Signs for Hope

Most of us know Proverbs 3:5-6 by heart. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight." It is interesting to note how the word "heart" is used above. First, I used it in relation to the English idiom, "to know something **by heart**." It means to memorize something perfectly, or to know something perfectly. Wonder why we do not say we know something "by mind" as that would make more sense…would it not? Then, Solomon urges us to trust in the Lord with all our heart and not our understanding…not our minds. Why the focus on the heart? And, what does trust mean anyway? According to Merriam-Webster: trust - assured on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something.

Trust is the foundation for any and every relationship you and I are a part of. And according to the definition truth is deeply involved in building trust. Trust has different levels as our relationships vary based on the amount of time we spend with each other and/or how quickly or how slowly we might feel we can identify with each other. In reality, the ability to trust someone else is directly related to how well we can identify with him or her. Trust is not something that comes without struggle, especially since none of us are perfect. It is something I believe develops over time. It is said, "Trust is given and respect is earned", however, if somewhere along the line trust is broken and became distrust, renewed trust must be earned.

When our children became old enough to drive and were more independent and away from us more and more I can remember telling them that I trusted them to make wise decisions without our being with them constantly. For the most part they had proven they were trustworthy over the many years we spent together prior to that time. I also told them if they did something to cause me to lose that trust in them, they would have to prove they were trustworthy, once again, and that would take time. During that proving-time they would have to bear the consequences for whatever they did to cause my distrust. As far as I can remember they never broke that trust during those years.

Trust-Based Relational Intervention Training is offered by Texas Christian University (TCU) and Dr. Karyn Purvis. You might recognize that name as she is the co-author of the book "The Connected Child" and one of the main speakers at the Empowered to Connect Conferences held across the country each year. I was introduced to Dr. Purvis at our first CAFO Summit in Irving, TX in 2009. Johnny Carr recommended her to me. His words, "If you see her name, GO!" I have been going ever since. Now, I am so blessed and honored to share with you that Show Hope has granted me a full scholarship ($3,000) to attend this specialized training in September at TCU. Course work for this training begins 10 weeks prior in my home, but I will be on the TCU campus for the final 5 days of training.

While this training was founded primarily for use with children enduring the foster care system and/or abandonment and adoption, it truly benefits all those who work with children with any and all backgrounds. Whether you are raising children, teaching children in the academic or church-based setting, or counseling children…this training would be of great benefit to you. TBRI training will give me additional training and the credentials for much of what I already do with families who are adopting deaf children and for what I plan to train those in Liberia who are caring for deaf children. All these deaf children are "from the hard places" as Dr. Purvis describes them.

Blaire Murray...On Liberia!

Whenever the subject of mission work came up, I joked that should God want me to go on a mission trip, He'd have to command me through a lighting strike. It would need to be that dramatic. Last fall I was surprised to hear His command (though not as a lighting strike, thankfully). I was in denial for months; what would I have to give to children in Liberia? Why me? Something I read in one of SFH's newsletters by Vandora Henderson, another Liberia team member, stuck with me: God wants your availability. I still wasn't sure what my role would be in Liberia, but I knew beyond doubt He wanted me there. So I made myself available, got my visa and immunizations, put my trust in God, and flew across the wide wide *wide* ocean to see what God's command was all about.

Not to be cheesy, but I discovered there's a whole other world out there. To me, international events were something that happened "over there." As long as they didn't impact my day-to-day life, I didn't pay attention to anything happening over there. If you haven't already, I'd encourage you to read the SFH newsletter from March. Steve Farmer, one of my teammates from this trip, writes about events of the trip. You can see from his letter that nearly nothing went as planned, yet God "is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine (Eph 3:20)." Not only was His hand in everything on our trip; His hand was on me. My first mission trip was such a rough experience that it caused me to be resistant to going on another. This trip was not without its "bumps in the road" – I say that with fondness and humor because Liberian roads are nothing if not bumpy – yet my heart was open. And while everything about Liberia is so different from my day-to-day life, I discovered one thing that is universal in people: the desire for relationships.

