of her house, lest you give your honor to others and your years to the merciless, lest strangers take their fill of your strength, and your labors go to the house of a foreigner....”** (vss 3 & 4) The father does not say the attractions themselves are wrong but only that they should be spent on one’s own wife and if the son is not yet married then he must wait until he is. Tweaking the passage with a change of pronoun, a mother can change this warning to fit the particular temptations of her girls.

Children should not be trusted, even in play, to be pure in this area just because they are growing up in the church, play with Christian friends and have Christian parents. Don’t fall into the trap of thinking, “Oh *my* children would never do that!” Children are curious and they play about everything they see in the adult life around them. My children often played “church” (somehow it was always Bryonie who was the preacher!) but they also played “doctor” and, Vange told me, they played it with the kids of a Christian family that our kids played with a lot. I remember coming upon my three girls stripped down to their underwear doing I know not what but thinking to myself that I wanted to stop this play but without getting angry. The point is

that mommy needs to know what the children are doing *all* the time; otherwise you can't weigh in on their behavior.

We live in a society that is over-sexed and full of the consequences of the sexual revolution of the sixties which makes Christians seem odder and odder in a world of "free" sex. We are considered "repressed," "closed off," even sick. This means that our children are even more vulnerable than we were as children—vulnerable not only to their own sexuality but also to the sexual expression of others in their lives, adults and children alike. It is therefore ever more important to teach them what is appropriate and what is not—to give them tools not only to understand what is going on at any particular time but how to think about it rightly and then, what to do about it. A simple statement like, "Honey, *no one* should touch you there" can begin the education of right touching as opposed to wrong touching. Children are resilient but there is behavior that will have lasting effects on their lives—abusive behavior—that they must be protected against at all costs. Again, it is simply foolishness not to face the effects of sin in our lives and the lives of our children, especially in the area of sex which has power to ruin a life either by abusing or by being abused. It is important not to consider ourselves immune to such sins but rather to take steps against them while we can, like removing temptation and then telling your children why you did what you did. I will never forget my own OPC pastor saying to me in a private conversation that if I thought that anyone was not vulnerable to any sin, but especially to the sin of having adulterous thoughts, which of course lead to adulterous actions, then I was not facing the truth about mankind and if one does not face the truth about oneself often one can be in the middle of sin before one knows how he got there. "To be forewarned is to be forearmed," which is what parents need to do for their children. (I don't think any of us needs to be convinced of this point nowadays!)

Some years ago Rob included in a Sunday night's sermon a story about the fourth century preacher John Chrysostom and the beautiful young widow he fell in love with. Both of them had taken vows of chastity and so consummating their love was out of the question. Imagine the difficulty of managing that while carrying on a very close relationship through many years! This is how they did it, so says J.N.D. Kelly in his biography *Golden Mouth*: "They employed a well-organized self-discipline (including, for example, the elaborate formal courtesy by which they distanced themselves from one another) to keep [romantic and sexual attraction] at arm's length." Here is a very practical tool we might instill in our children as they grow up: manners and respect which will include the exercise of *self-control* in all kinds of ways and at many times of the day. We do not have in our culture most of the social niceties evidenced by Jane Austen's novels, for instance, so any inhibitions our children may have when they grow up will have to be instilled by us when they are small.

We cannot say enough that God made sex perfect and perfectly wonderful; it is sin that has corrupted it and made it dangerous. Here is Mrs. Schaeffer again: "*Have you ever seen the loving care with which a maker of fine wood furniture gathers wood and seasons it, preparing it for just the right matching of grain in making his chairs and cabinets and tables? Think of someone wanting to warm himself in front of a fire coming and chopping up all that precious oak, walnut, cherry, mahogany, and making a fire in the fireplace as he sits and eats and drinks by the blaze. What a waste!*" [ibid p. 156] God meant sex for something wonderful and wonderfully helpful and fun for husbands and wives but sin ruins it and, it is only foolishness not to face the effects of sin in every area of life but especially in this one. Sexual sin has more

lasting and powerful effects than any other since it is sin against a body that was created by, and belongs to, God. **I Corinthians 6:13b-20: “The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body....Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, ‘The two shall be one flesh.’ But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”**

