

Mothers' Encouragement Group
February 8, 2018
Plant Them and Let Them Grow #6
The Fourth Commandment
What's in a Name?

We have been talking about planting our children in the only soil that will give them all the health-giving nutrients they need to become strong Christian adults, working happily for their Savior in one corner or another of the Lord's kingdom. We have said that this soil is the Word of God and that they must be taught its law from the very headwaters of their lives, teaching them to live in obedience to its principles. The first four commandments of the law of God are meant to teach us *that* God is, *who* God is, who He isn't and how He wants us to worship Him. We have reminded ourselves that He IS THE CREATOR of all the world, of all the life that is in the world and especially of all human beings and as the Creator knows and understands us down to the bottom—He knows who we are and what we are made of. We have reminded ourselves that there is to be NO competition with Him in the love and worship of our hearts and the demands of the obedience of our lives. Today we're thinking about the use of God's name and the care we need to take in the use of it, not only with respect but with the awe it deserves since it is one very important way that He has shown Himself to us. I believe that as we learn better to understand our God and His name, which expresses who He is, we understand ourselves better and what we need to be, and in understanding ourselves better we understand our children better and what they need to be.

III. The third commandment: You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain. Exodus 20:7

So what does it mean to “take the name of the Lord in *vain*?” **Ecclesiastes 1:2** says, “**Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.**” By “vanity” we are meant to think of emptiness, uselessness, pointlessness, worthlessness, fruitlessness. The book of Ecclesiastes is telling us that no matter how hard we try we cannot see the point of life in this world unless we understand it from the Lord's point of view. Our minds are too small, our experience too limited to be able to see what the Lord is doing, or even that He is doing anything! We cannot see what He has done, and we certainly cannot tell what He will do in this world simply by living our lives and observing our own selves and our feelings as we live in it. In comparison with His infinite power and understanding we are nothing but specks on this earth and though our lives seem large and all-consuming to us, in the whole scheme of things they are nothing but a moment, a nano-second, in the flow of the eternal life that the Lord has set in motion. With *that* kind of understanding of who we are in the world it is no wonder that without the knowledge of who God is we can never figure out what in the world is going on in this life: who are we, how did we get here, what is the point of going anywhere or of doing anything in this life? As the Preacher in Ecclesiastes says it is all emptiness, uselessness, pointlessness, worthlessness, fruitlessness, that is, vanity.

Another way to put it is the way Edith Schaeffer spoke when she said that the questions “who am I?” and “how can I be fulfilled?” that plague the more thoughtful people in this world can never be answered satisfactorily without the knowledge that all things begin and end with our creator/God and when we behave as though He doesn't exist and hasn't made demands on

our lives, and when we allow our children to live as though He hasn't then we have emptied His name of all of its meaning; we have made it useless, pointless, worthless. When we speak lightly about Him, or when we attribute to someone or something else the things that God has done we have "taken His name in vain." Folk who believe the theory of evolution are trying very hard to give the credit for creation to *chance* and not to God.

The "health and wealth" preachers take His name in vain when they lead people to believe that God will always reward them with "the good life" if they believe and live the way they're supposed to when God has never actually promised this. They are like the false prophets who prophesied happy things because that is what the people wanted to hear. **"They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace." Jeremiah 6:14** Those who preach this are leading astray thousands in the name of Jesus—an egregious misuse of His name.

And of course we take His name in vain when we use it merely to emphasize or punctuate our speech as is done all over our world today. To hear the exclamation, "Jee-zuz!" or "God" or "Oh my God" or "Jesus Christ!" ought to jar us down to the bottom. I've seen folk texting OMG, maybe you have too—easy for Christians to fall into this one when it is *so common* in everyday speech! [Illustration from *Fixer Upper*: "Oh my...go...sh!"] People who say these things are thoughtlessly using words that ought to be precious to us and becoming precious to our children—full of the meaning of a real person.

