

Ancient Paths to Modern Blessings: The Vision of the Modern Christian Homeschool Movement: Part 3

Homeschooling: It's Not Just for Kids!

By David Monk

Many who have not experienced homeschooling themselves (and even some of us forgetful veterans) see homeschooling as pure sacrifice for parents in exchange for benefit to the kids. It is clearly a sacrifice. Homeschool parents exchange many of the finer things they expected to enjoy in adulthood for, shall we say, unexpected things. They exchange free time for study time, two incomes for one, glamorous dates for trips to Sam's Club with the stroller, the approval of friends for questioning glances, and rich upholstery and rugs for school desks and books. But the homeschool vision I want to describe to you isn't simply "children win – parents lose." Some of the richest blessings come to mom and dad! There are two sources of these blessings. One source is the work of homeschooling itself. Moms and dads reap rich rewards in their minds, character, and spirits from applying themselves to teaching their children diligently. The second source is a clearer understanding of their unique roles as mothers and fathers. This understanding does not come from going through the mechanics of homeschooling but from reading and learning from wise teachers who, I believe, are helping a generation of families return to biblical marriage and parenting.



Most early presentations of these ideas that I have read deal primarily with the roles of mothers since they undergo the most dramatic changes in what they actually do day-to-day. In that sense, homeschooling is often misunderstood as a women's movement, however it is important to understand that while homeschooling changes the lives of wives in easy-to-identify ways, truly catching the Christian homeschool family vision described in this series requires even larger changes in the perspective of fathers. Homeschooling is often initiated (and unfortunately often completed) solely by mothers' energy. This is certainly a step in the right direction, but there is more. A healthy, full-family vision will include both "turning the hearts of the fathers" AND "Titus 2" motherhood.

Blessings for Fathers

Men don't like to be told what to do. I know this because I am one! We are very successful at accomplishing what we set our hearts to do but resist (sometimes to an absurd degree) laundry lists of action items. I believe God understood this about us, and when he deals with us, he usually sets the goal, convinces us that it is compelling, and then sets us loose. When God starts a revival among men, it is inevitably one of the heart. This is not to say that changed actions don't follow; they do. The starting point for revival, however, is inside of us. I believe a revival of men's hearts began about 20 years ago all around the country. It was unplanned, uncoordinated, and spontaneous. The result was thousands of visionary fathers who have stood against the flow and proven the ultimate power of heart-based fatherhood. Many believe it was in fulfillment of the prophecy in Malachi:

"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse."

Because many recognized this revival, references to Elijah and the "mantle" are common in homeschool literature. Notice for instance a few well-known company names that reflect this: Mantle Ministries (Little Bear Wheeler), Elijah Company (Chris and Ellyn Davis), Spirit of Elijah Ministries (Norm Wakefield).

So how is this new visionary father different than the typical “good father” of the 21st century? Don’t good Christian fathers see themselves as leaders in their home? Don’t they see themselves as responsible for their children? Don’t they see themselves as providers of their family’s financial needs? Yes, I believe they do, but this expresses their sense of duty to their families, not the alignment of their hearts. Permit me to use a somewhat trite illustration to show the difference. If I entrusted my pair of Beagles (cute, but troublesome) in your care while I went out of the country for several weeks, I could probably trust you to care for them well, out of your sense of duty. You would keep them fed and watered. Since I warned you they eat anything not nailed down, you would keep your cleaning chemicals and chocolate (their favorite) carefully out of reach. Since I warned you they love to run away but can’t find their way home, you would probably keep them fenced or tied up diligently. These flaws in their character may not concern you, however, since your service is one of duty and not necessarily of affection. If you took a liking to them, however, you may be deeply concerned with the dangers they may expose themselves to if they are not better trained (we tried, believe me!). This change in perspective is very similar what fathers go through when they begin to lead from the heart, rather than strictly out of duty.

When fathers’ hearts are turned toward home, they draw their identity, fulfillment, and purpose from their roles as husband and father. When men’s hearts are aligned this way, their actions inevitably follow. They get involved in spiritual leadership because they care deeply for the eternal destiny of their “flock”. They work on character issues because they want to save their children from pain in the future. They step in to block corrupting influences wherever they may come from, not only from institutional schools. They teach their children because they want them to have the best chance possible in their lives. They are deeply grateful for their wife’s efforts in teaching the children because they see what a difference it makes. They watch carefully for signs of discouragement in their wives or children and deal with it quickly since this can be so difficult to overcome. They commit their financial resources (to whatever degree God has provided) toward making the family and the homeschool successful. This is the way God intended men to be,

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and when they are properly aligned, His blessing follow.

