

TITLE: "Letting Go and Trusting God"

TEXT: Isaiah 49:15 (OT p. 680) "Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb?"

Introduction – When pigs can fly

Prior to last fall's national election, some people were saying, "We'll have a Black president when pigs can fly."

Now we have an African American President and ...swine flu.

Change happens. Some things seem to change too fast. Gas prices rise too fast. Cars wear out too fast. We get older too fast. Children grow up too fast.

Some things change too slowly. Spring takes its time coming. Tax returns take forever to come. The last hour of school, or work, goes too slowly. And WE change our behavior too slowly. Sometimes I start to think I can change when I want to, and then I try to take some weight off and keep it off. It's hard to change ourselves.

It's also hard to change those we love. If you don't believe me, try to get your kids, no matter what age they are, to save money, to help around the house or share your faith.

I have spoken to several moms over the past couple weeks who are very concerned over the fact that one or more of their children does not share their faith in Jesus Christ. So I want to address that issue. To do so, I want to read you a story and then give you three truths that I hope will give you some direction and some peace in this regard.

1<sup>st</sup> truth: "Unless the pain of not changing gets worse the pain of changing, a person will not change."

2<sup>nd</sup> truth: "The Holy Spirit can change from the inside what we cannot change from the outside."

3<sup>rd</sup> truth: "Prayer, especially a parent's prayer, will activate the Holy Spirit."

Here's the story. It's titled "What I have learned," and it is by Anna Quindlen, who is a *Newsweek* Columnist and Author.

All my babies are gone now. I say this not in sorrow but in disbelief.

I take great satisfaction in what I have today: three almost-adults, two taller than I am, and one closing in fast. Three people who read the same books I do and have learned

not to be afraid of disagreeing with me in their opinion of them, who sometimes tell vulgar jokes that make me laugh until I choke, and cry, who need razor blades and shower gel and privacy, who want to keep their doors closed more than I like. Who, miraculously, go to the bathroom, zip up their jackets and move food from plate to mouth all by themselves. Like the trick soap I bought for the bathroom with a rubber ducky at its center, the baby is buried deep within each, barely discernible except through the unreliable haze of the past.

Everything in all the books I once poured over is finished for me now. Penelope Leach, T. Berry Brazelton. Dr. Spock. The ones on sibling rivalry and sleeping through the night and early-childhood education, all grown obsolete. Along with “Goodnight Moon” and “Where the Wild Things Are”, they are battered, spotted, well used. But I suspect that if you flipped the pages dust would rise like memories. What those books taught me, finally, and what the women on the playground taught me, and the well-meaning relations --what they taught me, was that they couldn't really teach me very much at all.

Raising children is presented at first as a true-false test, and then becomes multiple choice, until finally, far along, you realize that it is an endless essay. No one knows anything. One child responds well to positive reinforcement, another can be managed only with a stern voice and a timeout. One child is toilet trained at 3, his sibling at 2. When my first child was born, parents were told to put baby to bed on his belly so that he would not choke on his own spit-up. By the time my last arrived, babies were put down on their backs because of research on sudden infant death syndrome. To a new parent this ever-shifting certainty is terrifying, and then soothing.

Eventually you must learn to trust yourself. Eventually the research will follow. I remember 15 years ago poring over one of Dr. Brazelton's wonderful books on child development, in which he describes three different sorts of infants: average, quiet, and active. I was looking for a sub-quiet codicil for an 18-month old who did not walk. Was there something wrong with his fat little legs? Was there something wrong with his tiny little mind? Was he developmentally delayed, physically challenged? Was I insane? Last year he went to China. Next year he goes to college. He can talk just fine. He can walk, too. ...Even today I'm not sure what worked and what didn't, what was me and what was simply life. When they were very small, I suppose I thought someday they would become who they were because of what I'd done. Now I suspect they simply grew into their true selves because they demanded in a thousand ways that I back off and let them be. The books said to be relaxed and I was often tense, matter-of-fact and I was sometimes over the top. And look how it all turned out. I wound up with the three people I like best in the world, who have done more than anyone to excavate my essential humanity.

That's what the books never told me. I was bound and determined to learn from the experts. It just took me a while to figure out who the experts were.

I share her sentiment. “I too have wound up with the [two] people I like best in the world, who have done more than anyone to excavate my essential humanity.” It sounds like she thinks the experts were actually the kids themselves. With that, I agree and disagree.

Let's get to those 3 truths. The 1<sup>st</sup> truth: “Unless the pain of not changing gets worse the pain of changing, a person will not change.”

Our text from Isaiah says: “Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb?” The answer is, of course, “No!” But each child is born with a “parent switch” in their brain. And it gets bigger as they grow older. And much of the time when we try to teach them something important, they turn off that switch.

If we want to understand why this is true, all we need to do is look objectively at our past. There we will see that we were the same way when we were growing up. The way WE learned things was by trial, error and consequence, not by listening to parents.

When Mom said not to touch the stove when it was on, we waited until her back was turned, touched it and got burned. When we doddled and missed the bus, we had to walk to school. When we first got our license we ignored the speed limits sign and got our first ticket.

We all hoped there would BE no consequences, but there were. And some of us had to experience those consequences more than once. But we did. And it seems to me that parents are more protective now than they used to be. They want to shield kids, no matter what their age, from the consequences of poor or unproductive behavior.

