Ministering To The Heart Of Your Child

By Cindy Rushton

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Who? Me? A Virtuous Woman???
YES! YOU! A Vessel God CAN Use!

PLUS! Lots More Coming Soon!!!
Stay Tuned!

In Loving Dedication...

To My Dear Elisabeth

This book is lovingly dedicated to you, my dear daughter and friend... You are my dose of encouragement each step of my way. You are sunshine in my life that always chases the drearies away! You are my joy when only a good laugh will do. You are a pillar of strength when I am I am weary and worn. You are my gift from God!

I thank you for all of the lessons that you have taught...and the patience you graciously extend while I am learning! I thank you that you did not keep your wounds all of the many times I have broken your heart, but that you have willingly used those opportunities to teach me how I really could minister to your heart. I thank you for opening up your life to others, you truly minister to the depths of everyone's soul!

You are my delight...my treasure... May God continue to bless you richly and keep you right in the center of His Will. May you one day step up to the call of motherhood, ministering to your precious little ones too! Love, Mom

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Turning Our Hearts Back Home

Turning Our Hearts Back Home...

"But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings…Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse."
Malachi 4: 2, 5-6

Ever noticed how amazingly God weaves together messages and books? I am in utter amazement as I think back to the story of this book and how God worked in our lives to bring this book to conception in my heart. As I have thought back over this book, I really believe that you need a little background on our lives before you dig in.

A Gift From God...

I simply love motherhood! My children are such a delight and constant joy. Matthew is now just a few weeks away from being 13 (now only a few weeks from being 19!) and *still* a complete delight and joy! (For mothers looking at teen years with a little anxiety, this should be a relief! Yes, they can be wonderful at this age too!) I am currently studying over the life of David, a man who was said to be ***"after God's own heart."*** As I think of Matthew, I really believe that David has nothing on him. Matthew has always had a heart for God. My life is forever changed as I have mothered Matthew, who is definitely a gift from God, as his name implies.

From the time he was little, there was always something very, very different about Matthew. As a toddler, we would have the most tremendous conversations! Yes, a toddler! Even then he became one of my very best friends. We played together, read together, walked together, worked together. Those early years with Matthew planted the seeds of my love for being at home full time.

Matthew was saved at the young age of 5. Have a rowdy 4 or 5 year old and think that this is *too* much?? Well, hang on! I will never forget that year before he was saved. It was a tremendous year of frustration for him. I had worked outside of the home for the first time that year. He had never had to be apart from me, but it was inevitable as I began

working a part-time job that quickly consumed *all of my time*--working and not working. His little heart was churning with conviction that whole year. It played itself out in his behavior, which quickly began to be unbearable!

Strangely enough, this all began at our church Vacation Bible School. During an altar call, he raised his little hand saying that indeed he was a sinner and wanted desperately to be saved. I was shocked that a child that young could have such a heart. Yet, I was not surprised that he had a full understanding of his own sin and his need for God's grace. We had always taught him that sin was sin, meaning that as we would discipline him, we would share with him that what he did was sin and would have a penalty. This took chastisement much further than *"because I told you so."* We always gave them firm instruction of what was sin so that our children ***knew*** what was expected and what the penalty for their sin would be. From infancy we shared with him about our Heavenly Father, Who loved him dearly, so dearly that He wanted to have a relationship with him, but in spite of His deep love for Matthew, God simply could not look upon him as he lived in sin.

As I look back over that year after that Bible School meeting, it reminds me of the year before I was saved. I was basically a good girl, yet as a little girl I kept finding myself falling short! I wanted to be *so* good. I tried to be good through my grades at school, wearing certain clothes, helping as much as possible, doing certain things, having certain friends, and even making constant resolves to be *"good."* My turmoil of heart kept building until that precious night at a Halloween Carnival (***ever*** heard such a story???) that I heard the gospel story I had heard all of my life, but this time I heard it in a new way.

