



### **The Blue Pencil Box**

A blue pencil box has quickly become one of my youngest daughter's favorite possessions. When school was cancelled for the year she began asking, "When can I get my pencil box from school?" I told her it would be a while. I went to Dollar General and bought her a new one and filled it with shiny new supplies. She said, "Thank you mom- it is just not the same though." I was perplexed. I informed Ruthie that it looked the same and had all of the same supplies in it and these were all new ones. She said, "I appreciate your trying." I could not figure out what was so special about this blue pencil box. She continued to ask for it several times a week.

When we picked up her supplies from school during the first week in June, it was the first thing she pulled out of her large bag of materials. She exclaimed, "I am so happy to have this back." She was so excited that I was expecting some sort of hidden treasure to be found inside of that plastic box.

I have watched her over the past month. She has taken that pencil box with her in her bag to church, to restaurants, and in the car. She has had to wait a lot more since she is going in less places. Often, we will find ourselves in the car while her dad or sister runs into the store. Ruthie will pull out her coloring book and blue pencil box. The Lord impressed upon my heart one morning as I was praying over my spunky six -year old that the blue pencil box was a source of security and comfort to her. A token of a year that finished too quickly. A reminder of her beloved teachers and classmates. She was dismissed from school on a Friday fully expecting to return the next Monday. She has grieved over this loss, even without fully realizing what she is doing.

As a mom and as a school counselor, I have really struggled in helping her work through this process. I haven't fully understood and so have wrestled with how much to tell her. She is growing up hearing phrases that I have not heard until my forty-third year such as mask up, social distancing, new normal,

unprecedented, pandemic, and community spread. I have often doubted and second guessed what I have said to her during these times.

In doing so, I have definitely experienced some “mom fails” since the quarantine began in March. At 7:30pm each night, I feel like I’ve completed a race most days without receiving a medal at the end. God led me to Psalm 121 for such a time as this. As a mom, all we can do is keep our eyes focused on the cross. Our help comes from The Lord. The end result is to raise “arrows” who are heading in His direction. Those who are following hard after Him. A child who will cling to The Lord as much and as dearly as she is now to her blue pencil box.

The Lord nudged my heart with this question, “*Julie-what are you aiming for with your children?*” Stephen said in a recent sermon, “After Covid-19, some things will need to remain and some things will need to be removed from our lives.” I have thought about that so much lately in regard to parenting- to sharpening and strengthening the three “arrows” whom God has blessed us with.

***“Like arrows in the hands of a warrior, are children born in one’s youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their opponents in court” (Psalm 127:4-5).***

I have only had one experience with an actual bow and arrow when I was in college. All I will say is that it looks so much easier than it is to hit the actual target. I googled 😊 the basic steps for shooting an arrow and they are as follows: Assume the shooting position, anchor the bow, aim, release, and follow through.

God laid these parallels on my heart to parenting in regard to **“Sharpening Arrows.”**

**Assume the Role-** There are so many roles involved with parenting. As a first-time mom I will never forget bringing Natalie home. I carried her across the threshold of our home and burst into tears. I had absolutely no idea what I was doing. I did not grow up with younger siblings and had zero experience babysitting. I was terrified I would do something wrong. I cried out to The Lord for help in assuming this new role. In Psalm 121 David is crying out to The Lord. “*My help comes from The Lord, who made heaven and earth*” (verse 2). That same help is available to us today as we assume the parenting role during the midst of uncertain times.

**Matthew 7:7** Jesus said, “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”

**Matthew 7:11** *"If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him."*

**Anchor to the Rock-** I love to go out on the lake in a boat. Often, we will find a cove and toss the anchor down so the kids can swim. The anchor keeps the boat stable. In order to be successful in sharpening our "arrows"- we have to anchor to the spiritual rock that is higher than you and I. When we pray, we need to expect God to answer. Recently, I have seen God answer our prayers in so many amazing ways. He cares about all of the details.

*"...I cry to you for help when my heart is overwhelmed. Lead me to the towering rock of safety, for you are my safe refuge, a fortress where my enemies cannot reach me" (Psalm 61:2-3).*

**Aim for Results-** **"If you aim at nothing, you will hit it every time" - Zig Ziglar**  
There is a lot of truth to that statement. If you look at the model of how Jesus invested in His disciples. He provided these men much of his time. The time which Jesus invested in these few disciples was so much more in comparison to that given to others. It was intentional. He spent more time with his disciples than with everybody else in the world put together. So much of how Jesus did things was tied in to the person of Christ. In other words, Jesus did not bring a message. Jesus was the message. An arrow has to be pointed in the right direction to even have a chance to hit the intended target. It doesn't ensure success; however, it has a much better chance of getting there than if it is aiming at nothing. I have been anxious a lot this past few months. God has continued to remind me of **Philippians 4:6-7 which says, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."**

**Allow Room for Growth** – As a mom, I find myself worrying a lot. I know that is my greatest sin. David cried out to The Lord and was reminded of the powerful God that He served. Often, we have to teach our children and then allow them to attempt it all on their own. The Lord has reminded me during this time that I can't fix it, change it, or put an end to it. All I can do is pray about it and put my trust and hope in The Lord. As Ruthie walks around with her blue pencil box, I just need to continue allowing her room to ask questions. There are many times when we will not have the answer. All I can do is point her to the one who watches over her (Psalm 121:5) and who has ALL the answers.

**Assure Regularly-** As parents, our work is never completely done. It changes from season to season; however, we will continue to mold, shape, and steer

the trajectory of those “arrows” for many years. Right now, Ruthie refers to me as “the best mom in the world.” I kind of enjoy that title. ☺ As a teenager, I am sure she will perfect the shoulder shrug and snarly eye roll, and then am hoping by her latter high school days she will come back around to that earlier title she has bestowed upon me. Even when they will not admit it, our children need constant assurance and re-assurance that this season will pass. At some point schools will fully re-open, sports will be played, and churches will be back to full capacity. A final thought is to pray the closing verses of Psalm 121 over each of your children. ***“The Lord keeps you from all harm and watches over your life. The Lord keeps watch over you as you come and go, both now and forever” (Psalm 121:7-8).***