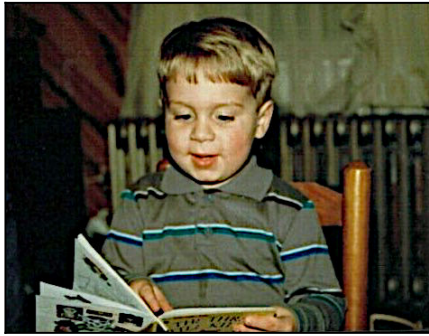


Home Education: It's God's Idea



There are many excellent reasons for choosing to teach your own children at home.

First, there is now incontestable evidence that on average children who are home schooled fare better *academically* than children of either public or private schools. This is not surprising since tutoring has always been recognized to be the best method of education.

Second, home educated children are spared the corrupting environment of the peer-oriented classroom and thus are benefited *socially*. A common myth of our society is that children need to be with other children for extended periods of time to be properly socialized, but this is the exact opposite of the truth. Much time in a peer culture is damaging to children. Socialization is one of the best reasons to home school.

Third, any home schooling family will tell you that one of the greatest benefits of the process is the way that *family bonds* are strengthened. Parents and children grow closer through the shared hours of each day. Siblings develop a new love and respect for one another as they live and learn and work together day by day. These families can overcome the family-fragmenting forces of modern life. They just plain have more time together; and love is spelled t-i-m-e.

Fourth, home educating families prosper *spiritually*. Parents are able to guide their charges in godly paths as they protect them from the immorality and falsehood so prevalent in public schools and teach them the Bible and its application to life. The very process of discipling one's own child results in character growth in both the child and the parent.

As good as all these reasons are, however, the very best reason to choose home education has not been listed yet. But to appreciate the force of this last reason you must first agree to a vitally important premise. So let me run that by you first.

The premise is simply this: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16,17). Or, put another way: "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory

and goodness" (2 Pet. 1:3). Or, finally: "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path" (Ps. 119:105). In other words, in our Lord Jesus and his Word, the Bible, we have all we need for spiritual and moral direction in life. The Scripture is our wholly sufficient guide for what to believe and how to live in ways that please God.

Do you believe that? Do you agree that what is written in the Bible is written to tell us how to live; that when the Word of God addresses any particular aspect of life, it is giving us wisdom to be followed carefully; and that God has good reason for all that he reveals in his Word? If you do, then you are ready to hear the final point.

The best reason for choosing home education is that it is God's revealed plan for raising our children.

The Bible knows no other system of education. God did not prescribe schools for his people; these were invented by others. The pages of Scripture espouse, by precept and example, a process that closely resembles what we call home education.

To grasp God's plan for the raising of children we need to consider what the Scripture says about four important elements of the educational process: the teachers, the method, the content, and the goal.

The Teachers

Throughout the Word it is the parents who are assigned the role of teaching their own children. The primary responsibility rests on the father. God said of Abraham, "I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him" (Gen. 18:19). Paul gave this guidance under the Holy Spirit's inspiration: "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4).

Of course, as the man's helper (Gen. 2:20-23), his wife is also a teacher of the children. "Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching" (Prov. 1:8; cf. 6:20). Even the grandparents are to share in the teaching task: speaking of God's commandments, Moses said to God's people, "Teach them to your children and to their children after them" (Deut. 4:9).

Home education by the parents is highlighted at the very apex of Old Testament revelation. Israel has just heard Moses pronounce the sacred Name: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one" (Deut. 6:4). This is followed immediately by the commandment which Jesus called the "greatest commandment" (Matt. 22:38): "Love the LORD your God with all you heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" (Deut. 6:5). Then comes the climactic charge to the people: "These commandments that I give you today

are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up” (6:6,7). Parents have a solemn obligation to learn God’s Word and teach it to their children.

The mandate for parents to teach their offspring is a perpetual one. “He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children” (Ps. 78:5,6). Each generation should be raised with the expectation of teaching the next.

Beyond the parents, the priests and Levites had a teaching role in the holy community; but even they did not teach children directly apart from the parents. They taught “the men, women and others who could understand” when gathered as a group (Neh. 8:3,7,8).

The Bible, through command and example, presents the parents (and grandparents) as the only teachers of children. While it might seem at least possible, as an exercise of parental prerogative, to delegate the teaching responsibility to others, there is no instance of this in Scripture. (Gal. 4:2 speaks of a child being subject to “guardians and trustees until the time set by his father.” This may have been the practice in the affluent strata of the pagan society which was the cultural backdrop of the Galatian converts. It is not presented as a positive practice in this context, a context which is not addressing how parents should raise children.) Although the bare teaching function might be delegated, the parent-child relationship cannot be delegated. No one can successfully replace the parents as the child’s teacher because no one else is the parent, and it is this special relationship that is central to the success of the educational process—which leads us to the second element of that process.

