



Selah Mom's Night Out Talk

February 28th, 2006

First, I want to address homeschool moms. When the history books are written from God's perspective, I think you will have far more significance than you realize. I have realized that afresh, studying the Old Testament and how frequently it is the "behind the scenes" women that change history: Sarah, Moses' mother, the Hebrew midwives, Manoah's wife, and Hannah.

My Story

I was homeschooled from the fourth grade and was thankful for the freedom from sitting in a boring class all day and for being able to do my own thing. *The tough decision to be homeschooled through high school, etc.* I can still remember so clearly the pressure from the other dads on the *Boy Scout Eagle Board of Review*.

Three sample concerns that it seemed that homeschooling was going to hinder:

- *International Businessman?* When I was a kid I wanted to be an international businessman. I wanted to travel, etc. Homeschooling would probably not provide a prestigious education, so becoming an important international businessman was out.
- *Foreign Language?* How, if you are homeschooled, are you going to learn specialized subjects like foreign languages? I started homeschooling, and learning French was not working, so I thought foreign language was out. I would watch my brother and sister come home from their high school French classes able to speak with Mom, and all I could say was a few scattered phrases...
- *Underdeveloped social skills?* How are you going to develop interpersonal skills if you are always at home?

Not an international business man, but an international traveler:

Some of my travels: Colorado for the summers, then Washington DC, then Alaska, Mexico, then France for three summers, England, Ireland, Corsica, then Kenya, Switzerland, Senegal, Pakistan, Afghanistan. And not one of them was for tourism.

Paul's phone call from Moody after camping in Chamonix. So ironically, I was sheltered from Leigh and Bellarmine High Schools and I was exposed to the world.

A love and a rich experience with the French language:

Mr. Alexander :« *Vous ne parlez pas comme les autres Américains... ils parlent comme ils ont une pomme de terre dans la bouche !* »

My Perspective as a Homeschooler

What did I value most about the homeschool education? What is the key difference between class-room and home-room education? Why am I thankful that, after all of the difficulties, I am very glad that I was homeschooled? My framework for thinking about this depends on what my goal for education is. What is, then, the goal for education?

What is the goal of education?

One article said: “Education is preparation for adulthood.”¹ But what is adulthood? Just making money, paying bills, taking the kids to school, watching football? According to most modern secularists, it seems that education is to prepare people to be strong members of the work-force, especially as you get higher in education (college, graduate school). That is *close*.

But just become a productive part of the work for is not everything. For example: what is the difference between a Michelangelo painting of a nude and elicit hard-core pornography? What is the difference between good literature and bad literature? The difference between a John Grisham novel and a Victor Hugo or a Doskevesky novel? The difference between the *Prayer of Jabez* and *Calvin’s Institutes*? What is the difference between the sound of a vacuum cleaner and a Vivaldi symphony? What is the difference between a good leader and a bad leader? Why is one philosophy of life better than another? Why should a person die—or not die—for his country or his belief?

How do we get at an idea of education that gives a sound framework for answering these questions?

Back to the Garden: Let’s look back to the first creation and what God designed for mankind. Adam was definitely made for work (“God took the man and put him into the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it.”) but not *only* work. Adam had to be creative (naming all the animals), a man of authority (rule over), a poet (his first words to Eve), and a lover. My imagination was sparked recently from a scene in *Paradise Lost* in which Milton describes Satan’s emotion at seeing God’s creation of man for the first time:

*“From this Assyrian garden, where the fiend
Saw undelighted all delight, all kind
Of living creatures new to sight and strange*

¹ Steve Moitozo “The REAL GOAL of Education” <http://www.athomeinamerica.com/node.php?id=8>

Two of far nobler shape, erect and tall,
Godlike erect, with native honor clad
In naked majesty seemed lords of all
And worthy seemed for in their looks divine
The image of their glorious Maker shone
Truth, wisdom, sanctitude severe and pure²

According to the Bible, *education is developing into an image-bearer of an infinite God of glory*. That is why it never ends... because there is always more of the infinite God to taste and to reflect.

