

Why Are We To Teach Them?

By Steve & Carol Ryerson

Deuteronomy 6:4-7 ~ *Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.*

Recently I was involved in a conversation with a sister in the Lord in which we were discussing home education. As I gently mentioned that we are commanded in Scripture to train our own children, she asked, “Do you think that includes everything, or just the spiritual things?”

Let’s look at that question for a few minutes. After all, there is no Scripture commanding us to teach our own children math and science. Why can’t we just send them out to the “experts” to learn those secular subjects while we take care of the spiritual training?

We need to understand that this very question comes from a false worldview, although most people do not recognize it as such. The real, unstated thought is that there are areas of our lives (such as math and science) that have nothing to do with God, while other areas do relate to Him. In that way of thinking, I control part of my life, while I have given other parts over to Him. Is that view really in the Bible?

What is our purpose here on earth?

Revelation 4:11 ~ *Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.*

There, in a nutshell, is the purpose of every person on earth. All things were created to give God pleasure. However, as a born again believer, I have an additional purpose:

Matthew 28:18-20a ~ *And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you:*

The same passage in NIV reads:

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

Every believer is to be a soul-winner. We are to make disciples of people by baptizing them and teaching them to obey our Lord’s commands.

You may be asking, “Are you saying that we don’t need to learn anything except the Bible?”

Of course not! Our children do need to have a deep knowledge of the Bible, led by the One Who wrote it. The person who knows only the Bible, and has not studied other subjects from a Biblical perspective

can bring a reproach and mockery upon the Lord because he doesn't understand how the Bible relates to situations in which non-Christians live. In order to make disciples of people, we need to be able to respond to their questions, to meet them where they are in their thinking. Everything we learn should look toward our being better servants of the Lord.

Let's look at some individual subjects with the thought in mind of why we need to study them in order to fulfill the Great Commission.

The language arts may be the most obvious area. Our children must learn to read in order to study the Word of God. (We know there are late bloomers in learning to read, and this is not a criticism of them. Those that we know about have all learned to read well). Not only the Bible, but reading other books to gain a knowledge of God's world is important.

Learning to think clearly and logically is important. One does not have to read too many letters to the editor in a local newspaper before seeing letters full of unsubstantiated opinion—valid ideas perhaps, but without clear reasoning, their impact is severely diminished. A local minister wrote a letter in our newspaper in which he was stating an important, Biblical opinion. However, instead of backing up that opinion with fact, he ranted on and on about a number of unrelated thoughts in a way that became a laughing stock for several responses over the next few days. His inability to express himself well caused his original valid thought to be discounted.

As part of this learning, writing and speaking skills are very important. Not everyone is going to become a published author, and not everyone is going to become a speaker in front of thousands. But...have you heard someone give a testimony in a service in which they cannot really coherently say what God has done for them? They stumble around trying to bravely say something to their brothers and sisters, but the message has to be picked out of what they are saying. Another person may clearly and forcefully tell of his experience that day in a way that brings tears to our eyes. In the Church, we understand that a certain person just may not do well at speaking in front of people, but what about people outside the Church? Unbelievers are not so willing to be patient. We are commanded to make disciples of people in the world. Shouldn't we be training our children to organize their thoughts and use correct grammar so that their testimony to the world will be received?

Some might say, "Wait a minute, doesn't the Word say that we shouldn't go to people with 'excellency of speech' and 'enticing words'?" (I Corinthians 2:1-5, Colossians 2:4) Yes, it does, and we must be careful that the form of our words doesn't become more important than their spiritual content. Our brother and apostle, Paul, teaches in the above passage in Corinthians that it is our consecration to God that gives our speech its spiritual impact, not the words themselves. We are saying that well-chosen words will help in that process. "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver." (Proverbs 25:11)

Remember Peter said that he had difficulty understanding some of the things that Paul wrote, yet he respected the Lord's ministry through Paul's carefully expressed thoughts. (II Peter 3:14-18)

Another very important area is science, the observation and analysis of order in God's creation. Sometimes people get nervous about science because of the creation~evolution debate. We must remember that we have God's Word on our side.

