

September 2021



NEW DIRECTION Mustard Seed

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Dear Friends,

“There were two prostitutes living in the same house
(no this is not the opening line to a joke. It’s a true story from the Old Testament).....
each the mother of an infant son.

The women approached the bench of King Solomon for his judgment regarding a dispute between them. One of the babies died, the mother having rolled over on him in the night. Once finding what she had done she went into the other mother’s room where mother and child were soundly sleeping. She ever so stealthily switched the babies and tucked the other baby beside herself in her own bed. Each claimed the living baby as hers. Obviously one of the mothers was lying. They argued back and forth in front of Solomon until finally he said, **“both of you say this live baby is yours. Someone bring me a sword!”** A sword was brought and Solomon ordered, **“Cut the baby in two! That way each of you can have a part of him.”** The woman whose son was alive was filled with compassion for her son and said to the king: *“please, my lord, give her the living baby! Don’t kill him.”* But the other said, *“Neither I nor you shall have him. Cut him in two!”*

Then the king gave his ruling: **“Give the living baby to the first woman. Do not kill him; she is his mother.”** When all Israel heard the verdict the king had given, they held the king in awe, because they saw that he had wisdom from God to administer justice.” 2 Kings 3: 16-28

If you have ever been involved in Family Court custody case proceedings, you have witnessed the current day's judicial practice of splitting children in half: 50% mother - 50% father. Should there be a situation in which one of the parents is unfit to properly care for the child, the burden of responsibility lies on the other parent to prove this to be true. Most often it is the father who is unfit. It takes a good lawyer who understands the need to fight for the best interest of the child.

represent or observing other cases, we have witnessed, first hand, in so many instances, the right of an unfit parent to eclipse the protective rights of a child. A parent's rights trumping a child's need to live in a stable home environment. Even when a mother and children have fled a domestically violent, emotionally abusive situation a court will often decide the father has a right to having the children with him 50/50.



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How grand it would be to have King Solomon seated at the bench to make wise, godly decisions for the wellbeing of children. If only single mothers who have had to flee a household of domestic violence with children in tow, didn't have to then engage in a battle to keep their children protected.

Although there is no standard definition of "best interests of the child", the term generally refers to the deliberation that courts undertake when deciding what will best serve a child as well as who is best suited to take care of a child. "Best interests" determinations are best made by considering a number of factors related to the child's circumstances and the parent or caregiver's circumstances and capacity to parent, with the child's ultimate safety and well-being the paramount concern. (Determining the Best Interest of the Child; Child Welfare Information Gateway; Children's Bureau)

These are fanciful wishes. Reality holds a long-suffering, extremely expensive, emotionally wearying path ahead for these women. One can only imagine the angst inherent in having to entrust care of the children to one of whom the children are afraid. Believe it or not there are situations in which nursing babies are having to be relinquished.

We can tell you, as well as many others who are involved in this work, what is written above is rarely upheld in court without a tenacious battle. Even with professional documentation.

The Mustard Seed Project was birthed back when working with single mothers, we realized many of them had been stuck in the ever-revolving door of family court in an attempt to procure protective custody of their children. We, personally, had never stepped across the threshold of family court before that time. We have learned much over these years as we have walked with loving, protective mothers who are doing whatever possible to fight for the protection of their children.

Legal representation is expensive. The majority of women with whom we work took out credit cards to hire a lawyer. It is not unusual for there to be a debt of \$30,000 with little or no actual work having been accomplished toward protective custody. In many cases the lawyer has told the women "you just need to accept he will get 50/50 custody." Important to know these are not cases which had amicable divorces and both parents capable of competently parenting. The women of the Mustard Seed were victims of domestic violence. The children, at times victims of sexual and emotional abuse. The sinister aspect of this dynamic has been to keep the women believing they are incompetent and can never make it without a man (albeit an abusive man). Our relationship with many of the women has begun after several years in court, mounting debt and judgments piling up. At any point they could have made the decision the fight was not worth it and simply acquiesced. But.....they have the same

As we have sat through hours of deliberation in family court either alongside the women we

heart of love as the loving mother standing before King Solomon. The difference being, if they truly thought it would be to the best interest of their child to surrender they would have done so. We are blessed to have some excellent lawyers who diligently fight for the protective custody of the children.