What blessings do fathers experience when they align their hearts to their families? Quite simply, they regain their heritage. A man’s relationship with his wife improves because he is more in line with the natural concerns of her heart. He gets the satisfaction of earning the respect of his children. His home is more content, his wife is energized, and he is “praised in the gates” as the father of a healthy home. What more could a 21st century man want?

But there is more. When a father has adopted the whole vision, he sees many other benefits in character and mind, some quite unexpected. First, taking the job of spiritual leader drives a father to the Lord himself. Nothing energizes your personal devotional time like knowing you will be the feature presentation at the next family prayer meeting! Secondly, it encourages you to practice what you preach. You will find, for example, that your admonishment to “be diligent” will fall on deaf ears if you don’t manage to get around to math lessons for two weeks! Thirdly, our own children have a way of exposing to us hidden, sinful attitudes and habits that we thought we had conquered. By spending more time with our kids, we find we are forced to deal with these sins and humbly pray for God’s grace to work in our lives.

Aside from the benefits to their character, homeschool fathers reap benefits to their minds. They keep learning, and they keep reminding themselves of what they have learned in the past. This not only makes them better fit for God’s use, but it models a lifestyle-of-learning behavior for our children. Perhaps the best benefit to the father’s mind is that he ends up grappling with, and eventually answering the hard questions of life. Children ask very insightful questions like “how do seeds turn into plants?”, “how do we know the Bible is true?”, “where does the rain come from?”, “if God is only good, where did the devil come from?”, and “why do I have to learn to write anyway?”. When fathers listen to themselves trying to answer some of these questions, they realize they don’t know the answers themselves. This sends them back to the books... which is good!

But this homeschool family vision is not only for fathers; there is deep new meaning to be found for Mothers as well.

Blessings for Mothers

Implicit in the philosophy of the modern Christian homeschool movement is a radical departure from our culture's egalitarian concept of the role of women. Like most of the other ideas in the homeschool movement, it is not a new one but an old one reapplied today in spite of determined opposition. While it was a reaction to feminism, it was not a return to the stay-at-home mom of the 1950's. It is much richer and more significant than that. It is a return to the traditional place of women as educators, health care providers, counselors, and more.

The year 1983 has been suggested as the birth date of the modern homeschool movement. It was just two years afterwards that one of the boldest and clearest books refuting the dominant feminist culture was written. There was hardly a homeschool mom to be found in the early 90's who had not read it (many with tears). Mary Pride (a former radical feminist herself) in this book *The Way Home*, proposed that Titus 2 motherhood was not only God's plan, but it was fulfilling, significant, and more valuable than any other pursuit a woman could follow. The following excerpt from the introduction chronicles the decline of motherhood and pleads for a return to the biblical "homeworking" lifestyle.

"Motherhood in the fifties, for example, had been reduced to a five or ten-year span, lasting only until the youngest of the two or three 'planned' children was in kindergarten. With an empty house full of labor-saving appliances and a family which no longer seemed to need her, it was understandable that a woman felt trapped at home. She was not expected to produce anything at home; her very inactivity was a status symbol for her husband.... Feminism claimed to be the answer to the housewife's dilemma, and women were captivated by the freedom feminists promised. Sentimental arguments about the importance of motherhood fell flat against the obvious truth that the children already weren't home most of the day.... They wanted more scope for their talents.... The sad truth is that the 'traditional role' which feminists attacked in the fifties had already lost its scriptural fullness. Christian women were staying home out of habit, not out of conviction. Women had been robbed of their role, even though they were 'in their place'."

"Homeworking is the biblical lifestyle for Christian wives. Homeworking is not just staying home either (that was the mistake of the fifties). We are not called by God to stay home, or to sit at home, but to work at home. Homeworking is the exact opposite of the modern careerist/institutional/Socialist movement. It is a way to take back control of education, health care, agriculture, social welfare, business, housing, morality, and evangelism from the faceless institutions to which we have surrendered them."