When you say a person's name the person himself comes into your mind, doesn't he? Joshua, for instance: I've known a few Joshua's in my life—Josh Halinen, Josh Leonard, Josh Westerlund, Josh Wilson and of course the one most important in my life, Joshua Moon. As I say it each time, thinking a different surname, a different person comes into my mind and with each person, a different set of characteristics of body, personality, circumstance and character. My father's name was Clarence and I was amazed as a young teenager when he told me how he hated it. He was baptized with the name "Koert," but his parents and siblings always called him "Clarence," I suppose to Americanize the family's German roots a little more, and that stuck and became his legal name. He never liked the sound of it but I don't think anyone else ever thought of that—I was certainly surprised—because everyone loved him. His personality was full of fun and his character full of loving-kindness. He lived in a way that did honor to his name. My own name I have never been particularly fond of either and have lived through a host of nicknames attached to it that in my young years I considered made it a little more bearable: Flo, Flossy, Florrie were some of the more ordinary ones. Fluffy, Floozy and Flor-horse (this from students in my fourth grade French class who were inept at pronouncing the French 'r'!) were some of the more unusual. My family always called me by a nickname—usually Flo—but when I met my future husband he said, "You are Florence. We'll have none of this other nonsense!" Huh. Well alright, then. I think I was glad; it immediately put dignity back into the handle and I felt myself sort of "growing up." But in later years, during the time of teaching at CHS and when we began exposing our children to all the wonderful musicals that have been composed, we watched and listened to *West Side Story*. Rob of a sudden began singing to me, *in the presence of our children*, "The most beautiful sound in the world I've ever heard....*Florence, Florence, Florence....*" and of course, we would all burst out laughing, though I admit to feeling slightly peaked. In more recent years we have admitted to each other that it really isn't a very pretty name but when a name is attached to a person that name is infused with the meaning, the loveliness or lack of it, the character and personality, of the person to whom it belongs. So it is

with our Lord and so it behooves us to think about His name and to put back into it all the character and meaning that we can and to do this for our children as well.

How did the Lord first introduce Himself and His name? One of the first times we get to hear that introduction is in the account of Moses and the burning bush. **“Then Moses said to God, ‘If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?’ God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’ And He said, ‘Say this to the people of Israel, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.” Exodus 3:13-15** I used to think to myself, “What does this ‘I am’ mean? It doesn’t say anything at all about who God is,” but in actual fact it says everything we need to know.

Before anything else was, God is. I remember Dr. Schaeffer back in 1970(!), during a lecture at L’Abri in Switzerland, drawing a big circle on an empty blackboard to illustrate for us what has always been in existence—in other words, nothing—not the world, not the sky, sun, stars or space, not any of the waters and no forms of life. Then he would erase the circle to emphasize the nothingness as he reminded us that, though there was nothing, there was God. When we have come to this place—the beginning—in our thinking we can start with **Genesis 1:1. “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”** After this we start to see who that ‘I am’ really is and we begin by reading about what He has done. **Hebrews 11:6** tells us that **“whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.”** God rewards those who want to know Him with the knowledge of who He is; when He spoke to Moses in that burning bush He was about to reveal Himself to Israel and the unwilling Moses would be the one who would do it through the things God told him to say and the special works God gave Him power to do. God reveals Himself to us through our understanding of the world He made for us to live in and in His Word.

One of the interesting things about the ‘I am’ statements that Jesus made in the book of John is that they made the Pharisees mad, precisely because they realized that Jesus was using the name of God to describe Himself. Here in **John 8:53-59** it couldn’t be more clear! We read this hard on the heels of Jesus having said, **“I am the light of the world.”** The Pharisees asked Him, **“Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?”** Jesus answered, **‘If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, “He is our God.” But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word. Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.’ So the Jews said to him, ‘You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?’ Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.’ So they picked up stones to throw at him....”** And if there was any doubt that the Jews knew perfectly well what Jesus was saying about Himself Jesus put that to rest when He said to them, **“I and the Father are one.” John 10:30** (An interesting aside: Jesus was much younger than fifty years old then but that is the number the Pharisees used. Doesn’t that make you wonder if the spiritual and emotional burden He was constantly bearing caused Jesus to age faster than He might have had He lived the life of an ordinary man?) I find it amazing that the Creator God would not only make all this wonderful life, not only *not* throw it

all out when it went sour but would humble Himself enough to have conversation with proud and stupid men!