In contrast the heart of the fathers, in these cases, is just as calloused as the mother who felt it perfectly fine for the baby in Solomon's courtroom to be cut in half.

The belief of many is that legal aid provides such representation for parents in these situations. While legal aid is a valuable asset to the community, the truth is they are not able to provide this type of help. There may be offered limited, initial services for restraining orders and emergency custody but nothing beyond that. Hence the taking out of a credit card to pay for legal services.

How many times have we sat with a mother, weary from the battle, who says "the system has failed me and my children". In a large percentage of the cases we handle, the fathers had little heart connection with the children before mother and children exited the home, most often in the heat of conflict. Once a restraining order is in place this seems to be a catalyst for the father to take on an attitude of needing to win what they perceive to be a game. Unfortunately it is the children who become the living pawns. It seems all of these men are related; in reality the resemblance is the spirit from which they are operating. Inevitably their lawyers tend to be equally, tenaciously unscrupulous.

The role of the Mustard Seed is multi-faceted with these mothers. It entails hiring a lawyer; oftentimes paying off old legal debts (sometimes firms are willing to settle for an amount); regularly consulting with the mothers and lawyers regarding court orders, etc; being a steady sojourner and encourager as they navigate through this piece of their journey. Most importantly is the reminder that the Lord has gone before them and has worked out all of the details. While it may seem He is absent, He is very actively at work. His desire is for them to trust Him.

Time and time again we have had the blessing of witnessing these ladies grow stronger in the Lord. As well, we have seen His great hand of righteousness move according to His perfect plan.

Just the other week we were sitting with one of the mothers who is in the midst of a very difficult battle. Her words:

"I am trusting the Lord to be faithful. It doesn't mean He is going to do what I want Him to do. It means He will walk me and my children through this. We will get to the other side."

It reminded me of the words of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to King Nebuchadnezzar as he was ready to have them thrown into the fiery furnace: *"If our God, whom we serve, can save us from the white-hot furnace and from your hands, O king, may He save us! But even if He will not, you should know O King, that we will not serve your god or worship the golden statue which you set up."* There was the visible presence of the Lord in that furnace with them. They not only came out unscathed but free of their bindings. While it appears man is in control of the thermostat, it is the Lord who is in control.

There are times we think "maybe we don't need to do the legal piece any longer as it is so expensive and emotionally consuming".....but then will come a call, followed by a meeting with a distraught mother.....We will keep on keeping on until the Lord directs otherwise.

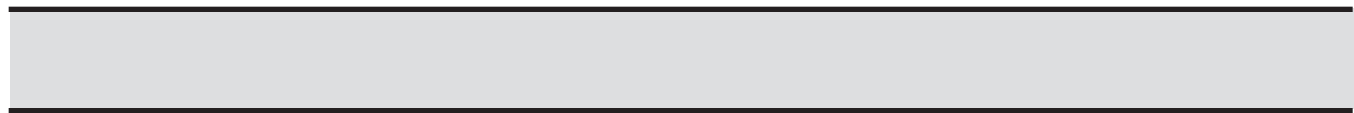
An individual with a heart for these women and children has donated seed money to begin a legal fund for the Mustard Seed Project. If you would like to, specifically, donate toward that fund it would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you for your partnership in this vital work of the rescue and restoration of women and children.

The Lord Bless You and Keep You
All of Us at the Mustard Seed Project

Psalm 18 is packed with so many aspects of the pieces of these ladies' experience. A friend, Joy Hof, created this beautiful painting to reflect the Lord's rescue.

"He reached down from heaven and rescued me; He drew me out of deep waters.....He brought me out into a spacious place; He rescued me because He delights in me.The Lord has rewarded me for doing right. He has seen my innocence. To the faithful you show yourself faithful, to the blameless you show yourself blameless; to the pure You show yourself pure, but to the devious you show yourself shrewd." Psalm 18:26



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Encompassing Hope and Care For Families.