

108 Days  
A Path to Being a Beacon in Our Modern World

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This book is dedicated to everyone that I have learned from in my life. The roads haven't always been smooth, but even the bumps gave me pause to look at myself and change. Sometimes changes came gently, other times they were like freight trains in the night, but each one sculpted and molded me into the woman I have become, the Beacon for my family – for this, I am eternally grateful. My life is full, I am happier than I ever imagined. Thank you.

Also, a special thanks to my dear husband, Erik, without him this journey would be so boring! Thanks to my children, without them this journey wouldn't be worth taking. Thanks to my family, near and far, without them I would have no life experience to write about. Thank you to my friend Chris, for having the courage to step out on a limb and change my life. And thank you to our co-editor and dear family friend, Angela.

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## **Introduction and How to Use this Book**

As I sat at the water park enjoying the shrieks of delight coming from my children, I noticed a book that my mother was reading and picked it up to glance through it. I have been writing and working on spiritual strivings so deeply for the last several years that reading a novel was something I just hadn't really missed. As I began glancing through the introduction, something caught my eye – 108 days. The author was using this idea that she could transform her situation in 108 days. Although the book was fairly superficial, the idea wasn't. I have long been pondering and praying about a book that is purely spiritual. My husband, Erik and I write homeschool curriculum. Our work is infused with spirituality, but I kept feeling called to take it to deeper place.

About a year ago, in November of 2009, amidst turmoil in our own lives, we stepped out to share some of our wisdom as Beacons for our family with others. Our program “Be a Beacon” was born. Since then we've been teaching moms how to let go of their past and walk firmly in the Light. This is a daily striving for us all. We have often been faced with comments like “This work is wonderful, I wish I could figure out how to bring it to my husband and children.” I am hoping this book is that bridge. We are all called to be Beacons for our family. A Beacon of light is often a symbol of direction and hope. Many mothers want to be this for their family but just end up getting by, forever wishing they could do more. Guess what? You CAN do more. Working to be centered and connected allows you to be present for your family and when you are present, you fully take on the challenge and the joy that comes with being a Beacon for your family. I hope this work will be of some help.

As I said, this book is a bridge. When I was growing up, my parents were of two faith backgrounds and when they came together, that translated into no faith. I remember sporadically going to church as a young child, but it wasn't until I was an early teen that my mother decided to take on the religion of my father (whom she had already divorced) and convert to Catholicism. The conversion for her was a deeply spiritual one. I then began attending Catholic school and I think it was generally believed that the children attending the school would be spiritually fed. How could one not be fed with mass once a week at home, at school and also catechism classes required in school? I don't however remember feeling fed. I remember feeling... hungry...very, very hungry. I remember devouring a world religions class that I took because it gave me a chance to think about other faiths and I also remember pondering “do those children feel hungry too?” I believed that God cared for me and I prayed often, but just could not feel the connection I longed for – the hands of the Spirit touching me to say “Melisa, I am here, you are loved. Walk on.” I so longed for it. As an adult, I continued to go to church, I tried volunteering at church, hoping that somehow I would feel God more presently in my life. I had children and dutifully had them baptized... believing it was the right thing to do for this is what I was told, but all the while not feeling it. Was there something wrong with me? I had other friends that seemed to have a connection much better than my own, they didn't seem to struggle as I did. I tried on a few other Christian hats, read a few fundamentalist books, it seemed like I was forever searching. It was this search for

connection and Truth that had my mother giving me the nickname of “Joan” – Joan of Arc became sort of a family joke – “what is Melisa going Joan over now?”

As I began to fully take on my role in motherhood, I began to realize that my search for Truth and Light was more inside me and less outside. I decided that I would no longer only exist on what others told me I should do and that I would walk a path of what I knew would be right for me. This meant that I really needed to get to the heart of just who Melisa was. It took me down some very interesting paths. I had a dear friend at the time who was Pagan. I began to ask her questions. She never really took on the role of missionary for me, she only answered what I asked and offered support. She opened my eyes to realizing just how much about the religion of my youth that I didn’t know and it took me deeper into the realm of some very interesting and loving people that were also on the same path. At the same time, I really began digging heavily into the work of an Austrian philosopher by the name of Dr. Rudolf Steiner. He had this belief that we can all “know” the higher worlds... this idea of “knowing” rather than just believing what I had been told was very intriguing to me. Some say that I was acting without much faith! I would agree! I kept being told to have faith, but without a testimony of what I was to have faith in then simply having faith was a real struggle for me.

Somewhere along the line, I divorced. Finally free to know myself a bit better, I dabbled, I tried on a few labels... Pagan, Christo-Pagan, Gnostic, Anthroposophist. As I began to dig deeper into who I was, I began to realize many Truths jumping right out at me. Truths that told me I didn’t need the labels for the outer me. I needed to more and more search for what lived inside me. During this time, it became very clear to me that I didn’t want my children to flounder or feel disconnected as I had, so I began looking for a church that might suit us. We live in a very conservative area, there were not many non-Christian options. I settled on the Unitarian Universalist church and quickly worked to become involved. I wanted my children to feel the Spirit. I also began meditating. My work in meditation started with many of the exercises recommended by Dr. Steiner, exercises that are easy to do when practiced. Most of these exercises mirror traditional Eastern meditation, working to empty your mind and detach from what is around you. This idea of detachment was very intriguing to me. How on earth could I detach when I was a mother to some very attached children? It was also through the work of Dr. Steiner that I realized more and more that the emotional and religious health of my children was up to me. A quote from him stuck with me – “No hands can bless in old age, unless in childhood they have been folded in prayer.”

While reading Dr. Steiner one day I realized – I didn’t need to say good-bye to Jesus the man, the teacher. I wasn’t sure I wanted to discuss Christianity, but I at the same time I was pretty sure that these base teachings of love, charity, peace were the Truth I was in search of. When I began to really seek these things out in myself and in my days, I realized that what I needed to do was live as Christ lived. This also meant me opening to how other spiritual greats lived – Buddha... Mohammed... Zarathustra. All of these great teachers led me right back to God. As a practicing Pagan at the time, I also had a strong desire to know the Divine Feminine. My search became much more focused and I went from just believing what others told me about God, to KNOWING God. I began to

understand all of the glory that is God. There were times when that patriarchal name didn't feel right to me so I began to try on different titles... Source... Creator... what I really came to realize was that God IS. God has different faces for different people because we each have a unique connection. A connection that we are responsible for. A connection that we must cultivate. I realized God was teacher, musician, doctor... God was all of these things. As I began to be filled and was no longer hungry, I realized just how much more I needed to bring to my children. We were enjoying our church, but there was something missing – it wasn't a social piece, as the Unitarian Church is *very* social, it was an element that just wasn't coming through our religious studies. I began to really ponder and ask God for some answers. My meditations began to change. I realized that prayer was often my asking and meditation was my pondering and waiting for an answer. It took me quite some time to realize that the answer wasn't going to come from a thunderbolt out of the sky. It comes in the still, small voice. It comes in the form of friends. It comes in the form of strangers. Sometimes it comes through our children. If we listen, it comes. If we connect, it comes.

Once I opened up to asking for this missing piece to be found, answers came from odd sources. I had a dear friend, she was a Mormon. I was raised in Utah and was not about to become a Mormon. As far as I was concerned, this friend of mine was an odd Mormon, she didn't fit my mold of what I thought a Mormon was. She was open, honest, non-judgmental, loving... all the things I was striving to be more of – surely this did not come from her faith. What I noticed was that the more I talked about my faith walk, the more she listened and discussed with me just how normal I was!

One night, at about 3:00 a.m. I was awakened from a deep sleep. My children were staying with their father and the house was quiet. Why was I awake? Seconds later there was a frantic knock at my door. There stood my dear friend with tears streaming down her face. At first I was worried for her – something had to be wrong, was it one of her children? Her husband? What could it be? She came in, hugged me tight and said “God woke me and asked me to bring you this message.” She had written out a page of writing – near scribbling that spoke to the very things I had earlier asked God about. How could she know these deep feelings of my heart? How could God have given her this message? This was the day that I began to realize just how small we all are. Not small in the sense of being insignificant, small in the sense that we are all children, all learning, all striving to get back to the spirit home we left. I began to realize that the label we wore didn't matter as much as our understanding and KNOWING that we were responsible for this connection with God and that when we are open, God can speak through many – God's words are alive and well today – not only found in scripture but in life, in striving, in living – living a life that magnifies the Creator and in turn magnifies us.

While I did later become a Mormon, this book isn't about that. This book is about how my experiences searching helped me to understand that there is Truth everywhere and it is just waiting for me to connect to it. One thing that I realized after joining the LDS Church, was that the piece I was searching for was found. It wasn't found because I had finally joined – it was found because I could finally see fully the components that went into a healthy home. This had less to do with my conversion and more to do with

strengthening my connection to God. As Mormons, we are blessed with a very organized church – some might say too organized. For me, it was the right mix. Something for men, something for women, something for couples, something for families... something for everyone. We are very blessed to have this help in our daily lives to fill that spiritual hunger that our children have. You certainly do not need to become a Mormon to find the balance to fill that hunger and if I relied solely on church to fill it then the balance would again be off. I come back to my intention that this book be a bridge: a bridge that helps mothers on the Beacon path to be connected to God, themselves, their family and allows space for their family to seek out these connections too.

Why 108 days? I have found that real, lasting change takes much longer than the famed 21 days that are often spoken of. To really have an impact on our lives spiritually, we need a much longer commitment than that. We need continual work to build up in us a sharpness that this world tends to dull. We live in a time of instant gratification, stopping to listen to that small voice is often very inconvenient. We want our answers right now. We often run to the Internet with life changing questions rather than getting down on our knees!

There is significance in the number 108 – Hindu culture, they say prayers according to a strand of beads numbering 108. As a Catholic child, I was raised with the rosary so I fully understand this form of prayer. 108 also means something more to me... there is something very sacred to me about  $1+0+8=9$ . Nine has some very beautiful thoughts attached to it. In numerology, it signifies an openness and willingness to share, change for the greater good, love of life and more. Thinking of nine, also brings me to three, the square root of nine. Three is sacred in many religious traditions. It brings to mind the three parts of the Godhead for Christians: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Maiden, Mother and Crone for Pagans. Father, mother and child for others. I pondered on the number 108 for months after glancing through my mother's novel and tried to decide why it kept coming back to me in relation to this project. One morning not too long ago, it hit me, God laid out the entire book, all I needed to do was write it down. So... here we are. Enjoy.

**How to use this book.** Since I began this journey years ago, I have always felt guided to write things down and at times paint or draw what my heart sees as well. I suggest you purchase a sketchbook and really let your creativity flow. Journal and draw until your heart is content. I have divided the book into 16 weeks of lessons. The first week encompasses the first three of the 108 days. The next 15 weeks are broken down with a new set of virtues for you to ponder each week, stories for young children, a suggested activity to bring it to older children and work for you and your partner to do together. This book also comes with an audio CD. If you purchased it and did not get the audio tracks as well, please contact us so we can get it to you. The audio tracks are extra support for each week – love and blessings from me straight to you. The family portions of the book can be used as a supplement to Sunday school or as a family study if you haven't yet found a church of your liking. The virtues are not necessarily presented in any specific order, feel free to change the order to fit your needs and those of your family. The stories, activities and quotations come from many faith backgrounds. It is

multi-faith. I encourage you to open up and be ready to find your own Truth, be ready to fill your hunger. Peace and blessings to you!

## Chapter 1 The Plan

*“When the time for decision comes, the time for preparation has past.”*  
*Thomas S. Monson*

I have almost always been a planner. I homeschool my children and run a business from home, these tasks cannot come without a well laid out plan. For years I struggled with rhythm in my home until I realized that it all came down to me. What did I want? How did I want it to feel? How it felt to me was always far more important than how it looked! I wanted a comforting space where my family could be at peace and we could enjoy each other. Of course I realized this was largely up to me so I needed a plan. When you are connected to Spirit, you can do anything! The more you take the time to connect, the easier it becomes and the more peaceful your days will be. When I am having an off day, I generally say to myself “Melisa, did you think to pray?” The answer is always “no”. And of course, I am pretty indignant about it because who needs God when I can do it all myself! I found out long ago that the key to really being able to connect alone with Deity, came with getting up before my children. This was so hard for me in the beginning. I breastfed all my children and we slept in the same bed and all I wanted was to stay snug and cozy until the last possible minute. Then of course the snug and cozy part ends and Mom feels like she’s been shot out of a cannon and catapulted across the house into the kitchen, forced to feed people and get them moving before her own eyes are even open. This was not the peace I wanted to feel and longed to hang onto while laying in bed gazing at these beautiful people who had not yet begun to stir and battle each other for the day. I remember that first prayer about it to God. I knew I wanted not only to feel whole each day but I also had our first book just aching to be born and no time to write. By this time I was remarried and had a sweet baby. God was very direct in answering “You will get up before your children. Yes, I know you are not a morning person, I will help you with that.”

About this time, I stumbled across a poem from Rumi, it confirmed God’s promise to help me if only I would just listen.

The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you  
Don’t go back to sleep  
You must ask for what you really want  
Don’t go back to sleep  
People are going back and forth  
Across the doorsill  
Where the two worlds touch  
The door is round and open  
Do not go back to sleep

It felt as though Rumi was speaking right to me. From then on I made the commitment to climb out of bed before everyone else. At first it was just for prayer and meditation and I was happy to have 10 minutes to myself before the baby wanted up too. The more

diligent I was, the longer the time became. The more thankful I was for 10 minutes, the more I realized the time was getting longer and longer. I began wanting even more time so I got up earlier and earlier to have this time with God, with myself, to feel gathered and ready to meet the day. I realized more and more that the children acted pretty much the same each day, there were scuffles and bickering but the days when I didn't get up it seemed magnified. I resolved to never complain about their behavior again if I wasn't going to be willing to put myself in a good place to great them.

Another component to meeting my children each day was realizing that they were each in different places developmentally. I had been studying the work of Dr. Steiner for years and really began to dig deeper into what each of them needed. It was easy when they were tiny... they all seemed to need the same things! Now they were growing, my oldest and my youngest were certainly not in the same cycle of development. I had learned through Dr. Steiner's work that we each develop in cycles of about seven years. When we honor and pay attention to these cycles then parenting can be much easier territory to explore than when we try to make them into little adults.

Children that are under age seven learn through imitation. We need to give them wonderful things to imitate. Have you ever watched your children fight and inevitably they say something nasty that either came from your mouth or from some character on the television? That is imitation. Young children can not help but do what they see and every sense impression to them is very real – a cartoon is just as real as something that happened in their everyday life. Young children do not begin to leave this place until they approach age seven. Dr. Steiner also believed that the veil between Heaven and Earth was very thin for a child of this age and that they often communed with the Spirit regularly. As children leave this place it is often frustrating for them and they can act out. Ever have a six-year-old climb on your last nerve? This could be why. I have so much more sympathy for them knowing that this veil is closing for them. Almost as if they are leaving Eden and being told to walk in the world alone. Of course they have us. We are here to guide them and love them – hopefully with some of the same fullness that God did. They are gifts.

Children between the ages of seven and 14 have a much different set of needs, they need to know and understand authority. Don't mistake this for a heavy fist, for it isn't. Authentic authority comes from a place of good, a place of willingness, a place of obedience. If your children are this age then they are looking to you and how you answer to authority. Do you believe in a higher power? In God, Source or Creator? Do you live by a moral code? Do you hold yourself to the standard that you are expecting of them? This also becomes a time of really learning self control, while it begins in the early years, it continues through this cycle and beyond. If governing adults in their lives do not have this sense of self control then they will not learn it. If we give into every whim or refuse to stand our ground as a parent, we are turning an already challenging job into a nearly impossible one. This is the age group when having a religious or at least a spiritual base is very important. These children respond well to stories of spiritual authority such as the ones taught in the Bible and in many other ancient texts. You don't have to be a member of the religion to gain something from the story. If you are parenting this age group, be

firm. Set loving limits. Help your child to realize that your job isn't to always be well liked, it is to be the guardian of their spirit and to raise them properly.

The age group of 14 to 21 is even trickier. Their needs are far different. Today's world is really scary for them. So many teens today seem to run around with no sense of natural authority and no real idea of who they are. This isn't unlike how I felt. I remember almost begging for a spiritual experience. Looking back, of course there were many things that I just didn't understand and didn't have the mentor to help me. These children don't need you to be their friend, you must still be their parent. Boys and girls are often different, while boys tend to withdraw, girls tend to become more outgoing. We have to really help our girls have strong body images and encourage creativity at this stage – being creative helps to keep them in the Light and away from so much darkness that prevails in today's movies, television, music and video games. There is so much more to worry about than when many of us were children. I remember listening to music by Prince and thinking I was such a rebel because it was so dirty sounding... now the music kids listen to ranges from experiences in prison sex to cop killing. Video games pose another challenge and while I try to understand all I can, as a parent we are often not given all the answers. I realized that "M" rated games are like allowing my child to watch a rated "R" movie and that a "T" rated one was like a "PG-13" movie. Keeping these things in mind helped me to navigate the gaming section of the store. For many years, we had very limited media and no video games in our home and as the children have grown, I have been very close to making sure our standards are not compromised by what they are playing or seeing.

Being an open parent and allowing our children to freely express concerns, excitement and their own ponderings to us is an ideal place to be. We will not always be perfect at it, but striving is the key. Another quote from Thomas S. Monson sticks out for me, "The mantle of leadership is not a cloak of comfort, but a robe of responsibility." This reminds me how precious this gift is and while there are times that the road is slow and easy, I am always the one that needs to lead.

As you begin your journey over the next 15 weeks, it will take a some planning on your part. You may chose to work through the lessons first for yourself and then go back and bring them to your partner and your family or you may want to just jump in, learn together and enjoy the ride. Either way, take the time to set up a plan. Begin by deciding a day or evening of the week to come together as a family for each virtues lesson. We have laid out the book so that each week begins with you pondering the lesson, then taking it to your partner to ponder together and then bringing it to your family. It helps to put together a schedule so that you can be certain to stick with the program. Remember that to reach a goal that you have never been able to achieve, you will have to stretch yourself further than you ever have. I know you have it in you. You can do it!

I am often asked if it is really necessary to include one's partner. For some this seems like a really scary place to trod, my answer though is YES! When you came together to become parents, you took on that mantle of responsibility together. You each have differing roles, but many homes are of a blended faith so how can you possibly find

common ground? Well, find it! You are raising children together. Be grown ups and decide how you can both bring them the spiritual needs they hunger for. This program was specifically set up to cross faith boundaries, allowing two faiths to come together or two people to explore what faith means for them and their family. While you are the Beacon, Dad's role is also very important. I lived for many years in a marriage where my former husband and I were not on the same page in parenting or in spiritual matters. This caused a strain on our marriage that eventually ended in divorce and I vowed to never again be in that place. Erik and I have a beautiful marriage but it is not one that just comes naturally – we work at it. We work hard together to understand each other and to parent together. We don't have to agree on everything in order to be on the same page. We just have to strive to be together – strive to parent properly and of course strive to bring our children the love God intends them to feel. I realize this may be hard for many couples. Using virtues as a foundation should help with any barriers that may be present. You know how to best approach your partner – finding a loving way to connect and ponder together will ensure that you are on the same page. Remember you are both human, you will make mistakes and wake up some days with egg on your face! So you forgive and start again. Renew love and selflessness in yourself and it will live in those around you.

I encourage you to get out your calendar, lay out just how you will work this program with your family – having a plan will help ensure your success. Feel free to use what ever might work best for you and your family. I again encourage you to journal your experiences, when you stumble, go back and read about your successes. Also, write notes to yourself to help you remember things in the future.

**Pondering and prayer.** I mentioned before that the methods I developed for myself were partly derived from things I had learned during years of practicing meditation – both guided and open. What I found worked best for me was to begin with prayer. Let's use this new program as a perfect example. Some may be asking "I haven't prayed in so long, how do I begin?" or "I have never prayed, what now?" I often find prayer is best if ordered, it helps me not to forget anything. I will thank God for the day and for all my blessings – naming them specifically when I can, and then asking God for help or guidance. Sometimes, many times, I am just thanking for my blessings but other times I am in dire need of counsel. Once I have done my asking, I close my prayer and begin to open up for my pondering and meditation. This can be quick – sometimes God answers prayers almost immediately and sometimes it seems slow coming. Often when it is slow coming there are a few things at play. Perhaps I wasn't as specific in my asking as I could have been or God has already given me an answer that I might not like! Other times it is really because there were some lessons that I needed to understand before the answer could come. Whatever the case may be, bless it, always bless it. Murmuring never helped anyone, work to be positive and remember that there will always be a reason to not continue your journey. Darkness always tries to dampen the Light. Shedding Light though will always overcome darkness – you don't have to chase it away, just shine the light.

**Goals.** Do you have any goals from this work? Most likely you picked up this book for a reason, my guess is that you want to strengthen your connection with your family and with the Spirit. Any other goals? Take some time to write them out.

**Get to it!** These first three days may take up to a week, but make sure you get ready.

Day 1: Read through the book, glance at the lessons and take time to pray and ponder just how you can implement it.

Day 2: Ponder what you read, take some notes if necessary and set aside some time to put together your plan.

Day 3: This may take you a few days, or you may be primed and ready to get moving. Put together your plan. Remember that your family might not be as excited as you are to start this, so you may have to work on them slowly. I suggest taking a full seven days for each set of virtues. Perhaps Sunday you get up, read the week's lesson, listen to the audio clip and then let it work on you all day. Monday you might journal about it and ponder it through the day. Monday evening you share it with your partner. Give him a day to ponder it. Then perhaps Wednesday or Thursday you bring it to the children, taking the time to give them a full experience of the lesson. You can draw together as a family, think of ways that you can live the lesson together. Pray together as a family. I always include a treat! Treats help especially when we are working with children. It need not be something grand, perhaps it is simple, always best if it is homemade and even sweeter if you made it together. Participation from your entire family is the key.

Now you are ready to begin. Good luck!

## Chapter 2

### Humility

I used to think that humility was all about feeling ashamed for something I had done. In years passed, I never thought that the act of being humble was a great thing, it always sort of felt like a spanking to me and wasn't something I readily wished for. Humility is so much more than this! The act of being humble is a very spiritual act and should be thought of as one of the best virtues to bring to our families. When I really began to study the roots of humility, I found that the root word was humus, meaning earth. In order for earth to bring forth fruit, the soil must be turned, tilled and carry proper elements. After all, good soil brings good fruit, bad soil, bad fruit. How can this change our understanding of the word humility? If we are boasting and not living a life of virtue then chances are that times of being humbled will seem like a spanking, but if we are living a life dedicated to Spirit then it is much easier for us to cultivate humility in our hearts, leaving space for beautiful fruit to grow. Sometimes we need to do a little pruning and grafting. If something isn't growing right, then maybe the plant would grow better in richer soil. We are all plants, in a garden together. Our family garden probably has some thorns, these can be sharp and painful but they can also be stepping stones and keep us alert.

**Pray & Ponder.** Do you try to live each day cultivating humility in your home and your life? Do you think you have a full understanding of what you feel living a humble life is? If your life were soil, would goodness grow? Or do you have some pruning to do? While you ponder this, take some time to draw your family. If you were really plants in a garden, what would you look like? Are you all different plants? Or do you have common seasons? How are you tied together? This exercise is always fun for me. It changes over time as my children have grown in body and spiritual strength. Right now your plants might feel small, but at the end of 108 days, you may all be mighty oaks!

**Share with Partner.** If you are comfortable, share your drawing with your partner. If not, just talk about the concepts surrounding humility. How does he feel about his own soil? Ask him to think about it for a day and then come together to discuss your family lessons.

**Share with Family.** Humility is often hard to explain to children until you break it down into the plant analogy. We were discussing it with our children one day, ages 4 to 14, when I put it all in plant terms it became very clear to everyone. The younger ones could really use a story, for them, I have written one below.

