

KEEPER OF THE SPRINGS

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A young father was trying to explain the concept of marriage to his four-year-old daughter. He got out their wedding album, thinking visual images would help, and explained the entire wedding service to her. When he was finished, he asked if she had any questions. She pointed to a picture of the wedding party and asked, "Daddy, is that when mommy came to work for us?"

A teacher gave her class of second graders a lesson on the magnet and what it does. The next day in a written test, she included this question: My full name has six letters. The first one is M. I pick up things. What am I? When the test papers were turned in, the teacher was astonished to find that almost 50 percent of the students answered the question with the word Mother.

When we are young, we need an example of sincere faith. Too often parents say that they want their children to make up their own minds about religion. They usually say that because they have not made up their own minds about what they believe. So, in essence, they are making disciples of their own belief system. Their children are going to believe like them unless somewhere along the line there is an intervention.

In everything that you've needed to know, somewhere along the line a mom probably taught you. Let's revisit some of those lessons:

My mother taught me logic: "If you fall off that swing and break your neck, you can't go to the store with me," as well as, "If everyone else jumped off a cliff would you do it too?"

My mother taught me medicine: "If you don't stop crossing your eyes, they're going to freeze that way."

My mother taught me to think ahead: "If you don't pass your spelling test, you'll never get a good job!"

My mother taught me to meet a challenge: "What were you thinking? Answer me when I talk to you. Don't talk back to me!"

My mother taught me humor: "When that lawn mower cuts off your toes, don't come running to me."

My mother taught me how to become an adult: "If you don't eat your vegetables, you'll never grow up."

My mother taught me about genetics: "You are just like your father!"

My mother taught me about my roots: "Do you think you were born in a barn?"

My mother taught me about the wisdom of age: "When you get to be my age, you will understand," or, "I will explain it all when you get older."

My mother taught me about anticipation: "Just wait until your father gets home."

My mother taught me about receiving: "You are going to get it when I get you home."

And my mother taught me, justice: "One day you will have kids, and I hope they turn out just like you. Then you'll see what it's like! I can't wait!"

How much does God care about you as an individual person? How important are you to Him? The biggest problem that children and youth have today is that they don't know who they are. Oh yes, they know their names that their parents gave them, but they don't know their true identity, they don't sense their own self-respect or self-worth as individuals. So they drift into all sorts of evil. "Here's nuthin' goin' nowhere" is the root cause of most crime and degradation, including teenage promiscuity and pregnancies that later produce a replay of the same tragic consequences, generation after generation.

We think it's a grand achievement when we can learn to have faith in Jesus; we "have passed from death unto life," etc.

But what about Jesus Himself having faith in human beings? That's backward thinking! We trust Him, ah yes! But does He trust us? What is there trustworthy about us? And why would He need to trust us, even if we were trustworthy? He has everything, billions of angels at His beck and call, infinite resources.

In answer, the Bible does say that He believes in us and trusts us, in fact, He has to if He is ever to win the great controversy with Satan. Paul asks, "What if some [Israelites] did not believe? Shall their unbelief [non-faith] make the faith of God without effect?" (Rom. 3:3). When the heavenly Father sent His only begotten Son into the world as a baby, did He not trust human beings to care for Him, especially while He was an infant? Did He not trust the virgin Mary to be a faithful mother to Jesus? Did

God not trust friends to care for Jesus during the years that He lived with us on this planet? (Yes, people did crucify Him, but we read of women who prepared food for Him, took care of His laundry, and friends who invited Him to be a Guest in their homes, like Lazarus and Zaccheus of Jericho).

And we read of how "the faith of Jesus" comes into focus in the last days: "Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus" (Rev. 14:12). In fact, it is the "faith of Jesus" that saves us, for He is "the author ... of our faith" (Heb. 12:2). When He died on the cross and He felt forsaken by His Father, His faith triumphed. For at the last just before He cried out, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit," He chose to believe and to trust that there would be a multitude of human beings around the world who would respond to the truth of His sacrifice, and who would believe and be loyal to Him: "All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before Thee. For the kingdom is the Lord's. . . . A seed shall serve Him" (Psalm 22:25-30).

