

Introduction

Since we'll be spending quite a bit of time together, you may wonder who is talking to you. So I'd like to start by introducing myself and telling you a little bit of the story behind Libraries of Hope. And by the way, I know you're busy. So I've created a number of audios so that you can take me along while you're folding laundry or driving to the store or work or doing the dishes. And although I will be directing much of what I say to mothers teaching children, these ideas are for anyone who wants to live a richer, more abundant life.

My name is Marlene Peterson and I am the founder of Libraries of Hope and the finder of the Well-educated Heart philosophy of learning. My husband, Brent, and I have raised 8 daughters and one son. I graduated from BYU with a degree in Child Development and Family Relations, but my real learning has taken place in the laboratory of my home. I have always been restless where education is concerned. That is why we homeschooled, public schooled, private schooled, charter schooled, onlined schooled, unschooled and did combinations of all of the above. By current educational standards, you might say we are a success story. All nine of our children have graduated from universities with several earning advanced degrees.

But I always felt like something was missing.

About fifteen years ago when our youngest was getting ready to leave home, a friend asked if I'd like to help her with a little school she had adopted in the slums of Nairobi, Kenya. This educational restlessness returned as I looked into the faces of these little children in the pictures she showed me. They met in a makeshift classroom with hot tin walls. The chiggers bit their bare feet on the dirt floor. Many of them were orphaned and showed up to school with hungry bellies. But there they were—sitting on crude wooden benches, eager to learn.

But to learn what? Many of these children would likely never grow to adulthood. Few would have a chance to go to college. There weren't a lot of jobs out there. Because there were no books, they had to rely on rote memorization of facts in order to pass standardized tests. And I wondered, what's the point?

And it got me thinking—I really wanted to know-- what is the purpose of education? I saw one study where 365 people were asked that very question. They got 365 unique answers. How can we think we can design a uniform system of education when we can't even agree why we're doing it? What I wanted to know was what is God's purpose and reason for education and what are His methods? If I could find the answer to those questions, I knew that the lives of these little children would be blessed no matter what life dealt them.

It set me on an intense course of study for the next year. I turned to the writings of great spiritual leaders and to the scriptures themselves. Along the way, I compared what I was learning with different educational models. I took hundreds of pages of notes. All that learning distilled down to two basic truths for me:

I now believe the purpose of education is to prepare children to live lives of maximum joy and

the method can best be summed up in a phrase I took from the writings of Charlotte Mason: True education is between a child's soul and God.

A simple pattern for learning unfolded and I came to appreciate the powerful influence of fine literature, art, poetry and music and the sweet influences of nature on the hearts of our children and a mother's unique role as the best educator of a child's heart. But let me remind you again: if you are a woman who has never had children of your own or whose children are all grown up, you are still a vital part of this work. Your influence will be felt in ways you may not now imagine. All the things I talk about will bring an added measure of joy into your life.

And now I'm going to go out on a limb and share some deeply personal thoughts. But if you're going to take this journey of the heart with me and trust the teachings I am going to share with you, it's important you understand the why behind what I am doing.

I think the why can be traced back to a simple prayer that has been a constant in my life: Lord, please make me an instrument in thy Hands. Without Him, I am nothing. I am not the Founder of the Well-Educated Heart philosophy; I'm a finder. I have more questions than answers. But I love sharing with you what I am learning along the way. When some of you tell me you want to meet me, it makes me uncomfortable in some ways—not that I don't want to meet you—I absolutely do! I love you! But like Mr. Rogers used to say—I'm not a fancy person. I stumble over my words in private conversation. I'm awkward and actually very shy. And there's a part of me that worries that you'll be disappointed with me and that somehow I'll be a stumbling block to the message I feel to deliver.

Yet, I cannot deny the clear and distinct impressions that have come to me over the years, starting over ten years ago when I felt to create a small library of books and to call it Libraries of Hope. It was to be filled with books that would give children hope because they would be filled with truth and light. I had no idea how to go about such a thing. More than one person said, "You know, children aren't reading very much any more. Especially old books without any pictures. There really isn't a market for what you are doing." And I was asked how I planned on marketing this; what my business plan was; how was I going to get the funds to publish the books. The truth was, I had no business or marketing plans. I didn't exactly know why I was doing what I was doing. I was just doing what I felt I had been asked to do. And the feeling that I had was to not concern myself with that. In my heart, I was told the Lord was preparing a network of mothers and when the time was right, He was going to start writing messages on my heart, that when I delivered them, it would resonate in their hearts and these mothers would be drawn to the message and would want to learn more.

I believe you are the fulfillment of that promise.