#### *The Gnome's Soil*

*It was early in March and Floris, a young gnome was ready for his first instructions. He was born into the Garden Gnome Clan. This clan was responsible for the seed babies each spring and made sure all the plants were put to bed in autumn. Floris was cheerful and happy, but one thing about him often lost him friends – he thought he knew everything. Floris had been nicknamed “Expert Gnome” in jest by the older gnomes and*

*his mother often had to remind him that while he was very smart, he still had much to learn. “Knowledge is a gift from our Creator,” his mother used to say. Floris listened but didn’t really understand what she meant so he often went on doing just what he wanted to.*

*In his class, there were many other gnomes from his clan. He thought that none of them could match his smarts so he didn’t even bother to try and make friends. When the teacher announced their first duties, Floris only half listened. The teacher explained that all seeds need a few things to live, without these things, then there will not be health in the plant, something will be missing. He went on to explain that plants need not only sunlight, clean air and water, they also need the proper soil. The teacher had prepared soil just for her class to use, this soil was full of all the things the seed baby would need to grow. She told the student just where to find the soil and the seeds and then sent them on their way to begin this assignment.*

*Floris again thought that he knew everything about gardening so he didn’t listen to the part of about where to get the soil, he just went and picked out his seed and a pot and then went to find his own soil. He thought for sure that his soil would be best. Days went by and all the other student gnomes had plants that were sprouting a beautiful green, opening their baby leaves to greet the sun. Floris’ plant, however, wasn’t doing much. It seemed to really be struggling, the stem didn’t look healthy and green, it was very droopy. His teacher noticed his plant and after she excused the other students, she asked him if he had gotten his soil from the pile where she told him to. “No,” said Floris, I thought I could make my own soil and that it would be better and then I would have a better plant. “Oh dear,” his teacher said “let me help you.” She explained to Floris that the soil she prepared was full of all the vitamins a seed baby needed to grow, she told him that all things need a proper place to grow. She asked him how his heart felt. “Sad” said Floris “I should have listened to you, I thought I knew better.” The teacher gave Floris a big hug and she kissed him on the top of his gnome head and said “Floris, what you are feeling right now is how your plant has been feeling. Lets work together and transplant your heart into a better soil along with your plant. If you remember to always listen with your heart open to learning then you will always be able to grow and be strong, just like your seed baby. If you think there is nothing for you to learn, then your heart will always feel sad when you have to learn something the hard way.”*

*Together, Floris and his teacher replanted his seed baby and soon it had pretty baby leaves reaching to the sun too. It didn’t take long before his nickname changed. His friends and his family began to call him “Hummus Floris” and as he grew, he became a wonderful and knowledgeable garden gnome.*

After your story, why don’t you have your family each draw themselves as a plant. It is always fun to see what my children come up with and again just as my drawings for them change, their drawings change as they grow and learn too.

How can you as a family work to be more humble? Are there beliefs that keep you from being open to listening to others? Often service helps us be humble. Is there a neighbor

or friend that could use help in their garden or a meal brought to them? As a family come up with something simple that can open you up even more to the gift of humility.

## Chapter 3 Generosity, Charity & Selflessness

If you want to truly understand the concepts of charity, watch a child. Most children not touched too much by the modern world, will gladly give of their time and talents. I have recently watched my daughter, ten years old, model this for our family. We have several elderly neighbors and she delights in helping them – expecting nothing in return. Last week, my mother-in-law was going to help one neighbor clean her house and my daughter begged to go and help. Upon arriving home, she was beaming. She had given of herself, her time and her talents and knew that her Creator was pleased. She never thought of gaining anything in return. What I love about watching children act fully in charity is that the lasting affects on their attitudes. She was walking on a cloud all the next day and wanted to do more and more for this dear woman. Now, each week when we bake bread, she takes a loaf to Mrs. Moon and a loaf to Grandma, singing as she delivers it. There is no prideful or boasting tone, it is pure selflessness and charity.

Where do we lose this? Some children don't regularly have it fostered, but it lives within them. Most tiny children have the desire to help, but it does really come from modeling it – this act of imitation that begins with us has long reaching affects on our children. In our world of “if you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours” there isn't often a place for charity or genuine generosity. Many times when we give, we are looking for what we'll receive in return.

In researching charity, I found something very interesting. In the Bible, 1 Corinthians Chapter 13 discusses charity – or it used to. The original King James Version holds the true scripture – many others have changed the word to “love.” Is love appropriate? Perhaps, but in this world where love doesn't mean much, the original text of “charity” seems much more appropriate.

The passage from the King James Version reads:

*Verse 4 ~ “Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up”*

The chapter goes on to say that without charity there is nothing – no knowledge, no prophecy, nothing stands without charity. And of the three virtues, faith, hope and charity, charity is the greatest of them all.

Now you might say, “but I give to charity!” The act of giving to an organization is indeed a modern form of charity, but how do we keep this virtue alive and bring it to our children, as writing a check is not an act of charity in itself?

I love what the Dalai Llama says about generosity – a form of charity:

“If you become proud and arrogant when giving, or if you practice generosity with the idea of a reward, then all the merit of the generosity is lost. Instead...pray that the positive karmic result of their generosity will ripen in others rather than in themselves. If we forget ourselves in order to benefit others, if we are prepared to give our own lives to save the lives of others, and if we are giving them whatever is necessary for their welfare, then we shall gain happiness and all perfection.”

At times we may have trouble calling upon the feelings we need for charity. The Dalai Llama has something to say about this too:

“Visualize every being as your own beloved mother, or another person for whom you have the utmost affection, someone who, for you embodies great kindness. Call up the feelings of affection that arise with regard to that person and then extend those feelings to every other being. Perceive that each being has been equally kind and loving to you.”

This is a challenge in today’s world! In a time of road rage and angry people everywhere, it can be hard to practice charity for everyone. It can be doubly hard to perceive them as being the same way back to you. Try. When I walk into a grocery store and am faced with an angry or apathetic employee, I try hard to sympathize with what they might be feeling. I had an incident just recently where I dutifully took my reusable grocery sacks into the store and right up to the cashier. She gave me an angry look. She was probably in her late 50’s. I began thinking to myself “what could she be so angry about?” It hit me – most women in their late 50’s probably never envisioned themselves as grocery clerks. This was likely someone’s grandmother and she was working because she had to and not because she wanted to. I put on a happy face and said “I know those grocery sacks can be such a bother for those who have to fill them. I am so sorry to add to your burdens today.” Immediately she lightened up. Her entire countenance changed and she continued to pack our groceries with joy. Along came a young man, another store employee and he gladly helped her. My husband and I thanked them both and left. Had I just been angry with her then that exchange may have been much more uncomfortable.

So who needs charity? Everyone. Does that mean you give everyone all you have and leave nothing for yourself? Of course not. It means that you greet each situation with humility and right standpoint. I love what Dr. Steiner has to say about this:

“In ordering your life, live in harmony with nature and spirit. Do not get buried in the external knickknacks of life. Avoid all that brings restlessness and haste to your life. Be neither impetuous nor lazy. Consider life as a means of inner work and development and act accordingly.”

When you have a neighbor in need, do you murmur about helping them? Or do it with joy? Of course you have needs, and little children, you are busy... all these things you tell yourself. Are you really *that* busy? Bring your children along. I believe that even if you can give nothing from your wallet, you can give millions from your heart. These are the

millions that matter. Generosity, charity and living selflessly have their rewards and not just in heaven! I often find that if I can give without ANY expectation of receiving, then I am always cared for. Abundance doesn't have to mean money, it is a state of mind. You can be abundant in spirit and not have a dime to your name. Things often happen to us in the most peculiar of ways. My husband and I are always amazed at how we are taken care of. We may not have what others would consider the "finer things" in life – but we have a loving, caring, striving family and that to me is better than rubies. There is a favorite verse of mine, one that I try to read at least once per week – Christian or not, you should try to read it. It is from Proverbs, chapter 31, beginning at verse 10. The chapter is discussing a virtuous woman. Newer Bible translations have changed this to noble woman, but again, I prefer the original. My favorite part is verse 28:

"Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband *also*, and he praiseth her."

Why do I love this? Not because I want praise, but because my goal for my family is that my children will feel blessed by my leading them and my husband will appreciate my striving too. The riches of the world are nothing without the charity that begins at home.

**Pray & Ponder.** Do you practice charity? Can you give without murmuring and without expecting something in return? When was your last act of charity? Parenting is often in this category! Do you mother with joy? Or with frustration? Do your children pull deeply from their hearts and act charitably? Now remember – charity among siblings is rare, or so it would seem. If you foster charity then fighting and bickering among older children isn't so bad, the more they feel the depth of charity at home the more they will model it for others.

**Share with Partner.** Discuss true generosity and charity with your partner. Is your parenting charitable together? Are you on the same page? Do you give to them without expecting them to give back? Many parents will say that they have very unthankful and selfish children – remember that gratitude must be modeled as well. That will be covered in a later lesson. Also remember that young children especially do not have the capacity to understand gratitude the same way we do. Modeling selflessness will show them in a very pedagogical way how to have charity and in return they will also better understand the role of gratitude.

**Share with family.** Remember that young children, especially those younger than age seven, will follow your lead. If you act with a humble heart and a contrite spirit, not seeking to control situations or people, then your children will see this striving and work to imitate. Children are smart! Those early adolescents will see right through you if you are not working from a pure place. Older children can be "reminded" of charity, for it lives deeply at their core, even if they don't remember it. You can reawaken this in them. Work together and discuss the feelings that they have when working for a neighbor or friend in need. Below you'll find a story to help your younger children.

## *Scratch My Beard*

*Happy was a forest gnome, he lived deep in the forest with his clan and rarely made contact with humans or even other gnomes. One would think with a name like Happy that he would be cheerful and kind – he wasn't. In fact, those who knew him often called him "Unhappy" but Happy didn't care. He only did something if he got something in return. He loved strawberries and if someone had none to give him as pay then he would not help. He was unmarried, even though most gnomes his age already had a wife and children, he lived alone in a stump of a tree, and he often complained that no one ever helped him.*

*One day, Happy was out for a walk, hunting for wild strawberries. Suddenly he heard a voice "Help! Help!" Happy looked all around and could find no one. He heard the plea again "Help! Help! I am up here." Happy looked up and there he found a garden gnome caught in a snare. The snare was likely left by a human to catch animals, they were trouble because they often caught gnomes instead.*

*"Do you have any strawberries?" Happy asked.*

*"No, I don't. I am sorry. I am a garden gnome and all the garden berries have already been collected for the season. Can you help me get down? I would really appreciate it."*

*"Do you have anything to pay me with?" asked Happy.*

*"No I don't. I am sorry. Won't you help a fellow gnome?"*

*"I will not. I only work for pay and if you had been working harder then you would not have gotten yourself into the situation you are in. You will have to find someone else, I do not practice charity!" Happy yelled and walked on.*

*The nerve of that garden gnome, Happy thought. Just what kind of world would this be if we all helped each other with out expecting anything in return? How would we get paid? How would I find strawberries? Ridiculous!*

*As Happy walked on, he finally found a patch of strawberries, hidden under a tree. He sat and began to eat them. Somehow they just didn't taste as sweet as he remembered they should. He was still angry about the garden gnome. After a few moments, he got up and began the short walk home, continuing to grumble about the gnome in the snare. Happy was so caught up in his anger that he neglected to see that he was about to step on a snare. Before he could do anything about it, he was swept upside down, high up in a pine tree. "Now this is a fine fix." He thought to himself. Happy was stuck in the tree for hours and hours. Other gnomes came by and only taunted him. "That is just what Happy deserves!"*

*Later in the day, he caught a glimpse of a familiar face. It was the gnome he left high in the other tree without helping him. Happy didn't dare call out to the gnome, surely he wouldn't help him. Oddly, Robin Red Breast was flying by and saw Happy in the tree, he swooped down and signaled the garden gnome who immediately climbed the tree, took out his pocket knife and set Happy free.*

*"My name is Patches," said the garden gnome. "I was in the forest today looking for some wild mint as our garden is all out and my poor wife has a terrible stomach ache. I found the mint and I am on my way home."*

*"Why did you stop and cut me down? I didn't help you when you were stuck," said Happy.*

*"Well, right after you ran on, a very nice forest gnome came along and cut me out of the tree, pointed me in the direction of the wild mint and also showed me where I could find the sweetest wild strawberries in the forest. I was so touched by his kindness, that I wanted to help the next being I saw, human, gnome or animal. You were the next being I saw," answered Patches.*

*"Do you want payment?" asked Happy.*

*"No, of course not, but I do remember you telling me just how much you love strawberries, what if I show you the berries the other gnome showed me, then you'll never have to hunt for them again. Come, I will take you there."*

*Happy was puzzled by the friendliness of Patches. A gnome from another clan even! Happy began to think about just how thankful he was that he had been saved from the tree, he could have been there for days. He silently vowed to be more kind, more humble and to work for others when ever he could, payment or not.*

*The two gnomes arrived at the strawberry patch. Happy thanked Patches as he ran back through the forest to take the mint to his ill wife. Happy ate some strawberries, amazed at just how sweet they were. His heart softened and his face went from frowning to a sweet, berry stained smile. He gathered just enough strawberries for his dinner and began to walk home. He greeted every gnome he saw with a kind smile and a cheerful heart. When he was almost home, he heard the cry of a baby deer. He quickly searched for it. Upon finding it, he realized it had gotten caught in a hunter's trap and the mother was no where to be found. He freed the deer, took out his medicine pouch (all gnomes carry one) and he began to dress the wound with herbs and then said a prayer over it. He put the baby deer over his shoulders and began to walk through the forest to find its mother. Soon he spotted a doe. She looked up and was excited to see her little fawn, then she realized who was carrying it – Happy, the unhappy gnome. She thanked him and offered him a payment (knowing that this was Happy, she worried that he would not otherwise return her fawn.) Happy said, "no payment, that was the unhappy Happy. The new Happy only works for the feelings in his heart. I am working on always doing the right thing." Happy gave the mother deer a big smile and he went on his way. His heart felt*

*so full that he made sure to stop and help every other creature he could through the forest as he journeyed home. Soon other gnomes began to realize that Happy was a good name for him and stopped taunting him – they began calling him Helpful Happy. The forest was full and open with the spirit of charity.*

What can you do right now? Make a list together of people in your neighborhood that could use help. What? You don't know your neighbors?! Shame on you. Go make some cookies or muffins and learn who your neighbors are today. Apologize deeply from your heart for being too busy to get to know them. If you have big kids then get them in the spirit by having them offer to do yard work or shoveling snow. If your children are small, bake for them. Many elderly do not eat well, they are often too frail to cook regularly for themselves as it wears them out. Perhaps you could begin to cook extra at just one meal each week so you can bless someone. We often make extra bread or muffins just to bless such people. The children delight in delivering it. Also remind your children that charity begins at home. How can they model charity for each other?

## Chapter 4 Love, Devotion & Faith

Today's fast paced world often has us skimming these three virtues. They really go together, I find that without a true understanding of love, we can't properly devote ourselves to our family or God, and in turn without that devotion, we can't walk a path of faith. Now when I say faith, I don't mean it in the "oh I have faith" sense. We have to realize that faith is a word of action, it isn't something you hold in your pocket to covet, it is something you DO.

Let's start at the beginning with love. Do you have a good understanding of love? Culturally, love is often seen as something trite, something silly – who needs love? The physical aspects of life are often praised higher than those we carry in our hearts. We fall in and out of love on a whim and walk through life, many of us, not really understanding what love is. Love is a gift from God.

One of my favorite poets, Kahlil Gibran said it best in his book *The Prophet*:

“When love beckons to you, follow him,  
Though his ways are hard and steep.  
And when his wings enfold you yield to him,  
Though the sword hidden among his pinions may wound you.  
And when he speaks to you believe him,  
Though his voice may shatter your dreams  
As the north wind lays waste the garden.

For even as love crowns you so shall he crucify you. Even as he is for your growth so is he for your pruning.  
Even as he ascends to your height and caresses your tenderest branches that quiver in the sun,  
So shall he descend to your roots and shake them in their clinging to the earth.  
Like sheaves of corn he gathers you into himself.  
He threshes you to make you naked.  
He sifts you to free you from your husks.  
He grinds you to whiteness.  
He kneads you until you are pliant;  
And then he assigns you to his sacred fire, that you may become sacred bread for God's sacred feast.

All these things shall love do unto you that you may know the secrets of your heart, and in that knowledge become a fragment of Life's heart.

But if in your fear you would seek only love's peace and love's pleasure,  
Then it is better for you that you cover your nakedness and pass out of love's threshing-floor, into the seasonless world where you shall laugh, but not all of your laughter, and weep, but not all of your tears."

Many of us did not have proper role models when it came to love, many of our parents were not healthy themselves, not healthy enough to really help us to understand what love is. As a teen I searched and searched... I looked for it in all the wrong places, it went hand in hand with my search for God. As I became a mother, I slowly gained more and more insight into love, but being in a very unhealthy relationship with my first husband gave me conflict. Love should be unconditional. In our day, it certainly is not. We are constantly faced with ultimatums and arguments that keep us from loving. As we practice charity and generosity, we can begin to see the threads of love coming through. It is said that charity can be defined as the pure love of Christ. In 1 John, Chapter 4, verse 16 it says "God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God." Those are pretty powerful words. How do we know though if we truly have love? If we really know it.

Dr. Steiner, discusses love with egoism. He suggests that if our love has ego intertwined in it then it isn't true love. True love comes from a place with no ego, from a healthy place of desiring to serve others with no expectation of return (charity.) He also says that love is the creative force in the world. He asserts that magnanimity, the virtue of being of great mind and heart, if practiced becomes love. One who carries the virtue of magnanimity doesn't fall prey to pettiness and it can lead to a greatness of soul. Aristotle called it the crowing virtue.

In our world of frustration and constant war, in our homes and across the seas, it can be so hard to live each day out of love, but just as Gibran suggests – by allowing ourselves to taste the sweet, we also have to taste the bitter. These bitter times sharpen us. It is our task to remove our ego out of the times of bitterness and remember that love, given freely to ourselves is also a gift. To love when it is hard is a much bigger test of our will forces than to love when it is easy.

Once you have a good handle on love, then you can begin to easily flow over into devotion. What does devotion mean? Again, like love, it can be slippery. If we have been raised in a home where love wasn't authentic, then it is quite possible that we may not understand devotion, we may have it confused with codependence. Codependence is all about ego and drama, the need to falsely please the other person so they will like you – or worse, love you. That is not healthy love. When I think of devotion, the words *devotee* and *disciple* come to mind as they are at the center of understanding what devotion really is. These words easily evoke swirling thoughts of organized religion – someplace you may not want to even think about! Stick with me. Devotion first must come as an act of love. It is the first step in coupling off for marriage. You are devoted to each other, disciples even of each others words and deeds – loving each other and believing that each of you can do anything as long as the other is by your side. You each see the other's authentic self and even though you don't have all the same interests, you

are devoted to seeing the greater good in each other, always. As this grows and a family forms, this devotion turns to each member, believing that no matter what happens, someone you love will always “have your back” – no matter what. Can you say this about your immediate family? Would your partner stand behind you in all things? Are you on the same page? Now of course this doesn’t mean you always have to agree, but in thought, word and deed, would your partner stand behind you? Are you hesitating to answer? What about you, would you stand behind your partner no matter what? In good times and bad? If you hesitate, then you might want to really think about your level of devotion. The more I have been watching families and understanding dynamics of children being raised and couples parenting together, I have found that nine times out of ten, any discord with the children comes down to Mom and Dad. When parents are united in devotion to each other and their family then there is strength and with that comes a level of connection that is unsurpassed. I adore this quote by Gordon B. Hinckley, “The health of any society, the happiness of its people, their prosperity and peace, all find their roots in the strength and stability of the family.”

In my first marriage, where my skewed sense of love and devotion played center stage, my former husband and I could never reconcile our selves to being on the same page – most of the time we were not even in the same library! Our level of love and devotion to each other was fraught with ego, not allowing us to really understand that love and devotion take work. Our relationship was more like siblings, than as a married couple. As I began to really work on my connection to God, to fully and openly understand love, devote myself to a path of God first, family second and all else third, then I began to understand the magnificent gift that devotion is. When we hold love and devotion in a healthy place, then it is easy to pull faith in.

Chapter 11 in Hebrews gives many accounts of faith in action. As I said before, faith seems to have gone from a verb to a noun. A noun that we keep tucked away in our pocket and almost covet it – we dare not use it, for if we did what would others think of us? The opposite is sometimes true as well – some people confuse faith with an idea that God will do everything for them. “Oh if I just rely on God then I can sit here and continue the life I am living, for God’s mercy will take care of me, I have faith.” This tosses aside the notion that faith without work is not faith at all. Faith comes from great striving, in good times and bad. It comes from being devoted to a path that you know with all your being is the right path for you and trusting that the road is there, even if you can’t see it.

In searching for ways to really describe the actions of faith, I found Mr. Hinckley to again be profound:

“I refer not to some ethereal concept but to a practical, pragmatic, working faith – the kind of faith that moves us to get on our knees and plead with the Lord for guidance, and then, having a measure of divine confidence, get on our feet and go to work to help bring the desired results to pass. Such faith is an asset beyond compare. Such faith is, when all is said and done, our only genuine and lasting hope. Faith is so much more than a theological platitude, though many regard it as such. It is a fact of life. Faith can become

the very wellspring of purposeful living. There is no more compelling motivation to worthwhile endeavor than the knowledge that we are children of God, that God expects us to do something with our lives, and that He will give us help when help is sought.”

**Pray & Ponder.** Spend some time pondering this lesson, find the thread that binds, love, devotion and faith. How does it work in your life? Are your relationships filled with healthy, egoless love, partnered with a strong sense of devotion and sealed with faith? Do you have a passive acceptance of God? Of your place here? Working to connect through actively, anxiously seeking, will help you to gain a testimony, that peace that can only begin by knowing love. From this place you can really begin to use faith, believing that a way is always made for you.

I have this simple saying taped to the front of a cabinet in my kitchen:

“I believe I am always divinely guided. I believe I will always take the right road. I believe God will always make a way, even when there appears to be no way.”

The quote is from Commander William Robert Anderson, he manned the submarine *Nautilus* under the North Pole from the Pacific to the Atlantic. I often find myself in places where it seems my faith must become extreme in order to make it through. I think about the faith Commander Anderson must have worked with to get him through some very frustrating times. Faith allows me to do what others only talk about, it gives me wings, it forces me to listen to the still small voice and hear the actions I must do to stay on the right path. Can you hear the voice calling you? Be still and know.

**Share with Partner.** Now this one can be a bit tricky! First discuss what the three virtues mean to you. If neither of you came from an emotionally healthy home, then this is a perfect time to really dig into making your marriage emotionally healthy. If it isn't right now, ask your partner to commit to you as you commit to him to work hard on a healthier connection to each other. Vow to banish codependent and unhealthy forms of communication and to be only your authentic self. You may not feel comfortable with this level of intimacy. It may take time. I find it interesting how mechanical sex can be and talking about feelings is frightening. I will guarantee you something – find authentic love and devotion in your relationship and your sex life will fulfill you on a level you never thought possible. You will both find yourselves in new territory, acting like young lovers, only this time you will truly understand the Divine nature of completely fulfilling sex. Something very magical happens when ego is taken out of the couples love relationship, you begin to desire connection for very different reasons than the physical ones in your past. Gone will be any arguments centering around frequency – gone will be any nagging about needs – the desire to connect will be there and the things that need to happen in order for it to all take place will be equally shared. It will be true, selfless lovemaking and love giving.

