Podcast #200: The Way Through the Days Ahead

This is probably the hardest podcast I have ever delivered. Maybe a better word is reluctant—I have never had a podcast I am more reluctant to share. I’ve had something pressing on my mind for quite some time now, but I don’t want to talk about it. It will stir up fear in some of you, and the last thing I want to do is add to your worries. For others, it will cause some eye rolls. I hope what I will talk about turns out to be unnecessary, but the cycles of history and the signs all around us tell me otherwise. And maybe it’s more for a future day and not right now.

All I know is that no matter how much I have tried to walk away from saying what I will say, it comes back with more urgency to deliver the message. So I’m just going to put it out there.

It was my study of Switzerland this month that finally brought many pieces together and if you’ll be patient with me, I want to attempt to connect some dots for you to think about. .

Here is the first dot, taken from a book about Switzerland written in 1881 by Harriet MacKenzie. I’ll post a link in the notes. I believe Switzerland has some lessons for us today in what we may be facing.

In 14th Century Switzerland, in the fertile valleys of Lake Lucerne surrounded by the majestic Alps were nestled villages of peasants and shepherds who quietly went about their work and lived simple, free lives in that setting of unrivaled beauty. It is said their fathers had fled Sweden—they’re my people-- in a time of famine in search of a new home. They had carried with them their songs and their faith.

A new emperor came along who wanted to unite all Switzerland under his power—for their well-being, of course. But he wanted them to do things his way. Their reaction: If the protection of the emperor does not secure us our rights, we have no further need of him. They refused to bow down to the demands placed upon them. Oh is that right, he said. If they refused his loving-kindness, he would begin a course of tyranny that would drive them to him. Taxes were increased, small offences were punished by heavy fines and imprisonment, and every oppressive measure was carried out with an insolence which the high spirited people could not endure.

At last, it was a woman’s voice that stirred the men to action. Hedgwig was her name, and one day, when she had had quite enough, she turned to her husband and said: “Shall we mothers nurse beggars at our bosoms, and bring up maid-servants for foreigners? Let there be an end to this.”

Her husband said not a word, but went to the homes of two friends where they discussed the miseries of their country. They agreed that their only hope was in themselves and in God, who had given no King the right to rule so unjustly.

Each made up his mind to go back to his own part of the country and consult with the bravest men of his district, and see what could be done for liberty and safety.

On the 17th of November, they met at a meadow called the Rutli where each one of the three had brought with him ten men, tried and true, who were resolved to hold by the old freedom of their fatherland.

The three leaders raised their hands towards heaven, and swore to the Lord, before whom peasants and kings are equal, “faithfully to live and die for the rights of the people, to suffer no injustice, but also to commit none, and to undertake and carry out everything together, as one man.” Then the thirty raised their hands in turn, and took the same oath to God and all the saints, manfully to strive for their liberty. Their covenant being made, they agreed to begin the work on New Year’s Day.

Among those thirty men was a young father named William Tell. We all know the story of how he refused to bow to the ridiculous hat with the peacock feather in the middle of the townsquare, and how he was forced to shoot an apple off the head of his young son or face instant death for both of them.

I’ll leave you to read the daring and inspiring story of what this little band of freedom fighters accomplished against such a formidable tyrannical enemy. If you’d like, you can listen to a recording of a version written for children by Henrietta Marshall. It’s posted in BelMonde and I’ll also link it in the notes.

I’ll come back to their story before we’re done, , but let’s now connect to the next dot.

I happened to get my Imprimis newsletter that’s put out by Hillsdale College while I was learning about Switzerland, and the featured article was on the Great Reset, and I now want to share some snippets from that article. It taught me more about the World Economic Forum—WEF—that was scheduled to meet just this past week for their 52st annual world conference in an upscale ski resort in a place called Davos… Switzerland. Our connecting point. Covid has delayed the live gathering until later this year, but they went ahead with a virtual meeting called the Davos Agenda that began last Monday with speeches by leaders from around the world. It’s nothing secret at all. Anyone can listen. It opened with an address from the president of China celebrating the success of the Communist Party’s first 100 years and how it has increased the well-being of their people. And the Davos Agenda is all about the global well-being of people..

