

Embracing the Work

By: Sally Hohnberger

My early life growing up was filled with difficulties and unpleasant circumstances, yet I never knew depression until I had become a "professed" Christian with two children. I had such high ideals, such lofty goals, but reality fell far short of all my desires and plans.

I'd just put my baby, Andrew, down for his nap and was on the phone with one of my friends when I discovered Matthew throwing Shilo's dog food all over the dining room floor! Excusing myself from the phone, I promptly went to deal with my little mischief-maker. I confronted him with my hands on my hips. One look into my eyes clearly told the story of my displeasure and the tone of my voice emphasized my frustration.

"Matthew, pick up this dog food immediately!" I commanded.

He looked away and started playing with the remaining dog food in the dish.

"Matthew pick up that dog food right now!"

No response. My mind literally whirled as I wondered what I should be doing. "Children obey your parents ...'Eph 6:1. He simply must obey me like Jesus wants him to." I remembered Abraham - he commanded his

household after him. "That's it - I must be too soft! If I were firmer like Abraham my two year old would obey." I didn't understand then that Satan can use scriptures to seduce us into wrong paths. Meanwhile, Matthew dawdled still at the dish unmoved by my commands.

His unwilling and dawdling spirit reigned even after my third, fourth and fifth commands followed with spankings for non-compliance. Oh yes, he went through the motions, but only a small handful of dog food was picked up and that against his will. My own flesh now rose in harshness and anger as I tried everything I could think of to make him obey, but this, too, ended in absolute and utter failure. Despair swept over me and I left him crying in his bedroom. I was ashamed of my failure to gain obedience and even more ashamed of my loss of self-control.

I didn't understand what was wrong with me and why my method of discipline wasn't working. Hadn't I applied the rod, reproof, and correction like the Bible says you should? Where was the obedience? I didn't know it then, but I was doing what was right in "mine own eyes" as the scripture calls it. I

was following my own reasoning. I didn't know there was anything else and because I was following my own inclinations and not following Christ, even though I desired to, Satan ruled my life here and I was not under the control of God. One master or the other always rules us and my attitude and approach revealed clearly the reflection of the evil one.

I thought the problem in my home was Matthew when in reality the problem was me. As far back as the time sin entered the human experience, we have blamed others for our failures. We can even blame God! I had been trying to do what God's word said, but I went out determined to do it in my own will power and thus failed. Are you the pilot and discovering that without Christ you can do nothing? Or are you discovering that with Christ as your pilot you can do all things in Him?

"Lord, what have I done?! Lord, what can I do to make it right?" Remorse burned within me, tears streamed silently down my cheeks. I looked at my hands, remembering how they had just spanked Matthew so unreasonably, and ashamed, I sat on them, as if putting them out of sight could make the memory go away. I understood now how one could so easily go from discipline into abuse. This had been just too close and it frightened me! I tuned my ears toward heaven hoping for, desperately wanting an answer, but not really expecting one.

Then this thought came clearly into my mind, "You left out the main ingredient in your discipline."

I knew this idea did not come from my intellect. This had to be God speaking through my conscience, reasoning with me; but how could He be speaking to me? Feeling too unworthy for communication with God, especially after today's episode I asked in disbelief, "I did what?" Then I listened again, unsure what to expect. This experience was too new to be my imagination and too practical to be a dream.

"Sally, you left out love in your discipline. You need the balance of firmness with love covering it, not just your love, but My love directing your steps so that we can work cooperatively to win the heart of your child.

You cannot gain true inward obedience from your child using harshness and anger, no matter how hard you try or how right you may be. You can drive devils in with this method, but you can't drive them out. No spanking you give will change his heart unless you love him Divinely, and he knows that you love him that way."

"But Lord, I blew it again! I'm making a mess of raising my children when I really want to do what's right. Maybe someone else would do a better job raising them. I'm so depressed I'm ready to give up."

