



# ***A Homeschool that Handles the Hard Times***

*A Guide for Christian Homeschoolers*

***Tammy Marshall Cardwell***

# **A Homeschool that Handles the Hard Times**

*A Guide for Christian Homeschoolers*

**Tammy Marshall Cardwell**



CJ Press \* Baytown, Texas

Published by CJ Press  
PO Box 268  
Baytown, TX 77522  
[www.cjpress.net](http://www.cjpress.net)

Copyright © 2007 by CJ Press  
All rights reserved. Published 2007  
Published in the United States of America  
ISBN: 0-9754430-5-4  
ISBN 13: 978-0-9754430-5-4

Cover Photography: Catherine “Lindy” Bridges  
Photo: Cascade Mountain Range, Oregon

## **Dedication**

This eBook I dedicate to my family,  
with whom I have gone through many hard times.  
Together, we still stand.

# Contents

Chapter 1: It's All about Priorities	5
Chapter 2: God	9
Chapter 3: Spouse	20
Chapter 4: Children	24
Chapter 5: Church	27
Chapter 6: Academics/Job/ Family Business	30
Chapter 7: Final Thoughts	37
End Notes	38

## Chapter 1

# It's All about Priorities

I've spent some time thinking back over our homeschooling years and comparing how we fared with the stories of other homeschoolers I've known and worked with. Inevitably, these thoughts led me to one basic question. What did we do, and what have others done, that made the difference? Why is it that we were able to homeschool through graduation, through the very same hardships that drive many away from homeschooling and back into the system? I can't say we've experienced it all, but we have dealt with poverty, watching close family members die, a highly destructive midlife crisis, an extra family living in our home for over a year, our oldest son almost losing the use of one eye, a home-based business, and more. We made our share of mistakes, and in many cases it was those mistakes that caused the terrible events we had to live through, but we obviously did much right as well or we'd have given up years ago. I knew I had to find the answer to this question, to determine at last where the difference lies, and share it in hopes of making other lives easier. In the end, the answer was as close as a Wednesday night sermon.

In Matthew 7:24-25 Jesus compares one who follows His instructions to one who builds his house on a rock. So many sermons have focused on this

## A Homeschool that Handles the Hard Times

passage that we should all understand the importance of building our spiritual lives on the right foundation. What I now realize is that, if they are to weather the storms of life, we must also build our homeschools on the proper foundation. And, truly, after all of my studying and meditating on the issue, the answer really did come to me in a Wednesday night sermon. The answer, at least on the surface, is astoundingly simple. “Priorities”

The priorities message is not a new one. My pastor has been preaching it as long as I can remember and I’ve seen for myself that when I keep my priorities in line with God’s priorities I make progress. Likewise, I can track most of the truly damaging events in my life to specific points at which I, or someone close to me, let those priorities shift. Yes, most of the hard times I’ve faced, even the times that might well have resulted in me giving up and putting our sons back into the system, were brought on by yours truly.

**Quick Test:**  
**Where do you invest most  
of your time, energy,  
and money?**

Your answer to this “Quick Test” is a strong indicator of your priorities. The question is, are they the right ones? Are they the ones that result in a family that can handle the hard times, a homeschool that handles the hard times?

What are these right priorities? What is this magic formula that guarantees a successful homeschool? Well, forget the words *magic* and *guarantee*, because there is no magic involved and the only guarantees are in God’s Word, not my words. However, I can assure you that I have seen, in our family and many others, that the one who follows this basic principle lays a foundation that can enable his or her homeschool to withstand any storm, and the one who fails to hold godly priorities weakens their homeschool’s foundation. I also admit freely that it is much easier to list the priorities than it is to live them. They are...

- 1) God
- 2) Spouse
- 3) Children
- 4) Church
- 5) Academic studies/job/home business

## A Homeschool that Handles the Hard Times

Wage earners and homeschooling parents who feel that putting their jobs or their children's academic studies higher up the priority list usually react to this with at least some level of skepticism or shock. Through the years, however, I have realized that only in keeping to this order do I see consistent victory. (Side Note: Victories only come when we have battles, and testimonies result from tests; we will inevitably face both battles and tests in this life.)

When considering the order of these priorities, think about permanence. We were created by God, for God, and our relationship with Him is eternal; He is first. We promised our spouses "until death do us part." They will be with us long after our children are grown and gone; we must continually nurture this relationship. Our children are precious gifts from God, and are our responsibility until they reach that age when they are prepared to move out on their own. Too, every parent of "grown" children knows that the ties and relationships remain no matter how old our kids are.