For years, the work I was doing was met with apathy and disinterest. And then those messages started coming into my heart. And I have been amazed as I have watched the Lord do His work. I have heard from mothers from around the world—from Australia and New Zealand, from Denmark, Norway, Germany, Italy, Africa, Mexico. From all over the United States from Alaska to the East Coast. And frequently they say this: I don't know how I found you, but when I heard

your message, it resonated in my heart and I want to know more.

A few years into the project, I became discouraged. So very few people cared about the books I was gathering. Was I just wasting my time?

In that state of mind, I woke up one morning with one clear thought on my mind: Read the Book of Enoch and my first reaction was, “Is there a Book of Enoch?” I can tell you there is—I found it online in the Apocrypha. The Book of Enoch is said to contain Enoch’s vision of our day. I started to read and wasn’t really getting anything, but I felt to just keep reading. When I got to the very end, the words lit up and made my heart burn. Enoch saw the books of our day! First he said that ‘Sinners will alter and pervert the words of righteousness in many ways, and will speak wicked words, and lie, and practice great deceits, and write books concerning their words.’

Boy, we see that, don’t we?

But here’s the good news : ‘To the righteous and the wise shall be given books of joy, of integrity and of great wisdom. To them shall books be given in which they will rejoice and acquire the knowledge of every upright path.’

I am here to say we have been given that great gift! We are living in the day of the harvest when all the greatest books from all the greatest hearts of all the ages have been preserved and gathered and placed in the hands of children in even the humblest home, thanks to our modern day gift of technology. As John Ruskin wrote: “Will you go and gossip with your housemaid or your stable boy, when you may talk with kings and queens, while this eternal court is open to you, with its society wide as the world...the chosen, the mighty, of every place and time?”

Your job is to awaken the desire to read them which will largely be accomplished through the books you read aloud.

When I wonder if the gathering of books is worth the time, I think of a couple of sweet mothers I met at a conference who live in a remote area in Canada. They had internet, but had little access to books. With great emotion, they said they had found my Library of Hope and were so thankful they now had books with which to teach their children.

If I had millions of dollars and could have hired New York’s finest marketing team, they could not have designed a marketing strategy that would have had the direct global reach the Lord has quietly been accomplishing as He gathers mothers one by one.

I am constantly reminded by Him that numbers don’t matter. For those of you who are frustrated that your efforts to gather others often seem futile, you’re not alone. I think it’s worth sharing part of an article I’ve shared before that addresses this very thing. It was written in 1936 by an Albert Jay Nock and it was entitled “Isaiah’s Job.”

The writer started by describing a conversation he had had with a man who felt like he had a philosophy and a message that would save mankind and that he was going to spend the rest of his

life spreading his message far and wide in an attempt to try and reach the Masses.

Nock mustered the courage to tell the man that the masses would not care two pins about his doctrine and he proceeded to paraphrase the job of Isaiah. In a time of great commotion and unrest, the Lord commissioned the prophet Isaiah to go out and warn the people. He said, in essence, "Tell them what is wrong, and why and what is going to happen unless they have a change of heart and straighten up. Don't mince matters. Make it clear that they are positively down to their last chance. Give it to them good and strong and keep on giving it to them. I suppose perhaps I ought to tell you," he added, "that it won't do any good. The official class and their intelligentsia will turn up their noses at you and the masses will not even listen. They will all keep on in their own ways until they carry everything down to destruction, and you will probably be lucky if you get out with your life."

Isaiah had been willing to take on the job, but now a new face was put on it. It raised the obvious question: Why, if all that were so—if the enterprise were to be a failure from the start—was there any sense to starting it?

"Ah," the Lord said, "you do not get the point. There is a Remnant there that you know nothing about. They are obscure, unorganized, inarticulate, each one rubbing along as best as he can. They need to be encouraged and braced up because when everything has gone completely to the dogs, they are the ones who will come back and build up a new society; and meanwhile, your preaching will reassure them and keep them hanging on. Your job is to take care of the Remnant, so be off now and set about it."

Now I make no claims to be an Isaiah or a prophet—far from it! But the same feeling has been placed in my heart—to tend to and strengthen the Remnant, even if that number is very small. The writer goes on to say that in any given society the Remnant is always an unknown quantity. He said when you are called to tend to the Remnant, "Two things you do know and no more: first, that they exist; second, that they will find you." In fact, they will find you without you doing anything about it.

