Podcast #202: Doing Your Due Diligence

Today is my sweet granddaughter’s birthday. She is turning 17! You’ve met her through several of my stories and she is the illustrator of the Book of Delights title pages. I love her to the moon and back. Like all my grandkids.

Hopefully by the time this is public, she will have opened her birthday present from me which is a T-shirt that says: Once upon a time there was a girl who really loved horses and dogs. It was me. The End.

She has been drawing horses from the time she picked up a pen. When her dad was assigned to teach at West Point Military Academy, the first thing she did was apply for a job at the horse stables there. She was turned down—they told her she was too young. So she asked if she could volunteer there, and they agreed to that.

What she does isn’t glamorous at all. She scoops horse poop for hours and hauls away wheelbarrels full and rakes the hay and brushes the horses and feeds them. And she loves it all. . The stables are about 5 miles from their house. She shows up rain or shine or sleet or snow. Before she got her driver’s license, If her mom or dad couldn’t drive her, she walked or rode her bike. One day their car broke down halfway there on a freezing cold rainy sleety morning. There wasn’t a question of what to do—she just walked the rest of the way in the rain. She’ll show up to work even when she doesn’t feel well or is tired or has been invited to do other things. Because she loves those horses and she knows they need her.

She’s rather an itty bitty thing—she stands just over 5 feet tall. But when the stable managers saw the hard work she was capable of and her diligence and her trustworthiness, they decided she wasn’t too young for a job after all and so they started paying her to do that which she loves. And then the stable managers let her start riding the horses until now she has a horse that is like her very own that she can take out and ride on the trails whenever she wants. The other workers all love her and have adopted her, so to speak, in that they have given her sparkly outfits and entered her in horse show competitions—where she has brought home trophies and ribbons, even though just being there was enough reward for her.

Now, what would this job and experience have been like if Kayleigh didn’t love horses, but her dad thought working at the stables would be a good character building experience, so he had arranged for her to work at the stables and handed her a time schedule which often started at 7 in the morning and then demanded she show up… or else there would be consequences to pay?

I don’t think there would have been a happily ever after.

I was thinking about this as I reflected on an experience I have had recently—the difference between acting out of duty vs. love. . I have always loved reading from the scriptures and make sure I read something every day. But the last year or two, my scripture reading has become more casual. I still did it every day, but it was more to check it off of a list I had made for myself.

Over time, I started feeling a dullness to my life, in some ways that I can’t really describe. And I kept feeling the nudge to be more diligent in my scripture study.

Diligent is an interesting word. It comes from the root word ‘diligo’ meaning ‘with love’. When I do anything diligently, I am doing it ‘with love’.

I would say Kayleigh was a diligent worker because all she was doing was ‘with love’.

Rather than check off my to-do list that I had read my scriptures for the day, I had a desire in my heart of something I wanted to learn. Specifically, at this time, I hungered to read for myself what the gospel of Jesus Christ was as it was taught by His own mouth during his earthly ministry. I longed to see more clearly where He walked and to feel closer to Him. So I started working my way through the Gospels of the New Testament, with pen in hand.

You might say I now became a diligent student.

I noticed, I wondered, and I found things that reminded me of other things. I looked up lots of words in the 1828 dictionary I thought I understood, but really had missed layers of meaning of. I pondered meanings and reflected on them in my notebook. I went slowly—often pausing at a single verse to consider all the layers of its meaning. Questions came into my mind—and I jotted them down.

And then something happened—there was a spiritual light and power that poured into me for which there is not a logical or an intellectual way of measuring or describing or explaining—but it is real. I found my thoughts becoming more clear. I found myself accomplishing much more in the day. I felt hope and love and gratitude—all fruits of the spirit. I looked forward to my study time even with so many other demands on my time.

Diligence—doing things from a place of love and desire—makes all the difference in the world in the outcome of the things we do, particularly in creating a learning environment for our children. . While checklists allow us to be in control, the danger is that they may start controlling us. And then we find our learning begins to stagnate and grow dull and lifeless.

