

December 1997

**From the Heart**—The Real Lessons: God's Curriculum of Life

Success at education requires knowing where to begin, where you're trying to get to, and how to get from one to the other. Jesus said "I am the way, the truth and the life."<sup>i</sup> He says "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending."<sup>ii</sup> If you want to know where to begin, start with Christ. If you want to know the ultimate destination, consider Christ. And if you want to know how to get from one to the other, consider Christ. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."<sup>iii</sup>

Life is the sum total of many seemingly insignificant details all working together according to a great design. Consider the works of the Lord in creation. When the student is shown the incredible complexity of God's creation with all its intricate details he can begin to perceive the goodness and faithfulness of the Lord. Consider His workings in history. The important lesson from history is *remember*. Do not memorize history but then forget the past. Contemplate prophecy and God's promises. Examine his works in current affairs and in your daily life. More than simply knowing the facts, wisdom is putting the facts in proper perspective. "Facts seem unrelated only to those who know few facts."<sup>iv</sup>

Deuteronomy 6 says you shalt teach the lessons of His Curriculum of Life "diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."<sup>v</sup> The same passage continues, "Beware lest thou forget the Lord."

The LORD's curriculum trains a doer of the word by applying and experiencing the truth. Truth learned this way is unshakeable. The Scripture instructs us to "study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."<sup>vi</sup> This right dividing involves learning the proper application of God's word to life. To be approved by the Lord, what should be studied and how should it be studied? Jesus said, "Take my yoke upon you and *learn* of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart."<sup>vii</sup>

While Jesus emphasized the spiritual aspect of life, "modernity is, at one level or another, the refusal to deal with the spiritual component of reality and to try to master reality through science or other forms of knowledge, and once you do that, you cut off people . . . from a community of interest that explores that which is most profoundly important (the sense of identity and the sense of cultural identity). And as a result, people try to hide or seek release from the alienation they feel . . ."<sup>viii</sup> The "socialization" of the schoolroom does not satisfy the soul's need to belong. Home education offers each child the secure identity of a unique place in the family. Spiritual relationships are built as the hearts of fathers are turned toward their children and those of the children toward their father. God's Curriculum of Life contrasts the wisdom of maturity and the foolishness of youth.

What do you study? I seek to understand life, to know *why* things are as they are, to value and treasure the right things. Take the time to reflect on the events of life. What is God's purpose in the things that occur. What is the cause? What lessons can be learned from the occurrences of life?

The Lord's Curriculum of Life unfolds unexpectedly and unpredictably. As in a good mystery, each new chapter dramatically changes one's perspective on the whole story. Who knows what a day may bring forth? With tears in my eyes, I write that Sue Parkerson from our office finished the course of life on December 25, 1997. She has

now joined that cloud of heavenly witnesses. For the past 6 years, we have worked side-by-side, instructing and exhorting parents in the training of their children. Many of you have known Sue's kind voice and encouraging words. After her sudden loss, I am realizing what a friend in the Lord she has been to me and my family. My life has been profoundly touched by her life of service and dedication to the Lord. I am comforted, knowing that the Lord who blessed us with Sue's life, remains an ever-present help in trouble.

Sue had been diagnosed with gall stones, confirmed by ultrasound. On December 7, she was taken to the emergency room with an acute abdominal attack. After treatment with strong pain medications including morphine, and after fluctuations in her vital signs, she was moved to the critical care unit. She was then diagnosed by a CAT scan as having a ruptured appendix, and received an emergency appendectomy. In addition to all this, doctors also diagnosed her with pancreatitis. Over the next several days she developed ARDS (Adult Respiratory Distress Syndrome), a life-threatening condition very similar to drowning, in which fluid accumulates in the lungs. After being on a ventilator on 100% oxygen, her lungs ultimately failed and she went to be with the Lord.

Please continue to pray for the family in this difficult time. Sue's husband, Wayne, has worked in our office since May and plans to continue laboring for the Lord in this ministry. The Parkersons have two grown sons: Tyler, now age 22, was home educated from the 7th grade through high school graduation. David, age 27, went to Christian schools and has nearly completed studies at seminary.

Sue's death has caused me to look at things from a somewhat different perspective. I am reminded of the preciousness of the time given us by the Lord. It is good to labor for the Master, to do with all your might what your hand finds to do, and to punctuate this appropriately with rest and fellowship. In view of this, we will begin closing our office from noon til 12:30 so that our office staff can share fellowship and a meal together.

