

Should I Homeschool? Where do I Begin?



What joy and contentment homeschooling our children have brought to Mike and I as parents. And what a challenge it has been! Homeschooling is hard work! It has required sacrifice and faithfulness. Yet, looking back, I would not do it differently. Homeschooling is wonderful! I look forward to the years ahead homeschooling our children.

I do not believe that homeschooling is for every family. There is a great amount of time and commitment that many parents are unable or unwilling to give. Without seeing homeschooling as having the same time and energy commitment as a full-time job, there will be problems and disasters. Weigh carefully whether or not you are able to give the time required (without resentment).

Homeschooling requires you to have control over your children's behavior. Rebellion and homeschooling don't work together. Teaching a student requires that the student respect you as a teacher and follow your directives. There is not time for temper tantrums, arguments, or passive resistance. All children experience disobedience and disrespect from time to time. But over all, is your child respectful and obedient? Are you able to give directions and have them followed?

Homeschooling works the best when relationships are healthy and happy. Children learn best in a loving environment and thrive under approval and admiration. Children are at their best when they know that their parents are their greatest cheerleader. Do you believe that God has great things ahead for your child? Do you like spending time with your child? Does the thought of being together with

your child all day bring joy or fear? Honestly evaluate yourself before jumping off the safety ledge into the adventure of homeschooling.

Why Homeschool?

The first "basic" of homeschooling is articulating verbally (and possibly in writing too!) why you and your family have chosen to undertake the "homeschooling adventure."

Why is this a "basic?"

Your faithfulness and commitment to homeschooling for the long haul will depend on the strength of your convictions. It will not always be easy or flow smoothly. Knowing why you are homeschooling will help you persevere no matter what circumstances arrive.

Secondly, from relatives, close friends and complete strangers will come the big questions: "Why are you homeschooling?" and "Aren't you worried about their socialization?". Be ready to answer these questions graciously and calmly.

Here are the reasons our family has embarked on the "homeschool adventure."

OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S WORD!

God's Word makes it clear that the responsibility to teach and train their children belongs to parents, not the church, nor the government. You are free to delegate this responsibility to a public or private school but keep in mind that as a parent, you, not the school, have the ultimate job of educating your child. If they do not receive a good education, the blame is on your shoulders. Delegate carefully.

"Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it."
—Proverbs 22:6

"Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."
—Ephesians 6:4

"My son, keep your father's commands and do not forsake your mother's teaching."
—Proverbs 6:20

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the LORD is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commands 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."

–Deuteronomy 6:4-8

Parents are responsible to equip children for the life God has called them to live. They are to train little ones academically, socially, physically and spiritually. Part of a parent's duty to their children includes developing their character, preparing them with practical life skills, teaching them to handle their emotions, and equipping them for long-lasting relationships.

When parents put their children in a public or private school, they are delegating a portion of their children's education to someone else. It does not alleviate their responsibility for their education nor their accountability to God. Their education must still be closely supervised by their parents.

In our home, we decided not to delegate our responsibility to a school but rather to teach our children academics at home. We combine our areas of teaching and training: spiritual truths and character building are interwoven with academic time. Social training takes place as well when we learn to interact as a family in a way that honors God. There is so much to learn! Learning is not restricted to "school hours" but takes place everywhere and any time!

OBEDIENCE TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

"If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him."

God began to make it clear to Mike and I that it was His plan for our family to educate our children at home. He showed us His plan through various means: circumstances, provision of resources and finances, godly counsel, a confirmation in our heart that we were to homeschool, and a workable plan to carry this adventure out in practical ways. But the strongest way God made it clear that it was His heart for us to homeschool was a conviction that grew stronger and stronger every time we prayed about it.

Homeschooling was something we had never heard of before when a book arrived as an order mistake. The book was on homeschooling and I decided to keep and read it. Then we met a few families that homeschooled and were impressed by

the character of their children. When our oldest child was a year old, we went to hear Gregg Harris. We met more homeschooling families. There were several years of prayerful investigation on our part. We looked into curriculum, legal aspects, and support groups. But above all, we sought God. What was His will for our family? We are very pleased that He led us to homeschool. Our family has grown tremendously from it!