In reading the genealogy of Jesus Christ in **Matthew 1** it strikes me that each of these names was a real man, a real person, beginning with Abraham (and remember that Jesus said, **“before Abraham was, I am!”**). Each man the father of a particular son, each son living a particular life and becoming the father of the next son until we finally get to Joseph, not Jesus’ biological father but chosen to be father to Him on earth. Then we read about Joseph’s scrupulous conscience wondering what in the world he was supposed to do about his pregnant fiancée when he was visited in a dream by the Lord’s angel. The angel explained to him the sign that God had given King Ahaz through Isaiah when Ahaz, scared about two of his enemies shacking up together, *refused* to ask God to prove that what He had said to him was true. (How did Ahaz have the guts to do that?!) So God gave Ahaz this sign: **“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel’ (which means, God with us).” Matthew 1:23 and Isaiah 7:14** Imagine Joseph waking up: did he wonder if the vision was real? Was he scared to go ahead with plans to keep Mary and face criticism from his peers? or was he such a man of faith that he was able to take God at His word and live according to it? Obviously that is what he did but I wonder if it was hard for him; I wonder how much courage he needed in order to obey. **Hebrews 11:1 “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”** Joseph, Mary and a host of other saints mentioned in this chapter, *believed* God and acted on that belief, living their lives, making their choices, based on believing that what they had heard from God, though they had not yet seen it, was true. But back to this sign that gives us another piece of Jesus’ name: **“Immanuel”** which, we are told, means, ‘God with us.’ GOD with us!, coming to live as a man with men, having conversations, learning obedience, making decisions and being **“made perfect through suffering”** as we read in **Hebrews 2** last time. In **Isaiah 7:15-16** God told Ahaz, and us, that **“He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted.”** What? Jesus had to *learn how to obey*?! That’s what it says and what an encouragement for us when we struggle with obedience and struggle to make our children learn it: our Savior, the God/man, had to learn it too and did so perfectly. He is our model and our example; we cannot be perfect as He was, but we can follow faithfully in His steps.

The **“I am’s”** of Jesus, because He was and is God, reveal to us more of who God is and what His name means to us as Christians. In fact, Jesus, called “the Word” in **John 1** is a big part of how God revealed Himself to man—“the Word made flesh,” that is God actually becoming a man and living like one. Seeing how Jesus lived on earth helps us to see with our own eyes just what His character is, what His responses were to given situations and what His teachings implied. Jesus’ life, the choices He made, the conversations He had, the teaching He offered, is huge in helping us to know who God is, what God is about and, therefore, what we should be about. Consider these things that Jesus said about Himself:

1) **“Jesus then said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.’ They said to him, ‘Sir, give us this bread always.’ Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.’” John 6:32-35**

What can we say about this except that we get our nourishment from Him physically, emotionally, spiritually, psychologically and in any other way we may need to stay alive and healthy: Jesus is the sustainer of our lives.

2) **“Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”** John 8:12 Jesus’ life is the embodiment of the law; His life and His conversation has shown us how to live according to the Word of God, to make right moral choices that will please God and call down His blessing and compliment on our lives. The entirety of **Psalm 119** describes the blessing of living according to the law of God but vs. 105 says explicitly: **“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”** And we read in **John 1:1ff** **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God....In him was life, and the life was the light of men....The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him....And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us....”** Jesus is the Word and the light that shines on our path and shows us the way forward, that is how to live—what obedience to the law of God looks like.

3) **“Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.”** John 10:7-9 We learn here that Jesus is absolutely the ONLY way to God, to eternal life and to happiness in this life. When we hear of folk, such as those who practice the Baha’i religion, who say that “all faiths lead to God” and then say that they “love Jesus Christ just as much” as we do, we can, and ought to respond “No, you don’t!” If they really knew what Jesus said about Himself, believing that He said it—that He alone is the only way to God—they, like the Jews, would be offended at Him which is a truer way of responding than with an insipid, ignorant acceptance.

4) **“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.”** John 10:11-15 We are *safe with Jesus!* He truly loves us and His love is powerful enough to effect our salvation and secure a place for each of us in His eternal kingdom. He will not run away from us when hard times come, when spiritual enemies, out of hatred for, and jealousy of Him, work hard to destroy our faith and our happiness. We know that He will not let them win because He is stronger and in fact He knows that every one of those enemies is headed for ultimate defeat. *He is not afraid of them!* Neither do we need be afraid as long as we are Christ’s.

5) **“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit....Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing....By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and**

so prove to be my disciples.” John 15:1-8 If we truly belong to Christ we get our nourishment from Him and we begin to be like Him since we are taking His DNA into our DNA and as we do our lives begin to show it and if they show it, it is because of the effect of His saving power in us. But if our lives do not show that we are His we *have no reason to believe* that we really are and ought to feel the danger of being cut out of the vine by the “Father vinedresser!” And if our lives show little fruit we can expect the “pruning” tool. Yikes. Our children need to be showing that fruit in their lives as well, as much as a two-year-old, a five-year-old, a ten-year-old can.

6) This one is the heart of everything, the reason we become Christians, stay Christians and will never be anything but Christians. **“Martha said to Jesus, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Your brother will rise again.’ Martha said to him, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?’ She said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.’” John 11:21-27** Then Jesus proceeded to bring Lazarus out of his grave! Life is God’s gift to us in the first place; it is His sustaining gift here on earth and it is the gift He gives when our bodies have died. In fact, once a life is conceived in a womb and the Lord has given that little seed a soul, we can know with a certainty that that soul will live forever; it will never die, though its body certainly will. How very important to teach our children to love and serve the Lord so that when their bodies die they will live forever *with* Him and not without Him.

