

# College at Home, for the Glory of God

by John Thompson

As habitual as birds heading south for the winter, a new brood of students takes wing each fall to college campuses around the world. Clearly, this seasonal migration is healthful for birds. But is the flocking of students to college campuses likewise wholesome? Is this recurrent pilgrimage the result of careful reasoning or cultural influences? Before sending our children to flight, our family decided to more thoroughly investigate the campus charisma.

This was two years ago. Zoie, our oldest of three daughters and an aspiring student of music, was beginning her last year of high school. Ten years of home education had raised (and answered) the many well-worn questions about curriculum types, learning styles, father's involvement, relating to the State, relating to the church, preference vs. conviction, peer-group problems and various others. But now we faced a whole batch of new questions:

- (1) What precisely is God's purpose for our children's higher education?
- (2) Does a father's home-education responsibility extend to *fully preparing* his children for adulthood, marriage and establishing a new household?
- (3) What specific disciplines (in academics, fine arts, life skills and spiritual development) are necessary for "entering adulthood?"
- (4) How are these disciplines different for young women vs. young men?
- (5) What role does a young person's God-given gifts, talents and interests play?
- (6) How might these disciplines be developed during the post-high school years? (home business, apprenticeship, trade/technical school, college programs—under what circumstances?) And most importantly,
- (7) How do our home-schooling convictions apply to post-high school training?

At some point in our home-schooling adventure, we fathers must deal honestly and faithfully with these seven crucial questions. Otherwise, we will fail to complete (or may even seriously *undermine*) the child training that God has entrusted to us, resulting in spiritually aborted children. Sadly, I had seen this happen to home-schooled students across the country, graduating from high school and then just floundering at a menial job or being sent away to a compromising setting (usually college). The fruit of hard parental labor was devoured by the locust of humanistic values, never to yield a truly bountiful harvest for the Lord.

Determined that our children would not become just another statistic of spiritual mediocrity, our family set about the task of resolving the hard questions that now confronted us. Here is "our story." It may not answer all

your questions, but is intended at least to *introduce* you to a model for post-secondary education that we hope you will, like the noble-minded Bereans, “examine by the Scriptures to see whether these things are so” (Acts 17:11). During her last year of high school, Zoie and I spent much time together in study and discussion about her future education, deliberating over these seven determinative questions. Since “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge,” our investigation from start to finish was guided by the principles of God’s Word. We knew that if God’s revealed will in Scripture were compromised, His glory through her life would ultimately be diminished. No education program was worth that! Hence, we agreed that any option requiring conformity to the world rather than to Christ simply was not His will. Thus, our journey had begun on solid footing with a common commitment to God’s truth.

## **God’s Purpose For Our Children’s Higher Education**

Our course would largely be charted by the answer to our first and most pivotal question, What precisely is God’s purpose for our children’s higher education? Or, to broach the issue a little more generally, what is man’s ultimate purpose according to the Bible? Surely it is NOT simply to improve himself (“be all that you can be”) nor even to serve mankind (“do good works”), though these are unquestionably proper byproducts. Rather, man’s ultimate purpose is to bring *glory to God* in all that we do (1 Cor. 10:31).

Shouldn’t the schooling of our children, therefore, have this goal as its principal test? Certainly! What, then, glorifies God in educating our children? Scripturally, it is when their education prepares them to achieve their God-ordained responsibilities in this world, which are (in order of priority):

- (1) to be properly related to God through salvation and spiritual growth (Matt. 6:33; 22:37);
- (2) to be accomplished and devoted in their role responsibilities as a husband/father or wife/mother (Eph. 5:22-25; Gen. 2:18; Tit. 2:4; 1 Tim. 2:15);
- (3) to be a dedicated, active member of a local body of believers (Eph. 4:12; Gal. 6:10); and
- (4) to bring dominion over the creation (not independently but with their mate) by developing their God-given abilities (Gen. 1:28).

These four life functions define our responsibilities to God, family, church and world. Anything which detracts from glorifying God through these four general responsibilities can have no place in our children’s education. Anything? Yes, that is the plain meaning of 1 Cor. 10:31: “Whatever (anything) you do, do all to the glory of God.” Immediately we could see that anything secular in Zoie’s future education would need to be very carefully scrutinized. Secular education by definition does not intend to relate our children properly to God or help them to grow into the image of Christ. Instead, its stated aim is

to glorify man through evolution, self-authority, situation ethics and “global citizenship.” Even worse, it is often purposely designed to destroy our children’s faith in God.

Unfortunately, however, even most Christian education today works at cross-purposes with God’s blueprint for our children. By training young men and women for self-satisfying careers that are independent of their mates or families, Christian schools (though perhaps unintentionally) mimic the world’s disdain for the values of marriage, fatherhood and motherhood. Something is desperately wrong when a young person can graduate from a Christian college—even a Bible college—and view their role as a husband/father or wife/mother as secondary to some self-pleasing profession, whereas God places those esteemed roles second only to our walk with Him.

Already it appeared to us that Zoie’s higher education would not follow any traditional path. But, then, home schoolers should be accustomed to pioneering new trails. That is simply our calling as “aliens and strangers” in a foreign land (1 Pet. 2:11).

## **The Extent Of A Father’s Educational Responsibility**

But who was I to direct my daughter’s higher education? After all, she was of age now, wasn’t she? At age 18 wasn’t she automatically an “adult” and responsible to make her own educational decisions? These were the kinds of questions leveled at us by well-meaning family members and educational acquaintances, Christian and non-Christian alike. They echoed the anti-family, individualistic philosophy of humanism that has infected even the church today.