THE OPPORTUNITY TO IMITATE JESUS, THE PERFECT TEACHER

“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” —I John 3:2

"Be imitators of God, therefore as dearly loved children."

—Ephesians 5:1

As Christians, we have the glorious hope that one day we will be like Jesus! Wow! In the meantime, we are called to imitate Jesus while we await that wonderful day when we see our dear Lord Jesus face to face!

The best teacher that ever walked the earth was Jesus! Homeschooling gives me an unique opportunity to imitate Jesus! His methods were excellent and creative. Some of Jesus' teaching methods were tried and true--used effectively for centuries! Other methods that Jesus used were very innovative. Like us, Jesus was surrounded by a small group of teachable men and women (ours are younger) that were with him constantly. Like us, Jesus had to repeat lessons over and over again. Like us, He sometimes felt weary and often had his time alone interrupted. Our dear Lord Jesus was a loving and skilled teacher and we would be wise to watch Him closely and learn from Him.

It encourages me so much to know that Jesus understands what I go through. I remind myself that Jesus knows what it's like to be weary, to have to repeat lessons again and again, and have his time interrupted. Not only does Jesus understand, but He handled every situation perfectly. He can give me the wisdom and grace I need with the situations that arise for me as a homeschooling mother. When I keep Jesus in mind as the Perfect Teacher, I am quicker to pray and ask for help as circumstances arise.

Since I became a Christian at age sixteen, I have longed to walk closely with the Lord more than anything else in life. I realize that the more I imitate Him (as well as read the Bible, pray, fellowship, witness, etc.), the closer I will walk with

Him. Homeschooling gives me so many situations to ask myself: "What would Jesus do in this situation?" or "What would Jesus say right now if He were here in person?" Homeschooling gives me so many opportunities to grow spiritually.

When I see in the Bible how Jesus taught, live with and loved his disciples and compare that to myself, I am aware of the discrepancy. I have so far to go and so much to learn. This does not discourage me. Rather it makes me thankful for the Cross and thankful that His grace is sufficient for me and that His power is made perfect in weakness. (II Corinthians). Homeschooling keeps me dependent on God and thankful for His grace--and that's a good place to be!

TO SERVE MY CHILDREN OUT OF LOVE!

"Live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." —Ephesians 5:2

There is a special love that God pours into our hearts when we become parents. Suddenly that little baby's needs become more important than our own. Jesus acknowledges that parents desire to give good, not bad, gifts to their children. (And that God gives better ones!--Matthew 5:9-11) Almost all parents sincerely desire to give their children all the good that life can offer them.

As a mother, I want to give our children the very best that I am capable of giving them. There is much that I am not capable of. I am not brilliant, nor a great athlete, nor an artist, nor a musician, nor wealthy, nor a perfect mother. I stumble and fumble and make the same mistakes more than once!

But in spite all that I cannot do, there is a lot that I can give to my children.

Time: Homeschooling allows me to give a lot of time to my children. We have heard it said that children spell love "T-I-M-E." There is time to laugh together, to cry together, to plan surprises together, to dream together, to walk together, to play together, to work together, to finish projects together, to learn together, to sing together, to pray together, and to talk together.

Homeschooling gives me the opportunity to share my life with my children in an intimate way. I am able to share my heart with them.

Godly Heritage: Homeschooling allows me the opportunity to give my children a godly heritage. They are able to watch me walk with God on a daily basis. They see me learn, grow, stumble, fail, and receive forgiveness. They see God answer prayer, teach us all through His Word, change us from the inside out, provide

for our daily needs, protect us, give us opportunities to minister, send people to love us and remain faithful. God is not an "abstract concept" but the living and intervening Lord of our home. "In this home we serve Jesus!" we often tell our children. More importantly, we try to live for Him each and every day.

Besides watching Mom and Dad (and older sisters) have a personal relationship with God, our children serve God with us. We have daily time of Bible study, prayer, and worship. We also turn to God when situations arise where we need His help!

