



Educating the WholeHearted Child, 4th Edition

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The Case for Christian Homeschooling

We hope you will enjoy this free PDF extract from our book, *Educating the WholeHearted Child*. This introductory material is intended to help new homeschooling families, or those considering homeschooling, understand the biblical, personal, and practical reasons for choosing the Christian homeschooling lifestyle.

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Whole Heart Ministries | *Keeping Faith in the Family*

Christian Homeschooling: Taking a Step of Faith toward Home

It's Your Decision

“We homeschool.” Those two words change everything. Deciding that you will homeschool will change the course of your life and your children’s lives. It’s not overly dramatic to say that it is a decision of epic proportions, so make sure you make it for the right reasons. Whatever else may influence your decision to homeschool, one reason will become an anchor in your heart—the conviction that, before God and by faith, you know being at home with your children is the right thing for you and your family.

When you declare your independence from conventional schooling and establish a new outpost of personal and academic freedom within the walls of your home, we want to assure you that you can do that with faith and confidence about your decision. Nonetheless, whatever your current homeschooling experience may be, the task of actually home educating can generate questions about methods, materials, and self-confidence: How can I be sure my children will learn all they need to know? What curriculum should I use? What will we do all day? Can I really do this? What do I do now?!

Home or School?

It is at this point that many new, and even veteran, homeschoolers can begin looking in the wrong direction for answers. Having chosen to be at home with their children, they look outside the home and try to pattern their homeschooling after a traditional classroom model. They fall back on the default mode of teaching and learning that they grew up with—classrooms, teachers, textbooks, and curricula. But a home is not a school! Schools of all kinds serve their purposes in society and have contributed beyond measure to civilization. However, despite their value, school is not a divinely established institution like family, government, and the church. From a biblical perspective, home is the primary institution designed and provided by God in Scripture for training children and young adults. When you homeschool, you are affirming that divine design for home and family.

A home-centered, wholehearted approach to learning is a biblical lifestyle, not an institutional experiment in education. It is a renewed expression of life and learning located within the trusted biblical institution of the home. As you move toward it in faith, you might hear echoes of God’s words in Isaiah, “Behold, I will do something new” (43:19), or Jeremiah’s invitation to walk in the “ancient paths” and the “good way” of God (6:16). Families who let go of their “old school” ways—formal classrooms, graded curricula, and tedious textbooks—find a new way in the home, a God-designed dynamic learning environment, full of real books, real life, and real relationships. This book is all about finding that “good way” of seeing and thinking about home education.

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I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

— 3 John 1:4

We proclaim Christ, admonishing and teaching our children with all wisdom, so that we may present all of our children whole and complete in Christ. To this end we labor as parents, struggling with all the energy Christ provides through his Spirit, which so powerfully works in us as fathers and mothers.

— Colossians 1:28-29 (adapted from NIV text)

We know truth, not only by the reason, but also by the heart.

— Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), French scientist, philosopher, and theologian, from *Pensées*

“On the other hand, our children naturally loved reading and being read to, talking about their own insights and ideas, learning through real life, and having time to explore and learn on their own. We knew instinctively this was how God intended our children to live and learn. It was the liberation of learning in our home!

*A little Learning is a dang'rous Thing;
Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian Spring:
There shallow Draughts intoxicate the Brain,
And drinking largely sobers us again.*

— Alexander Pope (1688-1744), English poet, from “Essay on Criticism”

He is educated who knows how to find out what he doesn't know.

— Georg Simmel (1858-1918), German philosopher

The Liberation of Learning

Your home can and should be a warm, vibrant place where your children love to learn as freely and as naturally as they love to play. In fact, education should be the natural activity of every Christian home. That is what God intended in his design for home and family. For many homeschooling families, though, the tyranny of textbooks and the rigid rules of school have stolen the joy of homeschooling. The freedom that homeschooling should bring is held captive by an artificial formality and the constant demands of age-graded curricula. Families with the right intentions become enslaved to the wrong educational methods—methods designed for human institutions, not for the home.

That was briefly our experience, too, until we realized that dry textbooks and formal curricula could too easily become artificial means of education. Rather than unleashing learning potential, they often held it back. For us as parents, the common tools of conventional classroom schooling created a false security that we were doing enough and a false confidence that our children were really learning. For our children, those tools created an unhealthy dependence on formal methods of learning and a misguided distinction between learning and living. We began to see how conventional classroom curricula diluted the wonder and joy of real learning and too often turned it into a tedious and burdensome task unrelated to real life at home. This was not how God intended children to learn and grow! On the other hand, our children naturally loved reading and being read to, talking about their own insights and ideas, learning through real life, and having time to explore and learn on their own. We knew instinctively this was how God intended our children to live and learn. It was the liberation of learning in our home!

Cooperating with God's Design

Since then we have been fully invested in and championing a home-centered, wholehearted approach to learning using real books and real life. Every day we see more clearly how natural and normal it is. For our family, it has been more than just finding the best way to home educate—choosing one out of many other good ways. It has been more like finding the right way—the commonsense way that we sensed must be out there all along. At last we feel like we are actually cooperating with God's design for our home and children. There is great freedom in knowing that what we are doing is going along with a pattern that is already built into the very fabric and rhythm of life. We have come to the place where we can honestly say that there is no distinction in our homeschool between home and school—we are living to learn and learning to live, all at the same time. That is what should happen in a home.

You may ask how we know we are cooperating with God's design when the term “homeschooling” is never mentioned in Scripture. It's because home education is not our primary goal—home nurture and discipleship are, and home education is simply the natural extension of those biblical priorities. If we are nurturing the life of Christ in our children's spirits to want to know and follow him and we are discipling our children to be used by God in his church and kingdom work, then that process will also naturally include preparing them intellectually to be thoughtful, productive, and competent adults in the world in which they will live, work, and raise a family. Since biblical nurture and discipleship are relational processes, then education must be a relational process, too.

When we follow God’s biblical patterns and principles for home, the natural and normal fruit should be not just spiritual growth and maturity, but intellectual growth and maturity as well. Scripture suggests no other process or institution for raising and training children—only the family. Your home is a dynamic living and learning environment designed by God for the very purpose of raising your children to become mature, useful disciples of Jesus. When you begin to understand the biblical priority and the spiritual dynamic of home and family, you will begin to find a freedom you never knew was possible in your home education. It is not God’s design for a school to be the center of your children’s lives for twelve years. The purpose of this book is to help you discover the full dynamic of wholehearted learning so you can see how your home, by God’s design, will actually work for you in nurturing, discipling, and educating your children.

The WholeHearted Learning model is not just a new perspective on your home and family, though; it is also a new perspective on your children. Not only did God design home to be a living and learning environment, but he also designed and prepared your children to learn naturally within that environment. Children made in God’s image are prewired to be intelligent, creative, and curious. No matter what you do (or don’t do!), God has already put within your children the drive to question, explore, discover, and learn. They do not learn because you enable them to make sense of things; they make sense of things because they are able to learn! Your role as a home-educating parent, then, is to provide a rich and lively living and learning environment in which your children can exercise their God-given drive to learn and then to biblically train and instruct your children within the natural context of your home and family life. It’s that simple.

WholeHearted Learning

WholeHearted Learning, as described in the rest of this book, is not meant to be an educational program that you implement and maintain, as though we have the only right way to homeschool. We are very comfortable saying that what is right for one family may not be right for another. How we express WholeHearted Learning in our home will be, and in fact should be, different from how you express it in yours. Our aim in this book is not to tell you what we think is right for your family. Only you can determine that. We don’t even want to tell you what books you should read to your children at what age or in what order. You are the best judge of what books your children should read and when. Neither have we any desire to become yet one more curriculum.

You don’t need to become dependent on others telling you what to do, whether it is us or someone else. God has given you all you need to train and educate your children at home—it’s in real books, real life, and real relationships. We want to equip you and other home-educating parents to homeschool with confidence in yourself, in your home, and in God, with a minimum of curricular safety nets. We simply want to come alongside your family and share some of the things we have learned. You can take it from there.

Our goal in this book is not complicated—it is to give you a larger vision for what God can do in your home and to provide a model of home education that gives you the freedom to follow the Holy Spirit for what your children need most. WholeHearted Learning is simply cooperating with God’s eternal design for your family, home, and children. It is really just an old model with a new face that is bringing freedom to home-educating families. May you find that freedom in your home.

“Our goal in this book is not complicated—it is to give you a larger vision for what God can do in your home and to provide a model of home education that gives you the freedom to follow the Holy Spirit for what your children need most. WholeHearted Learning is simply cooperating with God’s eternal design for your family, home, and children.

Therefore, teaching, talk and tale, however lucid or fascinating, effect nothing until self-activity be set up; that is, self-education is the only possible education; the rest is mere veneer laid on the surface of a child’s nature.

— Charlotte Mason, *Towards a Philosophy of Education*, 1925

“WholeHearted Learning will radically change the way you view your home, your children, and how God meant for you to live and learn. Even more, you will sense the presence of God in your home in a fresh new way. If you seek him in your home and homeschool, you will find the reward of his blessing.

All your sons will be taught by the LORD, and great will be your children's peace.

— Isaiah 54:13

I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

— 3 John 4

Keeping Faith in Your Family

There are many doors of entry into the world of Christian homeschooling. We'll look at a number of them in this book, but our goal is to help you understand the adventure of faith and family that lies behind the WholeHearted Learning door. We are motivated by God to point you toward that path, but not just because we love homeschooling and want you to experience the same joy and fulfillment it has brought to our family. That would be enough for a book like this, but we're motivated by a vision for family that is bigger than just homeschooling: We want to encourage and equip you to build a biblical home for your children. You have taken a giant step of faith toward home by choosing, or even just considering, homeschooling, and we have written this book to affirm and support your decision. But we also want to strengthen your faith to see the strategic and eternal importance of your home in God's plan. Our vision is to help you keep faith in your family. That's really what *Educating the WholeHearted Child* is all about. We want you to be a truly faith-based and faith-building homeschooling family!

In the rest of this book, we will look at four key components that define the WholeHearted Learning homeschool approach: home, learning, methods, and living. In the “Home” section, you'll learn why Christian homeschooling must be built upon the foundation of a Christian home. You'll learn about biblical and practical reasons for homeschooling and then review the three biblical priorities of building a Christian home—home nurture, home discipleship, and home education. In the “Learning” section, you'll find out what makes WholeHearted Learning unique as a model for Christian homeschooling, how to organize your home for learning so it will work for you, how to understand your children's learning styles, and how to think about the young adult years. In the “Methods” section, you will be inundated with ideas and suggestions for how to implement the WholeHearted Learning model in a wide range of subject areas and topics. In the “Living” section, you will gain insight on how to live the homeschooling life with grace and faith. You'll find helpful suggestions for planning, organization, support, and family life. Finally, in the “Resources” section at the end of the book you will find lists, information, and forms you can use.

The writer of Hebrews said, “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him” (Hebrews 11:6). You have taken a step of faith toward home, but you will need to remind yourself daily that faith doesn't stop when the homeschooling begins. If you get caught up in the works of curricula, workbooks, and age/grade demands, you'll soon wonder what faith has to do with homeschooling. However, we are convinced that when you truly liberate learning in your home with the ideas and principles in this book and you begin to taste the fruits of homeschooling by faith, you'll never want to go back to old-school ways of learning. WholeHearted Learning will radically change the way you view your home, your children, and how God meant for you to live and learn. Even more, you will sense the presence of God in your home in a fresh new way. If you seek him in your home and homeschool, you will find the reward of his blessing.