Thus, our family embarked upon answering our second decisive question, Does a father’s home-education responsibility extend to *fully preparing* his children for adulthood, marriage and establishing a new household? Here, really, was a question of the breadth and depth of our home schooling. To what extent in age and subject matter is a father responsible for his children’s education?

It may come as a surprise—even to some home-schooling parents—to think that the father has much of a role at all in the education of his children. Isn’t Dad just the “provider and protector” of the home, leaving Mom to school the kids while he slugs it out in the workplace? This common picture is fatally flawed! Indeed, every (yes, EVERY) child-training command in Scripture is directed NOT to mothers but to fathers (e.g., Ps. 78:1-8; Eph. 6:4). The mother’s role is to assist (not replace) the father as his God-appointed helper (Gen. 2:18). Dads are personally responsible before God not merely to oversee their children’s education but also to participate in their training through daily hands-on involvement. Thus, the Bible throughout pictures the father himself frequently with his children, teaching them both formally and informally (Deut. 6:1-9; 2 Ki. 4:17-18; Prov. 1-9). And, much more than just daily devotions, the content of the father’s instruction, according to Psalm

78:1-8, encompasses both God's Word and God's works—including math, science, language arts, history and all other subjects of God's creation. When the father is legitimately unavailable due to other Scriptural responsibilities, the Bible pictures the mother as his primary assistant for the child-education task (Prov. 1:8; 6:20; 31:1). And when truly necessary, the father may delegate some (not all) instruction to a private tutor who will stand *in loco parentis* (in place of the parent) by imparting the father's biblical values and submitting to the father's will (1 Chron. 27:32).

Now, if a stranger were to peer into your window and conclude that the mother is the *primary* child trainer and the father is *her helper*, then something is drastically wrong in your home. That is NOT the biblical norm. Regrettably, America's home-schooling movement is led almost entirely by women, both in the homes and in the local and state organizations. This is God's rebuke to the men in our generation for their sinful withdrawal from leadership, much as was the case in Israel when Deborah was judge (cf. Jud. 4; Isa. 3:12). It is time for home-schooling fathers to repent of their halfhearted efforts and truly turn their hearts back to their children (Luke 1:17), "that they should put their confidence in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments, and not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation that did not prepare its heart, and whose spirit was not faithful to God" (Ps. 78:7-8).

Plainly, then, a father has the foremost role in home schooling. But, as we asked before, to what extent in age and subject matter is he responsible to teach his children? The extent of "school" is commonly considered to be kindergarten through high school and the subject matter to be "academics" plus a smattering of fine arts. Yet isn't the scope of a father's duty to train his children from birth until adulthood in all disciplines necessary for maturity? The Greek (secular) model of child education, as it is practiced in our modern culture and has influenced us all, *wrongly* assumes that a father's training of his children is completed when they reach age 18 and complete certain high school academic requirements. He then "graduates" his children from high school and sends them out of the family home to a college or job. They are released from parental oversight, often to godless supervisors and circumstances, with little further opportunity for spiritual or practical discipleship by the father.

The Hebrew (biblical) model of child education considers our children to be "youth" from age 13 until about age 20 (a norm, not a legalistic framework), and charges the father with a much broader scope of child training until the youth is fully prepared for adulthood, marriage and establishing a new household. Indeed, that was the scope of the Torah (the Law of Moses), the Hebrew father's primary curriculum for child training. It was a veritable "manual for life" to which every facet of life was related. Not only did the Torah teach one about his relationship to God, but also his relationship to his neighbor, family, spouse, community, government, enemies and, indeed, all of society as well as the physical creation. Being not only *revelatory* of God but also *regulatory* of the nation, the Torah guided the whole life of the Jew: his

house, dress, food, employment, domestic arrangements, distribution of property, politics, and civil and religious life.

How much more extensive and expansive the biblical vision of child training is! And Jewish fathers (Old Testament believers) assumed this broad responsibility enthusiastically. Indeed, they considered it an honor; and everything else gave way to this most important part of their lives. Modern home-schooling dads must restore the biblical “depth and breadth” of their educational responsibility.

## **Disciplines Necessary For Release To Adulthood**

If traditional “high school graduation” is not the biblical measure of maturity, then what specific disciplines are necessary for a young person’s release? What subject matter will *fully prepare* our children for adulthood, marriage and establishing a new household?

This third of our seven vital questions led not only our family but also our whole church toward a new completion point for home schooling which we call *Life Graduation*. After fulfilling her high school requirements, Zoie enjoyed a family-centered celebration similar to a birthday party and received a high school diploma primarily as a “passport” into college level studies. But her sights were now upon a much more comprehensive target—the full range of disciplines necessary for adult maturity, which seem to fall into four basic categories: academics, fine arts, life skills and spiritual maturity.

Academics, rather than being an end in itself, is to be pursued for the purpose of *understanding* God’s creation and *undergirding* training in the other three fundamental categories. Fine arts enable our children to appreciate the *beauty* of God’s creation whereas life skills (applied arts) equip them to exercise the *utility* of God’s creation. Both aspects of God’s creation—its beauty as well as its utility—comprise God’s “dominion mandate” (Gen. 1:28) which we fathers are obliged to train our children to fulfill. Finally, our children’s spiritual maturity purposes to *glorify* God and *enjoy* Him forever.