Sally, I don't need someone else to raise your children. I need you! I want you to learn how to walk and talk with me in your child rearing. I'll teach you. All I need is your hand continually in Mine and your ear listening for my instructions. If you follow my directions, you can walk with me like Enoch did. Do you want to?"

"Oh yes, yes I want to ... but how can I ever make up with him for my harshness? Can he ever love me again? I was so angry and needlessly hard on him. I see now that I was the problem, not him!"

"I am your Helper in trouble. I will never leave thee nor forsake thee. If you will go and get him right now, and tell him you're sorry, I will be with you and lead you in obtaining that which you desire."

Is this really God speaking in my thoughts? I struggled as my emotions pushed me to doubt. I distrusted myself, ashamed of my failure and the fear of more failure threatened to hinder me from belief that God still cared for me and would be with me. I wanted to go forward and act on the directions God had given, but to do so meant I would have to go in opposition to my feelings and emotions. It was so hard to discount the emotions that previously ruled me, but because I believed this was God speaking to me, I chose to act and walked resolutely to Matthew's room.

My courage nearly failed me when I entered his room as I saw him run to hide in the corner and when I picked him up he squirmed in my arms to get down. My own precious son was afraid of me. I sat down in the chair and told him how sorry I was and that I behaved wrongly. "I will never spank

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you that way again!" I promised. I was hoping for a quick and easy solution from God. It came as a shock to me when his fear turned to anger and he began beating on my chest with his little fists. My heart cried silently, the feelings of guilt and helplessness welling up because I felt I deserved his retaliation.

"Lord, there is no hope for me! He'll never forgive me!" I cried out in despair. "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" Acts 9:6 I listened, but there was no voice from on high, commanding me to take a certain action, nor even any thoughts that were new, rather just the conviction to follow my God-led heart and again I apologized to Matthew and asked him to forgive me. I assured him that I loved him and this time, his eyes met mine. His fists beating on me slowed to a halt now! His little mind was being led of God to love and trust again - I just knew it. I could sense it intuitively. Through my prayers and cooperation, I had opened the door of his mind to the Spirit's impression and when he saw real love in my eyes and expression, his icy disposition with all the anger and hatred melted before my eyes. It was a miracle of healing!

Almost before I knew it, his arms were around my neck. His eyes and more important his heart were filled with love from above. My son had forgiven me and now I cried again ... but this time with tears of joy! God had spoken to me, plain old Sally, when I was the least worthy, and simply told me what to do. I did it and it worked! This concept was so new to me, I struggled to grasp it. "Why didn't I ask for His wisdom in the beginning when I was trying to correct his misbehavior?" I questioned myself.

In a few minutes, our emotions settled down and I felt the impression of God upon my heart to continue on the course I had started and carry it through to its logical conclusion, so I walked Matthew back into the dining room and pointed to the dog dish. This time there were no hands on my hips, no words, no commands, none of the various airs we adults put on to try and increase our authority. I didn't even speak. I just pointed my finger. Matthew smiled and with a will, dili-

gently picked up all the dog food and returned it to the dog dish. Shilo, our Brittany Spaniel, trotted beside him picking up too, although his contributions were not returned to the dish.

This was one of my early exposures to true heart surrender—one of the memorable sights of true, willing obedience and a valuable insight into what a child could be like if they had a willing disposition led of God. Our children need our worthy example of subjection to Christ to imitate.

Are you following in the same pathway of parenting I was? God wants to save you from it. He longs to personally teach you and me in our day-to-day life of parenting. Won't you join hands with Jesus that He can apply His corrective course in your home - to make it more heaven-like?

Power for Living

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Empowered Living Ministries
3945 North Fork Rd, Columbia Falls, MT 59912
Office: (406) 387-4333 Fax: (406) 387-4336
Toll free (877) 755-8300 (orders only)

Email: office@empoweredlivingministries.org
Web: www.EmpoweredLivingMinistries.org