So open the door into WholeHearted Learning and begin to explore and experience the joy of living and learning at home. We hope you find in it all that your heart is hoping for in your decision to take a step of faith toward home and homeschooling.

The Christian Home: Learning to Be at Home with Christ

Home Is Where Their Hearts Are

It has often been said that there is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every person that can be filled only by God. However, we believe there is also a home-shaped vacuum in the heart of every child that can be filled only by a biblical, godly home. In the same way that we seek after God until we find him, children will seek after the kind of home and family life that they instinctively desire, even though they are too young to do anything about it. Every child bears the image of God, their Creator, in their soul. Since the ideal of a godly home and family was part of God's original creation before the Fall and an expression of his creative nature, we believe it is etched in every child's heart. Your child is made for and naturally longs for the home that you can provide. If a child finds that kind of home, the vacuum will be filled and they will be more likely to find contentment and fulfillment that will shape the rest of their lives; if they do not find it, they will be more likely to seek to fill that vacuum with substitutes and counterfeits, and that futile search will shape the rest of their restless lives.

There is a reason that Moses, before Israel crossed the Jordan to enter the Promised Land, exhorted all of the people (Deuteronomy 6:1-9) to love God with their whole beings, to have his commandments on their hearts, and to diligently teach them to their children at rest and at work, in the evening and in the morning. (In colloquial Hebrew, he meant everywhere and all the time.) There was a God- and home-shaped vacuum in the heart of every child in Israel that needed to be filled with God's reality and God's truth. That, and only that, would create a generation that would find its fulfillment and purpose in God. Moses was writing the prescription for the future health of Israel. Unfortunately, the people of Israel did not love God wholeheartedly or have his truth on their hearts, and they soon forgot Moses' admonition and even Joshua's "as for me and my household" challenge to serve God after they were in the land (Joshua 24:15). It should not be surprising that the next generation did not know God, forsook him, and served other gods (Judges 2:10-13). The vacuum was never filled in the hearts of their children, who grew up and filled them with substitutes and counterfeits.

We must not underestimate the importance of building a godly, Christian home. We are no different from the parents of Moses' day, and his exhortation is just as fresh for us today as it was for those undoubtedly well-meaning parents 3,500 years ago. Though we are not building a physical nation, we are nonetheless building a spiritual one, and the health of the future body of Christ and his kingdom will be affected by whether or not Christian parents heed the admonition of Moses concerning our children and of the Apostle Paul to "bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). We still must choose whom to serve and to build our homes for Christ.

"Since the ideal of a godly home and family was part of God's original creation before the Fall and an expression of his creative nature, we believe it is etched in every child's heart. Your child is made for and naturally longs for the home that you can provide.

Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

— Deuteronomy 6:4-9 (NASB)

...choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve ... But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.

— Joshua 24:15

You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.

— St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430), Christian theologian and philosopher, from *Confessions*, ca. 397

“Let me state what should be obvious, but isn’t: Christian activities and interests do not make a home Christian. A Christian home is never defined by what the children are doing; it is defined by what the parents are doing.

Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it.

— Psalm 127:1a (NASB)

Parents! The work entrusted to us is holier than we know. The precious instrument, so delicate, so wonderfully made, so marred by sin already, and so exposed to its power, is of such inconceivable worth. To take charge of an immortal soul, to train a will for God and eternity, surely we ought to shrink from it. But we cannot. If we are parents, the duty is laid upon us. But, thank God! Sufficient grace is prepared and promised, too. If we do but give up our home and our life to God for Him to come in and rule, He will Himself take possession, and by the gentle influence of His Holy Spirit bow their will to Himself.

— Rev. Andrew Murray, *The Children for Christ*, 1887

It ought to be so, in every well-ordered home, that a child can find more pleasure at home than away from home. ... Wiser parents secure to their children such home amusements as cannot be indulged in to the same advantage outside of that home.

— H. Clay Trumbull, *Hints on Child-Training*, 1890

Three Priorities of a Christian Home

Every Christian parent will readily affirm that their children are being raised in a Christian home. Probe a little deeper, though, and you’ll find that often what they really mean is that their children are being raised in a Christian culture. Let me state what should be obvious, but isn’t: Christian activities and interests do not make a home Christian. A Christian home is never defined by what the children are doing; it is defined by what the parents are doing. Your child could study the Bible every day, listen only to Christian music, watch only Christian videos, read missionary biographies, know a zillion memory verses, and never miss Sunday School or Bible Club, yet still not live in a Christian home. Simply deciding as a Christian parent to homeschool your children does not mean they will be raised in a Christian home. You can bring your children home for the right reasons, but without the right biblical perspective you might be just adding another activity to their lives and to yours. As good as homeschooling can be, it’s only part of the picture.

A Christian home is one in which the parents purposefully keep Jesus Christ at the center of every area of family life. You choose to build your house upon the rock of Christ and his words and then to bring up your children “in the training and instruction of the Lord.” That is why this book is about much more than just homeschooling; it is about building a Christian home. Even though most of the book is about home education, you cannot really understand that priority without understanding it as one of the three biblical priorities that we believe define a Christian home: home nurture, home discipleship, and home education. Each of these three priorities builds upon the one before it and supports the one following it. Each is necessary if you are committed to becoming a Christian homeschooling family in a well-balanced Christian home. Each is critical for shepherding, shaping, and strengthening your child for God.

HOME NURTURE: Shepherding Your Child’s Spirit to Long for God

Home nurture is bringing the life of Christ into your home. Many Christian parents mistakenly believe this is accomplished only by adopting a Christian lifestyle. While certainly part of the process, the heart of home nurture is bringing the living Christ into all that you do through the life of the Holy Spirit and through the living and active Word of God. A Christian lifestyle alone might cause your children to long for Christianity, but only regular exposure to the living God will cause them to long for Christ. When you understand the power of home nurture, you realize you are shepherding your children’s hearts and planting seeds of longing for the living God. You are giving them life.

HOME DISCIPLESHIP: Shaping Your Child’s Heart to Live for God

Home discipleship is the process of leading your children to follow and serve Christ as Lord. It is one thing to know the language and lifestyle of Christianity, but it is quite another to know Christ. Home discipleship is how you as a parent not only instruct your children about Christ but also model the life of Christ for them and lead them into a relationship and daily walk with him. You do that by studying Scripture together, reading and discussing inspiring and challenging Christian books, and getting involved in church and community ministry as a family. It is the process of walking with your children on God’s path of life until they begin to walk that path on their own with God.

HOME EDUCATION: Strengthening Your Child’s Mind to Learn for God

Home education, then, is the natural outgrowth of home nurture and home discipleship. Your goal is not just an educated child, good SAT scores, and college or even a career with a good salary. Those may be fruits of your efforts, but your overriding goal should be to raise spiritually mature children who have both the will and the skill to learn and the desire and ability to keep learning. That is the goal of WholeHearted Learning. Your goal in home education should be to raise well-rounded, spiritually grounded, truth-founded Christian children whose goal in life is to make a difference for the kingdom of God, whatever life path they choose. You’re actually raising future Christian adults.

It’s important to understand, though, that there is no biblical formula for building a Christian home. We can define the principles that we believe provide the major building blocks of a Christian home, but like everything else in the Christian life, how you express and live out those principles is all by faith. At its simplest, it is really just a relational process of loving God and loving your children. In fact, like the Christian life, most of the process of building a Christian home is simply a matter of walking daily in the power of the Holy Spirit, praying for wisdom, and stepping out in faith. That is what will define your home as a Christian home—that you, the parents, with God’s help, are nurturing, discipling, and educating your children at home for Christ.

Home for Good, Home for God

When you decide to keep or bring your children home for good, you are saying two things: (1) that your home is where they should be and (2) that your home is a source of goodness in their lives. You don’t have to look very long or hard at the state of culture to see a rapid deterioration of truth, values, and morality. You rightly worry about so many negative influences that could lead your precious children away from God’s goodness and grace and even away from you. Home is a place, by God’s design, where you can shield them from those negative influences, protect their innocence, and preserve the good in their hearts and minds. Home is good, but that’s only half the solution.

When you also bring your children home for God, you are saying two more things: (1) that your home will give God the most undistracted access to their hearts and minds and (2) that your home will give you the greatest freedom to influence them for God for their entire childhood. When your children are home, they are in the best place to experience the presence of God in their lives, either directly in a childlike-faith kind of way under your guidance or indirectly through watching, listening to, and learning from your own relationship with God. You can limit negative and unnecessary influences that would distract them from God, and you have complete freedom to speak God’s love, grace, and truth into their lives without competition from voices that do not share your convictions. Bringing your children home for good keeps out the negative influences that could lead them away from God’s path of life, and bringing them home for God puts in the positive influences that will keep them on the path of life with God.

This book is mostly about home education. But we want to help you see that the home life you are seeking is also about home nurture and home discipleship. When all three of those priorities come together in one place in your home, you’ll be able to say with confidence that you brought your children home for good and home for God.

“Bringing your children home for good keeps out the negative influences that could lead them away from God’s path of life, and bringing them home for God puts in the positive influences that will keep them on the path of life with God.

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

— Ephesians 6:4

How many parents there are ... who are readier to provide playthings for their children than to share the delights of their children with those playthings; readier to set their children at knowledge-seeking, than to have a part in their children’s surprises and enjoyments of knowledge-attaining; readier to make good, as far as they can, all losses to their children, than to grieve with their children over those losses. And what a loss of power to those parents as parents, is this lack of sympathy with their children as children.

— H. Clay Trumbull, *Hints on Child-Training*, 1890

“It is not our intention to suggest that there is a definable or defensible doctrine or theology of homeschooling in the Bible. However, Scripture is filled with principles and truths that inform, undergird, suggest, reflect, and reinforce homeschooling beliefs and practices.

Your statutes are wonderful; therefore I obey them. The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple. I open my mouth and pant, longing for your commands. Turn to me and have mercy on me, as you always do to those who love your name. Direct my footsteps according to your word; let no sin rule over me. Redeem me from the oppression of men, that I may obey your precepts. Make your face shine upon your servant and teach me your decrees. Streams of tears flow from my eyes, for your law is not obeyed.

— Psalm 119:129-136

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

— Hebrews 4:12-13

Homeschooling by the Book

As *Educating the WholeHearted Child* grew from workshop and seminar notes into its first incarnation in 1994, it became clear to us very early on that this was not going to be a “passionate defense of homeschooling as an alternative education” kind of book. We were never driven by the need to marshal all the evidence to prove that homeschooling is a valid educational alternative or to argue why it is more desirable than its public and private counterparts. Frankly, many other writers have done a much better job of making those kinds of arguments than we can or will. We simply assumed the validity and desirability of homeschooling from the beginning. We realized that what we were writing was not just about why to choose homeschooling over other more conventional educational options but even more about why to choose homeschooling because it is the fullest expression of a biblical Christian family lifestyle. Rather than being the discovery of something new, we saw homeschooling as the recovery of something old—the recovery of the biblical home as God had designed it to be his primary institution for spreading his righteousness from one generation to the next. Rather than writing about homeschooling by the numbers, as though there were some simple formula for success, we were writing about homeschooling by the Book and the challenge to live by faith by the biblical design, principles, and vision of a wholehearted Christian home.