Life Graduation signifies that a young man or young woman is entering full adulthood and, though no partner may yet be in waiting, is sufficiently prepared for the covenant of marriage and the establishing of a new household (Gen. 2:24). This is the climax toward which all child training since birth should be culminating. This—not some secular substitute—is the focus of our educational vision. And, since the whole local church is involved in equipping parents (Eph. 4:12), this is the event for which the entire assembly should joyfully gather to honor the new graduate and to give praise together to God! This now became our family’s new destination for our educational journey. We looked forward to the day our daughters’ would attain the noble goal of being a “Proverbs 31 Woman.”

## Education Of Young Women Vs. Young Men

As our family wondered how to arrive at that new destination we were prompted to address the fourth essential question, How is the education of young women different from that of young men? Even to pose such a question in our egalitarian, post-Christian culture, is to invite ridicule and ostracism by the educational establishment where traditional male and female distinctions are despised. Yet, if the God-ordained role of a woman is different from that of a man, then it follows that her preparation for that role will be different, at least in its content and perhaps in its instructional location as well.

Already we had concluded from our first question that God is glorified in our children's schooling *only* when it prepares them to achieve their four God-ordained responsibilities (God, family, church and world). But does God distinguish those life functions *by gender*? And, if so, how? Clearly, there is no gender distinction in our first responsibility of being properly related to God through salvation and spiritual growth. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).

But in each of the other three life functions, God plainly differentiates the woman's role from the man's. A young man's education, therefore, must prepare him (in this order of priority) to be a selfless husband and father, a servant-leader in the local church, and a ruler over the social and physical spheres of God's creation in a way that involves his wife as his assistant. However, a young woman's training must equip her (again, in this order of priority) to be a devoted wife and mother, a servant-contributor in the local church, and a helper to her husband in bringing dominion over God's creation—that is, assisting her husband rather than having a separate ministry or occupation.

Precisely how do these gender-specific life functions influence the content of our children's education, and perhaps their instructional location, too? Since God gave us a family of all girls, the young woman's training was our foremost concern. In examining the four disciplines necessary for adult maturity, we saw only minor gender-related differences in the teaching of academics or fine arts to our children. Yes, since academics comprise the support structure for the other three disciplines, there would be some small variation for young women. Still, a woman must have sufficient academic ability to aid her husband in schooling their children to the point of full adulthood. And whereas "keeping house" (1 Tim. 5:14) is part of the woman's role, her training in fine arts may include some applications different from that of a young man (such as flower arranging, stenciling, interior decoration). Nevertheless, the study of fine arts itself (music, art, literature, architecture, landscaping, etc.) is definitely as important for young men as it is for young women if we are equally to appreciate the beauty of God's creation as He intends.

It was in the other two disciplines—the life skills and spiritual

development—that we found substantial, gender-related differences which would affect the content of our daughters’ education. Since the role of ninety-nine percent of young women is to be a devoted wife and mother (i.e., not remain single, Gen. 1:28), her training in life skills must prepare her to be a capable helper to her husband, trainer of her children and caretaker of her home (Gen. 2:18; Prov. 1:8; Tit. 2:5). Such skills would certainly include all that is involved in the spheres of cooking, sewing, home care, child care, health care, animal care, gardening, and domestic finances.

Further, if a young woman’s spiritual role is to be a servant-contributor, the content of her training must equip her to be a submissive helper in the home as well as in the assembly, freeing up the men to exercise their God-appointed leadership (1 Tim. 2:8-15). Training of this sort might include a major ministry to mothers in the church (on Sundays and weekdays too) as well as helping with the church nursery, fellowship meals, home Bible study hostess, music ministry, hospitality, family evangelism, missions helper, visitation of shut-ins, etc.—all under parental supervision, of course.

In summary, a young woman’s training should be modeled after the examples of Sarah, Mary and the virtuous wife of Proverbs 31, whose lives centered around their husband, children and homeworking (cf. 1 Tim. 2:15). A Christian woman’s God-ordained “career” is not just *in* her home—it is her home (i.e., her husband and her children)!

*Where* is this training to occur? At some distant school, camp or other educational setting? Decidedly not! The fundamental tenet that distinguishes Christian *home* education from Christian *school* education is our belief that the parents are a child’s God-appointed teachers (Ps. 78:1-8; Prov. 6:20) and that the family home (and its environs) is the God-ordained classroom—“when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way” (Deut. 6:7; 1 Cor. 15:33).

Then *when* do older children finally leave the family home? For young women, it seems, the Scriptural time for departure is at marriage, and not before (1 Cor. 7:36-38). Because God created the woman to be the “weaker vessel” (more vulnerable, 1 Pet. 3:7; 1 Tim. 2:14), He intends for her never to be out from under the protective covering of either a father or a husband (1 Sam. 30:18). She is to abide in the protective shadow of her father (Ps. 36:7) until she moves into the shadow of her husband (S.of S. 2:3). This is the clear implication of Numbers 30 which sets forth only three Scriptural marital states for women: a single woman in her father’s house (normally in her youth), a married woman in her husband’s house, and a divorced or widowed woman who is under the direct protection of God (Ps. 68:5) and the care of church elders (1 Tim. 5:3ff). There is no biblical marital status (and no normative Scriptural example) of a single woman who leaves her father’s home for reasons other than marriage. Obviously, such a conclusion from Scripture had a significant impact on where we would train our daughters and where they would reside before marriage.