Thousands will be attending the live meeting in the summer, including the chief executives of companies like Verizon, AstraZeneca, and IBM. The leaders of at least three Wall Street Banks will be speaking. Here, world leaders will mingle with the chief executives from many of the world’s largest companies.

It is a gathering of the rich and the powerful—the global elite who believe they are smart enough to transform our world—for our well-being, of course.

The article goes on to say that at their 50th annual meeting which took place in June 2020, they announced the Great Reset’s official launch, and a month later Karl Schwab, the founder of the World Economic Forum and someone named Malleret published a book on Covid and the Great Reset.

The book declared that Covid represents “an opportunity [that] can be seized”; that “we can take advantage of this unprecedented opportunity to reimagine our world.”; and that “for those fortunate enough to find themselves in industries ‘naturally’ resilient to the pandemic—think Big Tech companies like Apple, Google, Facebook and Amazon- the crisis was not only more bearable, but even a source of profitable opportunities at a time of distress for the majority.”

I took a look at their website. Like I said, they aren’t hiding anything or doing anything in secret. At first glance, you might even say this is great, the problems they are trying to solve. But I’ll tell you what is missing, at least what I couldn’t find—any reference to securing the freedom and rights of individuals or nations or any efforts to uphold and strengthen families or faith.

Can there truly be well-being without these things? I know there are a growing number of voices who are saying yes. As for me, my heart is in line with the Swiss in the story I opened with: If the protection of this global elite does not secure me my God-given rights, I have no further need for them.

Unfortunately, I don’t think they care too much about what I think of them.

The Imprimis article continues: “The draconian lockdown measures employed by Western governments managed to accomplish goals of which corporate socialists in the WEF could only dream—above all, the destruction of small businesses. Millions of small businesses closed their doors to the lockdowns, and data indicates that 60% of those closures are now permanent. Meanwhile companies like Amazon, Apple, Facebook and Google have enjoyed record gains.

“Other developments that are advancing the Great Reset agenda have included unfettered immigration, the Federal Reserve’s unrestrained printing of money and the subsequent inflation, increased taxation, increased dependence on the state, broken supply chains, the restrictions and job losses due to vaccine mandates. “

Just as Schwab and the WEF predicted, the Covid crisis has accelerated the Great Reset.

“We are watching hitherto democratic Western states—think Australia, New Zealand, and Austria—being transformed into totalitarian regimes modeled after China.”

 In fact, to bring this reset about, Schwab writes: “every country from the United States to China must participate, and every industry, from oil and gas to tech, must be transformed. This Chinese-style system includes vastly increased state intervention in the economy, on the one hand, and on the other, the kind of authoritarian measures that the Chinese government uses to control its population.”

Schwab and Malleret wrote that if “the past five centuries in Europe and America” have taught us anything, it is that ‘acute crises contribute to boosting the power of the state. It’s always been the case and there is no reason it should be different with the Covid-19 pandemic.

“The goals of the Great Reset depend on the obliteration not only of free markets, but of individual liberty and free will.”

Depressed yet?

I’m not done. Now my third connecting point.

Last Fall, my daughter Shannon came for a visit and brought a book with her she had picked up from the library called Live Not By Lies by Rod Dreher. She said she had heard Andrew Pudewa from the Institute for Excellence in Writing –who I think a lot of you know—recommend that every American needed to read the book. I have a lot of respect for him, so I stole the book from her and read it.

It is written by a journalist who was contacted by an eminent physician who explained that his mother, who is now in her nineties, had lived under Communism in Czechoslovakia as a youth. She was concerned because the events in the United States today reminded her of when Communism first came to Czechoslovakia. He said that his parents had warned him about the dangers of totalitarianism—or state control—his whole life. But he wasn’t concerned. “After all,” he said, “this is America, the land of liberty, of individual rights, one nation under God and the rule of law.”

It can’t happen here.

Aleksandor Solzhenitsyn has something to say about that, and he would know: “There is this fallacious belief: ‘It would not be the same here; here such things are impossible.’ Alas, all the evil of the twentieth century is possible everywhere on earth.”

Dehrer said, “There was something in the tension in the doctor’s voice that rattled him. “What if the old Czech woman sees something the rest of us do not?”