**Share with Family.** If your children are very young, then you have the opportunity to really help them understand how to care for each other, especially as you are walking this path. If your children are older than about age nine, then you will likely have more

challenges. Remember, young children will easily mold to your modeling so live devotion and they will understand devotion. Let them see you pray. Pray with them. Pray as a family – at more than just meal times. If this is new then it will feel very awkward at first, but once you and your partner begin to feel more and more comfortable with it together then the easier it will be to bring it to your children. With your older children, you will likely have to take it slower. Listen to their lives, talk to them. In school they often are faced with emotionally unhealthy adults as teachers, listening to the cues they give you will help you to understand if they are hurting. This is being devoted to your children – giving them space to grow, but listening to them for things that are important. It is important for them to see you and your partner modeling these virtues and it is also a good thing for them to see you actually openly practicing, faith. Discussing faith. Many people see acts of faith and the fruit that can come as mere coincidence, let them call it what they would like – you know it is faith. Teach your children to pray, reminding them to ask in faith and then listen for that still, small voice, to study it out in their hearts and then to act. The acting is just as important as the asking and the listening. The acting takes faith from being a noun to being a verb.

#### *Faith and Thomas, Devoted Gnomes?*

*Faith was a sweet gnome, she was raised by wonderful parents who taught her love and devotion. She prayed each day and served her family, as they all served one another in love. She spread happiness to all the other gnomes in her clan. Lately, her prayers were often for Thomas, a gnome working in the King's treasury. Thomas lost his parents when he was young and he didn't trust many people, but he was head over heels in love with Faith, or was he? Did he understand love? To him, her praying was a waste of time, he only put up with it because she was so wonderful to be around. Faith sensed that his love for her wasn't what it should be so each morning and evening she prayed to the Creator for help.*

*"Dear God," she prayed, "Help Thomas to see what real love is, help him to understand me if we are to be together."*

*Days of praying turned into weeks and because Faith had such a strong family that taught her unconditional love, she was patient. She knew what she wanted in a marriage, she wanted Thomas to love her the same way and she was willing to pray and wait. She believed in him. Even though he had a hard life, he was honest and that was a start.*

*One day, Thomas was accused of stealing from the Gnome King's treasury. All the evidence pointed toward him, he was in the right place, the right time, the precious jewels came up missing. Thomas was blamed. Faith was shocked. She immediately went to pray, asking in faith to know what to do. God told her not to lose faith in Thomas and that in the end all would be ok. He also told Faith that things were not as they seemed and that she should ponder what the Gnomeland Security Force may have missed. She went to see Thomas, the guards let her in and Thomas was ashamed, while he was innocent, he could not understand why Faith believed and no one else did.*

*“Why did you come?” Thomas asked.*

*“Because I love you and God told me that you are innocent. I have faith in His answers and faith in you,” Faith replied. “Thomas, will you pray with me?” she asked.*

*Thomas didn’t know what to do, he didn’t believe in prayer, he wasn’t even sure he believed in the Creator, but he knew that Faith did and that something made her love him even though he convinced himself that he was unlovable.*

*“Okay,” he agreed, “but I don’t know how, will you show me?”*

*Both gnomes got on their knees, on the floor of the dirty jail cell and Faith began:*

*“Dear God, we come to you in faith. Please help Gnomeland Security find that Thomas is being honest. If we can help, please make it known to us how.”*

*As they both stood up, immediately Thomas had an idea. “What if George made a mistake?” George worked in the treasury too and he was in charge of writing down the numbers during the count. “George was sick yesterday when he made the count, I wonder if he put down the wrong numbers?”*

*Faith jumped to her feet and called the guards. She kissed Thomas on the cheek and ran from the jail as fast as she could to George’s cave. George was indeed sick and now in bed.*

*“George,” Faith said, “did you know that Thomas is in jail? Gnomeland Security thinks he stole from the treasury.”*

*“Oh Faith,” George said, “What if I made a mistake? Gnomeland Security came by yesterday and asked me but I was so sick with fever, maybe I wrote down the wrong numbers? I am worried that I may be to blame. Perhaps there were only 15 rubies and not 25.”*

*Faith ran to get an officer, he listened to George. Now the evidence wasn’t so good, it could have just been a mistake. They had to let Thomas go. The Gnome King came to visit George and gave him a blessing to be healed. Then he visited Thomas.*

*“Thomas,” the King began, “I hope you will forgive us and accept our apologies. We hope you will continue to work in the treasury.”*

*Thomas couldn’t believe it! He learned in just one day the true nature of devotion and of faith. He would doubt no more. He and Faith began praying together each day and soon they were married.*

Write a family affirmation, something that really describes what you want your family to be. Have a family meeting and get everyone involved. An example of the Nielsen

affirmation is below, you can use it as a template, or create your own. Your affirmation might change as your children and your challenges wax and wane. Don't be afraid to re-evaluate it from time to time. We like to say our affirmation together as a family when we start our day together. We say our affirmation and then one family member leads us all in prayer. This really helps cement us through our day. It offers strength to my husband and I as we navigate our duties and it helps our children wear a bit of armor each day knowing that they have a family that really loves them, believes in them and has their back.

The Nielsen Family is  
Always honest  
We count our blessings  
We bear each other's burdens  
We forgive and forget  
We are kind and tender hearted  
We comfort one another  
We keep our promises  
We support one another  
We are true to each other  
We look after each other  
And we treat each other  
Like we treat our friends  
But most important  
The Nielsens  
LOVE ONE ANOTHER  
Deeply from the heart

## Chapter 5 Gratitude & Contentment

People often ask me how it is that I can have so much gratitude when some of the things our family has experienced over the last few years would have tried anyone's faith. I am not going to lie and say that my faith wasn't tested or that there were not times when I cried out worrying that God had forgotten me, but what I will say is that each time I began to lose hope I was reminded to count my blessings. During this time, one hymn in particular became a favorite of mine, *Count Your Blessings* by Johnson Oatman, Jr.

When upon life's billows you are tempest-tossed,  
When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost,  
Count your many blessings, name them one by one,  
And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.

It is so easy in today's world to get caught up in the drama that is sometimes our life or one that we have created in our minds, we forget to stop and be thankful for all the wonderful things we have. Those blessings seem so small until we begin to count them, as they mount we can see how blessed we are. The blessings of a home, a roof over our heads, always gives me pause to say a prayer for all that are homeless. The gift of food for my family, even when times are tight and we are eating the same thing for the third time that week, reminds me of those who go without. A car to drive, though it may not be fancy, it carries us safely where we need to be. All of these seemingly mundane things are blessings.

I meet people all the time that just don't understand how cultivating gratitude will really make a difference in their lives. I think of myself as a parent and how good it feels when I know that one of my children is genuinely thankful for something they have received and then in return are completely content with life. This rejoicing that I have as a parent fills my heart, so how must God feel when we are thankful for the blessings of life? Gratitude reminds us that we can not walk this path alone.

“Gratitude is the beginning of civility, of decency and goodness, of a recognition that we cannot afford to be arrogant. We should walk with the knowledge that we will need help every step of the way.” This quote by Mr. Hinckley reminds me that gratitude is again another egoless act. If we were not raised with an attitude of gratitude, then cultivating it within ourselves might feel a bit like lying at first. If you are not sure yet what you think of God, then you might be wondering just who to give thanks to. Start at the beginning, list all the things you can think of in one minute that you are grateful for. Then look at your list. Gratitude, while an egoless virtue, is dependent on things that happen directly to us, so somewhere in there our ego gets involved, even if just a bit. It pulls back when we live in contentment. Realizing our blessings keeps us from having a hardened heart and a dark spirit. I have in anger heard someone say, “what do I have to be thankful for? Nothing!” Well, let's start with life. Breathing is a good thing, living is a good thing, seeing and hearing are both good things. The list can grow from there. Nothing pops me out of a bad mood faster than a quick little check list of what blesses me.

I also believe heavily in the laws of attraction. Movies and books like *The Secret* while they can seem a bit superficial, can be a great primer for understanding just how things can work. I can't attract a new car while cursing the one I have. I must allow it to come and by constantly thinking about the hatred I have for the current one, the new one will just not appear or will always seem out of my grasp. As a family we have experience in this! Our dear family van of 13 years was really beginning to fail us. It seemed to be in the shop for more and more repairs, leaving us without a vehicle and also with a big repair bill. I loved the van, carted all of our children around in it, three out of four children came home from the hospital at birth in it – it was well loved, but in need of retirement or at the very least, respite. We were fortunate to rent a van for a short weekend trip. It was the van we wanted, we all fell in love with the extra space, the seating arrangements – every bit of it. When we returned it to the rental agency, we found out that it was for sale. Try as we might, we just couldn't find a way to purchase the van, it was far out of our budget. We put it to prayer, we knew what we needed, what we wanted and in the meantime we just continued to love our older van. We worked on keeping it cleaner, thanking God for the blessing of a car we could all fit in and reminding each other of all the great times the van had been with us as a family. A few weeks passed and it happened that we came out on top in a settlement we had been working through. The other party didn't have the money to pay us, but what they did have was good credit, so they purchased a van for us in exchange for forgiving the settlement. While it wasn't the exact van we had been looking at before, it was beautiful and even the color we had been wishing for. The situation worked for both parties, the other party could pay the debt off over time and we had what we needed – a newer car. The older van still sits in our driveway and gets a short trip now and then, but continues to rest while waiting for our oldest son to be ready to drive. I know that had we only focused on how upset we were that our old car was failing, then we would not have been able to open up to the possibilities of getting a new one – we had to let go of just how it would come to us and allow it. In essence, we thanked it into being.

Gratitude is a sign of maturity so if we did not have it modeled as children and we did not find it naturally as adolescents then we may be stuck in the mindset that the world owes us something. Without this maturing, we can not step into a place of true insight. We become stuck. I can see this in many of the youth today. Mom and Dad are too busy with their own lives to really spend time with them, so they are turning to peers, television or video games to fill their needs for companionship and mentoring. If we do not give them what they need in this stage of development, they will look for it where they can find it and those may not be the healthiest ways.

Recently, my husband and I were helping a 19-year young lady to move into her first apartment. We offered up our van to assist in the move. As he and I lugged boxes and dressers up the stairs to her apartment, she stood and watched us. She didn't offer to help and didn't say thank you. While it really upset me, not because my ego needed to be thanked, but because she had so little humility or gratitude for what we were all doing for her, the remarks from my own children were the surprise. "Wow Mom, I can't believe she just stood there and didn't help move her own things." In her mind, she believed we owed it to her, she was upset and not fully desiring to leave the nest. Her lack of

gratitude surfaced in her own ugly egotism. She is young and while I know she hasn't always been this way, recently we have watched as she occupied herself more with her peers and less with her family, these peers have the same attitudes and traits that she seems so proud of. My deepest dream for her is that she'll realize that in life you cannot expect to do it all alone and that gratitude will gain you many more friends than attitude will.

How do we work with our children to give them a better sense of gratitude? Dr. Steiner says that it begins at birth.

“Generally speaking, people are far too unaware of what, in this context, I would like to term gratitude or thankfulness...in order to play a proper role in the human soul, [it] must grow with the child...gratitude will develop very spontaneously during this first period of life, as long as the child is treated properly. All that flows, with devotion and love, from a child's inner being toward whatever comes from the periphery through the parents or other educators – and everything expressed outwardly in the child's imitation – will be permeated with a natural mood of gratitude. We only have to act in ways that are worthy of the child's gratitude and it will flow toward us, especially during the first period of life. One should realize that, just as one has to dig the roots of a plant into the soil in order to receive its blossom later, so one has to plant gratitude into the soul of the child, because it is the root of the love of God. The love of God will develop out of universal gratitude, as the blossom develops from the root.”

**Pray & Ponder.** When was the last time you sat down and really pondered all you are thankful for? If it has been a while, take today and start a list, this is just for you. See what you come up with. Now also, spend some time really focusing on what you hear from your children. Do they model your words? Are you being thankful for your blessings in a manner that they can hear? Perhaps spend some time at mealtime and center your conversation around gratitude. I love to hear what children come up with, it can be a really fun activity and can really let us into the hearts of our family. One of my sons easily looks toward the negative in all things, he'll spread bile if allowed, so we tend to head things off quickly and once he gets in the mode of counting his blessings, then he begins to turn his scowl into a smile.

If gratitude has been hard for you, stand back and ask yourself why. Do you believe the world owes you something? Or do you believe that you are undeserving of blessings? We are all worthy of blessings and showing gratitude is one of the best ways we can ensure them.

**Share with Partner.** Often Erik and I will lay in bed together at night and bask in all we have been blessed with. We may not have fancy cars or a big house, but we have each other and a wonderful family with our needs met. It is from this gratitude that we can really begin to dream about bigger things. Want a bigger house? Dream and ponder together how you can love the one you have while you work at finding a way to have the home you want. Sometimes it is just as simple as opening up to allowing it to come to you. The story of our new van is only one such story in our family. We have attracted

homes and vacations this way as well, it only took changing our mindset and being fully in a state of constant gratitude.

Enjoy your dreaming session together. Once you give breath to your dreams and begin to be open to work that can be done to bring your dream forth, then it becomes a goal. There are few things more satisfying than working on a common dream with your partner and watching it come into being. This is gratitude at work. Being thankful for each other is a large part of it all. Take the time to write a love letter to your partner about how much you love and appreciate them. Ask if they will do the same. If you are working to repair your relationship, this is a wonderful step. Remember that men and women communicate differently so do not expect him to give you a flowery love letter, his is likely to be peppered with the practicalities of life. Most men are exceedingly practical and mentioning how well you keep the house or how wonderful you are with the children is a very high compliment to them. Be sure you mention some of these practicalities too, men by nature love to solve problems. One of the things I adore about my husband is that he will tackle appliance repairs that many men would just call a repair man for. He enjoys learning a new skill while taking care of his family and helping us watch our pennies.

**Share with Family.** Now that you and your partner are working together on gratitude, take it to your family. As I mentioned above, you can make it the topic of a meal discussion or if you are beginning to pray together as a family, you can be sure to include gratitude for your blessings as part of your family prayer. Do not gloss over any thankfulness, no matter how small. I have listened to prayers of thanksgiving about a new toy, a new baby, bugs on trees and some very humble prayers thanking God for a warm house when they knew they had friends that were not so lucky. I have often been humbled by the sweetness of a child's prayer. We should get in the habit of listening to each one, they tell us so much.

Now what do you do when you realize that perhaps you haven't cultivated gratitude and now your children may be running amuck? Sometimes we must work with tough love. If we are the culprit then we must immediately decide we are willing to work for change. As we strive to be present in our daily lives, we can see opportunities for our own gratitude and then model it. We can begin to hold back on some of the finer things for our older children as they too learn to become thankful for what they have. We can remind them of families that go without. A great object lesson for children over 9 years old would be to spend the day as a family in service of others. As we have discussed before in our chapter on charity, losing yourself in the service of others is a great antidote for the greedy spirit. Children under 9 years tend to learn wonderfully through stories and also through our modeling.

## *Green with Envy*

*Henry was a treasury gnome in the king's counting house. He loved counting the money and jewels. When he went home each night, he made sure that his own money was counted and always moaned, "this isn't enough, I need more." When Henry ate, it was never enough, often he would make himself ill because he always wanted more. It never occurred to Henry that he should share – it would take away from him and that was just not right, he needed it all... all the food, all the money, all the stuff he could get into his tiny cave deep in the ground. Other gnomes were afraid of Henry, they were always worried he would take things away from them, all the gnomes except one. Helen. Helen was a sweet gnome, she was giving and loving and caring. When she saw Henry coming, she didn't step out of the way, she only offered him a bit of sunshine, sometimes she just gave him a smile (even though he returned it with a frown) and when he demanded her yummy popcorn, she gave it to him with joy, she knew she could make more.*

*Helen always counted her blessings. She woke up each day with a prayer on her lips and a spring in her step. She loved to count her blessings and found that when she was happy and thankful that she was always blessed with all she needed and all she wanted. Helen worked to spread her happiness wherever she went, other gnomes loved her and she had many friends. She was always worried about one gnome, a greedy little gnome named Henry. She said hello and smiled at him often and shared with him each time they met, but he was so angry all the time.*

*One night, she prayed about Henry, she asked God to help her understand him and to know what to do. When Helen woke the next morning, she knew just what her mission was and she set out to do it. She made a big batch of her best popcorn and went looking for Henry. It wasn't long before she saw him, dressed in green and angry as a hornet.*

*Henry saw Helen and her popcorn and he stopped "I want that popcorn right now!" he demanded.*

*"I will give you my popcorn," Helen said, "but first, I want to talk to you."*

*"What do you want?" Henry shouted.*

*"Why are you always so angry Henry? I see you almost everyday and you never seem to be happy," Helen questioned.*

*"What is there to be happy about? I want more and more and can't seem to get it." said Henry, now his anger turned to impatience.*

*"Why do you need more? Have you ever thought about being happy with what you have?" asked Helen. "I might live in a tiny cave and I don't have all the riches you do, but I am happy."*

*“How can you be so happy if you are not rich? I want to be as rich as the king, wait... richer than the king. I want his house and his servants! How can you be happy if you are not rich?” he demanded.*

*“Walk with me Henry and I will tell you,” Helen said.*

*The two gnomes walked and slowly Helen opened her bag of popcorn and began to share it with Henry (who didn't realize they were sharing!) Helen told him how she began each day counting all of her blessings, her home, her food, her friends and how each time she counted her blessings she realized just how much God had given her and was still giving her each day. She explained that when she walked in happiness and contentment, grateful for all she had, that she was always blessed with more and that it filled her heart so much that she wanted to give what she had to others. Then she explained that the gnome king taught her these lessons years ago when she was just a young gnome and she worked in his treasury. Henry was surprised. He didn't know that the king was like Helen.*

*After Helen finished explaining, she asked if she could go home with Henry and help him count his blessings. Henry was embarrassed, no one had ever asked to come to his home before and he knew it wasn't tidy, but he agreed. Once the two arrived, Helen started by getting out her paper and charcoal pencil. She began writing:*

- 1. Helen is my friend.*
- 2. I have a nice cave for a home.*
- 3. I have 4 rubies and 3 diamonds that I earned working for the king.*
- 4. I have a cupboard full of food.*
- 5. I have a bed to sleep on.*
- 6. I have clothes to wear.*

*Helen continued to write and after a short time, there were almost 100 things on Henry's list. Then she helped him tidy and she changed #2.*

- 2. I have a nice CLEAN cave for a home.*

*Henry looked at his list, he was amazed that he had so many wonderful things. Helen asked him if they could pray together. Henry had never prayed, he believed in God but before God wasn't his friend because he never gave him all Henry wanted. This time it would be different. The two gnomes got on their knees and Helen gave her prayer of thanks first, then Henry began:*

*“Dear God, I am sorry I haven't prayed. I want to thank you for all my blessings and most of all for my new friend Helen, she helped me understand how selfish I was. Thank you God for sending her to me.”*

*When their prayer was over, Helen gave Henry a hug and a smile and walked home. She did just what God had prompted her to and she felt so good that she could help someone.*

*The next week, she was walking in the garden and she saw Henry with a smile on running to her.*

*“Helen!” he shouted, “I must tell you something. I went to work today after thanking God for my blessings and the king came to tell me how much he appreciated my good work, he offered me a bigger cave and gave me this little ruby. I want you to have the ruby Helen, you mean so much to me, I am so thankful that I took the time to let you teach me what it means to be thankful.”*

*Helen gave him a hug and a kiss on the cheek, took his hand in hers and they walked through the garden together.*

One of my greatest joys is to write love letters to my children. We discussed earlier in the chapter writing them to your partner, but also take the time to do it for your children. What I find is that it begins a chain reaction of gratitude filled love letters to each other. The love that I have spread to them becomes contagious and they begin to write letters to their friends, extended family and of course, those in our own house. This is a perfect “pick-me-up” for a bad day, especially if you have become angry at a child. Taking the time to stand back and visualize this child as the Creator sees her will give you a different perspective and also begin to quell your anger. Most of the time I realize that any anger I held was because of a short-coming in my parenting and that my child was only modeling something I have given them. As an adult, I have the opportunity to correct my thinking and give my child what they need. Remember that gratitude is the antidote for a bad attitude.

## Chapter 6

### Optimism & Perseverance

I seem to have been blessed with eternal optimism, some people appreciate it and others think I am out-right crazy. Even though I have nearly always been a happy person, sharpening my skills of being optimistic can be a challenge in today's world. Listening to the news for even five minutes can make my stomach go south and often make me want to curl up like a child. Negativity is the cancer of our society, rarely are there news stories about things that are uplifting, someone is either hurting someone else or the government is hurting the people or politicians are crooked. It is easy to get addicted to information and the need to know up-to-the-minute attitude that prevails. Most of us couldn't get along without a cell phone and the Internet for a day, let alone a week. I remember when my husband was a newspaper reporter during the first years of our marriage, between Thanksgiving and Christmas his assignments were always different. The newspaper wanted people to read uplifting stories during the holidays and therefore sent him out to find them. Once you start looking for good things to report, they are everywhere, it just seems like most media sources don't want to hunt for them.

We now know medically that negativity can take a toll on our health, it increases our risks for high blood pressure and many other ailments. Surely this isn't how God intended for his children to live! Life is set with challenges and our job is to rise to them. One of my favorite poems is by Emily Dickinson, it always reminds me that I choose just how high I rise, no matter what the occasion.

We never know how high we are  
Till we are called to rise  
And then if we are true to plan  
Our statures touch the skies—

The Heroism we recite  
Would be a normal thing  
Did not ourselves the Cubits warp  
For fear to be a King—

I strongly believe that our lack of optimism is rooted in fear and lack of perseverance. We can choose not to live our lives depressed, angry and frustrated at everyone. As adults, we make the rules or we choose to let others make those rules for us. What would happen if all our rules were rooted in our relationship with God? And what would happen if we looked at each problem like a challenge to solve and worked to persevere through to the other side? Life is full of troubles, problems, job loss, home loss, life loss – you name it, loss is there and we can choose to live in the drama of it all or we can choose to stand in the Light. With the lessons from the previous chapters, hopefully you've started to count your blessings and you are feeling much more optimistic. This is a beginning, but it can still be very easy to get addicted to the drama of life.

A few years back, I had really been pondering drama in our lives and just how it was affecting us as a family. Of course there is always *something* going on that we can't do much about, but I began focusing on the drama that I could easily squash. It was all around me. I had a few friends that loved to gossip and live in drama and I had been noticing a pattern within myself that I just didn't like. I know that I am a beacon for my family and if I am in a negative place then it is likely the entire family will be up in arms. This is a big responsibility and one that I don't take on lightly. I began with one situation at a time. Each time a friend would call to gossip, I would make myself not available to talk. I prayed and pondered and asked that I use my gift of discernment to seek out the drama in our lives and put an end to it. As I began really paying attention to it, strange things began to happen – new friends stepped up to fill the void, positive friends! My friends that enjoyed the drama began to drift away. Our extended family relationships also began to change. One day, as I was working through this, I was on the phone with my dear mother and I quickly noticed that the conversation was getting heated and this was not the drama I wanted any longer in my life. I stopped the conversation and let my mother know that I was really working to be drama free and that I just couldn't talk about the topic she was discussing anymore and that if it didn't stop I would have to get off the phone. She seemed perplexed but it was as if she didn't hear me and she kept going. I just hung up. She called me back angry. "Why did you hang up on me?" she said in frustration. I replied, "I told you Mom, I am warding off drama, I want to live fully in the light and I warned you that I would hang up. Can we now talk about something else?" That day was a big turn in our adult relationship. As I began to see more and more changes within myself and consciously began to strive more and more to be optimistic within my home other relationships changed as well. The children gained different friends, ones that seemed to uplift them. My husband, Erik, had been struggling with a friend from his childhood that was always so negative and suddenly he stopped calling so much. Slowly but surely our lives began to look more and more optimistic.

As we began to see changes, Erik and I challenged each other to stop watching and reading the daily news for a month. We agreed that we would check the headlines periodically but that the news would not be on in our home. The Internet provided quick access to updates and then it wouldn't be blaring through our house. Something incredible happened, our bigger children were about 5, 7 and 9 years old, they expressed just how glad they were that we stopped watching and listening to the news. They told us just how much the news frightened them. So many times as parents, we think we aren't exposing them too much, in fact our news watching was minimal compared to what most families do daily, but even that little bit was bothering them. Remembering that children don't really have the powers to harness their intellect until they are around age 14, helps us to know what might bother a young child and what might be okay. The news is rarely okay.