You will find some content in this chapter and throughout the book that sounds like a defense of homeschooling, but in reality it is there to provide insight and perspective that you can use to gain confidence as a Christian homeschooling parent that what you are doing is God’s will for your family and is a sound biblical choice for building a Christian home. If you think all you need is a simple pro/con analysis of homeschooling, public schooling, and private schooling so you can pick the one with the most plus marks or the highest score, then this book might be somewhat frustrating unless you’re willing to add all the biblical and spiritual arguments into your analysis chart. We wrote this book to give Christian homeschooling families not just a reasoned justification for their choice for bringing their children home but a truly biblical vision and foundation for it. We are convinced that homeschooling is a movement of God in our times, and our heart is to spread that vision for Christian homeschooling to other families.

It is not our intention to suggest that there is a definable or defensible doctrine or theology of homeschooling in the Bible. However, Scripture is filled with principles and truths that inform, undergird, suggest, reflect, and reinforce homeschooling beliefs and practices. What it teaches, admonishes, and illustrates about children, parents, home, and family is consistent with biblically based expressions of Christian homeschooling, such as the WholeHearted Learning model. When all of the relevant scriptures are taken as a whole and taken seriously, it is difficult to deny their affirmation of Christian home education as a major component of the fullest expression of a Christian home.

The rest of this chapter is a suggestive, but certainly not exhaustive, collection of scriptures you can consider as confirmations of your choice to homeschool your children. Each page represents a different perspective on why homeschooling is a biblical choice for your family. You can study each page individually or discuss it as a couple or family. Some of the scriptures are specific, others more general. Let the Word of God direct your heart as you consider making homeschooling a part of your Christian home.

Ten Good Biblical Reasons for Homeschooling

1. Homeschooling best reflects the Old Testament model for family that is closest to God’s original design.

Deuteronomy 5:16, 6:4-9; Psalm 78:1-8; Psalm 127:3-5

2. Homeschooling best reflects the New Testament principles of Christian home and family roles and relationships.

Ephesians 6:1-4; Titus 2:3-5; 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12

3. Homeschooling allows the greatest opportunity for emphasizing the Word of God in a child’s life.

2 Timothy 3:16-17; Hebrews 4:12-13; 1 Thessalonians 2:13

4. Homeschooling allows the greatest opportunity for building wisdom and discernment in a child’s life.

Proverbs 1:1-9; Matthew 7:24-27; James 1:5-8

5. Homeschooling allows the greatest opportunity for strategic discipleship influence in a child’s life.

Luke 6:40; Matthew 28:18-20; Colossians 2:6-7; 2 Timothy 2:2

6. Homeschooling provides the best setting for personalized learning through natural, biblical relationships.

Philippians 4:8-9; 2 Timothy 3:14-15; 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12

7. Homeschooling provides the best setting for self-motivated learning through reading and real books.

Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1; 2 Timothy 4:13

8. Homeschooling provides the best setting for dynamic learning through exposure to real-life experiences.

James 1:2-4, 19-27; Proverbs

9. Homeschooling provides the best setting for discovering and developing spiritual gifts and personal skills and talents.

1 Peter 4:10-11; Colossians 3:17; 2 Timothy 1:6-7

10. Homeschooling is the best way to live out the biblical picture of walking with your children on God’s path of life until they walk it on their own.

Proverbs 4:1-19, 22:6; John 14:6; Ephesians 5:1-2

NOTE: The scriptures listed for the ten points are meant to be suggestive only, not exhaustive. There are many more scriptures that could be added to each point.

“Rather than being the discovery of something new, we saw homeschooling as the recovery of something old—the recovery of the biblical home as God had designed it to be his primary institution for spreading his righteousness from one generation to the next.

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 Timothy 3:16-17

I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

— John 12:24-26

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.

— Matthew 16:24-27

Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, "This fellow began to build and was not able to finish." Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.

— Luke 14:28-33

Counting the Cost Before You Begin

Christianity is not neutral. Neither is Christian home education. There is always a cost to accepting the cross, whether it is in your career, marriage, lifestyle, family, or your homeschool. If you decide to keep or bring your children home, you will have to make some sacrifices—there will be a cost. However, the temporal and eternal benefits in your family's life will be worth the sacrifices you will make.

Home education is a ministry of discipleship with much the same concerns as Jesus addressed. You are building your child into a disciple, so you must be committed to finishing what you start. You are heading into a battle, so you must be prepared to face and fight that battle wisely. Whether building or battling, you are taking up the cross for the sake of your children, and the cross always has a cost. Before you take the step into Christian home education, be sure you have honestly counted the cost.

The Cost of Ministry (John 12:24-26)

Am I willing to minister to my children...to become a servant like Jesus, giving up my own life for my children?

Christian home education is a ministry of discipleship and education to your children. It is a powerful biblical way for you to "bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord." For ministry-minded Christian parents, home education is not simply an educational alternative. Rather, it is an issue of obedience and submission to God's will for their family. Home education is the natural and logical extension of what God, from the beginning, designed the family to be and to do.

The Cost of Lifestyle (Matthew 16:24-27)

Am I willing to accept, along with the joys and blessings, the limitations and sacrifices of the homeschooling lifestyle?

Home education will change your life...literally. The good news is that you will be blessed because of it. The not-so-good news is that you will have to make sacrifices. To be a successful home-educating family, you must be ready to continually, and sometimes radically, adjust your lifestyle to the realities of home education. It will impact every area of your life: home life, church involvement, leisure time, income, adult social life, your children's friendships, housekeeping, and more. It is not small change.

The Cost of Commitment (Luke 14:28-33)

Am I willing to take a step of faith, trusting God to provide and intending in my heart to persevere in that decision?

Home education is not something you casually fit into your calendar or make room for in your schedule. It is a commitment you make to God and to your family that will require perseverance, energy, and patience. You cannot buy a homeschooling kit that will make you instantly and easily successful. It is a long-term learning process, both for you and for your children. Only a prayerful, deliberate commitment before God will sustain you through the difficulties and challenges you will face in that process.

Be Sure It Is God's Will for Your Family

If you have counted the cost, then you are ready to decide if Christian home education is God's will for your family. Be sure that your decision is a matter of conviction that has come from earnestly seeking God and hearing him speak to your heart through his Word. If home education is not a matter of faith for you, then you very likely will not last as a Christian home educator. If it is a matter of God's will for you, then step out in faith, without doubting, and do it (James 1:2-8). God will honor your faith and enable you to do his will.

The pages that follow contain some selected scriptures to help you gain biblical perspective and insight as you seek to discern God's will concerning home education for you and your family. Listen to and carefully consider what God has to say to you about your children's Christian training, home life, and education. If you're not sure about what it means to know God's will for your life, first take some time to consider the scriptures in the sidebar and the biblical insights below.

God's will is not something hidden that needs to be found; it is something revealed that waits to be done.

The Holy Spirit — The first step in knowing God's will is to know Christ as your personal Savior and to be filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives us the mind of Christ. You cannot know and do God's will if you are walking in the flesh. You must walk in the Spirit. (Romans 8:5-8; 1 Corinthians 2:11-16; Galatians 5:16; 1 Peter 4:6)

Stewardship — In the case of home education, God's will is mostly a matter of stewardship: What is the best stewardship of the home and children that God has entrusted to you? Regardless of your feelings or circumstances, Scripture calls you to be a good steward or manager of all God has entrusted to your care. Your home and children are certainly among your most valuable possessions in this life. (Romans 12:1-2; 1 Timothy 6:17-19)

Obedience — What is God saying to you through his Word? Are you sensing the conviction of the Holy Spirit in the area of becoming a more godly parent? Are there direct commands of Scripture concerning your children that you need to obey? If you sense God's leading in your life, it will become an issue of obedience. (John 14:15-17)

Discernment — Determining God's will is primarily the exercise of godly discernment concerning the choices and decisions you make. God's Word and his Spirit are his means to help you develop spiritual discernment and wisdom. The more you study the Word of God and walk in the Spirit, the more discerning you will become. (Philippians 1:9-10)

Prayer — Doing God's will always involves persistent prayer—asking God for wisdom, discernment, and direction. As God speaks to you through his Word, you speak to him in prayer about what he is saying to you. That ongoing prayer relationship is essential to the process of decision making. (Philippians 4:6-7)

Wise Counsel — God will often speak through other godly, wise Christians to make his will clear to you—to clarify confusion, affirm a conviction, or confirm a decision you have made. Seek out the insights of trusted friends, godly homeschoolers, and wise counselors. Ask them to pray for you. Listen to their counsel. (Proverbs 15:22)

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. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.

— James 1:5-6

Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.

— Ephesians 5:15-17

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

— Proverbs 3:5-6

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

— Matthew 6:33-34

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

— Romans 12:2

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.

— Matthew 7:24-25

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

— Galatians 6:7-9

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

— Matthew 6:19-21

I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

— Philippians 4:11-13

Biblical Principles to Consider

Renew your mind. (Romans 12:1-2)

Most people's thinking about education is influenced and shaped by, and often conformed to, the philosophies and thinking of the world. Despite many successful alternative approaches, public education is still the default standard by which any educational models or materials are evaluated. But God commands us to be transformed by renewing our minds with his truth so we can think like he thinks. He doesn't want us thinking about anything by default. And that includes our thinking about parenting and education.

Build on truth. (Matthew 7:24-27)

Some very dangerous cultural storms are looming on the horizon. You will face some as a home-educating parent, and your children will face them as adults. These storms will tear apart many families who are unprepared. You and your children, though, can stand strong and stay faithful in the face of them if you build your house on the secure foundation of God and his Word. Any foundation other than God's truth will be sandy ground that will wash away in the storms and floods of life. Your house wouldn't stand a chance. But God's truth is solid rock. Build the house of your family on truth and stand.

Sow for the Spirit. (Galatians 6:7-9)

You will reap in your children's lives exactly what you sow in them as a parent. If you want to reap secure, mature adults, you must sow by the Spirit the seeds of time, togetherness, and training. If you want to reap a godly heritage, you must sow by the Spirit the seeds of godly influence. If you want to reap godly character, you must sow by the Spirit the seeds of a good example. You can no longer sow to please your own desires, but to please Christ. Only he can cause your seed to grow and produce a harvest of blessing. You are sowing for temporal fruit with eternity in mind.

Value the eternal. (Matthew 6:19-24)

Your children are your most valuable assets. They are priceless, eternal treasures entrusted to you by God. They are yours for a short time, after which you will present them back to God. He has given them to you to invest for eternity. If you treasure those young lives, that is where your heart will be—reproduced in their hearts. If you treasure the things of this world, though, you will have missed the opportunity to touch their hearts for God. You must decide what, or who, is going to matter most to you this side of eternity. For "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." In other words, the designs of your mind will define the desires of your heart.

Be content in Christ. (Philippians 4:10-13)

A decision to homeschool is also a decision to accept limitations on your life. Your expectations of adult life will be greatly limited by the realities of home education. The more you resist those limitations, the less content you will be. Contentedness grows as you learn to submit to those limitations. God has promised that you can do everything through Christ, who gives you strength. You can sacrifice, serve, and learn to be content with whatever lifestyle God has for you. You can be content as a home educator.

Specific Scriptures to Consider

About Parenting

Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21 — How can I make sure that I am obeying God’s commands to raise my children for him and to train them in righteousness?

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 — How can I make sure that my children’s training in righteousness is consistent and continuous and that it is a whole-life, “everywhere, all the time” process?