He continues: “During the next few years, I spoke with many men and women who had once lived under communism. I asked them what they thought of the old woman’s declaration. Did they also think that life in America is drifting toward some sort of totalitarianism?

“They all said yes—often emphatically. They were usually surprised by my question because they consider Americans to be hopelessly naïve on the subject. Some were genuinely angry that their fellow Americans don’t recognize what is happening.”

“ A totalitarian state,” Dehrer says, “is one that aspires to nothing less than defining and controlling reality. Truth is whatever the rulers decide it is. A totalitarian state seeks not just to control your actions but also your thoughts and emotions. It is a form of government that seeks to control all aspects of life.”

Let me repeat that. A Totalitarian state is a form of government that seeks to control all aspects of life.

One of the interviewees observed: “The young people today have it harder than we did in one way: it is harder to tell who is the enemy.”

“The old totalitarianism conquered societies through fear of pain; the new one will conquer primarily through manipulating people’s love of pleasure and fear of discomfort.”

“If democratic majorities come to believe that transferring social control to governmental and private institutional elites is necessary to guarantee virtue and safety, then it will happen.”

A survivor in Slovakia said: “ I saw that people were willing to sacrifice a lot of their personal freedom for the sake of national security. “

So what do you think? Are the majority of Americans favoring comfort and security over their freedom? Wasn’t that what the Austrian emperor was offering the Swiss? Comfort and security—their well-being? The lessons of ancient Rome warn us what will happen if that is the case. Such a people will not only lose their comfort and security, they will lose their freedom as well.

Well, the first half of the book goes over details of what that all looks like and I will leave you to search that on your own, if there is interest.

I would rather focus on the second half of the book, because my purpose for this podcast isn’t to terrify you, although the prospect should terrify us all!. My purpose is to offer you hope which brings me to my fourth connecting point which is to talk about navigating our way through this potential threat. In the second half of the book, the survivors offer us hope as they share how they made it through without breaking and with their faith intact.

So just a little detour. The name Libraries of Hope came in an instant one day in the shower. And I knew that whatever I was to create was meant to bring hope in the lives of those who used it. It was a little later down the road as the philosophy of learning began to take shape that the descriptive name The Well-Educated Heart came in the same instant flash, and almost immediately, was abbreviated by the letters WEH. When you read that out loud, you might wonder how to say it. My daughters and I have talked about that. It usually comes out WEH.

But after I read the second half of this book, I have changed my mind—it is most certainly WEH. Because everything they recommended as the way through a season of totalitarianism is what we are already learning and doing through the Well-Educated Heart. I believe we have been given the Way through what appears to be coming.

Rest assured, totalitarianism is built on lies so it cannot and will not last. It is in our power to shorten the duration..

One thing that I didn’t tell you earlier in the story of Switzerland was that a few years before the league of the eight cantons was formed, the Swiss faced a bigger enemy than the Austrians. A desolating plague swept over them. One third of the Swiss people perished. Reading now from the 1881 book I referenced at the beginning, it says “The newly reclaimed lands were left uncultivated, for whole families were swept off, leaving no kindred to claim their inheritance. The priests were too few to bring even the last sacraments to the dying, and the burial places had no more room for the dead. Close upon this calamity there followed such earthquakes as no Swiss had ever seen before…fire burned…”

BUT “through all the fourteenth century, through war and peace, plague and earthquake, petty feuds and national resistance, was steadily growing the spirit and power of liberty.” And they needed that spirit and power to conquer the great and powerful enemies of their freedom.

So do we.

 I think everyone will agree that our world is broken. What institution have we not lost faith in? Our schools are broken, our medical system is broken, our government is broken, even our churches are broken.. We need change. There is too much poverty and suffering in the world.

But here are the two ways of transformation. One way, promoted by the powerful and rich, believes in effecting change from the top down, applying force and compulsion from the outside to change the inside.

A few thoughts to my friends who are trying to correct things by promoting and studying the Constitution. I love and value our Constitution. We should know and understand it. I believe it was inspired. But in a way, it’s another top down approach to change— you know, if we can just change the way our government is operating, we can fix things.

