

“What we truly believe truly matters. Beliefs and behavior are linked and incorrect principles produce varying measures of mortal misery.”

--Neal Maxwell

PREFACE

There have been those who have said that a mother of my experience ought to write a book, however I have always felt uncomfortable sharing any idea that was based upon experience only, but I do feel an obligation to share what I have discovered that is right. The most fascinating and rewarding venture in my life has been the quest to discover truth and then to live it. The first is easier than the second, but the first is not easy. Truth seems to hide from all except the most persevering.

This book is not written for those who are looking for someone to tell them how to parent; it is written for those seeking understanding in parenting. The objective is simply to explain principles that I have discovered that have profound implications for parents. As a mother of eleven, I have found these principles extremely enlightening, and for that reason I am anxious to share them.

My search for these principles began some twenty-five years ago with the challenges I faced with my first son. I can still see my little blond toddler looking at me through tear-filled eyes. In him I could see the reflection of my own emotions--confusion and frustration. I was young, inexperienced, and bewildered. My situation resembled that of a person with no knowledge of football and any skills or training being thrown onto the football field and expected to make touchdowns! Out of pure despair I began a twenty-five-year search for ideas that would take me out of the fog. First of all, I observed parents who seemed to have some answers. I asked questions and voraciously read books on achieving success in parenting. Eventually, I came to the conclusion that it would take a college degree and I began formal studies in family science.

Soon, I became more confused than ever. The concepts taught seemed somewhat interesting but totally irrelevant to the day-to-day challenges of parenting. Besides that, almost everything I heard conflicted with my beliefs and experience as a mother. I was taught that children are mere evolutionary products whose ancestors swung from the trees; yet, my own experience and intuition indicated that they come from a more divine source. I was taught that they come “tabula rasa”--as a blank slate--yet from day one I observed vibrant personality traits. I was taught that children are the product of environmental and hereditary factors, and that they do not act but merely react to conditioning, yet I recognized within the little people a strong, independent spirit. I was taught that children are totally self-centered and selfish and that if they do display characteristics of concern it is only because they mimic the behavior that they have seen in others. Yet it has been my observation that they come into this world as the models of empathy, compassion and love. We need to mimic them.

Watch a three-month-old--catch his eyes--and he will squirm with delight and strive to communicate. Observe an eight-month-old and he will show characteristics of godhood--dignity, gentleness, coyness and compassion. The tiny ones shine like one who has been born again--with overflowing joy, friendliness, and cheerfulness!

I was taught that children are sexually attracted to the parent of the opposite sex and painfully jealous of the parent of the same sex, and yet I had observed that children adore both parents even to the point of worship and delight in watching their parents express affection to one another. (Our little ones are often so elated that Mommy and Daddy are hugging that they join in at the knees!)

I was taught that mental distress is a consequence of the idea that one's behavior is sinful--or morally wrong and that to overcome this distress one must abolish the idea of sin! Of all the philosophies of men this seemed to me one of the most absurd. Reasonable logic stated that in order to get rid of mental distress caused by sin one must eradicate the sin itself not merely the idea of sin. In other words, there can be no peace of mind after indulging in two or three-dozen cookies even if one says over and over, “There is nothing wrong with

eating a few cookies.” Obviously, no rationalization is going to defray the consequences.

In addition to these concepts, I was taught other tidbits of factual knowledge that seemed both then and now useless in the pursuit of good parenting practices such as: the various and differing potty-training practices from Africa to Alaska, the sexual practices of the field rat, and so forth. I did learn one thing, however, that I was on the wrong tract. I had become even more confused.

Besides all these conflicts, it seemed to me that these approaches to child guidance seemed to smell of either manipulation or permissiveness--the first a violation of the free will of man, and the second a violation of man's obligation to God, himself, and his fellow man. How can one study man strictly by the scientific approach without acquiring an aloof, distant, scientific attitude toward man? How can one use only secular tools to study a spiritual being? How can one see with an eternal vision when blinded with a mortal view?

My greatest complaint and confusion resulted as I came to realize that I was gaining a shortsighted perspective on parenting. I was taught that the objective is to raise children who are smart, socially adjusted, and self-actualized. Today we see all around us the harvest of such narrow narcissistic objectives. We see children clamoring for self-actualization--with the bizarre hairstyles, make-up, clothing and foul language, but, interestingly, their quest for identity seems to herd them together. They shout to the world, “Hey, you guys! Look at me! I can ignore your standards--your morals--and make up my own. My own values. My own morals, Me! Me! Me!”

When the smoke of secular learning had cleared I asked myself, “What did I expect? What could I have learned besides statistics, standards of social behavior, and the speculation of men? What else is there?” I abandoned my search for help from the professionals but continued reading books on child guidance that held some concrete answers. I appreciated deeply the practical ideas offered, but none of them addressed the underlying principles upon which the practices were based.

It was not until years later that I found real answers. I had become involved politically and as a consequence began studying

American political thought. As I read, I came to realize that these inspired principles could and should be applied to the home. The home is a unit of government. Parents who govern in the home ought to be aware of the free-will factor, the conscience factor, and the justice factor. Parents, too, need to recognize the eternal nature of the child. They, too, can find great hope in the awareness that they can receive strength and assistance from an all-loving God. I was making progress. In time I came to realize that my former feelings of being out-of-control were rooted in being out of understanding. I set a new course--not to find someone to tell me how to parent but to find the foundation principles of parenting.

As study brought these principles to light, I learned that each principle carried with it an illumination of wisdom and understanding that enabled me to gain peace in myself and confidence in governing.

When Solomon was made king over Israel he was filled with overwhelming fear and inadequacy. He sought his God in prayer: "I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in. . . Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people" (1 Kings 3:7,9). As kings and queens of our homes, we, too desperately need understanding hearts.

I have become converted to these inspired principles. Through the discovery and application of them, I have found greater peace of mind and freedom in mothering. This is not to say that there are no thunderclaps over our own private Camelot occasionally, but they pass and the sun shines through. There are still days when all seems lost, but thankfully there are days when all seems found. Through it all the thread of love and friendship continues on. Family success is not the absence of problems, but the understanding of them. Just as there are no perfect people, there can be no perfect families, but then that's the challenge of it all! Mortality is messy business. I am continually amazed in our family that, despite our struggles, we have achieved a more perfect union than I thought possible on this earth. My wish is that these principles will do the same for you and your loved ones.

