

HEARST



4

WORLD

Heart 4 Kidz

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A Note...

Here is a glimpse into my heart. It beats with a touch of the love that the Creator of each child feels for such special creations—tender, vulnerable, lively, emotion-filled, curious, growing, needy, buoyant, loveable, important, fun, unique, beautiful, special, impressionable, hungry, and courageous children. May we cherish and believe in the endless possibilities wrapped in such amazing souls.

These pages hold a collection and selection of my simply-written, unedited posts, expressing what I hope will make life a tad bit brighter for a child—and for those around us—as we feel moved to put these concepts into action. You may agree with many things in this book; and disagree with other points. Some things may stir you into action and evoke positive change; others may create an array of varying opinions and emotions.

I'm quite certain, however, you won't go away untouched or unmoved in some way or another, as it deals with matters of the heart and conscience, mixed with personal experience and opinion.

My goal in sharing these personal thoughts is with the hope that something written therein might make things better in some way, in the life of your child, and in your life as well. If even one child is cheered and warmed by genuine care and love, then it's worth it.

Giving love changes the lives of those we bestow it on, who will in turn affect another. The ripple effects go on. When love is shown to a child in all the ways most needed, they've got their lifetime ahead to continue passing it on.

—Chariare Quille

Children are the Solution

Children are God's solution to this world's problems—if responded to in the way He intended us to.

For the lonely they would create a family.

For the hard and cold in heart, they'd bring out tenderness.

For those who seek only their own goods, they'd bring out a generous side, for the needs of children worldwide are many.

For those caught up in their own pursuits, too busy to help others, they'd create new fulfilling opportunities.

Of the bored, run-down with the day-to-day grind, they'd raise up new entrepreneurs, to fill the needs of growing minds and bodies in this fast paced world.

If each individual focused a bit more on the treasure of wealth within little lives, and the great opportunities they provide for us all, if we'd let them change our world, our character, our hearts, I believe we'd see the mountains of pain, hardness, and problems caused by our own lacks melt away. And the growing generation of youth would create a wonderful world to live in.

Just think about it. When you put the best interests of every child in the world first: there would be no war and the civil destruction caused by it, no starvation, no violence, no terrorism, no poverty, no uncared for orphan, no

underpaid parent, no lonely child, no teenager lacking in challenge and opportunities, no health problems that stem from stress and just being too busy to care for ourselves or our children properly, no forgotten unloved adult, for the primary lesson we'd teach our children is to love—God and His creations.

You say, “But what about natural disasters, accidents, disease, lack of natural resources in a decaying world?” Though these things will continue to be part of the cycle of life, love for God and for others will bring the quickest healing and aid to any and all problems.

There are many agencies and laws in place attempting to protect the wellbeing of children. While these may help, we need to do far more—we need to bring healing and remedies to the hearts and lives of each man, woman and child.

Our children would create for us the wonderful world that we're dreaming of, if we'd all give each child on this planet the love, time, care, resources, training, learning opportunities and divine guidance they crave and need. We'd receive so much more in return.

By letting a child change your focus, inspire your attention, and bring love into your lives and those around you, you are activating the solution God intended for that little one to be for you.

Banish Fear—Build Faith

As a child I was highly sensitive to anything remotely frightening. I was scared of the dark till in my mid-teens. I still remember the repeated, vivid nightmares I had when 6 and 7 years old. The images affect me to this day. As a result, in my care of children, I have gone on a “no fear” campaign.

I started to notice how many children’s stories, reading material, movies, games, costumes, pictures, fairy tales, and most things that are available for children’s input are based on initiating a reaction and attempting to captivate children’s attention through fear.

The bottom line is that adults—and everyone—wants to feel good about themselves. When we have an effect on others, it makes us feel like we matter. If someone can get a group of children to hold on to their every word while relating some spooky story, it boosts the presenter’s self-esteem.

But it really isn’t doing much for those listening, and takes away from the children a key element in their being able to grow and tackle their life’s challenges: faith and confidence. Thus I conclude that anything that engenders and instills fear is wrong, and is in opposition to our goals as parents and caregivers.

Those things that attract attention through using the sensitive side of children’s nature and in any way tears down their courage, trust, faith, and knowledge of God’s love and care for them, should be shunned. Our reactions and presentations to our children should be done in ways that gives them the

support, and the tools their hearts and minds need, as they prepare for their difficult and challenging journey through life.

Salmon Fish

Be like the salmon—swim upstream. Buck the tide. Do things differently. Do what your child needs. I assure you the easiest thing, the “done thing”, the “whatever one else is doing” is often the wrong thing for your unique child.

As one of my personal slogans say: *Do the difficult. Do the uncomfortable. Do the best.*

You may not seem to win the acclaim of the multitudes. And may receive more than an earful from well-meaning friends and family opposing your decisions to give optimum nurturing care to your young one. But when they are grown, whether you had enough friends at that time won't matter to you, and won't be a worthy excuse to offer to your children in hindsight why you made poor decisions in their care.

Focus on giving them a good start in their life. This time when they are young and exceptionally impressionable will seem so short, and is what will “make or break” the deal in many ways as in how they cope with life, the character traits they acquire, and what they are able to give back to others as a result of your care, training, nurturing and love.

What Goes In...

I guess it's the commercialism that is behind all the endless cartoon characters that are printed on every-other child product that just goes against my grain.

Now don't take offence if you actually, genuinely enjoy these types of imagery. But the fact that we are barraged with endless fantasy-world images of often less-than exemplary characters, in the attempt to get us and our children to want to purchase this or that product, makes me feel used.

Who is deciding for us, anyway, what characters and images are to play such predominate roles in our children's lives?

Do "they" care, genuinely, about our children, when they made the latest cartoon for "children"? Or is the goal and concern about whether it's a hit world over, and tons of funds are raked in for the production of the film?

So what if the Jones, the Smiths, and the Browns all took their children to see the film. Did you see it first, before showing it to the children? Did you decide that what it portrayed, and the images it showed, the "messages" subliminally and upfront, the attitudes, speaking habits, songs, and decisions were what you are comfortable having your children mirror?

All that goes in, comes out, in one way or another. Maybe today, maybe a year from now. But it all becomes a part of them, and changes them in some way.

Break away if you dare. Plan a memorable family camping trip the weekend the new "hit" comes out, if you must! You—together with God—are in charge of the care and raising of your children. Take care. Be aware. Pick and choose.

True...Lovely...Good

A friend gave me a couple of baby books. Tiny, cardboard, colourful ones. One was on transportation. Cute, nice. One was “nursery rhymes”. I looked at it, as is my practice before showing anything to the children.

“Huh?? Who in the world would read this to their children?” Nearly everything had a negative spin to it, or in some way was in opposition to the good morals we try to instil in our little ones.

What lasting quality does “Mother Hubbard” have? My children are not only taught, but have seen living proof that God takes care of his children, provides for us, day by day, year by year. I can imagine if I read it to them, they’d still be waiting for the “punch line”.

“Yes, and, what...? Then what happened good in the end?” It ends so lamely. They expect and deserve better.

Since getting to know the children’s personalities and reactions to things, I’ve learned to look first, read ahead, skip the inappropriate parts when reading books to them, and so forth. I tailor the books and reading material, videos and input according to the children’s development stage, emotional needs, personal make up.

I want each thing I pass on to them to help in some way to build character and confidence, and I eliminate fear-instilling elements and non-sense.

I'm a teacher. They expect—and get—appropriate truth from me. They expect facts. When I read or tell a fable that has a good moral and is appropriate, I make sure to differentiate for them that it “didn't really happen, but it teaches us something.”

Reality and Reasoning—Truth and Trust

I don't like to say motivational “threats” that a good parent would never do. Or that is based on motivating them through fear. I don't say, “Please come right now to get in the car. We're going to be late. If you don't come right now we'll leave without you.” Since I'd never do that, it's pointless and tears down trust.

Nor do I use other fear-stimulating scenarios or tales that have no element in reality. “If you are naughty Santa won't come.” (Well, firstly, we celebrate the real Christmas—the birthday of Jesus! And I teach them about the real St. Nicolas, and joy of giving to others, like God gave His love to us.)

Knowing what I say is what I believe to be the truth, builds trust in our relationship. Trust encourages obedience and cooperation, and thus helps our times together to be happy.

I will qualify however, that just because something is “true” or “reality” doesn't make it age-appropriate or beneficial for children.

Why does every nature show have to have the standard “lion eats the zebra” scene? I always pass it by. It would ravage their tender minds. How awful!

Yes, it's life as we know it now, but they'll get plenty of harsh reality as they are older. Let's let them enjoy their childhood, and be nurtured.

Bible—Burden or Blessing?

Bible stories can be a wonderful tool and way to teach faith and closeness to Jesus. But choosing carefully the stories, portions of stories, and the way it is told, can make a world of difference.

When children grow to be teens and adults they can read the full version of the Bible, should they choose to. But if I were to make a children's Bible story book, it would be different than the ones I have purchased.

Most content of many of the books are great. But there are the seemingly "standard" stories that are often included in every children's Bible book, that are not age appropriate, nor do those stories impart to them what's needed for their development at a young age.

The classic story is "David and Goliath". It is one of the least "child friendly" stories around in a child's Bible book. Whoever thought to tell it to children didn't know the effect it would have. Anything to do with violence, war, and killing, is not for children—plain and simple.

As adults we can learn from that event, and tackle the challenges of our lives, relating them to “Goliaths” and how God can make us strong enough to overcome and be winners in life. But a three-year-old may start throwing stones, and harm himself and others!

And who is then to blame? The Bible? Nothing but a poor choice of inappropriate reading material complete with how-to, pictures in colour! I always pass over that story, along with “Cain and Abel”.

Another “favourite” in children’s Bibles that has caused fear and nightmares for young ones is the story of Jonah. The way it’s said and illustrated more often than not, isn’t a concept they need or are emotionally prepared to deal with.

Even harsh looking crucifixion-of-Jesus scenes, and other seemingly “make sure to include in children’s books” stories, that simply aren’t for children. Let’s start with the love and care of God, especially as pictured in Jesus’ life, then build on that foundation as they grow into it.

After getting thorough fill of all types of published Children’s Bibles, at last I felt the call to tackle making one—hand in hand with the one who said, “Let the children come to Me.” The inappropriate stories were not included, or at least not in the harsh way often depicted. There are also some wonderful character-building stories in the Bible that I’ve never found in children’s Bible story books. These are included in the new children’s Bible.

The 10 P's

This is my personal list for making progress in my teaching, training and nurturing children.