Oh, the same words were spoken about how that there was a great gulf between man and God that was caused by sin. I knew that was truth because I knew that there was nothing within me that could possibly be *"good"* because I had tried everything. My sin overwhelmed me, embarrassed me, and frustrated me constantly. Yet, there seemed to be ***no*** power to withstand it because I just did those things that I did not want to do and I had no power within myself that could help me to do those things on my heart. I wanted to ***know*** God, but I seemed to be unable to really understand what this God, Who I wanted to know so badly, was all about. As I sat there I knew that I needed to do whatever I could to be saved. It was almost as soon as I thought of this need in my heart, they shared that ***all*** I needed to do was to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and I would be saved. Tears flowed down my face in a stream that felt like a river, I ran to the gentle teacher and asked how I could be saved! The release that I had searched for finally came!

A Holy Moment That Would Change MY Life!

I remember the night that Matthew was saved. I felt that same turmoil coming out of his spirit. I did not really realize what was going on because I was not expecting that one so young would be so aware of this eternal need. As I look back, I know now that he was going through the same turmoil that I went through that year before I was saved, but I could not see it at the time. I was in for the greatest treat of my life on that night!

It was our special bed-time. We always read through the Bible right before tucking the children in bed. As I tucked Elisabeth into bed, I turned to go to tuck Matthew into bed. We had begun to memorize real Scripture just the night before. (One of my greatest regrets is that we did not begin sooner…they were so able!) He had decided the night before to memorize John 3: 16.

As I sat beside his bedside listening to him share his verse, I noticed this tender child's eyes swelling with big, huge, alligator tears. As he quoted his verse, he looked up at me and asked me right in the middle of the verse, *"Mommy, does God really love ME so much that He gave His ONLY Son to die for ME?? I…I want to be saved!"* I began to sob from the depths of my heart. By the time he had uttered this question, he was sobbing. I felt in my heart that this was a *holy moment*, one of my greatest treasures as a mother! My husband was in the other room waiting for me to come spend time with him. I called (actually squealed in delight!) him into Matthew's room! He could not miss this!

We felt the preciousness of what was going on at that moment as Matthew, Harold and I sat beside Matthew's bed while all of Heaven watched this little soul "come home!" I felt that all of Heaven must have been rejoicing in the little quiet scene in this little room in Mississippi! TREMENDOUS! We, as parents, were blessed to witness the transformation in this little life that would not just transform Matthew into a new creature, but us as well!

Real Focus…Turning My Heart Back Home!

Oh, I had always loved being a mommy. My children were such fun! I was never happier than those moments at home with these two little treasures. Yet, at that moment, I realized that I had never had any comprehension of the call to motherhood! I had always thought that the main goal in my life was to lead my children to Christ. I simply wanted for my children to all *"be saved"* by the end of their lives. This is not a bad goal in and of itself—just far below the greatness that God has planned for each child (and parent!).

As I left Matthew's bedside, I almost immediately felt a tremendous weight come upon

my heart. I saw for the first time that my calling as a mother was much, much more than feeding, clothing, caring for their physical and emotional needs and merely leading my children to Christ, I had the call to disciple them so they could someday disciple others. Salvation was just ***the beginning*** of my call to influence their lives! I was immediately humbled!

Stepping Up to the Call!

Although I had loved my children as much as I could, I really did not love them completely because I did not understand until that night how important my role as a mother was really going to be. I had fallen into the trap that is so common in our culture of having in the deep recesses of my heart a reservation for *"my life"* that I would one day have. I had no idea that this life as a godly wife and mother ***was*** "my life" that God had planned for me!

I had enjoyed my children, yet my heart was not completely at home until God did the work to move me from having a wandering heart—to turn my heart toward my children. Turning my heart toward my children brought a real love for my children…a deep, abiding love…a complete love! This love brought me an immediate realization that there was great purpose in training up one of these little ones. I had not tapped into the abundant delights of motherhood simply because I had a double mind. Turning my heart back home brought me peace and a fullness so I could ***know*** that I ***know*** that what I am doing within my home ***is*** the call—it ***is*** my purpose in life!

The seeds of love for the call womanhood planted in those early years were finally growing in my life.

The Heart of the Book…

This brings us to this book and to a little bit about my precious daughter. From her conception, she has been *just* like me! J I remember her in my womb as a gentle baby—real relaxed and easy to carry. I hardly knew she was there. Well, except one night when I went to hear a Christian music group in Huntsville. I had won the tickets with our local radio station. When we got there, we were shocked to see that this Christian group was so loud and the atmosphere was not exactly what we expected.