But keep in mind--The Constitution provided instructions in governance to a people who had already declared and made themselves free. The Constitution itself didn’t make them free. It only secured and preserved what they already possessed. Furthermore, John Adams among others said it would only work with a moral and virtuous people. If those who are out promoting the Constitution are not making concurrent efforts to inspire us with greater virtue and morality, it won’t be enough. Lafayette tried to bring the Constitution to his own people in France. But they were of a different heart and it didn’t work.

And if we manage to hold on to liberty, what will we do with it? Will we continue spending out time shopping and pursuing trivial pursuits or will we bear fruit worth keeping us around as a free people? I think God is watching our answer to that question more than any other.

The other way of transformation, ironically was taught in a decidedly top-down country, China, over 2000 years ago by Confucius:

To put the world in order,

we must first put the nation in order;

To put the nation in order,

we must first put the family in order;

To put the family in order;

we must first cultivate our personal life;

We must first set our hearts right.

This is a bottom up approach to fix the problems of the world that starts with you and me, as individuals, tending our own hearts. And then change comes from the inside out, circling upward and outward.

It was the remedy Jesus taught in another day of oppression and tyranny.

It is what I teach through the Well-Educated Heart which aligns with the advice these survivors are offering to us on how to navigate our way through what may be coming towards us.

I have often said to you that, although the Well-Educated Heart is used by many homeschoolers, it is not designed as a homeschooling curriculum. I’m fine that people use it any way that serves them. But I have always had a feeling that there was a much deeper purpose for it all. Becoming aware of these things I am sharing with you has added a new layer of understanding for me.

So let me unfold some of these connections. First I will give you what the survivors of totalitarian regimes advised and then remind you of what Well-Educated Heart offers to help you accomplish it.

Step One: We must cultivate our personal lives and set our hearts right.

The survivors said you must ground yourself in truth. Let me link together some of their comments:

One said: “You will be surrounded by lies—you don’t have a choice. Don’t assimilate to it. It’s an individual decision for each person. If you want to live in fear, or if you want to live in the freedom of your soul. If your soul is free, then your thoughts are free, and then your words are going to be free.”

I will add we have to know what we believe and why.

A priest was asked: “How does an honest man live under totalitarianism?” He responded, “With difficulty. Of course it is difficult, but thanks be to God, there were people who were doing their best to build their lives in such a way that they could live in truth. People understood that if that was going to be a priority to live in truth, then they were going to have to limit themselves in other ways—the progress of their careers, for example. But they made a choice, and resolved to live by it.”

Another offered: “The first step in liquidating a people is to erase its memory. Destroy its books, its culture, its history. [We could add its monuments].Then have somebody write new books, manufacture a new culture, invent a new history. Before long that nation will begin to forget what it is and what it was. The world around it will forget even faster.”

Cicero said, “Not to know what happened before you were born is to remain a child forever,” . “This is why communists place such emphasis on conquering the minds and hearts of young people. A collective loss of historical memory—not just memory of communism but memory of our shared cultural past—within the West is bound to have a devastating effect on our future…It’s the act of forgetting itself that makes us vulnerable to totalitarianism in general. And the more totalitarian a regime’s nature, the more it will try to force people to forget their cultural memories. “

“It they erase all memory of the past, and turn everyone into newborn babies, then they can write whatever they want on that blank slate. [Oh my goodness! Is that ever happening! ] It’s not so easy to manipulate people who know who they are, rooted in tradition.”

“A totalitarian personality is ‘the completely isolated human being’. A person cut off from history is a person who is almost powerless against power.”

That is worth repeating. A person cut off from history is a person who is almost powerless against power.

“Hitler’s plan for Poland was to destroy the Poles as a people. To do that, the Nazis needed to destroy the two things that gave the Polish their identity: their shared Catholic faith and their sense of themselves as a nation.”

Think about that. America has had, in its past, a shared Christian faith. That is no longer the case. And Americans—especially our youth-- are fed reasons to despise our nation. They are ashamed to be called Americans.

Orwell feared a world in which people would be forbidden to read books. Huxley feared a world in which no one would have to ban books, because no one would want to read them in the first place. “This is China today. Even though a great deal of information remains available to students, they don’t care about it.” I believe that generally describes American youth as well. And a big part of your jobs as mothers is to reawaken that interest to learn.

“Czech students were starving for knowledge. They wanted to learn so that they could know how to live, especially under a dictatorship of lies.”