One last quote from Mrs. Schaeffer: *“The truth of what God made us to be in the first place and what He is preparing for us to enjoy in our new bodies needs to be made known. It must have a practical part in influencing our decisions....The sacrifices we need to make to live in line with the commandments of God must be recognized as an integral part of actively believing that the Lord is really coming back, and that one day we will not only rejoice to be in our new bodies, but will stand at the believer’s judgement in our new bodies. And when our child asks us, as in Deut. 6:20-21, ‘What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the Lord our God has commanded you?’ tell him....”*[ibid p.165]

Finally, this from **Malachi 2:13b-15: “You cover the Lord’s altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. But you say, ‘Why does he not?’ Because the Lord was witness between you and the wife (or the husband) of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she (he) is your companion and your wife (husband) by covenant. Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? *Godly offspring*. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife (husband) of your youth.”** Open your mouth and use your words to teach your children what godly sexuality looks like and then live out that godly sexuality in front of them.

This, that is, the education and raising of our children, is all very mysterious: why does the Lord entrust to us who are sinful and flawed the raising up of HIS children whom He loves even more than we do? He has given us the responsibility of a caretaker’s job and expects us to make a success of it. The Lord says to Israel through Ezekiel, “And you took your sons and your daughters, *whom you had borne to me*, and these you sacrificed to [other gods] to be devoured. Were your whorings so small a matter that you slaughtered *my children and delivered them up as an offering by fire to them?*” Ezekiel 16:20-21 When we fail to teach our children the ways of our God and to obey those ways this is really what we have done: **we have offered them up to other gods.**

I’ve told you before that it is not our Lord’s sovereignty over us and over everything that happens in this world that amazes me more and more the older I get; it is rather the amazing freedom He has given us to decide what we want about how we live, where we go, who we love and what we do with the time He has given us. Doesn’t He realize that we make wrong choices all the time that can so easily, and so often do, mess up our lives, sometimes irretrievably so? Yet He gives us children to raise—precious individuals He thought up before He made the world!

We get one shot to teach them all we know, one life to live in front of them, one childhood in which to acquaint them with their sin and their Savior; one chance to place them on the path to Heaven. *And He will hold us responsible if we do not.* How is this not a paralyzing thought?! Perhaps it shouldn't even be attempted! But the fact that He put the desire for children in our hearts and that He holds us responsible for their upbringing can, and should, give us the courage to do what must be done for them: if my God wants me to, and thinks I can, I will do what He commands. But I have often pondered why the Lord chose to get the next generation of believers this way. Some things I know and some things I will always wonder about.

First of all, I think parenting our children must be a way to understand our Heavenly Father's parenting of us which then improves our ability to parent our children. He gave us His law *which is meant not to be transgressed!* These are principles we are to obey, by which we are to live, governing our own lives and the lives of our children. Period. **"The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."** Deuteronomy 29:29 God's law is full of "thou shalt not's" that teach us what it is that God hates, that is, what sin is. But He also gave us a lot of freedom within that law to grow our personalities, to use our gifts for the good of others, to express our thoughts and to have relationship with our God. He made us, as the catechism says, "for His own glory," that is, to bring Himself joy. We know, don't we, that when our children obey of their own accord for the first time and we have not *made them do it*, what joy we feel and even pride in who they are becoming. So I believe with our Lord: when we make right choices, choosing to teach our children the path of wisdom and holiness, that must bring Him joy, the "glory" we were made to bring Him.