1.) Plan

Definition:

a) a scheme or program for making, doing, or arranging something; project, design, schedule, etc.

b) a method of proceeding

*Each day will have its own demands, and the most important may be squeezed out by the timely essentials. Trying to come up with quality, daily ideas and materials for nurturing young hearts and minds, while on the go, will prove to be irregular and scatter shot without putting some time into making plans. I like to plan a year's program in advance, and break it down to monthly/weekly/daily goals. Plans can include not only what is to be done, but the 'how-to' as well, to keep things upbeat and lively.

2.) Prepare

Definition:

to make things ready

*The best and most attractive, well-balanced plans will go unused if they are not practical to follow through. Time needs to be taken to carefully look over the plans, and list mentally, or on paper, what is needed to have on hand. Then make/get/collect the items, or whatever needs to be done to make the plans doable, before the busy day takes you onward.

3.) Proactive

Definition:

Taking the initiative (Initiative: the characteristic of originating new ideas or methods; ability to think and act without being urged; enterprise)

*Thinking in advance what the trouble spots are, and trying new ideas and methods to smooth things over. Being proactive rather than reactive. Not waiting for problems to arise, but constantly thinking a few steps in advance, how to keep things going in a positive, happy, progressive way, with all the needs being met.

4.) Perspiration

Definition:

the act of perspiring; sweating

*Quite literally, yes. You have to get off your seat and be active, lively. The best learning can happen when children are moving, rather than at a desk and chairs. And the best plans won't be enacted unless you do the hard work of DOING them.

Don't keep giving yourself the easy way out and excuses. *Do the difficult. Do the uncomfortable. Do the best.*

Don't skip over cool ideas that the children would just love, just because your chair is particularly comfortable that day. Have fun being a child again, together with them.

5.) Patience

Definition:

the state, quality, or fact of being patient; specif., a) the will or ability to wait or endure without complaint b) steadiness, endurance, or perseverance in the performance of a task

*When, not *if*, things don't go as planned, take a deep breath, and remember that the example of kindness, understanding, cheerfulness, and caring, is more important than a carefully planned-to-a-T day, unfolding glitch-free. The very nature of children is growth and development, both of which mean: change! That's what they do and are made to do. Thus the changeableness and unpredictability of each day is, well, predictably so.

6.) Prayer

Definition:

a) an earnest request; entreaty; supplication

b) a humble and sincere request, as to God

*“When the day is hemmed with prayer, it's less likely to unravel”—the saying goes. And I've found that praying at the dawn of the day, changes the day magically. Especially when I pray for specifics, in each area of development and growth, protection, my own conduct, for wisdom, for supplies and materials, for the needs of their tender hearts and minds, for stages of growth or events yet to come in the future. Things then happen in wonderful ways that I couldn't have made happen, no matter how hard I wished or willed it to. Jesus hears and takes action. After all, they are His creations, His children, and very dear to His heart. He wants the best for them, more than we ever could.

7.) Positiveness/Praise

Definition:

Positive—making a definite contribution; constructive

*Praise—to commend the worth of; express approval or admiration of
to laud the glory of (God, etc.), as in song; glorify; extol*

*See the good, speak the good. See the good side of a situation or action of someone, and highlight it. When a mishap occurs I like to think quickly about what worse thing could have happened and didn't, and exclaim I'm glad things weren't that way. Cultivate in myself and in the children a habit of reacting to seemingly negatives by seeing the good side to the situation, and verbalizing it. Noticing and expressing and commending steps of progress in those I'm teaching. Noticing and expressing the love and goodness of the Lord, using it as a tool to pull out of low points during the day, or difficult situations.

8.) Perseverance and Plodding

Definition:

Perseverance—the act of persevering; continued, patient effort

Plod—to work steadily and monotonously

*Each day won't be a circus show, entertaining you with wonderful results and great strides of progress. Some days will just be plain hard work. Focus on taking one step at a time, and don't give up, no matter how you feel. You'll make it through the fog, and get those "Ah, it's worth it" moments in time. And the time you have now with them really won't last forever. Nothing ever does. But you are here now. So determine you want to make a positive difference in someone's life, and give it your best. Whether you have a day or a decade or more, time always goes past, and you'll be glad you gave all the love that you did while you had the chance.

Wonderful World of Water

Here's a science experiment for you to try: Give your children enough water!

Sounds simple and basic, but you'd be surprised at the noticeable and wonderful difference it will make if you try this:

--Find out how much water your child needs in a day (1-2 litres, according to age, activity, outdoor time, health, thirst) Decide on the amount to aim for, for optimum health and body operation.

--Find out what is a comfortable amount they can drink at one time (I chose ¼ cup for 1-2 year olds, ½ cup for 3-5 years, ¾ cup for 6-7 years.)

--Choose a length of time that you won't surpass without giving them their drink "portion". (45 minutes to 1 hour max is what worked best for my children)

--Doesn't work to have them go long periods being thirsty and then trying to make it up by drinking lots. The "going without" period catches up to you and causes problems.

--Do things in a fun way (rewards chart, a little nibble of dried fruit, a game to race drink, "after you drink we can then"... , fun cups, drinking straws, etc.)

Here's a few things I found out:

Not sufficient or regular water intake:

--constipation

--irritable and easily upset

--crying meltdowns, especially at the end of the day

--catch colds and sickness easily

--unable to concentrate or think clearly, extra forgetful

--bed wetting at night

--restless nights

Sufficient and regular through-out the day water intake:

- easy going
- regular elimination
- get along with others at play time
- happy times of learning and activities
- not catch colds from the other children
- happier cooperation and obedience
- fast recovery when sick
- happy, peaceful bed times
- not thirsty at night
- good night's sleep

Other discoveries:

- Cups are better than bottles. With a drinking bottle a sip or two may be taken; a cup a lot more, and you can monitor the amounts.
- Juice isn't water, but food, and makes you thirsty.

--Needing to often go to the bathroom when drinking more water only happens when your body isn't getting enough. After a few days of getting enough it regulates.

--Pee is not a problem, but the harmful effects on your body from insufficient water are.

--Jump starting the day, nearly as soon as they wake, with a glass of water gets their body moving, and keeps moods cheerful!

--Drinking enough myself gives me more cope-ability, less irritability, more patience.

--You don't always feel thirsty in your mouth when you are in need. Just take it for granted that to operate all your body functions it's using up the fluid in your body. (Dr. Lorraine Day M.D says an adult's body uses 10 cups in a day to operate all that it needs to internally.)

--Have them use the bathroom before giving water, or have a way to do it should the need strike at water time.

--There will be a zillion things trying to stop you. Expect it, but be stronger and don't give up till you reach the goal of what is best for your child.

(The "giants" in my way were the strong opinions of others, including teachers; water spills; wet clothes; need for toileting extra; being busy or forgetful to do it.—Even news articles every now and then saying some "woes" of water. Just discard it and keep going with what you know is right, and what proves to work best for your child.)

*The first day I tried this “water portion” program with my 2 ½ year old, there was no crying and whining at the end of the day, and peaceful sleeping through the night! It was really that simple! -Just give’em water, enough and frequently enough.

Try it! You’ll love it. Your relationship with your child, and him with his friends will change for the better. The health benefits will send you soaring with joy!
(And make sure it’s good, clean, filtered water in

The gift of your presence throughout the year will be more treasured than your gifts and presents at the end of the year.

Presents I want to give you, my child...

Presents I want to give you, my child...

--The art of seizing the moment and making the best of it. Each moment comes yet once in a lifetime.

--Peaceful yet not lethargic; calm yet ready to act when needed.

--Enjoying and appreciated what one has, though not the same as another might seem to be enjoying.

--Believing that problems and difficulties are but stepping stones to greater joys, when the paths of love and faith in God are followed, as well as creative solutions sought out and realized. Everything serves a purpose, and everything will improve, in time.

-- Treasuring the gifts of another's love shared and expressed, however humble or faulty. To "see the love" in other's actions. To appreciate what was at the heart of it.

--To draw out the good in another; to recognize and appreciate the seldom noticed traits in others; to create a vacuum for others to come to the fore using their best side and proving to be a character of quality.

Hundreds of Ways to Say “I Love You” to Children

Here are just a few to start ...

- Cheery and upbeat tone of voice.
- Hug them while gently pointing out needed improvement or behaviour lacks.
- Laugh at their jokes.
- Thank and appreciate them for something you never have thought to mention before.
- Read that same story or book yet one more time!
- Bring home something from your time out or away from them—showing that you thought of them while gone. (A leaf, flower, picture, napkin, anything!)
- Spontaneously dance with them, twirl them around.
- Give the nearly-too-big-for-a-piggy-back-ride child a ride anyway, just for fun!
- Fluff up their pillow to be as soft as can be before they lie down.
- Write a note of things you appreciate or like about them. Read it to them if they can't read yet.
- Put a nice picture of them as your computer desktop picture.

- Make readers or books with pictures of them.
- Tell them a happy memory you have from when they were younger.
- Give the piece of food that they personally enjoy most (eg. a certain part of the baked chicken), or personalise the veggies as each one individually prefers it, when you get the chance (cooked, raw, cut, grated, etc.)
- Put up a picture of Jesus near their bed for them to look at while going to sleep or waking up.
- Make up a song or poem about them.
- Get on their level, look into their eyes and really listen when they talk to you.
- Stop what you are doing to watch what they want to show you, or play for a while together
- Use courtesy-filled ways to make requests like “Would you mind helping...?”
- “I’d so appreciate it if someone could...”
- “It’s fun having you helping me..what part would you most enjoy doing..?” etc.
- Have talk time or “quiz question” time to get to know them better, and show that they are interesting to you.

“If you could go to any planet...”

“What time of day do you most enjoy”

“Are there things that I do that bother you, or something you wish I would do differently?”

- Ask questions about how they are doing:

“Are you comfortable with amount of air blowing in through the car window?”

“Do you miss your friend? Is there something you’d like to write them about? I could type it for you.”

“Are there things that are hard for you when your younger (or older) brother/sister play with you?”

- Keep things in your purse to use as fun, simple activities to do when out, or in the car waiting. Throw in a few things you know they like, and pull it out for fun. -A car, a book, a pen and paper, etc.
- Be extra enthusiastic and praise them for even small signs of progress or good choices. Clap heartily. Notice the positive, loudly.
- Don’t unwittingly embarrass them in front of others. They most likely won’t tell you it made them feel very uncomfortable. Avoid saying things for all to hear that are of a personal nature.
- Pray for them every day

....and on the list goes.

Size Does Matter...

... when it comes to food presentation for children. I would venture to say that many of the food dislikes that children have are due to the preparation and presentation. -**IF** they haven't spoiled their tastebuds and cravings through sugary and processed foods. That's a different issue.