What about the education of a young man? How is the content and location of his education unique to his gender? Since the vast majority of young men are

intended by God first and foremost to become selfless husbands and fathers, his training in life skills must prepare him to be a bold but loving leader in his home, a skillful discipler of his children and an adequate provider for his household. To be fully prepared for adulthood, marriage and establishing a new household, a young man must demonstrate Christlike character, sufficient knowledge to teach his children, and stable employment (preferably a home business) that will support a family (Prov. 24:27; 1 Tim. 5:8). In addition to “income *producing* skills,” he ought also to have “income *preserving* skills” such as home building (carpentry, electrical, plumbing, painting, masonry), landscaping and lawn care, auto mechanics, vegetable gardening, animal care, business administration and computer skills. And since a young man’s spiritual role is to be a servant-leader, his training must involve leadership in worship (1 Cor. 14:26), prayer (1 Tim. 2:8), doctrine (1 Cor. 14:35), self-sacrifice (Eph. 5:25), decision making (1 Tim. 2:12) and justice, mercy and humility (Mic. 6:8)—in the home as well as in the assembly. His father should disciple him in Bible teaching, counseling, public prayer, family evangelism, political issues, organization skills and much more.

Now if the purpose of all education is to equip us to achieve our God-ordained responsibilities in the world, then what kind of occupation provides a young man the framework for attaining these life functions? To put the question another way, Where does a young man’s career fit into his four God-ordained responsibilities? Is his career equivalent to “bringing dominion over the creation”? And what should guide his career choice?

Contrary to most Christians’ lifestyles today, the Scriptures do not view work (i.e., career, job, occupation) as a priority in and of itself but rather as a *means and medium* for achieving a man’s biblical priorities (life functions). For example, a particular occupation may strengthen his walk with God, provide sufficient income for his family and church, leave enough time (or, ideally, provide the framework) to nurture his family and minister to others, and allow opportunity to govern a particular sphere of God’s creation. But a *different* occupation might tear down his spiritual life, supply meager funds for family and church, leave inadequate time for family nurturing or ministry, and grant little occasion to “subdue and rule” over some area of God’s creation.

So, you see, a man’s work is not a priority at all, but instead, is a help or a hindrance in achieving his biblical priorities. A father ought therefore to choose a vocation for his son that best enables him to carry out his life functions. Though a man’s work should develop and utilize his God-given talents, it should be inclusive, not independent, of his family (Gen. 2:18). Home-schooling families normally recognize the importance of the wife being family-centered; but it’s just as biblical for the father to be family-centered, not career-centered. This is why a home business is generally a young man’s best choice for his occupation. When compared to working for an employer outside the home, a family-centered home business normally gives a man much greater freedom to meet his God-ordered priorities (rather than the boss’s priorities). For this reason, the Apostle Paul urged the Corinthian



believers in regard to employment, “if you are able indeed to become free, rather do that” (1 Cor. 7:21). That is, pursue an occupation that gives you the greatest freedom to achieve your God-ordained priorities.

*Where* is a young man’s occupational training to take place? Although a young woman’s schooling is to occur entirely under the safeguard of her father (generally in the vicinity of the family home), a young man’s training location is a wisdom decision (by the father) based on many factors. Though he is to remain under his father’s *authority* until being released to adulthood (Life Graduation), he may not necessarily remain under his father’s direct *oversight* for all of his occupational training. In Bible times, a son normally learned the trade of his father (or at least a vocation his father could teach him), just as Jesus learned carpentry from his step-father Joseph and Paul tentmaking from his father.

However, it was not uncommon for a young man to be apprenticed in a different trade under a trusted employer. Although young men do not have the same physical and spiritual vulnerabilities as young women, still Solomon warned his son of the risk of bad company, particularly the adulteress and the harlot (Prov. 1-9).

So, it seems that the biblical norm (and thus what will most often be wise) is for a young man to complete his life preparation in the family home and under the direct oversight of his father. Even if a father has not yet developed his own home business, perhaps he can help his son start a home business and “learn by doing.” Nevertheless, when a son is to learn an occupation unfamiliar to his father, he may be apprenticed (by an individual or school) under certain conditions.

To reach a wise decision concerning apprenticeship, a father must ask a number of important questions. In regard to the son, is he physically and spiritually mature enough for release from parental oversight? Has the son proven himself faithful in small things so that release will not be beyond his moral maturity? Is the father’s spiritual discipleship of his son completed, leaving deep-rooted spiritual habits that will not be compromised under trial? In regard to the circumstances, is the son’s release detrimental to the household (perhaps he is still needed at home)? Does the father know personally and sufficiently the work environment as well as the persons responsible for his son? Are there serious moral or physical risks? How long is the son being released (days only, overnight, weeks, months—the longer the release, the greater the risk)? How far away is the son being released? Is it close enough to know what’s going on and to intervene if necessary? In regard to the opportunity as a whole, is this the option that best fits God’s principles? Has the father sought the counsel of his elders? The answers to these and similar questions will enable a father to make a wise decision regarding apprenticeship for his son.

After Life Graduation, a young man has the biblical liberty either to establish his own “household of one” or to remain a contributing member of his father’s

house. We see examples in Scripture both ways, though the latter may have been the norm since a Hebrew father's responsibilities included "instructing his son in the law, teaching him a trade and bringing him into wedlock." Consequently, Isaac remained in his father's household until he was 40 years old when Abraham got him a wife. The words "For this cause (marriage) a man shall leave his father and his mother..." (Gen. 2:24) speak certainly not of the only cause, but perhaps the *primary* cause of a man's leaving his parental home.

