
GETTING STARTED *Homeschooling Today*



by Steve and Kara Murphy

Find a support group, attend a convention, study educational philosophies, pinpoint your child's learning style, and choose a curriculum—many articles geared toward new homeschoolers give similar advice. However, the regional convention is far away, and at conventions we have witnessed the glazed eyes of the overwhelmed, inexperienced mom with her arms loaded with books as she wanders between vendor booths searching for the “perfect” curriculum for her family. Support groups are not available in some areas of the country, or it is difficult to find a group that shares your philosophy.

In the beginning, we spent hours reading about different philosophies and children's learning styles, but ultimately, we still had no idea *how* to homeschool our children. The labyrinth of choices available to the niche market of Christian home educators is confusing at best and misleading at worst. The advice we received wasn't necessarily bad advice, but as new homeschoolers, we didn't find it helpful.

At *Homeschooling Today* magazine, we desire to offer practical help to our readers. Home education will look different in every family, and there is no exact formula for everyone, but we have found certain similarities and particular family habits that guide our choices and contribute to our success in training our children. These habits help you start homeschooling. . . . today.

Get Legal Knowledge

First, understand and comply with the homeschool laws of your state. From *Homeschooling Today* magazine's homepage, www.homeschoolingtoday.com, choose Resources/Organizations/HSLDA State Laws and select your resident state. If you have concerns or questions, we recommend that you join the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA). Your family membership provides a lawyer who stands ready should anyone challenge your right to homeschool, supports work to maintain the rights of parents to educate their children, and contributes to the defense of persecuted families. It is worth every penny of the reasonable fee.



Once you have rendered unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, turn your attention to rendering unto God the things that are God's—the children, made in His image, with whom He has blessed you (Matthew 22:21; Genesis 1:27).

Start with the Bible

Scripture opens with “In the beginning, God . . .” and our instruction should begin there. R. C. Sproul, Jr., a regular columnist for our *Father's Heart* department, writes that Christians are required to teach only three subjects to their children. He nicknames them the three Gs: who God is, what God has done, and what God requires.

Some Christians might object to this goal simplification. After all, shouldn't we be teaching our children how to get along in society, how to be hard-working employees, and how to be good citizens? All that and more is included in the summary of the commandments—to love God and to love our neighbor.

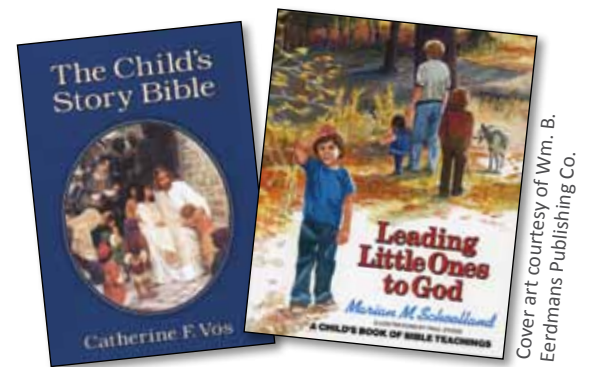
To teach the three Gs, it should seem obvious that the first and most important resource is the Bible. Yet it is so obvious that we often neglect it. Do you have a Bible? Read it together. Study it. Memorize it. Meditate on it. Apply what you read to everyday situations. Use it to teach and train your children. Use it to correct them. As you read it aloud together, investigate what you are reading. Dr. Ruth Beechick's excellent book, *A Biblical Home Education: Building Your Homeschool on the Foundation of God's Word* (B & H, 2007), includes many suggestions for enhancing your Bible study.

Family Worship

If your family has never enjoyed a regular, daily time together in God's Word, you might consider *The Family Worship Book: A Resource Book for Family Devotions* by Terry L. Johnson (Christian Focus, 2003). With practical suggestions including how to structure your worship time, he offers resources for catechism and creeds, prayers, Psalms, and Bible reading schedules. Fathers, this is a particularly appropriate way for you to lead your family as you begin the adventure of home education. Perhaps you will lead a family time before or after breakfast, after dinner, in the evening, or before bed. The logistics are less important than that you actually implement the time. When you miss a day or two, as we all do on occasion, just resume leading it again.

If your children are young, using a story Bible can be helpful. *The Child's Story Bible* by Catherine Vos (Eerdmans, 1983) is our family favorite. Another great devotional for mothers to use with younger children is *Leading Little Ones to God* by Marian M. Schoolland (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995). You can find

suggestions for using this book in HST's July/August 2008 issue in the *Lessons for Little Ones* department. Kara uses this book to help our children form the habit of doing daily lessons with Mom. Even if you don't use these particular resources, please do not neglect this most important, foundational, and overarching study.