Stew—I disliked having it. It wasn't the taste or the content. I liked carrots. I liked the taste of meat. I liked potatoes. But the sizes of the chunks in my plate were too much work to manage. Just one chunk of meat would fill my whole mouth and I couldn't chew it easily. It was tough work and unwieldy. I just accepted that was what stew was and would always be like. It just didn't cross my mind to ask for it to be cut smaller.

Spinach—I remember the stringiness of it every time I tried to eat it. I would be gagging over the toilet, choking on it. It probably wasn't so big or long. But remember, things for children are really much bigger than they are to an adult, and they are still learning and trying to grasp how to use their teeth and tongue skilfully. I didn't like it for that reason. And I thought it was the spinach I disliked. When I was older I attempted to eat it of my own accord, and found to my surprise I really liked it. It just had to be cut properly. For children who I

feed those great leafy-dark-greens, I take great care to cut it tiny. The stems sliced to the size of peas, or removed, and the rest of it pretty small.

Eggs—I had a great, intolerable attitude to eggs that were not fully, completely, to the point of being rubber-like, cooked. (And it's just as well. I got sick with salmonella, when in my mid-20's, from a dessert made with raw egg whites—unknown to me at the time of consumption. It's not something you're keen to repeat.

I remember having to sit for the longest time till I finished my eggnog. I was seven, and rather underweight. I just kept thinking about the raw egg in it and couldn't do it. Somehow it accidentally spilled. I knew better than to make that happen. But I wasn't shedding a tear that it was instead all over the floor. Hunger was better than drinking it.

Eggplant: The way something is cooked or prepared can make such a difference. Sometimes our nanny would prepare the meals. Though she knew how to make special spice dishes, there were some foods that weren't her forte. Boiled eggplant isn't that edible, if you've ever tried it. Water seems to bring out the bitterness of it. I and my brothers greatly disliked it.

When I was grown I ventured to cook and eat it. It is one of my favourite vegetables currently and that of my little children too. When cooked right, it's delicious. They ask for it! I cut it real small, cook it with olive oil and a some

salt. After cooking it for a long time in the frying pan, they nearly inhale it, as it's all crunchy and delicious. Or we blend it as part of a sauce and it adds a creamy quality to it.

Safe sizes: Carrots when raw shouldn't be cut and served in round wheel-shapes. It can be deadly—as my friend nearly found out! They are the perfect size to fit into the throat and choke a child. (The same with hot-dogs or sausages. Cut them long-wise first, then slice or serve.)

Portions: This goes without saying, but I've found greater success with serving small amounts—smaller than I think they “should” eat. And give more should they still be hungry. Then they can more easily learn to “finish their food”. It's very attainable. I serve a balanced plate of the food groups, and should they want more, the balance is there too. More starch comes with more veggies, or whatever.

Finger Food: Our favourite type of lunch, when I was young, was called “finger food”. We'd get all excited and run to eat it, even if not everything on the plate was actually our favourite. The menu consisted of foods that could be eaten with the hands. The fact that no cutlery was needed, and we could just easily use our fingers without being told it was wrong, made it relaxing for us. A weight was lifted, and we laughed and enjoyed those times especially.

I'm sure there are a million things that could be said about feeding children, and their nutritional needs. But here are just a few down-to-earth examples to make meals more “doable” and pleasant for young ones.

A House—Friend or Foe?

It's my friend when I have a place to store the food, and cook meals for my family.

A foe when I get my tired eyes on the pile of dishes to wash, more than on the One Who supplied the food to fill them, and whispering a praise.

It is a friend when I have a place to get things done, with electricity, sheltered from the elements, the tools to do whatever I need to do from home.

A foe when a sense of work is casting a shadow on the gratitude that should be prevalent for all that I have been blessed with.

It is a friend when on a cold, rainy day, the children have a warm place to play.

A foe when I nag and get impatient about the mess of toys left around, allowing myself to be too busy to play with the children, to laugh at their creative designs, and to enjoy watching them grow.

It is my friend when it provides a comfortable place to rest.

A foe when that's the only thing I'm wishing for. Forgetting the millions who would love to have just one night in a comfortable bed like I get to enjoy nightly.

It is a friend when I have a place for friends to gather, family to meet, events and get-togethers.

A foe when I stress over the work, set-up, and clean up afterwards that is involved, making my personal family feel the tension of pressures I'm allowing to dominate me.

It is a friend when I can have, at my finger tips, what I need in my domestic duties—a place to do the laundry, cook the meals, wash the dishes, bathe and dress the children, iron the clothes, and so forth.

A foe when I can't keep a peaceful air about me, and am fretting over the mountains of cleaning and washing that just piles up. When I can't speak patiently or react calmly in response to additional requests made, because I'm too consumed by the work I feel swamped in.

It is a friend when I have a place to raise, train and teach my eager-to-learn, happy-for-life bubbly children, with everything handy that I feel I need for them—books, table, computer, running water, toys, walls and doors to keep them safe.

A foe when I feel I can't leave the house, to take them out, until everything is tidy and in its place, every dish is washed, and every bed is made. When I forget that it's more important to “leave it all behind” to tend to their greater needs—nature exploration, fresh air, exercise, fun times together, learning new things, making friends. -Giving priority to the growing children's needs, before my needs to feel “snug” and “together” and have the acclaim of others of my domestic organization.

Rule of thumb:

Tend the needs of the animate before the inanimate; the living before the non-living objects; give more thought and energy into being something for others (kind, patient, fun), than doing something for others (house care, work); doing things *with* others more than doing things *for* others; having (and helping my children) have a clean and fresh inside (heart and thoughts), before the outside and what can be seen.

Thought to ponder:

When I tend mostly to the children's needs, the house seems to go wild. But when I tend mostly to the house care or other work, the children grow wild—if not always in action, in heart and mind, their thoughts and conversations.

“A child left to himself brings his mother to shame”, it says in the book of Proverbs 29:15. Both need care, and a balance is good, but getting 100% in every area of life's to-do's is just not possible. I have to choose each day what will truly be important in the long run. What will leave me, my children, and those whose lives my children will influence, with the least regrets, and the best “fruit” to show?

Zacchaeus' Method

A few days ago I prayed to know what my children felt like, what ways I could improve in my communication with them. I didn't want to not hurt or offend them unwittingly. My wish to know was answered three days later.

I lose my cool at times and speak more sternly than I'd want to. Like when they dash in the room loudly when I know they know I'm finally putting the baby to sleep! Or like yesterday morning when my five year old son was wildly jumping and yelling on the bed first thing in the morning. Totally unnecessary, or so I thought. He was trying to have fun, to the beat of a song, but the way of expressing it really wasn't my style.

After telling him firmly to calm down, he said something rather thought provoking. "That's the 5th time you've really made me feel bad." I probed more, since the day had just begun. "Do you mean today, or other days...?" He couldn't even remember all the incidents over the past few days, but had kept a tally of times that had gone deeper than just the usual "guidance" kind of comments and instruction.

He said, "When you sit down beside me and we talk about it (and you explain things) then it's better than if you just tell me firmly." I was glad for this insight. Some things just hit a nerve I guess, when said in the wrong way. I apologized, I prayed with him for our communication to be better. I hugged him, but I could tell that as far as healing up the hurts that he was trying to

express, and had been holding inside for days it seems, it still wasn't doing the trick.

Then a thought came to mind. Zacchaeus! That short man who nobody liked, because he was always taking their money, and short changing people. To make amends he promised to give them back four times the amount. (Luke 19:1-10)

So I explained the idea to my son, and since he's into numbers and math I added it up to him and said, "Okay, so that means that since I made you feel bad 5 times, today I will do 20 nice things for you!" Finally the light shone. He's face lit up with a big grin. That did it for him.

And I followed through with it—wasn't just a "make him feel good" comment that turns into an empty promise. Of course many of the "nice things" were just the usual things that mums do. I just made sure to highlight it as a loving deed.

Some things were even on the school planner list, but happened to be a favourite activity! I threw in some other special 'n' fun things too. He felt loved and better, and I felt better knowing what someone felt and that I was able to make things right—rather than just having smiles, thinking everything was fine, but not being aware of what was going on below the surface.

Ask Personal Questions

They say children are “buoyant” and in many ways they’ve gotta be. But taken from my own way of reacting as a child, they also know how to hide things better. They feel embarrassed to be experiencing negative feelings, or don’t understand their feelings even, or don’t know how to express them.

It can appear to others as if something doesn’t affect them, but it’s just because they’d rather laugh and have fun. It makes things twice as difficult to think about it too much or stay sad outwardly, and attempt to formulate the thoughts into words that may or may not be taken seriously, or treated with tenderness and understanding by grown-ups. But deep inside are those questions, fears, and hidden tears. Sometimes they last a day, a month, or even a lifetime. But you’ll never know, and they’ll have a hard time working through whatever it is that’s a particular issue for them personally, unless there is good communication.

Ask questions. I often ask, “How did that make you feel?” Or “What did you think when that happened?” or other probing questions, when some comment is made giving a glimpse of a thought. Let them know you want to know more, you want to know about them, and it’s okay to have feelings and express them—even opposing feelings, differences of opinion, and so forth. You love them no matter what, and love to get to know their heart and thoughts.

I pray I will be what my children need me to be as a communicator, from the time they are young—hearing them out, drawing them out, showing love and acceptance no matter what.

“Perfect” or “Best” ?

I was sure I knew what was best for the children. I wanted to give perfect care. They’d been fighting a cold. We all were. They’d missed sleep and were tired. All things were in place for a wonderful early night to bed. Or so I thought. They were tucked in for the night. Then the oddest thing happened. A second wind seemed to kick in, and there was no sleep happening in the children’s department—not even a hint!

I could struggle with it, demand calm sleep of them—though that wouldn’t work, and we’d only all be crying tears of frustration. Or I could painfully accept a change of plans. I got alone for a moment of quiet prayer and had the most out-of-the-box idea. Arrrgh! I really didn’t like it. I was tired, and I feared them getting a fever if they didn’t get enough rest. But with the other option worse—a very grumpy and unhappy time of trying to force what I thought to be best on them—I opted for the new solution.

“Okay, you can get out of bed and put on your pants and jackets. Let’s get our ‘jiggles’ out, outside!” So we did. The calmness, the beauty of playing in the setting sun, while I finally got a chance to clean up the yard, made a nice way to end the day. More fresh air was what they needed, I supposed. A solid 10-hour sleep without waking was enjoyed by them that night.