“To be indifferent or even hostile to tradition is to surrender to those in power who want to legitimate a new social and political order.”

So how did the parents combat these things in tending the hearts of their own children? Let me string together several of their suggestions:.

They filled the moral imaginations of their children with the good. One mother, despite a demanding job, read aloud to her children for two or three hours daily. Every day. She read them fairy tales, myths, adventure stories and even some horror classics. The Lord of the Rings was a cornerstone of her family’s collective imagination.

The key, they said, is to expose children to stories that help them know the difference between truth and falsehood, [good and evil] , and teach them how to discern this in real life. One remembered his dad teaching his children how to read the world around them, and how to understand people and events in terms of right and wrong.

In other words, conversations and discussions were happening in the home. They said their parents were heroes to them. They saw them living what they taught.

“What my mom always encouraged in us and supported was our imagination, through the reading of books or playing with figures. She also taught us that the imagination was something that was wholly ours, that could not be stolen from us.”

They said you can’t simply be against everything bad. You had to be for something good. Otherwise you can get dark and crazy.

They taught their children to not be afraid to be weird in society’s eyes, to be prepared to make great sacrifices for the greater good, and to teach them they were part of a wider movement, even though they might not have immediately seen it.

They talked about the need to give their children stories every single day of people living good and upright lives. They constantly needed to nourish their souls in this way.

I have shared with you my experience pretty early on in gathering stories for Libraries of Hope when I woke up one morning with a clear impression to read the book of Enoch. My first reaction was, Is there a book of Enoch?” I found it online. In it, Enoch is said to have shared a vision of our day. At the very end you can read—it’s worth repeating:

“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.” BUT “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.”

The word upright means just like it sounds - to walk up and right. Webster adds “not deviating from correct moral principles’. To walk in honesty, integrity, compassion, justice, mercy, courage, honor. .

I am here to tell you we have been given those books.

I wish I had the power to truly help you to understand the incomparable gift that has been given us in the stories such as you find in the Forgotten Classics Family Library. From about 1880 to 1920, it was like the world paused long enough for gifted scholars to consider the most important stories of the ages—from history, from literature, from music, from art, from poetry, from nature, inspiring stories of great lives—and write them in a way that young people could comprehend and understand. It was like they sifted through the debris and found the gold nuggets. No other generation has had what our generation has been given. How many times and ways can I say that to you?

Why do we read these old books?

I think C. S. Lewis says it best:

“We may be sure that the characteristic blindness of the twentieth century - the blindness about which posterity will ask, "But how could they have thought that?" - lies where we have never suspected it... None of us can fully escape this blindness, but we shall certainly increase it, and weaken our guard against it, if we read only modern books. Where they are true they will give us truths which we half knew already. Where they are false they will aggravate the error with which we are already dangerously ill. The only palliative is to keep the clean sea breeze of the centuries blowing through our minds, and this can be done only by reading old books.”

These stories will give your children the cultural and historical perspectives that are being erased. They will ‘keep the clean sea breezes of the centuries blowing through’ their minds by awakening a desire to dig out the older writings and studying them. . They are loaded with examples of how to live upright and morally virtuous lives, sometimes by showing the opposite, but with ample examples of lives well lived. Something woefully lacking in the stories being written today. The Forgotten Classics Family Library is heavily loaded with stories from history and stories of great lives, which you will need an abundance of. They are written by men and women who prized freedom and faith and family and who loved the young people for whom they were writing. They will give you the very soul food you will need to get through the lies that have already started coming. Anchored in truth, they will give you hope. They are a library of hope. If your children won’t listen or read, will you? Will you store them in YOUR heart? It needn’t take all day. Read a few stories a day—out loud is actually best—even one a day—and let them settle in your and their hearts. All I’ve done is tried to collect some of the best and make them convenient for you to access. You certainly aren’t limited to the ones I have found. Do your own search. We are continuing to find ways to improve that delivery because we know how important these stories are.

They will help set hearts right, grounded in truth.

And tyranny cannot stand in the face of Truth.

Step Two: Set our homes right.

Of course, it’s not possible to accomplish step one without doing step two at the same time.

“Under communism, the family came under direct and sustained assault by the government, which saw its sovereignty as a threat to state control of all individuals.”