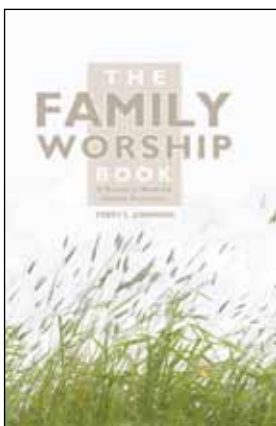
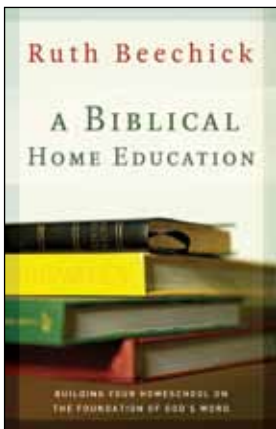
A second enjoyable and educational habit that coincides with Bible reading is singing Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs as a family (Ephesians 5:19). Even if you are not musical, resources are available for family music, such as the Genevan Foundation's *Hymns for Kith and Kin* (www.genevanfoundation.com/). This audio CD coordinates well with *The Family Worship Book*.

Read Aloud

After establishing a daily habit of coming before the Lord and looking into His Book, you can think of other ways to teach who God is, what He has done, and what He requires. Isn't it amazing that God has chosen two primary means to communicate about Himself to us? He uses the Bible and His creation (Psalm 19:1). God's use of literature suggests that we, too, should value it in our family life.

The next priority is to establish the habit of reading—reading aloud as a family and children reading independently when they are ready. In what is becoming a modern classic homeschooling resource, *Honey for a Child's Heart*, Gladys Hunt writes:

That is what a book does. It introduces us to people and places we wouldn't ordinarily know. A good book is a magic gateway into a wider world of wonder, beauty, delight, and adventure. Books are experiences that make us grow, that add something to our inner stature. Children and books go together in a special way. I can't imagine any pleasure greater than bringing to the uncluttered, supple mind of a child the delight of knowing the many rich things God has given us to enjoy. Parents have this wonder-



ful privilege, and books are their keenest tools (Zondervan, 2002, emphasis added).

We have used this book of books to lead us to some of our favorite works of literature. Our copy is well-marked. A checkmark signifies we have read that book. A highlighted title indicates we have the book in our family library.

If you would like more description of individual books and a wider variety of reading levels and subject areas, try *The Book Tree: A Christian Reference for Children's Literature* by Elizabeth McCallum and Jane Scott (Cannon, 2001). This mother/daughter team offers a good description of literature, including biographies, for children from preschool through high school.

Covering Content

These two resources suggest books from many content areas—literature, history, biography, science, poetry, and so on. In addition to learning directly from nature, we also like to read other books on God's creation. A multitude of books teach science concepts in an enjoyable way. As we read, we also use the important method given to us in Scripture for teaching our children—we talk (Deuteronomy 6:6). Discussion is simple and vital for biblical learning, but it is easy to overlook in our schedule.

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In our home, Kara reads aloud oodles of picture books on a variety of topics in the morning after breakfast and/or in the afternoon after lunch. *Five in a Row: Volumes 1, 2, and 3* by Jane Claire Lambert (Five in a Row Publishing, 1997) suggests many great titles to help you start this habit and how to use them to enhance your learning and relationship. Usually, Kara has one longer book in progress at the same time. In addition to reading the Bible, Steve reads aloud chapter books in the evening before bed. Our family also has a routine, quiet reading time in the afternoon when the little ones are napping. This hour gives everyone an opportunity to read books of his choice from our family bookshelves. Much learning

occurs during this unstructured time. Implementing these habits will vary greatly from home to home, but the necessity is the same. Read aloud, read together, read individually, read often, and discuss what you read.

Establishing habits of family Bible reading and family worship, reading aloud together, and reading independently doesn't sound like most "getting started homeschooling" articles, does it? Should families that don't homeschool incorporate these habits into daily life too? That's right! Ultimately, homeschooling simply is discipling children through life. The richer we make our home's family culture, the richer our children's educational experiences will be. The more foundational God's Word is to our day-to-day life, the better we will obey the Lord.

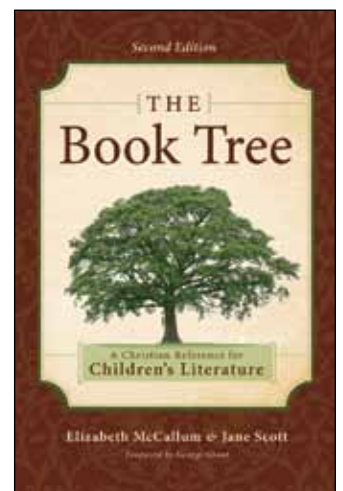
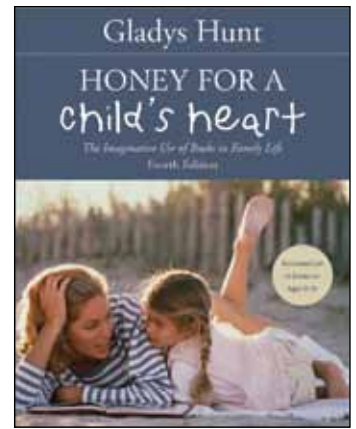
Choosing Curriculum

In *A Biblical Home Education* Ruth Beechick writes,

Teaching children at home does not have to be as difficult as people make it by trying to follow too much of the world's schooling system that has developed layer upon layer over the years. We can peel away excess layers by the one great principle of viewing language learning as different from the content subjects. Language includes speaking, reading, writing, listening, and thinking. These are skills to use for learning Bible and all other content subjects. That is more effective and more efficient than adding layers of skill classes.

