

The Father's Role in Home Education

by David A. Huston

WHEN A FATHER IS WORKING TO SUPPORT his family, the mother will of necessity be spending more time in the tasks relating to educating the children. But it is a serious mistake for the father to dump the whole thing on mom and have no involvement. The father's involvement does not have to consume a lot of time, but to maximize the children's education and avoid overwhelming the mother, he must be involved as leader of the educational process.

The father's involvement must include the following:

1. Overseeing the entire education process, guiding the understanding of the purpose of education in the family, staying aware of the processes used for learning and what subject matter content the children are studying, and participating in the selection of study materials.
2. Supporting the mother in her daily tasks, which includes asking how things are going; taking the lead role in disciplinary matters and supporting the mother's disciplinary decisions; deciding on relevant subject matter for study together with the children; teaching the children by allowing them to participate with the father in various activities he is involved in; and by teaching the children in specific areas of expertise or interest.
3. Asking the children what they learned at end of each day and how their learning is moving them toward their educational purpose. This can take place at the dinner table, at bed time, or at some other designated time. This is the way home educated children should be tested. It is not a matter of answering a certain percentage of questions of a test paper; it is a matter of being able to tell in an understandable way about what they have learned and how their learning is related to purpose. If they can do this, they have learned.

Fathers who show no interest in the education of their children are seriously remiss in their godly responsibilities as a parent. They are piling their responsibilities on their wives, which is both unfair and unkind. The Bible places the responsibility of educating children first and foremost on their fathers (see Deuteronomy 6:4-8).

The Difference Between the Father's and Mother's Roles

Proverbs 6:20-23 says, "My son, keep your father's command, and do not forsake the law of your mother. Bind them continually upon your heart; tie them around your neck. When you roam, they will lead you; when you sleep, they will keep you; and when you awake, they will speak with you. For the commandment is a lamp, and the law a light; reproofs of instruction are the way of life...."

The first appeal to the son in Proverbs 6 is an appeal to recognize the value of the counsel and direction given by a father and mother. This admonition demonstrates that the things most valuable are often found at home rather than in some distant, exotic place. The invitation is not to find a holy man or guru to follow, but to hear a father's instruction and a mother's law. The individual who turns away from the counsel offered by godly parents rejects one of the most valuable sources of wisdom and direction he will ever find.

The father is said to give commands, while the mother is said to give the law. Perhaps a distinction between the two can be made on the basis of Proverbs 6:23, which equates the commandments with a lamp and the law with light. A lamp is the source of light, an object that emits light. The light is the product of the lamp. In the family relationship, the father is responsible to give commandment—the ultimate objective or purpose in view. The mother is to give the law—the outworking of that purpose, the practical means by which the objective will be achieved.

The root meaning of the word commandment (*mitsvah*) is to constitute. The word law (*torah*) would be better translated as teaching. The root meaning of torah is to shoot at, to point out, or to teach. Therefore, we can think of the commandments as the Constitution that lays out the general purpose and structure of an organization, and law as the Bylaws, which specify how the organization is to operate on a day to day basis.

For example, a father may say to his young son, "I want your room clean when I get home tonight." To enable the child to fulfill this task, the mother may say, "Now the first thing to do is pick up your dirty clothes and put them in the hamper. When that is accomplished, the mother may say, "Now make your bed." In this way, the child, led by his mother's law (or teaching), will accomplish his father's commandment.

Matthew 12:48-50 says, "But He answered and said to the one who told Him, 'Who is My mother and who are My brothers?' And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, 'Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother.'"

Obviously not all children have godly parents whose counsel can be relied upon. Therefore, Jesus lets us know that ultimately our family is our local assembly of believers, particularly those who are actually serving God and doing His will.

(Extracted in part from: *Ancient Wisdom for Today's World* by Daniel Segraves, (1990: Word Aflame Press, Hazelwood, MO), p.28-29.)

The following article appeared in the Associated Press on January 22, 2003

Homeschool Dads Want to Take Active Role

By NICOLE ZIEGLER DIZON

CHICAGO -- For Tim and Nicholas Peebles, school is always in session -- even at the grocery store. As the father and son stroll the aisles, Tim finds plenty of visual aids to teach 8-year-old Nicholas about subjects like health and nutrition, agriculture and economics. No longer content to sit on the sidelines, fathers like Tim Peebles are getting more involved in what was once firmly a woman's domain: homeschooling.

Erika Karres, an education professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, said she has seen an evolution in fathers' roles since homeschooling first caught on in the 1960s and 1970s. The role of dads then was nonexistent, except maybe nodding their heads and saying, "OK, if that's what you want to do, wife," Karres said. "I welcome this as a great, positive change in the homeschooling movement."

While statistics and the stories of homeschoolers suggest mothers still tend to be the stay-at-home teachers, Karres said fathers in general are showing more interest in their children's education. Many homeschooling fathers are following that trend by sharing some of the teaching burden with their wives, she said. Clark Aldrich, who designs computer programs from his home in Madison, Conn., lets 8-year-old Slater sit on his lap and listen in when he takes conference calls for work. Aldrich and his wife split teaching duties and often have science class as a family during their outdoor walks. "We tried kindergarten at public school, but I didn't like their attitude," Aldrich said. "They were of the philosophy that we know better than you know how to raise your child."

About 850,000 students were homeschooled in the spring of 1999, according to the most recent statistics available from the U.S. Department of Education.

Homeschool advocates estimate the current number is closer to 2 million this year, based on their own surveys. In 1998, a voluntary survey of homeschooling parents whose children took one of two national standardized tests found that 23 percent of the mothers of those students were employed, while almost all the fathers -- 98 percent -- had jobs. Federal figures from 1999 showed one of two parents worked in the homes of 444,000 homeschooled children; both parents worked in the homes of 237,000 homeschooled children.

Susan Wise Bauer, co-author of *The Well-Trained Mind: A Guide to Classical Education at Home*, said fathers participate in different ways depending on their reasons for homeschooling. Conservative Christian families tend to view the father as the head of the household, so those fathers may serve as homeschool principals, setting curricula or checking homework, Bauer said. In other families dissatisfied with the quality of public or private schools, fathers may have less traditional jobs that allow them to work from home and share teaching duties, she said.

Whatever the reasons, Bauer said she has noticed more male faces in the crowd when she speaks at homeschool conferences. There used to be no men at these conferences, Bauer said. At the latest one I was at it was almost 50/50. Peebles, a theology doctorate student in Chicago, stays home with Nicholas while his wife works. He sees nothing but benefits in his decision. I'm completely confident it's been a good thing. I have no second guessing at all, Peebles said. I feel blessed that I've been able to be home with him more than most fathers have time to be with their kids. "

Luis Oviles took three of his children out of private schools in the San Francisco area to teach them himself. Oviles schedules his job counseling troubled teens around his children's schoolwork. Many of the teachers are not well-trained to deal with multicultural children, said Oviles, who is Hispanic. Oviles' wife helps with the basics, such as arithmetic, but leaves most of the teaching to him because she speaks limited English, he said. He also gets help from a homeschooling program run by the Laguna Salada Union School District in Pacifica, Calif.

I think there's a real awakening going on, said Robert Ziegler, spokesman for the Home School Legal Defense Association. As we continue to evaluate ourselves family by family, I think dads are saying, hey, there is a role for me. "