So then what in my experience was the advantage, when it came to the nuts-and-bolts of homeschooling, over public or private school? Three things:

I. IT GAVE ME THE FREEDOM TO DELIGHT IN DISCOVERY INSTEAD OF PASSIVE CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION.

Much of Modern Education is Rowing a Sailboat. Predictable, steady, even, and hard work! It is the factory-style education that can promise simplicity, security and regularity and would love to find a way to “ensure success” for our future generation. You do make *some* progress rowing, but it tends to force everyone into the same rhythm and speed.

I found that a better alternative is to treat education as the means by which the cords of self-discipline and the sails of personality and interests are angled just right so that the wind of the delight in discovery fills the sails. What is the most powerful teacher in the world? I think it is when a motivated person tastes of the delight of learning. No teacher, no program, no e-learning can ever, ever compete against a young person that *is bursting to know something*.

Einstein says something similar:

"It is almost a miracle that modern teaching methods have not yet entirely strangled the holy curiosity of inquiry; for what this delicate little plant needs more than anything, besides stimulation, is freedom."³

Perhaps the clearest place this was seen is when I went back to a “factory school setting.” I felt outraged at how dull the material was and no one else cared. Had they all been conditioned?⁴

Theology II

² John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book IV, 285-29

⁴ (New York: Barnes and Noble, 116)

³ “The Formative Years II” <http://www.aip.org/history/einstein/early2.htm>

⁴ I have often felt that Bible school is like force-feeding someone high volumes of wine and fine cheese who is used to cheetos and soda.

Getting a bad grade in Theology II and afterwards having dinner with a top Evangelical theologian who told his daughter that I was the most articulate in the group.

Preaching: Streamside vs. “Communication of Biblical Truth”

A “C” in Preaching class at Moody—the school D.L. Moody founded! (Compared with preaching at Streamside Christian Camp)

A broken and humble passion to learn is more valuable than technique or form. In a sad way, the same thing is true with growth in God’s word. From the immediate people I know, more people got fired up in secular school through a para-church organization where there was freedom than at Bible school where spirituality was regimented through mandatory chapel, church attendance, etc.

C. S. Lewis writes, “*The task of the modern educator is not to cut down jungles but to irrigate deserts.*”⁵

Are you irrigating the imagination of your children? Their desire for what is *right*? Their love, their honor?

2. IT SHELTERED ME FROM THE HIGHLY CONTAGIOUS “ENTERTAIN-ME” SPIRIT AND ALLOWED ME TO DEVELOP MY OWN SELF-DISCIPLINE TO LEARN.

An Entertainment Culture

Ravi Zacharias says “We live in a generation that hears with its eyes and thinks with its feelings.”⁶

A common educational goal of young people is to get the most amount of credentials for the least amount of work. So contagious!

Neil Postman sounds the same alarm:

“What Orwell feared were those who would ban books. What Huxley feared was that there would be no reason to ban a book, for there would be no one who wanted to read one. Orwell feared those who would deprive us of information. Huxley feared those who would give us so much that we would be reduced to passivity and egoism. Orwell feared that the truth would be concealed from us. Huxley feared the truth would be drowned in a sea of irrelevance. Orwell feared we would become [an imprisoned] culture. Huxley feared we would become a trivial culture, imprisoned only by man’s almost infinite appetite for distractions.”⁷

⁵ C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), 24.

⁶ “An Ancient Message through Modern Means , to a Postmodern Mind” in *Telling the Truth* ed. D.A. Carson, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 26.

⁷ Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, (New York: Penguin, 1986), vii-viii. I wanted to mention that I had abridged the quote slightly to make it clearer for an auditory reading but I forgot.

Oftentimes I would ask students who their favorite teacher was and they would say, “Mr. So and So, because he is easy.”

Meanwhile, my favorite teacher split my mind open to see things I had never seen and others would just say, “He is too philosophical and complicated...”