We didn't want to be rude, but as the comfort level decreased, so did the comfort level decrease for my little baby in my womb. She wadded up in a tight ball and seemed to almost pang on my bladder in sharp pangs! As a baby in my womb, she stood (or wadded

up!) for what she believed.

Yes, this is my Elisabeth! Of all of the people in the whole wide world, I have never known one person as passionate about life. She has always immersed her whole being into anything that she does. She has always been and will always be a person who is strong in conviction and passionate enough to stand for her convictions! She is the one person who purposes to see little needs and meet them, whatever the costs!

Our Little Blessing...

I fell down a flight of stairs in our home not long after we finished building our own house. I was forced to slow down and stay in bed just due to the throbbing pain with any extra movement. Elisabeth came forth in the fullness of her gifts as she covered my bedside table with precious cards, food, drinks, and little gifts. This is our little encourager! This is a simple picture of her response to life in ALL situations.

In fact, the closest I have ever come to being arrested was because of her! Got your attention? Yes, she was only around 2-years-old. Picture this simply beautiful little toddler with her blonde hair always pulled up with a big matching hair-bow on top of her head much like "Pebbles" from the Flintstones. Imagine her big, electric blue eyes. Then, imagine this little girl picking a flower *just for Mommy* at the Alamo!!! Oh, yes, **The Alamo**...the place with security cameras and great big signs warning all that *"IF YOU PICK THE FLOWERS, YOU WILL BE PROSECUTED!"*

Yes, my darling Elisabeth...unhindered by anything or anyone when it comes to ministering to others!

Elisabeth was also saved at an early age. I am not sure now if her salvation was the first fruits of Matthew's ministry here on earth (as he would preach to her about her sin and need to be saved as ***only*** a brother could do)...Elisabeth's passion for not missing a moment of anything God has in store for her on earth...or a mixture of it all!

I never imagined that *both* of my children would be saved at early ages! You could imagine my surprise when Elisabeth was four years old as she walked down the aisle wanting to be saved at revival at our church! I was stunned!

That particular night, I was tired, utterly exhausted. We were building our own home. Each day was met with so many "to-do's" that I was exhausted almost every day. On this particular night, I had decided to just stay at home with the children to slow down my

pace. We never missed church, but surely that night we would do better to just be at home as a family with more time for rest and family worship. The children begged to go to church so I relented, having no idea what I would learn that night!

The message was typically wonderful, but the message was not the life-changing moment for me that night. I would learn that night that every minute counts for our children, that we do not need to hinder them from coming to the Lord in spite of our own limitations, and that you never know when it may be time for a big step forward in God's plan for their lives.

As they gave the altar call, my little baby girl looked up at me and whispered that she needed to be saved! As I shared earlier, I was stunned…shocked…completely caught off-guard!

Since Matthew's salvation, I had realized the tenderness and the deep understanding that children have for things of God. I knew that it was possible for this little girl to be convicted and really understand that she needed salvation. So, we went together to the back with a counselor. I had a funny feeling. Elisabeth could answer *every* question *exactly* right. She was sincere. Yet, as we walked up front, I felt a pang in my heart! I figured it was just because I felt that jealousy for her being saved at church rather than at home. I really had desired to lead my little ones to Christ after the pleasure of leading Matthew to Christ. I just credited my "check" of spirit to my disappointment of my plans, which was really fine, but I could not shake that "check!"

The weird thing was that instead of struggling "before" her salvation as Matthew (and even I) did, she began having a really tough time that year. She was constantly in trouble. Harold and I knew that she had a heart for doing right, but she just seemed to do everything wrong! I was heartbroken for her. Her struggles were really difficult for a mommy to watch. I constantly prayed for her and tried to help her walk step-by-step through her temptations and difficulties, yet she struggled even with help.

A whole year later, I was teaching Vacation Bible School. That year our church was building a new addition so it was much too dangerous for Bible School to be at the church. Instead, we had "Backyard Bible Clubs." I will never forget one of those days. I was teaching a precious lesson about Corrie Ten Boom and how God worked in her life and used her as one of His vessels. As I shared the gospel, not so much for *my* little ones because they were "saved" already, I was shocked when one little girl raised her hand wanting to talk with me about being saved. I thought that maybe she did not understand the question because I "thought" that she was already saved. I motioned for her to put her

hand down and whispering that I would talk to her later. Guess who?