Psalms 78:1-7 — How can I make sure that I pass on a godly and righteous heritage to my children and to their children and that nothing of eternal value is hidden from them?

Psalms 127:3-5 — How can I make sure that my children know they are valued blessings in my house, not burdens, and that they are arrows of God’s truth to the world?

1 Timothy 3:4; Titus 1:6 — How can I make sure that my household is managed well and my children are “under control” as a testimony of my maturity?

About Your Children

Proverbs 2:11-12, 22:6 — How can I make sure that my children are disciplined to go in the way they should go so that they will not be misled off the path of righteousness?

Matthew 18:5-6 — How can I make sure that I am not putting my children in situations where they will be tempted to sin, or even worse, which will cause them to sin?

Proverbs 13:20; 1 Corinthians 15:33 — How can I make sure that my children walk with “the wise” and do not become harmed as the “companion of fools”?

2 Corinthians 6:14 — How can I make sure that my children do not become spiritually, emotionally, or socially “yoked together with unbelievers” as light with darkness?

2 Timothy 2:16-19 — How can I make sure that my children are not under the authority and influence of false teachers or false teaching that would lead them to ungodliness?

About the Christian Life

Romans 12:1-2 — How can I make sure that my children do not become conformed to the world (its ways of thinking), but are transformed by the renewing of their minds?

1 John 2:15-17 — How can I make sure that my children are taught to love God and to do his will and are not taught to love the world or anything in the world?

Proverbs 4:23 — How can I make sure that I am guarding my children’s hearts against all ungodly influences that can adversely shape their beliefs and attitudes?

Ephesians 5:11-12 — How can I make sure that my children are not enticed by the “fruitless deeds of darkness” or exposed to those things God calls “shameful”?

Philippians 4:8 — How can I make sure that my children’s minds are filled with and trained to think about only those things that God considers excellent and worthy of praise?

Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.

— Colossians 3:20-21

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.

— Psalm 78:4

My son, do not reject the discipline of the LORD or loathe His reproof, for whom the Lord loves. He reproveth, even as a father corrects the son in whom he delights.

— Proverbs 2:11-12 (NASB)

Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.

— Proverbs 22:6 (NASB)

So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For in just a very little while, "He who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him." But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.

— Hebrews 10:35-39

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. ... And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

— Hebrews 11:1, 6

All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. ... Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

— Hebrews 11:13-14, 16b

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. 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 12:1-3

Be Ready to Live by Faith

There are many reasoned and rational arguments you can make to justify and defend homeschooling. There's only one, though, that closes off debate: "We searched the Scriptures, prayed about it, and determined it is God's will for our family to homeschool." At that point, it is no longer an opinion but an issue of conviction, obedience, and faith. Good arguments alone will not carry you very far as a home educator. When you're up to your eyeballs with children, housework, home business, activities, responsibilities, bills, broken appliances, car problems, and you-don't-know-the-troubles-I've-seen circumstances, those nicely reasoned arguments will ring pretty hollow. When you're pushed to the limits, only a tested and seasoned faith will take you beyond.

That was where many Jews found themselves as new Christians after being scattered throughout Israel in the persecution that followed Stephen's martyrdom. For a time, they lived by their newfound faith, holding on to the apostles' teachings. But then they began to grow weary and to shrink back from the life of faith. There probably will come a time when you, too, will be tempted to shrink back from what God has called you to do in your family. If that happens, read Hebrews 10-12 and then come back to this page to do this study so you can hear God say to you, as he said to those first Christians: "So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised."

Hebrews 10:35-39 — Perseverance: The Mark of Faith

What could cause you to want to throw away your confidence in God's presence and work in your life? In what ways do you need to persevere in doing the will of God? How does the promise of Christ's return and his rewards affect your faith?

Hebrews 11:1, 6 — Belief: The Proof of Faith

What do you hope for with a surety that affects how you live? What spiritual realities are you certain about even though you do not see them? When is your faith enough to please God? Do you really believe that God exists? How, exactly, do you seek him?

Hebrews 11:1-38 — Faithfulness: The Example of Faith

Which examples of living by faith mentioned in this chapter touch your spirit? Why? What can you learn from them? What would you want to be said about you?

Hebrews 11:39-40 — Hope: The Promise of Faith

What was the promise that kept all those mentioned in chapter 11 living by faith (see verses 1, 2, 9, 10, 13-16)? What does that promise mean to you? How does it affect the way you live? Do your children know what the promise means to you?

Hebrews 12:1-3 — Endurance: The Strength of Faith

Are you encouraged by the testimonies of the great cloud of witnesses in chapter 11? What hindrances slow you down in your race? What sins, big or little, entangle you and trip you up? Do you fix your eyes on Jesus or on the distractions around you? Do you think about him when you grow weary and lose heart? Fix your eyes on Jesus!

The Christian Homeschool: Learning at Home to Be with Christ

Starting with a Heart for Home Education

It has been interesting over the years to observe the responses of Christian parents who do not homeschool when they learn that we do homeschool. Though we rarely initiate the topic, they almost always volunteer an assessment of themselves, as though our just being there compels them to say something. There are generally three kinds: (1) those who approve of homeschooling, (2) those who do not approve (whether reasonably or unreasonably), and (3) those who say, “Oh, I could never do that.” Most in that third group are sincere and generally are not negative about homeschooling, but they are expressing a myth that keeps many good families from ever even considering homeschooling. It is the myth of qualification: “I don’t know enough to homeschool my children.”

The myth that you must have some kind of higher education in order to give your children a good education suggests that being smart is more important in homeschooling than being committed. It isn’t. When we were on staff with a large Christian organization, we often heard that the real standard of our qualifications to serve others was being FAT: Faithful, Available, and Teachable. That is true of the Christian homeschooling parent as well. To really serve your children, you will need to be faithful to God’s ideals for your family, available to God and to your children, and, yes, teachable. You need to be ready to learn new things. It doesn’t matter that you don’t know everything about all that you want to teach your children (none of us does), but it matters much that you are ready and willing to learn with them. Your influence in your children’s lives is not derived from how smart you are, but rather from how committed you are to becoming all that you need to be in order to help them become all that God wants them to be. It is not your responsibility only to give them an education; it is your vision and privilege to guide them into learning, growing, and becoming—with you.

Whatever you do for your children’s education, it should be clear from the previous chapter that at the very least you need to be committed to building a Christian home. Christian homeschooling is about having a heart for building a home that includes learning together as a family, knowing that process will bring you together in a way nothing else can. Making that commitment, though, requires you to have the heart attitude that you are just as excited about what you can learn as a home-educating parent as you are about what your children can learn at home. Your confidence will not be shaken by the myth of qualification. Your vision will not be blurred by the challenge of growing personally to be a better home educator. Your commitment will not be weakened by fears or feelings of inadequacy. This chapter will help to strengthen your confidence in homeschooling, but never lose sight of the bigger vision—that you are choosing to learn at home so you can experience Christ more as a family.

“Your influence in your children’s lives is not derived from how smart you are, but rather from how committed you are to becoming all that you need to be in order to help them become all that God wants them to be.

I am much afraid that schools will prove the great gates of hell unless they diligently labor in explaining the Holy Scriptures, engraving them in the hearts of youth. I advise no one to place his child where the Scriptures do not reign paramount. Every institution in which men are not increasingly occupied with the Word of God must become corrupt.

— Martin Luther (1483-1546), German priest and theology professor, founder of the Protestant Reformation

“Home education is not just a reaction to the moral decay in our culture—it is a proactive decision about what is the best way to raise and educate children. The best motivation for home educating is that you have decided, before God, that it is the right thing to do for your family.

You as a parent have a big advantage in teaching your child simply because you are the parent. The most significant people in a young child's life are usually his mom and dad. ... You may think that you're something less than the world's best parent. You might also think that you can't possibly educate your child as well as a state certified teacher might. But because, subjectively, you are the most significant and important person in the world to your child, you have greater credibility with him and can get more mileage out of instructional time than anyone else could. And that is an objective reality.

— Gregg Harris, *The Christian Home School*, Wolgemuth & Hyatt Publishers, 1988

Be Confident as a Homeschooling Parent

The Scriptures are the basis of your confidence, whatever you do in life. We have found that the best way to make sure that you raise your children according to the principles of Scripture listed in the previous chapter is nurturing, discipling, and educating your children at home. If home education is biblical and you have determined it is God's will for your family, then you can homeschool with confidence. There is no biblical argument for putting your children under the shaping influence of other authorities during the most formative and impressionable years of their lives. American cultural norms notwithstanding, doing so runs counter to the biblical concept of the family, and it is in conflict with how we are wired as mothers and fathers by God. If family is God's design for raising children, then a spiritually sensitive parent should not be surprised to feel conflict when faced with the choice to allow others to raise them for half or more of their childhood waking hours. It should be natural to want to keep your children home to raise them.

On the other hand, keeping your children at home only because you want to keep them protected from the negative influences of the public school is shortsighted. Home education is not just a reaction to the moral decay in our culture—it is a proactive decision about what is the best way to raise and educate children. The best motivation for home educating is that you have decided, before God, that it is the right thing to do for your family. Again, the Scriptures should be your confidence, not the latest statistics on public schools' moral and academic failure. More than just a reactionary decision, home education is a gift you give to your children. You give them the opportunity to experience childhood and growing up the way God intended them to be, all within the context of home and family. You give them a sense of wholeness and rightness that only a Christian home can provide. You give them time and space, with you beside them, to become secure, mature Christian adults. If your family is reasonably mature and stable, you can be confident—without doubts or apologies—that your children will be better off at home with you. God designed your home for your children, and it is right that they should live and learn there until they are ready to leave home.

God's principles are like a strong river flowing through your children's lives and yours. If you ignore those principles and attempt to swim against their current, you will make little progress. If, however, you submit to those principles and swim with the current, you will find a natural strength and power as you are carried along in the flow. As you cooperate with God's eternal design—built into our very nature as fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters—you will experience an undeniable sense of rightness and release. You will know, deep down, that home education is the right thing to do because it is what God designed you to do. Unfortunately, even though you may be going with the flow, you'll soon discover some rocks in your river: critics, skeptics, and sometimes just people with honest questions. The knowledge that you home educate your children will draw several predictable responses from non-home-educators. If you have made your decision to home educate based on the Scriptures, you have no reason to let criticism shake your confidence. The following pages explore five of the most common questions raised about homeschooling and present a confident home educator's response and defense. You don't need to win the argument; just make the point gently and with the confidence that you are doing God's will for your family.

Know What to Do When Cornered by a Critic

Most people who have questions about homeschooling simply want to understand it better. They are curious, but not critical. However, you will also run into the occasional true critic. Always remember that these vocal adversaries of homeschooling are not neutral. You can generally assume their criticisms have been cooking for some time, and you just happen to be the one who gets to taste what's in their mental oven. You don't have to swallow their arguments, but don't throw them back in their face either. Your "gentle answer" may help convert a critic into an inquirer and maybe even a friend. Here's what to do when cornered by a critic:

- **Be open.** Above all, be patient and attentive. Let them have their say. Simply listening to a critic may be the first step toward winning them over.
- **Be instructive.** Consider it an opportunity to gently educate. If they are receptive, suggest a noncontroversial book about family or homeschooling they might want to read. If they are resistant, simply ask about their family and move on.
- **Be self-controlled.** Stay in control of your emotions. Becoming defensive and angry will only polarize the issues and convince your critic that homeschoolers are extremists. If you answer gently and patiently but with conviction, you may not win the immediate debate, but you won't lose the opportunity for future discussion.
- **Be humble.** Don't be overzealous to defend homeschooling. Offer responses to criticisms only if there is sufficient time for discussion and you can do so confidently and knowledgeably. Otherwise, suggest getting together later to discuss it over a meal.
- **Be restrained.** Don't let an itchy trigger finger unload on your critic with all your best-shot arguments for homeschooling. They'll start shooting back, and you'll both end up emotionally wounded and angered by the exchange.
- **Be thick-skinned.** Don't take your critic's criticism personally. Depersonalize and generalize your response as much as possible. Listen patiently and politely, and share your own thoughts gently and graciously. "A gentle answer turns away wrath."