Second, parenting children is a way, I believe, to explore and understand personality and personalities. God made us each different, unique and *complicated!* He made your children different from you and from each other. We would often look around our table when our five babies were beginning to be teenagers and said to each other, "Where did they all come from?!" Each one had the same gene pool to draw from and though they shared similarities in appearance and personality they were all very different (and very loud!).

The Lord was not content with one kind of tree, one kind of fruit, one kind of animal or fish or bird, one way for a snowflake to look and so He made a wonderful and infinite variety of things, expressing His own infinite and wonderful personality. Just so, every mother's mothering is different—suited to the particular children God gave her. It's like what Rob says about preaching: the word of God mediated through personality. The same text preached by 10 different preachers will produce 10 different sermons, all helpful and useful for the Lord's people. So with mothering: every personality is different, every child is different, every circumstance is different, boys are different than girls and so on. But the principles, that is the Law, remains the same for each of us and for each and every child. We have said before that obedience is the child's first and foremost obligation and that is what each and every mother must teach and insist upon no matter who you are or what is going on *and*, discipline must be tapered not only to the circumstance, the severity of the infraction and the strength of the rebellion but also to the particular personality and makeup of each child. Does this take the wisdom of Solomon? You betcha! But who gave Solomon that wisdom and who is waiting for us to ask so that He can give it to us? This is the kind of prayer our Lord *loves* to answer and, since

He is the one who made each child He is the one who can give you perfect insight into each little heart so be on your knees asking Him for help; He will always give it.

Third, parenting increases our faith and is a woman's particular path to sanctification. **I Timothy 2:25: "Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control."** Faith first asks and then *behaves as though it has the answer!* We need to trust the Lord and not question His ways. **"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."** **Isaiah 55:8-9** Instead we concentrate on what we do have responsibility for: obedience in our own lives and in the lives of our children. **Deuteronomy 29:29** again: **"The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."**

So the Lord is doing all kinds of work through you! He not only is raising a new generation of Christians but is working in the lonely privacy of your own heart where no one else can see, not even a most beloved husband. The Lord is working and you are working, hand in hand, to do something you cannot see but must trust will come to pass because of the blessing God has promised on that work.

Bryonie verbalized something of this in one of her blog entries back in October of 2011. Judah was two months shy of his first birthday. She called it, "Kingdom Work."

"I was unprepared for how intensely private mothering is. So much of it is just you and your baby, behind closed doors. When I go grocery shopping I love to push Judah around in the cart, taking pleasure in the passing glances he gets from admiring strangers. They see a happy, (mostly) organized mama and a happy, (sometimes) calm baby.

"There are so many private battles within our home that seem to determine the nature and character of my work and life. I'm not talking about my battles with Judah (although there are some of those, of course!). I'm talking about all the battles I fight in my own heart to be the person I'm supposed to be and the mother Judah needs. I face a million opportunities, all day long, to choose life or choose death. And all day long Judah is directly affected by my choices. He is completely helpless in this. He is not only unable to remove himself from my choices, but he is also entirely unaware of his position of helplessness. If I choose not to love him the way he needs to be loved he suffers, whether he knows it or not.

"I am sobered and humbled by this reality. I know I can't change it. That's the way God made parenting. What else can I do but pray for mercy, over and over and over?

"It occurred to me that being a parent, though perhaps a more stark reality, is no different than any other calling. We fight battles in our hearts every day, all day long. We either choose life or death and others are always affected by our decisions, whether we like it or not.

“Sometimes I live in the big questions of calling and career and my place in this world. I will probably always wrestle with those questions from time to time. Now, however, I’m living in the day to day battles -- a different sort of calling, just as important and just as tiring in its demand for perseverance. My mom would say, ‘Honey, you have to live there and you have to live here.’

“I came across a quote this morning. You know how sometimes a sentence or paragraph will suddenly shine a big spotlight into your heart and something that was dark for so long is suddenly illuminated? This simple paragraph helped me to see where I should be living, as a rookie mom.