You have got it! Elisabeth!

I continued on and I could see her frustration in me. I prayed with one little girl about her heartbreak from the struggles she was enduring in her recently broken home. As I turned to get goodies ready for their snacks, one little girl (my Elisabeth) was standing behind me in tears! I ***knew*** in my heart that I had to stop what I was doing to listen to her!

I guess in my mind I was expecting that she might be wanting to make a greater commitment in another area of her life??? But, she wanted to be saved. She shared with me that when I shared in the lesson that we cannot be saved by trusting in what we do, what or who our parents are, in baptism, in works, or nothing but Christ and Christ alone…that God spoke to her. She shared that she had really wanted to be saved and had thought that being baptized would save her! We had taught her well, but she did not place her faith where it needed to be placed. She came up empty and in deep need of ***salvation***!

I was blessed that day to watch my little girl's life change! She entered into this pilgrimage with our entire family. I was once again overwhelmed by the privilege of getting to disciple such a great servant of God.

If you knew Elisabeth, you would know why God would bring one so young to a saving knowledge of Himself. Elisabeth's specialty is in the little things. She has always delighted in being a ***"behind-the-scenes"*** servant. I firmly believe that one day God will use her in a mighty way to influence multitudes just because she is so willing to take the back seat and do the little things for anyone and everyone. She is an encourager of all. A servant of all. Her passion for living and life is addictive!

Saying this, I have to tell you that just as any other Christian will find, her strengths and giftings are also the areas that her faults and struggles are found. Just like me, she struggles so much with wanting to please others and getting frustrated as she tries to help the *whole* world and gets into more trouble and makes more messes as she tries to help!

Now after all of this background, we are at the introduction of this book!

Our Family Lifestyle...REAL Ministry!

God called our family early into a lifestyle of ministry. Now, don't get the wrong pic-

ture here. My husband is not a preacher. He is an Alabama State Trooper (now retired and running his own business). In our area, I am pretty nameless except for the loving terms which I am most often called "The Trooper's Wife" or "Matthew's Mom" or "Elisabeth's Mom." While we love our church, we attend a simple little country church that only has one pastor on staff, part-time. We are a real, live family like many of you! Yet, from early in our marriage, we have committed to living a Christian life in our entire life. All beginning in our home so our culture can truly see what God can do for real people.

Our heartbeat has been first to minister and disciple one another within our family and then to stretch forth our "tent" to those God brings to us. As I look back over our lives, I am not surprised that God brought our children to saving knowledge and commitment to Him at early ages, He wanted for them to be part of our family ministry. It makes our ministry and our influence more effective, more credible, and more doable. Not to mention, a family ministry is the perfect training ground for their own lives in the future, but it is much more than that. As we live day-to-day, I am amazed at how God uses all of us together for the ministry He has called us to do ***today***! (*There is more about that in the pages of this book.*)

You can imagine our dismay as we faced a tough time with Elisabeth last year (now way back at the beginning before the first publishing of our book J).

A Warning Sign...

We were on the road. It was the end of a busy traveling season. I guess it is evident by now that I am a writer. Because of God's blessing, we do travel a good bit as a family to minister in this public ministry *(only a small part of our REAL family ministry—more on that later!)*. On this particular week, we had a simply wonderful week of time together as a family. We had three bookings in a week, but don't get scared! In between those bookings, we had time to slow down…swim…read…and cuddle together for even more time than usual. This was perhaps that reason that I was shocked so much by one little event in our life.

During the Saturday session of our retreat, Harold took Elisabeth with him to go shopping and sight-seeing. When we travel with our ministry, Harold says that his *role* is to ***play*** with our children! J They usually go shopping to look at shops of their interests or they go to see the various sites in the area.

He said that as he was leaving the room and walking down the hall, Elisabeth looked

up to him with her soft, disappointed eyes to say, *"I know..."* Harold asked her, *"What? What do you know?"* She replied with a broken heart, *" I know...I have to go with you because they are afraid that I won't behave...I know."* We would *never* think such a thing of her! She is such a darling little girl! She is such a blessing to mothers at our retreats as she holds and plays with little babies so their mothers can have a moment to be filled up with the Word of God. She is constantly finding little ways to encourage those who attend our workshops and she is that person you never see behind the scenes because she is constantly busy doing little things for others. We ***know*** we could not minister without her!