A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

— Proverbs 15:1

But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

— 1 Peter 3:15-17



IN OUR HOME

It doesn't happen that often, but occasionally we will have a guest in our home who feels comfortable letting us know that they really question homeschooling. Rather than engaging them in the debate or giving them a guided tour of our learning room, library, and discovery corners, we simply redirect the discussion and give a positive testimony about our own experience. We might talk about a recent novel we read out loud as a family together, an especially interesting field trip, or a musical event we attended. But the best way we have found to quell any questions is to have our children in the room. We train them early how to engage in conversation with adults, ask good questions, listen well, and be polite. In comparison to the average child or teen, they really are our best arguments for the positive benefits of homeschooling.

Good philosophy must exist, if for no other reason, because bad philosophy needs to be answered.

— C. S. Lewis (1898-1963),
British author, academic, and
Christian apologist

Why Homeschool?

According to a 2007 study by the National Center for Education Statistics (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences), homeschooling parents were asked which one of their selected reasons for homeschooling was the most important. (Most parents homeschool for a variety of reasons.) The top three were:

- Provide religious or moral instruction, 36 percent
- Concern about the school environment, 21 percent
- Dissatisfaction with the academic instruction available at other schools, 17 percent

Understand the Questions and the Answers

Let's be realistic. Homeschooling can seem pretty radical to the average person. It is a nonconformist educational movement in a culture that has invested heavily for at least six generations in first a common school and then a public school system that requires conformity for it to work well. Institutional or public (government-run) schooling is now so entrenched in our American experience and mindset that most citizens never even think to question its existence or its effectiveness. The modern homeschool movement will likely require a few more generations of success and integration into culture before it will be widely acknowledged as a valid form of education with the same level of acceptance that public and private schooling now enjoy.

Given its relatively short history since the early 1980s, it is quite natural for people to have questions about homeschooling. Of course, there are those in the national educational establishment who are opposed to even the idea of homeschooling, which by its nature elevates the role of untrained parents in education above that of trained, professional teachers. Homeschooling challenges an entrenched system of education, cultural values, and history. However, most average people have real, reasonable questions about homeschooling. You have an opportunity to sway their opinion and perhaps even win a follower if you can offer good, thoughtful answers to their questions.

The Legislation Question

“It’s not right to keep children out of school. Shouldn’t the government ensure that every child gets a full and proper education in a good school?”

The Education Question

“You can’t really give your children all the benefits at home that they would have in a school. Aren’t you depriving them of a much better education?”

The Socialization Question

“Homeschooled children seem so isolated at home. How will your children ever be able to function in the real world unless they are in school?”

The Qualification Question

“I don’t think being a good parent is enough for a child. How can you possibly provide as good an education as a professionally trained teacher?”

The Reputation Question

“I hear so many disturbing news stories about homeschooling families. Don’t you think homeschooling is an unusual and extreme thing to do?”

The remainder of this chapter presents some of the answers you can give to these inevitable questions. Due to space limitations, they will be very brief answers, but they will nonetheless provide a starting point for you to give a good answer to people with questions as well as to undergird your own convictions about home education.

Answering the Legislation Question

“Home education is legal in all fifty states. It is widely recognized as a valid educational choice.”

Home education has been legal in all fifty states since the mid-nineties, although regulatory policies differ widely from state to state, and laws are always subject to change. In some states there is essentially no regulation; in others there is more restrictive regulation. The issues of legality and validity may be largely settled, but regulation of home education will be a continuing concern. The ongoing battle against governmental intrusion into your private family life intensifies with the choice to home educate your children. The regulatory tools of intrusion that might be wielded against home educators are myriad—written reports, curriculum review and approval, home visits, attendance and instructional time record keeping, required testing, and on and on. There is no end to the meddling of bureaucrats, regulatory agents, and politicians with our constitutional freedoms and with our children! Regardless of legal conditions, however, home education is always a legitimate form of educating our children. It may not always be fully validated by the state, but it is certainly validated by Scripture, history, experience, and common sense.

There are two areas of special concern as the homeschooling movement continues to grow and mature. The first is the possibility of state or federal legislation that would attempt to regulate home educators through teacher qualification requirements, mandatory testing, standards-based educational goals, or other intrusions. This is an ongoing battle at every level of the educational, political, and legal system. The courts are fast becoming a new battleground for the future of homeschooling. The National Education Association, the very powerful and influential U.S. public school teachers’ union, has been on record opposing home education. The NEA lobby will surely continue its campaign to regulate homeschooling. The second area of concern is the real threat of state social and child protective services agencies initiating actions against homeschooling families. In many areas, these agencies can be relatively unaccountable and able to act on unsubstantiated and anonymous charges. They can be aggressive and intimidating, and they have authority to remove children from the home. The courts can recognize and restrain the unconstitutional scope and power of these agencies, but because they are matters largely of state and local oversight it is likely conflicts will continue.

Because home education can be a tenuous freedom, we recommend that home-educating families become members of Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA). Since 1983 this nonprofit advocacy organization has been fighting legal battles in every state in order to “defend and advance the constitutional right of parents to direct the upbringing and education of their children and to protect family freedoms.” The low annual fee (reduced through most state organizations) that ensures legal protection for the member homeschooling family is both reasonable and affordable. If you find yourself unexpectedly on the defensive against an aggressive governmental or educational system, your legal representation and fees are completely covered. HSLDA will handle your case. Even if you never need their services, your fees are a small contribution to the ongoing fight for your freedom to home educate. You are contributing to a greater cause and helping other families like yours fight the legal battles that you don’t have to fight. Those battles will help win the war for your freedom to homeschool.

Freedom is a fragile commodity. It must be won. It must be maintained. Freedom is not a guarantee. It is something we earn. Earning freedom starts with doing a good job training our children academically, socially, spiritually and morally. Home schooling freedom will continue to advance so long as we continue to pursue excellence in all that we do.

— Michael Farris, “Marking the Milestones: HSLDA 1983-1993”

State Regulations

Don’t begin to homeschool or withdraw your children from public school until you know for certain what is required for you to be in compliance with the regulations in your state. State requirements vary greatly, so before taking your first step, call your local and state homeschool organizations, and then call Home School Legal Defense Association (www.HSLDA.org). Don’t stay home without them!

HSLDA Mission

“To preserve and advance the fundamental, God-given, constitutional right of parents and others legally responsible for their children to direct their education. In so doing, we rely on two fundamental freedoms—parental rights and religious freedom. We advocate for these freedoms in the courtrooms, before government officials, and in the public arena. Additionally, we assist other educational organizations in similar activities, where possible and appropriate.”

My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.

— Proverbs 2:1-5

I would rather my child had a limited curriculum and access to limited educational resources, and yet learned by basking in the atmosphere of someone who had true pleasure in the books that were pursued, than that he should go to some well-equipped and soulless situation where, theoretically, he could “learn” at optimum speed.

— Susan Schaeffer Macaulay, *For the Children’s Sake*, Crossway, 1984

The purpose of education and the schools is to change the thoughts, feelings and actions of students.

— Prof. Benjamin Bloom, the “father of O.B.E.” (Outcome-Based Education, a comprehensive secular methodology that emphasizes attitudinal and values conformity over traditional educational goals), *All Our Children Learning*, 1981

Answering the Education Question

“There is no better learning environment than a loving home and a personal tutor. My children are home because I want them to have the very best education.”

Those who question homeschooling often raise the issue of what kind of education your child will receive. Skeptics and critics usually imply, but often blatantly assert, that you are sentencing your child to a second-rate education since you cannot possibly, at home, attain the high standards of education provided by conventional schools. Though you almost certainly will not be able to convert critics through argument, no matter how well-reasoned your position, your children will ultimately be your defense (Psalm 127:5). You can be confident, if you use the educational strengths of your home to their fullest, that your children will graduate from your homeschool not just intellectually prepared, but spiritually and personally prepared too. Against a well-educated, wholehearted homeschool graduate, critics have no defense.

To expose the illogic of the education question, simply turn it around. Why should anyone believe that a depersonalized, institutionalized classroom setting is somehow a superior learning environment? On the contrary, it is the least effective setting for developing self-motivated, free-thinking learners. Age grading (placing at a grade level by birth date) is a necessary element of conventional classroom educational strategy, but it is primarily an administrative standard that is used only to maintain order, which has very little to do with true learning. It results in children being routinely advanced in grade by age without achieving the competencies required for learning in the next grade. Only the average child (whichever one that is) is served by grade-level education. Motivated learners are frustrated by the slow pace, struggling learners by the fast pace. The conventional classroom too easily becomes a controlled environment with little or no freedom or flexibility, in which the noisiest and the neediest 10 percent get most of the teacher’s personal attention, while the rest of the students are left to fend for themselves. In most conventional classrooms, whether public or private, there is a great deal of wasted time trying to keep children busy, a default reliance on textbooks and workbooks, and a self-perpetuating dependence on the teacher for learning. This system may be efficient for the classroom, but not for the child.

Your homeschool, in stark contrast, has all the potential to be an ideal learning environment for your child. Remember—God designed homes, not schools, to be the living and learning center of a child’s life. When you tap into the natural dynamics of your home, you will liberate learning to be all that God intended it to be for your child. You can balance control and flexibility to meet each child’s individual learning needs. You can fill their lives with the best books and resources. You can turn them loose to learn whatever they desire. You can determine readiness for and pace of learning, holding off or jumping ahead of grade level without concern. Because you are training your children for life, not just preparing them to make a living, you can use all of life as a classroom. Real life is always within easy reach. If you use the natural learning environment of your home and family, your homeschool graduates will be exceptional people—well-educated disciples, ready to live godly and productive lives. They deserve the best—your home.