He forgot about His own reward; what made Him happy in those last moments was the confidence that He had won the battle, the contest was decided, and WE will live forever in God's kingdom now made forever sure. Here was His total emptying of self! When He "tasted death for every man" (Heb. 2:9), it was the real thing; He died our second death. But He was happy in the confidence that He had saved us from it.

When you were born as a baby, your mother probably counted everything she could see—you had both eyes, two ears, two hands, two feet, and yes, she probably counted the toes on each one to be sure you were “normal.” She paid attention to you; you were important in her eyes. But as you grew older, you began to realize that she could not follow you around all your life, re-counting your fingers and your toes; you were on your own. That’s when you began to have problems, unless you had learned somehow to believe that you have a heavenly Father who cares for you infinitely more than your father and your mother ever could.

One thing your mother never counted on you—how many hairs were on your head. Even though she cared for you she never cared that much. But Jesus makes a fantastic statement that must not be brushed off as mere exaggeration: He says in Matt. 10:29, 30 that your heavenly Father has counted all the hairs on your head! And you must not disbelieve it—Jesus says it; it has to be so. The important point is not the actual arithmetical total (it would do you no good to know), but it’s Jesus’ way of saying what David said in Psalm 139:17, 18, “How precious are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand.”

Now, what will you do with this? Believe it, or disbelieve it? Your happiness here and maybe forever, depends on which way you choose.

They are all around us—young people who need help whom you and I can if we only know what to say.

It’s not a psychological injection they need; that soon wears off and they’re in worse need than they were. They need more powerful, more lasting help. They feel that they are “born losers,” and often a little inquiry discloses that their parents are often split-ups.

These alienated youth have deep needs; if you can save even one such life, you have not lived in vain.

But don’t turn around now and be a “born loser” yourself: “physician, heal thyself” is always thrown at us. We have an inward battle ourselves to wage, and neither you nor I have any merit to make ourselves be a success.

What these youth need is the plain, simple, Bible truth of the New Covenant to take the place of the Old Covenant that has been drilled into them in places where the Lord has wanted them to get the New—that is, in church and Bible classes. Know the joy of the New, and you are in that group Jesus says “believe in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water” (John 7:37, 38); those “rivers” are simple New Covenant gospel truth. A thousand times better than a psychological injection, which Satan gleefully exploits because their prayer becomes “Thou hast lifted me up and cast me down” (Psalm 102:10). The higher they are temporarily “lifted up” the more painful is the “cast down” experience.

The New Covenant is (1) the seven promises God made to Abraham in Genesis 12:2, 3. (2) You are Abraham’s “descendant” by faith because (3) your heart cries out to God as “Abba, Father” (Rom.

8:15, 16), which (4) proves that He has “adopted” you, stumbling and staggering and unworthy as you may feel yourself to be; (5) you’re in the “family,” and the Savior has promised and sworn that He will “in no wise cast [you] out” (John 6:37).

Now in this light, tell your young, perplexed friend that the 23rd Psalm becomes his/her daily song. Memorize it and repeat it each night just before you fall asleep (the “day” begins at sundown! That’s a lesson the Bible has been trying to teach us on its very first page, Gen. 1:5, etc.). We can’t say that one prayer is more important than another, but the good night prayer underlies the good morning prayer. Yes, drift off to sleep “in the Lord.” Best beginning for a happy new day.

Let that “river of living water” flow from your heart to your young friend. Guaranteed: it will refresh him/her.

I saw a mother’s love exemplified; she couldn’t keep her eyes off that baby!

No matter who was holding her, every moment, mother’s eyes were on that baby!

The Virgin Mary made a confession that has in it some Good News for our encouragement. It’s in Luke 1:48 where she says that the Lord “hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden.”

No one likes to be in a “low estate.” We want to be in a higher “estate.”

But the Good News is that if we confess the truth of our “low estate,” the Lord makes a response:

He “regards” it.

The Lord responded to her humble confession by lifting her to the highest “estate” that any woman

could envisage—to be the mother of the world’s Redeemer!

If you and I can humble our souls and confess the truth of our “low estate,” the dear Lord will “regard” it, that is, think about it, and He will plan for our better future.