The Method

Scripture does not even use the word “education” to describe the process of training children for adulthood. That word, as we use it, is freighted with connotations of schooling, academics, and training of the mind—a very narrow Greek/Western concept of training (rationalism views man’s mind as his primary faculty).

Those who are properly informed by a biblical/Hebrew perspective would say that true “education” is discipleship. It is a process of training the whole person, not just the mind. The goal is not a mind stuffed with facts; the goal is a changed person.

The heart is the most important part of a person “for it is the wellspring of life” (Prov. 4:23). The purpose of life is to love God with the whole heart (Deut. 6:5); and this purpose is realized in children as parents have God’s Word in their own hearts and then impress it on their children (6:6,7). Fathers

are to say to their sons, "Lay hold of my words with all your heart; keep my commands and you will live" (Prov. 4:4).

God's method of education is revealed in Deuteronomy 6:7-9. Speaking of God's commandments it says, "Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates." True education occurs any place ("home and road") and any time ("lie down and get up"). The parents are to be the constant companions of their children, teaching them God's view of life at every opportunity. Every child of a godly family will live unceasingly in an environment that is saturated by God's Word, and his parents will be creating that environment.

Since the purpose of education is to love God with the whole heart and to have his commandments lodged in the heart, the method must be one which reaches the heart. *Discipleship*—along-the-road living with the two people to whom the child is closest (his parents)—is God's method for reaching the heart of children.

The method is seen also in Jesus' relationship with the Twelve. He did not enroll them in a classroom course and address only their minds. He chose them "that they might be with him" (Mk. 3:14); and they talked, worked, walked, ate, and slept together for over three years. They were his apprentices. They learned by watching, listening, doing, as Jesus taught them about and modeled for them the life they were to live.

Jesus said, "A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher" (Lk. 6:40). That is the discipleship method: on-the-job, real-life training until the student is like the teacher. And that is the only method of education that results in the changed lives that God is seeking.

Biblical education/discipleship cannot be accomplished within the confines of a classroom. A small part of it could occur there, but its main features require involvement in the real world with real people doing real things. It requires doing work and ministry. It demands character training and learning life skills. It requires spontaneity as well as structure. Teaching can occur in a school, but discipleship can only occur in the context of real life.

Our educational method must reflect a biblical understanding of truth and life. The Greek/Western worldview sees truth as ideas that can be reduced to printed pages and considered in abstraction in a classroom. In the biblical/Hebrew worldview truth is personal (Jesus said, "I am...the truth." Jn. 14:6); and while it can be expressed in the statements of Scripture, it is always connected to life and conduct ("speaking the truth in love," Eph. 4:15). Truth is not only something we can know, it is also something we can and must "do" (1 Jn. 1:6). God's truth is only communicated truly in the context of relationship. God did not just give us the written Word of truth, he gave us his Son and fills us with himself ("If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of

God, God lives in him and he in God.”—1 Jn. 4:15).

God wants truth to fill our children’s minds, but he wants much more. He wants the One whose name is Truth to fill their hearts and shape their lives. That is what discipleship is all about.

In a thoroughly biblical approach to education, the method is as important as the content.

The Content

Most discussions about education dwell upon the content of the curriculum; and whereas the importance of method is often minimized, we should not, in our attempt to balance the discussion, minimize content. It is absolutely critical. Truth has content, and part of education is passing on that content to our children.

What exactly is the content of education for Christian children? Psalm 78 puts it this way: “We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done. He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children...” (vv. 4,5). The Word of God and the works of God are the content of a godly education.

All education should focus upon the Lord God: who he is, what he has said, and what he has done. Fathers are instructed concerning children to “bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). Not the instruction of the world or of mere men, but “of the Lord.”

Study of the Word of God itself is the foundation for all learning since the Word is the source of all wisdom. That is why parents are given the task of impressing God’s commandments on their children at every opportunity (Deut. 6:7-9). In the psalm quoted above, fathers are commanded to teach God’s “statutes” to their children, referring again to the written Word. Obviously, the very words and passages of Scripture and the history and doctrine they contain must be taught diligently and systematically. The Book of books itself must be studied as a worthy object of attention in its own right.