“It’s not an accident that every dictatorship always tried to break down the family, because it’s from the family that you get the strength to be able to fight. You have the feeling that family members have your back, so you can go out into the world and face anything.”

For those of you who have taken the time to listen to Dr. Gordon Neufeld, you will recognize this idea in his teachings that as we strengthen our family relationships, our children are better equipped to go out and face the bullies of the world. We want our children to attach their hearts to us as parents when they are young,- not to their peers-- because it provides the anchor they need. .

“The family was the bedrock of forming faithful resistance to Communism.” The story of a national hero of Christian resistance to communism—began in a little house in a dull, poor village in the middle of nowhere, in the bosom of a family that prayed together.

This family house must be a real home, “that is a place which is livable and set apart, sheltered from the outer world; a place which is a starting point for adventures and experiences with the assurance of a safe return—in other words, a haven in a heartless world.”

Dehrer described one of the family homes he visited. It was a place filled with books and art and life.

Creating such a home is one of the most patriotic acts you can do. .

Family is the bedrock of civilization and must be nurtured and protected at all costs. The family offers three gifts:
1. Fruitful fellowship of love, bound together

2. Freedom

3. Dignity of the individual

All three of which are most certainly missing in any totalitarian rule.

Less formal, everyday acts within the home are more powerful than you might think.

As you know, one of the focuses of the Well-Educated Heart is creating a life-giving home environment where individual desires and talents can be nourished and expressed; where children can learn that questioning is good; that there is a danger in single stories. We don’t want to duplicate school at home where students are driven by a spirit of compulsion and authority. Rather, we want them to fully experience the joy of exploration and discovery in an atmosphere of freedom, love and acceptance.

As Orison Swett Marden wrote, “Home is the holy of holies . . . and in it lies the very secret of human progress. The highest civilizations have scarcely as yet glimpsed the possibilities of home.”

No wonder tyrannical leaders want to crush home and family.

STEP THREE: Gather with others.

“The individual standing alone against the machine will be crushed.”

Thousands of years ago, Aesop told the story of a father giving his sons a twig to break, which they easily did. Then he banded the twigs together and not one of them could break them.

Isolation is vital for grabbing power because, standing alone, we are so easily broken.

The survivors said they were saved by small communities.

They urged the forming of small communities around basically anything. They said, “ Organize now while you can. The longer we remain isolated in a period of liberty, the harder it will be to find one another in a time of persecution. Form communities and networks of communities. The point is that the members of that community must be very supportive of one another, no matter what comes. You must have something in common and to do things together. “

“Only in solidarity with others can we find the spiritual and communal strength to resist.”

“Christians must act to build bonds of brotherhood not just with one another, … but also with people of goodwill belonging to other religions, and no religion at all.”

“You had people of totally different worldviews and ideas joined together. The lesson of valuing diversity within a broader unity of shared goals is something that Christians today need to embrace.”

One respondent observed: “When we look at what’s happening in America today, we see that you are building walls and creating gaps between people. For us, we are always willing to speak, to talk with the other side to avoid building walls between people. It is much easier to indoctrinate someone who is enclosed within a set of walls.”

“When it comes to survival, maybe what’s most important is simple fidelity: not by evangelizing people but by developing honest relations with one another—not looking for whether one is good or bad, or judging them by their ideology.”

Above all, they said to be kind to others, for you never know when you will need them, or they will need you.

“What happens when you can’t trust anyone? Don’t worry about it and be kind anyway.”

“Join your grief with the grief of others, and then you will find it easier to carry.”

“Families and religious fellowships were places of retreat. So were underground educational seminars. A key institution was the seminar held in private homes. In these events, scholars would lecture on forbidden subjects—history, literature, and other cultural topics necessary to maintain cultural memory. Its driving purpose was first, cultural preservation in the face of annhilation, and by doing so, they were cultivating the seeds of renewal when the danger was passed.”

Remember—spring always follows winter and there will need to be seeds for a new planting. .

“These seminars were an act of responsibility of the old—those who still had their memories of what was real—toward the young. The formal institutions could no longer be trusted to tell the truth and to transmit the cultural memories that told Czechs who they were. But the task had to be done, or the Czech people would disappear.”