Now you might be thinking, "I can work on optimism and I can work on the drama in my life, but it is just such a drag sometimes!" You are right, it is! Tell me, what is the alternative? A life filled with anger and frustration at every turn? Or that same life with peace and love threaded through it? Both lives are exactly the same, both have challenges, stepping stones to our greatness or our demise, all that changes are the lenses

you see it through. We will have times when we fall into the trap of being negative, but I promise you this... once you begin practicing optimism, you will be quick to notice the negative and it won't feel good, you will want to move past it and back into the light. It seems that the longer we allow ourselves to feel good, the quicker we recognize and extinguish feeling bad. We are quicker to remove ourselves from negative situations and become valiant soldiers, protecting optimism. Sometimes it isn't pretty, we have to leave an outing or hang up the phone, but as you work through it, you will be sending a message to your family and those around you: I am not willing to stand a moment in the dark. I am a child of the light.

The idea of perseverance as a daily act is tough for many people. It does seem so much easier to just allow life to happen to us. Dr. Steiner reminds us, "...know that it is not the momentary success that matters; it is working on and on with iron perseverance." While we can build on those momentary successes and grow them, as a people, our wills have become weak and our powers of perseverance seem to only be roused in times of great need. I challenge you to continue striving with this iron perseverance each day. When dark clouds come, remember the sun is behind them and often all you need to do is blow the clouds away and then you can stand in the light once again.

A few months back, as I was working on a radio show for our Beacon program, I ran across this poem, the author is unknown, but the message is perfect.

#### Attitude

##### (A Matter of Choice)

I woke up early today, excited over all I get to do before the clock strikes midnight. I have responsibilities to fulfill today.

I am important. My job is to choose what kind of day I am going to have.

Today I can complain because the weather is rainy or I can be thankful that the grass is getting watered for free.

Today I can feel sad that I don't have more money or I can be glad that my finances encourage me to plan my purchases wisely and guide me away from waste.

Today I can grumble about my health or I can rejoice that I am alive.

Today I can lament over all that my parents didn't give me when I was growing up or I can feel grateful that they allowed me to be born.

Today I can cry because roses have thorns or I can celebrate that thorns have roses.

Today I can mourn my lack of friends or I can excitedly embark upon a quest to discover new relationships.

Today I can whine because I have to go to work or I can shout for joy because I have a job to do.

Today I can complain because I have to go to school or eagerly open my mind fill it with rich new tidbits of knowledge.

Today I can murmur dejectedly because I have to do housework or I can feel honored because the Lord has provided shelter for my mind, body and soul.

Today stretches ahead of me, waiting to be shaped. And here I am, the sculptor who gets to do the shaping.

What today will be like is up to me. I get to choose what kind of day I will have!

**Pray & Ponder.** So you've been working on being humble, generous and grateful. You are remembering or learning the power of true love and starting to really understand faith. Those are wonderful things to brighten your day, but what about the muck in your day? What about the complaining children, the bills that await you, the mortgage that is too big? What about all those real life problems you encounter each day? Just how will you be bright and sunny while you are asking the power company for an extension on your payment? You must. If you seek true and honest change, then you must change how you are looking at things. Where ever you are in your journey, there will always be reasons not to go on. There will be times when you must be critical of someone or someone points out something truthful but critical of you. A wise person knows when change needs to happen and begins to make the changes. If you are not enjoying the constant up and down sadness to angry to frustrated back to sadness cycle then you must make changes.

There is nothing wrong with taking stock, standing back and looking at where things are in your life. Taking stock might not be pretty, I can remember a time when I was doing such an exercise and my list was very ugly; Erik was very ill, doctors had sent him home to pull through or die, his immune system had been beaten up by a severe case of Epstein Bar (mono) and our second car had just been repossessed, our mortgage was behind and our business while growing was not moving as fast as it seemed we needed it to. All around us, people were telling us to give up our dream, put our children in school and our youngest in daycare and to just live the "normal American life" – I didn't want that life! I wanted the dream, the goal, the reality we had been working so hard to create. As I was taking stock, I got on my knees, I began to list my blessings as I poured my heart out to God, then I spent time in silence, just listening and pondering our best action. Spiritual confirmations came strong that Erik and I were working not just for our desire, but for something that was very much in line with our mission here. God reminded me, we both worked from home, we only needed one car, be thankful for one less car payment. I received inspiration during that pondering for other pieces of our business and how to boost our growth. Later that day, my in-laws called and offered us help on our mortgage for a few months. At church the following Sunday, our pastor, knowing that Erik was sick and therefore not able to help work our business, offered to pay our utilities and get us some groceries. At each turn, my gratitude grew and so did my optimism. I began to hunt for things to add to my list of blessings and find things to be thankful for. Within a few weeks, Erik's health began returning and our business was taking wonderful turns. In looking back, I could have fallen apart as I watched the car be pulled from our driveway, I could have given up hope and just watched my husband fade away. I didn't. I pressed on. Life will always give us lemons, our job in this age old cliché is to make lemonade and put as much sugar in it as we'd like. We are grown ups and can make grown up choices about how we feel and how we handle our challenges.

What can you do right now about your challenges? Decide which ones are true challenges and which ones are drama. Drama doesn't need your attention, in fact as soon as you withdraw from the drama, the other challenges will seem lighter. Are your challenges financial? Realize that you are not alone! If you are an American, much of our country is in financial peril right now, there is no shame in it. It is what it is. Ask

God with a sincere heart to help you find the good in it all. Where are the lessons and how can you move forward and persevere to find the help you need? After you have asked, open up, change your thinking, work on that blessings list, let people know your situation and see if they can offer up help. Being open and having faith will build your optimism. Before you know it, those challenges won't seem so bad, they may not change a whole lot, you will likely just change how you are seeing them. I found a quote long ago that I just love, perhaps it will help you in this process:

“Cynics do not contribute, skeptics do not create, doubters do not achieve.”

Promise yourself that you will watch how you talk to yourself and others. When you slip back into old patterns remind yourself of the above quote. Remind yourself that only you have the power to change your thoughts.

**Share with Partner.** Often times it is Dad that is more addicted to the news than Mom. Most men are born problem solvers so they usually crave the news as a means to think about solving problems. What is left out of the equation is that most of the world's troubles can't be solved by discussing them over and over on a news program. Real change and progress comes from working on one's own family and then growing from there. Taking the lessons from the last chapter to another level, discuss taking a break from all invasive forms of the news media. If a month seems too long, then try a week. During that week work together to find uplifting and positive things in life and point them out to each other.

Discuss the difference between helping someone constructively change and what can happen when we are always faced with criticism. Are there places either in your relationship together or in your parenting that can use a tune up or if you are just beginning to work on your relationship, discuss openly ways that you can bring challenges up in a manner that won't feel so critical to one another. Work to really think before you offer criticism “is this really something I need to make a big deal out of?” We become so accustomed to talking to each other in rude ways that it is second nature. It is worth reminding yourself that you pledged your life and eternity to this person, they deserve to be spoken to with love – and so do you!

Our husbands often feel like we nag at them. It doesn't sound like nagging to us, but to them it sounds a bit like Charlie Brown's school teacher, a constant “Wah, wah, wah.” They learn to tune us out and that doesn't help build our relationship. Sharing openly and calmly can help us break the nagging cycle and also allow them the opportunity to talk about things that they would like to see us work on. Remember that wisdom comes in realizing when we need to make changes and then taking the proper steps to walk forward and make them. It can be hard to take our egos out of the situation, it is easy to get hurt feelings, but rather than shying away from the conversation in fear, walk on in optimism that you can work together.

**Share with Family.** Between school and friends, our children are constantly bombarded with reasons to feel pessimistic. Our problems of money and other things often don't

occur to them because many times their own seem so large that they can't even think about the adult ones. In many ways this is good, they shouldn't be thinking of our problems. If our problems spill over then we are not doing something right. There are real family issues, but again knowing what to tell children and how to do it is the important distinction to make. A young child should never be burdened with financial worries. If we can't afford something, rather than saying "I can't buy that right now, we don't have the money." Optimistically say "That isn't in our budget today, maybe we can get it another time." This puts you in charge of the budget, rather than surrendering to some crazy force that seems to suck you dry, you are putting yourself in charge of your wallet. As you respect this, so will they. As children grow, you can share some things with them, but be gentle. We recently had a situation where Erik and our oldest son were due to visit a movie event a state over. They both were very excited, but as time drew closer, we began to realize that financially it wasn't going to be feasible. Rather than cursing our luck, we stood back and looked at how we could be blessed by it. Perhaps it was just a prompting to remain home. We blessed it and found other things to fill the space with.

Life will have disappointments, teaching our children to have optimism in the face of them is a challenge we can only rise to if we can do it for ourselves. They need us. Their school and social challenges often feel like life changing events to them. Helping them to realize what is drama and what is real can help. Remember that a young child can often be healed with stories, while older children need us to hear them and give empathy. I often find myself asking my oldest son "Would you like Mom's help? I can offer advice or I can just support you." With an older child and teen, this can allow them the space to open up. If they have been watching us model strong healthy relationships, they will move toward them as well, if we continue in dysfunction, they likely will also.

Listen closely to your children over the next day or so. If you have teens, see if you can pick up some of the drama they believe is so important, don't judge it, just listen for it. What do they say when they think you aren't listening? How do they speak – is it constantly negative? Don't be surprised, it is not uncommon for children to be critical. Often when I do this exercise, it opens me up further and further to places I can improve my parenting. Children are often our mirrors, they will say and do things that make us cringe and then we remember what just escaped their lips, escaped ours last week! This exercise can show us places where we might be able to model optimism.

Remember that different age groups seem to be more critical than others. Young children, under 7 or 8 years, should be living very much in the goodness of life, if we are working to protect their childhood, then they will easily say nice things to each other and be very loving, especially if this is being modeled at home. Around age 9, a change begins in our children and they may seem as though we don't know them. They become more critical as they begin to realize that the world around them is just not as rosy as they once thought it was. The problem with this new found information is that the intellect hasn't fully been born so they have this new information and all they can do is be critical of everything – or so it seems. They are quick to point out rule breaking, especially if it is by you or Dad. Remember that this is a normal phase, but children are always affected

by their home life, if you are overly critical, this phase will be far more difficult than otherwise. Children that have healthy parenting models will often begin to stop this critical phase or at least it will begin to wane around age 12 and even more so around 14. At about 14, they can begin to really see that sometimes rules can be different for different people and that it doesn't mean it is unfair. Again, this is very dependent on what is going on at home.

*Half Empty? Or Half Full?*

*Meet Justin and Joshua, they are twin gnomes living with their parents in an old oak tree. Listen to them describe their lives and then decide who you think might be happier.*

*I am Justin. I live deep in the woods in a beautiful old oak tree. The tree has been in our family for hundreds of years and my grandpa says it was planted by our ancestor that came here from a gnome clan that lived across the sea in England. Our tree is so big and full of love. My grandparents live with us. I love to hear my grandmother talk about life when she was young while she teaches me about cooking and baking. My grandfather tells me stories of dragons and how he helped heal animals in the forest. My parents are so helpful, my mother trusts me to help at home and my father lets me go out with him while he tends the forest. I am a very lucky gnome.*

*I am Joshua. My life stinks. I live in this old oak tree that smells damp and is always dark. My grandpa says our ancestors planted it and all I can say is "can't we move?" The tree is crowded with all these people living in it. My grandparents live here with us and it is too cramped. My grandfather tells the most boring stories – he thinks I am such a baby gnome, all he tells are dragon stories, I know dragons aren't real. My grandmother is always trying to make me cook with her, I hate cooking. My parents make me do chores at home and my father makes me go out and tend the forest with him. Can't everyone see that I just want to be left alone? My life stinks.*

Just as you did in the last chapter with counting your blessings, see if you can work together to really be optimistic. This can be a challenge so maybe start one day at a time. Make it through one day, catching each other in a playful manner and then try another day. The more it becomes habit the easier it will be. Make it a part of your family prayer time – ask that you all can work to make optimism part of your day. When you feel the power of optimism, revel in it. Feel it working on you.

## Chapter 7

### Forgiveness, Mercy, Compassion & Freedom

Hold on to your hat, this is a weighty chapter! As children, many of us were told that if we didn't forgive then we could not be forgiven, while the logic seems easy, the act of forgiveness is often not. The simple truth is that with forgiveness comes freedom. Most of us have someone that we are refusing to forgive, it may be dormant, a deep dark secret we are carrying – it is there and because of it we can not be completely free. For many, this bit of held angst toward another is precisely what has kept us from being completely healthy and moving forward.

In 2009, we began the program *Be a Beacon*, with the primary aim of helping women get to the root of their baggage (we call it “poo”) which keeps them from being able to move on with their lives making real change for their families. I found through years of working with women through lactation, birthing and most recently homeschooling, that nearly all of our anxiety comes down to one emotion. Pinpointing that one emotion, naming it and setting it free allows us to obtain levels of forgiveness and freedom that were never available to us before. You might be thinking “one emotion? Are you serious? There are so many!” Yes, one emotion, in this chapter we will work a bit to uncover that emotion and help you move forward, forgiving all and stepping out of the bondage that just may be holding you back.

We call it poo rather than baggage because baggage implies that you are the only one carrying it, but in all reality when we enter into any kind of relationship, casual or serious, that suitcase just can't stay closed. Poo is a better description, it is dark and dirty and no one wants to touch it, on a good day it may stay locked up in that bag we carry on our back but on a bad day, it comes out and we try to throw it on anyone within range. Poo is at times very hard to identify because most of us have been carrying it for such a long time – since childhood. Someone sold us a lie about ourselves and rather than allowing it to roll off our backs, we tucked it away in our bag. For some adults, that bag is pretty heavy right now, for others that were raised in near perfect settings perhaps that bag is much smaller – some may not have one, but this would be very few people.

My guess is that some of your poo may have been working its way out as you have been going through these lessons. Your bag could have been filled by a parent, teacher, caregiver or as is often the case, a person of the clergy that, while well meaning, made you feel small, inadequate and maybe even unworthy. The problem that comes as we collect poo is that we have several instances, that in some way connected to the first one and when it is triggered within us then we decide, “oh yes, I *am* unworthy, I am going to put that in my bag.” The poo stays in the bag until we get angry, have a day of depression or are threatened, then watch out, the poo will be flying. Most of the time we send it flying and we don't realize it. A good friend might say something about our parenting skills – it may not even be something bad and we lash out. Our parents might call and while we don't lash out at them, we hang up and spend the next hour yelling at our children. Or maybe, we refuse intimacy because we feel unworthy of love and that starts a vicious ugly cycle with our mate. There are countless ways that poo can creep out. The act of

throwing poo only ensures one thing – you will have to clean it up, somehow. As mothers, most of us know that keeping poo in the toilet is preferred to cleaning it up anywhere else! Poo is icky and sticky and dirty and will require a shower (repentance) and a fresh set of clothes (restitution). For those of us who aren't alert enough to realize we are spreading it – which is a great deal of humanity, we may throw the poo and then walk away, not realizing what a mess we have left and the clean up job the other person has on their hands.

How do you know if you are throwing poo? Well, let's first talk about the poo we have acquired. A healthy child is born, given to well meaning parents who love her. Perhaps these parents aren't completely emotionally healthy on their own and unknowingly their own poo experiences begin to show. Here are a few clues:

“Suzy, don't eat that, you'll get fat.”

“Don't worry, it is better to be smart than pretty.”

“I can't believe you did so poorly on that test, what is wrong with you?”

“Why can't you be more like your sister?”

These are mild and don't even begin to touch the abusive poo that some may experience; sexual, physical and verbal. These patterns set themselves up deep in our soul and if we don't shed them as children we will carry them for life. As an adult, we continue to take on poo from many places, just tucking it away. We become collectors. Many of us come to a place in our lives where we know something must change, we try positive thinking, we try attracting something better to us, we work on ourselves and our marriage, but in the back of our head that little voice says “this is all a lie, you are not worth fixing.” As long as that is present we are powerless to make lasting change and we will continually come back to that same bag of poo. We must name it and get rid of it and begin the process of forgiving each person that contributed to it, from your father to your third grade teacher to your college professor to your ex-husband, each person must be forgiven.

Let's begin with naming that poo. This is a process that will likely make you pretty grumpy while you work through it. I suggest that you warn those around you that you are taking on this challenge and then work to complete it within a week. You will want to keep a pen and paper handy as you do this work so that you can take notes as you make discoveries. Begin by asking God for help in this, you are making a commitment to leave your poo behind and you will need strength and discernment. During meditation, go back as far as you can remember into your childhood, back to a time when you remember being happy, follow that path until you come to a place where you can remember having poo thrown at you. It may seem very small and insignificant to you now as an adult, but it didn't as a child. How did that make you feel? Write it down. Walk through your life pulling out these times of pain and frustration, times that seem buried but really aren't because they still cause you continual trauma. As you work through, write each piece down.

As I worked with this exercise for myself, I felt frustrated. My father's continual infidelity was something my mother tried very hard to hide from me, but children know. These feelings of frustration later turned to sadness when I realized that cheating on his family was more important than keeping us whole. I watched my mother take more than 10 years of verbal and emotional abuse that finally ended in divorce. My father left our home and quickly the state we lived in. He was done with us. Cards came on my birthday and gifts at Christmas, but he did not love and care for me the way I needed a father to. My mother did not remarry for many years and as a child I felt very small, unworthy of real love and unsure what it really was. As a teen I turned to boys for comfort in inappropriate ways and met and married my first husband while searching for someone to make me feel worthy of love. The patterns in that marriage were not too different than the one with my father. My ex-husband chose to abuse his body and his mind and over time, became verbally abusive. Again I was left feeling unworthy of love, only by now, I had gained enough poo that I was easily throwing as much as I was collecting. Throwing poo became my mechanism for dealing with the sadness and frustration of my life. While the ink was still drying on my divorce decree, I began another very unhealthy relationship and when that went south, my bag seemed so full I could hardly carry it. For years I felt that I wasn't good enough for men to step up to the plate and do what was right. This made for some very interesting times while I was seeking God – would I yet again be let down by another entity that was supposed to love and care for me? It would take me another four years after meeting and marrying Erik, four years of experiencing unconditional love before I was entirely ready to hand over that bag. In the process, I was having a really hard time naming my emotions. Sure I was angry, frustrated, felt unworthy, but what I finally uncovered through meditation and pondering was that all of it came down to feeling insignificant. As a business owner, I would get wonderful love letters from customers and I could soar like an eagle, until I received a piece of hate mail. One piece of angry mail could set me off for days. As a motivational speaker and writer, that isn't a healthy pattern! Those angry emails also made me feel insignificant. Small – like I wasn't helping anyone. So there I had it, my emotion. Now what?

Just how do you go through the process of getting rid of it now that you have named it? Guided meditation works wonders. First decide who you trust – do you trust God, Christ, maybe Buddha or even angels? For those who have trouble with God or Christ, I often suggest the Archangel Michael. Michael is a defender of good and is celebrated on his feast day in September as a symbol for casting out darkness or defeating dragons within us. He can be a very safe entity to trust. Perhaps it is Heavenly Mother that you trust? She wraps you in her heavenly cloak, reminding you that your spiritual birth was perfect and that you have nothing to fear, she will always be there when you need her. Once you have decided who you can trust, then the process of letting go can really begin. Imagine yourself taking the name of your bag and taking the time to embroider that emotion to the bag. I had a big burlap bag with “insignificance” embroidered in red across the front. It was heavy, weighing me and my family down. Before you give it away, spend some time going back to that first memory, how old were you? I remember being about nine. Through meditation, go to her, see her with that big bag, love her, tell her that it is ok, you are going to help her not have to carry that big bag anymore. You are going to help

her hand that bag to someone she trusts and loves. You look up and see that person or spirit walking toward you. In love and peace you embrace, the three of you, yourself as a child, yourself now and the guide you are trusting. Together, with your young self, you hand the bag over. This will be emotional and painful, you have become very comfortable with this bag, it will feel strange not to have it and for a time you might find yourself looking for it or even trying to see if that last piece of poo is stuck to the bottom of your shoe. It isn't there, it is gone, you have given it to someone you trust and now you are beginning a new chapter. Now the lessons from the previous chapters will really begin to help you make change – there is no poo to throw when you get upset, there is just you, loveable, likeable, worthy YOU. It feels good doesn't it?

Now that your poo is gone, the real work of this chapter can begin. Most of us have a lot of forgiving to do when we are at this stage. Forgiving all the people that handed us all that poo over the years. Without the forgiveness portion, your poo will creep back and you will start a new bag – this bag will be much different and far more dangerous for you have explored the child-like emotions of sadness and frustration, as an adult, lack of forgiveness leads to vengeance and retribution. The forgiveness portion of this exercise should happen as soon as possible after you have handed it off, within days really. You don't need time to mull it over, rethink it or otherwise drag it up, remember you have handed off that poo, now you are only focusing on the person that gave it to you – NOT what they gave you. Remember that this person, while they have harmed you, they have received theirs from someone. Remind yourself that healthy people don't give poo. Trying to see this person the way the Creator intended is the first step in understanding forgiveness. Also it is very helpful to remember that most of the time the person we are harboring these feelings for is not even aware of it. They may know that they have trespassed against us but it is likely that they do not realize you are still carrying it around with you. You don't have to physically tell each person that they are forgiven, you can if you want but it is not necessary for most of the hurt we are carrying. If they are unhealthy people then they are likely to not take your forgiveness well and will see it as self righteousness. Your aim is making things very simple. If you are forgiving someone you no longer have contact with, simply bring them to mind, tell them they are forgiven and that you are sorry it took you so long. Wish their spirit well.

For those that we have to see regularly, this act can be a bit more challenging. Start by setting up boundaries. This is very hard in our reality TV, tell-it-like-it-is society. Privacy is not upheld as a good practice these days. The only person that can set boundaries and keep them is you. You do the setting, you decide where it is and you decide when someone is trying to cross it. Perhaps it is simple, maybe your mother calls and wants to discuss those last ten pounds you are carrying, if weight is an issue for you then this will not be a comfortable conversation. Where do you set the boundary? As soon as she begins to talk about weight. "Mom, I really don't want to discuss this with you, when I do, I end up feeling hurt and angry. Can we please talk about something else?" It is likely she doesn't realize how hurtful she sounds and only thinks she is being helpful, but you have set the boundary, now you must uphold it each an every time you talk. Perhaps it is more difficult than that, maybe you have an ex-partner that continues to rely on you for support. I found this to be part of my own bag. While I had divorced

my first husband, for a long time I was his only friend. I had compassion for him. I knew that as I was working to become healthy, he just wasn't moving at all, how sad his life must have been. This continual lack of a boundary set up some very unhealthy habits on both sides. I allowed him to have more than he was legally allowed to and he in turn abused it at every turn. It wasn't until I set up boundaries that things began to change. At first they were very caustic and we ended up in court, but now that the boundary is set and I am strong in keeping it, and the poo can't come back. As a family, Erik and I set up a boundary that involved us moving to a different county. What a difference it made in our lives and in the stability of the children's lives.

Once you can keep boundaries in place, then forgiving those that are close to you becomes easier. You can begin to understand their drama cycles and realize that they don't have to be your drama cycles. Even those who have abused us can benefit from our forgiveness.

True forgiveness means that you forget too, you don't hold on to that thought in the back of your head that sounds like this "I forgive you but..." There are no "buts" in true forgiveness! True forgiveness gives peace to you and to those around you. When you are faced with another transgression from a person you have forgiven, give mercy and ask yourself "what was my part in this? Did I fail to uphold my boundary?" It is very easy to fall into an old pattern of anger with someone we have previously forgiven. Before you get angry, examine if a new boundary needs to be made. Then walk forward appropriately. For those perpetual line steppers, have compassion. Be strong, know your boundary. Compassion can flow from you when you can give empathy to someone who has wronged you. You begin to realize that person is not healthy and you have set up boundaries so they can no longer hurt you, but you can feel for them, they do not yet understand the power that can come from living in the light.