## **Role Of God-Given Gifts, Talents, Interests**

If our four God-ordained life functions are to guide our educational choices, then what role does a young person's God-given gifts, talents and interests play? That was our fifth crucial question. Hasn't God given these gifts to be developed and used for His glory? Indeed, yes, for Paul charged Timothy to "kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you..." (2 Tim. 1:6). But practically speaking, most of us have several gifts, talents and interests, each of which may be developed in a dozen different directions. So, a choice must be made about which talent to develop in which direction; and that choice must be in accord with biblical principles, not in violation of those principles.

In practice, then, a father's career choice for his son (yes, it is ultimately the father's decision) must be guided by the larger needs of the family, by what would best enable his son to accomplish his life functions, and by the biblically legitimate training options available. If Scriptural principles would be compromised, then a different talent or a different direction should be chosen for a vocation. Though the world literally defines a man by his occupation, biblically a man's faithfulness to God is far more critical to his success in life. Consequently, we find the most pivotal men in history—Christ and His apostles—in such simple vocations as carpenters, tentmakers and fishermen. And despite God's supernaturally calling certain persons in the Bible to specific tasks, the idea that God "calls" each Christian to a particular "life work" finds no support in Scripture (see *Decision Making and the Will of God*, by Garry Friesen.)

Likewise, a father's higher education of his daughter (as is my case) should fit the overall goals of the family, qualify her to carry out her life functions, and avoid all compromising education options. Instead of preparing for a worldly career distinct from her husband's, a young woman should have one primary application in view in developing her gifts, talents and interests, namely, that of becoming a capable wife and mother. And the father must then find for her a husband to whom her talents correspond—what Genesis 2:18 calls "a *corresponding* helper," one who completes him in all of life as the two become one flesh.

Secondarily, her higher education ought to equip her to be a contributing member of her father's household until she marries and, in the event of an untimely death of her husband, a self-supporting widow from within the home. This last eventuality may never be needed, for most widows would be cared

for by her husband's estate, her children or the local church (1 Tim. 5:3-16). But there are cases historically and biblically (e.g., Lydia, Acts 16:14) where women have needed to support themselves. And she would be prepared to do so if she had skills for a business within the home (Tit. 2:5).

Some fathers may think we have too narrowly understood a young woman's education and work. It is not within the scope of this article to argue that point further, but only to refer you to the forthcoming book by Douglas Phillips entitled "God Calls Men To Be Providers" (first published as a series in *Quit You Like Men*). Other dads may have cautions in the opposite direction, that higher education for a woman leads to pride, discontent, self-sufficiency, worldly temptation and easy divorce. These are legitimate concerns. But couldn't the same be said of men? A stable marriage is founded not upon a man or a woman's education level but upon an understanding of their biblical roles and their commitment to God. In fact, a strong case could be made that a marriage is *more* stable when a woman's higher education qualifies her to help her husband more ably. Isn't a woman just as responsible as a man to develop and use (within biblical parameters) her God-given talents to help her husband bring dominion over the creation (Gen. 1:28; Matt. 25:14-30). Douglas Wilson writes in *Credenda-Agenda*, "A neo-Amish sisterhood is starting to develop in some quarters of the conservative Christian community... [which] disparages the intellectual capacities of women." Instead, we should view the intellectual capacity of a woman, blended with godly character, as a valued capability to aid her husband and educate her sons who will stand with their father in the gate, contending together with their enemies (Ps. 127:5).

In view of our studies to this point, our family concluded that not only Zoie but also her two younger sisters (Cara and Kesed) would pursue gender-specific life skills and spiritual development in keeping with their unique role as women. And in the realms of academics and fine arts, they would develop their talents in music (piano, flute, violin and voice) in hopes of serving a husband who would enjoy and need those abilities in his life and ministry. The critical question now facing us was, How? How to advance their musical talents to full proficiency within the environment of the family home and under the watchful oversight of their father?

## **Post-Secondary Educational Options**

Zoie and I could now see the finish line before us as we asked the next critical question, How are the adult disciplines best developed during the post-high school years? As we researched this issue, the educational options fell into four categories. A young person's talents and disciplines could be honed through home business, apprenticeship, trade/technical schools or college programs. After a thorough study of what each option offered in the field of music, Zoie and I concluded that some sort of nontraditional ("at home") college program (supplemented with home business, apprenticeship and technical training) would best equip her to use her musical gift for serving her future family and church. Thus, we began to probe that option through much

reading, many phone calls, personal interviews and visits to college campuses. What we learned was both shocking and inspiring.

We were dismayed to discover that many students today flock to college because they have little vision for what else to do with their life. With few exceptions, the remaining students go to college for one of three reasons: (1) to get an education, (2) to get a degree or (3) to “party” (that is, to socialize with peers). Regrettably, the first reason is no longer the *foremost* reason for an increasing number of these students. That is why many dedicated teachers have become disheartened; and more than a few serious-minded students have sought alternative approaches for their higher education. Here is where our investigation became deeply encouraging.