That statement leads to remarkable dissatisfaction and misery, and yet I am infected by it almost every time I go to school. But I was sheltered from that for much of my upbringing, largely because we had no TV.

Listen to the words of the preface to Jonathan Edwards, “*The Religious Affections*.”

“A latent fire pulses and quivers under the acute and victorious and remorseless arguments, and there is that in their pages which will keep them vital and vitalizing so long as men crave great thoughts to live and die with.”⁸

Edwards, toward the end of his life, held up a copy of Locke's Essay and openly declared to some of his friends that when he read Locke at the age of fourteen, he did so with more pleasure than “*the most greedy Miser [finds] in gathering up handfuls of Silver and Gold from some new discovered Treasure.*”⁹

The most resources and the least education? Isn't it surprising that we have by far the best resources in all of history for education. Not even counting electric lights, leisure time, pencils and paper, but also the internet, free libraries, word processors, and Google, it would seem that we would be by far the most intelligent people ever on the face of the earth. I went to Bible school, so the best area I can compare is theological knowledge and it is shocking if I compare a testimony I hear in your average high school group with that of Hannah or Mary or Charlotte Bronte (who was taken out of school).

Are you teaching your children thoughts so great that they can live and die by them? Or are you teaching your children to make the most amount of money for the least amount of work? Or, more importantly, are you teaching your children that *there even is such* a thing as *thoughts* that are worth dying for?

The greatest proof of Christianity (education...) for others is not how far a man can logically analyze his reasons for believing, but how far in practice he will stake his life on his belief.

... T.S. Eliot (1888-1965)¹⁰

3. IT GAVE ME THE AUTHENTIC SOCIAL CONTEXT OF A HEALTHY FAMILY INSTEAD OF ARTIFICIAL CONTEXT OF SCHOOL FRIENDS.

⁸ Alexander Smellie, (1898) in *the Religious Affections*, by Jonathan Edwards (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2001), 9.

⁹ 17 Cited in Paul Copan, “Jonathan Edwards philosophical influences: Lockean or Malebranchian?” JETS, March 2001, quoting from Wallace E. Anderson, ed., *The Works of Jonathan Edwards: Scientific and Philosophical Writings* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980) 17. Hopkins's work was *The Life and Character of the Late Mr. Jonathan Edwards*, which was published in Boston in 1765.

¹⁰ <http://www.worldofquotes.com/author/T.-S.-Eliot/1/>

Authority:

David Riesman writes:

“As adult authority disintegrates, the young are more and more the captives of each other.... When adult control disappears, the young’s control of each other intensifies.”¹¹ ... Many young people many even become enslaved to the tyranny of their peers.

Fathers, know your power!

Gender:

School makes everyone play the same note on their instrument of gender. I was horrified at Moody at the amount of social pain the whole school caused by forcing everyone into the same gender mold.

When it comes to relationship, purity is so much more valuable than experience. It was hard for me at college—completely separated from a family, sisters, etc. There was a girl that I was interested in and pursued; and it was I thought ironic how this worked against me. Because I did not grow up in the youth group and have a lot of experience, I was awkward and nervous around her; and in the end she was not interested. But I have wondered, if it was not the very thing that put her off that was in fact one of the greatest gifts I could have given her: namely, purity and mystery of who she was as a woman.

I have the best small-group in the world. We are multigenerational, multi-gender, and have different personalities. I went snow-camping with one of the girls in this small group a few weeks ago and we slept in the same snow cave out in the middle of Yosemite and no one batted an eye. The girl was my sister, and the small group is my family.

My Perspective as a Christian

The Value of a Soul

If the modern world’s goal for education is to prepare for adulthood and to ensure material success I want to wave a banner over all that I have said the radical words of Jesus:

Matthew 16:26: “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul.

Your children can gain the whole world; and yet if they lose their soul all that they gained will only multiply the tragedy of their loss.

Matthew 18:3: “and said, “Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.”