"The whole problem of intellectual education is controlled by lack of time."<sup>ix</sup> The traditional classroom is a contrived arena, so stuffed with tidbits, detached and extracted from the reality of life, that the real substance of life with its consequences, joys, and sorrows is obscured. God's Curriculum of Life includes responsibility. The other day I noticed water dripping from the ceiling of the school. Going upstairs I found the source—an overflowing toilet. I checked with the principal to see that the problem had been reported. The problem was a repeat malicious performance. The principal's question was provocative: What is it about these boys [that makes them do such things]? Pondering this, I looked out the window of my office and watched the children playing in the schoolyard. I realized the contrast between the way problems were handled in the classroom and the way they are handled at home. Problems, maintenance, and repairs in the classroom are relegated to the principal, the custodian, the painter, the plumber, or the maintenance man, but almost never to the students. At home, the children, according to their maturity, share in the consequences and responsibilities. I realized that as the burdens and responsibility increase in the household, this is a part of God's Curriculum of Life. The burdens of life which increasingly weigh upon family are not a strange thing. They are a normal part of God's curriculum, which seeks to instill maturity, wisdom, and godly character in both parent and child. This curriculum builds responsibility and dependency.

This has been a challenging year for our household. Our verse for the year has been, "Thou has beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it." It seems that we have been hemmed in by situations that are almost overwhelming. Being inundated with the challenges of life is a part of the Lord's school of prayer. Being hemmed in does not

seem to be a blessing unless you know the purpose. We have found ourselves squeezed and pressed into dependence on God. This curriculum is especially effective in larger families. The load is not intended to crush you, but that the burden would be transferred or shared. It is not right for children to spend all their time studying or playing while the parents spend all their time working or serving the children. Children need to be taught to accept responsibility. The concept of brotherly love does not imply equality but graduated levels of maturity.

One aspect of the Lord's Curriculum of Life is proper reckoning. As Christians, we are told to "reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord."<sup>x</sup> The Christian life is a life of faith, believing the Word of God even when it seems not to be so. We are to be transformed by the renewing of the mind. This transformation is internal, and cannot be measured by machine-scoreable tests.

"*Schooling* is done in public places, but the roots of an *education* can grow only in the hidden ground of the mind. Lessons are taught in social situations, but they can be learned only by private people. The acts that are at once the means and the ends of education, knowing, thinking, understanding, judging, are all committed in solitude. It is only in *a* mind that the work of the mind can be done. There is no such thing as 'collective thinking.' Our schools can be an instrument for socialization or an incentive to thoughtfulness, but they cannot be both."<sup>xi</sup> Schooling is an external thing; education is an internal thing. The first approach focuses on the subject matter, the other concentrates on the learner. Jesus did not say go and teach "classes", but rather, go and make disciples. The education process should reproduce disciples. It should cultivate a heart and mind receptive and hungry for the truth.

The goal of education is not simply the accumulation of facts and names and dates and places and definitions, but knowledge of the ways of man and of the ways of God. His ways are not merely academic facts, but truths and experiences resulting from relationship, or from the testimony of the the experiences of others. This education can be a communion, a sharing together of life. Teaching your children those things which you know and value and use is a natural part of being a parent. The measure of education is not what you once *knew* but what you remember or can use in the long run. Some of the trappings of academia appeared irrelevant when you were being taught and the test of time has confirmed your evaluation. If you learned something in school, but have not used it once in the 30-odd years since, perhaps it should be considered non-essential to a balanced educational diet. It is hard to teach such things without a certain amount of hypocrisy.

Is the goal of education to fill the child with a world of books? Reading is a terrific skill, but misuse can lead to an antisocial bookworm. What is place of books? I contend that books are not the substance of education, but simply one tool for learning about real life. Properly, education can be an excellent fellowship, a sharing together of the incredible world of ideas—discovering together the magnificent world of God's creation (in science, in history, in literature).

Long-term mastery requires application. Students need, not just knowledge, but use of that knowledge to make it relevant. "They learn by contact. . . . The devil to be avoided is the cramming of general statements which have no reference to individual personal experience. . . . The introduction of any subject is the process of learning by contact."<sup>xii</sup>

The other day I heard a slight grinding sound from the rear of the car as I braked. From previous experience, I knew its significance. I took my boys with me so they could hear. I had them assist me by jacking up the car, removing the tire, cleaning the wheel bearings, going to the auto parts store, watching as the brake drum was turned, and

telling what to install next in the re-assembly process. One of the boys remarked with amazement that there are so many parts in something that looks so simple.