The more you begin to offer forgiveness, even silently, to all who harm you, the deeper your understanding of humility and love will be and the more free you will become. Freedom is something that many Americans only understand as patriotism, but true freedom is an act of the soul. You can be imprisoned in a dark cave and be free. You can also live in America, land of the free and be in complete bondage. True freedom is not physical, it is a flowing connection between you and God, between you and your neighbor and within yourself. Freedom is realizing that every situation can be a learning experience, enabling us to move forward with more knowledge. Freedom is having no regrets from your past, realizing that every second in your life has molded you into the fabulous person you are today. Freedom is being able to look at someone who has caused you great pain and wish them well, send them on and live your own life, free of the chains that accompany an unforgiving spirit.

**Pray & Ponder.** Evaluate forgiveness in your own life. Take the time to work through your bag of poo. This chapter may take you two weeks, it is an important step in being emotionally healthy so take your time. Taking care of your own drama, allows you to forgive others and also dodge poo that might be coming your way. The technique I describe for taking care of your poo works fabulously with most women. In your zeal to

share your find with others, don't be surprised if you are faced with unwilling participants! Poo is a safe place for many people and giving it up, no matter how much it is harming them or those around them is not something they are ready to do. Being healthy yourself will allow you to be a beacon and to lead by example. I have often been faced with naysayers that will tell me that my happiness and level mind is fake, they can't possibly imagine someone this happy or this grounded, it just isn't possible so I must be fake. I am also often seen as self righteous or arrogant because I won't engage in common drama. The healthier I become, the more painful drama and conflict become for me, it is very uncomfortable and I avoid it like the flu. The only real vaccine for drama is to walk away.

**Share with Partner.** Men deal with poo differently than women, many of them bury their feelings and they come out in different ways. The ways it presents itself can range from passive aggressive behaviors to violence. Sometimes men who don't have a proper outlet for venting their poo will become depressed. Coming to him with a loving heart is the gift he needs. Now so many people will say to me "I just can't talk to him about that!" Again... you have intimacy, made babies together and you can't talk about ways to make your family and life smoother? Yes you can! The key is tact and approach. If he blows up about the house, the children, money – what ever he is upset about, hear him. Most of the time it isn't about that. I try to look deeper. If it is about housekeeping, ask yourself "how did my mother-in-law keep house?" Was she a fabulous housekeeper with everything neat and proper? Is this how she showed her family that she loved and cared for them? If so, does he believe that you must keep the house in proper order to show him love? Talk about it. Work together. Do your children need more chores? Does your house need a complete decluttering? Is his issue the opposite? Did he have a hard home life and seeing the clutter reminds him of it? Either way, get him to talk. Put kids to bed or get up together early and talk. Money is another tough one. I learned in my first marriage that not being on the same page with money or hiding purchases just becomes more poo that you have to carry – that bag is heavy enough, do not add lies to it. Most fights about money are fights of scarcity. Decide that you will work on money together, it should never be just one person's responsibility. Marriage is a partnership, now this doesn't mean that men and women don't have different duties. Of course this is a new era of equality, but I do believe that way of thinking has hurt women and families in many ways – helped too, but also hurt. Just because the law says I can have it all, doesn't mean I have to want it all. Look at your duties and again, talk through the poo. This will be so much easier once you have worked through your own. You will be calm and level headed and able to greet him without your bag.

**Share with Family.** Getting healthy is such a blessing for our children. From a young age we have talked about flinging poo and how it makes each other feel. Poo is a really good analogy for young children – talk to them about what happens if you let someone hand it to you, how you'll have to clean yourself up and how icky it can make you feel. I love the Buddhist saying "if someone gives you a gift and you don't accept it, then who does it belong to?" Think about that. If you teach your children to be strong and not take poo from anyone...not adults in their lives, not friends, no one – think about that bag... hopefully they won't have one, or it will be so small that they can deal with it easily.

More than once I have been out in public and heard my daughter shout to one of my older sons “Don’t give me your poo!” Once it warranted a call from a Sunday school teacher, she was so distraught at the language coming from my children until I explained to her the context. Dealing with poo can be tricky!

### *Ellen’s Bag of Ick*

*Meet Ellen, she is a sweet gnome, most of the time. Ellen is loving and caring. She takes care of her gnome family and all of her older gnome neighbors. Every now and then Ellen gets mad and when she gets mad she takes out a bag of moldy mushrooms and starts to throw it at everyone around her. She doesn’t mean to give her icky attitude to others, it just happens, she tries not to but suddenly it just comes out. Ellen is best friends with Helen, remember her from our other story? Helen is so gentle and kind. One day while walking together in the forest, talking about pie recipes, Ellen got really upset. She thought that Helen wanted to take her mother’s famous spice pie recipe and give it away. Before Helen could explain, Ellen had opened her bag of moldy mushrooms and began throwing them at her. While she was throwing them, she was yelling, “You can’t take that from me, it is all I have left of my mother!”*

*Helen, being the dear friend that she is, waited for Ellen to stop shouting and throwing, then she took her hand and the two sat under a giant oak. “I wasn’t trying to take her recipe,” said Helen. “Talk to me about your mom, you really miss her don’t you?” Ellen looked at the mess she had made, her best friend was covered in moldy mushrooms, and Ellen began to cry. “I am so sorry Helen,” she wept, “I do miss my mother, it just isn’t fair that she is gone when I need her. I am so angry and I feel so left behind.” Helen hugged her friend and let her cry. When Ellen was feeling better, she began to help Helen get cleaned up. She brushed her sweet friend’s hair and tried to help her get all the icky mushrooms off.*

*“Why don’t you give me that bag of moldy mushrooms,” said Helen. “You have been carrying it a long time and you don’t need to anymore. You know, your mom loved you very much and she wouldn’t want you to be sad or angry.”*

*Ellen agreed to give Helen her bag and to never throw moldy mushrooms or anything icky again. She felt so much better after talking to Helen about everything. She knew her mother loved her and forgave her for going with the angels before Ellen was ready for her to.*

As a family, work for a full week to identify what is poo. This will be easier if you have handed yours off and are on the road to being healthy. Once poo is identified, work to quickly forgive each other. Remember that a loving family stands behind each other, so be sure you are compassionate and empathetic in working with everyone near you. If your child has been through trauma, getting rid of their poo might take a longer period of

time, you will have to work one on one with them to help them see what they are either doing or allowing someone to do to them. This can be hard in blended family situations where the birth parents are not on the same page, it takes work, but can be done. Help them see how good it feels to forgive, the light inside children burns brighter and stronger when they can feel the happiness of not carrying that ick around with them.

## Chapter 8

### Patience

Such a dirty word isn't it? Patience. I remember as a young mother just begging God to help me with patience, I had three children under the age of five and I was sleep deprived and frustrated and only called on God when I needed help. What I didn't realize when I asked for patience was that in order to gain patience, I would need to grow it. God would put me in many situations to help me see just that. After a while, I caught on, I decided that asking for patience only put me in more situations that required me to be patient. There had to be a better way.

When I really began to explore patience and what it meant, I realized just how much of it came down to my own will. This is far different from the modern concept of doing what ever you'd like. We live in a time, as I have described before where we can have just about anything and fairly quickly. Order a book today, you can have it delivered to your door tomorrow. We have everything at our fingertips – our men don't even have to stop and ask for directions anymore! My own cell phone has all I need to allow me to be in touch and away from my office for hours and sometimes even days. With these new conveniences we have lost a bit. One of the things we have lost touch with is our own will forces. The will is much more than controlling yourself from eating that piece of cheesecake. The will is what allows us to get things done (or not) and allows us to choose. Agency or the act of having a free will is often attributed to spiritual endeavors. We can not control someone else's agency, we can only be responsible for our own. This is a big thing in today's world where excuses abound and our use of freedom often becomes the scapegoat for our actions. Just because we *can* do something, doesn't always mean we *should*.

Often parents will ask me in desperation, "I can't get Johnny to do anything, he is so lazy and he won't control himself. What should I do?" My response is often to ask parents to take a long hard look at themselves. Are they impulsive? Do they expect more from their child than they are able to give? Learning about our will and how to control it is no easy task, but it is a necessary one if we want to really take control of our lives and our habits. Temperament has a lot to do with our will forces and how we put them into action. Look at people – some seem to laze about with no desire to do anything, they may talk big but no action comes forth, others seem to be so sad and depressed that they cannot force themselves to do what they know they must, still others seem to be headstrong and get a lot done but at the cost of alienating those around them, and the last group tends to want to get things done and starts a lot of projects but in the end they don't have the follow through. While these are generalizations, we all fall in here somewhere. A balanced will belongs to someone who knows when to rest. They can work and get things accomplished and willingly do the tasks they want to as well as those they need to. We must realize that when we are building up our will, we are working not just to do what we want but to do all that is required of us. That is a big task! It is an adult task. If we want our children to learn how to really grasp the virtue of patience and self control, we must first harness it within ourselves.

The rigors of motherhood, pregnancies, nursing and being a wife can really make us feel like our will is being pulled in a million directions – after all, most men only have to will themselves to work each day right? Well maybe! Motherhood can be a perfect time to really learn to grasp that will and either build it up or harness what is there. This can be very rewarding and can also help lead you to becoming the beacon you want to be for your family.

In my own experiences, I have a lot of will forces... I fit somewhere between the mom who is bossy and just gets it all done and the mom who starts projects and has trouble finishing – although my bossy side doesn't generally allow me to quit! This can be a real asset in motherhood, I often can plan something out and get to it, get it done – at all costs, which isn't always an asset. Remember I said that patience was a real issue for me in early motherhood and it is because I had this over abundant sense of will and a need for things to go my way. Most mothers realize that this can't always be the case. Sometimes we have to learn when to be calm and when to preserve the relationship. What helped me immensely was understanding the needs of my young children. I wanted to go out – they needed to have rhythm and stay home. Learning and understanding the purpose of rhythm and planning in my life helped me to tame the strong will I had and also guided me in helping other families.

Lets begin with rhythm. When I first speak to families, many will express that they don't want a schedule, they want to just have life flow. My general response is, “and how is that working for you?” Rhythm isn't necessarily a strict schedule. Think of the tides in the ocean, the seasons, the cycle of the moon, your own fertility cycle – everything has rhythm. Now think of what would happen if the moon didn't do its job or the seasons didn't change in time – we would have chaos, there would be no crops to harvest and eat, as a planet, humanity would cease to exist. Rhythm is simply a fact of life and to ignore it is only to cause ourselves frustration and angst. Take a good look at your week, do you have a flow or do you just run from beginning to end only to fall flat Friday evening and pray your weekend revitalizes you? If you are a stay-at-home mother, think about the needs of your children. Young children need to have the security of a defined rhythm, changing directions rapidly does not give them that security and can make them cranky and harder to parent. A cranky child in turn puts Mom on edge, beginning a cycle that will not end well. Planning out a reasonable rhythm will give you and your children the security of knowing what will come next. Taking a good look at your rhythm will also clue you into whether or not your family is too active. Many children these days are over scheduled, leading to them being overtired and over stimulated. Waking and going to bed at regular steady intervals each day, eating on a regular schedule and working hard to schedule any outing or errands in groupings will allow you to have a more peaceful home life. When you do go out with young children, watch their body language, it is important to pay attention to what I call the *overs*. Overtired, over stimulated, over hungry. If I need to be out on a long afternoon outing I always bring a protein snack, we try to limit stimulation too, young children can get over stimulated very easy and it can immediately affect behaviors. Have you ever pulled a kicking and screaming 3-year old from a store? If so, you missed a cue they were trying to give you. It happens to us all, we all have things that must be done, part of learning patience and working with our will means we

have to work with priority and also realizing whose needs must come first. Becoming a parent means we have committed to putting our child's needs before ours – sounds tough, it can be, but with proper planning and a good solid rhythm, it won't feel like such a sacrifice, everyone will benefit.

Now let's look for a moment at will development. The will is something that we can't see, yet it is there, it lives in each of us, perhaps dormant or perhaps overbearing, but it is there. With the chaos in our modern world, many of us don't take the time to stop and smell the roses. Of course there is more to it than taking the time to be present – although it is a good start. Working with the will takes a great deal of power from within. If we haven't developed this properly in our childhood, then it is going to seem almost like an insurmountable task, but once you begin to see the fruits of your labor within yourself and in your children, you will be so pleased with the outcome.

Will development begins in early childhood. All children need boundaries – they crave it. When we don't give them proper boundaries in the early years, they will become harder to instill as they get older. I mentioned before that the child between birth and age 7 is in a place of imitation, as you model worthy behavior, your children will pick up on it. As you work to control your own impulses, they will begin to understand that Mom doesn't always get everything she wants right away, sometimes we have to work for it. As children move into the second seven-year cycle, they need to be able to rely on us as an authority for them. Children are not born knowing this.

Nearly a hundred years ago, Dr. Steiner wrote:

“Children's sense of authority will need to be more intensively and more highly developed between the ages of seven and fourteen in the future than it was in the past....What we implant during these years will form the basis for what adults within the social organism experience as equal rights for their fellow human beings. A feeling for equal rights for other human beings cannot exist in adults if a feeling for authority is not implanted in them during childhood. Otherwise, adults will never become mature enough to recognize the rights of others.”

He goes on to say:

“People can mature enough for socially responsible community life only if they learn to build their lives upon that true authority they experience during their school years. Today, we must make it clear how far people's actions and imagined needs are from what we should be doing and what truly relates to reality.”

Dr. Steiner was a man ahead of his time to say the least! Respecting righteous authority and properly guiding our children will allow your family the peace and harmony needed in today's fast paced world. Remember that authority doesn't mean that you are running your home with an iron fist, it only means that you are firm and offer loving boundaries. Loving boundaries won't always make your children happy, but it is for their own good and will also help build their will forces and their own patience.

As we develop patience and will control, we can begin to see the blessings that come even when we don't get our way. We often may cry out in frustration, only to find out later that there was a reason for us to not have what we wanted that moment. I am reminded of a favorite song by artist Cherie Call. She sings of a loving God that sometimes must tell his children "no" – He wants to give us what we want but it isn't always for our own good. There are times when things don't go our way or happen as fast as we want them to, our challenge is to become comfortable with the knowledge that there is something to learn from each situation. Being able to bounce back from a disappointing situation with renewed optimism can be one of our crowning achievements.

Remember a few chapters back I spoke of an event that my husband and son were both looking forward to, but the money just wasn't in our budget for them to attend? The gift of patience was really at work that weekend for our family. The morning after they would have left, Erik was doing his normal computer checking and happened to look at a local advertisement for an electronics store. The store was running a promotion for customers that used our cell phone carrier. The promotion included new high tech phones... for free! Erik and I were both in need of new phones, we had been working to put a little extra away each week just for this purpose. Imagine our delight when we went into the store and left with two brand new phones – without paying anything. When we were on our way home, we laughed at the timing. If he and my son had gone on their trip, he would have never been on the computer that morning, we would have completely missed the giveaway. Our patience had a wonderful reward and while it doesn't always happen so dramatically, when we are careful to count our blessings rather than our shortcomings, we are always amazed at what we find. Learning patience and controlling our will can be one of the crowning achievements for us as human beings.

**Pray & Ponder.** In a previous chapter, you began to take stock of your family life. This time, I want you to look at your rhythm (or lack there of.) How does your life flow? Do you feel like you are constantly fighting against the tide? Or do you feel like you have a calm flowing life? If you are struggling with getting children to behave and flustered by the rigors of motherhood then it may be time to step back. While motherhood isn't always an easy job, it shouldn't be constantly exhausting and frustrating either – otherwise women would stop having children! There are times when we will be more tired than others. Being pregnant or nursing a child can be very taxing on a woman, be sure to take care of yourself. Planning ahead and enforcing boundaries with your other children can be such a blessing to you during this time. Take a good look at your week, are you too busy? Do you have too many activities that you are running to? My general rule has always been very few activities between birth and age 7, then one activity per child afterward, until they can get themselves to activities on their own. My oldest sons have scouting activities and one other each week, I have allowed two because they are capable of getting to scouting without much help from me and they are responsible for it themselves – this isn't possible when they are young, but years of training their will and developing their level of patience has made it possible for them to have extra activities. I am quick to cease any activities that don't allow for the growth of our entire family.

I am often asked what specific activities can be done to build up the will forces in children and adults. I think chores are wonderful for children, we start when they are young and increase their duties as they get older. It is rare that I am folding laundry or doing dishes, the children carry most of the household chores as part of our family unit. Chores helps them to build that part of their will that is a sense of duty for things they may not want to do but need to do. Teaching follow through is great for building their patience and stamina – for instance, music lessons are fantastic for an older child, or gymnastics, or any sport that requires them build their skills bit-by-bit until they master it. Homemaking, knitting, crocheting and other tasks at home are wonderful ways for you to build your will forces – pick something that is a challenge for you and work to learn it. If you are like me and have an over abundance of will, then your challenge might be something very simple – baking with your children. How does that build your will? Well when I was a young mother, the whole idea of having my children help me in a task that I could clearly see the beginning and ending to just seemed like a hassle, why would I do that to myself? To learn of course! The more I forced myself to call them in to bake with me, the more I tamed that will and gained patience and ultimately learned to really enjoy motherhood.

Examine areas in your life where developing or harnessing your will might be helpful to you and the flow of your family life. Strive to live with purpose but also strive to smell those roses, enjoy the time. A clear plan and rhythm will only work to help you in this striving.

**Share with Partner.** How often do you have a meeting with your partner? I know we have spoken of this before, but those daily connections, taking time to discuss things going on in your home, talking together about the children and how your days flow is very important for your connection as a family. Is your partner patient? Without alienating him, discuss ways that he might work on his own will forces. Talk openly about what can change in your home to make things run smoother. One thing that helped us so much when my husband was working out of the house, were weekly interviews with each child. First he and I would speak about each child, things I saw them struggling with or issues we were having during the day when he was away. Erik would then spend time with each child, letting them know that he was not only there to listen but also there to enforce the place of authority that I was taking in his absence. This really helped the children understand that both of us were governing our family from the same place, that we loved them and it set forth our expectations. See if your partner would be willing to hold weekly interviews with your children – even if they are young. They need not be formal, perhaps a walk in the park, chatting over a board game or an ice cream cone. Be sure you talk together daily about everything going on in your home and reconnect each night before bed affirming you are on the same page.

Patience extends beyond everyday life. Erik and I found the biggest lessons and blessings came from being patient with our spending habits. Money is a hot button in many marriages, husband and wives often don't agree on how the resources are spent. We decided early in our marriage that living on a cash budget would really give us the strength we needed to control our spending. Most couples are shocked when they hear us

say “oh that isn’t in our budget this week, maybe next week.” It has become a blessing to us to learn to live only within our means on a cash budget. This forces us to really think about every purchase. We still go on family vacations each year and do all sorts of fun things, but we do them within our means. Working with this sort of budget takes a great deal of will force and communication. Think of the legacy you will be giving your children.

**Share with Family.** Talk openly about patience. Vow to point out for one day instances of impatient behavior. Keep in mind that little ones are not going to be good at this, so quietly giving guidance is a wonderful way to model patience. My 4 year old son will say “Mommy, I want a candy bar right now!” as he is sitting on the edge of my bed. I will scoop him up and give him a kiss and reply “I know, I do too, but we don’t have a candy bar, we do have apples, would you like to share one with me?” An older child can easily learn from you – rather than grabbing that credit card, talk about how you really want this or that but you know you can wait. My older children have learned a great deal from examining their own spending habits. When they are old enough to start getting paid for work at home, we have them keep a ledger of their expenses. This shows them just where their money went. Somehow when your money is gone, that candy bar you purchased when you still had money doesn’t seem like such a great idea.

Other great object lessons can be pointed out. The story I shared earlier about our free phones is just one example. I am certain if you look at your family life, you can find many instances where patience seems to synchronize with blessings. Work together to count those blessings.

### *The Blessings of Patience*

*Wilbur awoke from a fabulous dream. He could almost smell what he was cooking in his dream. He jumped out of bed and quickly pulled on his boots. “If I hurry,” he thought “I can rush to the other end of the forest and get the best tasting mushrooms and bring them home and sauté them with a bit of garlic, just like in my dream.” Wilbur ran as fast as he could, not paying attention to the beautiful morning sun or his favorite sound of the rooster greeting him, he ran past his best friend’s house and the ducks near the river. He arrived at the mushroom grove before anyone else had been there. Wilbur was shocked! No mushrooms! What could have happened to them all? He began to get angry, he was hungry and he wanted mushrooms for breakfast! Frustrated he walked home, sulking. He passed the ducks without paying attention to them, he ignored his best friend waving to him, the rooster was annoying him and the sun was just too bright. “Why today”, he thought to himself. He was nearly to his front door and he didn’t see a bit of tree root poking out of the ground. Wilbur tripped and tumbled under a bush. He got his wits about him and turned to crawl out of the bush, as he did, he spotted perfect little brown tops, a log under the bush had a crop of mushrooms growing right there, right next to his house! From that day on, Wilbur worked patiently to care for his mushrooms, realizing the great gift he had been given. Gnomes came from all over the forest to trade goods for Wilbur’s fantastic mushrooms.*

A great will building activity for you as a family might be to decide on a family vacation or other big purchase. The point of the activity is to see how patient you can all be in working together to achieve it. Make a goal together, decide how long it will take you to reach your goal, actively work together each pay day to put a bit away to reach your goal.

## Chapter 9

### Honesty, Integrity & Being Impeccable

Recently, when I was sharing the concept of this project with others, I had someone challenge me “You can’t expect that *real* people will follow this!” I laughed “Of course, I can!” We spend a lot of time in reflection of the mess our world is in, it is in this mess because somewhere these values have gotten terribly distorted, often by well meaning people, but still distorted. As generations have moved farther and farther away from what is good and right, other values have taken their place. Materialism seems to be a common factor in setting all these common base values aside. We should continually remind ourselves that materialism pulls us from God, disconnects from the very Source that allows us to remember that we are not *this place*, this is a journey – one of learning and mastery. The lessons of this journey can only be obtained if we are striving to understand our connection and how to strengthen it. Now that doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t own things – it means we should be responsible consumers and also know when our consuming is interfering with the beauty of life. Honesty, integrity and being impeccable play into this as well as other areas of our lives.

Would you say you are honest? No really – even when no one is looking? Do you obey the speed limit? Do you tell little *white lies* to your children or your partner? Here’s one... do you talk too much? I found that when I observed people who talk to much, the conversations can quickly go from honesty to embellishment. I noticed that within myself, if I am practicing silence more, then not only do I enjoy the conversations, but I have the opportunity to be more impeccable and authentic with my own speech. Dr. Steiner said this control of speech becomes a sense of truth. He describes an exercise called “right word.”

“Only serious, meaningful speech must leave the lips of those who strive for higher development. All talk for the sake of talking – to pass the time, for example – is harmful. Avoid the usual sort of conversation that involves jumbled, simultaneous cross talk. This does not mean that you should cut yourself off from interacting with others. Especially in such interactions, your speech should gradually become increasingly meaningful. Listen thoughtfully to every statement and answer. Consider every approach. Never speak without a reason. Prefer silence. Try not to talk too much or too little. Listen quietly and process what you hear.”

Now this may be a really lofty goal! Being a mother means we have to talk – even though many days I prefer silence! This exercise made me really think about my words in all cases – was I taking care to represent my message honestly? I began to really observe others in social situations, watching how quickly and easily it was for others to be dishonest without even thinking about it. A little embellishment in one place turned to an outright lie elsewhere. It made me think about, as a society, if we really can be trusted to be truthful all the time. Is it too much to expect? I decided that this impeccability that I was seeking had to begin with me. Everything else had to be between the others and God. Our world seems to not know what to do with straight shooting, honest people.

