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**From the Heart**—A fresh start.

As you begin a new school year, carefully consider your course. Home education is a great but challenging undertaking. May God's grace be upon you as you teach your children. I recently heard a contrast between Japanese and American education. Japanese parents did not stress education for children under six, whereas Americans did. After six, Japanese parents played a very active, participatory role in their children's education while most Americans left the job to schools. I am encouraged that the Lord is leading parents like you to immerse yourselves in the education of your children. We encourage you to teach your children throughout the day, throughout the week, and throughout the year.

Teaching your children is a natural part of parenting. ". . . parental obligations unquestionably evolve corresponding rights. These are, to control and govern their children in the Lord, to direct their education, and enjoy their help in need. No argument is needed but to say that without these powers parental duties could not be performed. Against this inherent right to direct the children's government and education, the theory of compulsory State education sets up a rival claim which puts the commonwealth on the parents' throne."<sup>i</sup> Beware of supposed experts who have an agenda for the education of your child, but no heart for your child. This agenda is infectious. Your experience in the classroom often leads you to school as you were schooled. Most of us have sojourned in a rut, which is easy to fall back into. All we like sheep have gone astray, and we often follow each other, the blind following the blind. Will you blindly follow those who educated you? Is academic development more vital than moral character? Is "socialization" by other children more important than parental authority? Is the natural world more important than the spiritual?

Many home-educated parents become frazzled trying to make their children learn all that is "covered" in a traditional classroom in a year. Parents naturally educate their children in the way that is *familiar*. (Because of the way the parents were taught, this often means textbooks, worksheets, flashcards, spelling lists, and one-hour class periods.) "Many of our ideas about life are ours only because we know no other way."<sup>iii</sup> Take your time to learn other methods of education.

Conventional wisdom suggests that you "cover" everything for the child's grade level. Covering everything without regard for context or logical order is a formula for superficiality. A "complete" curriculum which claims to cover everything does not encourage further study. It doesn't invite more study in other books or related areas. Who decides what is included in a school book? Sit down with a textbook, . . . open it, and after a short while you discover you can't read it. For some reason, *it just doesn't read*. Its too textbooky, too dry, too dull—you can't put your finger on it, but there is some invisible obstacle, and you don't seem to get anywhere. Don't get discouraged. Everybody knows that textbooks are unreadable, even

educators. Here is what a committee of the American Council on Education had to say about them recently: 'An ordinary textbook is a compact body of factual statements which does not invite or permit fluent reading.' Why is this so? The main reason is simple: textbooks are written for teachers, not for students. The textbook writer is the only writer in the world who doesn't have to worry about his readers: as long as his book pleases the teachers, it will be 'required reading,' that is, students will be forced to read it whether they like it or not. So, naturally, the textbook writer doesn't care a bit whether his book will be pleasant to read or interesting or well written; he knows that this isn't what teachers care about most. Teachers look first to other things in a textbook: whether it is well organized to teaching, whether it has good exercises, whether it has a lot of information—in other words, whether it will be a help in teaching, a laborsaving device. As a result, textbooks are what they are.<sup>iii</sup>

The traditional "curriculum" approach involves a step-by-step program with generous amounts of busy work to cover an inordinate amount of material. Any grade-level curriculum to be sold in a competitive market must cover the things teachers and parents *expect* at that level. But where did those expectations come from? Mostly from experience in the classroom. As educational institutions have evolved to propagate and preserve themselves, schools have become inefficient and confused. Natural order and sequence have been left behind as teachers hurriedly try to cover everything in a year, and then repeat the process, adding a little more the next.

Why worry about being ahead or behind others who are aimlessly treading in the circular spiral-curriculum rut? If you knew where you were going, you probably wouldn't be going round and round. In the long run, will you be behind if you don't teach division to a student who can barely multiply? Comparison with others breeds pride, envy, or inadequacy. Should you teach many things in a jumble and later try to sort out the resulting mess and unconfuse the student? Wisdom looks at consequences and long-term results. It is better to avoid confusion in the first place. A curriculum that is well-ordered from a teacher's perspective can be confusing to a child. To avoid confusion, begin with the familiar and build upon what the student already knows. Apply the things which have been learned. Teach things so that they can be put to use.

Consider housekeeping by the traditional school curriculum mentality: First thing in the morning, clean the left half of the toilet bowl, put on two eggs to cook, and change one pillowcase, then vacuum one small section of carpet and dust one shelf on the bookcase. Next, wash two towels, three spoons, and a fork, and iron three shirts. The following day change another pillowcase (perhaps the same one, since you don't know which one you've already changed). Continue the process, randomly adding a little more each day for 12 years or until you have a breakdown. Would you expect the Good Housekeeping seal of approval? This "curriculum" would run you ragged even if it did get the job done. The alternative is to work by priority. Finishing the laundry on Monday makes it possible to do the ironing on Tuesday. Priority requires that the dusting be

delayed until the family is fed (unless the dust is so bad you can't find the table). Routine may be beneficial but flexibility is essential. Wisdom means doing what needs to be done.