The British scientist, Lord Kelvin, once said, "If you study science deep enough and long enough, it will force you to believe in God."

The study of science gives us a greater understanding of the power of God. Knowledge of science allows us to talk intelligently with non-believers. We recently heard a Christian speaker talking from a logical, scientific perspective about why abortion is wrong. This speaker was relaying a conversation he'd had with a man who was pro-abortion. At the end of their conversation, this man said he had talked with pro-life people for 25 years, been given many pairs of little feet, been told he was going to burn in hell, etc, but that this was the first time he had been given rational, educated reasoning about why abortion is wrong.

That should not be. Christians need to be educated so that they can talk with the non-believing, educated world about their faith.

History is another vital area. In a day when the foundations of our country are being destroyed, we must teach our children about our nation's Christian roots. Did you know that in 1782, the United States Congress voted this resolution: "The Congress of the United States recommends and approves the Holy Bible for use in all schools..."? James Madison, who was the primary author of the United States Constitution, once said, "We have staked the whole future of our new nation not upon the power of government; far from it. We have staked the future of all our political constitutions upon the capacity of each of ourselves to govern ourselves according to the moral principles of the Ten Commandments." The Mayflower Compact states in part that the pilgrims came to this land for the propagation of the Christian faith. Our children need to know about the faith of America's founding fathers and how God worked in miraculous ways in the early fight for freedom.

We also cannot neglect the study of other cultures. No longer do we need to go on the foreign field to encounter a foreign culture. Contacts with other nations are being made every day by companies in your community. Not long ago a man we know told us that his company went through a very rough time, but they were able to make it with very few layoffs because "their sales in Europe were very strong." Not too many years ago statements like that would have been made only in large cities or ones on the East Coast. Not any more! Of course, any company doing business overseas needs staff who know how to interact with those cultures.

We need to study the cultures of the world so that we can better understand people who may literally be our neighbors. We need to know how they think in order to meet them where they are at in bringing them to the Lord. In fact, sometimes we Americans read the Bible with a western mind set, forgetting that it is of Eastern origin. A good example of that would be the Scriptural references to sackcloth. Without knowing the Eastern origin of the concept, you might think that the "sack" being referred to was a bag for putting grain in, so the sackcloth would be what we would call burlap. Actually the sackcloth is a dark-colored, heavy, coarse cloth made of goat's hair. Putting it on indicates mourning and casting it off indicates joy or release from bondage. (II Samuel 3:31, Esther 4:1, Psalm 30:11, Revelation 6:12) Learning some things about the culture of that area aids in our understanding of the Word.

That brings up the subject of foreign languages, which strikes fear in the hearts of some home schoolers. If you have never studied a foreign language, that is understandable. For students through junior high levels, there are several sources of material that is highly self-instructional. For high school students, the same is true. At that level, we would recommend that you work with a native speaker or someone else skilled in the language. The Lord may make someone available to you on an occasional basis to check your pronunciation and give experience in conversation. You may be able to find a Christian college student who could fulfill that role. And, don't discount the idea of your learning the language right along with your child.

Why study foreign languages? Consider these factors: The previously stated need for awareness of other cultures, the indirect benefit in becoming more aware of your own language, and the possibility that you would use the language in business. We must not forget the Lord's command to us to reach out to all the world with the truth. An awareness of languages could help considerably there.

More and more of our brothers and sisters are visiting the foreign missions field. A knowledge of the language or at least some experience in dealing with another language comes in very handy. Recently one of our sons was on a short term missions trip that involved his preaching through an interpreter to a French speaking congregation. While he said it was an interesting experience (hard to keep his train of thought), being able to speak and, possibly, preach in a person's native language is a big help.