Focused Motivational Encouragement

After many attempts this afternoon to direct, correct, inspire, lead, control, etc, etc. I was in tears, while trying. Behaviour and vocabulary had been quite poor from my young boys. Expressions and verbal attempts at humour as well as childish anger had been quite unrefined.

"What can I do to make them be good?" was the exasperated thought, though not in those words.

When having a moment of reprieve as they peacefully did playdough outside the window, while I tried to get dinner going (and feed the baby in the highchair) a refreshing thought came to me.

"It's not your job to make them be good all the time. It's their choice too, what they do with the training you give them."

My life isn't marked with a black demerit and punishment awaiting me if my children aren't perfect angelic beings their whole childhood long. I can and should lead them, instruct, encourage, correct, inspire and do all that I can and should. But in the end, what is done with the information is up to them.

I can't control their every move and word. That takes a load off! It's probably something I've realized before--but something I seem to need reminding in.

As the afternoon progressed the next thought came, more as a question: *How much have you praised, rewarded, noticed, admired and made them feel real good about doing things the right and kind way, the polite and considerate way? Or do you just notice the times things go wrong?*

Hmm, food for thought.

Just like a spotlight shines on the star of the show in a dark theatre, so will I focus on the positive actions and words. I'll think up rewards to offer and make enthusiastic attempts to shower them with complements during those times-- the many more times--that the right way is chosen.

When I think about it, if in the 14 hours a day that I'm with them while they are awake, if they say even a dozen unkind or unpleasant comments, that's pretty good. How many times did they get rewarded or complimented for doing things right? I can't remember doing it with too much effort today... oops. Guess I'm the one that also needs to pull up my own socks!

Love Vs. Fear

I like having “quiz question” time with my children, asking “get to know them” questions. We might think that because we are with our young ones day and night, that we know them well. But there is a lot that goes on in the mind and heart of a child that isn’t as they say, “worn on their sleeve.”

Today at breakfast I posed a question on fears, “What is something you are afraid of? And what comforts you most or gives you faith when you are afraid?”

Since my second child, now three, is expressing more feelings lately of insecurity and being frightened, and it has now affected my older boy, I wanted to make sure we talk about it enough. It’s hard enough feeling uneasy and scared about those little childish things, without having to go it alone. I want them to know I’m with them, on their wave-length, and don’t put them down for feeling uneasy.

I don’t try to brush it away with, “That’s nothing to be afraid of”. That would have only made me feel worse as a child—fear is still there, plus the alone feeling added by a comment that’s lacking understanding from someone. Today’s little worry was caused by a pair of black pants that were hanging partially out of the cupboard, that my young son saw from the next room. So we went to investigate it, and allay the fear.

When asked the question later on “what comforts you”, he answered that it helps him to check things out and find out what it really is.

My older one said, “When you hug me.”

I think showing love and affection, holding a hand, giving a hug, a smile, really helps to pop that growing balloon of fear. There is something magical about it. A warm embrace seems to make things all right in situations also when a sudden mishap occurs or a “close call” has left them crying or trembling from the shock of what nearly happened. Love can relieve the stress, give courage to keep going, and brings a warm blanket of peace to their heart.

“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear.”

(1 John 4:18, KJV)

Just Say Yes

When I feel I really don't have that moment to give, but am asked, “Can you please play Lego with me”. I've tried something new. I hold my tongue on excuses and listing the things I feel I really must do right that moment. And I just say, “Yes”, and do it. It's worked wonderfully. I haven't gotten any less done than before.

Perhaps I only have 30 seconds or a minute to take, at that time with them. But it's not the length of time or the having the greatest toys to play with, but expressing to them that you care more about them than anything else you're rushing around to do. (And of course, working into the schedule longer, quality time is essential.)

As sweetly as I may try to say it, when the bottom line of your response to their request for a bit of individual time is, "No", or "Some other time", to them you are saying, clear, and hurtfully, that what you want to do is more important to you than they are.

Yes, one day when they are grown they may understand. But now is when their confidence in your love is being formed, and they search for unconditional love, and security. Responses need to assure them of this.

So when I started noticing a pattern that I was nearly always excusing myself, because the request would come at the "one free moment I finally have to get to something that I've needed to do all day..." I just remind myself that their being reassured of their place of importance, and feeling loved is 1,000 times more important.

I just say yes, and do it. Or I say, "Yes, I'd love to. I'll be there as soon as I can." And then keep my word. It takes giving and selflessness. But they are so worth it!

Mind Grabbers

I find that “blank mind time” for the children is just a vacuum for the undesirable. Their mind never stops thinking and needing challenge and channelling. From the time my first one was born I’ve made a conscious effort to spare him the mental boredom. While nursing him I’d read aloud, often reading or quoting Bible verses. But the time he could talk he knew many simple scriptures by heart, since hearing them as a baby.

While feeding him in the highchair I’d ask questions, tell stories, sing songs or do action poems. Extended times on the potty was for books and stories. It has paid off wonderfully.

Now with three young boys, and caring for the baby often gave the two older ones too much “blank mind time”, and I’ve regretted it. My second child especially mentally downloads from I-don’t-know-where, negative self-created songs lyrics, fears and concepts, when his mind is left alone too long.

He needs good children’s tapes playing; stories read to him while he has his long toilet time; meal time discussions; scripture memorization on topics that help him with the feeling he deals with.

The days I made a concerted effort to fill the empty times with “whatsoever things are good, honest, just, pure, lovely, good report, virtue, praise” are always the happier days. When they are “looking Up” so follow the corners of their mouth.

Here are things I do or have done:

--Appropriate Bible stories read at breakfast.

--Educational library books read to them at lunch.

--Play time while listening to good children's music tapes.

--“Talk time” or “quiz question” discussions at meals or snacks.

--Stories of positive nature before bed, and a picture of Jesus to look at posted on the wall.

--Stories, library books, while on the toilet.

--I made educational and Bible based discussion ideas and talk time starter cards (for example, talk about water and all its uses and forms; ask questions about a Bible story; sing a song, etc). We pick a card when we want quality ideas to focus on.

--Mp3's, CDs or tapes for car trips, or talking about things, or books to read.

--Place a 'Prayer List' on the back of the bathroom door.

I've learned that just because their body is busy, or even if they seem quietly engaged in some activity, it doesn't mean their mind is finding great places to go. The vacuum is always on, and the airwaves seem to bring all kinds of things to their mind. If they—and any of us—don't actively mentally pursue the positive, the negative will often be the default.

Middle child? Or Best of Both worlds!

I've read of the concept of the "middle child" before, but it wasn't until I had one that I started to see it more clearly. My heart went out to him. I was busy with the baby often—and doing those cosy mummy things that he was having not too long ago: those extra cuddles, the exclaiming over some new accomplishment, sitting on my lap, getting him dressed, and so forth. But my "middle child" was expected to be older, and grow up, and have to help himself in many situations—as I just didn't have enough arms to go around. It seemed that to cover the needs of the new little one, the last boy had to grow up more and be brave about it. What other option was there?

Then there was the oldest boy, who had to grow up fast too, to make room for this now "middle child". But when the third child came along he could do things better than the middle boy, and get more "big boy" type things. He could actually help at times with the youngest, and was appreciated for that.

My heart ached a bit for my "middle child" wondering what to do, how to show him love and care, and let him know that he was special. Then the most wonderful and new thought came to me.

I needed to change my way of thinking. I had been getting it wrong—thinking he needed to be older than the baby, and grow up, but not try and compare himself with the older one, and always trying to do things that his brother could do, and so forth.

Instead, I was to give him the opportunity to enjoy the "best of both worlds". Besides giving him his individual needs, time and care, to also include

him as often as possible, in both the considered “too old” or “too young” things his brothers get to have.

When I offer a nibble to my baby, to ease the teething troubles, offer a bite to “middle man” too. When reading to the baby, I offer for him to sit with us too. Hug and cuddle him as often as I could, as if he was still the youngest. Treat him as the youngest, in the “fun loving ways” that babies get to enjoy, laughing and playing. And when doing something with the older boy, invite him along too, to read the book, or help in his own way to build the new Lego car.

And I wasn't to expect him to keep up with everything the older one can do too, just because there is a baby now. He still might need to be carried a bit on a walk if he's getting tired. Or just need to be cuddled until he falls asleep at night.

He is in-between—so offer him the best of both worlds, and don't expect him to either be as grown up as his older brother, or to be detached from receiving a bit of babying. He still has feelings and misses being the youngest. And then when he does try to take the leap from babyland, all the way to his older brother's capabilities, I shouldn't put him down for trying, “You're too young to do that...(or something to that effect)” He's trying to find where he fits in, and in reality he can fit in a bit into both levels.

So I stopped thinking and saying, “you're too young for that...”(and a moment later) “You're too old for that”. Just let him be what he's comfortable being, stop being afraid to “baby him” at times, and drawing him in as often as possible. That's the way he understands, “I love you”.

His “Heart 4 Kidz” Thoughts

At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,

And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.

But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.

Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!

Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.

How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray?

And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray.

Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.

(Matthew 18: 1-7, 10, 12-14, KJV)

The Fresh Morning

The smell of a fresh new morning is just the best sensation to me—the smell I most enjoy. There's something to it that can't be replicated at any other part of the day. It's like the mind of a child when they first wake up, fresh, happy about the day, and their mind a sponge for whatever you present to them.

If I so much as wait 10 minutes and let the children take care of themselves for those once-a-day special moments, I've let the magical moments slip away.

I find that whatever we do first thing holds a big effect on the rest of our morning and day! If they go to play before we pray for the day, there is always crankiness and arguing within a minute or so. I keep something handy for when they first wake up, and enjoy a deep breath of air from Above before we get on with the challenges of the day.

They need not only their physical body “batteries” charged with a good sleep, but also the “battery” of their heart and mind satisfied with the only thing that “does it” -something from and about the One Who created them. They too, are God’s creations, and as it is with us as well, we won’t have that peace, that joy, that cope-ability, without Him playing His role in our life, giving us His thoughts, and reassurance of His forever, no-matter-what, love.

We do things like:

*Listen to a song about Jesus’ love for children, and look at paintings and drawings online of Him with the children.

*Sing a song about gratitude with a guitar and simple toy instruments, and then say aloud things we are thankful for.

*Give each other morning hugs and pray for our day—for safety, fun, patience, happiness, for our friends and so forth.

*Look at pictures online of beautiful nature—trees, mountains, flowers, etc. while we listen to an audio of children’s songs of praise.

*Read a story in a Children’s Bible book.

*Watch a children’s Christian music video.