Before the mid-1970s, a student seeking a nontraditional, “off-campus” college education had exactly two choices: the University of London and the University of South Africa. Since then, however, there has been a virtual explosion of college-level correspondence courses, guided independent study and accredited “external degree programs.” In fact, we learned that more than 400 accredited colleges in the United States now offer “nontraditional” degree programs; and over 100 such schools grant fully accredited bachelor’s, master’s and/or doctor’s degrees entirely, or almost entirely, through non-residential study, which are well recognized in the academic, professional and business communities. Included in those numbers are more than 20 Christian liberal arts and Bible colleges that offer many educational programs from a distinctively Christian world view.

As Zoie and I poured over various college guides and course catalogs, we began to see how all of the “general education” requirements (English, history, math, science, etc.) for a Bachelor’s degree in music (or any other major) could be acquired through accredited correspondence courses from various Christian colleges. And the “hands on” music requirements of keyboard, voice and ear training could be obtained through “portfolio credit” with carefully chosen (and supervised) local instructors and apprenticeship programs. The remaining music credits in music history, theory and composition were found to be available from a music institute (a technical school) with no humanistic ax to grind. This became the course of college study that our family chose for *five major reasons* (which apply to young men as well as young women). Any one of these reasons could easily be expanded to many pages—in fact, there are whole books written on several of these issues. But to preserve your patience, let me try to be concise.

**If the primary purpose of college is *educational*, then something is amiss in the classroom.** Simply put, research has shown that, for most subjects, tutorial instruction and guided independent study give superior results over classroom teaching. For example, in one study correspondence students consistently outperformed their classroom counterparts by more than ten percentage points on the final exam. The non-classroom approach is also more flexible, allowing the student to use books, audio, video, and computer networks to study at his own pace (intensively, if he chooses), in his

own home, according to his preferred schedule, even while traveling. With such flexibility, our goal is that each of our children complete their bachelor's degree in three years or less (and a master's degree, too, if needed), yet without sacrificing our moral, family or financial integrity. Yes, such a course of study demands greater self-discipline and personal scheduling; but, in our judgment, it better prepares the student to be a self-starter, leader and entrepreneur in later life.

**A second rationale for favoring an off-campus education is *moral*.** What conditions best enable my post-high school children to continue the pursuit of godliness as they complete their education? Although we do not seek to live in a vacuum, we believe it both wise and biblical to guard against negative influences upon our lives (this is insulation, not isolation). The average residential college thrusts very impressionable youths under the persuasion of typically liberal professors and libertine students. Confused minds and compromised morals are nearly guaranteed! But by cautiously selecting our tutors and courses, we can maintain, to a very high degree, an education from a Christian world view. And by choosing off-campus studies, we avoid the immoral peer influence which pervades the typical college campus, even to the point of serious physical and moral harm. What should we expect when youth with raging hormones are told they are nothing but evolved animals? Crime statistics reveal that the average college campus is now more dangerous than New York's Central Park! How much wiser, we think, to study under the care and protection of godly parents.

**The third convincing reason for selecting non-residential study is *family*.** Frankly, we enjoy one another's company in our family; we delight in each other's educational experiences. That is why we have pursued home business and home schooling for the past 11 years. Moreover, since the parents' task involves preparing their children to be well-educated, self-supporting, highly capable mates and parents-to-be, we believe the parents' role has seldom been completed when their children reach age 17 or 18. In short, we have more parenting to do; and we do not believe it either wise or biblical to delegate this responsibility to an *alma mater* (literally, a "foster mother"). In a personal letter, Phil Lancaster of *Patriarch* magazine concurs: "Family is not just a launching pad for independent individuals, it is the context in which every person is meant to live out their earthly existence. We must get over this mindset that children grow up and 'leave the nest' (prior to marriage)."

**I don't wish to be mundane, but our fourth motive for adopting an external degree program is *financial*.** Economically, an off-campus education is simply better stewardship of our limited resources. Whereas a four-year degree will average about \$80,000 at a private university and \$40,000 at a state school, it will run less than \$20,000 at home—even as little as \$12,000 for some programs (including correspondence courses, tutoring charges and even room & board payment to parents). Furthermore, the student can usually earn more at home through a more flexible work/study schedule. In our case, our children earn profit sharing through our family

bakery business as well as conduct their own music studio (which also provides field experience for their course work). Admittedly, the above comparison does not take into account the fact that scholarship aid is much more readily available to on-campus students. However, since most of such aid comes from tax dollars or inflated tuition fees (all taken without the giver's consent), we prefer to pay our own way (or seek truly philanthropic aid) rather than fleece our neighbor or encourage socialism.

## **Applying Our Home-School Convictions To Post-High School Training**

**The fifth, final and foremost cause for our deciding on college at home is *spiritual*.** The first four reasons—educational flexibility, healthy moral development, closer family relationships and better financial stewardship—could be asserted as well by a non-Christian. Make no mistake, they are significant reasons; but at best they make college at home a *wise* decision, a *preferred* choice. It is the fifth cause, the spiritual reason, that, for our family, moves this decision from preference to *conviction*—that is, something required of us by God. This seventh and final question was the very heartbeat of our research, namely, How do our home-school convictions apply to post-high school training? Other sincere Christians may not assess this issue quite as we do, and we do not make this a test of fellowship with them. But see if this makes sense to you.