Classroom Education	Home Education
CHILD: Children are part of the group. Classroom education focuses on helping the child conform to group and age-grade standards in order to learn certain things at certain times in certain ways, with limited regard to maturity or ability.	CHILD: Each child is an individual. Home education focuses on the development of the whole person, responsiveness to individual learning needs and desires, and guidance in growing in Christian maturity unrestrained by age/grade limitations.
SETTING: Learning structures are created with a teacher's needs for order, conformity, regimen, and control in mind. Formality is demotivating and stifles children's curiosity, creativity, and natural desire to learn.	SETTING: Learning structures are created with the interests of the child, the home, and the family in mind. Unrestricted time and freedom unleash opportunities to exercise children's curiosity, creativity, and natural desire to learn.
INSTRUCTION: Instruction is often simplified to accommodate the poorest learners in the class. Motivated learners are frustrated by the slow pace, struggling learners by the fast pace. Average learners learn to stay average (to keep the teacher's pace of instruction). Slow learners are stigmatized, and fast learners are ostracized.	INSTRUCTION: Instruction is aimed high to challenge all in the homeschool. Learning abilities can vary without any attached meaning or stigma. All children advance at their own pace. Each child advances according to his own level of learning and motivation. Each child is treated as an individual without reference to others.
ATTENTION: Each child receives only limited individual attention in a class of 20-30 children. A single teacher is not able to respond to every child's individual needs and interests. Concentration can be hindered by the high distraction factor in a noisy, uncomfortable, or open classroom.	ATTENTION: Parents are able to give each child unlimited individual attention in a one-on-one tutoring relationship and to respond to each child's individual needs and interests. Concentration is reinforced by the ability to control and even eliminate distractions to optimal learning.
AUTHORITY: Children learn how to please various teachers. The authority relationships are generally unnatural and formal.	AUTHORITY: Children instinctively want to please their parents. The authority relationship is natural and loving.
MATERIALS: Teacher routinely relies on approved textbooks and workbooks. The teacher is the educational authority. The classroom setting results in a self-perpetuating and necessary dependence on the teacher for learning progress.	MATERIALS: Parents are free to choose the best living books and curricula available. Parents are learning facilitators. Children are trained and expected to depend on their own independent learning abilities and skills to advance.
TIME: Much time is wasted in order to keep students occupied and under control. No real-life learning occurs sitting at a student desk. The instructor teaches much less material in much more time. Most graduate at 18 years of age.	TIME: No time is wasted. All of life is a classroom, so every activity or involvement is a learning opportunity. Parents can teach much more in much less time. Not difficult to graduate several years earlier than standard age/grade.
PROGRESS: Children advance in studies on the basis of age and grade with limited regard for knowledge or competence.	PROGRESS: Children advance in studies on the basis of knowledge and competence without regard for age or grade.
TESTING: Children are tested primarily for short-term linear knowledge (ability to recall facts and information). Retention is low. Written tests, though less effective, are easier to administer and grade; oral testing is generally avoided.	TESTING: Children are tested primarily for long-term global knowledge (ability to grasp ideas and concepts). Retention is high. Written tests are unnecessary; oral testing is more effective and a better indicator of learning.
HOMEWORK: Homework is necessary because of the teaching and learning constraints of conventional schooling.	HOMEWORK: Homework is largely unnecessary because of the integration of home and education, living and learning.
GRADES: Grades are necessary for teachers to be able to control and track the progress of a large class of students.	GRADES: Grades are largely irrelevant. Parents work with the child until the knowledge or skill is acquired.

He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm.

— Proverbs 13:20

Do not be misled: “Bad company corrupts good character.”

— 1 Corinthians 15:33

What about Socialization?

Research studies by educator John Wesley Taylor, Psychologist Mona Maarse Delahooke, and others affirm that home-educated students, in relation to public-school-educated students, are *not* socially deprived. On the contrary, research by Dr. Larry Shyers, Dr. Norma Hedin, Dr. Linda Montgomery, and others reveals a significant advantage for homeschooled children for key social development indicators—they are socially adept, possess a positive self-image, and are active in areas that develop leadership skills. In a 1992 controlled study, Thomas Smedley concluded: “...the home educated children in this sample were significantly better socialized and more mature than those in public school.” (Dr. Brian Ray, “Marching to the Beat of Their Own Drum! A Profile of Home Education Research,” National Home Education Research Institute, 1992). Nonetheless, a 1995 survey of public school superintendents reported that 92 percent did not believe homeschooled students received adequate socialization experiences.

Answering the Socialization Question

“The family is God’s primary institution for the socialization of children. If the goal of socialization is greater maturity, that comes from being around mature adults who love the child.”

Every home-educating parent hears it with numbing regularity: “But aren’t you afraid they won’t get enough socialization?” First, you must understand what is being said. To most non-homeschoolers, socialization really means simply learning to enjoy and get along with friends and classmates of the same age and grade. It’s about an experience. To the sociologist or educationalist, it means the process of learning one’s culture and how to live within it. It’s about conforming. To the biblically-informed Christian homeschooling parent, though, socialization should be about the development of biblical character, personal confidence, and social competence for relating appropriately with grace to other people in any situation. It is about Christian maturity. A properly socialized child, then, knows how to relate well to other people, whether young or old, male or female, rich or poor, different or similar. You can be confident that the Christian home is a far better socializing environment than any form of traditional school. In fact, the conventional classroom gets very poor marks for socialization. Research and testing have consistently shown homeschooled children to be significantly above traditional testing norms for social skills and development and for self-esteem.

The reason seems clear. In the homeschool, the primary models for effective relationships are mature adults—father, mother, grandparents, family, friends. This kind of age-integrated socialization simply does not take place in a traditional school setting, where the models are primarily other foolish, immature children and where there is minimal supervision and intervention by mature adults. In the home, in contrast, social skills are constantly and consistently modeled, trained, and corrected by loving parents. Poor social skills are not allowed to become habituated, and good ones are regularly reinforced.

As to interaction with other children, one wonders how much is enough. Who decided that four to eight hours per day in a school should be the norm for socialization? Why not much more or much less? It really seems like common sense, but studies show that constant and excessive interactions and activities (such as in a school) have a negative impact on children, while limited interactional environments (such as a home) have a positive impact. Homeschooling families can easily find opportunities for interaction with other children through church, field trips, support groups, lessons, sports, service, and many other activities. And all of that time is under the loving supervision of mature adults who have a vested interest in the social development of their children. There is no credible evidence or argument that children are better off socially being in an age-segregated, over-active, unsupervised social setting up to eight hours per day. They are better off at home.

Those who say that homeschooled children aren’t in the real world just aren’t thinking straight. School is the false world. Never in the rest of their lives will a child be forced to live and interact with twenty to thirty age-mates in a sterile, isolated classroom totally segregated from real living experiences. The true real world of home, family, work, and ministry prepares children to work with people of all ages in actual situations that they will experience as adults. School can’t even counterfeit that kind of real-life experience.

Conventional School Socialization	Home School Socialization
GOAL: To ensure that a child conforms to the social norms and knowledge of his age-mates and school. Other relationships, if addressed at all, are peripheral.	GOAL: To teach and train a child how to relate graciously and effectively to other people in all kinds of relationships: siblings, parents, other adults, friends, peers, church.
SCOPE: Relational experiences with school age-mates and a teacher with limited involvement or supervision. Extremely limited range of relational settings.	SCOPE: Relational experiences with family, friends, work, ministry, church, neighborhood, community with high involvement and supervision. Wide variety of relational settings.
MODELS: Primarily other immature children.	MODELS: Primarily parents and other mature adults.
QUALITY: Peer relationships are generally shallow and uncertain. The atmosphere is often cool and always competitive. Family is not a factor.	QUALITY: Family relationships are generally stable and close. The atmosphere is warm and non-competitive. Peer relationships are incorporated into the family.
IDENTITY: Child's identity is developed and reinforced by attempting to be accepted by peers. Acceptance is based on popularity and judged mostly by appearance, intelligence, and abilities. Child becomes dependent upon and wants to become like peers. Child feels false security or false pride.	IDENTITY: Child's identity is developed and reinforced as a member of his family. Acceptance is based on the mutual, unconditional love of a Christian family. Child wants to become like his parents. Child feels secure and significant as a family member and is able to act independently of peers.
VALUES: Christian values are often in conflict with the values of other children and of the school. The Christian child can be isolated, rejected, or ridiculed apart from family support.	VALUES: Christian and family values are taught, modeled, and reinforced without conflict. Any rejection of a child's Christian values is shared with the whole family unit.
OTHER FACTORS: Respect for authority is routinely challenged among peers. Interaction with other children is rarely supervised; adult intervention is rare.	OTHER FACTORS: Respect for authority is constantly reinforced. Interaction with other children is supervised by mature adults; adult intervention is immediate.
RESULT: This child is a "companion of fools" and "suffers harm." The child becomes like other children.	RESULT: This child "walks with the wise" and "grows wise." The child becomes like an adult.



IN OUR HOME

We believe in family style socialization. We try to make our home and family life as entertaining, enriching, and enjoyable as we can. We want our children to become family dependent rather than peer dependent, and to prefer our home to any other place they might go. We work hard and make some social sacrifices to build strong family ties. We have a weekly weekend family night with pizza and activities or a movie, a weekly tea time on Sunday afternoon, fun family Bible times on some weeknights, game nights with popcorn and hot chocolate, and of course special traditions and foods for the holidays. All of this, of course, is in addition to play times with friends, support group activities, and church activities. We make our home a magnet so other children will be drawn to the life they see at the Clarksons' house. We want to do all we can to win our children's hearts so that they will value and prefer our home and family over any other.

I've seen kids dismantle one another while parents and teachers stood passively by and observed the "socialization" process. I've then watched the recipients of this pressure begin to develop defense mechanisms and coping strategies that should never be necessary in a young child.

— Dr. James Dobson, former President of Focus on the Family, in a letter to a colleague (quoted in a letter to ministry supporters)

But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

— 1 Samuel 16:7

Learning Happens

The Family Research Council evaluated research on learning and found that what happens at home is the single most important factor in determining student success ("The One-House Schoolroom," *Family Policy*, Sept. 1995). It is interesting to note that none of the top-ranked factors, which could be considered typical qualities of the homeschooling lifestyle, involved either curricula or teaching qualifications. The study, which did not evaluate homeschooling, nonetheless concluded that academic success in school is most likely when there is:

- Commitment to family routines and meal times
- A limit on outside activities
- An emphasis on self-discipline and hard work
- A high but realistic expectation of achievement
- Parental involvement in the learning process
- Family reading, writing, and discussion
- A wide variety of books and other learning tools readily available
- An involvement with community resources

Teacher Certification?

A 2008 study of 11,739 homeschooling families (Dr. Brian Ray, NHERI) found that previous or current teacher certification of one or both parents created no statistically significant impact on higher achievement test scores. In fact, students with never-certified parents received slightly higher scores.

Answering the Qualification Question

"I am fully qualified to teach my children in my home. They couldn't have a better teacher than a loving parent committed to their best interests."

Those within the public school system have persistently called for certification of homeschooling parent-teachers. However, given the steady success rate of homeschooling students as compared with their peers in traditional schools, the true intent of the push for certification seems obvious—the regulation of homeschools. Educational associations and lobbying groups opposed to homeschooling argue that state or federally mandated certification is the only way to ensure that every American child receives a quality education. However, there is no reputable research to support the claim that a teaching degree or certificate makes an individual a better teacher. A teaching certificate is simply a state-issued license to teach, not a certificate of knowledge or ability. In reality, much of the training and certification a professional teacher goes through has as much to do with classroom control and the administrative and political aspects of teaching as it has to do with knowing how or what to teach. As a loving, committed parent, you are already certified by God to teach your children. You do not need the state to tell you whether or not you are qualified to train and instruct your children. You are.

You may be tempted to deny your natural qualifications to teach your child or to think that there is just too much to teach and subjects that you might not know much about. The real issue, though, is not how much you don't know, but how much you do know. If you are a parent of average intelligence, are reasonably mature, can speak, read, write, and do math, and love your children, then you are qualified to instruct them. Many traditional school teachers do not meet those qualifications! With only a good library and minimal curricula for teaching the basics, you can take your children much further than a certified teacher ever could in an average classroom setting. There are many exceptional teachers, to be sure, but there are also unfortunately many whose teaching consists mostly of passing out textbooks and workbooks and giving and grading tests. As a parent, you are qualified to do much more. Your goal as a Christian home educator is not just to make your children good test-takers but rather to shape their hearts and strengthen their minds to become self-motivated, independent learners. And because you have a personal, God-given, one-on-one relationship with each of your children, you are much better qualified and equipped to reach that goal than a classroom teacher whose attention is divided between your child and twenty or more other children.