“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil . . .” (Jer. 29:11). The Lord thinks of each of us as though we were the only person in the world; and His “thoughts” about us and for us are always “good,” in that His plans for us are always bright and prosperous in our circumstances.

He “thinks” about each of us individually; He knows all about our history, even from our days as a fetus in the womb of our mother; and because of the sacrifice of Christ when He saved the world by His cross, the Father individually ponders and thinks about us.

Even if we have sinned grievously, the “thoughts” that the Father has towards us are always thoughts of His much more abounding grace; this is because of the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus.

The Father is not planning vengeance or punishment toward us—no! Even if we deserve such; His “thoughts” or His planning are of His much more abounding grace.

There is no human love that we know as faithful and enduring as the love of a mother for her son. (I said “son” for a reason—it’s sons who get into so much trouble that they break mother’s hearts—more than daughters seem to do!)

The best Son in all eternity broke His mother's heart when she was forced to watch Him writhing on a Roman cross, crucified as though He were a criminal.

Can you imagine the pain that slashed Mary's heart! Old Simeon, when he found Joseph and Mary and the holy Child in the Temple, said to her, "A sword shall pierce through thy own soul . . ." (Luke 2:25-35).

The Greek word old Simeon used for "sword" was *ramphaia*, the word for Goliath's sword, that huge weapon that young David pulled out of its scabbard as he jumped up onto the felled and stunned giant after he had hit him in the forehead with his pebble slung with marvelous accuracy inspired by the Holy Spirit; but what a prophecy old Simeon declared under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit!

Although Mary never gave in to nagging doubt, the powerful temptation returned again and again. Her Boy was delightfully different from other children, but sometimes He could be painfully different as well. It was often hard to understand Him.

A sinless Boy was not always welcome in Nazareth's sinful society, and family members would easily misunderstand Him. As a devout Jew Mary would feel deeply ingrained reverence for the honored rabbis of the synagogue. Why must her Son so often have different ideas than they had? From His childhood all the way to His cross, Jesus' failure to win the good will of the priests and leaders must have given her a constant pang of painful perplexity. And the step-brothers who often nagged and despised Him only made her sorrow worse.

And then finally, there was Calvary. The leaders' mysterious rejection of Him, the apparently legal condemnation of the illegal trials, the soldiers' cruel mockings and beatings that the leadership allowed and even encouraged, the phenomenal hatred heaped on Him, and then the crucifixion—all seemed a wild nightmare. This couldn't be real! How could this be happening to her Son, if He was the Messiah?

But there He was, stretched on a criminal's cross; and even He had reportedly confessed what implied that His enemies must be right, for He had cried out in anguish something about "My God, my God" forsaking Him! Had she been mistaken all along? Was He only a pious, naive fraud, a self-deceived maniac? Had she borne such a Son?

Under intense emotional and social pressure, good people can be tempted to doubt themselves and to confess crimes they never committed. The agony of Mary's temptation at the cross must have been horrendous. Gazing incredulously at the awful sight, she would wonder whether she had only imagined the angel Gabriel's visit at the beginning, the virgin birth, the visits of the shepherds, and their tale of angels singing in the sky, and the wise men and their gifts from the East.

And then she would recall the unfailing love evident in her Son's character, even from His childhood, His unusually thoughtful tenderness to her, His miracles, the shouts of the people acclaiming Him. How under heaven could this be happening if her Son was the Messiah? How could He be dying as a criminal, naked and despised?

Something must be wrong somewhere. *Where* was God?

Poor Mary, as she watched her holy Son grow up and wondered at His holy character! What joy He must have brought to her; but she could never forget that inspired prophecy of the old prophet; no mother has suffered the pain that Mary must have suffered when she watched Jesus being crucified!

Someone will object, "But many mothers in the old Roman Empire had to watch their sons crucified!"

Yes, but don't forget the more than sublime hope and joy that Jesus' identity had brought to her from His birth to the awful event of Calvary; she could not understand what was going on! Sometimes in my faulty human thinking I have wondered if it had not been more merciful of the Lord to let Mary join her husband Joseph in sleep before Calvary had to happen; but I cannot second guess the Father's holy will.

The Father permitted this terribly awful Event to be witnessed by the human mother of our Lord and Savior; if any mother will read the awful Story in the Gospels, as it is, she will be inspired and strengthened to endure the trials that God in His providence permits mothers everywhere to endure.