Most importantly, we introduce them to God and instruct them in the ways of relating to and serving Him! We share the Gospel with them at their level from many different Scripture passages and stories. We lead them to Christ and personal salvation when they are ready to repent and trust Jesus. From the day they are born we train them to live in a way that pleases Jesus. We teach them to have their own personal devotion time. They begin personal devotions before they can read with a toddler picture Bible (telling themselves the story aloud from the pictures), praying simple prayers, and singing simple songs.

Homeschooling allows me to instill godly values in my children. We discover together in God's Word what He sees as important. We have learned that God values relationships, strong families, wisdom, hard work, evangelism, missions, hospitality, obedience, and service among other things. We contrast the world's values (money, fame, self-love, power, romance) with God's values and ask God to change our hearts regularly so that we value what God values.

Another priority in our homeschool is building godly character in our children. Our children are like tender young fruit trees in a garden. We water, fertilize, and prune with tender care. The fruit we expect to see is godly character (love, joy, honesty, integrity, hope, industriousness, kindness, self-control, faith, etc.).

Tutoring: One on one tutoring is considered the most intense and effective teaching method. That is why it is used for children struggling in an academic area or with a learning disability.

Homeschooling allows me to teach one on one. We read. We discuss. There is instant knowledge on my part of my child's grasp of the material. I can also read their interest in a subject from discussions and body language. It is easy to keep their attention on the material and we can go longer on exciting things researching more deeply than our original plan.

Two hours of tutoring is roughly equal to six hours of classroom instruction. This means that school hours at home can be shorter and that more can be learned during those school hours. Our children are then free to pursue other interests, talents, and areas of service.

Individualized Care and Training: Homeschooling allows me to tailor my nurturing style and teaching methods to each of my individual children. Since I have four daughters, I am able to raise them up to be feminine young ladies. I can applaud and cultivate their mothering instincts repudiating the asexual agenda of the public school system. In our home, homemaking is held in high esteem as a wise career choice. We try to relate many careers to the homemaker--"How could she use that educational and career background to be a better homemaker or to bring extra money in with a home business?" I am able to let Jimmy be a man. I want him to be free to be aggressive—conquering and subduing his world. But I also want him to respect others, be a gentleman and control his temper.

Our children have very different personalities. Julianna and Sarah Joy are very social! Katie Beth likes to have a goal and a plan! Jimmy likes action! Sarah Joy always wants to know if we are "going to see anyone extra today?" when we start the schooldays. We enjoy spontaneity, so changing our schedule around or dropping everything for something totally different makes school more fun. Of course, a complete change of plans is seldom appreciated by Katie Beth and she needs some adjustment time to rework the schedule in her mind. I try to stay on schedule and do subjects always in the same order with Katie Beth--she loves that! Learning about the people who made history is more exciting to Julianna than the actual events themselves, so I can help her learn about events by seeing them through the eyes of the people involved. On the other hand with Katie Beth, I am always careful to give her a time frame and we try to learn history chronologically--it's more logical!

There are three distinct ways to learn new information: by seeing it (visual), hearing it (auditory), or "hands-on" learning (kinesthetic). There are many ways to combine these styles to present information. New information presented in a child's strongest learning style can make a big difference. I found this out while trying to teach Julianna the concepts of "first, second, third, etc." in math. Even after rereading the book together (visual), verbally explaining it to her (auditory), and drawing my own illustrations (more visual), she still could not grasp the concept. But when I got out ten small stuffed animals, lined them up and made a game out of putting them in order (first, second, etc.), she was able to grasp the concept and memorize the ordinal numbers in an half hour!

Positive Socialization: Socialization is simply being trained to participate effectively in our society. We want to pass on Biblical values, principles, character, and standards. We want them to learn to interact with other people in a way that pleases and honors God. Sitting in a classroom full of peers does not equip them for the real world. It is a very artificial setting. Instead, I expose my children to all kinds of people in all kinds of real-life settings. This is positive socialization!