But DAVE, CAN “a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb?” No. Not unless you believe that “God loves your children more than you do.” This is where I agree with Anna Quindlen who wrote that article. Our kids ARE the experts. They CAN learn what they need to learn ...if we allow them to experience the consequences of their behavior. ...And if we trust God enough to believe that God will watch over them if we allow those consequences to happen.

2<sup>nd</sup> truth: “The Holy Spirit can change from the inside what we cannot change from the outside.”

Proverbs 22:6 in the RSV Version reads: “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.” Our NRSV reads: “Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray.”

Church attendance is down across the country because the present generation of young adults ARE departing from the way they should go and they ARE straying. Many parents are distressed over this and some feel guilty imagining that they may not have done everything they could to raise their kids as Christians.

This is where I disagree with Anna Quindlen. In regard to faith, children are NOT the experts. Although we, as parents certainly are not perfect, it IS up to us to talk to our children about faith and to be sure they are taught the about the Bible and basic Christian principals.

It is not our responsibility to make them Christians. I mentioned earlier the “switch” children have in their minds that often turns off when parents try to convey some important truth. There comes a time when many kids do wander away from their parent’s faith. This is a part of growing up and it is often a necessary part of accepting their own personal walk of faith.

Accepting Jesus as Savior takes an inner sense of need. You can’t force that. While in college, several people I knew were addicted to drugs. The fact that they needed help was painfully obvious to everyone who knew them, but it was not until THEY admitted their need that they sought help.

It takes a similar sense of inner conviction to accept Jesus as Savior. That inner conviction is the job of the Holy Spirit. I Timothy 2:4 tells us that, “[God] desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” As I said, God loves our children more than we do. God is working 24/7 to convict them of their need for their Savior, Jesus Christ.

You can TRUST the Lord to bring this about in your children. When Carol and I worry about our kids and find it hard to sleep, we picture taking our children out of our hands and placing them in the loving hands of God. That image helps. Of course, the problem is that we put our kids in God’s hands and then we snatch them out.

But Dave, isn’t their ANY way we can help in the process? Yes. 3<sup>rd</sup> truth: “Prayer, especially a parent’s prayer, will activate the Holy Spirit.”

Carol and I prayed, even before our children were born, that they would accept Jesus as their Savior and that they would find the person God wanted them to marry. Gog hears and responds to the prayer of parents.

Let me read you a story (by Mac St. Johns – *Guideposts 11/87 His Mysterious Ways*).

In the winter of 1944 during WWII, I was in France, a platoon sergeant in the Yankee division under General Patton. About mid-December I received a letter from my mother back in the states. “Can you remember,” she asked, “where you were on Thanksgiving Day?”

Could I remember? How could I forget the odd thing that happened that day. At dawn I was sent to check out a crossroads where an enemy stronghold was suspected. Normally I would have had my men fan out so they could move with the cover of the trees. But just before we started out that Thanksgiving morning, I stopped. I stood stark still, arguing with myself about what I should do.

Then, going strictly against the book, I walked my men right down the middle of a road in an exposed column. No one fired at us; there was no evidence of the enemy. We found the crossroads unoccupied and turned to walk back. There, on the backside of the trees where only the German soldiers would have seen, were signs warning MINEN. The woods had been mined. We would have been blown to bits!

Mother's letter continued. She told me how she awakened after midnight on Thanksgiving Eve when it would have been daylight in France: "I had the strong feeling that you were in great danger," she wrote. "When I opened my Bible, a phrase from II Chronicles 20:17 gleamed on the page" "Stand ye still and see the salvation of the Lord with you..."

God is faithful. When we pray for our children, God hears and responds. If we as parents, ask God to bring our children to faith, God will do it. They may do it when they are young or they may come to faith when they are old, but they WILL come to faith.

Conclusion – No greater joy

Ill John 4 reads, "I have no greater joy than this, to hear that my children are walking in the truth." If that is your greatest joy, remember Unless the pain of not changing gets worse the pain of changing, a person will not change. The Holy Spirit can change from the inside what we cannot change from the outside. Prayer, especially a parent's prayer, will activate the Holy Spirit. Amen.

NOT USED

From Anna Quindlen's article

Every part of raising children is humbling, too. Believe me, mistakes were made. They have all been enshrined in the, "Remember- When- Mom- Did Hall of Fame." The outbursts, the temper tantrums, the bad language, mine, not theirs. The times the baby fell off the bed. The times I arrived late for preschool pickup. The nightmare sleepover. The horrible summer camp. The day when the youngest came barreling out of the

classroom with a 98 on her geography test, and I responded, "What did you get wrong? (She insisted I include that.) The time I ordered food at the McDonald's drive-through speaker and then drove away without picking it up from the window. (They all insisted I include that.) I did not allow them to watch the Simpsons for the first two seasons. What was I thinking?

But the biggest mistake I made is the one that most of us make while doing this. I did not live in the moment enough. This is particularly clear now that the moment is gone, captured only in photographs. There is one picture of the three of them, sitting in the grass on a quilt in the shadow of the swing set on a summer day, ages 6, 4 and 1. And I wish I could remember what we ate, and what we talked about, and how they sounded, and how they looked when they slept that night. I wish I had not been in such a hurry to get on to the next thing: dinner, bath, book, bed. I wish I had treasured the doing a little more and the getting it done a little less.