¹¹ Quoted in Henri Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer* (New York: Image Books, 1972) 32

If your children—or you for that matter—love Jesus like a little child—you might fail in everything and in the end you win.

Does this mean we run from education and just shelter our children?

Two Extremes: “It is a matter of personal choice, and so I will do everything like everyone else in the world and if they want to be a Christian that is their choice.”

The other extreme is to overly shelter them and think that so long as you keep whitewashing the tomb, suddenly the corpse will come to life.”

Your children must meet God is a radical way on their own, and yet you can do things that facilitate this:

C.S. Lewis wrote “The Seeing Eye,” and he flips the question, “How do we reach God” by asking, “How do we avoid him?”

“How can we reach God?”

How, then, it may be asked, can we either reach or avoid [God]? The avoiding, in many times and places, has proved so difficult that a very large part of the human race failed to achieve it. But in our own time and place it is extremely easy. Avoid silence, avoid solitude, avoid any train of thought that leads off the beaten track. Concentrate on money, sex, status, health and (above all) on your own grievances. Keep the radio on. Live in a crowd. Use plenty of sedation. If you must read books, select them very carefully. But you'd be safer to stick to the papers. You'll find the advertisements helpful; especially those with a sexy or a snobbish appeal.¹²

There is not shock at the shattering silence of the God of the Bible in our world. If we think that evolution and “Sex-ed” are the main problem with a secular education, I think the devil laughs.

Psalm 119: Old Testament and the word “to learn:” Appears twice in Proverbs and 13 times in Psalm 119. Here the Psalmist tells us who the teacher is that can teach us to have a “seeing eye”

“*teth*”

Psalm 119:65-72: A testimony of the education of the Psalmist

65 You have dealt well with your servant,

O LORD, according to your word.

66 Teach me good judgment and knowledge,

for I believe in your commandments.

67 Before I was afflicted I went astray,

but now I keep your word.

68 You are good and do good;

teach me your statutes.

69 The insolent smear me with lies,

¹² Lewis, *Christian Reflections* (Glasgow: Fount Paperbacks, 1981), 211.

*but with my whole heart I keep your precepts;
70their heart is unfeeling like fat,
but I delight in your law.*

*71It is good for me that I was afflicted,
that I might learn your statutes.*

*72The law of your mouth is better to me
than thousands of gold and silver pieces.*

So the teacher is affliction, because nothing like hurting makes us look beyond ourselves. That was my experience: I remember a few of those days when I had nothing to be respected for and I was miserable: music, career, skill, pleasure, etc.

The River: articulating my pain

“At first it was easy sailing. Although there was no one else to sail with close by it didn’t bother me. Then, during the third week out, to my disappointment the canoe sprang a leak. This meant I had to bail almost constantly and my feet were always wet. I began to wish I had more company but no one was ever in sight. I began to get sick and weak and my pace slowed. One night I heard another group of kids coming down the river. They were going much faster than I was and so I lay down in my canoe so I would not be humiliated by their passing me. I can still remember them coming by; they were laughing and having a good time in their nice dry canoes. I longed to go back and start over with another boat but that was impossible. There was no going back up the river. I cried myself to sleep that night in the bottom of my wet canoe.”

Story of a Prison Surgeon

Story of being in prison with your child and having the choice of life in the filthy cell with a beautiful view of the land you will have one day with your freedom, or no chance of freedom and having a surgeon come to sew the child’s eyes shut so that the child can happily be unaware of his situation. (No one would choose the surgeon!)

Now, if you are not showing your children God, and if you are not fighting with insight and prayer against the devil’s blinders, not only are you welcoming the surgeon into your children’s bedroom; you are doing his job for him.

Be still, my soul: when dearest friends depart,

*And all is darkened in the vale of tears,
Then shalt thou better know His love, His heart,
Who comes to soothe thy sorrow and thy fears.
Be still, my soul: thy Jesus can repay
From His own fullness all He takes away*