Without love and desire and choice in their proper place—the materials I provide will have little long-lasting benefits. You may find yourself ‘doing’ without the joy of ‘being’. You may get it done, but be no better from having done it.

There was a certain reluctance in creating the Reading Record I just announced for these reasons. . I knew moms would love it because I know moms love checklists. Whew! Now I can just pass this off to my kids and I won’t have to think about it anymore. And I’ll know it will get done. And we tend to care a lot about getting things done.

But my worry is that you might make your way through the entire checklist, but without the ‘diligence’ of learning.

I faced the same dilemma when I created the checklist for Catch the Vision. You can read the whole thing –all 3 big fat volumes --and check off all the boxes and have none of it really sink in. It requires learning with ‘diligence’ with love and desire to truly know something. Which usually requires a pen in hand.

There are prayers I offer because I made up my mind that I would pray everyday. But there is a big difference between my casual prayers and those prayers when I kneel down with paper and pen in front of me. That’s when God knows I am really interested in what He has to tell me. He knows I am paying attention.

Notebooking isn’t something you ‘get’ your kids to do. Notebooking will always be a fight and a chore until they see its benefits for themselves and want it for ‘diligent’ study of something they love. It may take a long time—even years—before they catch the vision of notebooking. But I would rather have them never do it than be forced to do it. Your job is to help increase desire and help them catch the vision, not put it in a checklist of tasks they have to do.

Well, with these things in mind, I received a letter from a mom in our group. Its arrival was timely. In case you missed the announcement, we are creating a new website and I introduced you to an incredible new tool for your use called Biblioguides. But, in my efforts to try to make things easier for you, was I actually helping or hindering your process of applying Well—Educated Heart principles in your home and lives?

The mom who sent the letter graciously has given me permission to share some of her thoughts with you:

Seven (ish) years ago, I stumbled on your website. I was a newbie homeschooling mom, but my one year in had at least given me enough experience to know that what the world was telling me to teach and HOW to teach was not quite right. One of the first stories I listened to on your site was of the mother duckling leading her little ducks . . . not by shooing and pushing behind them, but by leading the way—out in front. That resonated with me. I DEVOURED your site. I listened to the catch the vision course (it might have been called something else then?) and then relistened to it and relistened to it. The best way I can describe how I felt as I continued to learn from your resources is edified. The scripture in Moroni 7:13 says *“But behold,* ***that which is of God inviteth and enticeth to do good continually****; wherefore, every thing which inviteth and enticeth to do good, and to love God, and to serve Him, is inspired of God.”* I knew the well educated heart principles were of God. They just felt true in my heart. And without a doubt, I knew Heavenly Father had heard my prayers and led me to a fountain of light. I attended every event you put on that I possibly could—the simple joy conference, the storytelling conference, the John Muir Laws nature day. I didn’t quite know how to start but I just started anyway . . . and found that that would soon be the motto for my homeschool journey. I remember hearing you say once—don’t agonize over which book to read or where to start on the rotation schedule, just pick up a book and start reading to your kids. And that is basically what I did.

Heavenly Father saw all of my stumbles, all of my mistakes. He still sees me making them. But I’m learning from every single one of them, and this messy homeschool journey of mine has turned out to be one of my most beautiful treasures. Looking back, I see the key to all of it has been that I’ve had a say in its creation. With the help of well educated heart principles and libraries of hope resources, I can design the XXXXXX curriculum every month. The principles help me prioritize the arts (story, nature, art, music, poetry), the rotation schedule gives me backbone and direction but also flexibility as I get to choose topics, time, and duration, and the library provides resources and ideas. My kids and I memorized this quote a couple of months ago.

“God left us the world unfinished for man to work his skill upon. He left the electricity in the cloud, the oil in the earth. He left the rivers unbridged and the forests unfelled and the cities unbuilt. God gives to man the challenge of raw materials, not the ease of unfinished things. He leaves the pictures unpainted and the music unsung and the problems unsolved, that man might know the joys and glories of creation.”

To me, part of what makes well educated heart and libraries of hope SO impactful is that it is not a handbook. It is not a curriculum. It is true principles and resources. You have left the work unfinished so that we could work our skill upon it-so that we might know the joys and glories of creation.