“These communities must have ‘living models’ of men and women who enact these truths in their daily lives. Nothing else works.”

I hope as I share these things, you are recognizing the guiding principles behind the formation of Mothers of Influence groups. We have encouraged you to bring together women of different ages and backgrounds and different religious faiths. We have discouraged using the groups as political activist groups or as promoting a single doctrinal point of view; not that those things are not good, but these particular groups are meant to provide safe and common grounds of good. The Arts have the power to unite people because they speak of our common human experience. And they are so healing. That is why our study is centered on the Arts.

The most important thing in forming these groups is that positive, loving and supportive relationships among the members of your group be at the heart of all you do. Don’t allow contention and dissensions to form. Practice respect. . Keep the groups intimate and small. Do network with other groups nearby and consider meeting together occasionally. We do have a sense of a safety net spreading across the country and being connected to each other is important.

If you haven’t heard the story of the Singing Revolution in Estonia, look it up. After 50 years of living under oppression, the people started learning and singing their forbidden folk songs in small groups until one day, they all united 150,000 voices strong on the public square and the Communist Party saw they had lost power and left.

We have encouraged you to bring your families together to do things that work best in groups like singing together, dancing together, sharing foods from different cultures, putting on simple plays for each other, playing musical instruments together, reciting poetry, inviting guest speakers, creating together, doing service projects together, celebrating many cultures—learning of their holidays and celebrations and traditions—dancing their folk dances, singing their folk songs, having conversations about interesting things you are learning and helping children carry on meaningful conversations with each other, playing real games, making real connections to counter our virtual world.

Listen to what they suggested and see if it sounds familiar:

“We have to tell our stories but also manifest cultural memory in communal deeds—in mourning and in celebration. The theater performances, seminars on literature, history, philosophy and theology help one other remember who they were. Celebrate festivals, make pilgrimages, observe holy-day practices, perform concerts, hold dances, learn and teach traditional cooking—any kind of collective deed that connects the community with its shared sacred and secular history in a living way is an act of resistance to an ethos that says the past doesn’t matter.”

I’ll interject here—America is a melting pot of many cultures. It is very American to learn about and celebrate all of them.

Now continuing from the book:

These communities were multi-generational.

“In a time when people have forgotten how to be neighbors, simply sharing a meal or a movie together is a political act. This is a way to fight back against the loneliness and isolation that allows totalitarianism to rule.”

“Screen a film once a month and invite groups of people to come watch it and talk about it. There is something unique about sharing the experience with others, and talking about it. Don’t just screen new movies, but also older ones. Often younger people don’t know it’s a remake. Jumping between eras helps the young people to understand the cultural context in which films are made. The fact that the younger ones can learn from the knowledge and experience of the older ones is really meaningful.

In talking about a movie, it’s a way for older members of a community to contribute to the passing on of cultural memory to the young.”

We are on the brink of the worst mental-health crisis in decades and much of this deterioration can be traced to our phones. The deep unhappiness comes from the isolation felt, despite being connected. Young people, especially are living in illusions; in a virtual world, not a real one, which makes them easier to control

We have got to get them involved in real things.

What is provided to you through Well-Educated Heart can help you. There are plays and creative activities and suggested movies—old and new—and music. And of course lots of stories.

STEP FOUR: Which is really Step One.

This is the step Confucius left out. It is the rock upon which we must build, or there is no foundation and the building will topple.

There must be a faith in God.

A Russian Orthodox mystic of the nineteenth century, Saint Seraphim of Sarov, once said, “Acquire the Holy Spirit, and thousands around you will be saved.”

The survivors of the godless communist rule had these things to say:

“The more I depended on faith, the stronger I became.”

“Material things which mankind regarded as certainties were fleeting and illusory, while faith, which the world considered ephemeral, was the most reliable and the most powerful of foundations.”

Memorizing texts from the New Testament proved to be an excellent preparation for critical times and even imprisonment. “The most beautiful and important texts which mankind has from God contain a priceless treasure which ‘moth and decay cannot destroy, and thieves break in and steal.’

‘Sometimes one word, or a single sentence from a Scripture, is enough to fill a person with a special light. An insight or a new meaning is revealed and penetrates one’s inner being and remains there for weeks or months at a time.”