God the Father Himself is a relationship within the Trinity. He is in constant community with Jesus and the Holy Spirit. He has made us in Him image, and in turn we crave community. In people with hearing loss, I believe that craving is amplified. Even Jesus confirms this. In Mark 7:31-37, Jesus heals a deaf man. However, we see in verse 33 that "He took him aside from the crowd, privately" and healed him. Jesus knew exactly what this man needed to able to connect. He knew that in a group, this man was overwhelmed and isolated. He knew He needed to take him aside one on one to be able to communicate and develop a relationship with this man. He knew that he needed to be touched instead of spoken to in order to understand that Jesus was about to show him His healing power. Jesus knows the Deaf, and craves a relationship with the Deaf. And we crave a relationship not only with Him but with other people. The Liberian Deaf community is no exception. They crave communication, relationships, and community. I discovered for myself that the Deaf community is universal: we saw their desire for visual words, their love for telling stories, their talent in sharing skits as a means of teaching, and the instant bond that forms when Deaf people meet for the first time. At least to my own limited experience, those things are apparent in American Deaf culture as well as Liberia. It was wonderful to see this happen.

In making myself available to Deaf Liberians, I hope that I was able to show them what it means to have a relationship with Jesus. I know that they showed me. I have never felt so welcomed and loved by strangers as I did by the people in Liberia. "...for I was a stranger and you invited me in" (Matthew 25:35). I learned the importance of being open to strangers. The relationships that were formed there will stay with me always. Do make yourself available to people as much as you make yourself available to God. In doing so, you serve Him.

If you are interested in joining Signs for Hope on future trips to Liberia contact Becky. Several trips are in the planning stage, even now!

Signs for Hope Scheduled Events Summer & Fall 2014
Many Opportunities for Prayer

This is where the Lord is making my paths straight over the next several months as I do my best to submit to Him and trust Him with all my heart. My time in between these are His, too, and He delights in making sure I do not miss His paths with face-to-face meetings, phone calls, emails, FB messages, texts, etc. Your prayers are so important when it comes to my ability to consistently submit to and trust Him in all things and for all things. I certainly have no understanding that I desire to depend on when it comes to all things Signs for Hope. Please know that I never will minimize the importance of your prayers...each and every one of them.

June 17 - 19 – Charlotte trip – meet with SFH families and Blaire
June 27 – 30 – ASDC Conference, Boston (Becky & Vandora)
June 30 – TBRI pre-course training begins
July 1 – 8 – Joseph & Kate are here in Asheville
July 17 – 21 – Knoxville, TN; Louisville & Lexington, KY - Meet with SFH families and Orphan Voice, director, Tony Brewer and family. SFH partners with Orphan Voice for training a staff member in Vietnamese Sign Language to teach 10 families and their deaf children beginning this fall. NIC (national ASL interpreter) test the 21st.
July 23 – 31 – Charles' Denver conference, several SFH family connections & wedding plans with Joseph & Kate
August or September – China?!?! It is looking more like a September trip. If so, it will not work for me to travel with this Deaf couple in September to bring their deaf daughter home. My September is full. SFH will share the expenses with Lifeline Children's Services for another qualified ASL interpreter to travel with them if need be. However, I am still asking God to work this out for me to go. Seeing deaf adoption up close and personal like this, for me, is always a great learning experience.
September 11 – 15 – ETC in DC, (ASL Interpreters being secured and Deaf Adoption Chats are planned); Open Bible Deaf Church, meet with SFH families
September 18 – 27 – Austin, TX , meet w/SFH families & observe at TSD, Dallas for TBRI Training 22-26
October – Joseph & Kate's wedding in Denver
October – mid-late, Liberia Trip – Please pray for God to touch hearts to join with SFH on this trip
November – SFH Asheville Fundraiser – "A SFH Family Affair"

From my heart …

While I was waiting for Blaire's article I began writing this month's PrayerLetter. I did not give Blaire any guidance into what to share, I just told her to share whatever God led her to share. I received her article after writing the first portion and as you can see, He led Blaire and me to the same topic without us even knowing…relationship! This is not an accident or something that just happened by chance as His desire is to go deeper in relationship with each of us. If you have not figured it out yet when God leads us deeper that is when He receives the greater glory. It is when others see in us a living God. One who can be trusted, wholeheartedly, in the midst of the chaos, confusion and mess.