I had no idea what had been said until later when Harold confided in me that he was broken hearted for her. It was all that he could do to keep from crying in front of her as she shared her insecurity. We both treasure both of our children tremendously. We know we could not do a ministry without each of our family members sharing their giftings and talents. He was more concerned with her broken spirit because it was a warning sign of a broken heart.

As he poured out his deep concern and grief, I melted in heartache for her. This scared me! You may be thinking, *"What is the big deal?"* This is not a child turning away from the Lord...nor becoming rebellious...nor a teen pregnancy...nor even a child smoking pot in the bathrooms. This was just a little seed beginning to grow. Yes, this may have been a little seed, but it was a rapidly growing seed. You may have noticed little seeds like this one, which all too soon become great big monster weeds!

You see, one of the things that we have seen over and over as we have traveled and ministered to families is that rebellion begins with the little things. Christian children are not exempted. In fact, they may be even more at risk. Rebellion hits all people, but it need not get a hold on anyone! We can all expect to be hit at some time by this temptation to rebel. However, unlike popular opinion rebellion does not occur in a day, at a certain age, or in response to a particular upbringing or even in one's life. It is not due to hormones...poor training...lack of commitment... too much commitment (overprotection)... abuse... government schooling... private/parochial/home schooling... bad friends.

Any of these things could have "caused" our rebellion as teens...and we may have blamed any of our rebelliousness on any of these circumstances. The funny thing is that this is not the root problem. If it were truly the *real* problem, these same things would continue to cause or influence us to rebel from God today as we live our adult lives. This just is not biblical.

Can you just imagine?? Say for example, I have a hormone fluctuation. Have them?? I have to confess that my hormones are *much* more trying at this age than they ever were in my teen years! So, my hormones begin their monthly rage and I, ***justifiably*** go off the "deep-end" and rebel against all of the authority in my life??? Better yet…my progesterone increases so I scream at the first person who calls in the morning…***beat*** the children… run over the first idiot that pulls out in front of me on Woodward Avenue (those in the Shoals area ***know*** that this would be EASY!)…then, ***dare*** the first insurance agency ***not*** to pay for my fit! Oh, then there is my husband as he comes in from work! J

I know this seems silly. But, we hear everyday the excuses that our culture gives for rebellion. They just do not match up. Children do not ***have*** to become rebellious. They can be trained to live as godly young Christians without any of the excuses that are so common for our culture for behavior that is plain and simply--walking in the flesh. Of course, it is not the infamous hormones. It is not even caused by poor training. We see countless stories of great people who have overcome poor training or poor upbringing. They had the choice to choose greatness or choose rebellion.

Rebellion is not a result of a lack of commitment. One of my dearest friends has recently gone through the *"valley of the shadow of rebellion"* even after giving her whole life to do the job that God has called her to do! We can assure her, as well, that this rebellion in the heart of her child is not from her *"overcommittment"* aka *"overprotection"* either! Looking back over my life, I just wish that my parents had been even ***more*** protective of me. I ***loved*** that security of knowing that my parents would take care of me. Of all of the things that my parents *did* right, this is on the top of my list *and* it never led me to rebellion.

If it is not hormones or parental commitment, then surely rebellion would be inevitable if someone were abused. Surely, abuse should at least give a good reason for rebellion. Right? Wrong! Some of the most dynamic, joy-filled Christians that I know have been horribly abused all throughout their childhood only to become vessels that God uses to minister to others. Wrong again!

What about schooling? You know, couldn't the education that one has or has not gotten affect their rebelliousness? If we were to ask what kind of an education each of the readers of this book had, we would find a mixture of government schooling, private and parochial schooling, and maybe even homeschooling. I am afraid that once again, we might *"blame"* any mode of education for yielding the fruit of rebellion, but the truth is that there are rebellious and very submissive, happy children from all modes of education. None can yield a bad apple every time and none can yield perfect fruit every time!

"I know," you say, "It is definitely bad friends!" Wrong again. Looking back into my teen years, my *"bad"* friends were often better influences than my *"good"* friends. They were the ones to challenge me to get right with God! Hummm…

No. My dear friends, I hate to say it but ***none*** of these are the real reasons for rebellion. Instead, the root cause is much, much deeper.

