Coming Full Circle

My daughter came home from a Mothers of Influence meeting not long ago and said the question had come up: Who are we? Are we Libraries of Hope? Are we Well-Educated Heart? Are we Mothers of Influence? And now do we call ourselves Belle Ame?

All the alphabet soup gets so confusing.

Who are we?

So I sat down at my desk with a paper and pen and considered the journey I have been on and I found myself drawing circles and suddenly it all fit together so nicely into one grand whole. As I’ve shared this simple illustration with others, it’s like the light goes on and it all makes sense, and more importantly, they see clearly where they are in their own personal journey.

And although I didn’t recognize it as I was going through the process, I now see that I was going through the same Pattern for Learning and Creation I have been teaching you.

It all started with a desire and a question. I told you how I was working with a friend about 20 years ago now who had adopted a little school in the slums of Nairobi, Kenya. Here was a classroom of children eager to learn. Many of them were orphans. They came to school hungry and barefoot. Chances were, many of them would not even reach adulthood. Our traditional way of thinking about school and education didn’t seem to make any sense for them.

So the thought struck me- if we could learn God’s purposes for education and discover His methods,--if we could align ourselves and live in harmony with His ways—I knew we would be successful in blessings the lives of these little children.

Although I’ve always been restless where education is concerned, the desire to answer these questions—What are God’s purposes for education and what are His methods-- sent me on a much more intense search for answers—a search that continues to this day.

Notice--I had asked a question that sprang from within my own heart—where all lasting learning begins--, now I started seeking and searching for answers. I started with sacred writings and then read educational method books, but it wasn’t until I happened upon the writings of the heart educators of the late 19th century that the lights started turning on.

It was while reading the same books I share with you in the Forgotten Classics Family Library that dots started connecting and patterns started emerging and the philosophy of the Well-Educated Heart was born. Another way of saying it is that I was now ready to knock, and understanding started being unfolded to me and the right-use- for the knowledge I was gaining. .

Had I not taken the time to study, I wouldn’t have given the Spirit anything to work with in giving me understanding. There would have been no Well-Educated Heart philosophy.

 But the creation process didn’t stop there. God always multiplies and gathers. It wasn’t just for me.

He began preparing the hearts of many mothers, and when the time was right, they were ready to come together to learn and apply the principles in Mothers of Influence Circles. It’s one thing to have a vision of a great painting you want to paint; another thing to master the skills to paint it. Mothers came together to strengthen and support each other while they learned and applied the lessons.

Then came the fruit of that learning; a way to express and share the fulness of their hearts and to scatter more seeds so that the planting and growth process could start all over again and spread outward.

Belle Ame is the fruit of all that comes before.

Notice the inner circles were about desire and vision, then came principles and application and finally the right-use of all that was being learned. The right-use being that you are using your knowledge and wisdom to bless as many lives as possible.

The direction is inward-out.

And each circle is dependent on the circle before.

For example, If you are attempting to apply the Well-Educated Heart philosophy of learning but you aren’t spending any time in the Libraries of Hope books, you are missing vital nutrients to feed the growth process. Do you remember what I shared from the book of Enoch in the introductory talk? Enoch saw our day when he said:

‘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.”

I believe we have been given those books. They are filled with light and truth. How do I judge that? I test them. This is my criteria:

Does it enlarge my soul?
Does it enlighten my understanding?
Does it taste delicious to me?
Does it contain living ideas that sprout and begin to grow?

Does it cause me to have more faith in God?

Does it inspire me to love others?

As I have spent time with the writers of these books, I have found them to be rooted and grounded in the love of God which is expressed in their desire to help and lift others. They love the children for whom they wrote and wanted to teach them the ways of happiness.

I have only mined part of the treasure available to us. By all means! Do your own excavation. But I offer you something to begin with.

Another example-- If you join a Mothers of influence group, but you don’t spend any time in the writings found in Libraries of Hope or study the philosophy through Catch the Vision, you are going to have a gaping hole in your experience. It will be hollow. There is nothing to feed those outer layers. And without common purpose, it will likely fall apart.

Likewise, it’s not just putting on a Belle Ame activity that makes it one—it’s your spirit and your personality and your influence that will give it its power to change lives. Your influence will be felt because you are rooted and grounded in the love of God and it shines through you.

That power only comes as you start in the center and grow outward.