I can not hope to describe the homeworking lifestyle in this brief article. What is important to understand is that in these early days, the return to traditional motherhood and homeschooling went hand-in-hand. It is difficult to understand the homeschool vision for the family without grasping this dramatically enriched role for mothers. The "coming home" which accompanied the homeschool movement was not simply modern career women being forced to quit their job and come home so she could handle the sheer volume of work

homeschooling required.

The homeschool family vision redefined the roles of mothers to their biblical "homeworking" and "keeper at home" models. This shift of priorities and focus brought mothers home voluntarily, not just to teach but to stay.

Visionary homeworking motherhood is quite different

than what our culture understands as the "stay-at-home mom." The latter has a long list of delegated tasks such as taking the kids to school, signing them up for sports class, keeping the house clean, preparing meal plans, buying clothes, and yes, even baking cookies. A visionary homeworking mother sees her situation much differently. God gave her husband the eternally significant responsibility of raising children for Him, and of managing the home in an orderly and productive way. God also uniquely gifted her, the wife, to manage and direct these affairs day-to-day better than anyone else. Therefore, under her husband's leadership, she is doing the work handed to her by God (thru her husband) and she does it with all her might to please her Creator. She takes dominion over the home and transforms it to an orderly, productive place. She takes dominion over the education of her children and refuses to allow institutional schools to undermine her children's values or the relationships in her family. She takes dominion over the

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health of those under her care (including elders) and refuses to allow it to be compromised by poor eating habits, or by poor health-care choices (another topic for another article). She prioritizes her work as mother over any other opportunities, no matter how flattering, that come her way. Her identity is inextricably tied to her motherhood. In the words of the Proverbs her “children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her” and “the heart of her husband doth safely trust in her”.

Visionary “homeworking” motherhood brings deep new meaning for women, and with it, a re-energized sense of purpose. But that is not all. Women reap benefits in their character as well. I will not kid you, much of the character development comes through the sheer difficulty of the job. Gone are the days of doing what you want, of several hours of exertion followed by glowing praise. Gone for a season are the glamorous outfits and the stimulating adult conversation. Sometimes it seems there is no time for yourself at all. This draws mothers to consider humbly that the job they have been given by God (i.e. motherhood) must come before any that they personally desire. They grow to delight in this job and to experience true satisfaction only after they have surrendered themselves to His service. When this transition is complete, mothers feel they have finally found themselves. In fact, they have found what God intended them to be.

While it may be one of the most obvious points made in this essay, it still needs to be made. Mothers benefit greatly in their minds from learning alongside their kids. When the oldest children go into their potty-training years, mothers of all backgrounds and educational levels educate themselves on teaching techniques and generally manage to teach this complex social behavior to their reluctant-learner children. Amazingly, though, these same mothers fear teaching their children to read so deeply, they are convinced they can not do it... in spite of the fact that there are 100 times more books written on this subject than the last one they mastered with almost no help. When mothers rise to the challenge and find that teaching reading is much more rewarding (and considerably less messy) than potty-training, they feel a deep satisfaction. This satisfaction comes not only because they saw their children learn to read, but because they themselves mastered a new skill. This satisfaction grows over the years as they tackle writing, history, math,

science, and eventually the SAT. In the end, mothers have shared many enjoyable years of learning with their children, and the memories last forever.

By this time it should be clear that this vision of motherhood could not be further from the de-moralizing one from which the feminists rebelled. Mothers are the managers of the center of learning, center of industrious work, and the center of character development, which is the home. They are the prized “right arm” of their husbands in the work of nurturing the family. They are indispensable. They are, in the words of the ancient proverb, “the hand that rocks the cradle” which eventually “rules the world.”

In Conclusion:

Homeschooling isn't just for kids. The modern Christian homeschool family vision suggests significant changes in perspectives for both fathers and mothers. In their new visionary roles their significance is not diminished, but enhanced. While accepting their new roles requires sacrifices, mothers and fathers reap rich rewards in their own lives. When these concepts are understood, the vision of the modern Christian homeschool movement reveals itself as dramatically counter-cultural. In fact, to many it may look naively retrospective, or nostalgic. It may appear irrelevant for today. Yet nothing could be further from the truth. It gives families the tools they need to counteract the destruction which creeps into good Christian homes all around them. By applying these Biblical principles they are nurturing healthy, strong, and godly families who really love each other and serve God. By understanding and applying these ancient truths fathers and mothers have found their calling again, a calling worth giving up their dreams, their time, their money, and their lives.

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