The more honest I tried to become, the less some people believed me! I didn't let it deter me, I was willing to just keep pushing through.

After practicing honesty for while, you really begin to notice how easily others lie. Centuries ago, even decades ago, a good man was known by the integrity behind his name. Many ancient cultures upheld honesty above all other virtues. Ancient Athenians took an oath to “never bring disgrace” to their City by being dishonest. How many people today could take such an oath? These oaths are all around us, but do we really take them seriously? How many of us can say we have never lied to our partner? Our children? Our marriage vows call for honesty as we honor one another. What about something more civic – like the Pledge of Allegiance for Americans. We make a pledge to honor our country – do we take that seriously? Or is it nothing more that a poem we memorized as children? I can say for certainty that there have been times when I have struggled with the pledge, during those times I resolved just not to say it. It came to my awareness as I was really working to find impeccability in all areas of my life. I was at a scouting event with one of my sons and during the pledge, one of the other leaders noticed that I wasn't saying it with the others. He asked me about it and I was honest. I felt like our country was not being run very well and that I could just not give an oath for the sake of giving it without thinking about how it affected my own integrity afterward. To my surprise, he didn't think I was crazy! He respected what I was saying, even though he was of a different political mind than I was.

I was getting good at this honesty thing! I was really examining it from all angles. I found that not everyone was supportive of my new endeavors. At the time I was still in my previous marriage and I found that my ideals were not on my then husband's radar and the more I pointed out his dishonesty the more it created contention in our lives. At the time I was already considering divorce so the honesty factor was just another reason to part ways. I could no longer live with someone who lied to me about basic daily interactions. I vowed that if I ever remarried that I would only marry an honest man. How did I know? I just did, if you doubt, go back and read the chapter on love.

As time went on I found just how much good influence I was having on those around me. I knew it would be tough to be so truthful – many times people are not seeking truth when they ask your opinion, so I had to get very good at asking “are you wanting my honest answer? Or do you just want support?” I found too that sometimes having the honest truth given back to me was not always pleasant, these became deep reflections to me and helped me be more tactful toward those that I loved and deeply respected. I found that being honest with my children lifted some of my parenting burdens and also had an amazing affect on their own honesty. Remembering how much imitation young children do, they know who we are at our core and they know if we are lying. Our older children watch us carefully – if they see us ignoring laws or lying to our family and friends they are the first to call us on it. Being impeccable has new meaning when you are a parent.

We have all known adults that could not seem to tell the truth – it is a flaw in their upbringing. Somewhere along the line, someone convinced them that the lie was more

appealing. This is prevalent in mental illness. If someone does something they know is wrong, rather than taking responsibility, it is more comfortable to change the story, over time it becomes very hard to tell where the lie ends. This can lead to repression of feelings so that one doesn't have to "live the truth." Being in this place of repression can also lead to a very delusional life, a life out of touch with emotions, this can scar children emotionally for life, so keeping them in a healthy home should be the highest goal, limiting any contact with people that don't live in reality – at least until your children are older and can begin to discern reality for themselves.

Now I am not saying I am perfect with this at all – please do not detect self righteousness in this chapter, it is only a call for us to stand back and examine yet another value that is so very important to a healthy way of living. I think of all the covenants that God has made with His people – they are contingent on our honesty, obedience and striving to live impeccable lives. I find so many blessings that come from honest living. Any rewards gained from dishonest living are often followed by a fall harder than if honesty had been practiced all along.

**Pray & Ponder.** Take some time to think about your interactions with others. Are you impeccable with your word? Do you embellish? I found it interesting in the age of computers and the Internet just how easy it is for people to be dishonest – I am not talking about those who steal credit card numbers, I am talking about everyday moms just like us who just want to add a bit of excitement to their profile so they embellish just a bit. This seems to go well until little lies become bigger ones. It can come tumbling down and those affected by it are left wondering if the person was even real. Internet dramas can often trump anything we can cook up in real life and it often leaves people frustrated and confused. Isn't it always easier to just tell the truth? Wouldn't it be nice if everyone were truthful? How do you feel when you've been lied to? Does the size of the lie make the betrayal sting less?

Take some time to think about your daily speech, are you talking too much? Too little? It can be tough as a mom to walk through our day with little speech, I found with young children I can just start doing and they come along – singing works too! Even if you don't believe you have a wonderful singing voice, your children will love hearing it. With your older children, vow to really start listening to them. I know you've been working at it in previous chapter exercises, so allow this to continue. Listening allows you to see if their word is impeccable too.

I found most of us don't mean to lie, it has become second nature in a culture that doesn't uphold truth as it should. I never lie to my children – well I did once and they never let me forget it. My oldest son and my daughter have birthdays within two days of each other, and I have always worked to make them special. Most years we have one family party and the children have a great time. One year, I decided to throw a surprise party but in order to do it I would have to lie. I had not intended to, but my son kept asking questions about the venue and in desperation I blurted out something silly. This incident was about four years ago and they still bring it up, "the day Mom lied to us."

Now of course being truthful with children is not always easy. It means we have to be really careful about how we live our lives. There are some things that may not be completely appropriate for their age. For instance, when my middle son was 6 years old, I was pregnant with our fourth child, when standing, my son was eye to eye with my growing belly. While shopping one day, he turned to me and said “just how did that baby get in there?” I was in a panic, my other children had not asked this question and I was not prepared to answer it graphically *and* I didn’t want to lie! While the store clerk was packing up my purchase and trying not to laugh at my obvious predicament, I gathered my wits and gave a simple yet truthful answer. “Sweetheart, God put him there.” To my surprise this was the only answer my son needed. He didn’t ask anything more about baby making for several years.

There are times in parenting when our faith has to be big enough for them to borrow. Many times I have been asked questions that I simply can’t give a definitive yes or no answer to. I will often say, “well this is what Mom believes...” Now of course this is reserved for things that I in fact don’t have a clear answer for – “are gnomes real?” Maybe... I think they are... what do you think? “did dragons used to fly in the air and walk the Earth?” Maybe... I know that there were flying dinosaurs, maybe there were dragons too. Giving a truthful, heartfelt answer is the root of having an honest relationship with your children.

**Share with Partner.** Is your partner impeccable with his word? Are you on the same page with this topic? Sometimes when we stay home and they work outside the home, it is hard for us to understand the pressures they may be under in the workplace. Are these pressures leading them to lie? If so, does that carry into home life? Is this ever a problem in your marriage? As a parenting unit, are you a good example to your children?

I often talk to families where it is evident that one parent really struggles with being truthful all the time. One mom told me that her partner lied about taking out the garbage – a lie that she easily caught him in when she returned home and when she questioned him about it, he responded “Well I meant to take it out before you got home.”

Openly discuss the topics of honesty, integrity and being impeccable. Do you have boundaries? Do you stretch the truth? It is funny how life presents itself. While working on this chapter, Erik and I had the opportunity to visit an IKEA store near my mother’s home in Utah. On our list of things to purchase was a replacement chair for my mother-in-law. A few months back, she had gone to the same store and brought home a chair for us with the understanding that we would replace it on our next trip. When we arrived at the store, we were delighted to see that the chair was reduced by \$15.00. The topic of the conversation then became... “do we tell her it was cheaper than the one she purchased? Do we pay her the difference?” Of course in the end we discussed it as an honesty issue and paid the price difference, but we wondered if others would have done the same.

**Share with Family.** With your older children, discuss the topic of dishonesty. It has so many forms. For many children in our society it involves cheating. A while back, a friend sent me a link to an article published by an education newspaper. The article

focused on the subject of term paper writing and just how many papers are not really written by students but are purchased to then turn in. It is far different from when we were young and students took notes on their hand in preparation of a test. I was appalled as I read the article and the writer described just how many students pay him – medical students, business students, law students...even theology students.

The newspaper article made me recall a story I heard a while back about cheating and being prepared. I forget just where I heard it. It involved several young men in a religion course in college. The instructor always asked the same question for the end of term test. The question was something like this..."discuss the works of the apostle Paul and how you feel about them." The student was sure to prepare only for this test question and not others, he was looking forward to a smooth test. On the testing day, the student and the other young men took their seats for the test, as the instructor wrote the test question on the board. The young men were shocked as they read "describe the sermon on the mount." There is nothing like preparing for one thing, only to be faced with something else.

Our young people are under more and more pressure to cheat in order to get ahead in today's world. The cost on their young souls is tremendous. They are setting themselves up for a life of living a lie in one form or another. A few years back, my oldest son was to read the book *Tom Sawyer*, we were working on a bit of American literature and history. He began the book and after a few days of talking about it as one of his favorites, he stopped discussing it. A few weeks went by and he declared that he was finished with the book. Having read the book myself as a student, I began to ask him about his favorite parts and after a few moments it became clear to me that he was not being truthful. To avoid being angry, I sent him to his room so I could gather my composure. Once I was myself again, I asked him to come and talk to me. When I questioned him about lying to me, he became very remorseful. In his 12-year-old mind, he was not thinking about the lie, he was thinking about not reading the book! This was autumn in the year before Barack Obama became President of the United States. I asked my son what he thought he should do to fix the lie. He agreed to read the book again, in two days and then we would talk. For two days, he sat with his nose in the book, I heard laughter coming from his room, I answered questions about slavery and when he was finished reading, he had gained so much. He came to me with a heartfelt apology for lying and our discussion also opened a new window for him. He was very curious about how our country went from owning slaves to having an African-American in the running for the White House. He asked for more reading on the subject. By this time, the election had been held and my son had begun to read a children's version of the President's life. He was fascinated. Later, we reflected on the cheating and lying. He was so sorry, he realized just what it cost him and that if he had not actually read the material he would not know all the wonderful things he learned about the process of government over the last 200 years. I have never worried about him cheating again.

Discuss openly with your children how they feel when they have been lied to. It can become an object lesson if you have a child that is having trouble with being truthful.

Lying is all fun and games until the tables are turned. Most people who lie, expect that others will tell the truth and it doesn't feel great when they are the object of dishonesty.

I thought of many stories I could write for this chapter, so many gnome stories came to mind, as the gnomes so easily come alive in my little corner of the world, but the one story that really stuck out to me was *The Boy Who Cried Wolf*, a fable attributed to Aesop.

*A Shepherd-boy, who watched a flock of sheep near a village, brought out the villagers three or four times by crying out, "Wolf! Wolf!" and when his neighbors came to help him, laughed at them. The boy was pretty proud of himself, not thinking about what might happen if a wolf indeed tried to come and take the sheep. Time went by, and there appeared a wolf, this time, the Shepherd-boy was really scared and shouted in terror: "Please come and help me; the Wolf is killing the sheep"; but no one paid any attention to his cries and no one came to help. The wolf destroyed the whole flock.*

When sharing fables with young children, be sure not to give away the moral of the story, the story will work on them, just give it time.

With your older children and your partner, play a game. Take a day and make an effort to really watch every word that comes out of your mouth. Being impeccable with your word can be hard! While you are working with this exercise, take the time to also pay attention to your speech. Are you talking too much? When you make every word count then you can really take time to think about what you are saying.

## Chapter 10 Civility, Kindness & Authority

The title of this chapter might throw you a bit! I have put together thoughts for just you and your partner to ponder. We have discussed the role of authority and raising children, but often when I discuss this with my clients I am met with a blank stare or more often, with an objection. While we have discussed working with our will forces in previous chapters, this time, I want to really focus on the inner home environment and the importance of proper authority. You might be wondering what this has to do with civility or kindness... stick with me!

People often think Erik and I are sheltered because we live in this tiny Idaho town of 1,250 people. We know all of our neighbors and our children gladly serve those around them that need help. It hasn't always been this way. Erik and I both grew up all over the world, his family traveled a lot when he was young and I was raised in a military family for the first half of my childhood. We've been around! We now choose to live in our tiny community because of the values we want for our children. Each year, we take several trips away from our little haven to other parts of the United States. We are always amazed when we travel at the language people use, many of them with children in tow and also at just how uncivil families act toward each other. In reflection, we can't judge them, we just don't know what standards they were raised by or what has transpired in their lives.

Where does civility come from and why is it important? What does it have to do with authority and parenting? When I think of *civility*, the word *civilization* quickly comes to mind. To build a strong civilization, we must start at home. We can't teach civility to our children without really understanding and applying proper authority. Over time, as many of my generation have sought to do things better than the last one, we have become a society of permissive parents with little or no control over how our children act. Now of course, this isn't all parents, but it does concern a great many. In the last chapter I discussed patience and authority right along with controlling our own will, now I want you to shift a bit and think about force verses authority. Most of the objections I get from clients are from those with young children and they just can't possibly think of taking on an authoratative role – they refuse to properly “own” motherhood. Maybe refuse is a strong word. Maybe it is that all of their experience with authority was from someone practicing unrighteous dominion over them? Parenting is a hard road and I don't profess to have all the answers, I do however have very well behaved children – not easy children! It has taken time and consistency. Children will give respect and act with civility when it is commanded. Commanding it doesn't have to involve beating or coercing a child at every turn, sure there are times – hopefully few and far between if ever – that a spanking will arise out of anger, or when we feel at our wit's end and use coercive techniques to get our way, but both are short lived. The times when my older children were young and I resorted to parenting that didn't make me feel good, I realized in the end that it hurt my authority far more than it helped. I often would spend the next few days trying to make up for being such a bear. This behavior sets up a cycle of abuse. I quickly realized that just as I wouldn't lie to my children, I wanted them to respect me

because of my righteous, proper authority rather than fear my actions. In my relationship with my own father, I feared him, I didn't respect him. My mother on the other hand only delivered one spanking that I can remember and I was a teen. Looking back, I understand why. I respected her so much and knew that while my actions always had consequences, she would be fair and loving. I watch many parents today and they often come in two groups – those who spank; their children fear them: these children still misbehave, and those who don't hold authority at all; their children also run amuck. There must be a middle ground, right? Sure there is. First, you must realize that children need boundaries and crave them. When they are not provided with healthy boundaries, they don't know what to expect and their lives feel very chaotic. This is especially important with children who are under age 9. This is the time to really build up your part. In doing this, be sure that you never make a threat you can't follow through on. If you say "once more and we will have to leave the store" but then don't follow through, then they will know they can continue to push.

I am constantly amazed at how funny life can be. Most people would think that children would jump at the chance to live in an environment with no rules or boundaries. I have witnessed first hand children that verbalize their desire for boundaries. My former husband has very little parenting skills and his children know it. In the last few years, two out of the three children from that marriage have decided not to visit. My oldest even gave his father an ultimatum – "please parent me or I won't come." It didn't take long for him to decide not to visit. My daughter decided not to visit because she never felt safe in the environment. My middle son has been given the choice of living with his father many times but comes home because he knows that he prefers boundaries. I got a funny phone call from a friend once. It was the middle of winter, big piles of snow everywhere. The older three children were visiting their father, they were probably 7, 5 and 3 years old at the time. The friend on the phone said he had seen a very shocking thing, he said he had to get closer to make sure he was witnessing what he was about to tell me. He said the three children were climbing all over a large snow pile while my former husband stood at the bottom yelling at them to come down, they ignored him. My friend knew these were obedient children and could not imagine why their father could not have them behaving. It was a great laugh. Children know when an adult is cultivating respect and when they are just going to simply stand there and yell.

How can you command authority if you don't believe in it? Authority isn't force. Force often involves coercion or physical violence to get one's way. Real authority begins at birth. As you lovingly hold that new baby, vow to always be the parent – not the friend. She will have many friends in her life but probably only two true parents. I am reminded of something my mother told me as a child – anyone can become a father, but not everyone can be a dad. Of course this rings true for mothers as well. We must hold that space – we must know love and freely give it and part of that is taking on the mantle of responsibility – remember that quote from the beginning of the book? It is NOT a cloak of comfort – parenting has taken me from my comfort zone more times than I can count, but remaining the authority allows my children to know they can count on me without fail. When your child is young, stick to your convictions – if they are acting up in the grocery store, move your cart aside and leave, sure it isn't convenient, but it sends a

message. It is best if you can do this without getting angry. Do not let a child know they can push your buttons, otherwise they will do it often just to see if they can. This doesn't mean that I think children are little plotters waiting to upset their parents, they are just children and sometimes negative attention gets mixed up with positive attention, so try to keep your cool.

I have watched parents in church over the years leave the service with their rowdy child, only to play games and placate them in the lobby – this teaches a child that leaving is a reward! Rather, take enough engaging quiet activities to have the child wanting to stay in the service. Also, remember that building obedience takes time – on both of your parts!

As your child grows, enforce boundaries with proper consequences. I know one mom that gave the most ingenious consequence to her teen daughter. The daughter was a wonderful babysitter, she often was booked weeks in advance, she also had a tough time being kind to her younger sister. Her mother determined that if the teen was not civil enough to care for her own flesh and blood then she wouldn't be caring for other children either. It was a tough lesson, but the tone of her teen toward her younger daughter was greatly improved and by doing so, the family as a whole benefited.

Erik and I work with clients that at times really struggle with holding this place of authority. Recently, we were working with a family that has two teen children. Both children lack will forces to such a degree that the mother has to bribe them to get out of bed and dressed each day. She went to the lengths of taping a \$100 bill on each of their bedroom doors and telling them if they got up and dressed in a timely manner each day for a month then they could have the money. Two things came to our minds, 1) why could she not command this without bribery? And 2) what happens after they earn the \$100? What is their incentive to keep getting up each morning?

When we don't fully take on that mantle of responsibility when they are little, we will fight it as they grow older. I have a friend who is about 10 years my senior. One day my older boys were just at each other with words that hurt, all day. I asked her, as a mother of three boys and two girls, what she did when her children acted like this. I remember her words so well. She said that it very rarely happened because she doesn't allow it. I thought "she is my kind of woman!" She took her role as mother very seriously. She explained that she grew up in a house where the children were allowed to physically and verbally abuse each other. She vowed that when she became a mother it would not be part of her parenting. So what does she do with those big boys when they get out of control? They sweep the gutters, they go for a run, they rake the neighbor's leaves...she puts them to work. She made the point that the only time the children get out of hand is if they are too idle, so she is careful to watch their cues and respond accordingly. She is one of those women that I have always admired with the thought "she's the mom I want to be when I grow up" even though I am already a grown up!

**Ponder, Pray, Reflect & Share.** As a partnership, are you struggling with authority? Do you spend more time yelling and less time loving? Are your children obedient? Do you understand authority? Or are you working hard to just not do it the way your parents

did? If you had forceful, mean parents, stand back and look at instances that stand out in your mind, how could you have parented the same situation differently? It isn't fair to just say "I wouldn't spank," you must put yourself in your adult shoes and look at the transgression that got you in trouble at that time – how would you have handled the same situation with your own children? If thinking about your childhood is too traumatic, then try to think objectively about a world where there were no boundaries. We are quickly heading to this place in our society. Pornography and deviant activities are everywhere. Children and parents act as they want without thinking about that mantle of responsibility. There is little respect for public property or other people. I know part of reading this book is an attempt to pull yourself and your family from that place. The world is in chaos and while unconditional love heals all, boundaries are needed in order to live as a civilization and to realize the fruit of that unconditional love.

Once you decide to command that authority and really take on parenthood, be sure you are on the same page as your partner. I will often hear moms say "They behave for me but not for him." Help your partner to realize that a lopsided sense of authority will have lasting impact on your children. Will they grow up thinking that men in their lives can't protect them and show them boundaries? WOW?! Yes, it can happen. Be on the same page. Your children should never have the opportunity to drive a wedge through your marriage, you must each give the same answer all the time.

Ask yourselves:

- Have we surrendered to parenthood and put on the armor of authority?
- Are you a friend or a parent?
- What experiences from your childhood were great that you want to bring forward?
- What experiences do you hope not to repeat?
- What does power/authority mean to you? Does it make you uncomfortable?

If you keep in mind that power comes from within and force often comes with malice then you can heal some of your feelings and misconceptions of what authority really is. Recognizing unrighteous dominion in your life is a gift – remember, you are a grown up now, only you can change your feelings about your past. Your children deserve a clean slate, not a childhood peppered with the poo that you are trying to leave behind.

If you are still having trouble picturing power verses force, try looking at historical figures. One of my favorite stories is the one of Nelson Mandela. He had power. Someone with force took it from him, but he was strong. Strength comes from God and gives you power. I love the quote by William Henly, that Mandela refers to when he is asked how he got through some of his dark days in prison, "I am the master of my fate. I am the captain of my soul." This is a man filled with power and authority. Now take a moment to think of a historical figure that got his way with force. Adolf Hitler. Force is no way to gain favor, force only makes one afraid. Force does not come from God. God's way is to empower us to be strong and lead with strength and conviction. Force comes from a very dark place and begins with fear "I must force them because otherwise they would not follow me." Do you see the difference? Can this heal your views of authority?

Let's bring it all back to civility. Once you have claimed that authority in your home, you can begin to demand civility which can then turn to kindness and of course, love. As you require civility between your children then their edges will soften toward one another and you will find times of absolute peace. There will still be times of struggle, siblings do that to each other, but those times are short lived when there is authority in the home that listens and directs.

## Chapter 11

### Courage

The dictionary defines courage as the ability “to act in accordance with one’s beliefs, especially in spite of criticism.” Author Maya Angelou suggests that, “Courage is the most important of all virtues, because without it we can’t practice any other virtue with consistency.” This definition would tie courage closely to will control and the role of proper authority. Why is courage so important? In many ways, appropriate courage does seem to have lost its way in our current society, we have to look deep in order to find it. Courage is that bit of “oomph” we need to surpass our fears and become the person we are intended to be. Having the courage to stand up when someone is trying to control us unrighteously or speak out when some one is being treated poorly is part of courage, but beyond these – how about the courage to live a Beacon’s life? Do you begin each day praying for the courage to be all you can?

As we were preparing this chapter, once again we began to experience these virtues acting out in our lives. Our act of courage began a few years ago when Erik was ill and we were told by the Spirit that we needed to prepare for another child. We couldn’t see how that would be possible with our lives at the time, but we were courageous enough to take God’s challenge. The challenge would take years to come to light. This past spring, I was up alone praying and meditating and clearly heard the call of a child. I began to check the bedrooms of our four children and all were sound asleep. I came back to prayer with an immediate confirmation that the time of our challenge was near as God asked us again to have faith and courage. I am in my late thirties, we assumed that the time would not come and that God had changed his mind. After waking Erik and praying together, we came to the very real conclusion that we had another soul to bring forth. We had no idea what would come before us and the courage we would be asked to summon. We have been constantly directed and keep our connection alive as we walk this path.

We began our pregnancy care with a dear friend who recently became a physician’s assistant. She has been a family friend for years and knew of our desire to have another natural, quiet birth. As time went by with our care, it became clear that her opinions of safe, natural birth were not what we had believed. Half-way through our pregnancy we prayed and were given the strength of courage. Courage enough to leave the practice of a good friend when our best interests were not at heart.

I remembered a quote by Lao Tzu:

“Being deeply loved by someone gives you strength while loving someone deeply gives you courage.”

I began to mediate more and more on our growing baby and in keeping her little spirit illuminated, I know that as we walk forward in courage we will be blessed.

Walking forward in courage is not always an easy thing to do. I think of the young missionaries in our church. Even before I became a member of the Church of Jesus

Christ of Latter-Day Saints, I treated these young men and women with respect. I may not have wanted their message at the time, but I always admired their courage. Courage to go out and share a message that many don't care to hear – they aren't forced to go, they have a choice, to choose two years that could very well be filled with frustration must take a great deal of commitment to their beliefs. I was always left with one thought... what if we all had that kind of commitment?

Commitment to courage takes audacity, love of life and a belief in something much bigger than we are. It takes knowing that we are all connected and all share common bonds even though some have forgotten or walked into darkness.

The French play write Jean Anouilh said it beautifully:

“True miracles are created by men when they use the courage and intelligence that God gave them.”

