

THE CORNERSTONE CURRICULUM PROJECT

Discipleship - A Family Approach to Home Schooling

by David Quine

If you were asked to describe or define home schooling in a word or short phrase, what would you say? I know many thoughts might come into your mind.

Both Hebrew and Christian instruction was formulated upon passing truth from father to son -from son to grandson - and from grandson to great grandson. It is as the Apostle Paul explained ... the impartation of his very life (I Thessalonians 2:8) ... to those to whom God had given him opportunity. This is of course, discipleship. There is no higher calling (Matthew 28:18-20)! There is no greater opportunity than discipling our children and grandchildren. In Psalms 78 verses 5 through 7 we are told that fathers impact their families through four generations:

For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments.

A Family Example

There is one extended family in the Old Testament that stands out as an example of discipleship. In addition to the Old Testament, God placed them into His "Hall of Faith" chapter of Hebrews. Of course, this family is Abraham, Issac, Jacob, and Joseph. Were they perfect? No. In fact, far from it. Yet, they pleased God because they lived "by faith."

The New Testament Principle

This same pattern is found in the New Testament. Jesus taught the 12 disciples and in turn sent them out to teach others. The Apostle Paul poured his life into Timothy who was instructed to find faithful men to teach who would in turn teach others (II Timothy 2:2).

We need to see home education as pouring our lives into our children who will in turn teach their children who will teach theirs as well. This family approach to home education means more than simply giving our children a workbook or hiring someone to work with our children. To disciple mean to tend, to guard, to guide, and to send.

To Tend

If you study the word 'tend' in the Old and New Testament you will notice that several other phrases or ideas surround it. These phrases include 'feed', 'not lacking', 'no fear', 'rest', 'rich pastures' (Je. 23:4 Eze 34:14). Through the power of Christ, we are to give our children a feast of ideas, of truth, in the safety and security of our pastures (our homes). We are to carefully watch over their tender hearts. We are to nourish their hearts and minds, so that they will grow into all aspects into Christ (Ephesians 4:14, 15). It is this aspect of home schooling that allows our relationship with our children to flourish.

To Guard

Another aspect of tending is 'watchfulness' (1 Peter 5:2). We are in a warfare - a spiritual warfare, a battle for the minds and hearts of our children. Jesus warned us to be on guard against false ideas (Mt.16:6). The Apostle Peter echoes this same warning: "Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position (II Peter 3:17). The Apostle Paul warned Timothy to "guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge..." (I Timothy 6:20). Paul says later "Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you--guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us (II Timothy 1:14).

When our children were younger we moved into a house that had no fence. There was a busy street immediately behind our home. Our children rarely ventured far from our house. I planted a row of shrubs to mark off the border of the back yard. However, our children still stayed rather close in. It wasn't until we placed a fence along the perimeter of our property that they felt safe enough to use the complete backyard for their play. Now the boundaries were clearly marked. Rules are like fences - delineating right from wrong. To guard without boundaries is not to guard at all. However, we must keep the balance, and guard our relationship with our children. Josh McDowell often warns parents: "Rules without relationships will end in rebellion." As we tend we nourish. As we nourish we develop a relationship. Because we have a relationship the rules are not seen as binding but rather freeing. We have seen that rules given in the context of strong relationships will lead to right attitudes.

To Guide

As parents, another of our responsibilities is to give guidance and direction to our children. In the last several generations this aspect of parenting has been ignored. Children have been left to themselves to try to figure out 'who they are and where they are going.' What a blessing it is to be lovingly guided by our parents!

The Bible often describes us as sheep. One common characteristic of sheep is that they seem to wander aimlessly about - paying little or no attention to where they are!

Have you ever heard of a bellwether? This is a sheep that is to lead the others. The shepherd would place a bell around the lead sheep's neck. The shepherd would lead the bellwether. The bellwether would in turn lead the other sheep.

Where are you headed? Are you following after the Shepherd? Are you intimately acquainted with the Shepherd? Do you know His voice and are you following (John 10)? If so, then your children will hear the 'bell' of your life and follow.

Another aspect of guiding is to know your children. Are you becoming a student of your children? Do you know them intimately? Do you know their interests, their talents, and the abilities? What is it that God is doing in their lives? One of the beauties of home schooling is the time that we are able to spend with our children. To give personal guidance to our children we must really know them. Because it takes T-I-M-E to really know them, we must take the time. Though it is a little more difficult to sit down with one or two of your children and have eye-to-eye contact as you teach them, most children need that kind of experience. Your children want most of all to spend time with you.

Enjoy this time! For soon, oh so soon, your role as a parent will change, and the days of teaching will be past.

Ask the Lord to guide your children continually, and satisfy their deepest longings - even in drought. The result is that they will “be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not to those around them (Is.58:11. Refer also to Isaiah 49:10).

To Send

This may be the most difficult part of home education. However, we should be preparing our children for just this time. As we once learned to trust God to give us just the right number, sex, and spacing of our children which He desired and designed, so we then learned to trust Him for their instruction. For each it was unique as they were unique. There will come the time to trust Him for their sending out from us. For each one His ways and plans will be unique and perfect for He does all things beautifully!

We have often heard speakers talk of having a quiver full of arrows. Have you heard many speak of sending those precious arrows into battle? Although there is safety being in the quiver, there is coming a time to take each God given arrow out of the quiver and set it on the string of the bow and send it into service for Christ. The home schooling movement is now at the threshold of this stage of maturity. Eventually our children will go out. As in the analogy, we, the warriors, have shaped and formed the arrows in partnership with God. Making sure their flight will be true, we now send the arrows confidently toward the goal that God has set before us. As each arrow is in flight we can have assurance that the breath of God’s Holy Spirit will direct the arrow to accomplish His will.

Each stage of home schooling has its own difficulties. Each stage demands our total concentration. Each stage taxes our energies, patience, and creativity. But God is sufficient for all our needs. His word is filled with promises that He will accomplish in and through us far beyond all we could ask or think. “Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord: Seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness” (II Peter 1:2,3).