In Scripture, we see that there is one ***key*** element that is present in every single case of rebellion and wayward children—***the heart!*** The parents either have never had the heart of the child or somewhere along the way they have broken or lost their heart. The same thing is true with our rebellion with God. It is an issue of the heart. He wants our heart—our whole heart. It is our heart that turns toward Him in surrender and commitment, or sadly, away from Him into rebellion and willfulness.

Bringing all of this back to my home, you can imagine my alarm as I realized that my darling little girl had a broken heart! Her idea of how we really thought and felt of her was marred and broken. One of the first steps toward rebellion!

We saw this as a warning sign that we needed to minister to her heart. We knew that children did not just *"go bad"* in a day! We immediately went to the Lord in repentance and to commit anew to the call of ministering to her precious heart. This time on our faces before the Lord began a process of the Lord showing us some simply profound truths that we would like to share with you in this small book.

Our prayer is that this book will help to challenge you to a commitment to minister to the heart of each of your children. That you will take this time to commit yourself anew to God and to turn your heart back home. That you will be willing to lay aside any hindrance that may be entangling you from truly ministering to the heart of your children. Most of all, that you will dedicate yourself to a greater call than merely *"raising"* your children—that you will commit to the call of discipling your precious little ones for God and God's glory!

The Heart of the Parent... Ministering to YOUR Heart!

Lord, Begin With Me...

Our culture has been ripped apart from the design that God planned from creation for the family. As we go back to the garden, we find that what began as close communion between God and man *and* husband and wife quickly "fell" into separation and void… strife and turmoil…pain and suffering as a terrible ramification of sin and death. It was then that the battle was declared for the heart of the home.

One of the first ramifications of the fall of man was found in the relationship between man and God. The intimacy that God planned was immediately strained and broken. The 2nd area hit was the calling of man and woman. The very areas of greatest delight in the life of man and woman were the areas that became difficult and challenging due to the effects of sin.

Think about your calling, it is just not natural for a person (Forgive me, but let's get more specific: woman—I can *really* speak for myself here!) to want to do exactly what God asks. There are just so many things that compete for our attention as we seek to commit our whole heart to the call of womanhood. As if that were not enough, we find ourselves swimming against the stream in our culture. Who wants to be radical… persecuted… completely different… catch the attention of those looking in on our lives?? We find ourselves on a path that is uncharted and very rarely traveled by those going before us. How are we to even ***know*** which way to go and what would work when there is no one there to point the way?? We find a constant pull on our family in how our time is to be spent and what our focus will be. Who can constantly guard their own heart and those of their children at the same time? I believe that this is where we must go back to God for restoration and complete healing.

Turning Our Hearts to God...

Ministering to the heart of our children is impossible without first turning our heart to the One Who brings absolute wholeness into our lives! Just knowing that God really does care about our lives, what happens to us, what we do each step of the way, really helps us to turn toward Him. So many people in our culture do not understand that God is a personal God. He really cares and wants to help us right where we are. He wants to take our pain and turn it into our ministry. He wants to take our struggles and use them to offer

His strength to others. Just knowing that He has answers and direction regardless of the situation or dilemma we face, gives us peace in the midst of any circumstance!

Turning to God is simple but often very difficult. He only requires simple turning to Him, committing our way to Him, and living completely for Him. The hard part is taking that first step and staying focused on Him all along the way. What joy we find in Him! We find that we are free from the bondage that steals life, peace, and joy. We find the path to real joy, which is more effective, easier, less stress and life-long. Only in Him do we find abundant life and purpose!

Restoration of Relationships...

As we turn to God, we begin to find that He begins the process of restoring our relationships. We do not naturally *know* our roles in life. We do not just *know* how to be a godly wife, mother, homemaker, mentor, or child of God. Very few of us have had truly Biblical models as we have grown up. If that does not make things difficult enough, very few of us have even sat under any teacher or preacher of what the Bible says about godly womanhood. This is probably because very few of them truly understand God's plan for womanhood or those that have a glimpse of God's plan are too intimidated to teach truths as convicting as those about Biblical roles of men and women because of persecution and rejection of their followers.