You will be called to be courageous in many areas of life, from something that may seem small like bringing another child into your family to something that may seem huge like crusading for peace in a worldwide forum. Learning to have courage will cement your faith and bring you peace. Courage, however, can be hard to obtain when we can't yet look at ourselves with open eyes. We can't get rid of things we refuse to confront, we must face them head on. Of course this brings us back to Chapter 7 and forgiveness. Courage is much easier when we can gain strength through forgiving others and having the faith to walk forward. We have to be courageous enough to see not only our strengths, but also our weaknesses. We often want to ignore weakness as though it doesn't exist, but like the poo that gets stuck to the bottom of your shoe and then smells, you can't ignore it. It will keep coming back until you face it with courage. We live in a time when burying our weakness is fashionable, all the while we try to gain new insights into why our lives are not going as we would like.

Thomas Merton, a monk and writer proclaimed:

“What can we gain by sailing to the moon if we are not able to cross the abyss that separates us from ourselves?”

How can we continue to walk on, searching for peace, without realizing it grows in us, we need only to cultivate it through our own courage? Dr. Steiner asserted that courage became the power of redemption. Through this redemption of self, we can move forward into peace never before known. Marcus Aurelius, Emperor of Rome, called by some, a philosopher-king, vowed to always keep an untroubled spirit and to look things in the face and know them for what they were. Imagine a home governed with such strength! You can have this strength. It lives in you. Harness it!

**Pray & Ponder.** Are you courageous? Have you successfully faced your weaknesses and realized their part in your life? We have been working through these chapters, each with the goal of bringing you closer to being that Beacon for your family. Don't be blind

to your challenges, rise to them. Rise to be the best mother, partner and servant of the Divine that you can. Remember that you are never given a challenge that you cannot overcome – you may just need to look at it from a different angle. Human nature often has us seeing things in terms of black and white. Keep in mind that God gave us many wonderful colors, colors full of virtue and morality that far exceeds our biggest dreams, it all begins with courage.

Take the time to really meditate on courage. Are you living up to all that you could be? This isn't a time to feel down on yourself because of limitations, this is a time to see beyond them and realize that the only thing that separates you from happiness, is you. Today is a great day to start. Today is a wonderful day to stop running away from yourself and have the courage to really take life, enjoy life, and love yourself.

Throughout my young adulthood and into early motherhood, I experimented a few times with direct marketing companies. They all had one thing in common: their desire to build their consultants so they could sell product. Those who did well were consultants that believed in themselves, believed that they had a purpose. I was one of them, I excelled at the tasks presented to me and did fairly well for my family. I left those companies because the work didn't make my heart sing. The positive self-talk however not only made my heart sing, but my spirit soar. Working with women was a passion that I realized early and decided that if those rallies for self love could work for women selling scrapbook supplies and cosmetics, it could also work for moms... selling themselves each day as they work to love their families and be strong for them.

Rally yourself each morning. Tell yourself just how much you love YOU and how wonderful your day will be. At first it might feel like a lie, but over time, you will come to believe in yourself and love you for you. Others can rally for you, but to really live it and know it, you must rally for yourself.

**Share with Partner.** You've had a few weeks to really work on forgiveness since reading and working through Chapter 7. How are things going between the two of you? Have you made a commitment to share together each day? Just as you must have the courage to face your own weakness, you must also face weaknesses in your relationships. If these are relationships that you care to grow, then allowing yourself to see the darker parts is the beginning of walking toward the light. By now, hopefully you are both talking openly and candidly about improving your lives together and working on when to talk and when to listen. Courage is what it takes to stand up and talk; but it is also what it takes to sit down and listen. Are you listening to each other? As a partnership are you taking on the mantle of responsibility that comes with parenting?

Perhaps your relationship has been rocky; have the courage together to face those jagged parts and forge a new bond together, being courageous and standing tall. Of course neither of you are perfect, we are all striving.

I often ask my Beacon members what they've had to give up in order to live a life of virtue... it is a hard question. For myself, my husband, and my family, the only thing we

have ever had to give up is the desire to fit in. What about you and your partner? What would you have to give up to live a life of virtue?

**Share with Family.** Courage is a hot topic for me with my children. It isn't easy to pick the right road and always return with honor. It isn't easy to keep from following the crowd. I remember Dr. Wayne Dyer in his talks "There's a Spiritual Solution to Every Problem" discusses his growing son. He wrote him on his 13<sup>th</sup> birthday and told him that if he followed the crowd, he would always be walking in poo, but if he lead the crowd, he wouldn't. This is so hard to teach our young people. It begins when they are young. It begins when they see a friend being made fun of or are themselves getting teased for not fitting in... these are the days to invite in courage, to help them stand a little taller wearing proudly the full armor of God. We must give them this virtue in strength and love now so they can gift it to others. Standing strong together is much easier than standing alone and young people united in courage will move mountains.

In the wonderful words of Ralph Waldo Emerson, remind your children:

"Whatever course you decide upon, there is always someone to tell you that you are wrong. There are always difficulties arising which tempt you to believe that your critics are right. To map out a course of action and follow it to an end requires... courage."

We often enjoy a family movie once a week, I love to pick movies that I know will have messages of courage. This week we viewed "Fly Away Home" – such a beautiful story of love and courage. The young girl becomes mother to a flock of Canadian Geese and is faced with the task of either having them all rendered flightless or helping them migrate. The story made a big impact on my pre-teen and teenage children. Such movies can often lead to wonderful conversations about their own lives. I encourage you to talk openly with your children; responsibly use media where you can to help you with stories that can touch them.

### *Brave Little Gnomes*

*Maya is a beautiful gnome with a wonderful soul but her feet are a little deformed. She is slower than the other gnomes and can't work in the crystal mines or the gardens like the others can. She spends her days enjoying nature and knitting sweaters for those in need. She never had dreams of becoming a mother or a wife, she believed that no one would want her.*

*Snip and Snur are rowdy gnomes, they do their work but then they are all over the place. Snip can be very mean-spirited and often makes fun of anyone who doesn't meet his idea of perfect. Snur is kinder and gentler but often can not seem to pull himself from Snip. The two have been friends for a long time, since they were little gnomes and over the years no one else wanted to be with them, they were too mean. Snur wasn't so mean but when he was with Snip all his naughty words came out too. Snur tried to get Snip to be nicer but it never worked. Snip could be a bully and Snur was sometimes afraid.*

*One day, Snip and Snur were causing mischief in the forest, being loud, and throwing pine cones at the squirrels.*

*“Stop that!” a voice called. “Stop being so mean.”*

*There was no one to be seen. Snur stopped, but Snip kept on throwing. Out of the bushes hobbled Maya, it was her voice that called and again she repeated “STOP!”*

*Snip in his angry tone said “Oh look it is Slow Maya. What do you want Slow Maya? Don’t you have some sweaters to knit Slow Maya? Why don’t you just shut up Slow Maya before I throw one at you?!”*

*Snur stood frozen for a moment. He looked at Maya who was about to cry. She was so beautiful and kind, being slow didn’t matter to Snur. Something happened, Snur remembered that he could have courage. He longed to live with kindness.*

*“Snip, stop that. You are mean and nasty. I have been your friend for many years and now I am done. I don’t like how mean you are. Maya is beautiful and kind. I will not walk with you anymore.”*

*Snur walked over to Maya and helped her to a tree branch to sit down. He apologized for taking part in such ugly behavior and asked for her forgiveness. She took his hand and told him how much she appreciated his kind words. As she spoke, they looked into each others’ eyes, something happened. A love spark began. A year later Maya and Snur had a beautiful wedding in the forest surrounded by their friends.*

*Snip never changed. He continued to be dark and mean. When ever you see a pine cone tossed in the forest, it could be Snip, up to his old tricks.*

## **Chapter 12**

### **Discretion & Morality**

You might be wondering why this has been included in this text, well look around! We have found ourselves in a culture that no longer holds discretion and morality in a sacred place. Now you might be thinking that I'm about to get preachy about morality, I'll try not to, I am however going to share personal experiences and experiences of families I have worked with over the years – in the end, morality is between you and God. This is another chapter aimed only at parents, for it is our responsibility to impart this very important virtue to our children with the conditions we set for them.

I wasn't a "good" girl growing up, as an adult I can take responsibility for my actions, but I also look back at my role models. I love my mother dearly, don't get me wrong, but she was a single mother, married young and when she divorced during my preteen years, she was determined to take back some of her youth. She is a very beautiful woman inside and out; I adore her. As an adult, I have come to appreciate her in so many ways. While I don't fault her for where she was at the time, it did indeed affect how I later acted as a single parent.

The aspects of chastity, sex and marriage were not discussed in our home save that my mom made it clear that she did not want me to be pregnant and single and that she did not want to be a grandmother before she was 40. This gave me a wide open door – not getting pregnant did not mean abstaining from sex. Unfortunately, I was much more aware than I think she gave me credit for. At age 16, I started taking birth control pills. Sex was just sex, the act of lovemaking was never imparted to me until much, much later in my life when I met and married Erik. I can remember several situations that I found myself party to with regards to my mother's overnight guests or afternoon affairs. I am certain my mother won't realize my full understanding until she takes the time to read this book! Unknowingly, she laid a very firm foundation of "it is okay to be sexually active." I remember her shock when I told her I was marrying Erik, a 30-something year old virgin, she was sure I was being lied to! She didn't understand that in the culture I now live in, saving oneself for marriage is not odd or backward – it is virtuous. My husband taught me, mother of three at the time, what lovemaking was really about. While I know many in today's culture can not comprehend abstaining from sex before marriage, I know that it cemented our relationship. I can remember others asking me "what if the sex isn't good? Don't you want to find out first?" Sounds romantic doesn't it? I had faith that if God was going to send me down this path, I would be blessed by obeying.

It is almost unheard of today to have celibate teens and young people. With movies like "40-Year-Old Virgin" it is reinforced that virtue is odd or that those who remain pure until marriage must have social issues. There are no media outlets today, save those run by religious organizations, that promote morality. On the contrary, PG-13 ratings allow our teens entrance to movies that have become more and more explicit. Many parents don't even think about whether or not their children will be engaging in sexual activity,

their concern is more what my mother's was... just don't get pregnant or today, just don't get a disease.

For many years, I didn't think twice about how I was raised, the relationships I had before marrying my first husband or the fact that he and I lived together before marriage. I know some will think that I have become dangerously close to being preachy, this is not at all my intent. My intention is to make you think. As I said, for years it didn't cross my mind, except to think "those Mormons are so weird." Then as I studied, I realized that Mormons and other Christians were not the only weird ones. Muslims are weird too as well as Orthodox Jews and many others. These weird people were small in number, but they were there! No longer was it assumed that a good Catholic girl was also a virgin, these other faiths though... they not only expected it, their young people for the most part fell in line. These religions suffered from less divorce, more functional marriages, partners that were on the same page and completely devoted to each other and their families – as if this abstinence before marriage actually made a difference! The more families I met in these categories, the more I really began to think.

After my divorce, I began to really reflect about how I felt when my parents parted. Although my children were younger than I had been when my parents divorced, I didn't want them to feel the way I did – I didn't want them to wake in the night to sounds of sex in the next room with a man that wasn't committed to both them and me. I wanted them to feel secure and safe – to feel like their mother was indeed there to protect and respect them. It was a struggle because even though I had done some research, I still wasn't convinced that this pre-marital abstinence thing was all it was cracked up to be, moreover, I didn't feel worthy of someone loving me enough to ever want to marry "damaged goods" let alone respect me enough to wait until there was a commitment in place to have sex. Again, I didn't understand real love, real devotion, the art of real love making – which has little to do with sex! I stumbled into a rebound relationship after my divorce and convinced myself that if he would love me enough that we could live together, he was a divorced dad and he made it very clear that the commitment of marriage was not something he would enter into again. Fortunately for me, this was also about the same time that I was really working on being healthy within myself, connecting regularly to God and hearing things from my heavenly parents that must have been there before but I hadn't been able to tune into. I remember walking through the grocery store and loud and clear – as if God were standing next to me saying "You are worthy of marriage, you are worthy of someone who will love you the way I intended married couples to love one another." That bit of revelation changed my life. I began to think about commitments we make, how serious we take them and what they mean for our eternity. If we are more than just this material world, then surely our commitments are too. A Bible verse nagged at me and I wouldn't fully understand why until later. The verse was from Matthew 18:18 and reads:

"Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

Later, when I met and married Erik, I realized that our bond was much stronger than this physical existence, that “till death do us part” was not enough.

Now if you are reading this chapter and are offended or irritated, my sincerest apologies – again that is not my intention. Morality doesn’t have to mean the same to you as it does to me, but it should mean something. As a parent, are you sending the signals to your children that sex and love are sacred and should be saved for the right commitment? Or is it okay with you to have a daughter or son that experiments with sex before they are ready? Physical and emotional maturity are very different. Just because their bodies *can* have sex, doesn’t mean they *should*.

Dr. Steiner lends some wonderful words for this age group:

“It is most important during puberty that the children have developed certain moral, religious feelings...They become weak if the religious, moral feelings and impulses have been neglected. The children then turn indolent, as though physically paralyzed. This will show itself especially during the years we are now discussing. The lack of moral and ethical impulses also leads to irregularities in the sexual life.”

Girls and boys mature emotionally at different rates. Most of us can remember a time of feeling crushed when a boy our age acted flippant or neglectful when we were devoted to their every word – emotionally withdrawing is what teenage boys do! Being outgoing and wearing their heart on their sleeve is what teenage girls do! They seem worlds apart but both boys and girls need to have the same moral cultivation.

Dr. Steiner goes on to say:

“In regard to boys, it will be necessary to provide them with ideas and mental pictures that tend toward strength and affect the religious and ethical life. With girls, we should bring the religious and moral life to their very eyes, while with boys we should bring the religious and beautiful predominantly into the heart, the mind, stressing the feeling of strength that radiates from them. Naturally, we must not take these things to an extreme, should not think of making the girls into aesthetic kittens that regard everything merely aesthetically. Nor should the boys be made into mere louts, as would be the inevitable result of their egotisms being engendered through an unduly strong feeling of their strength—which we ought to awaken, but only by connecting it to the good, the beautiful, and the religious. We must prevent the girls from becoming superficial, from becoming unhealthy, sentimental connoisseurs of beauty during their teenage years. And we must prevent the boys from turning into hooligans. These dangers do exist.”

Many of us were not raised with such conscience. Most of us have allowed ourselves to cave in to our animal instincts rather than remembering our moral compass. Is this what we want to pass on to our children?

The subject of sex shouldn’t be taboo, in fact most who honor morality talk openly with their children about sex and taking care of themselves. Erik and I talk openly, especially

with our oldest boys who are at the age where many of their peers are already experimenting. Learning about and understanding how our bodies work is very important information for our children. It is okay to discuss the pleasure of love making, just be certain to give expectations and parameters. You can speak of your own experiences when your children are old enough, by all means, use discretion – they don't need all the details.

I have worked with many same sex couples over the years, their situations do not change my counsel on commitment. Same sex partners can have private commitment ceremonies, the point is to model for your children the level of commitment you want them to carry out. Whether you are a straight couple or a gay one, you still have the same responsibility to show your children where you stand on morality. Morality isn't a scope defined only by religions, it should be first cultivated at home and only you can know what it means for you and your family.

**Pray & Ponder.** Take some time to think about your own sexual experiences – beware, this might be a painful journey. Are you proud of each one? Did your early sexual relationships strengthen you? Think of your children, would you want them to have the same sexual experiences you did?

Please remember, I am not sitting in judgment, your experiences are between you and God, my aim is to make you think a bit. If your children are young, keep in mind they won't always be, decide now how you will approach this topic.

**Share with Partner.** Discuss openly your first experiences, it doesn't have to be detailed, but share how you felt afterward. Was it all you hoped it would be? Do you have regrets? Are these experiences ones you would want your children to have? If not, discuss a game plan on how you will go about discussing morality with your children. These discussions will be some of the most important ones you will ever have with your children and will open the doors to many others.

**Share with Family.** Once you and your partner have discussed how you will be parenting with regards to morality, then it is time to decide how to approach your children. Knowing what to share at each age is an important factor in how you will bring this to your family. If you have children attending school outside the home then your task will be to bring it to them when they are younger than they may be fully ready, you want to discuss it with them before their peers do. Remember that before the age of 9, you'll want to keep talk to a minimum, answer their questions as they arise and only give them enough information for what they are asking, don't feel as if you should share it all with them. I shared a story a few chapters back about my middle son asking how our baby magically appeared in my then growing belly, we were very careful to only give him the information that he needed at the time. The incident made me reflect on the discussion I had with my own mother when I was about his age. Our "talk" had been very graphic and I remember it leaving me confused. I didn't want to give that to my son. I wanted my words to be right.

Tempering what to say is just as important as knowing how to say it. Keeping these discussions in a place of reverence allows them to see that it is important to you. If you approach it as though it isn't important, then they will assume you don't have an opinion about it.

## Chapter 13

### Learning & Equilibrium

Is life about the journey or the destination? I ponder this often. I see many around me that are certain to mark off every good deed believing that in the end their destination must be the pearly gates with Saint Peter welcoming them with open arms “You did wonderfully, so glad you got all of those deeds in.” When I stand back to really reflect upon our journey here, this spiritual journey in a human body, I think about how God must feel if we just surround ourselves with works and not with actual learning and progressing. I believe that all we are shown here is a mirroring of what we already know, our spirits have known it all along, we just need the right medium to draw it forth. We are not vessels to be filled as much as we are clay to be molded. All of our greatness lives within us from the very beginning, we just have to be exposed to the proper artist to help us see who we really are.

The majority of the families I have worked with in my business life are homeschooling families that strive to understand the work of Dr. Steiner. Dr. Steiner’s work calls for our continual striving, allowing ourselves to be constantly molded. He believed that the self education of adults was just as important as that of the children in their care – if not more important. We model for our children everyday and if we can show them a feasting of knowledge then we can set them on a path to continually raise the bar for themselves.

We all know people who graduated high school or college and decided that they now knew all they needed to and that would be it. No more striving, no more yearning to understand, they become stagnant, frustrated and part of the mainstream culture that tends to run in circles.

In his work *The Prophet*, Gibran writes:

“Your hearts know in silence the secrets of the days and the nights. But your ears thirst for the sound of your heart’s knowledge. You would know in words that which you have always known in thought. You would touch with your fingers the naked body of your dreams...For the soul walks upon all paths. The soul walks not upon a line, neither does it grow like a reed. The soul unfolds itself, like a lotus of countless petals.”

How beautiful to think of learning in such a manner. We could be so strong if we only allow ourselves to be open to all the possibilities for education that we have available. I often hear the excuse “I’m too old” or “my children are small and I can’t leave them.” We do not need to leave our homes to open our mind.

In one of his lectures, Dr. Steiner encourages us to really understand the meaning of Christmas from the perspective of a seeker. We can in turn take this to all areas of our lives. He begs the question: are you an innkeeper or a shepherd? An innkeeper is concerned with the material issues tied to this world, the literal housing of earthly possessions, while the shepherd is much more tuned into the spiritual messages that can come if we are attentive. He points out that an innkeeper can only take on so much,

materially their house will become full eventually, but a shepherd, a seeker, has the world in front of them. As we begin to understand ourselves and strive to hear the song of the Spirit then we can easily distinguish the innkeeper in us from the shepherd. I find that parenting lends itself to this task easily. When I get angry or upset at one of the children or at the circumstances at hand, I can stand back and ask “is this material? Am I being the innkeeper?” If the answer is yes, then I am immediately given pause to re-evaluate if I can make the choice to pick this battle? Or just walk on and try to be a shepherd?

When I have spent time meditating on the role of the shepherd in my life, I often think back to what their lives must have been like. These were times before the written word was common place, they had hours and hours to ponder the song of the Spirit. These young men didn’t need to know how to read in order to increase their knowledge or contemplate what they already knew, they just needed quiet.

Steiner suggested that we find equilibrium in all that we do, echoing the foundations of Buddhism, where practitioners are counseled to find the middle way. Often we forget that finding that equilibrium between learning and being stagnant blesses us with many gifts. We are never too old to try something new or to learn a new skill.

**Pray & ponder.** Have you committed yourself to learning something new each day? Learning about yourself can open you to a world of endless possibilities. As mothers we should be constantly learning. Know what your children are studying in school – if it is foreign to you then take the time to refresh yourself and take on a new road for your journey. If you are a homeschooling parent, have you taken the time to really understand the topics you are presenting? Prepare so that they can feel your love and understanding of the topics as you present them.

As children of our heavenly parents, we are sent here to learn and return, not just to mark off a list of accomplishments. Sometimes our innkeeper self gets in the way and we focus so much on tasks rather than the act of being a seeking shepherd. Contemplate the shepherd that lives within you. What can you do right now to strengthen that being and in turn pay less attention to the innkeeper? We have innkeepers all around us, this part of our nature won’t be missed.

Ponder what your own continual learning can bring you and your family. Mr. Hinckley suggests:

“No matter how old we become, we can acquire knowledge and use it. We can gather wisdom and profit from it. We can grow and progress and improve – and, in the process, strengthen the lives of those within our circle of influence.”

I should point out that Mr. Hinckley wrote this book “Standing for Something” when he was 90 years old! Having followed his life, I can say that he never stopped learning... when he crossed over, what a joy it must have been for him to have even more to learn!

Are you excited about doing something new? About picking a skill you may not have thought lived in you? About being moldable clay?

**Share with Partner.** Erik and I often take on new learning adventures together, it becomes a source of strengthening in our relationship and also keeps us on the same page. Whether it be discussing a lecture, an inspirational piece we encountered or reading a book together, we have found it really augments our relationship and gives us deeper insight into each other.

What learning experiences can you cultivate with your partner? It doesn't have to be academic! It can be purely one of pleasure or frivolity. Starting together with something simple will lend itself to depth over time. How about a book of poetry? Some scripture or holy book? You could listen to an audio book together – Erik and I enjoy Dr. Wayne Dyer. There are so many possibilities and the blessings are endless.

If your partner works long hours or has a long commute, how about trying an audio book together and then discussing it in bits and pieces through the day on the phone or via email? Work to stay connected. Having a common project gives you something other than the children to talk about!

**Share with Family.** Learning something new together as a family can be really rewarding too. Maybe a new sport that you can all enjoy or a new art skill? As a family, we love to paint together and draw together – none of us are fabulous artists mind you, we just enjoy the time together to create and learn. Visiting museums or other exhibits is another great way to keep learning as a family. A few years back, our small local museum was host to the exhibit “Ink and Blood.” It was a fascinating look at how scripture and printing has changed through the years, going from monks and scribes to the Gutenberg press and what it meant for literacy around the world during a time when most common people did not know how to read, let alone own a piece of writing. We turned this trip to the museum into a wonderful family discovery of the history of our own scriptures. It was fun and fascinating to the children on all levels and as a family we learned a lot about each other and how we view the precious written word. As a writer, the technology of the printing press is important to me, the exhibit gave the children a better understanding of just how it all came to be.

What can you do as a family to further your learning together?