The hymns they sang, especially in prison, brought comfort. Did you notice in the story of the Haitian missionary hostages who were recently released, that they spent much of their time in the singing of hymns? They felt hope and comfort as they sang.

Getting back to Dehrer’s book, he wrote: “They witnessed the spiritual power of the underground church firsthand. In a world of despair, these believers provided something rare and precious: real hope.”

“Those who are completely miserable, and lost, and in pain were drawn to people who looked like they were living in the light of truth.”

Dehrer wrote: “Not every anti-communist dissident was a Christian, and not every Christian living under communist totalitarianism resisted. But here’s an interesting thing: every single Christian I interviewed for this book, in every ex-communist country, conveyed a sense of a deep inner peace—a peace that they credit to their faith, which gave them ground on which to stand firm. “

Now, I have no illusions that the way I am suggesting here will ever be accepted or adopted by masses of people. God’s way has never been the popular way. But He has always fought on the side of those who are fighting for their freedom.

One of the interviewees said, “you can build a whole country on ten righteous people who are like pillars, like monuments.”

Going back to the story of the Swiss, remember it started with Hedgwig who inspired her husband to do something. He gathered two friends who each brought 10 friends to that field in Rutli where they raised their hands to heaven and covenanted with God to stand against the so-called nobility who thought they knew better ways for them and desired to take over their lands. Every battle began in the same way—they would all quietly kneel upon the ground and pray for heaven’s strength and then they would stand and face their enemy. .

Finally there came a decisive battle at a place called Morgarten; interestingly, scarcely a year earlier, the Scots under Robert the Bruce had gone against the powerful English army at Bannockburn and won their independence.

According to legend, here were gathered under Duke Leopold Austria’s greatest knights and nobles followed by 20,000 soldiers, all in gleaming suits of armor and banners waving high. They expected a quick victory over the simple Swiss peasants who barely numbered over 600 and who had no armor and only crude weapons. They strapped boards to their arms and carried their great grandfather’s pikes in one hand and short knives in another.

While the enemy haughtily adjusted their armor, when the Swiss were ready for battle, they fell upon their knees, as their old custom was, calling upon God, as their only Lord and Master, to help them that day, as they had called upon Him in every battle they had fought.

“Lord, God of heaven and earth, look upon their pride and our lowliness. Show that thou forsaketh not those who trust in Thee, but bring them low who trust in themselves and glory in their own strength.”

Then they rose from their knees and stood waiting for the enemy.

In less than an hour and a half, before 9:00 in the morning, the Swiss had gained a complete victory while the bravest and best knights of Austria lay dead upon the field of Morgarten.

“It would take another 200 years before the Swiss fully secured their freedom, but never again did they live through the dark and terrible days of their former oppressors.”

When did God ever need a numbers advantage or well-trained soldiers to win a victory?

We might feel like Frodo: “I wish it need not have happened in my time.” -

To which Gandalf replied: So do I, and so do all who have lived to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.”

I find myself returning to a favorite poem by Henry H. Barry quite frequently:

He Leadeth Me

In ‘green pastures’”? Not always; sometimes He

Who knowest best, in kindness leadeth me

In weary ways, where heavy shadows be;

Out of the sunshine into darkest night.

I oft would faint with sorrows and affright,

Only for this: I know He holds my hand;

So, whether led in green or desert land,

I trust, although I may not understand.

Beside “still waters”? No, not always so;

Oftimes the heavy tempests ‘round me blow,

And o’er my soul the waves and billows go.

But when the storms beat loudest, and I cry

Aloud for help, the Master standeth by,

And whispers to my soul, “Lo, it is I.”

Above the tempest wild I hear Him say:

“Beyond this darkness lies the perfect day;

In every path of thine I lead the way.”

So whether on the hill-tops high and fair

I dwell, or in the sunless valleys where

The shadows lie, what matter? He is there.

And more than this; where’er the pathway lead

He gives to me no helpless, broken reed,

But His own hand, sufficient for my need.

Isaiah saw our day. He assures us there will be a day when “Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders;

“Thy people shall all be righteous; they shall inherit the land forever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands..

“A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation.” (Isaiah 60:22)

Truly, with the help of God, by small and simple means, great things will come to pass.

We have been given a way through whatever may come to us.. Be not afraid.