7) Finally, the one that teaches our spirits to relax and to trust the One who knows our future and has the power to make us ready to live in it. **John 14:1-6** **“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going.’ Thomas said to him, ‘Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’”** We need be afraid of nothing since our Savior is working to bring us to the Father and since He has all power and can effect anything He wants *it will happen!*

As we think about what Jesus’ name, God’s name, really means, trying to “flesh out” the person it describes it ought to deepen our understanding of, and devotion to, our amazing, lovely Savior and as we take these things to heart we need to model for our children each of these characteristics. As our God parents us so we parent our little ones, gradually extricating ourselves and helping them to see that God is *their* true parent also:

- God sustains our life; He is our “bread” and so we sustain the life of our children with the nourishment and care that they need.
- We learn from Jesus how to obey God’s law; He is our “light” and so we teach our children to obey *our* law and show them that they are happiest when that obedience is given.

- We know that Jesus Christ is the *only* Savior; He is our “door” and we demonstrate that to our children in our speech and actions, by the worship of our lives.
- We know that Jesus loves us; He is our “good Shepherd” and we can trust Him to protect us from evil things and from enemies that intend harm even as we protect our children from harmful things, letting them know that we are doing it and that they have *nothing* to be afraid of as long as they are in our care.
- We know that Jesus is the source of all truth and nourishment; He is our “vine” and we are learning every day more of what it means to be a Christian and to live as one and if we are not the Lord has promised to do something about it because that is what He wants from us. So our children should be learning a little more each day, bit by bit, brick by brick, building a life of godliness and if they are not *we should be doing something about it!*
- We know that because Jesus is alive—always has been and always will be—we also will live forever *and so will our children*; He is the “resurrection and the life.” How very important, then, to teach them to trust our God and to live for Him so that, *together*, we may enjoy perfection and true happiness “beyond the Jordan.”
- We know that Jesus is “the way” and we can trust Him to bring us to Heaven no matter the circumstances of our lives and we can relax in the knowledge that *whatever* happens our loving God has brought it—I am *not* saying that God won’t bring us hard things, or allow us to bear hard consequences for sin, but only that we know *we can bear them because He, our loving God, brought them or allowed them*. So our children ought to be given an atmosphere in which they can relax and feel safe with the knowledge that nothing will happen in their little lives except Mommy & Daddy have brought it, allowed it or orchestrated it and because Mommy & Daddy love them, it is all right.

Let me close with a message from the book of **James** as he talks about the bridling of our tongues. We all know that what we say expresses what is in our hearts which is never more evident than when someone is “taking the Lord’s name in vain.” When we hear a person do that we know good and well that he has no understanding of what he is saying; he has emptied God’s precious name of all of its wonderful meaning. And when you hear someone speaking crudely with words that are not necessarily God’s name but have to do with things He has made—sex and Hell and damnation, for instance—that person has emptied those things of meaning also, meaning that God intends for us to keep. A man or woman who has been “living” in the Word of God would not be likely to speak this way. **James 3:2ff** tells us “**...If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things.**

“How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no

human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.”

Jesus said, **“Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.” Matthew 12:34**
Let us then take care that we are constantly filling our hearts and our minds, with all things godly and pure, holy and helpful to our Christian life and that we are doing the same for our children, filling their minds with the meaning of God’s name. **“Whoever guards his mouth preserves his life....” Proverbs 13:3**

I can give you the theory but each of you needs practically to work it out. May the following be true for each of you and for me as well: **“He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the LORD.” Psalm 40:3**

Think through your day with your children—of course I realize that every day is absolutely unique—and think about how the “I am’s” of Jesus might change your interactions with them:

- The bread of life
- The light of the world
- The door of the sheep
- The good shepherd
- The true vine
- The resurrection and the life
- The way, the truth, and the life

HYMN

This little sung prayer is one my mother sang with me and I can still see her in my mind’s eye sitting at the piano and playing it as we sang. She let me know very early in my life that **“Even a child makes himself known by his acts, by whether his conduct is pure and upright.” Proverbs 20:11**

Keep Thou the Door of My Lips

Effie C. Hill/Helen M. Browne
#103 in *Let Youth Praise Him*

Keep thou the door of my lips, O Lord,
For this I ask today;
Let me be brave to speak the truth
In all the words I say.

Help me to speak kind words to all
When at my work and play;
May only words that please Thee, Lord,
Fall from my lips today.