THE FINISHED PRODUCT!

"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."
—Hebrews 12:2-3

"Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."
—Philippians 3:13

No. I cannot see my children at the age of twenty-five until they are actually there. But I can imagine and hope and pray. This helps me keep in mind that life is fleeting. These years will go by quickly. What do I actually want to accomplish as a mother? What do I want to impart to my girls? What should my daily and weekly priorities be? I don't want to be so busy with the trivial that I miss out on really living and mothering.

My goal is to raise children who are equipped to be useful in the Kingdom of God. When I keep my eyes on the goal, it motivates me to homeschool because I see homeschooling as a means to an end. Homeschooling gives me more time to pass on wisdom and knowledge to my children as these precious years fly by.

Home and Family Management

The second "basic" of homeschooling is managing your home and family well. Home life and family relationships that are in order and peaceful make a tremendous difference in good fruit resulting from our homeschool efforts. As a full-time homemaker, pastor's wife and mother of five, my life would be full and busy without homeschooling. But adding homeschooling to my active world requires that I be diligent and disciplined in my household and family responsibilities. The smoother

my household flows, the easier it will be to teach academics to my children. When our money is handled wisely and carefully, there will be more to spend on quality homeschooling materials. When my children are obedient, responsive and teachable, behavior problems will not prolong our school hours unnecessarily.

SCHEDULE/ROUTINE:

Some people enjoy a schedule more than others do. If a rigid schedule works for you, then do it! If not, at least come up with a flexible schedule or routine. My schedule does not have times. From wake-up time until lunch time there are things that I accomplish each day and things specific to a certain day of the week. Then from lunch time to dinner time, we flow through a routine. We schedule our heavy academic work on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays. Mondays we also wash,

fold and put away a week's worth of laundry. Wednesday afternoon is church coop. Thursdays, we do history, art and piano with another family. Mondays we also wash, fold and put away a week's worth of laundry. Fridays are for field trips, outings, or catching up on other work for the little ones while the big ones enjoy "Friday classes" which are enrichment opportunities for junior and high-schoolers. Saturday is worship practice and cleaning the house. Sundays are church and resting.

FINANCES:

God honors faithfulness in finances. Tithing, hard work, sticking to your family's personal budget and avoiding debt will bring blessing in time. Larry Burkett has wonderful material on making a budget from a Biblical perspective. Our philosophy of spending has been that if it is God's will for us to have it, He will provide the money or provide the item itself. Sometimes we have not had money for homeschooling materials so we have prayed for God to provide. Sometimes He has sent the money and sometimes we have been given the exact books or materials we need.

CLUTTER/CLEANING:

Clutter is oppressive and dirt can harbor germs. It is worth the extra time and effort to keep your house fairly clean and clutter-free. Be released from perfection. Homeschooling homes are lived in and there has to be some evidence.

We clean Saturday mornings, dividing up the chores among the whole family. We mop, clean bathrooms, dust, vacuum, sweep rooms and porches, scrub the kitchen, straighten and tackle extra jobs. We usually have to vacuum and sweep a few extra times during the week.

To tackle clutter, everyone's bed must be made and room straightened before eating breakfast (This is great motivation!). When the children finish their schoolwork, they put away their school supplies and straighten up their work areas. Then, at the end of each day, right before Daddy comes home, we straighten up the main part of the house, set the table, and run the vacuum if needed. (This usually takes about twenty minutes.)

SCHOOL SUPPLY STORAGE:

This is very important! It can be frustrating to have quality materials that are difficult to get to and use. Every family will come up with a storage plan that will work best for them. Ours involves file cabinets, bookcases, storage drawers, crates, and cabinets. We have a bookcase of literature, a bookcase divided by school subjects, and a bookcase of historical works and historical fiction classified in order from creation to present day. The bookcases are accessible to our children. Two crates in the living room (tucked in corners) store our science and history texts and supplemental material that we all use together (material for the whole year). A large cabinet stores our sewing, arts and crafts supplies. Teaching ideas and materials, workshops notes, and magazines are stored in file cabinets along with folders for each child's finished work and record keeping. Each of the older children have their own storage drawers that contain personal textbooks, workbooks, and unfinished projects. Our storage equipment is out in the open so it is easily accessible. The drawback is that our rooms could never grace the covers of home decorating magazines, but that's okay.