Suppose when you were little, your parent(s) did not know how to teach you, train and nurture you in love. So, now you have problems inherited ever since childhood. (Sometimes you even hate yourself for the way you feel or act!) Can you overcome the handicap that has been yours since childhood?

(1) Your Father in heaven knows all about it. He does not blame you for what you had nothing to do with before you were accountable. He loves and respects you as an individual for whom Christ gave the sacrifice of His life.

(2) Still, God cannot excuse defects of character that ruin your own and others' happiness even though you acquired them through DNA or in less-than-perfect childhood upbringing. He has given us a Savior whose special job is to save us FROM our inherited and cultivated tendencies to evil. He is the great Physician who heals wounded hearts. We don't need to carry around the defects that our parent(s) saddled upon us.

(3) This promise is in Psalm 27:10: "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up." Not that they willfully abandoned you on someone's doorstep. Your parent(s) "left" you in the sense that they didn't know how to help you. There was a point beyond which emotionally they couldn't give you what you needed, and it was no fault of theirs. (Perhaps they inherited weaknesses from their own childhood! The problem goes back to Adam, really.)

(4) Therefore, you will find healing in letting the Savior write the fifth commandment in your heart which says, "Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee" (Ex. 20:12). "In Christ" you can "honor" them as the parents that they WOULD have been if only they had known Christ better as their Savior. (That fifth commandment is a promise more than a stern command when you see it as the New

Covenant. Even if you feel like a youthful friend of mine who said he could never “honor” his alcoholic father, the principle of corporate guilt and corporate forgiveness enables you to “honor” them “in Christ”).

(5) At the very point where your parents failed, that’s precisely where “the Lord will take [you] up.”

Peter Marshall, Chaplain of the United States Congress told a story known as the “Keeper of the Spring.” This story is about a man who lived in the forest high above an Austrian village that was located on the eastern slopes of the Alps. This man was hired by the town council to clear away the rubbish from the pools of water up in the mountains that fed the spring that flowed through their town. With faithful regularity, the keeper of the spring moved among the hills removing leaves and branches and silt that would contaminate the fresh flow of water. The town became a popular attraction for vacationers who were attracted to its beautiful clear spring.

Years passed and one evening the town council met for its semi-annual meeting. As they looked over the budget, one man began to question the salary being paid to the obscure keeper of the spring. He questioned why they kept the old man year after year. The council members decided the old man’s services were no longer needed.

For several weeks nothing changed. By early fall, the trees began to shed their leaves. Small branches snapped off and fell into the pools, hindering the flow of water. One afternoon someone noticed a slight yellowish-brown tint to the water.

Within a few weeks, a slimy film covered sections of the water along the banks and a foul odor was soon detected. Tourists to the little town soon left and many of the residents became sick.

Quickly the embarrassed council called a special meeting. Realizing their error, they hired back the keeper of the spring. Within a few weeks the spring cleared and the little town returned to a normal life.

Women and mothers are keepers of the springs. It was my mother who read me the scriptures. My mother taught me how to pray. And my mother who made sure I did. It was my mother who enrolled me in Sabbath School as a baby. All through my life, she consistently applied both the gospel and at times the flat palm of her hand to my life, each where they would do the most good.

“Family Living” is living out the truths of genuine righteousness by faith. It is not what we must do in order to have happy homes. The Bible emphasis is on things that we must believe in order to have happy homes, because it is what we believe that transforms us in character from being the ornery, self-centered people that we are by nature into people in whom self has been crucified with Christ and He is permitted to live out His life within us (Gal. 2:20). Self-centered people are bound to have friction at home; the real, ultimate, powerful change in family relationships comes through the pure truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is what Ellen White described as “the third angel’s message in verity.” Through this means actual, dynamic love is created within cold hearts.

A little boy forgot his lines in a Sabbath school presentation. His mother was in the front row to prompt him. She gestured and formed the words silently with her lips, but it did not help. Her son's memory was blank. Finally, she leaned forward and whispered the cue, "I am the light of the world." The child beamed and with great feeling and a loud clear voice said, "My mother is the light of the world."