Our God is a relational-God…so much so He wanted to make sure He could identify with us in a much more tangible way. What better way than to become like one of us and live among us? That is the reason, Brothers and Sisters, He sent His Only Son to be born of a virgin, to live a sinless life for approximately 33 years here on this earth, being tempted in every way just as we are. Jesus willingly suffered the most cruel death known to man, enduring its shame for sins He did not commit…yours and mine. And He willingly embraced every other suffering when He became sin for us on that cross. This is not something we know only with our minds, this is what we must know intimately, personally and embrace with our hearts fully. To know Him by heart!

It has always been a heart-issue for our God! How do we even know God has a heart? He tells us so in the Old and New Testaments when He speaks of David as being "a man after His own heart". That is why His focus is on the heart and not the mind. Oh yes, He knows the importance of the mind when it comes to obedience…take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ…but your heart and my heart are His greatest desire.

You remember how circumcision was an outward sign given to Abraham and the Israelites, which identified them as being in covenant with God in the Old Testament? It was an outward sign, proof of the covenant-relationship. Yes, it was painful and it had to be endured IF one wanted to be identified as one of God's chosen. Honestly, when does God choose to do something worthwhile that does not involve pain and/or suffering? Well all that was done in preparation for God's plan for Jesus' coming. The law and all the behavioral requirements was God's attempt to help the Jews and us understand what He had planned from before the foundation of the world. That was the outward proof during the time of the Law where right behavior was the goal, even though right behavior (obeying the law) was not enough because no one could do it 100% of the time. The "Savior" is then introduced into the story. This is when God's heart becomes involved on a much deeper level or at least when He reveals His heart to us on a much deeper level. A love story…no less! Not an earthly love story that our human minds would contrive, but one envisioned in heaven, one from the God who created all that we see and all that we cannot see. This is not a love story conceived and authored by man, but it is a love story imagined from the very HEART of our God. Elohim! Yahweh! GOD! And it is the kind of love story, God-love story, which we read about in 1 Corinthians 13. His love story for us is much different than one we would or could write. His love story is born from His God-perspective, which is infinite in every detail and not limited by our human-perspective, which will always be inferior and vastly different from His.

Obviously, knowing God intimately begins with knowing and learning about Him with our minds, but ultimately knowing God must become rooted in our hearts. In fact, Paul explains in Romans that the outward circumcision means nothing, but the inward circumcision, the circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, is what is known and seen by God. The more you and I scour and devour the scriptures, His truth, the deeper our trust in Him will grow and the deeper His roots of love will become established in our hearts.

Those whom God draws deeper into relationship with Him are the very ones that help me "know God by heart" better. These are the ones who reveal God's truth on a level much deeper than the everyday. On May 12th the Brown Family of Huntsville, AL was chosen to go deeper with God than they could ever imagine. Their entire family was already in a deep love relationship with Him. They had already brought home two special needs children (one is deaf) from the Dominican Republic early last fall in obedience and because His heart is in love with the orphan, but He desired to go even deeper in love with them. On that warm sunny afternoon mom was driving their 4 biological children to the school where the two adopted siblings were. The accident occurred at the entrance to their school. Micah Brown, their 5-year-old son, did not survive the accident. Two of Micah's three sisters in the car with him were critical and unstable with major head trauma; one had additional injuries, as well. Mom, Ryann, and the youngest Brown were only minimally injured physically. The first week following the accident only God knew if the girls would even survive. It has been an honor for me to watch this family in the midst of chaos, confusion, and mess allow the lover of their souls freedom to have His way with them. Of course this has been hard, but their transparency through life and death has proved invaluable for those of us on the outside looking in. The question in the midst of all of this…how can this be good? Read David Brown's *CaringBridge Journal entry for June 11* this week to find out.

Also check out the Signs4Hope Blog post *"Pain & Suffering…God's Plan!"* You will also see a new blog series "So You Want to Adopt a Deaf Child?"

My prayer for each of you and for me is that we will "know Him by heart". That we will grow deeper and deeper in love with our Savior, His Father, and His Holy Spirit, not in spite of the things He allows to cause us grief, but because of them. Those, my siblings, are what give you and me a greater God-perspective on all things and those are what causes us to fall deeper and deeper in love with Him, IF WE KNOW HIM BY HEART.

His love for you is the greatest!

Becky

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In You, the fatherless find compassion. - Hosea 14:3