Their Bible and character training studies, activities and stories comes later in the morning, day or evening. But I’ve chosen to reserve those first moments of the day for breathing in the morning air—for our hearts and minds. And then we get out of the house as soon as possible for a morning walk or play outdoors or a breakfast picnic. Ah! The beauty of the fresh new morning. There’s just nothing like it!

Travelling

Sitting too much in a car—or in a house for that matter—always seems to catch up with us in “wish we hadn’t done it” ways. So trying to do it over a longer period of time, so the children can benefit from the trip and enjoy it, rather than get the short-end, seems a wiser way.

I’m thankful my husband has a heart for the young ones’ needs. If the baby is fussy while travelling, we stop and take the needed time to care for him until he feels better again.

When having constipation pains, my two-year-old would nearly do back bends when attempting to put him into his car seat. The pain of the pressure of

sitting down was unbearable. Thankfully, I've had the highly-unrecommended-to-experience-it feelings at times. So I know what he feels. To an onlooker it could be assumed to be a tantrum for not wanting to get put in his seat. The solution is to stop and run or walk it out, and try again after a bit. Going home takes longer. But children that feel understood, are cared for, with their needs met in on-target ways, is the real goal, and our responsibility.

When your baby who hardly cries, has reached hysterical crying, for whatever the cause, and the choices are: finish driving the few minutes home, trying to block out the crying, or stop and tend to them, even if you are “nearly there”, what do you do?

It's painful to have people saying, “Oh just let them cry”. Would you do that to an adult? If they were yelling that something was terribly wrong, and asking you to pull over, would you just brush it off, so you can have the accomplished feeling of being at the place you said you would be, when you said you would be there?

A lot of pressure for improper care for children, while travelling especially, comes from these two things—our impatience to get there as fast as possible; and the lack of space and understanding from others on what it takes when trying to go out or travel with children.

So you're a bit later than the zippy singles, with all the unexpected last minute happenings, and you have a bit more baggage to tug around for the care of the children. Being made to feel bad about it doesn't help with the main goal of parenting: to properly raise and nurture children!

Tears Aren't the Issue—React to the True Need!

When little children are crying, you try to do everything you can to help it stop as soon as possible—it's made to be that way, to help you take action. But when toddlers and preschoolers have an issue, pain or emotion, getting the tears to stop isn't the goal in itself. Nor does lack of crying mean the problem is gone and you are free of any further responsibility or consequence. Finding the cause, and most of all teaching them, through loving example, how to handle others' calls of distress, should be foremost in our minds and actions.

Here are some thoughts on the issue of children crying:

--Take your focus off the noise and look past it to the heart. React as you would want them to act when they are grown and another person is calling out for help: Helpful, compassionate, communicative, tolerant, selfless, affectionate, kind, giving, tender hearted.

--Inability to stop or control crying is often the result of dehydration. More and regular water, at least some every hour, helps relieve this. (This helps eliminate or lessen the other pre-crying expressions of anger, irritability, lack of tolerance, screaming, tantrums, etc.)

--Children don't cry for fun and enjoy it. There is a cause. Most of the time physical—tiredness, dehydration, getting sick, headache, hungry, sore throat, bowel issues, other hurts, or whatnot. Often they can't pinpoint what it is, and aren't able to detect exactly where the discomfort is coming from, nor accurately communicate it.

--Some children prefer to be alone in a quiet room when getting over an emotional crying meltdown, rather than have the stress and embarrassment of being around everyone else. Talk about it with them at a neutral time and make a plan for when it hits next time.

--Hold them. Hug them tightly. Being with our little ones most of the day, talking and interacting, sometimes we can forget to just hug them. It builds up their cope-ability. Tell them you love them, that they are special to you, what you appreciate about them, that you'll always love them, forever!

--If they are not your own children you are caring for, and seem to be “crying for mummy”, there is often more to it than that. When my two-year-old woke from a nap, crying in discomfort while I was out for an hour, the person with them was convinced they were just a clingy, crying for mummy child. They had had a rough nap, waking lots with cramps from eating something wrong. I had

to leave for an appointment. I didn't want to. I knew the one who would care for them would have a situation when my child woke with the next pain. My little one wouldn't feel good and I couldn't be there to do the usual things that helped him feel better.

It's sad that people don't take a mum's word for it. We are assumed to just be softies and giving in to things, etc. However, there are facts we know that others just don't or won't believe. It pays to talk with the parents and listen with a real open, non-judgmental mind, when caring for other's children. It can give accurate insight.

--Sometimes we don't listen well enough. I was giving a story to a child once, while the mother was in the next room. He was 4 or 5. He started a big crying scene for what seemed like no reason. The mom came in, (and since this was in my pre-motherhood days, I was bugged. "Will this just make him do these tantrums more... she just jumps in?") But she knew her child, and asked him what it was.

"He doesn't like that story..." she relayed to me.

Later I said to the child who had calmed down, after feeling understood, "You could have told me." He said, "I tried to." He was a particularly emotional boy, and what seemed like a harmless and good-moral story in a children's book, for some reason triggered unpleasant feelings.

I'm much more sensitive now to how books affect children, as well as appreciating the insight of mothers—being one myself now, and having that special knowledge that comes with it. It's something I didn't know existed until I was blessed with children.

--Children have emotions and draw conclusion, form opinions and such. Just getting them to “stop crying about it” doesn't take out the problem from their heart. The effect of not working out the real issue, or trying to silence it, could end up worse than a few tears. They may decide you can't relate to them and will not attempt to communicate about touchy matters of the heart, and close a part of their heart to you.

--Give them the freedom to cry. Boys need to cry too. Don't put them down for it. I don't allow screaming and losing control, when hurt or feeling bad emotions. But cry, by all means! -While I hold and pray for them. It's not a sin or bad, naughty behaviour to cry! They don't need to be firmly scolded for it. Like my son said, “Mummy, when you talk firmly to me when I'm already sad it makes me more sad.”

--Just trying to quickly stop the crying of a child who is hurt, sad, or whatever, is just to make ourselves feel better. Unless the child is losing control and needs to calm down. But if we think about it, we often just want things to

feel and be comfortable and calm and appear good, and to feel “all happy”. Think of their needs more than what you need to feel good and like “things are fine”.

--What may seem like a small and fixable or non-important issue is can be overwhelming for a child. Remember we all—children and adults alike—have just the same level of difficulty and pain and troubles in life, all suited to what we’ve learned, and what we can handle.—Starting from birth. Just because what a child experiences may seem to us to be easy, it is my no means any easier for them, than our own troubles of adulthood are for us!

My child crying about a letter we were going to post, that he accidentally slipped irretrievably into a crack in a false wall, was a huge deal for him. In spite of the assurances that we would reprint it from the computer and mail it again, his tears were hard and long.

To us it wasn’t a big deal, and a good little cause-and-effect example to learn from, that was fixable. Yet to him it was a hope and work gone, forever. Yes a new one could be made, but not that one! And it was his fault. So much self-inflicted remorse he felt, and incompleteness of a goal—mailing it that day.

--Babies don’t just “cry to be crying”. There’s always a reason. When you are doing all you can, well, that’s all you can do. The bond of love, the reassurance, the attention you give them, is what goes into their heart and

spirit and memories, it builds their character and who they are, and the way they cope with life. Even if they don't remember the details of their babyhood as they grow older, it makes a big difference on their character and the way they relate to you and trust you. This then all has an effect on their behaviour.

“Trust and obey” as the song says, go together. If they can trust you, and you prove that they are important to you, and that you hear and answer their call, they too will do the same with you.

--They'd rather be up and cheerful. Bear with them patiently when they need time and space, a listening ear and warm caring. What if they were the parent and you the child? How would you want them to react? Your reaction to children's cries teaches them how to react to others they encounter with problems. Be kind, caring, empathetic.

The High Door Knobs

Last spring we travelled to a beach town and stayed in a friend's house for a few days. It was an older house. There was one interesting feature—the notably high-set door knobs. The doors were tall and the knobs were nearly at my

shoulder level. I had to make a mental note of it, and get used to being available to open the doors for the children every time then needed to open one.

It served as a worthy reminder to me of what I had been thinking, about making things “reachable” for the children. Not in the layout of a house, but in my requests and expectations.

For example I would get flustered at why my seemingly old-enough boy couldn’t complete the simple task of putting on his own pants. I was wasting my breath reminding him and getting upset at his seeming “disobedience”. When I talked to him and found out the real cause, there was a reasonable blockage in his path. He couldn’t put on the pants without his long johns riding up. He understandably greatly disliked the feeling of it. He needed help to manage that. So the problem wasn’t a lack of obedience to my “simple task” but rather the need to have good communication with him, and to teach him to let me know if there is something stopping him from following through.

Realizing the many other “unrealistic” expectations that I have set—either subconsciously, or in black-and-white type of instructions—helps me to clear them away, and be real once again. To be a mother, a nurturer, a guide, a gardener, to water and refresh the little ones.

Unrealistic:

--For the children to always have at the forefront of their mind and remembrance whatever happens to be my personal priority or focus, or that moment's bother point.

--For them to be aware of all dangers of every new thing they try, and having the ability to think things through that they've never even done or experienced before. Thinking up fail-proof plans, and only choosing those to follow through on.

--To stop immediately what they are doing, at all times, when fully engaged. Though obedience is a good thing, learning to complete things, finishing a task, feeling the fulfilment of working until completion something they started, is also a great character trait.

--To always be cheerful, patient, talk gently and politely when very tired and hungry, or feeling sick. None of us do. Somehow we, as adults can be excused, it seems, because we are able to put into words what we are feeling. But children aren't usually experienced enough to detect exactly what it is they are feeling! So if they haven't said clearly: "I'm feeling headachy and dehydrated from the sun today", then we assume all is perfectly well, and they are to act their (or our idea of) optimum level.

--For the children to read my mind and know what I mean with little or no explanation. When I say, “please put this in the sink”, to know what sink I am talking about, for example. I’ve learned to clarify.

They don’t need to act as I would. They won’t always have the right thing to say. Their reactions won’t be perfect. They wouldn’t be children then. Or human! They don’t need to be the incarnate version of my image of a perfectly wonderful human. I’ll do my part to help them learn and grow a bit more each day—but I must realise they—and I—are works in progress.

The Lettuce in My Garden

When I was a teen I attempted to have a small vegetable garden. It was basically successful. It had parsley, carrots, lettuce, chives, maybe something else. I forget. But what I do remember was what happened to the lettuce. It was my first attempt at growing it. I grew it from seeds.

I nurtured the seedlings, replanted them outside. They made it through the frost and all. It was the type that you can pull off a few leaves each day, and it will keep growing. But maybe I didn’t do things right, I don’t know, but it started going to seed.