Our family had already come to the conviction that God's purpose for our children's higher education was to bring glory to Himself by training them in their four God-ordained life functions (relationship to God, family, church and world) until they are fully prepared for adulthood, marriage and establishing a new household. We were also convicted that a God-pleasing education for our daughters must be very gender-specific (focused upon becoming a wife, mother and homemaker) and must occur entirely under the loving oversight of their father. If we had sons, we concluded, their education also would be very gender-specific (husband, father and family-centered vocation) and would occur under their father's oversight or in a morally safe environment.

Now, the critical issue is this: Does a traditional, residential college education bring glory to God? To answer that question, let's test the on-campus approach by the three components of a God-honoring education: the content, the teacher and the instructional setting.

**First, the *content* of a God-honoring education must be truth (Ps. 25:10; 119:163),** more specifically, truth which prepares our children to accomplish their gender-specific, God-ordained functions in the world. Since a secular education leaves God out, it cannot adhere to a Christian world view and will consequently misunderstand, misinterpret and misapply knowledge (Jn. 17:17, Col. 2:3). Even the best Christian colleges today, though teaching basic Christian content, have adopted secular goals for their students, encouraging both young men and young women to be career-centered rather

than family-centered, preparing women to be like men, and through women professors, displaying wrong role models for our daughters. Is that the target toward which you are aiming your young arrows? Does a traditional, residential college education (even a Christian college) pass the test of content?

**Second, the *teachers of a God-honoring education must be, for the most part, the parents (Deut. 6:1-9; Ps. 78:1-8; Prov. 6:20).*** This is so because *all* teaching conveys values; the student will not merely *think* like his teacher, he will *become* like his teacher (Luke 6:40; Jer. 10:2). Consequently, God instructs the father (with his wife as helper) to be the primary teacher of his children. This is simply a proper emulation of our Heavenly Father's relationship to His own Son: "... the Son can do nothing of Himself, *unless it is something He sees the Father doing*; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner. *For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing*" (Jn. 5:19-20). A Scriptural view of education (Father-Son, parent-child, shepherd-saint, etc.) is predicated upon an essential, irreplaceable heart-bond of love, "turning the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers" (Mal. 4:6; Lk. 1:17). Biblical teaching is not the sterile transfer of ideas from one brain to another, but rather a discipleship relationship. Do we love our children enough to remain their primary teachers (disciplers) until they are fully prepared for adulthood, marriage and establishing a new household?

At the college level, parents may be greatly aided in this responsibility by correspondence courses, preferably from Christian colleges (just as textbooks are utilized in the earlier years). Yet, when a parent is genuinely unable to teach a particular subject or skill, he may delegate *that particular task* to a tutor who will instill the father's biblical values and submit to the father's will. Parents teaching their own children until marriage was the norm for Scripturally obedient parents in Bible times; any biblical examples to the contrary were the exceptions, not the rule. Even the exceptions were trusted friends, not unknown faculty (even Christian) who will not faithfully uphold your values. Does a traditional, residential college education pass the test of the teacher?

**Third, the *instructional setting of a God-honoring education must normally be the Christian home and family.*** We parents are often pridefully self-deceived in thinking our children (and ourselves) to be spiritually invulnerable to tempting circumstances. That is why the Apostle Paul begins his warning in 1 Cor. 15:33 with the words, "Do not be deceived..." (because we are *likely* to be self-deceived). His warning then follows, "Bad company corrupts good character" (see also Prov. 13:20; Jer. 10:2; 1 Cor. 14:20). Young men and women should not be molded by the sinful and destructive values, attitudes, philosophies, vocabularies, behaviors and lifestyles of their peers. Nor by the "politically correct" teaching of secular (and sometimes Christian) professors. Yet that is precisely what occurs in the typical college classroom and on the typical college campus (yes, even Christian campuses— I was there!). The age-segregated, co-ed classroom by

its very structure promotes wrong male/female relationships and women learning to compete with men (rather than becoming helpers). By way of contrast, the Christian home remains a warm, nurturing, protective environment where studious young men and women can grow “wise in what is good [yet remain] innocent in what is evil” (Rom. 16:19b). Does a traditional, residential college education pass the test of the instructional setting?

Pass or fail? How does the traditional (including Christian) college measure up in God’s grade book? Does it bring Him glory in its content, teachers and classrooms? Our family has concluded that, if we were to choose an on-campus education for our children (even if we had sons), we could not adequately oversee the subject matter, the tutors or the social/moral environment. In our view, we would be abdicating our responsibility as parents. To ask us to choose the traditional college program for our children would be the moral equivalent of asking a Jew to eat pork. It would compromise our convictions. We could not do it and be true to our God. Yes, that sounds rather narrow in today’s culture. The world urges us to give our children a “broad” education, but God says “broad is the way that leads to destruction” (Matt. 7:13). Instead, Proverbs 22:6 says to *narrow* (the literal meaning of “train up”) a child in the way he should go—keep him within the biblical parameters which God has set up for his moral and physical protection.

In discussing this topic with several esteemed Christian brothers, a few additional concerns were raised by them. For example, What young man or woman newly off to college has not experienced the deep pangs of loneliness? Is this not a trap for falling into immorality which marriage obviously avoids: “For this cause—marriage—a man shall leave his father and his mother and shall cleave to his wife...” (Gen. 2:24)? Is not the modern college environment a clear violation of God’s principle to “make no provision for the flesh in regard to its desires” (Rom. 13:14)? College has become the principle context for choosing a life occupation and a life partner. Shouldn’t godly parents be directing both of these critical decisions? And what about the problem of an “unequal yoke” in the spiritual training of our children (2 Cor. 6:14ff)? Is this not a forbidden alliance with known enemies of truth and godliness? It seems that nearly every element of the college experience is a violation of some biblical principle!