Shallow education stops at memorization. The student parrots the requisite material on tests. A "scholar" can simply be one with an exceptional memory, but very little understanding. "What effect does a remarkable capacity for memory have on other major aspects of personality, on an individual's habits of thought and imagination, on his behavior and personality development? What changes occur in a person's inner world, in his relationships with others, in his very life style, when one element of his psychic makeup, his memory, develops to such an uncommon degree that it begins to alter every other aspect of his activity?"<sup>xiii</sup> I contend that memory is beneficial, but must be subject to character, from which behavior naturally follows. To try to fix or modify behavior without instilling Godly character produces a child who only behaves properly when watched. This is like expecting a harvest of good fruit from a garden overgrown with weeds, thorns, and thistles.

In the garden of the lives of your children what are you trying to cultivate? Are you seeking personality, that they may be liked by their friends? At first, this sounds admirable, but should a person work at making themselves likeable. This concept of personality can lead to the sort of chameleon who can win friends and influence people (and sell anything) . . . But if God's evaluation is the most important, then character is more valuable than personality. Emphasis on popularity may well be part of the broad road to destruction.

Misguided education often neglects the difference between teaching and training. A student can be taught one thing, yet simultaneously trained in the opposite. Training for writing requires generous *input* of written language to establish a foundation for *output*. (This applies to printing, cursive writing, spelling, arithmetic and even algebra.) Typically, students are taught how to use the dictionary while being trained to never use it. Many students are taught phonics, yet develop the habit of guessing. (The mind whose energy is spent trying to guess at the words themselves will be unable to figure out the meaning of those words.)

"Literacy is not, as it is considered in our schools, a *portion* of education. It *is* education. It is at once the ability *and* the inclination of the mind to find knowledge, to pursue understanding, and, out of knowledge and understanding (not out of received attitudes and values or emotional responses, however 'worthy') to make judgments. Literate people are not easy prey. They do know an inference from a statement of fact. They are not easily persuaded by pretended authority. They are attentive to the natural requirements of logic. They can make distinctions, very fine distinctions, and are able both to notice and to examine their own predispositions and even their only presumably 'right emotional responses' . . . In the absence of literacy and the habits of mind that it both induces and permits, no one can understand anything, for understanding is not the same as knowing. What we know can be expressed in statements about the world. What we understand has to be expressed in statements *about* [those] statements about the world. Understanding calls for classification and organization, fine distinctions, and logical testing, all related to knowledge."<sup>xiv</sup> Literacy provides "informed discretion." Discernment can help you to separate the academic chaff from the fruitful grain in the mixture of educational trappings. An important skill of discernment is the ability to "follow paths of logic far enough to discover contradictions in logic."<sup>xv</sup> Advertising is a fertile field for practice in such sleuthing. The lazy, impotent mind blindly leaps from true premises to wrong conclusion. The weak mind becomes a "yes-man" to the advertisers, whose goal is to turn a person's thinking toward a particular product for the

purpose of making a sale. Do not be led astray. Keep your focus on what is truly important in life.

**Grade/Attendance Forms**—Included in this mailing are Grade/Attendance forms for the first semester. The *Target date* for their return is January 15, 1998. Send us a COPY of the completed form as you will need to add second semester grades to the same form at the end of the school year. Please use the ABCD grade format. If your curriculum lends itself to numerical scores, our school's scale is: 100-94 A, 93-86 B, 85-77 C, 76-70 D, and below 70 F. The Satisfactory-Unsatisfactory approach is not appropriate for home educators because all work should be satisfactory as you control all the factors to make the studies acceptable—

If the student isn't ready for a subject, wait, using the time to accomplish preparatory material. If the student lacks essential background material, put the current studies on hold and remedy the problem. An eighth grade student who struggles with long division does not need to repeat each year's math curriculum until finally caught up. Treatment with such a regimen can make a student sick of a never-ending parade of stuff. Instead, pinpoint the greatest need. Often, mastering multiplication facts, followed by a season of practice and practical application, before attempting division can make a world of difference.