SCHOOLING AREAS:

It is not necessary to have a separate room for schooling although that can be a blessing. We do most of our reading aloud and discussing on the living room couch and love seat. The children do seat work at the kitchen table. Yes, they have desks, but they prefer the table. We keep a CD player in the kitchen so they can listen to CDs during lunch.

OBEDIENCE/RESPECT:

To teach someone requires that the person respects the teacher and will respond to the teacher's directives and assignments. Rebellious children (even your own) will be very difficult and discouraging to teach. It is worth the time and effort to put aside academics and concentrate on character, obedience and discipline in our children. Teachable and responsive children are a joy to teach!

We need to examine our life on a regular basis to see if it is a life worthy of respect. And to see if we are modeling respect toward our husband and other authorities in our life.

Choosing Curriculum

Curriculum can have a big impact on how well you and your children enjoy homeschooling and how easily material is learned. Curriculum can also be a big investment financially. Here are some steps to making that important decision.

STEP #1 PRAY!

God created you and your children. He has a plan for your home. He knows what materials would work well with your family and what lessons you need to learn. His heart is that we would represent Him to the whole world and be good stewards of His entire creation. Do not leave out prayer when making curriculum decisions. Ask God to guide you to the right curriculum choices and to speak wisdom through other people.

I set aside a day at the end of each school year. The previous year is evaluated. Where is each child excelling and where do they need to grow or be challenged? Where do we need to grow as parents and teachers? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the past year? We spend lots of time praying for our children and the upcoming year. We ask God for discernment and wisdom and then begin to plan the year ahead.

STEP #2 EVALUATE SELF AND CHILDREN!

What works for one family may not work for another family. We are all so different in our learning styles, teaching styles, personalities, ages, and genders. All these influence what curriculum will work best. Not only who we are, but what season in life we are in can influence our curriculum choices. I enjoy preparing and teaching unit studies but with a baby and a toddler following nine months of a difficult pregnancy, I don't have the energy to research and plan. However, a year from now, there's a good possibility we'll be right in the middle of an exciting unit study!! God plans the seasons of my life and I don't worry or feel inadequate when I have to make changes and adaptations to my curriculum.

STEP #3 RESEARCH!

Read curriculum guides (such as Cathy Duffy's or Mary Pride's). Talk to different homeschooling moms. Ask what materials they use and why? Ask them what they feel the positives and negatives are about these materials (nothing is perfect!). Try to put yourself in the position of using her materials. Can you see it? Does it fit? **Homeschooling catalogs and ads can be helpful but realize that they are trying to sell their products.** The same can be true of workshops and seminars given by the author of curriculum.

Avoid jumping to conclusions. Avoid grabbing the first materials you hear about or are exposed to. Investigate a wide variety of materials and talk to women who use different materials from others you've talked to.

STEP #4 SEE IT! HANDLE IT!

If possible, see the material before you buy it. This is what is wonderful about state conventions with all the vendors. If your research is done beforehand, you can arrive with a list of materials you are interested in. I always make a list of possible choices and carry it with me, making the final choices later.

STEP #5 DISCUSS WITH HUSBAND AND MAKE FINAL DECISION!

Some husbands want to be involved in the entire process and other delegate purchasing materials to their wives. Mike delegates the wise purchase of materials to me, although he is willing to discuss things with me if I am having a difficult time deciding on a book. He gives me a budget and I enjoy the researching and planning. But before I purchase materials, I sit down with him again and ask for any input. This safeguards me from emotional or impulsive decisions. And I find that Mike always has a perspective that is new and helpful.

STEP #6 PURCHASE MATERIALS!

May God bless and direct you as you begin one of the greatest adventures of a lifetime: homeschooling!