

February 3, 2012

“Echoes of the Heart”

Reflections on Life and Community Living

Raising kids and stuff. The key to raising children and to guiding them through life in their early years is to trust the parent-child relationship. Sounds so simple; yet, trusting the relationship is the key. For people of faith, it is also the most faith-centered way of child-rearing.

The assumption is that when we parents put ourselves lovingly into our children (no small task, indeed), at the end of the day, our children will not want to disappoint us. It is a matter of trusting the love and then trusting the relationship the love nurtures.

When we are able to trust the relationship, discipline suddenly becomes simplified. No need to *ground* the child or put the child on restriction; no need to put the child on some form of punishment that only builds resentment and breeds lower self-esteem.

In raising our children, it is important to remember that, as *children of God*, our children are spiritual beings. As spiritual beings, *trust* helps to affirm our love and to deepen the parent-child relationship.

In her book, *Wrestling Till Dawn*, Jean Blomquist, a frequent writer on the spiritual life, talks about how faith, at its most basic level is *living in trust—in trust that there is something beyond my own understanding, something larger than me that I am a part of.*

Going on, she reflects on how *trust* helps build faith and how *faith gives us hope that each moment of life is sacred and that every creature and every person are intimately connected.*

When we come to view our children as spiritual beings and understand how, as human beings, each of us is intimately connected, it opens us to deeper levels of trust in the essential goodness of creation. In trusting the relationship, we place our trust in this fundamental goodness.

Let go and trust the spirit! Most of the time in life, the best we can do is work hard, strive for excellence and, trusting the spirit (the relationship), hope for the best. Always, there comes a point when we have to *let go* and *trust the spirit*, realizing we cannot control all the variables of our lives.

There is a story of a man—somewhat older now—who, early on showed all kinds of potential and possibilities. Sadly, however, along the way, he became addicted to cocaine and his life tumbled, precipitously, into a dark hole. He lost his family, he lost his place in graduate school and he lost many big pieces of himself.

Still, somehow—miracles of miracles—he washed up one day on the shores of a good church which, over time, was able to put their arms around him and love him down a healing path. As the healing began to build up, eventually, against all odds, he was even able to reunite with his wife and children.

One day at his pastor's house, with his wife at his side, he began to talk about his life:

I want so much to believe, he said, that my best days are still ahead of me and that I can still be a difference for God. Going on, with his head buried in his hands, he added: sometimes I just can't help think that I've blown all of my chances.

About then his wife, God bless her, reached over, took his hand and said: *Baby, you've got to take your sticky fingers off that steering wheel. If God could yank Jesus out of a grave, there's no reason why he can't make something beautiful out of your busted parts.*

For some of us with a need to be in control, it is perhaps liberating to realize that, by ourselves, we can't make everything right in our lives. We can't straighten out all of the crooked stuff. There are some situations and people that we simply cannot fix.

Trusting the relationship. The key to all relationships is to pour our love into them and then *trust the relationship*. When our love is genuine and comes from the heart, people—generally—don't want to disappoint. They don't want to violate or disrespect the integrity of the love.

This focus on trust takes all of our relationships to higher spiritual ground. Rather than an approach to parenting that advocates putting children on restriction, which views the child as separate from the parent, child-rearing that is relationship-based sees *the relationship* as the critical element. The emphasis is on mutual love and respect, a healthy foundation for any parent-child relationship.