## **Your Own Application**

That is *our* conviction, developed from personal study of the Bible because God wants us to walk by conviction, not by convenience, seeking first His kingdom and His righteousness (Matt. 6:33), not being lukewarm about this matter or any other (Rev. 3:16). What is *your* conviction from the Bible on this crucial matter? What is God’s life goal for your children? Is it for them to glorify God (1) by being properly related to Him through salvation and spiritual growth, (2) by becoming accomplished and devoted in their role responsibilities as a husband/father or wife/mother, (3) by being a dedicated, active member of a local body of believers and (4) by bringing dominion over



the creation (with their mate) by developing their God-given abilities? Are humanistic courses, liberal professors and immoral classmates God's means to God's goal for your children? (As described above, even Christian colleges have similar problems.) The question is NOT should we ever study secular materials (then even reading the newspaper would be immoral). The question is WHERE, WHEN and HOW shall we maintain truth and purity without compromise in an ongoing program of self-education. The answer is, in my judgment, seldom in the college classroom.

Your reply may be, "But my son is spiritually mature, readily able to discern truth from error, and strong enough to resist temptation from peers." Jonathan Lindvall in his lecture on "Homeschooling College" observes that liberal professors (as well as homosexuals, abortionists, feminists, environmentalists, evolutionists, humanists, cults, Satan worshipers, etc.) ply their trade on college campuses expressly because they know just how impressionable the students are. Because God designed our children to still be moldable at this age, many Christian students have lost their faith (and morality) on the college campus. Is it possible that you might be overestimating your child's maturity?

However, *if* your appraisal is truly accurate, and not just parental pride (ask your church elders); *and if* there is no safer, wiser option for developing his God-given abilities (there generally are *several* talents to choose from for a life occupation, not just one); *and if* in your conscience you are not compromising any biblical principle; then *perhaps* a college classroom would be a legitimate alternative—*maybe*. Still, there are several options to prayerfully consider which I list below from poorest choice to poor choice:

- (1) Attending secular college, living on campus. (Clearly the worst possible choice.)
- (2) Attending Christian college, living on campus. (Sadly, not much better.)
- (3) Attending secular college, living at home (or possibly with a trusted Christian adult).
- (4) Attending Christian college, living at home (or possibly with a trusted Christian adult).

I hesitate even to list the above choices, believing they are nearly always poor choices, just some worse than others. They are *all* fraught with moral risk that may lead to disaster. If "college at home" will not achieve your occupational goal, why not just choose a different occupation? After all, a Christian's occupation is not an end in itself but simply a means and medium for achieving his biblical priorities.

Do these principles and concerns apply to releasing our children to situations *other* than college, such as apprenticeships, jobs or ministries away from home. Of course, they do—perhaps even more so! First, test each training opportunity by the above tests: (1) Does it teach truthful *content* which prepares our children for their gender-specific, God-ordained functions in the

world? (2) Do its *teachers* supplant what the parents should be doing, or fail to uphold parental values? (3) Is its *social/moral* environment “bad company” or promoting wrong relationships? Even then, don’t be too quick to give approval. In order to make a wise decision, you must have an adequate understanding of both your child as well as the new circumstances. Has your child developed deeply-rooted spiritual habits? Does he seek the company of those who are wise, not foolish peers? Do you know personally and sufficiently the environment and the persons responsible for your child? Have you received positive recommendations from other trusted Christians familiar with the circumstances? How long and how far away is your child being released? Have you investigated all of God’s principles related to this release? Have you sought counsel from your elders?

One regretful parent writes: “What we thought was a fine college ruined our daughter. A course in religion destroyed her faith in the Bible, a course in philosophy destroyed her faith in God, a course in psychology destroyed her faith in her parents, a course in biology destroyed her faith in the divine creation, and a course in political science destroyed her faith in the American way of life.” It may be natural for some birds (and students) to migrate, but not so for all of them. Those who find it “natural” are pursuing what stimulates their nature. Christians, however, have a new, redeemed nature which is not properly stimulated by the compromised values of the college campus (even the *Christian* college campus). Thus, these birds of a feather should flock together in the nurturing family that God gave them—at least until one of the brood builds a new nest with her mate.

Often Christian parents recognize the college option to be a compromise, but they see no other choice for training their sons and daughters. They understand what to “put off” but not what to “put on” in its place. Consequently, I am developing a step-by-step booklet to supplement this article. In it I will take you through the process of evaluating your children’s life goals, choosing a vocation that best enables them to accomplish their God-ordered priorities, deciding what sort of training is necessary for their chosen vocation (home business, apprenticeship, trade/technical courses, college by correspondence, etc.), and how to find that training without compromising your convictions. [NOTE: Patriarch Toolbox will carry this booklet when it becomes available.] In essence, I have simply documented our own family’s journey along the same path. And the training we found available has been wonderfully encouraging. That encouragement is contagious—please let us share it with you!

In closing, let me admit that this article is incomplete (I haven’t yet dealt with the “hard cases”) and imperfect (no man is without error). Trailblazing cuts a rather rough road initially just to get a pathway through new terrain. Consequently, the path that we are traveling will need more smoothing by others. So we welcome your kindly input just as Priscilla and Aquila “explained to Apollos the way of God more accurately” (Acts 18:26).

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