Priority in education means that not all "subjects" need to be taught one-hour-per-day/five-days-per-week. History, geography, and science have unequal places in the course of study. Even reading, writing, and arithmetic are not of equal importance. Words are the means for communication. Francis Bacon wrote in the 17th century, "Reading maketh a full man; conference a ready man; and writing an exact man." Although neglected today by most educational programs, conference and discussion train the student to be "instant, in season, out of season."<sup>iv</sup> Charlotte Mason, a British educator nearly a century ago, used the narration method in which children tell in their own words what they heard or learned. "Children are born with the instinct of curiosity, which motivates them to discover all they can about the world around them. As they acquire their wonderful new knowledge they are motivated to tell everyone around them all about it. But all too often this ability and desire to tell is 'schooled out' of children."<sup>v</sup>

A child's conversation can be expanded beyond his own life (or the latest television show) by reading and listening. A child must hear spoken language before he can speak. Similarly, generous input of written language is essential before a child can be expected to write. A child should read widely before being required to spell or write. In learning to read, a child is trained to pay attention to each word. With some children this comes readily; others require much practice to read correctly simple words like *is*, *was*, *may*, and *saw*. "The printed word is learned through association with the memory traces of the spoken word and its meaning. Actually saying the word helps some children to make this association. It is a mistake to try to get these children to do really silent reading before they have achieved some *security* in word recognition."<sup>vi</sup> Oral reading is the key to reading comprehension. Don't give up. A child who can read with discernment can learn on his own; all he lacks is motivation.

Make your studies practical, real, relevant, and interesting. Studying things in natural order and sequence teaches that the world is rational rather than absurd. Effective home education need not be dependent on "canned" curriculum. The best educational opportunities often happen spontaneously. Teach your children the things you know and how to look up or find out those you don't. When my daughter, Jessica, asked me the meaning of the word *contemn*, I said, "I don't know. You could look it up in the dictionary and find its roots." Then I paused and said, "Or, you could remain ignorant." The more you know, the more you can teach your children as you go along, without dependence on a curriculum to tell you what to do next. Do not be enslaved by a curriculum. If what you have doesn't work, modify it or replace it.

The alternative to curriculum slavery is the use of long-range goals. Once you know where you're headed, you can take the proper steps to get there. This is how parents naturally teach their young children to count, to know their colors and how to speak English. Vague long-range goals will become refined because

home education is self-correcting. When you realize your children don't understand something, teach it.

Exalting memorization as the chief object of education is short-sighted. Real education is more than swallowing knowledge and facts; it is digesting and assimilating them into a body of knowledge and life experiences. Education teaches values, even if it claims otherwise. "The supreme end of education is expert discernment in all things—the power to tell the good from the bad, the genuine from the counterfeit, and to prefer the good and genuine to the bad and counterfeit."<sup>vii</sup> Education is all about consequences. Education is teaching your children cause-and-effect. Wisdom considers the long term.

First and foremost, education is preparing your children for the future. It is teaching them what to put their trust in. The result of a good, strong, and wise confidence is hope. Optimism is the result of putting your hope in God. "I will yet praise Him." The alternative leads to disillusionment, hopelessness and cynicism. God created the heavens and the earth, demonstrating his power and authority. God demonstrated his love by sending his Son, Jesus, "that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."<sup>viii</sup> Teach your children to put their hope in God's remedy. Consider the long term in everything. Christian Education isn't about doing well on achievement tests, but God's evaluation on the Day of Judgment.

Following the LORD is usually different from following the crowd and the usual methods. Teach your children to ponder or consider all the affairs of life. We live in a day of rampant deception. Teach them to evaluate: Is this really the truth? Read or listen to soul-stirring biographies and discussions on issues that make a difference in life. Skip dead recitations of facts. Invest your time carefully. Start small; begin with a quote, an excerpt, or a magazine article. If it has the ring of truth, if it appeals to you, go back for second helpings. Little by little accomplishes great things. This is education by the appetite mentality. It begins with a testimony or recommendation. Take a tidbit and find its source and context. What did the person say in his own words? Was he like the proverbial stopped clock, which is right only occasionally? Or did he consistently speak the truth? Such value judgments are often left out of education. When you find something good, share it. This testimony method is how ". . . faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God."<sup>ix</sup>

The ultimate goal of education is not to prepare your children for the next grade; it is to prepare them for life. Train your children to understand facts in the context of life lived under the eyes of the LORD. Teach them to "draw nigh to God." As Christians, we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. What fills your mind? How did it get there? Your mind is filled with whatever you let in through the ear gate and the eye gate; by what you read, listen to, discuss, and imagine. As you choose true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy things, your mind is filled with things that are higher than our normal thoughts. Christian education emphasizes verbal skills and words because there is more to life than the natural world. Through words spiritual things can be considered. A popular question today is, "What would Jesus do?" Many have no idea. The question cannot be answered without

studying Jesus' life and His Word and the lives of His followers. Christian education cannot dwell exclusively on natural things and ignore spiritual things. Having a proper destination and focus will help you direct your children in the way they should go. Put these words into practice in all you teach:

The LORD our God is one LORD: and thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them 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. (Deuteronomy 6:5)

Your relationships to the Lord and to your children are the key to successful home education. To succeed you must get your household in order and you must have a purpose and a plan. Our goal is to assist you in training those little ones under your roof to be disciples of Christ. We aim to serve you as you train up "in the way he should go" each child God has entrusted to you. Thank you for being faithful about godly education. The real measure of an education is not what you *know* but what you *do*, which is the demonstration of what is within. Be not ". . . weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."<sup>x</sup> The standard we uphold is Jesus. It is enough that a disciple would be like his master.

Reflecting a little light in a dark world,

Greg Stablein

iR. L. Dabney

ii*The Three Battlegrounds*, by Francis Frangipane, 1989

iii*The Art of Plain Talk*, by Rudolph Flesch, 1946

ivII Timothy 4:2

v*A Charlotte Mason Companion: Personal Reflections on the Gentle Art of Learning*, by Karen Andreola, 1998

vi*Effective Teaching of Reading*, by Albert J. Harris, 1962

viiSamuel Johnson, quoted in *Crisis in Education: Public Education – a Disaster*, by Donald R. Howard, 1990

viiiJohn 3:16

ixRomans 10:17

xGalatians 6:9