### *Brianna the Bookworm and Stacy the Socialite*

*Brianna was a quiet gnome, she kept to herself, worked in the gnome library and never ventured out to meet new friends. Her gnome house was large, both of her parents had rejoined the soil and she was all alone in her family home. Brianna decided she needed a roommate so she made a sign to put up at the library, hoping that someone quiet and shy like herself would answer.*

*Weeks went by and no one answered her request. One night in prayer, she felt prompted to open her eyes a bit and just ask for a roommate without wishing for someone quiet and shy. She closed her prayers and went to bed.*

*Two days later, Brianna had a visitor at the library where she worked, it was a young gnome named Stacy and she was answering Brianna's roommate ad. Stacy was bubbly and happy and very social. Brianna was worried that they wouldn't be a good match but then she remembered her prompting to be more open so she decided to give Stacy a try. The first week was hard for them both, Brianna was quiet and often disappeared for hours at a time, while Stacy was the life of the party and had many friends over to visit. The two girls decided that the best way to get along would be to try to get to know each other deeper. Brianna agreed to come to one of Stacy's parties. She was nervous but found that she had a lot of fun, she danced and visited all through the evening and woke up the next morning, happy at her new experience.*

*Now it was Stacy's turn. Brianna had a wonderful idea, while the gnome library was fun, her favorite place was in the people library. It would be a dangerous journey but she loved the large library with rows and rows of book so much that she wanted to share it with Stacy. They packed a late night snack and at dusk set out to the village where all the people lived. They would have to go unseen and hopefully make it into the library just as it was closing so they could spend the evening with the books. Brianna's plan worked and soon the library lights went out and it was just the two girls, alone with all the books. Brianna showed Stacy all of her favorite human stories, "Alice in Wonderland," "Little Women" and many more. Stacy had no idea that there could be so many wonderful stories. They looked at maps and played with the telephone, before they knew it, the sun was starting to rise. Brianna slipped a book into her backpack – something she had been doing for years, she returned each book in perfect condition a week later. The two gnomes scurried home and slept the day away. When they woke that evening Stacy told Brianna that she had no idea books could be so much fun. She said that she had not read a book since she left school. All the evening Brianna and Stacy read to each other from the little book Brianna borrowed. Both gnomes realized that they could enjoy themselves in each other's world and that they didn't have to be shy and quiet or outgoing and loud to enjoy life, both were good places to be.*

*Now if you are ever hunting for a book at the library and can't find it, it may just be because a little gnome has borrowed it, don't worry, check back in a week, gnomes are good at keeping their word and they know better than to steal.*

## Chapter 14

### Thrift & Industry

When I started planning this chapter, I had Queen's "I Want it All" playing in my head. I took some time to think about my parents and grandparents and just how my generation and the one below me compares. When I was young, I thought my grandparents were rich and could never figure out why my parents seemed poor, now my grandparents seem poor and my parents seem to be rolling in money even when they tell me that times are tough. Thrift means different things to different people and it tends to change through our lives. Something that has really been interesting for me to watch is the progression of children into adulthood as they begin to realize just how much life costs. We live in a time where money seems to be everywhere when we don't need it and no where when we do – it can set our children and ourselves up for frustrations and disappointments.

Growing up, I didn't understand money. My mother really struggled between her desire to shop and her need to pay bills. It seemed like there was never enough money for the month and I remember when I started earning money on my own being shocked and appalled that I would have to somehow contribute. Now that I am a mother with children earning their own money, I can understand a bit more where she was coming from. Teaching our children the value of saving and working is one of our many jobs as responsible parents. Just how does this play into our spiritual life? Well, we've talked in past chapters about losing ourselves in charity and how good it can feel – how about losing yourself in the care and love of your home and your budget?

I am a BIG believer in the art of manifesting and in the last few years I have really put it to the test. I am often faced with people who tell me that it is hogwash and it simply doesn't work. I will submit that it does indeed work, every time, but we are not always willing to do what the Universe presents us with to have what we want. I live the life I want, my husband works at home with me, I love writing and working with families and while there are times when I could use a few more dollars, for the most part, we have all of our needs and many of our wants taken care of. This living has come from years of meditating and training myself to understand what abundance really is and how thrift and abundance can go hand in hand.

Thrift becomes the simple act of knowing how to budget your money and when to stop spending. There is no shame in being thrifty. I find the most financially abundant people are those that are fiscally responsible. The wealthy don't want to throw money away any more than the rest of us do! I learned over time that I can be facing financial hardship, bankruptcy and heavy debt and I can be angry and upset at myself or I can pick up and make different choices from here on in. Sometimes financial hardships come and we don't have a lot to do with it – partners lose jobs, the economic wealth of a nation can be to blame, someone else's litigious nature or even a medical situation that you didn't know you would encounter. We can't always be prepared for every circumstance. After divorcing my former husband, I learned how to really live in a thrifty manner, I found that even though I only had a fraction of what I had during my marriage, I survived and thrived. These skills were life skills, skills that I only wish I had learned as a young

child. Abundance works into this as well. When I have something to pay for, whether it is a want or a need, I know that I have the power to pray and ask for guidance and then I have the responsibility to follow through. Often when we ask God for something, He answers, but we may not be willing to go that extra mile, our job is to remember that He did answer! Often we need to open up our scope and allow things to flow into our stream. We've talked about this in previous chapters... it becomes the art of allowing and constantly remembering that abundance has less to do with money and more to do with how we feel about our lives. It is easy to blame money, it is harder to decide you will take responsibility and work from a place of love and forgiveness, opening yourself up to and allowing abundance from all areas to flow.

In order for us to have harmony with our social and economic standing, we have to look at our work ethic and how we spiritually look at money. I have come to realize that many of my past financial issues have come from my inability or refusal to have forgiveness in my life. When I forgive my past I am blessed. When I am quick to observe and obey, I am blessed. When I work toward my goals and dreams my whole family is blessed. It does take work. All of it takes work, the exercises in this book, controlling one's will, stepping up to be the parent you sometimes wish you didn't have to be...all of it takes work. Are you willing to work in order to live a life of thrift and abundance? Anything worth having is worth working for.

When we have a healthy relationship with money and our house is in order, we generally have the same healthy spending habits. I make it a practice to ask myself "Do I need this? Am I willing to work for it?" Of course there are times when we should just be able to *want* something and not feel guilty, that is a wonderful reward for work completed – but in our "have it now" society, even those of us that are choosing to live consciously might struggle with wanting. It goes back to our feelings of gratitude for what we have – when we live in gratitude, we are never poor.

I was recently enjoying a History Channel special with my oldest son, the series centered on things that made America what it is today. I couldn't help but think of how much we have lost while we have been in pursuit of constant gain. The pioneers of our country had to work so hard just to turn soil into food, and today we complain if the grocery store is out of our favorite of potato chips. People over the last two hundred years have come to our country in search of the "American Dream" – as Americans, we have often forgotten the dream...or maybe we didn't have it to begin with? My Italian roots have only been in this country for three generations, I often think of what the lives of my ancestors were like, they came here knowing that this was a land full of opportunity and wealth, but none of them were under the illusion that it would be easy or painless.

We have grown into an entitled people, demanding often without working. I have watched this carry into the rising generation and it truly frightens me. I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the wealth of my parents and grandparents. I have such fond memories of my grandfather, he was truly one of my best friends. I do not remember a day that went by when he didn't do some sort of work. He and my grandmother married young and he worked as an architect (back in the days when you didn't need college

education to be one!) and a housing contractor. He built homes and sold them and as my mother and her siblings grew, he owned a lumber yard where they all worked, he ran a pony ranch and in his later life he owned a tack and western wear clothing store. I am sure there were many days when my grandmother wished they could retire but it wasn't on my grandfather's radar. He worked hard, I don't think he knew any other way. As a child growing up, I was fortunate to have him as a mentor and a role model. I spent many summers counting back change to customers in his store and learning the art of being in business. He instilled in my mother his sense of working hard and she made sure it trickled down to me. While I remember very lean times as a child, my needs were always met. Even though my mother loved to spend money, she also knew when she needed to step it up and take on another job to help support me. I was fortunate to graduate from a private school and I know she worked hard to make sure I could stay there, she knew it was important for me and my future. Even though this was always seen as "hard work" I never really thought of it that way. Today we have so many people trying to escape the "hard work" not realizing that trials, working and thrift are things that truly shape us.

I love this bit by Gibran:

"When you work you are a flute through whose heart the whispering of the hours turns to music. Which of you would be a reed, dumb and silent, when all else sings together in unison?"

We must transform how we view work – it isn't hard, it is a blessing. Anyone who has been without meaningful work can attest to the blessing that comes from putting your shoulder to the wheel.

**Pray & Ponder.** How were you raised? In poverty? Middle class? Upper class? Where do you stand now? Are you happy with your position and your level of work? What is your relationship like with money? Do you have respect for it? Does it work for you? Or are you constantly frustrated that you can't have enough? If you have found yourself stuck, perhaps a trip back to our chapter on gratitude and contentment is in order. Perhaps you are ready to take that next leap?

Benjamin Franklin started out penniless and later became a very successful forefather of our nation. He wrote:

"Remember that Time is Money...Credit is Money...the Way to Wealth...depends chiefly on two words, Industry and Frugality. Waste neither Time nor Money, but make the best Use of both."

These are great words to live by. Come to terms with any forgiveness issues that could be standing between you and your abundance. If you have wants and desires, plan for them.

Every year, Erik and I pack up our van with all of our children and head to southern California. This trip becomes a wonderful get away for our family. We have never gone

into debt over this trip. We don't sleep at lavish hotels or eat out every meal, we carefully plan and then vow to have fun. Having fun doesn't have to take you out of your budget.

Learn the art of self reliance. Ask yourself at the end of each day "Did I lead our family in thrift today? Have I been open to abundance?" There are a few obvious roads to self reliance, including growing your own food, baking your own bread, cooking at home, working to reduce your power consumption, living on less money and others, but one that many people forget about is food storage. Every week when you go to the grocery store, dedicate \$10.00 to food storage, be smart about it and make sure it is food your family will enjoy. Rotate this storage often so you are not letting your storage go stale. Also, invest in a 72 hour kit for each member of your family, this could be nothing more than meals, water tablets and candles. Put thought to it and look at the needs of your family. Remember that thrift does not equal poor! You can be thrifty and abundant, it just takes changing your mindset.

**Share with Partner.** We have talked in chapters past about being on the same page with regards to finances. Let this be a check up for you – how are things going? Are you working together to make good financial choices? Are you both seeing the abundance in your lives?

Erik and I like to do a check up on this weekly, it involves more than talking about bills that need to be paid or upcoming expenses. Our connecting about money often revolves around what we'd like to create in our home and in our lives materially. Is there something we would like to have and want to bounce it off each other? I still run into so many couples that don't know what their partner is spending; sometimes this situation arises because the couple is not connecting about reasonable expenditures and resentment builds. I knew a woman who would get very upset at her husband, whenever they vacationed he would hover over her in fear that she would spend money they didn't have, she couldn't make him understand that she just enjoyed looking and it didn't always translate into buying. I know another couple where the husband has an extensive collecting habit and he has gone to great lengths to hide it from his wife, even to the point of having a post office box just for his shipments. I stand back and wonder...if you have to hide it, should you buy it?

Think back to our last chapter and apply the virtue of equilibrium here... we can work so hard that we work ourselves to death or we can play so much that we forget the value of work. The same holds true for spending money, we should absolutely benefit from our hard work with material finery from time to time, we should also know just when to keep that cash in our pocket.

What can you do to increase your communication about money? The top of my list is work on a budget together, work together to pay bills so each one of you knows just where the money is going. Be a forward thinker when it comes to money, realize that if something happened to one of you, the legal system could easily tie up portions of your estate, the best way to fight this is to know where you stand with finances. Ignoring the

bills because of the stress it causes is often worse than just paying them or facing them together. Make a commitment to be on the same page in all you do.

**Share with Family.** A good friend was lamenting lately about how her teenage daughter had no concept of finances and she wasn't sure just where she could have gone wrong. I assured her that it may not be her fault, she could have laid forth every means to teach her child but she just couldn't grasp money. Money can be very abstract to children, especially before the age of 9 years old. They can understand how to add it and subtract it and many can begin to budget it, but I have found that most just do not grasp it fully until they are older, perhaps around age 14. I suggested to my friend that she try an experiment with her daughter where they try to simulate an apartment situation for her. The child had a job and a fair income for a teen but wanted the lavish life that her parents had worked hard for years to acquire. She and I worked out a budget for her daughter including rent, car insurance, food and incidentals. She told her daughter that she would charge her fair prices and her daughter for one month would have to surrender her work earnings and at the end of the experiment she could have them all back. The experiment was a big eye opener for both mother and daughter. Most teens just do not understand what it takes to live and how it might be best to just hang around the nest for a while!

### *Sally the Saver*

*Once there was a cute little forest gnome named Sally. Sally was happy and joyful in all that she did, she worked with the tree gnomes to help take care of the new saplings to keep them safe and help them grow. Each week when she got paid, she made sure she put extra money away for emergencies, on the weeks when she didn't have extra money, she worked to find something she could save that would be helpful to her. One week, she didn't have extra money to put away, but she did find a patch of wild berries, she gathered them in her basket and rushed home to make jam. Making jam would ensure that she would have sweet berries even in the winter when berries can't be found. Sally learned to sew and worked hard to make her own clothes and mend clothes that had been worn. Sally wasn't odd, all gnomes were taught to be self reliant, it was the gnome way, but some gnomes chose not to.*

*On the way to work one morning Sally saw a begging gnome along the path. No one had been very nice to him, other gnomes picked on him and told him that he should have been saving so he wasn't in the mess of needing to beg. When Sally got close to him, she realized that he was a sweet old gnome that lost his house in a forest fire last spring and didn't have any work or place to stay. Sally took him home and fed him, mended his clothes and helped him find shelter. The old gnome was so thankful, he began to feel better and the king gave him a job to help him rebuild his home and resources. Sally was happy she could help. She always found that the most wonderful rewards came when she helped others.*

*One sunny day, Sally was walking through the forest looking for berries or mushrooms or something she could save for the winter. As she was gathering, Jerry, a mean spirited*

*gnome began to make fun of her. "Why do you gather so much Sally? You already have enough, why don't you just learn to play?"*

*"Oh Jerry," Sally laughed, "I do play. I love collecting food for the winter and I enjoy taking care of myself so that I can in turn bless others."*

*Jerry ignored her and kept on playing. Sally could feel the cold autumn breeze and finished collecting her nuts and berries. She prepared them at home and then admired all she had gathered through the season: cans of wild corn, asparagus, beets, jam and bags full of nuts and dried mushrooms. What a bounty. Of course Sally could never eat it all herself, some she gave as gifts and others she saved for those gnomes in need.*

*The winter seemed especially cold that year. In the middle of the season, long after the winter solstice had passed and all the gnomes were wishing to see the grass, there was a knock at Sally's door. She opened the door and who would be standing there but Jerry. He was cold and looked very thin.*

*"I should have helped you gather berries that day last fall," said Jerry with a sad look on his face.*

*"Come in, come in," Sally said with a smile. "I was just sitting down to eat and it will be nice to have company."*

*Sally welcomed Jerry, fed him some warm soup and bread and then gathered a basket full of enough food to last Jerry until spring. Before she sent him home, she darned his socks and fixed the hole in his sweater.*

*"Why are you being so kind to me Sally? All I did was make fun of you."*

*"Well Jerry, I am happy to help others, but for you I have something special planned. You made fun of me and I prayed for you. I prayed that God would help you to understand self reliance. Here you are! In the spring, you are going to help me plant my garden and I will show you where to find the best berries and how to take care of them so you have them all winter long. God knew you would come to me." Sally said with a smile.*

*She handed Jerry the basket, put on her coat and gathered some fire wood and walked him home. At the first sign of spring, there was another knock at Sally's door, it was Jerry and this time he looked well fed and had rosy cheeks.*

*"I am here to help you plant Sally! Will you teach me?"*

Another great story on resourcefulness for children is the Ants and the Grasshopper. Fables can really drive home these basics in virtue and are perfect for young children.

## **Chapter 15**

### **Accountability & Responsibility**

These last two chapters will be shorter, but we'll be asking some hard questions. You've worked through the last 108 days, hopefully connecting more with your partner and family about these important virtues. Perhaps you've learned a bit about yourself in the process and added some goals to your daily life. It is my sincere hope that you've also been able to walk away from some of the Poo that may have held you back. Now let's focus a bit on accountability and responsibility. We've talked about it briefly in other chapters, but now that you've worked through the book, I want you to really take the time to think about it in more detail.

Never underestimate the influence you have over your children. Your example is a powerful one. Making the choice to take complete responsibility for your actions now and in the past will speak volumes to them when they are faced with situations of frustration and hard decisions.

Being accountable for our past is sometimes a hard pill to swallow. I found that acknowledging where I am right now and detaching from my past, allows me to look at things without rosecolored glasses. I can say "That wasn't a great decision on my part, I can see how it happened and how I can keep it from happening again." It is so much more grown up than "It isn't my fault. Someone did this to me. I can't be blamed." I jump into "mom-of-a-teenager mode" when I hear "It's not my fault!" I often do a double-take and wonder if it really came from the mouth of an adult. How did we become a society of people that can blame everything on someone else? We have forgotten that God gave us free will and each time we make an excuse or refuse to take responsibility then we have allowed someone else to have control over us. My mother used to tell me all the time "you are a product of the decisions you make or the ones you allow others to make for you." It took me a long time to really understand what she meant. The more I strive to live my life on purpose, the more I examine all my actions each day.

Thomas Merton said:

"We must make the choices that enable us to fulfill the deepest capacities of our real selves."

What does that mean to you? I find encouragement to act responsibly and be accountable for those decisions that affect many and even those little ones that just affect me.

I think about the weight that I have put on over the last three years. I know why it happened, I know how it happened and I take full responsibility. Erik was really ill and I went from "happy mom mode" to "survival mode" – did I have to? Nope. But I did. When you are working to survive, you often forget how to thrive. I had to give to others and couldn't take what I needed for me and food became my friend. I have struggled with my weight during other times of my life so I knew just how my fanny got wider, no one's

fault, no one forced me to crave foods that I shouldn't have. Now I am on the road to correcting those bad choices. Moving back into the energy of abundance when you have lived just trying to survive can be a struggle but it can be done – all we have to do is wear our big girl panties! Yes, I take responsibility for my health, for what I feed myself and my family. Moving back into abundance energy takes humility and accountability, but once you get it back then you realize how much you missed it.

We can't always predict what others will do, but we can change how we react to them. I have many times found myself at the mercy of someone else's actions – haven't we all? We can't help the credit card that was stolen or the person who rear ended us or even the illness of a loved one. We can work to not play the blame game, we can take care of any part we may have had in the situation and not enable it to go on or work to find a good solution.

Pythagoras said:

“Choose always the way that seems the best, however rough it may be; custom will soon render it easy and agreeable.”

The more often we step up and become accountable for our lives, the easier it becomes and the better parents we become.

I love this poem by Portia Nelson as it really illustrates just how we can be responsible.

### ***THERE'S A HOLE IN MY SIDEWALK***

*Autobiography in Five Short Chapters*

#### ***Chapter One***

*I walk down the street.*

*There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.*

*I fall in.*

*I am lost .... I am helpless.*

*It isn't my fault.*

*It takes forever to find a way out.*

#### ***Chapter Two***

*I walk down the street.*

*There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.*

*I pretend that I don't see it.*

*I fall in again.*

*I can't believe I am in this same place.*

*But, it isn't my fault.*

*It still takes a long time to get out.*

#### ***Chapter Three***

*I walk down the same street.*

*There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I see it is there.  
I still fall in ... it's a habit ... but, my eyes are open.  
I know where I am.  
It is my fault.  
I get out immediately.*

***Chapter Four***

*I walk down the same street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I walk around it.*

***Chapter Five***

*I walk down another street.*

Is there a constant hole in your sidewalk? Isn't it time to see the hole and either walk around it or better yet, take another road?

## Chapter 16 Commitment & Detachment

Karl Konig, a writer, physician and follower of Dr. Steiner wrote:

“There is a knighthood of the twentieth century, whose members do not ride through the darkness of physical forests as of old, but through forests of darkened minds. They are armed with a spiritual armor and an inner Sun makes them radiant. Out of them shines healing, healing that flows from the knowledge of the image of the human being as a spiritual being. They must create inner order, inner justice, peace and conviction in the darkness of our time.”

These are dark times and we must step up to do our part in bringing light to our families, being that beacon for them and giving our children a foundation to grow from. If we do not take on this task, who will? Our villages and communities don't take on this task and sadly our churches often don't either. God gave us these children to love, to respect, to build up and to nurture – nurturing goes far beyond the physical needs and directly to the emotional and spiritual needs each one of them has. It is our duty to give them a sense of Eden and of the real physical world. Just as God gave to our first parents, we are called to do the same.

You've made it through these 108 days, now where will you go? What will you do to continue to nourish this new found life within your family? Will the progress you've made fall like a rock? Or will you continue to walk this journey, with your partner and your children, living in faith, humility, compassion and perseverance? Take the lessons you have learned in this book and find new ways to apply them, new situations that can become learning experiences. Remember that you are your child's best first teacher and you will be the only constant in their lives until they leave your bosom and cleave to their partner. Teach them well. I am not saying this is an easy commitment; there will be really dark days, days when you want to run away or give up. I have those days too, I have times of doubt, times of frustration and anger and when I turn to God and connect, my relationship with the Divine becomes a shield to me, keeping me safe from harm and cradling me in a nest of warmth. These are the times when I remember, I am not walking alone.

“A Course in Miracles” reminds us:

“If you knew Who walks beside you on the way that **you** have chosen, fear would be impossible.”

We've been programmed by society that we don't need this commitment to our higher self, but we do. Take the time, make a plan from here on out, perhaps even start your 108 days again, make up different stories for your young ones, continue strong conversations with your adolescents, deepen your intimacy with your partner. Live together, love together.

When we are making our own commitment, the lack of respect and commitment from others seems more glaring than we have ever noticed before. When we rise, it is easy to see how many are standing still, wondering, living in drama and have no desire to move forward. It is our nature to worry about them, to want to help them and to get caught up in their ways. It is a constant reminder to us that we need to see the holes in the sidewalk, we need to know them for their fruit and know the damage they can do to us and our path we are on. We have to learn how to detach from this place. Deepak Chopra describes the Law of Detachment as allowing each person the freedom that we also desire – letting God’s energy flow. Each person has the right to do with their freedom what they want, and in that freedom, we too can detach and let those around us live the life they choose. We can’t control what they’ll do, we can however pray that our family and friends will find comfort, peace and also their own connection. Practicing detachment allows us pure freedom, we no longer have to worry about that friend with horrible taste in men or the family that refuses to be accountable for proper authority.

Dr. Steiner mentions that contentment become detachment. When we are committed and content, we can allow others the same. We no longer have to control everything. It is so easy to worry about family. For us, Erik and I have worked together to help one another see when we might be stepping in a hole – especially if it isn’t a hole of ours! When we have extended family that is insistent on jumping enthusiastically into the same hole again and again, we have learned to step back. We have tried to help not step in the hole, we’ve tried to get them to turn down another street and over time we have realized that we can pray and ask for guidance, but only for us, not for them. Usually when faced with a situation that involves a giant hole in the sidewalk, Erik and I stand at the edge and ask, “God, can we do anything that will help?” If prompted we step in hole with a rope around our waist so we can pull ourselves back to safety. If we can’t help, we can detach but offer support. Support might not be anything more than asking “what can I do to help?” Often there is nothing and the party knows it – it is their hole, not ours.

If you have friends or family that enjoy those potholes, talk to your partner about keeping each other abreast of ways to not fall in yourself. Be a support for one another.

While you are approaching the next part of this journey, remember the words of Lao Tzu, “The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.” Take the step, make the commitment to keep walking, to stay the path and to be the beacon.

## Closing

Often when I finish a book, the closing is the hardest part. I continually ask myself “Did I say everything?” The answer is always the same, “no, but you can write another book.” I have a few books in my “once a year” pile. This is a pile of books that I try to work through at least once a year, these are books that have emotional and spiritual significance to me – books that help me remember to stay on the path and constantly deal with my Poo and keep myself accountable for my actions. It is my hope that this book will be in your “once-a-year” pile. It is also my hope that this book has been helpful to you and your family, that even if you haven’t agreed with everything here, that my words have made you think and that you will now walk forward in the knowledge that you CAN do it, you CAN be that beacon for your family, you CAN be the parent you want to be, the partner you yearn to be, the daughter, the friend and most of all the Queen you deserve to be. We are all women of Divine heritage, we all deserve love and peace in our daily lives, and now you know that you can create and be abundant in it so you can also give to others.

Many Blessings to you and your family.

Melisa Nielsen

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