No, you cannot know where your children may end up and what language they might need. However, my experience was that having become somewhat fluent in French during high school and college made

learning Spanish few years ago with my high school son much easier ~ even though it had been a number of years!

As our children get older and are well grounded in the Word, it is not a problem to study other religions. I sometimes read literature from organizations other than our own. When I read what they believe and why, it helps me to know how to Scripturally talk with a person coming from that persuasion. We have always told our sons, and we also tell the people in our local assembly never to become involved in a “your church vs. my church” or “your opinion vs. my opinion” argument. We tell people to keep the discussion focused on the Scripture. We must know the Word so that we can speak to someone who may not understand what the Bible really says.

One of our sons is currently taking a college religion class that is studying the different religions of the world. He made a very interesting observation recently. He said that as he has studied these religions and seen the importance of idols in their worship, it has given him a deeper understanding of why God commanded us to have no graven images before Him. He is thankful he grew up in a home without paintings that try to portray God and has a renewed conviction that those things will never have a place in his own home when he establishes it.

In a world that says there are many ways to God, we need to know what the Bible says, and also know why other religions are contrary to that.

Math is an area that many believe cannot be Christian. But, math shows the orderliness of God’s universe. Math is necessary in our daily lives. We are commanded to be good stewards of what God has given us. How can we do that if we do not understand things about money and mathematics? Some people are involved in the building or remodeling of a church building or their own homes. They had better know the math needed to build correctly.

Music can be a wonderful part of any home school program. Everyone can enjoy singing and worshipping the Lord. In fact, we are commanded to make a joyful noise unto Him! As a piano teacher, I would contend that *almost* everyone (I’ve left myself a loophole, so don’t bother to write and tell me you are the exception!) can benefit from some basic music lessons. Some musically inclined families may enjoy having their own instrumental ensembles. Others may sing together. These abilities can be developed and used to minister to others for the Lord.

There are many different areas of fine arts that can be visited. These areas are most apt to be more focused according to each child’s and family’s interests and abilities. Drawing and painting were never my strong points, but there are a lot of different media to use ~ different types of paints, crayons, etc. Okay, I admit I had never heard of oil crayons until very recently, but I’ve been really enjoying coloring with them. It’s like a second childhood. Most local assemblies would be overjoyed to have willing people who have developed their abilities in this area.

Computer skills are much needed in today’s society. Not only do many jobs require these skills, but, again, the capability of designing web pages, promotional materials, etc. is very helpful for churches and family ministries.

For girls, home making skills are a must and for boys, they can be a tremendous help. Someday most girls will be making comfortable homes for their own families. And remember, the Bible commands us to be hospitable. Learning to make nutritious meals for our families and friends is vital. As the world goes deeper into sin, the ability for girls to know how to make their own modest clothing is more and more important.

The list of subjects could go on and on.

Of course, every child cannot learn everything. However, God has a plan for each child’s life. We parents need to help our children find their bent, their talents, their strong points, and develop them. They need to learn all they can, especially in those strong areas, so that they will be able to go out and make disciples of the people God puts in their paths.

In answer to the question, “Do you think Deuteronomy applies even to ‘non-spiritual’ subjects?” I answer with other questions. What in your life does not relate to God? What area of your life have you not given over to God?

Psalm 127 speaks of children being arrows in our quiver. The archer had to have good aim. However, there is much more involved than just aim. An archer in those days made his own arrows. It was of utmost important how the arrow was made. Even the best archer could not shoot an arrow straight if it was poorly made. A crooked arrow would not fly straight. The most important time, then, was not when the arrow left the bow, but when it was being fashioned---whittled to the perfect shape. So it is with our arrows. Someday, we will send our children into the world to do the work God has given them. Many parents are fearful of that day. However, that is not the most important time. The most important time is their years of training at home. How are we making and shaping the arrows God has given us? As we teach them that everything they learn is to draw them closer to Him and to help them to better do His work, we are shaping those arrows to leave the bow and fly straight to the target.