I remember being bugged that others were making me feel bad that I had “let” my lettuce go to seed. I thought, “I didn’t know. This was my first attempt.”

The feeling of not knowing something and then being told you are doing things wrong in a “you should know better” kind of way stuck with me as being an unpleasant and unwelcome feeling. But I know I do the same thing with the children. I wish I didn’t. But I know I wrongly assume, perhaps subconsciously, that they should know something by now, and then when I point things out—that for them is the first time to hear about it—it makes them feel bad, as it’s all news to them.

I want to stop and think more, before pointing things out, to make sure to present things more as interesting information, patiently, calmly. Not just talking to them as if I expected them to know better.

I think perhaps, if it’s something I feel strongly about, or fear for their safety in, I want to make an impression on them, so as to give it as little chance as possible of happening again. But I think I need to just take a breather, and give them a chance at least, to remember the point from just hearing about it in a calm, informative way, before trying to make an “impression” and “make sure they won’t forget it by over emphasising it” kind of approach.

They are sensitive, want to please and be well thought of, and can take a hint. So I should give them more of a chance, and start with communicating lightly and gently, when at all possible.

Admit it. Apologize.

I read a marvellous passage in a book. Though I'd known the basic information before, the text brought it into a new light, and changed me for the better:

Susan writes:

“When I’m honest, as a parent, I know that I am all too often aggressive toward the child. I am angry at him, because I am angry at my own failures. I want this child to be the perfect human being that I somehow failed to become. It is shockingly easy to take my frustrations out on those who are under me. This is a matter of humility. My child respects me better when I come to him saying, ‘I’m sorry I shouted at you. I’m really worried and exhausted tonight, and I took it out on you. You should have remembered to put your muddy boots away, but my reaction was wrong.’ Or simply ‘I’m sorry. I’m wrong.’

“None of us live up very well to that model of righteousness, the loving Shepherd-Leader who is perfect Himself and can lead into the paths of righteousness in love. Such honesty strengthens our office. For we are only pointing in some poor way toward what is good. Thank God that the reality of righteousness is not based on the level I achieve myself! We look to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.” (End of excerpt from “For the Children’s Sake”, by Susan Schaeffer Macaulay)

I’ve known this concept for a long time: to be humble and apologize. But something in that portion of the book gave me a new side to it. I think deep in my heart I still feared that if I admitted—what surely was already obvious to the children—that I failed and didn’t have the right reaction or was mistaken, that I would lose some respect. That somehow if I acted as if I thought I was always right that it would make them have steady trust in me and follow in submissive obedience.

But I was just deceiving myself. Cause it’s plain as day to children when the reactions of adults aren’t in line. It was to me as a child. It stole the trust from my childish heart, rather than build it, when an adult was acting hard-line and didn’t admit they were mistaken in their reactions. I felt that if they were so blind as to not even see it themselves, or not to realise that we could see clearly what was mistaken about their adult reactions, we kids were indeed smarter than they.

But I guess I needed to have things explained in this new way. We aren't trying to uphold the image we want them to live up to. That's nice, and we should try to do our best to "be followers of Christ", in deed, and not just in words. But to place Him, as the perfect example, to the children, and be pointing always to Him should be my goal. When I fall short, to say so, making it clear what the right way is—His way, not my stumbling, feeble attempt.

Then I did it. I don't even remember what it was that was getting to me, but I was bugged. I was tired. I was stressed about something. And I was acting pretty grumpy. I swallowed my pride and told the children I was sorry for the way I was acting, that it wasn't right. Jesus would be acting differently if He were here, I explained.

The warmth and compassion and instant loving forgiveness they showered on me was unlike anything I expected—or would think myself capable of showing. Instead of them feeling bad and just trying to make it through this time with a grumpy mummy, they tried to cheer me up.

They knew my heart, and how I was feeling. I was lacking and they were trying to give. Bringing me hugs and snacks was their way of saying they loved me and wanted to speed me past the moment to happier times.

I want this to be one of my automatic reactions. Stop, explain, apologize, clarify, and uplift the example of Jesus. I lose respect, rather than gain it, when I go on pretending I'm always right.

Look at the Motive

Most things that seem “wrong” are just the inexperienced childish mishap that occurs when they are trying to do something great!

Endless water play with the hose outside is not allowed in our house. It wastes water and funds. But I found the two playful boys laughing, being silly and spraying the water around. Okay, in the house they go for their clean up job (the consequence of spraying the hose for no good reason). But then it comes out that they had had some argument, and were at odds with one another.

They really enjoy and appreciate each other’s friendship. When one is gone or sleeping, they are missed. Because of whatever happened, there were hurt feelings, and they just didn’t like the feelings of being upset at each other, so had turned to doing the one “sure-thing” way to bring joy again, something that cheered up the younger one, to win back his favour. -Even at the risk of “disobeying”. They were laughing once again as friends. The motive was love. I was glad for this insight.

My 3-year-old was making loud and silly noises in the car. I asked him to settle down. I had been surprised at this sudden outburst of what seemed totally unnecessary and driver-disturbing behaviour. He said he was trying to cheer up the baby. It was true. He has a tender heart. Even the baby’s little “whimpering” noises, not even a cry, he would make sure I was tending immediately to it.

“Mummy! The Baby is crying! He needs you to help him!” he would say. The way people feel, is very important to him. So on the car ride, the now-a-bit-older baby was starting to be unhappy about something, his older brother had swung into gear, with all his enthusiasm, to make him laugh—and had succeeded!

We often just see the shallow appearance of childish behaviour, but children have a deep side too, and a very thinking brain, and tender feelings that need to feel cosy.

Try a Tender Approach To Melt Away the Problems

I read a tip a year or so ago. It was a new thought. I wish it hadn't been. But I'm glad I came across it finally and have been able to benefit from it. It was talking about how to correct young children—to hold them in a warm hug and talk gently, explaining what needs correcting. Not just to talk at them, telling them firmly to stop doing what they are doing, and so forth.

I've tried it and it works wonders. It doesn't lessen the lesson. It doesn't weaken your authority. Rather it strengthens their desire to follow through—because the love they feel builds their trust in you, that you are doing things for their good, that you care, and this motivates them to want to change.

They may still need to additionally have a consequence, but do it in calmness, gentleness, tenderness and with motherly warmth.

So for the child who has just hit someone—hold them, explain how it hurts others, you, and even themselves when they act in unkind ways; explaining gently that won't have many friends, unless he acts friendly.

For the child who is screaming and has reached their limits in angry frustration—hold them on your lap, hug them, hear them out, see it from their point of view. Demonstrate and practice what to do when he gets that feeling. Then get away from the scene, have them do something different. They just need some “step back from it all” time, and need to feel loved and special.

For the child who has just disobeyed and consequently accidentally broken something all over the floor—first hug and hold them. Don't isolate them with stern cold words from across the room. Explain how you care about them, and how dangerous it is for them to do whatever they want, or to disobey. Something broke now, but later it might be something worse as a result. You want them to be safe and happy, because you love them, and that's why obedience is important.

The list could go on, telling of opportunities to show the children that you love them, and how you can gently lead them. Remember, the daily struggles they face are just as steep and difficult to handle as your “adult world” stresses and pressures.

Each stage of life brings us to our limits to grow us, stretch us and teach us new things. Children however have the further disadvantage of not having the perspective that years of experience brings. They don't know things can eventually work out. They don't know that their sickness and uncomfortable feeling of a sore throat will get better in time. They don't know that they'll go on to enjoy other things. They don't know yet that you'll love them no matter what, and will always be there for them.

They are just getting to know you and the world around you, and coping with new feelings all the time, feelings that they never felt before, as they continue to grow. They need loving care, and trust-building experiences. Flowers of obedience and good behaviour will more readily grow then.

“If You Know These Things...”

I've found out, and am still learning, that I should point things out to children in a “new information” type of way. What I mean is, the first time they venture to experiment and explore, and find out it wasn't the best move; or do something that isn't the best, or is dangerous, I should come across gently and informatively. To speak in a “You didn't know this before” kind of way. Giving “first offence grace.” Rather than coming across sternly, or

shocked, or making them feel bad, as if they've known it all along and are acting naughtily.

Sometimes—a lot of times—they just don't know the outcome of things, and that's what being a child is all about: Learning. If I have a “you should have known it” way of coming across, or out of fear for their safety are wanting to impress on them “never to ever do that again” it makes them feel insecure. They really didn't know what would happen, most of the time. I need to allow them to do what they have been fashioned to do: explore, try, experiment, find out, see, do, and learn.

They didn't come pre-programmed with a little device that informs them of everything that is right and wrong, and tells them what is a safe and unsafe action. They will act their age—not ours. Why do we know something? And are surprisingly surprised if the children don't automatically know it as well? (Like, that hanging on a laundry line will break it...) Well, we had a childhood too, and had to learn, one way or the other, with our own falls and failures, bad experiments, and the joys of finding out the best way too.

Let's not use our storehouse of hard acquired knowledge as a rule book, that if they do something that we happen to “already know better”, that they are breaking the rules, acting willing ignorant, and somehow should have known it too—didn't it pass through the genes or something? No, they've got to learn just the same. We can help make short cuts; we can afford them that. “A teacher is a short cut to learning”.

But if something they do isn't sound, well, you and I had our chance to be a child too—give 'em some time too. They'll be big and responsible before too long, if we don't scare them out of trying and learning through our “you should have known better's”. That's what they are in the process of acquiring. You and I didn't get to skip that step of learning when we grew up. Let's speak patiently with our children while they are having to do the same, and learn to instructing them gently with humility and kindness. In some ways it is the next grade for us. Can we learn and pass this grade?

“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing. Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men.”

(From Galatians 6:1-10, KJV)

Who's Calling Who Mad?

I felt about as discrete as a clown at a cocktail party. Well, maybe I was just feeling a bit self conscious. But when doing something “no one does”, in a public tree-and-grassy area, surrounded by roads and walkers, no matter how “recommended” and quality it is, can make one feel they are sticking out.

As I was on the dirt with my three boys, using sticks to make a little “structure” as my son had suggested, the concerned question came from a man walking his dog, “Are you okay?”

“Yes, just building things out of sticks...”

A chuckle followed while he walked on his way.

I wish it wasn't odd. Maybe that is the problem. If more people were out enjoying nature with their children, and making choices for good health, happiness and sanity, it might help to relieve or even eliminate what I saw next.

I don't know if it was every day, or we just happen to be in that place on “mental morning.” But vanload after vanload passed by, transporting the mentally challenged, ill, and retarded in some way, taking them to and from a nearby clinic, I guessed. These were adults in these vans.