But the Lord knows who they are. Elijah had been given the same job as Isaiah and he finally fled to the desert because he feared for his life. The Lord asked him what he was doing out there and his answer implied that he was afraid if he was killed, the truth would die with him. He thought he was the only one left when the Lord told him, "I don't mind telling you that there are seven thousand of them back there in Israel whom it seems you have not heard of, but you may take My word for it that they are there."

Sometimes you may feel all alone. You may feel obscure, inarticulate, rubbing along as best as you can. But the Lord knows you and you are counted and valued by Him. He takes the weak things of the world and makes them strong. He is an artist and you are His masterpiece in progress. And how do you know if you are of the Remnant? If you love the Lord and seek to do His will, you are of the Remnant.

Throughout the history of the world, in the middle of chaos and destruction, He is always

preparing and preserving seed for a new planting. I know from the seasons that winter is necessary for an abundant spring. I've seen the seasons in history. There is no question in my mind that we are living in a day of great harvest, but winter is coming. And the seed must be preserved if there are to be green shoots in the spring.

The Old Testament prophets were masters of imagery and of layered and even hidden meanings. Many interpretations have been given of Malachi's words where he expressed that the hearts of the children shall be turned to their fathers and the hearts of the fathers turned to the children, or the earth shall be wasted.

As I study history, I find my heart turning to the wisdom of our fathers. The beauty of our day is that we don't have to start from scratch. We have so many lessons to draw from that teach us how to govern nations, how to live together in harmony, how to live lives of joy and abundance. Many of those lessons come from seeing what hasn't worked. Yet, as I see solutions that are being proposed in today's world, they are coming from a place of total ignorance of how they played out before. History seems doomed to repeat itself because our hearts will not turn to the wisdom of our fathers who came before us. Nor do we make decisions based on the consequences our choices will have in the lives of our children and those who come after us. We live very much in a day when we think only of ourselves; what's good for me. We've lost that spirit of the Pilgrims who understood they were only laying a foundation for those who followed.

Turning 60 a couple of years ago was a turning point in my life for me. I suddenly realized I don't have a whole lifetime ahead. There are things I am not going to be able to do. If I plant a tree in my yard, I may not live long enough to see it grow big enough to give me shade. But the thought struck me, then plant it for those who will come after you, that they can sit under the tree that will give them shade.

I feel that may be one of the messages of Malachi to us—we are the connecting link between the past and the future. We have to look backward, and using the lessons of the past, make wise decisions with an eye to those who will follow us.

That is why you see me placing history at the center of all learning at the WEH. But it's history in a broad sense—it's a way of learning the lessons of our fathers. And those lessons have been preserved in art, in music, in literature, in poetry as well as the pages of historical fact. For me, History is not just a subject in a curriculum to be checked off a list.

I keep saying it—there has never, in the history of the world, been a generation that has had access to the wisdom the world has left us as this generation has. And there is no other group in the world that has the influence on the generations to follow that a mother has. That's why I constantly encourage you to store up the lessons of history in your own heart; to learn the languages of art and music and poetry and fine literature so that you can understand what our fathers are trying to tell us. And then, as you find those gems of wisdom, to preserve them in Books of Remembrance, not only for you, but for your children, grandchildren and great grandchildren who will follow.

I have a vision of a Remnant of mothers of refined tastes; who are well-educated, cultured and articulate. They are to be a force of great influence in the world. That will never happen without effort and of doing hard things. I totally get that you're busy. Like Martha, you are careful and troubled about many things. But I believe, because I have experienced it for myself, that if you have but the desire in your heart, and will act upon that desire by doing what you can do, the Lord will magnify your efforts, whatever they are.

A caution: Don't get caught in the letter of what you're reading. Don't make it a checklist. There's something beyond the words themselves you are looking for. Like Mr. Rogers taught, it will be a voice found in the white space between the lines.

C.S. Lewis wrote:

“The books or the music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them; it was not in them, it only came through them, and what came through them was longing. . . For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited...”

And as to the white space learning, Lewis continued: “Almost our whole education has been directed to silencing this shy, persistent inner voice.”

It is hearing this inner voice that is at the heart of what you will be learning going forward.

I share 18th century educator Pestalozzi's desires as he wrote: “I wish to wrest from education from ...cheap, artificial teaching tricks, and entrust it to the eternal process of nature herself; to the light which God has kindled and kept alive in the hearts of fathers and mothers; to the interests of parents who desire that their children grow up in favour with God and with men...[Love is] the sole and everlasting foundation in which to work. Without love, neither the physical nor the intellectual power will develop naturally.” Knowing how to nurture the heart of a child is of great worth. Our world desperately needs more mothers who have learned this prized and rare art. Are you willing to pay the price to learn? Then let's get started.