Everyone who is involved in the Belle Ame dream campus will need to go through all the circles for a very important reason—it helps to unify our vision and purpose. I have told you before about the time I asked my family what they wanted for Sunday dessert and they all said, “Coconut dessert!” So I made coconut dessert.
But when I served it, we found that every single one of us had a different coconut dessert in mind.

We don’t want to build a campus and then find out we are all seeing something different. This creative process of unifying a vision is a most important part of the work before us.

Now let’s look at this from a couple of different angles.

If I turn these circles sideways, it reminds me of one of those baby stacking toys, only upside down. We’re going to start with the smallest and work out. Notice how the center point, which I am identifying as the love of God, is in and through all of it. If you take Him out, the circles have nothing to hold them in place.

Nothing exists without a center—the nucleus of an atom, the hearth of the home, the heart of a body, the sun in the solar system, the capital of a nation. I believe all Light and Truth and Love shines from the center, which is God.

 One thing that is not accurately displayed by this toy is that our circles are connected like a spiral working upward and outward. If you cut the spiral, you’ve severed it from that which gives movement and life. You have to work from the center and go from there.

Notice the shape—it’s our tower flipped over symbol—from within, out.

Let’s try another way of looking at it.

We have adopted the symbol of the Cedars of Lebanon for Mothers of Influence. The symbol came as a heavenly gift to Marley one day—and peeling back the many layers of its meaning and significance has revealed what a perfect symbol it is for us to use.

The Cedar of Lebanon is noted for its longevity and resistance to decay. There are trees that are over 3000 years old. They have endured through tumultuous times. Their wood is prized—Solomon sent for the Cedars of Lebanon when he was ready to build his temple. The trees flourish on the high mountains.

The trees are exceptionally slow-growing. All the emphasis in the early years is on root development and internal strength. One of their secrets for endurance is their roots run deep. For every ten feet above ground, the root may travel 30 feet below ground. The tips of the roots have properties that make it possible to even bore through hard rock in search of a water source. But once it finds that everlasting spring of water deep within the earth, it can endure extreme conditions at the surface.

Cedars of Lebanon don’t bear fruit for the first 50 years but then will continue bearing long into their old age—even if they’re severely injured.

Its abundant sap is a natural repellent to pests and fungi.

As it grows upward, it reaches its branches outward and grows right into the foliage of the neighboring trees that now support each other. Sometimes they even grow together as one.

The tree is known for its healing and purification processes and its spiritual protection and it gives off a sweet fragrance.

Can you see the likeness here? We see each Mother of Influence as a Cedar of Lebanon, rooted and grounded in the love of God. If you don’t yet have that faith in God, if you can but desire that there is a God out there who loves and cares about you, it will be enough to start.

We spend our early years on root development and internal strength. We then grow upward as we reach higher and eventually outward where we link arms with others in an encircling reach of protection and strength and support. The growth process is inward-out.

It’s important that each Mother goes through this growth process, independently, although supported by community.

As I was pondering these things over the last several days, I woke up one morning with the thought to now look up the banyan tree.

Banyan trees are also very large. They can cover acres. But the banyan tree does not grow from planting a seed in the ground. Rather, the banyan seed seeks a host tree and attaches itself to it and feeds from the host. As its roots begin to grow, they start to strangle the roots of the host tree until they kill its host. The banyan tree then starts sending roots down from its own branches to secure itself to the ground. And the fruit it bears is nasty.

I feel this comes as a caution to us. If someone creates or joins a Mother of Influence group or organizes a Belle Ame activity, calling it that, or maybe someone is promoting something as being based on the Well-Educated Heart, but she hasn’t gone through the core process of asking and seeking and knowing for herself which means reading the books and going through Catch the Vision—and if she isn’t rooted in the love of God-- she may be bringing in ideas and traditions contrary to all we are trying to do, perhaps innocently, but as they get wrapped around the roots of the host, these ideas may begin to strangle out the purpose for which we are coming together and even kill the host.

This is why we are asking that If you desire to identify yourself as a Mother of Influence, that you will go through the growth process that we are all going through as I have attempted to illustrate with these circles, that we might be working in harmony with each other and have a common vision that we are working from.

Some of you may come and stop at the first circle. You dabble a little bit in the books and that’s all you’re interested in. That’s fine. They are there for you to use.

Some of you will expand to the next circle and study the philosophy for yourself and adapt parts of it according to your understanding. That is also fine. You may even try to do it without reading any of the books in the Libraries of Hope library. As long as this is done at a personal level, it is fine.