This void leaves a gap in our understanding of God's call for women. It takes time sitting at the feet of Jesus before we will be able to begin to understand the awesome call of womanhood. For this reason, we have to spend time seeking God's plan for our lives and allowing Him to change us and turn our hearts toward our husbands, children, and our homes.

Is Our Heart Turned Home??

How do we know if our heart is turned toward our husbands, children, and homes? One of the greatest tests will be our focus. If our heart is turned homeward, our primary focus will be upon our ministry ***to our family***. Ministry to *our* ***own*** *family* is the main thing! Ministry to *our own family* is the one thing that we can KNOW is eternal!

The call of womanhood is not to pursue menial distractions outside of the home. Regardless of pay and "respect" or even contentment, the eternal rewards are always menial in the trappings of the world. Even a close check into activities that are *"good"* such as our obligations to our church, ministry, support group, or community groups will quickly

turn up a loss of time and energy that could have been used for our eternal, God-ordained call.

This reminds me of an illustration that pastor, Brother Boyd Parker, shared in a life-changing (for me!) sermon a while back. He illustrated the morbid truth that it will not be six months after our death until we will be forgotten—totally forgotten. Even those who love us the most will not think of us very often. We are easily replaced. Sound tough?

Well think of those that have gone on before us? How often do you think of them? What about old friends? Do you remember their names? What do you remember about them? What about positions in your church? How long *does* it take to replace someone who steps down from a responsibility?

Before you get depressed and completely down and out, think of the many things that you are doing in your life. Do they count? Are they the things that are eternal? Can they stand through the fire? Look at 1 Corinthians 3: 13-15…

"Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire."

Time is so short here on earth. What we do ***must*** count for eternity. What we do ***must*** be able to withstand the fire.

Can you imagine this day that we will be standing before our Lord?

Think of ***all*** that you have ever done, good and bad…excellent and half-hearted…seen and unseen…***all*** being brought with you and piled in a great big bonfire! Yes, your precious service at church…your hours of meals that you have lovingly prepared…those precious moments at home with your little ones sharing loving words about God…all that you have written…all that you have said…all those moments reading to our children… oh, and all of the words read to them…moments playing…moments working… attitudes…desires…***all*** on the altar! Then, imagine a great fire with all of your precious life burning up in flames. Those things that you were *sure* God had led you to do frizzling away to nothing. Those "little things" turning into pure stones to present before your Father. Those precious lives that we touched becoming crowns full of jewels that we may

present before our Lord. The fire rages as you see the value of *all* in your life.

What remains?

What is left to present to the Father?

This life is *so* short! James 4: 14 says, ***"For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away."*** For this reason, we need to evaluate ***all*** that we do based upon God's call for our life. Are the things that we do *really* our own call *or* are we tending someone else's garden? Does it *really* count?

This sermon really hit me hard. I heard this only a week or so before I realized that indeed one of the responsibilities that had taken time from our family and ministry *was not* God's plan. Although it was a "good" thing, as so much of what we do happens to be, it was taking time and focus that could be better used by doing *only* what God called *just me* to do. The funny thing was that as I stepped back from this responsibility, I realized that not only could someone fill my place immediately, but I was quickly forgotten! Hummm…very humbling! Those things must be surrendered before they cost us our family…the *real* call that God has for our life.

Do We TRULY Love Our Children??

Another test for our heart is our love for our children? If I were to ask any of you the simple question, *"Do you love your children?"* your first answer would be *"yes."* You would not stutter…or answer with any reluctance. This is a "mother" thing.

My instant answer was always, *"Of COURSE!"* Even before I really surrendered all in my life for this call of womanhood, my easy answer was, "Why…of course!!" I completely adored my children. Memory of that first moment I saw my little Matthew with that sweet grin still sends delight to the depths of my soul. Those moments of watching Elisabeth play with her little blonde ponytail bouncing up and down as she spread her enthusiasm and joy to all around her…the funny things that they said almost constantly…the moments of excitement as they found little critters or spotted details on flowers that were never seen by anyone else! Oh, yes, I adored my children and had a love for them, but it was not until I completely crucified ***my*** plans…***my*** desires…***my*** ideas…***my all*** on the altar of sacrifice that I realized my lack of true love for my children and finally began to love my children.