Then there were the walkers. Someone was taking a couple of men who acted like 1 ½ year olds, for their daily exercise. Now things happen, and I admire the daily loving care given to these ones who are challenged mentally. And I in no way look anywhere by Up, to God's grace for granting me the privilege of healthy and whole children and family members. But I guess I like to also look for solutions. It seems odd that in a small community, of a high living standard, to have that many mentally challenged passing by in the space of 20 minutes or so.

And then to be made to feel like I am the odd one—the one actually doing things that contribute to good and healthy living—whether it's outdoor feel-the-dirt play, or schooling my children in the best way possible, by us parents, or not having a television around, or not feeding them any processed foods, just wholesome and good.

Or whether its giving them experiences and exercise rather than being forced to be separated from their parents, confined inside a box-like structure, sedated with pills, taunted, teased and hurt physically, mentally and emotionally, while physiologically chained to a wooden frame for most of the day, from the time they can say $1+1=2$.

Or perhaps I appear out of step because I dare to teach my children that God is real and alive, and created the World and them, and loves them immeasurably. And I allow them to believe they can be part of the solution—and to hope that one might even be possible, just around the corner...

On goes the list of things that really do make a difference in the mental and physical health of children and the adults they grow to become. And the adults who seem to safely make it to full age, coherent in every way, are then sabotaged by the forced “dance around the wallet” rut they get chained to, driving them insane with stress, ruining their health, and inviting the incurable into their life. The money ‘n materials game of madness.

I guess the results of choosing the best, regardless of the comments and looks of others, makes it worth it—the healthy, happy, lively, smart, above grade-level, outgoing, caring, solution-finding, creative, active, kind hearted kiddies that they are. But though I am happy as can be, there is a bit of sadness in my heart... why can't others let loose and enjoy the same? The world would be a heaven of a lot better off, if they did. It's painful to see the surrounding effects of the poor choices and ways people feel compelled to do things that harm and deteriorate mankind.

Who's calling who mad? Let's live and let live—and not think people weird for implementing solutions—and preventive measures—to stave off the madness! And I'm not talking about strange new solution ideas, but things that have been researched and studied, tested, tried and proven, by many on (the unfortunate) countless millions over the years. Let's all wake up and smell the sweet soil!

Positive Practice

Something new to try for those certain areas of your children's behaviour that need some maintenance and training. A positive approach to progress.

Together with my young ones we talked about the “weak areas” that they, and I, wanted to see change in, with their behaviour. We prayed, and a new thought came to me. A fresh approach. A new mindset.

If it's a weak area, it needs training, practice, and strengthening in. If a grownup needs to learn to drive, he takes lessons and practices, right? He isn't hit with tickets and fines the first day he attempts with a teacher. He's not called a bad driver—he simply hasn't yet learned how to do it properly. Practice, study, training, and experience is what's needed.

So we chose 6 areas of frequent need-work-on's during the day, things that are the current behaviour issues. I wrote each one on an envelope, along with a Bible verse expressing the Biblical guidance of the proper way to behave. And in each envelope were placed three or four so cards, with “practice ideas” to pull out and do when that type of behavior occurs and it needs to be worked on.

(Truthfulness is one of the envelopes. If they are forthright with their misbehaving, not trying to cover up their faults, then they just get to practice that area. If trying to tell an untruth about it: “The toddler just started crying... I don’t know why...he was grabbing my toy...” [when the truth was that the older one pushed or hit the toddler], then two cards must be drawn, one for the behaviour, and one from the “truthfulness” cards.

Now there’s no stress of, “They did it again! Now what?” It’s just a recognised area, and it’s kept more in check, as they know I’m prepared! We’re not trying to change every area possible, just focusing on a handful. I don’t have to dream up consequences and on the spot. Just calmly, matter of fact ready-to-help them make progress, offer “pick a card”.

A scenario might be:

“Oh, you are having a hard time playing together, and things are making you act unkind. I guess we need to work on ‘love and kindness’. Pick a card.Hmm, that one says, ‘Say 5 things you like about your brother, give a hug and apologize for acting unkindly’.

(After it’s done:) Okay, you can play now—nicely. But if you’re not ready or need more practice on how to act, we can always pick another one, and keep working on it until you feel ready to handle situations patiently.” And with a hug and prayer with the child, he can carry on his activity.

Green Footprints

The sheer joy, the thrill that shone from their faces in smiles and laughs, as they were jumping on the trampoline ... if only you could see why! I was watching from the kitchen window while doing some dishes. I smile incredulously. I couldn't believe my eyes. But there was no naughtiness about it, just joy in the moment. I had to let it go—it was too good a moment to stop.

My four-year-old had been painting with a large bottle of green paint. First mistake. I was trying to “get things done” so when his request for painting came, I put him outside (to save the mess), put a smock on him, and handed him the whole bottle of paint. He was on the cement pathway in the back yard, happily painting on his paper.

Next, I see him sitting on our large but low trampoline, enthralled, focused, enjoying the artistic moment, making designs with his hands in the thick paint on his paper. Shortly afterwards the artistic creativity started to really kick in.

Before I could do anything about it, the paint was being poured on the old, faded trampoline to make designs. Too late to do anything now, I kept watching. I'd wash it off in a moment and place him back on the cement. I carried on with the dishes, glad for the chance to finish up.

Then I looked up to see his non-judgemental older brother, happy for a good time, joining him in the next thrill. The paint had somehow spread to an area of about a meter square on the actual tarp, and they were leaping, running, getting it on their bare feet, and making foot prints all around the rest of the trampoline! They were just so, so happy!

I normally might have reprimanded, but the look of guiltless bliss, enjoying this moment in a pure way, stopped me. I gave them the chance to “live-love-laugh”.

After a bit I put them to wash their covered bodies, and soak their clothes, while I tried to scrub what I could off the trampoline. The big spot came mostly off, but all the green foot prints stayed—having dried much faster.

But it actually looks right. It brings a bit of colour and life to the grey-black, aging thing. And thankfully it doesn't remind me of a sad time, getting impatient with their childishness and seeming lack of sensible “appropriate” behaviour. Instead it reminds me of the good time they had, and that I was able to smile along with them.

It's really a daily heart's prayer—to teach, direct, guide, curb, and instruct them in the important things. But to not be too zealous and begin encroaching on what I should “let be”, allowing them to enjoy the thrill of childhood, in the ways that are, in actuality, fine and good! As odd as it seemed, I believe this was one such time.

Colourful Celebrations!

I'd been getting this thought—to have more celebrations! To pick things that are rarely thought about, and use it to make an extra spark in what could have been an “ordinary” day.

Then the other morning when I woke, I thought, “Just do it!” When the kids woke I announced happily that today was the “Celebration of colours” day! We dressed in colourful clothing—whatever they wanted to wear.

(I wore pink from head to toe, my husband donned his checkered blue-green-purple pants and a red shirt to join in, and the kids were as colourful as they could be!)

We ate a pink snack (blended with strawberry for natural colouring), we looked in a science book about rainbows and light, we read stories about colour—like Noah and the rainbow, and other children’s books on colours, and drew pictures with coloured markers.

The kids were happy and lively and glad for this new spark to the day. There’s so much to celebrate!

For example:

--Single socks celebration (only the unmatching socks worn that day), with things like 3-legged race, sock-puppet show, and thankfulness time for things that there are only one of! (Like unique them!)

--Celebration of hugs: give as many as you can, reach a goal that day! Play “guess who hugged you” with the one guessing wearing a blindfold or aeroplane sleeping mask. Make each member of the family feel as loved as they can be, to the point of knowing they each are important to each one, and appreciated for who they are.

--Celebration of sound: listen to music, play newly invented “musical instruments” from whatever you can find and create out of things around the house. Have “silence is golden” time to be utterly quiet for a short while, and just listen. Talk about what you heard. Play “guess the sound” while you all take turns making a noise with something just out of sight (behind a board or under a cloth). Learn some simple sign language, that those who can’t hear need to use. Be glad you can hear!

--Celebration of fingernails: being glad we having ‘em, and not being afraid to get ‘em dirty by mud play, gardening, painting. Then using a nailbrush to sparkle things up again. (And clipping all finger/ toe nails, of course!) Giving “prizes” before clipping, for the one with the longest, the shortest, the most odd looking, the strongest, etc. Making sure everyone get something, and no one is embarrassed by it, or made to feel uncomfortable.

--Smile celebration: Make happy smiley masks with paper plates or bits of cardboard. Act out and talk about the difference a smile makes on someone’s day, both those doing it and those receiving one. Make faces in the mirror. Put on clown face paint, if you have it.

--Celebration of silliness and laughter: good for grumpy and sick days! Wear odd dress-up clothes, or clothes inside-out and backwards! Eat on an upside down plate. Tell jokes. Play the “I can make you laugh” game, telling or doing things that just might do the trick--and have the children try to make you laugh. And do so, at their best efforts, anyway, whether you feel like it or not.

Make some crazy looking hats out of anything you can think of, and have a parade!

--Choose a day for each member of the family to be the “special person” - either each day of the week being for a different person, or the dates of the month that are the same as their birth date, or somehow. And on that day, shower them with kind deeds, first choice, things they like, words of kindness and appreciation, their preference. It can be like a pretend birthday! Why not?

And on goes the ideas ...

Have fun dreaming some up and enjoying life together with those you love!

What Are They Actually Learning?

I needed time to pray, to get things straight. There was a lot in my little boys’ lives and behaviour that needed to be looked into. I wanted to know “why” and how to deal with the current issues. It’d been too long since I’d really stopped, focused and talked about their individual needs with the Greatest Caretaker of all—their Creator.

So as I sat there to pray, while they hadn’t yet woken for the day, I listed each area that I needed some advice and insight in. The list kept growing. I

shouldn't have let things go for so long. But anyway, I knew "help was on its way" now that I was at last stopping to ask directions. I knew we'd be on our way to find our path soon after.

I didn't have long (as usual) to just sit quietly, and get God's input on each detail as I would have liked, and soon the children woke and the day was on us. But a little is better than nothing. And the thoughts He imparted to me were a great start in the right direction. And not surprisingly, we had a refreshingly nice day. Here are some the points I wrote down during that time yesterday morning:

The best thing we can do is bring them before the Good Shepherd, who knows more about their make-up than us. Use gentle approaches to training and caring for them, by taking the time to pray and hear from Him on what to do and how.

A lot of misunderstandings of children's behaviour comes from just trying to get to a certain place or reach goal, and in that one certain way, but not always does it suit the needs of the little ones. So then is the question: What is more important? --The goal? Or how and what is done along the way as we traverse through life, attempting to reach the goals?