In the same way that objective studies on socialization support the homeschooling model, numerous studies on qualifications and teaching skills have shown that certification does not guarantee or indicate teaching effectiveness and that it may even have a negative effect. The educational background of the parent has minimal effect on the learning of the child. The primary factor is the parent's commitment. Don't confuse qualifications with certification. Education at home is a learning process as much for the parents as it is for the children. Unfamiliar subject areas and problems that you are not able to solve do not reflect on your qualifications to teach your children. They are no more and no less than opportunities for you to learn together. You are qualified. It is not difficult to teach your child. This book will show you how to become an excellent home educator using the principles in the WholeHearted Learning model.

Classroom School Teacher	Home School Parent-Teacher
<p>QUALIFICATIONS: Usually a college degree, certification, competency requirements, and/or professional experience.</p>	<p>QUALIFICATIONS: Maturity, willingness, leading of the Holy Spirit, life experience, self-directed training and learning.</p>
<p>METHODS: Limited to more formal, group-oriented teaching methods that are suited to the classroom setting.</p>	<p>METHODS: No limitation on methods. Able to use informal, individualized teaching methods suited to each child.</p>
<p>GOALS: Goal of instruction is mostly head knowledge with a focus on the right answer. Due to class size, learning is measured mostly by knowledge of facts.</p>	<p>GOALS: Goal of instruction is head and heart knowledge with a focus on understanding. Learning is measured by both knowledge of facts and understanding of ideas.</p>
<p>CONTROL: Must be able to maintain constant control of a classroom of 20-30 children, many of whom are often untrained and undisciplined.</p>	<p>CONTROL: Control is already a natural and normal part of the parent-child relationship. Training and discipline are naturally integrated with learning.</p>
<p>RESOURCES: Mostly limited to the use of approved materials. Not always able to use the best resources available due to budget restrictions, time limitations, or class size.</p>	<p>RESOURCES: Unlimited opportunity to use the very best resources available. Only consideration is the family budget and lack of access to some materials.</p>
<p>CURRICULA: Must use a uniform curriculum and materials with all children in the class, regardless of individual needs, interests, capabilities, or learning style.</p>	<p>CURRICULA: Free to use a variety of curricula and materials, personally tailored to address each individual child's needs, interests, capabilities, and learning style.</p>
<p>CONTENT: Limitations on what can be taught and discussed with students.</p>	<p>CONTENT: No limitations on what can be taught or discussed with children.</p>
<p>TIME: Time with students is limited to the time spent in the classroom. Problem students receive the most individual attention. Unable to adjust the pace of instruction—must keep on tight schedule.</p>	<p>TIME: Unlimited time with children in wide variety of learning situations. All receive individualized attention. Can adjust the pace of instruction as needed—scheduling is flexible and non-restricting.</p>
<p>EVALUATION: Evaluating and directing student progress is limited primarily to testing and grading. Due to class size, evaluation is an impersonal process that necessarily excludes learning readiness, maturity, understanding, and other individualized factors.</p>	<p>EVALUATION: Children's progress is guided through personal interaction and direction. Evaluation is a very personal process that considers all factors that relate to learning in a particular area of study. Testing and grading, if needed at all, are optional tools for evaluation.</p>
<p>DISCIPLINE: Limited disciplinary methods due to legal restrictions. Because there are no natural bonds, discipline must be formal, strict, and authoritarian in most cases. Discipline is mostly for punishment of unacceptable behavior.</p>	<p>DISCIPLINE: Able to use whatever disciplinary method is most effective. Discipline is always done in love within the bonds of the parent-child relationship. Discipline is mostly for the purpose of training in character, conduct, and attitude.</p>
<p>CREATIVITY: Limited opportunities to cultivate creativity in students due to need for structured learning environment and emphasis on right answers. Students learn to stay in seats and answer questions.</p>	<p>CREATIVITY: Able to cultivate maximum creativity in children by providing a dynamic, hands-on learning environment at home. Children learn to explore, discover, ask questions, and seek out answers.</p>
<p>MOTIVATION: Varies greatly. It might be a chosen profession, a love of teaching, or just a job.</p>	<p>MOTIVATION: Most parents are motivated by love, obedience to God, and desire for better education at home.</p>

Homeschool Success Then

In a 1994-1995 study of 16,311 homeschooled students in grades K-12 from all 50 states, the overall average for the basic battery (the three Rs) was the 77th percentile—73rd percentile in language and mathematics and 79th percentile in reading. The national average for all students is 50th percentile. The sample was composed of all students who took the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills. The study was commissioned by Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) and analyzed by Dr. Brian Ray of the National Home Education Research Institute (NHERI).

Homeschool Success Now

In spring 2008, Dr. Brian Ray conducted a new study, commissioned by HSLDA, of 11,739 participants from all 50 states, Guam, and Puerto Rico. The results showed homeschool students excelling in comparison to their public school counterparts, averaging 34-39 percentile points higher than standardized achievement test norms—84th percentile in language, math, and social studies and 89th percentile in reading. The study further revealed that factors commonly thought to influence success and create higher achievement test scores had no statistically significant impact on the results—family background, socioeconomic level, teacher certification, state regulations, number of years homeschooled, or even style of homeschooling (degree of structure, amount of time in parent-directed learning activities, or enrollment in a comprehensive curriculum plan). Males and females performed almost the same at all grade levels. In the study sample, 82.4 percent were Protestant, 12.4 percent Roman Catholic, and 5.2 percent of other persuasions. Homeschooling parents' formal education level was above average, with a correlation between higher test scores and higher levels of parental education, just as there is in institutional schools.

Answering the Reputation Question

“Home education is a rapidly growing and successful educational movement. To many it is a blessing; to some it is a curiosity; to a few it is a threat. To all it is a reality.”

An objective observer of the homeschool movement will see a steadily growing forest that is strong and healthy. A biased observer will see one or two diseased trees and then condemn the entire forest. The best response to biased criticism that attempts to attack the reputation of home education, usually based on isolated negative examples, is to change the point of view. Don't allow a detractor to focus on one or two unstable fringe families who give homeschooling a bad name. Gently remind them that public and private schools have their bad trees too. Then, turn their attention to the tens of thousands of normal families (just like them!) who are making genuine sacrifices to obey God's will for their families. They are the solid center and healthy forest of homeschooling, the true measure of the movement's reputation. The best defense is a positive offense. With a positive, nonconfrontational spirit, simply point out the scope and reach of the homeschooling movement by emphasizing the factors that underscore its continuing growth and strength.

- **National, state, and local organizations defend, support, and assist homeschooling families.** There is no formal “national” home education association at this time, and it is unlikely there will be in the near future. However, though they vary widely in scope and purpose, state organizations protect and promote the interests of home educators in the individual states. They often lobby for better homeschooling legislation and cultivate relationships with the educational establishment when possible. These spokespersons, leaders, and organizations also sponsor curriculum fairs and homeschool conferences with special speakers and parent-teacher training seminars. Other spokespersons and organizations, such as HSLDA (see page 31), fight the political and legal battles for the right to homeschool freely.
- **Hundreds of thousands of Christian families choose to homeschool.** Home education is growing annually. Although precise figures are difficult to come by, estimates exceed two million homeschooling children in America. Convention attendance, magazine subscriptions, organizational memberships, product sales, and market research all point to a strong rate of growth and a relatively low attrition rate. Though homeschooling started as a predominantly Christian movement, any family can homeschool, regardless of their religious beliefs. Research indicates the movement is broadening every year.
- **The nationwide network of homeschool support groups is growing.** Many, if not most, urban and near-urban areas have thriving support groups for home educators. Groups vary widely in purpose, scope, structure, size, and quality, but all share common goals and purposes—to provide fellowship for homeschooling families and to help and encourage one another. Most support groups usually led by parent volunteers hold regular meetings, plan field trips and other activities, and provide other cooperative services. Some provide supplemental classes for children and teens for a variety of subject areas, keep academic records (depending on the state), or offer parent-teacher training classes and events.

- **Professional publications, publishers, and ministries keep home educators informed and supplied.** A wide variety of print and digital resources is available for homeschool families. Most are very personal and practical. These resources help homeschool parents stay informed about news, speakers, instructional ideas, and new products. They provide informal teacher training as well as fellowship in print. Curriculum publishers, product catalogs, and other ministries keep a steady stream of new, high-quality materials flowing into the homeschool community. There is already a rich sea of good educational resources, and it expands and deepens every year.
- **More and more homeschoolers and homeschool graduates are gaining national recognition for achievements.** Homeschoolers have gained national attention in televised spelling and geography bees, but that is minor compared to the impact of homeschooling children, teens, and graduates in many fields of endeavor, from education to politics to business to social work to entertainment and media to Christian ministry and much more. As homeschooling has become more mainstream, homeschoolers have become newsworthy for their achievements and influence.

Guarding the Reputation of Homeschooling

To paraphrase a famous line, “No homeschooling family is an island unto itself.” Whether you want to be or not, you and your children are public relations representatives for homeschooling. It is important to remember some simple guidelines that will help your family be a positive testimony for homeschooling. Your good example can do more to promote the reputation of homeschooling than any other single factor. Don’t underestimate or undervalue the importance of a good witness!

- **Be discreet.** Don’t hide the fact that you homeschool, but don’t flaunt it either. Give a defense when appropriate, but don’t create an offense by unnecessarily making it an issue. Channel your strong convictions into making your case to political and educational leaders, not into winning arguments with friends and neighbors.
- **Be friendly.** Get to know your neighbors and let them know you and your children. Invite them into your home, greet them when you see them, and have your children deliver cookie plates to them at holidays. Be open and friendly.
- **Be aware.** Keep your children under control whenever you’re out in public. Like it or not, fair or not, expectations are higher for homeschooled children.
- **Be sensible.** Limit out-of-the-house activities during public school hours to educational functions, such as support group meetings, co-op classes, field trips, and outings. When possible, let shopping with your children wait until after school hours.
- **Be discerning.** Use discretion about outdoor play during regular school hours. It is the perception (“their kids are not in school”) and not the reality (“they must be finished with their school work”) that some people will see and believe.
- **Be involved.** Church can be a seedbed of conflict over homeschooling. Support the pastor and ministries of the church whenever possible. Reach out in some way to homeschool critics in the body. Serve quietly and faithfully with your children.

How Many Homeschoolers?