A few years ago, I took a step away from the WEH facebook page. The group had been invaluable to me, but two things were making me uneasy: Sometimes, if we hear ALL the good ideas from everyone else on how to homeschool, we don’t have any room in our hearts for our own good ideas. Worse, we start comparing our good ideas to someone else’s good ideas and then start doubting inspiration. Second, though it was far and few between, I was frustrated with posts that again and again wanted more from you. More babysitting through the process, more ease with the website, more resources. I understand the questions and uncertainty—I had and have them still myself. But you gave us a TREASURE TROVE of resources right at our fingertips. I am amazed at the direction you are taking the new website, but I want to reassure you that what you have provided us moms the last several years has been more than enough. The books, the enrichment activities, the training, the beautiful artwork have given me a canvas to paint my own family’s education. I have learned over the years that the teacher (or the mom’s) passion and inspiration is key to impactful teaching. And that passion does not come from a laid out curriculum or short-cut handbook. It comes with work and effort and tears and prayers and creativity. Last month my mothers of influence group read “Music talks with children.” I was so impressed with this quote on page 48-49.

“Thoughtful people who have suffered in learning—all people suffer in learning, thoughtful ones the most—wonder how they can make the task less painful for others. It will always cause us sorrow as well as joy to learn, and many people spend their lives in trying to have as little sorrow as possible come with the learning of the young. When such people are true and good and thoughtful and have infinite kindness, they are teachers; and the teachers impose tasks upon us severely, perhaps, but with kind severity . . . Often in the doing of these things we find the lessons hard and wearisome, infinitely hard to bear, difficult, and not attractive. We wonder why all these things should be so, and we learn in the moment we ask that question that these painful tasks are the price we are paying for the development of our talent. That is truly the purpose of a lesson. And the dear teacher, wise because she has been painfully over the road herself, knows how good and necessary it is for us to labor as she directs.”

Marlene, I consider you a dear teacher—a dear teacher who has tried her best to make the road as easy as possible for her pupils, all while knowing how crucial our own labor and our own thinking is…

What you have already provided has already been more than enough. I am so grateful for the way your own laborious journey has changed me for the good. Bar none, my favorite quote from you (and I’ll probably butcher it) is “In the earth’s economy, the richest person is the one with the most money. In heaven’s economy, the richest person is the one with the greatest capacity for light.” I have found SO much light using your website and your resources, which you have so laboriously and unselfishly have provided for us, but I can feel my capacity for light growing in ways I couldn’t find before. ..

I am grateful that you are continually looking for ways to make our lives better, easier, and more full of light. So please don’t take this letter as a plea to stop the wonderful work you are doing—just . . . don’t try to please us all,…you have influenced my life for the good, and I’ll never be the same again.

I am so grateful that this mom took the time to write such a thoughtful letter. It is true—I want to make things easier for you. And likely, you want to make things easier for your kids. But the joy will always come through diligent efforts. Please don’t let my little checklist in a reading record or a more accessible website keep you from the due diligence required to extract the joy in your learning.

I frequently have moms approach me with offers to help me create a curriculum from my resources. They tell me I am overwhelming moms. There is too much they have to learn. They, too, want to help other moms by laying things out for them, perhaps a daily list of things to read and do according to the age of the child. And I kindly thank them, but have to say no to their offers. I will never create a curriculum for you to follow because to do so will deny you the experience you just heard described in this letter. Creating a curriculum would be the easiest thing I could do for you. I could probably attract a lot more families.

But in doing so, I would kill the process, the diligence required to experience the joy in this way of learning and living.

The closest I have come to doing that is to give you a Reading Record for the Forgotten Classics. Please don’t use it to make a checklist of things you want your kids to read. It is simply a tool. Never let it replace exploration and discovery and choice.

There is a favorite scriptural verse of mine:

“Teach ye diligently, and my grace shall attend you.”

Teach ye with love, learn with love, -- love is the secret ingredient. Love is the foundation of all learning.

.