But that is not the only use of the Scriptures. Psalm 119:105 presents one of the broader purposes of the Bible: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.” God’s Word is intended to illuminate the world we live in so that we can walk pleasing to God. The purpose of a light is to shine on an object so that it can be discerned more clearly. Similarly, the Bible is meant to “shine” on anything we encounter in the world so that we can understand it from God’s perspective. This means that beyond studying the Bible itself, we should use the Bible as our lens through which to view any other subject in life.

The second component of study in a godly education is what Psalm 78 calls “the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has

done” (v. 4). To study these works of God we must, of course, begin with the Bible itself which reveals his mighty works of creation and redemption. But this study will lead us beyond the pages of Scripture to the whole wide world that God made and sustains by his power. History, science, geography, law, art, music, mathematics, language—any subject area is a study of the works of God since it is he who created this world and guides the history of men in their scientific, cultural, and civil endeavors.

Each of these subject areas must be approached in the “light” of the Word, if it is to be properly understood. The Bible should not only be a subject in the curriculum, its truths should permeate every other area of study, providing God’s perspective on every subject.

Also, each field of study must be viewed in relationship to the others since creation and history are a seamless fabric of overlapping influences—all under God’s sovereign control. Life in God’s world does not unfold in neat categories. The traditional approach to education which presents a student with a collection of unrelated disciplines is a caricature of the real world. All realms of study find their unity in our Creator and Savior. The best education will present any particular subject in its relationship to other subjects and to the God of truth who gives them all meaning.

That is why many home educators abandon the traditional school-subject approach to teaching in favor of a “unit study” approach which takes into account the inter-relationship of the disciplines. Children thus engage in academic study in the same manner in which they experience the rest of the world—encountering the connectedness of the various elements of life. Such an approach not only respects the nature of the content of education, it also is most compatible with the discipleship method of teaching: learning from real life as it is encountered “along the road” every day.

The Goal

Each of the other elements of the educational process—the teachers, the method, and the content—combine to achieve one essential end. God’s goal for us is to raise children who know, love, and obey Jesus Christ.

The aim of education is a part of the great aim of this age: to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19). For anyone who is a parent, the discipleship mandate begins in the home. He must make disciples of his own children.

Education ought not to be seen as an end in itself. Nor should it be viewed in terms of mere academic or social preparation for life. Knowledge, by itself, is nothing and leads only to pride (“Knowledge puffs up”; 1 Cor. 8:1). We could give our children the very best academic preparation in the world, and only end up making them more effective instruments in the devil’s hands. No, God has something higher in mind.

God did not say: “train a child in what he should know, and when he is old he will not forget it.” He said, “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it” (Prov. 22:6). Education is not just about what a child knows; it is primarily about how he lives.

Understood in its broadest terms, education is character training. God is in the business of transforming people; and he is creating a people who have a living relationship with himself. The beginning of the process is simply to take God seriously in everything—or, as Scripture has it: The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom (Prov. 1:7; 9:10). The end of the process is mature people who know God; and who, knowing him, love him; and who, loving him, obey him in all things.

Christian parents should desire for their children what Paul, imitating the Lord’s own yearnings, wanted for his children in the faith: “My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you...” (Gal. 4:19). The great object of education must be Christ-like men and women.

All the elements of the Bible’s plan for child-training combine to achieve this goal; and each ingredient of the plan is crucial to the outcome.

Replace the parents with strangers or even godly fellow-believers as teachers, and you disrupt the parent-child bond which is God’s chosen channel of grace and influence.

If you choose a sterile classroom full of age peers instead of the rich home-based community environment with its natural variety of ages and conditions; if you choose mass teaching focused on the mind instead of face-to-face discipleship along the path of real life experiences—then you bypass God’s chosen means of reaching the heart of a child.

If you choose teaching which presents academic subject areas in isolation and without a biblical reference point instead of the unity of all truth based on the God of truth and his Word, then you eliminate the means of providing a coherent Christian worldview from which the child can engage the false ideas of the day.

Tamper with any of the facets of God’s revealed plan, and you decrease the prospects that your children will turn out to be godly men and women. Scripture gives us a promise in Proverbs 22:6: our children will not depart from God’s way if we faithfully raise them according to it. Modern Christians have come to doubt the truth of this verse because they are seeing their children fall off the path in such great numbers. But the problem is not God’s plan or his faithfulness. The problem is that we have abandoned his plan in so many ways.

We are back to our foundational premise: the Scripture is our wholly sufficient guide for how to live. Since, by precept and example, it presents a pattern for the process of raising our children, wisdom dictates that we follow that

pattern.

The path of safety and blessing is always that which adheres most closely to the revealed will of God. Home education as we practice it today falls short of the perfect pattern set forth in the Scriptures, but it is certainly a big step in the right direction—because home education is God’s idea.