There were no statistics then but some have estimated that there were 30,000 homeschooling families at the beginning of the movement in the early 1980s. A 1992 survey by Patricia Lines, Dr. Brian Ray, and HSLDA suggested that a decade later there were as many as 500,000 home-educated children in the U.S. (K-12). A 2007 study by the National Center for Education Statistics estimated that 1.5 million American students aged 5-17 were being home educated (up from 850,000 in 1999 and 1.1 million in 2003). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there were an estimated 54 million K-12 children in the U.S. in spring 2010, suggesting that nearly 4 percent of the school-age population (about 1 in 25) were being homeschooled. A 2009 study by Dr. Brian Ray and the National Home Education Research Institute (NHERI) put the number of homeschooled children at about 2 million, a 2011 study at 2.04 million, and a 2016 study at 2.3 million, with estimated growth rates of 2-8 percent per year. During that same time period, the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) reported the number of home-educated students ages 5-17 in 2012 at 1.77 million (3.4% of school-age children), and in 2016 at 1.69 million (3.3%). However, in a 2018 analysis drawing on statistical data from the states, Dr. Ray strongly challenges the DOE methods and statistical conclusions, and is confident in the validity of his higher estimates of both size and continued annual growth of school-aged home-educated children in America. Attrition rates among school-aged homeschooling students in the U.S. are statistically unknown, but home education appears to be healthy and growing annually, increasing by nearly 500 percent since 1992.

Private Schools

Private Christian schools play an important role in the education of Christian children. One cannot write a history of Christianity in America without taking into account the enormous positive impact and influence of private Christian schools. Though the commitment of private Christian education to biblical content and leadership is commendable, in most cases it is still the same institutionalized classroom setting that plagues the public school. Consider just a few of the issues, besides the cost savings, that make home education a more attractive choice. When you choose a private school:

- You are still giving up your ability and privilege to be the primary influence in every area of your children's lives—heart, spirit, and mind.
- Your children will still be restricted by unnatural formality and control at a time when their natural curiosity and creativity are at their peak.
- Individualized attention and real-life learning will be minimal due to the nature of the classroom.
- Even with a heavy dose of discipline, most Christian private schools must deal with children from non-Christian homes.
- Most schools still rely on tedious textbooks and workbooks, time-wasting seatwork, and unnecessary homework.
- Your children will still have to run in the age/grade treadmill with little or no opportunity or encouragement to linger or advance at their own pace.

Regarding Your Reputation as a Christian Homeschooler

One of the most subtle temptations that you will face as a homeschooling parent will be to judge your homeschool, and yourself, by whatever you perceive the world's standards of educational excellence to be. You may fret that your children don't know enough, or that you missed a subject area one year, or that their achievement test scores were too low, or that you aren't using the best materials, or...you get the picture. And if that doesn't give you enough to fret about, you may also be tempted to compare yourself and your children with other Christian homeschooling parents. You may judge yourself as not keeping up or not doing enough and begin to feel inadequate and inferior. You may think that you are not able to keep a good reputation as a homeschooling parent and that you should really just quit and put your children in school.

Here's the truth: You will never be able to live up to either the real or imagined expectations you place on yourself and your children. Don't even try! Make it your goal to please God in your homeschool, not other people. If you are truly seeking to please God in all that you do at home, that is the reputation that matters to him and the one that should matter most to you. If you are being faithful to do what is best for your children out of your love for God and for them, and if you are doing it with "all your heart" (Luke 10:27), then don't worry or fret about your reputation. Let your reputation be that you are faithful to God, known for "good deeds" (1 Timothy 5:10), "full of the Spirit and of wisdom" (Acts 6:3), and that you "seek first his kingdom and his righteousness" (Matthew 6:33). If that is truly your reputation, then you will better be able to keep homeschooling in a more realistic perspective.



IN OUR HOME

Looking back now, it was pretty tame, but in our first year of homeschooling it was a reputation challenge to us. Clay was the new guy on the pastoral staff of what in those days (1988) was a southern California megachurch of 1,500. He was expected to put in seventy hours a week, and Sally was expected to work outside the home like all the other pastoral wives. (Neither of us did.) The only other homeschool family in the church was leaving. We tried to keep our family life under the radar, but we became a blip. When Sally was asked to speak to the women's ministry, the president of the group—an outspoken homeschooling critic—stood up at the front and left the room when Sally got up to speak, and returned only when she had finished. This same woman discussed with other women leaders at the church that Joel, who was playing alone one morning in Sunday School, was obviously a homeschooled child because he was not well socialized. He was three years old! The associate pastor took Clay to lunch and confronted him with research from his doctoral dissertation to defend public schooling and explain why he considered homeschooling elitist. One woman, a stranger, came up to Sally at a meeting and started loudly criticizing homeschooling. We didn't last long at that church, but it was a providential time that crystallized our convictions about family, home, and homeschooling. Whole Heart Ministries was born out of those challenges to our homeschooling reputation.

Moving in the Right Direction

God moves in history at different times and in different ways. We both were involved with Campus Crusade for Christ in college in the 1970s and then as staff members after graduation. The evangelical Christian student movement that started in the early 1950s, the demographic wave of Baby Boom youth in the 1960s, and the Jesus movement of the 1970s all had a profound impact on the church and on Christian culture in America that is still felt today. We knew we were part of a movement of God for our times, and this shaped our convictions and visions about ministry for the rest of our lives.

Forty-something years later, when we look for that same kind of movement of God in a new generation, we see it in Christian homeschooling. The seeds were planted in the mid-1970s with books by national educators questioning the presumed superiority of classroom education and recommending schooling at home. By the early 1980s, homeschooling rapidly shifted from the fringes to the mainstream to become a national phenomenon defined almost exclusively as a Christian movement. In the years since, though the percentage of Christian homeschoolers has been reduced by the influx of non-Christian homeschooling families, the sense of God's hand continues to be a unifying reality among the still-growing Christian homeschooling community. Christian homeschoolers share a common vision and motivation that is rooted in the desire to be a biblical family. The absence of a single, national organization of Christian homeschoolers has prevented the institutionalization that can slow and weaken a movement of God over time. Christian homeschooling is largely the work of conviction-led, independent, Christian families who simply want to follow God and teach their children to follow God.

After over forty years of Christian ministry in a wide variety of Christian, cultural, and international settings, we believe family is a strategic mission field for the decades ahead. For three generations, the family has been fragmented on a scale and at a pace unprecedented in modern times. Even in Christian homes, children are increasingly being raised by parenting surrogates—day care, schools, churches, activities, sports, media, online social networks, and peers. Parents have moved from being central and present to being peripheral and often absent or transient—from being fully engaged, hands-on directors of their children's lives to being disengaged, hands-off observers. We are seeing the fruit of that fragmentation in a new generation, not just in the moral confusion and rejection of absolute truths but also in young Christians entering adulthood and starting new families while adrift on a sea of uncertainty about what a family should be and do.

We feel strongly that Christian homeschooling is a movement of God's Spirit to restore and strengthen the family. When our first child, Sarah, was born in 1984, our first thoughts—born of our years in campus ministry—were about how we would disciple her. We had begun reading books and articles about home education in 1982, and we quickly made the connection with discipleship. We started our homeschooling journey in earnest in 1988 and found ourselves caught up again in a movement of God. This book, first released in 1994, was as much a call to Christian families to be a part of this new movement of God's Spirit as it was an attempt to provide a discipleship-based, biblical model for homeschooling. This new version, after twenty-two years of home education and discipleship, is an even stronger call for Christian parents to see homeschooling as a movement of God to restore the family.

Moving Movements

The essence of an ideologically motivated movement is change. It is not successful unless it can bring about social, political, or religious change, usually on a culture-wide level. It does that by defining its vision or cause, engaging culture, and gathering a growing following of committed individuals and groups. Many movements are well defined but attract few followers and change little or nothing; other movements are broadly defined but attract many followers and change everything. In contrast, homeschooling is a successful and growing national and international educational and family movement that is well-defined, is engaged with culture, and has many committed followers and advocates. It also encompasses all three areas of ideological cultural change—social, political, and religious. It is still growing and gathering momentum, but it has the potential to be a major historical and culture-changing movement of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In terms of its impact on culture, homeschooling should be counted among the other major American movements of the past 150 years:

- Public Schools
- Sunday School
- Women's Suffrage (Vote)
- Communism/Socialism
- Labor Movement
- Social Gospel
- Fundamentalism
- Prohibition
- Progressivism/Liberalism
- Private Schools
- Evangelicalism
- Student Movement
- Conservatism
- Civil Rights
- Women's Liberation
- Gay Rights
- Conservatism
- Environmentalism
- Globalism

“What we are doing in our homes should be about much more than just educational methodology; it should be about generational theology. We are on this earth for such a short time, but we have the opportunity to make a difference in eternity.

O my people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter hidden things, things from of old—what we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us. 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, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands. They would not be like their forefathers—a stubborn and rebellious generation, whose hearts were not loyal to God, whose spirits were not faithful to him.

— Psalm 78:1-8

The heart of parenting is not just about raising an obedient, well-behaved child, but about shaping your child's heart to follow God and placing his feet on the same path of life that you and those before you have walked. Your faith and teaching will live on in generations to come through the hearts of your children, and their children, who hear the call of God to “follow Me.”

— Clay Clarkson, *Heartfelt Discipline*, Whole Heart Press, 2014

You Are Teaching Future Generations Today

There is a much bigger picture to being a Christian homeschooling family, though. We so easily get caught up in the day-to-day details, disciplines, and demands of the homeschooling lifestyle, and before we know it we slip into the error of thinking that home education is the big picture of our lives. It's not. In fact, homeschooling is only a small part of the much bigger picture in which God wants us to see ourselves and our children. So much of what we do is temporal and passing, but what we are doing with our children is eternal—we are creating a link in a chain of godly families that will become, by God's grace, a long, strong chain representing many generations of righteousness. Christian homeschooling should not be only about our children getting good test scores, going to college, and getting a job or career. Those are the temporal, not eternal, goals. If those become the focus of what homeschooling means in your family and you miss the bigger picture of passing on a righteous heritage for generations to come, then you've missed it all. You could become the weak link in your own chain of righteousness.

Psalm 78 presents the big picture. The psalmist is looking back to the command God gave to the Israelites many generations earlier as they prepared to cross the Jordan into the Promised Land. Moses commanded them to “teach [God's truth] diligently” to their children (Deuteronomy 6:7a, NASB). The psalmist is reminding the Israelites that the reason they are still a nation of God's people is that their fathers had told their children, who had told their children, and the chain of righteousness and truth had continued right down to the present. They, now, should do the same so that future generations, even ones “yet to be born,” would “put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands.” What a great passage for godly families today! But there is a caveat: The chain can be broken (vs. 8). When one generation is “stubborn and rebellious” because it does not “prepare its heart” and has a spirit that is “not faithful to God,” they will break the chain of righteousness. Some families, sadly, will fall away.

Psalm 78 speaks directly and powerfully to Christian homeschooling families today. We are part of the chain of righteousness it describes, and we are diligently teaching our children the truth of God so they can teach their children and even the children yet to be born. The highest and holiest motivation and vision for Christian homeschooling is that each family would be a visual sermon, an illustration in life, of the truth and power of Psalm 78:1-8 and Deuteronomy 6:4-9. What we are doing in our homes should be about much more than just educational methodology; it should be about generational theology. We are on this earth for such a short time, but we have the opportunity to make a difference in eternity. If we fail to be truly committed to God's generational plan (“a generation that did not prepare its heart”) or if we simply allow our spirit to be distracted by this world and become unfaithful to God's plan (“whose spirit was not faithful to God”), we will miss the opportunity to fill heaven with righteous generations. However, if we are committed and faithful, God will honor and bless homeschooling.

That is the big picture. But who knows how long this window of opportunity will remain open allowing us freely and faithfully to homeschool our children? Our hearts' conviction and burden is to call Christian homeschooling families to the bigger picture, to the vision of strengthening and extending the chain of righteousness into future generations. That is a homeschooling movement worth all the effort and sacrifice.