Most homeschoolers think that the how-to's of homeschooling begin with choosing and using curriculum. No matter what your style or your preferences, there is probably a curriculum geared toward your family, but unless you wrote it, it won't fit your family perfectly. How do you choose? That is the wrong initial question. Your first question should be, "What, if any, curriculum do we need?" We have already discussed reading as a way to learn in the content areas. Did you realize that as we read, we also teach skills to our children?

Most language skills are easily integrated into our reading times. Learn more about something God created; for example, dolphins. Read books about dolphins and copy from those books. Make a list of new words and write new stories about a dolphin. Each child can participate at his ability level. Young children copy one or two words and dictate a story to you. Older children do additional research in an encyclopedia and write a report. The littlest ones may learn the sound of *d* for *dolphin*. Better yet, read and copy from the Scripture your family reads. Make a little booklet about how it applies to your home.



Have the older children look up cross references and memorize verses. Make illustrated signs of Bible verses to post around the house as reminders.

Purchasing Wisely

If you decide to buy additional curricular materials, refrain from purchasing your entire set of materials for the year at one time. Spending your entire budget locks you into something that may

Home education will look different in every family

or may not fit the needs of your family. Your needs may change through the year. No curriculum or set of materials is so crucial to your homeschooling that you have no other choices. If you and your children enjoy using something particular, it can be helpful. On the other hand, don't feel bound by a curriculum just because you spent money on it. Sell it on a used curriculum board on the Internet or at a used curriculum fair and move onto something else.

Consider the time you have available to spend one-on-one with your children. Decide what skills you would like your children to learn and look for materials that will make up for any inabilities you may have. For example, since our time is limited, our family uses some self-teaching tools to teach arithmetic and mathematics, enabling the children to learn independently. We also purchased a typing curriculum for our older children to use unaided. We use these products during our "table time" in the late morning. Your family will have different strengths and goals.

One of the worst approaches homeschoolers fall into is simply to look at what the government school teaches and assume that standard rather than making informed decisions that fit their family's values and circumstances. For example, just because the schools are teaching grammar every year for twelve years doesn't mean this is the best approach. (For further discussion of that topic, read Ruth Beechick's article in the January/February 2007 issue of *Homeschooling Today* magazine.)

Many parents fear teaching a child to read. But think about that fear. If you read, you certainly can teach someone else to read. For children under the age of ten, *The Three R's* by Ruth Beechick (Mott Media, 2006) is a wonderful resource for parents to learn how to use natural methods to teach reading, writing, and arithmetic. Most of the ideas I've shared came from Beechick's book. These and other family-friendly, home-centered, simple resources are

usually best. If you decide you need a curriculum, find an inexpensive one that isn't time consuming.

The Bottom Line on Curriculum

You can use curriculum materials to supplement the healthy home habits you have already established. Some curricular materials can even enhance the habits you are striving to establish. After your family worship and Bible time, family and individual reading times, building a rich family culture, and working on skills in the context of life, you can fill any leftover time with a subject curriculum you enjoy. If you would rather plant a garden or make homemade bread or deliver meals to those in need, feel free to do that. When the Murphys aren't traipsing around the United States meeting homeschoolers, our family likes to listen to music, look at great works of art, tramp around outside, draw, and make and play games. Your family will have other interests and callings. Pursue them to the glory of God.

Homeschooling Today Magazine Can Help

Our "Bookshelf and Beyond" department in every issue presents reviews of a variety of books and curriculum, old and new, to offer subscribers specific suggestions. We focus on family-friendly materials we have seen work. Before we began publishing the magazine, those reviews were a great source of help, encouragement, and information for our family. We believe that you will find *Homeschooling Today* magazine a rich source of help to your family too.



While we can't advise the best math curriculum for your ten-year-old, we can't offer legal advice, we are not experts in family conflict resolution, and we can't diagnose your child's learning disability, we can answer *some* questions to help you in the sacred calling of discipling your children. If you want to ask a question you think we can answer, please contact us. Go to www.homeschoolingtoday.com/Contact, choose Questions & Comments for your subject line and we will answer as quickly as we can. May God bless your family as you begin this exciting adventure.