Now there are goals we are meant to reach, and when we don't there are, or seem to be, the consequences that follow. Brush consequences or possible consequences aside and pause to think for a minute:

What are the real goals, the hidden needs, the secret reasons for living life here and doing what we are doing? These are what we need to keep in mind.

Yes, having my boys grow to be fine young men, able to care for themselves and others, a worthy father and husband one day, is indeed a noble and worthwhile achievement. But what if my methods of trying to get them there has stolen their joy in life, their close bond as a family, and of just being happy to be alive?

What if instead of instilling in them responsibility it has festered a great dislike for cleanliness, because I've pushed it too much? And rather than following through on what I'm teaching them it produces the very opposite effect, and they turn aside for a time, just to breathe a breath of fresh air? It was too stifling for them.

What if rather than learning the joy of living life in godly ways, the lessons they learn instead in their heart is that someone can only truly achieve goals of interest by doing as they please? That for the most part they'll be stopped—when it's childish fun. But if one does the opposite of what those in charge are saying, then finally fun can be had?

I need to instead consider, what are they really actually learning? --More than just the surface. It's these things of the heart, the lessons deep within that actually shape character, and their life will follow as such.

Our adult heads can get so stuck in the temporal. Children are much deeper and can grasp things other than what the adult is trying to convey, and may seem to be successfully teaching by looking on the surface. But just because the children appear to be clean, well-groomed, behaving in the way we've impressed on them to be, doesn't mean all is in order in their heart and mind. It's more than a 3D experience to raise them well. We have to consider what's going on inside, and how best to help and inspire them, from the inside out.

Watermelon and Waiting

My six-year-old son retold me his remembrances of a conversation we'd had months ago. His account of it gave his "side of the story" which he hadn't expressed at the time. I'll write out here the sequence of it, according to his memory.

(After giving each child a piece of watermelon—and the mentioned son who wanted more, I gave my piece to.)

Me: Please make sure to throw your watermelon away! (Meaning the peels, I'd missed saying it just right.)

Son: (joking, after noting my slip of lip) My watermelon is rotten? Throw it away.

Me: (hearing it wrong, and quickly taking it back from him—since it was my piece to begin with) It tastes bad to you? It’s fine to me. That’s okay, I’ll eat it. (And proceed to do just that.)

Son: (speechless, watched me eat it and discard the peel.)

He said when telling me this story, “I didn’t feel too bad, because after all it was your piece. But next time you should wait more and give me time to explain.”

Good point!

Odd Balls

We took our children on an excursion yesterday to visit a dam that was being built—or rather being enlarged. I looked up and noticed wires high above, that threaded a few white, ball-shaped objects. We assumed they were to alert helicopters to stay clear.

I wondered how people who had so obviously spent an incredible amount of time, money, and clever thought on building this dam and the area around it, how they could have chosen such an odd colour as white.

“Why weren’t the balls some other colour? Wouldn’t they stand out more then?” I thought, looking up seeing how they nearly blended in with the puffy, white clouds. I didn’t think someone would have been that careless to overlook a detail like that, when seeing the evidence of great-minds-at-work all around us.

“Ah!” It hit me. I was the one who wasn’t thinking.

“Of course! The helicopter is looking down, not up at the clouds. The bright white would contrast far more as the pilot looks down at the green and brown land below. I could imagine it standing out in a noticeable way then.

We, from our high up and “clearly wiser” point of view, see things a certain way in our children’s behaviour, or the way we like things to be in our home. It’s good to remember that those lower down—our young offspring—may see things totally different, and not understand why things are the way they are, or why we insist things be a certain way. Or, heavens! They might even forget to do something that to us is of blaringly, obvious, utmost importance.

Maybe we just need to squat down and look up to see things from their perspective every now and then. Maybe something seems crystal clear and greatly important to us, yet to them, with all the other childhood things they face, it might just be a bit of a blur and blend in to the scenery.

We may also think we’ve made everything abundantly clear as we have explained and re-explained things to them—or so we’d logged into our brain that we have done. But if it wasn’t done in a way that truly is relatable to

them, it might not be making that much of an impression on them, or stand out to them all that much.

Sometime I have to check myself to remember that whatever is foremost on my mind and my list of priorities that day, for our home and training of the children, isn't automatically placed in their minds.

Their world doesn't revolve around me. So much is going on in their minds, hearts, emotions, interests—just plain having to grow in a multitude of ways each day, inside and out, can keep them pretty occupied.

I need to realise that, and capture their interest and motivation, focus and attention in child-attractive ways—when I feel it's something they really must adhere to.

They won't always remember every house rule at the same time as keeping themselves safe, as well as maintaining a pleasant personality, on top of managing all the other natural forces at work in their lives compelling them to do as they were made to at this stage of life: explore, try out, discover, run, eat, grow, drink, learn, ask, figure out, hug, cry, ponder, find out, breathe, watch, study, climb, experiment, build, observe...and on goes their inbuilt “to do list”.

The race against time is on. They only have so much time to finish it in, before their mind and body slow down, and their mental absorbency is lessened.

I Assumed Wrongly—Again

This week I seemed to notice the times I doled out verbal instruction, direction and correction—unnecessarily. I was the one that learned—to look harder first, to ask, to not assume, to not be too quick with tongue, but to assume and notice the good.

Two short examples:

“Please sit up at the table nicely” I said somewhat wearily to my older boy. I didn’t see the need for him to be doing antics like putting his head under the table. The toddler was fussing and I was struggling to get the food on the table. I wasn’t in the mood for misbehaviour or wildness. They could wiggle and play later—after the meal. He responded humbly, “I was just trying to help cheer up my little brother—playing peek-a-boo.” He noticed where the need was and used initiative to fill it. It was a kind step that should have been only commended.

While trying to pack up and leave to go home after staying in a cabin for a few a few days of nature fun with the children:

“If you take those books and read them now while I’m trying to pack them, they might get forgotten. I’ve already cleaned things up from that room...” I said to my son, who was taking the books and putting them in a bag. I didn’t want to lose things. I didn’t want to repeat work. My young son said nothing, as I took the books back from him. A minute later I changed my mind and

softened. Perhaps he did need something else to play with, while we were still busy cleaning up and loading things in the car.

“Here, if you’d like to use them for a bit, that’s fine. We can pack them later.” I offered. He responded sweetly, “I just had wanted them before to pack in my backpack.” --He would have helped to pack, if I hadn’t stopped him, when assuming wrongly.

God ‘s Property

I woke with a troubling dream this morning. But good in a way. One of those “good examples of what not to do.” And the message that I was passing on in the dream was worth remembering.

I was in my room and could hear some man barking out loudly and very roughly to my son, I don’t even know what. I was under the impression that he was some sort of caretaker, and that’s just the way he talked to children when trying to correct them. I looked out and saw the very hurt, nearly crying, painful look on my sons face.

I couldn’t handle it, I mustered up all my courage to challenge this rough and strong guy. I knocked on my window and called out as loudly as I could, “He’s God’s child. He’s God’s property. Don’t talk like that to God’s child! It upsets God very much to have His property mistreated and abused by those who are the temporary custodians.”

I woke up while saying these words out to this man. I would most certainly speak up should that have happened in real life. But does it? Have I ever been guilty of talking with less care and kindness than I would, if I remembered every second of the day, that my children do belong to God. Have I ever spoken roughly—perhaps not quite like the man in the dream—but still, not as I should, with the “law of kindness” in my mouth, as Proverbs 31 says?

Jesus, tender-hearted to the littlest ones, make my heart like Thine. Mould me to Thy form. Create in me the fruits of Your spirit, so that I may have fresh delights to offer the children as we go throughout our day. I want to know Your thoughts. I want to think them too. I want to say Your words. I want to truly see things from Your perspective. I want to be You for them.

Amazing Children

Each child is a treasure. Some have showy talents, others have quiet gifts of fortitude, wit, or tenderness. The list of the gifts that each child has and hones more each year is endless.

Children are amazing. Just think of the perseverance and fighting all opposition that a baby has to demonstrate daily as he learns to crawl and grab, explore and learn—in spite of often difficult and unpleasant outcomes and frequent “no’s” or falls. They just don’t give up. And thank God they don’t. Thus they learn and grow and become capable young ones.

Heart-stirring. Mind-awakening.

A proverb to ponder:

Better is a poor and a wise child than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished. (Ecclesiastes 4:13)

I'm sure I've read this before, but when I came across it the other day, it seemed brand new to me, and seemed a good and weighty thought to ponder. It stuck out to me, and fixed itself in my mind and heart.

Imagine a beggarly child, dirty, with little or no education, getting coins from those he can move to feel a moment of generosity, living in a shack, with nothing much if anything to call his own. He holds more worth as a person on earth, than a rich king, with a whole nation to call his own, having power and fame, gaining anything he wants.

Why? Because if the child is wise, and ready to learn, listening to others, mouldable, not thinking he's complete and good enough as is, wanting to change when there is a better way, he can benefit society far more, than

someone who thinks they have it made, and act at will, regarding no one else's thoughts and suggestions.

It wasn't just saying children that are smart, clever, beautiful, well-dressed, shiny and polished are great—but that even the children of paupers, those looked down on by higher levels, are to be cherished more greatly, and held in higher esteem than those who have it all, can control masses, look well accomplished, yet think they are too good, too proud, and too set in their ways to learn anything new.

Those qualities that children have—being ready to learn, being unset in their ways, being humble—are to be valued and cherished.

That child there, that you get the honour of being in the presence of, and the sobering responsibility of being the one to instruct, admonish, teach and train, can hold more value than a king—so the Bible says.

It's a deep and awesome thought.

And it wasn't the only time this concept was mentioned. Take what Jesus said, for another example. (See Matthew 18: 1-7)

It's very heart-stirring:

His disciples asked, *“Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”*

Who is the most respected, honoured, of greatest worth? Who, in the realm of God, with His way of thinking, is considered the best? There have been great

men of old; there are kings and rulers; there are powerful angels; those who have given their lives as martyrs; those who have built cities, those who were very rich on Earth. But in God's politics, in His list of "most important persons", what people, or type of people, or those with what qualities does He consider the most noble?

Jesus' answer is simply astounding, surprising, and deeply moving. -A little child!

"And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them..."

And those mirroring the example of humble, believing children are also highly regarded:

"Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

Can we allow our minds and hearts to truly accept and believe it, and act like we do? Think of the massive change it would be the world over, if every man and woman adjusted their mindsets, motives, priorities, actions and deeds according to what Jesus said!

May God help us view as He does, these precious ones we are granted the privilege to raise.