Oh, it took a lot of digging in the depths of my soul to really uncover where my heart

really was…wrapped up in myself and my selfish ambitions! I found this to be the hardest thing for me to face, much less admit! I had to repent bitterly because even though I was present *physically* in my home, there were years and years that I wasted spiritually as I bought the lies of our enemy that are so commonly fed to young women starting at their birth. I spent years thinking of marriage and motherhood as not much more than a vacation from "my real life" that I would some day continue when the children were school age and able for me to go back to work without any problem. I have to admit that this was my greatest hindrance to pouring my entire soul into my calling. Not to mention, it was hard for me to really love, totally love, my children if I were counting days until I could get out of the "bondage" and "drudgery" of taking care of them.

Oh, I never, ever verbalized these *horrid* feelings. But, I lived out my heart. My heart's desire and plans showed in many ways that I was merely counting days to send them off to school so I could then begin *my* life by going back to school and getting on with my dreams, ambitions, and well-made plans! This heart desire affected everything in my life: my responses to my husband (I was not completely free to trust him and submit to him in all areas of my life because I wanted an out "just in case!")…my children (I was not free to enjoy them for all of the constant guilt that flooded at weird times…guilt for *enjoying* my life at home when "surely" there was so much more for me in my career!)…the atmosphere of my home (There is a ***major*** difference in the spirit of the home when Mom is taking *every* minute to teach, disciple and minister to those within her home. Home becomes more peaceful and quiet spirited. Home becomes more of a haven of rest from the stormy world. *Big difference!!*)…my commitments (Sure did simplify *everything*!)…my spirit (At last rest! Joy! Contentment! Purpose!)...my ambitions (I was free to ***"Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.*** 1 Thessalonians 4: 11-12)…my life goals (Now all is related to my calling as a woman of God!). I could be free to enjoy womanhood and most of all, to love my husband and children completely!

I say, free to love completely, yet another one of the hardest things for me to admit was to myself (much less to others) was that I did not want other children. I *had* a boy and a girl…wasn't that just *too* perfect…wasn't that enough?? How could I really have a love for those I did have? I mean, think about it. Was this true love or just a fact of life? Was this a biblical love for mothering like we find that the Titus 2 mentor is supposed to teach the younger woman? To ***love*** her children? To be a ***lover*** of children?

This is not to condemn those without children, with one child, with two children, with 15 children. It is not a number game. It is not even an ability to have children or not. It

is a *heart issue*. One of those heart-wrenching lessons from God sent straight to me. I was desperately needing to develop a love for children like that modeled by Jesus when He taught us in His gentle way that, ***"Whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth Me."*** (Matthew 18: 5)

I did not even realize what I was saying or believing or communicating through my choices and lifestyle until one night after we found out that we were expecting our third child, Samuel Lee. That night my son was dying to share with the grandparents our news about our little blessing. While they were on the phone, one particular grandparent told Matthew that "whenever we had so many children that we could not feed him (EEK! Little exaggerated huh?) so that he had to go work at Burger King just to help pay the bills (WOE! He was just 8 years old!) … *Then*, he would be glad for Matthew to come live with him." (Hum! I don't think so!!)

What *does* a mom do about that? Let her little arrow fly!

He first told his grandparent that he could not imagine God ***not*** providing for us as he blessed us with more children. (YEA!) He continued to share his delight about the wonderful blessing God was bestowing upon our family! After he got off the phone, he looked at me and said words that cut down to the very depths of my soul. He said, *"If they do not want and love my baby brother, would they have wanted or loved ME if I were this baby??"* WOE!

Do our children *really* think this way? Can our reluctance to have more children communicate to our children a lack of love…just parenting because of duty…a rejection of them *if* they were not born when they were??? What does this tell them about our experience with them as our children? Are we letting them ***know*** that we ***love*** mothering ***them***?

Since then, I have really watched what I have said about having more children…about the children that I have…or about those I have lost through miscarriage. We communicate the depths of our heart and where our heart really is by the way we embrace children.

Responding A Key to Where Our Heart Is???

Finally, we can find where our heart is by the way we *respond to our children*. Are they a joy? A hindrance? An inconvenience? A treasure and delight? Our response to them will show where our heart is.