If the curriculum confuses the student by treating closely-related material together, skip certain topics until a later day. If the curriculum attempts to *cover* everything in a boring, lukewarm, superficial, dull, uninteresting way, supplement with something interesting, challenging, and/or personal. (Note that *adding* something to an already overwhelming curriculum requires that something be cut out. I know that your curriculum was designed and published by educational experts, but their expertise is based on 30 typical students in a classroom. You need to pray through if you think that your curriculum is so sacred that to deviate from it would be sin.) If you are going too fast, slow down. If you're going too slow, speed up. If the student isn't interested, seek to make the studies practical, real, relevant, and interesting, removing distractions as necessary. If the student has a bad attitude, administer discipline. Don't give up, but don't keep trying the same thing the same way. God honors faithfulness coupled with wisdom. Seek counsel.

I am not advocating lowering the "standard" until nothing is expected because poor Johnny is having a hard time. "Plumbers install plumbing, and, when something goes wrong with plumbing, they fix it. They don't care how the pipes feel about it. Teaching reading and arithmetic is much more like plumbing than you probably think. If you know how to read and cipher, you can, if you want to, teach those skills to almost any child in America. The chances are, too, that you will do a better job of it, and in a shorter time, than the schools. If you know a lot about mathematics and have paid thoughtful attention to language, you can do a much better job, and better by far, probably, than anything you can manage with your plumbing. But if the teaching of children were handled that way, simply by people who knew the skills and knowledge they were teaching, and who wanted simply to teach them, then a vast and comfortable empire would fall. . . . Many of the strange things done in American educationism suddenly become perfectly understandable when we see them not as educational methods but as political maneuvers. We must understand illiteracy, therefore, the root of ignorance and thoughtlessness, as not some inadvertent failure to accomplish what was intended, but simply a political arrangement of great value to somebody."<sup>xvi</sup>

One of the major pitfalls in education is *confusion*, with fear its driving force—fear of missing something essential, fear of inadequacy or insufficiency. Such fear, along with its siblings of anxiety and doubt, lead many to blindly entrust the education of their

child some educational expert, who finds a perfect solution—*cover everything* this year, then cover everything next year (in case something was missed last year). Traditional education is a bondage. "But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuteth him that was born after the spirit, even so it is now." "Brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free." (Gal 4:29) For some, devotion to the traditional curriculum is almost religious—without the curriculum to which they cling, they would be lost. Achievement tests can be like the Pied piper—beware lest you set your sights on him and follow the spiral road to oblivion. Accomplishment of the traditional curriculum, with a little bit of everything piled in a heap, often falls short in the long run because long-term mastery requires more than dabbling. The traditional-curriculum approach is like the law, legislating all the steps along the way. In contrast, the goal approach, in spirit, seeks the same ultimate end, without legislating the steps along the way. The traditional curriculum/law approach is necessary where there is not a personal relationship.

Those who do what is right can know that God will enable them. Those who do evil know that God will oppose them. And all the do-gooding in the world will not restore broken relationship. If God has given you a child, he has also given you authority to train that child. The anointing (the equipping by the LORD to do what you are called to do) breaks the burdensome yoke. Great peace is found in knowing God as a rewarder of them that diligently seek him: God rewards those who seek Him in trying to do what He has called them to do.

Should education be evaluated in terms of how much is learned? As you may know, the word education derives from *ducere*, the Latin word meaning to lead. To lead a child in education requires that you get him going, so to speak, and going in the right direction. A child floundering in education is like a skidding car—out of control. For the car, the first order of business is to get control of the vehicle, even though it is heading in the wrong direction initially. Once under control it can be steered toward a proper course. Ask the Lord for his wisdom for the education of your children. The Lord has instructed us to "be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."<sup>xvii</sup>

Sincerely,

Greg Stablein

i John 14:6

ii Revelation 1:8

iii John 11:25

iv *The Graves of Academe*, by Richard Mitchell, 1981 (p. 78)

v Deuteronomy 6:7

viii Timothy 2:15

vii Matthew 11:29

viii Interview with Ted McAllister, Mars Hill audio tapes Sept./Oct. 1996

ix *The Aims of Education, and Other Essays*, by Alfred North Whitehead, 1929 (p. 70)

x Romans 6:11

xi *The Graves of Academe*, by Richard Mitchell, 1981 (p. 82)

xii *The Aims of Education, and Other Essays*, by Alfred North Whitehead, 1929 (p. 71)

xiii *The Mind of a Mnemonist*, by Aleksandr Romanovich Luria, 1968

xiv *The Graves of Academe*, by Richard Mitchell, 1981 (p. 176, 177, 183)

xv *The Graves of Academe*, by Richard Mitchell, 1981 (p. 84)

xvi *The Graves of Academe*, by Richard Mitchell, 1981 (p. 185)

xvii Philippians 4:6