It’s when you start to gather a community that you need to be sure you haven’t left a gap in your circles. To say that you are doing a Well-Educated Heart activity without having spent time reading and studying from Libraries of Hope or having gone through the Catch the Vision course would be a misrepresentation.

Once you identify as a Mother of Influence, you have now joined a community. You are part of a Mothers of Influence Circle. As such, we ask that you join us in studying the books provided for you and trust that when you are ready to join that community, you will have completed the Catch the Vision intro course. It doesn’t mean you know it all; it just means that you know enough to know that you want to know more. As you do these things, your roots are going deep. Your understanding is lifting you higher. Going forward, we are here to strengthen and support each other.

This is not a place for Banyan trees.

We have work to do. It is hoped our encircling reach will become a shroud of protection and refuge in a world of growing uncertainty.

So back to the original question my daughter posed: Who are we?
We are Mothers of Influence, rooted in the love of God, studying the writings of the past to understand the course corrections necessary for those who follow, and spreading the spirit of Belle Ame far and wide.

I trust since you are listening to this, you have now completed the introductory course. I hope you are beginning to Catch the Vision of what this work of the heart is all about. We are building a community of families who are learning to restore the lost arts of educating hearts. We seek to preserve a culture of faith, freedom and family and a love of the True, the Good and the Beautiful.

Some of you may feel frustrated because I haven’t told you exactly what to do. I’m afraid I will never tell you exactly what to do because this is a personal journey between you and God and He customizes it to fit you. But as you continue to fill your heart with new ideas and thoughts, over time, you will begin to see the harmonies, the connections, the patterns, the lessons that will begin to emerge. You will learn by experience what works and what doesn’t work for you.

Shall I remind you again that you can’t speed grow a garden or speed grow a tree? Especially a Cedar of Lebanon.

Now, if you want to continue the journey, where do you go from here? There are several options for you.

Your body needs constant nourishment and so does your heart and your soul. So a reference library has been prepared for you to continue learning from. It includes transcripts of all the little talks you have just listened to plus so much more. You’ll find transcripts of many of my keynote talks and other presentations at conferences as well as most of my podcasts and the text for the Take 5s, which I will tell you about in a minute. There are booklists and fine art and quotes to draw from, as well.

I tried to pack them as full as I could. And there is a lot there!! They were never intended to be read cover to cover. Use them to explore and discover different topics according to what grabs your interest. .If you want to keep track of where you’ve been, there is a checklist you can print out for yourself.

You can buy hard copies of the reference library from our store, but there are also free digital copies on our reference bundle page which you will find a link for when you click on the ‘continue the journey’ button. Do start with the very first little booklet. If you ever wonder if one person can make a difference in changing the course of education, this little book will inspire you with possibilities. There’s an audio version there you can listen to if you prefer.

Another option you have is to make your way through the Take 5s. I created these as a way to gradually introduce and familiarize you with the many resources available for you to use as well as some suggestions for using them. They just take 5 minutes at a time. You will find a link to them on the same page I just mentioned and transcripts to them are found in the Reference bundle.

I also invite you to make your way through the Mother’s University. It, too, is designed for exploring and discovering. Read or listen to what you have time for, and then keep coming back as you work your way through the rotation. To access the Mother’s University, just click on the little Mothers of Influence icon on any of the pages in the libraries of hope website or access it through the menu.

All of the options I have just mentioned are resources that are open to everybody. You certainly fly solo. But as lovely as a solo instrument is, nothing compares to the music produced by a full symphony orchestra playing from the same musical score.

The next step in the journey is a special invitation only to those who have completed the Catch the Vision introductory course, which, if you are now listening to this, you have likely done.

You now qualify, if you choose, to join our Mothers of Influence community platform and identify as a Mother of Influence. It is the next circle. We have created a community platform where you can reach out and link arms with others who are on the same journey as you are. You don’t have to do this alone. There are incredible benefits to being part of this community. This is where you can receive additional support as well as offer support to other Mothers of Influence who desire to walk this path. I am so excited to be able to offer this to you!

In our Mothers of Influence community platform, you will find mentors to interact with—our Grand MOIS—who have been doing this for a long time. We can set up virtual workshops and discussion groups to meet your needs. Let us know what you want! For example, if notebooking is tripping you up, we can set up a virtual workshop and sit down and do some notebooking together and talk through what’s giving you problems. Or if you are studying a certain topic or book and you’re dying to talk to someone about it, you’ll be able to set it up here.