““Every kingdom work, whether publicly performed or privately endeavored, partakes of the kingdom’s imperishable character. Every honest intention, every stumbling word of witness, every resistance of temptation, every motion of repentance, every gesture of concern, every routine engagement, every motion of worship, every struggle towards obedience, every mumbled prayer, everything which flows out of our faith-relationship with the Ever-Living One, will find its place in the ever-living heavenly order which will dawn at His Coming.””

So, a mother’s own spiritual life is deepened and strengthened by her teaching, correcting, nurturing, pushing, pulling, guiding of her children every single hour of every single day. Her dependence on the Lord and her need of His help becomes more and more evident to her as she goes further and further into the task the Lord Himself has given her and if it does not, and if her life of prayer does not increase with every addition of a child, with every new demand upon her time and personal resources, with more and more understanding of the seriousness of that task and the consequences of its outcome, then she has not fully grasped her own self before the Lord and the weakness she begins with, both in a character flawed by sin and in her desperate need of wisdom from on high.

We must keep at bay the feelings of frustration and discouragement while signs of learning and spiritual growth in the children are slow to appear. It may seem that the children often get up in the morning and think on purpose, “Are the rules still the same today? I need to find out!” but here again mothering is like preaching: a life is not changed, a behavior is not modified with one sermon, nor is a child’s life changed with one spanking. It is line by line, precept upon precept, little by little, creating a culture of life. After a while—how long? who knows?!—you realize, “Oh, they think like me!” and, hopefully, that’s a good thing! Obedience, consistency and happiness are the goals of the day. It is the drip, drip, drip of constant influence that will finally bring about the changes you want to see in a heart or a behavior.

Fourth, parenting brings us joy, doesn’t it? The Lord made us to take joy in the birthing and raising of children. This *is* mysterious, isn’t it? But there it is, right down at the bottom of our hearts. When you look at your baby for the first time or anytime after—even in the cloud of fatigue, sleeplessness and the feeling of being overwhelmed; when you talk with your toddler and find that there is something in there that you did not put there; when you read a story or a poem and find someone else enjoying it the same way you are; when, after years of your own singing in the car there is someone else who starts up a song; and finally when they begin to

show who the Lord made them to be with their own gifts, strengths, weaknesses and ambitions for life. How absolutely wonderful that the Lord made a man out of that little boy, a woman out of that little girl—and you got to be a part of it!

Do they sometimes bring you sorrow? Oh yes! It often hard, exhausting, confusing, full of sleeplessness and sickness while they are growing up. And when they are grown even the most obedient of children can bring parents sorrow with decisions they make for their own lives. But is that because God’s arrangements are somehow faulty? God has never been at fault; we have done it to ourselves. But even in moments (or months or years) of sorrow do we ever stop loving them? Does Christ stop loving us when we sin against Him, over and over again? Even sinning *badly*? Surely not. **“For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for *the ungodly*. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that *while we were still sinners*, Christ died for us....For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.”**

Romans 5:6-10 Even as sex was created wonderful, and still is, but now is also dangerous; bodies were made strong, healthy and beautiful but now are not always so and too soon get old, shriveled and sick; even the natural world was made full of harmony but now is not, it is sin that has brought it all and it is sin that we must understand, live with, fight with and pray against until at last the Lord brings us to the world where sin will be no more, where our joy will be perfect and will never end. And if we have done our job—never perfectly, we know that—but as faithfully as we know how, the Lord has promised that our children will be there too and with us will also live and praise our perfect God with perfect hearts enjoying His own “fullness of joy.”

Deuteronomy 29:29: “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”

HYMN

We end the consideration of parenting principles with the hymn we began them with. In it is a reminder that God is our Father, our parent. The poem expresses the childlike attitude we need to have towards God that we want our children to have towards us. “A mind to blend with outward life, while keeping at Thy side” is the forever goal of our lives.

Father, I Know That All My Life
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. Amen.**