We have plans for Question and Answer sessions and panel discussions.

This platform makes it possible to connect with each other off of Facebook. You’ll be able to access it directly on your phone. There is one feature of it that has a similar feed like a Facebook feed. As this has nothing to do with Facebook, we will have none of their annoying interferences. And there are ways for you to customize what you see. In fact, anything I post in Facebook will appear in this platform as well. I will continue to support the well-educated heart Facebook group as long as it serves a need but will be more active in this community off of Facebook.

You will be able to identify and connect with those who are living near you so you can get together in person for Mothers of Influence meetings or plan events for your families.

Although we hope to hold in-person conferences in the future like the Simple Joy Conference we held a few years ago, we thought it would be fun to hold some virtual mini-sessions in the meantime. So, the first Wednesday of each month, you will be invited to join a virtual Simple Joy lunch date and listen to a special guest who will inspire and enrich your life and will talk about something to do with that month’s Mother’s University topic. If you can’t make it, it will be recorded to watch at your convenience.

And I am really excited that this platform opens up the possibility of setting up virtual classrooms for all kinds of courses that we can offer you and your family. For example, although it is still off in the future, we are looking very closely at being able to bring your high school students together so they can start interacting with peers who are learning in the same way they are learning and be given an opportunity to interact with other mentors. This platform makes it possible.

As everyone who is part of the Belle Ame Dream needs to have made their way through the circles, this community platform is where you will learn more. Here is where you will be included in the plans as we move forward and learn ways that you can be involved.

As with all new things, there will be a learning curve. At this moment, we are just getting started. I am excited to introduce you to the Mothers of Influence Council who has been working hard behind the scenes to make all of this possible.

If you decide to join our Mothers of Influence community and identify yourself as a Mother of Influence, this is what you need to do.

Click on the button that says ‘Join MOI Community”. You will be asked if you have completed the Catch the Vision introductory course. This prerequisite of finishing the course in order to join is for your benefit. It makes no sense to load you with more building materials if the foundation has not yet been laid. After all, you can’t build a house on air. Plus, this is a way of working together from a unified vision and in harmony with each other. So if you have not yet finished the course, which takes about seventeen hours total, pick up what you’ve missed and then come back and click on the button that says ‘Join MOI Community” when you are ready. .

You will be asked to make a one time contribution of $25.00. I hope you know me well enough by now to know that I don’t want a lack of money to keep anyone away. So if making this contribution is impossible for you—and I’ve been there! I understand!—please reach out to me and tell me what’s going on. There are some moms who have offered to sponsor those who cannot pay.

Please note—when you pay, enter the code MOI in the coupon field so that it doesn’t add shipping charges to your total.

You will then be sent an email that will give you a passcode to enter the community. When you enter, give yourself time to do some exploration and discovery. Rest assured, there will be someone there to help show you around if you need it until you are comfortable with all its features.

And then watch your mailbox! You will be sent a welcome packet that includes:
A lovely Mothers of Influence pin

The Well-Educated Mother’s Heart—a guidebook for Mothers of Influence

A beautiful keepsake notebook to write down the gems you learn as you make your way through the Mother’s University.

A special card with the stained glass window and the 5 things on the back to remind you of our standards.

A small Daniel Ridgway Knight painting to frame and remind yourself that, when the skies are gray and appear to be falling, climb to higher ground and look for the beauty.

A durable reference guide to all the topics in the rotation schedule.

Do you know someone who wants to join us?

You will be given several bookmarks to hand out to friends to invite them to Catch the Vision. It will point them to librariesofhope.com where this path begins for everyone. Have them watch the orientation videos on the home page. Then follow the path that is laid out, starting with the Catch the Vision introductory course. If this is a path they want to continue, they, too, will then be given an invitation to join our Mothers of Influence community where we will continue to grow together in the spirit of Belle Ame where seeds are scattered and the growth process spreads outward.

As the Psalmist sang:
“The righteous [woman] ….will grow like a cedar in Lebanon. (Psalm 92:29)

“The trees of the Lord are well cared for—the Cedars of Lebanon that He planted.” (Psalm 104:16 NLT)

“…and birds of every kind will nest under it; they will nest in the shade of its branches.” (Ezekiel 17:23)

I often share the first part of a Frances Willard quote: “Mother-love works magic for humanity.” It’s now time to place more emphasis on the second half: “Organized mother-love works miracles.”

By small and simple means, we believe great things will be accomplished.

We hope you will join us.