Have you noticed how many times I used the word relationship? In this world, everything is built on relationship—from buying a car to dealing with a sixteen-year-old daughter, it is your relationship with the other that determines the outcome of any situation. Therefore, these priorities are more than just priorities; they are the order in which we must concentrate on relationships. First come God, our spouse, and our children, then church, jobs, homeschool, etc.

God places us in the church as He wills. (I Corinthians 12:18) Being an active part of the specific church God has called us to is an essential part of the God priority. The Word makes it clear that forgoing church attendance is unacceptable (Hebrews 10:24-26) and that each one of us is a vitally important part of the church we are called to, a part that must be working actively if the body of Christ is to grow. (Ephesians 4:16)

Finally, at the very end of the list, come academic studies, jobs, and the family business. Note my use of the phrase *academic studies*. As parents, we are responsible for teaching our children many things. As homeschooling parents, we also teach academics. Much of what we are responsible for teaching our children falls into one or more of the other priorities. For example, teaching our children to love the Lord is part of our God priority; we are to put him first and lead our children to do the same.

## A Homeschool that Handles the Hard Times

If we keep our priorities in order, academic studies, jobs, and the family business will never come before God. In Exodus 20, we see what we know as the Ten Commandments. In the very first commandment, God declares that He must be number one in our lives, that there can be no other gods before Him. If it comes between us and God—even if it's our spouse, children, church or job—it's become a god (little g) to us and, no matter how good or important it is, its position in the priority list is unacceptable. Likewise, if we shift any of the lower priorities into higher positions, we are out of line and asking for trouble. Put your children before your spouse and your relationship with your spouse will certainly suffer. Shift academic studies ahead of your relationship with your children and you will pay a price as individuals and put your relationship with your children at risk. Relationship really is that important!

In this eBook, I briefly address each of these priorities, sharing some stories from my family's experiences, explaining how our mistakes caused certain problems and, thankfully, telling about how things finally worked out when I got my priorities back in line with God's. Like many others, our family took the tests and came through with some awesome testimonies. It is my hope that, in reading about our homeschooling adventure, you will learn the importance of having the right foundation and avoid a few mistakes of your own.

Remember, decisions determine destinies. Decide today to lay the right foundation, to hold to God's priorities, and you affect your tomorrow.

## Chapter 2

### God

In Matthew 7:24-25, Jesus likens a man who hears His sayings and does them to a man who built his house on a rock. This house, built on the proper foundation, withstood flood, wind, rain—all that life's storms could throw at it. Likewise, the man who hears Jesus' sayings and does not do them is as one who built his house on sand, the worst foundation imaginable.

Jesus is our first, best example in all things, especially when it comes to having our priorities in order. He understood priorities and, more than anyone else, lived a life in which God truly came first.

God has always desired—demanded—to be first in our lives. Exodus 30:3 makes this clear and Jesus makes the point once again in Matthew 22:37-38

*Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the first and great commandment.*

Jesus knew the truth, that what matters most in life must ultimately be gauged by long-term measures. In other words, forget today for the moment,

## A Homeschool that Handles the Hard Times

and even tomorrow. What can you do today that will matter more than anything else will 1,000 years from now? The answer is simple: Develop the closest possible relationship with God.

God made us for Himself, and our relationship with Him is eternal. It is the most important relationship we have, bar none, and there is no good reason for permitting anything or anyone to come between Him and us. If only we all truly understood this! A Barna Group survey shows quite clearly that we do not.

In February of 2005, the Barna Group released the results of a survey in which they asked 1004 adults questions about parenting and their goals for their children. The results, especially those reflecting the views of born-again Christians, are disappointing—even disturbing.

Not surprisingly, considering the range of people taking the survey, only 20% of these parents indicated that they considered “Having a significant faith commitment and an identifiable set of religious beliefs” to be a necessary ingredient for parental success.

When asked what outcomes they most desired for their children, those that they were most committed to facilitating, 39% mentioned a good education, 24% wanted their children to feel loved, and only 22% listed having a meaningful relationship with Jesus Christ.

Read further into this Barna report and the results get even more interesting. Of the respondents, 43% of the parents teach their children that there are some moral absolutes that must always be obeyed no matter what the situation and 45% teach that there are no such moral absolutes. One would think that surely the 45% reflected only the non-Christians. Unfortunately, one would be wrong.

According to this study, less than 60% of born again parents<sup>1</sup> teach their children that there are certain moral absolutes that must always be obeyed. Also...

Only three out of ten born again parents included the salvation of their child in the list of critical parental emphases...

## A Homeschool that Handles the Hard Times

How can this be? How can the Christians who answered this survey possibly have priorities that are so out of keeping with those of the God they claim to serve? Given the results of the survey, is it really any surprise that the United States is in its current condition, that so few families come through hard times still standing strong? If things are to be different for our families, we must follow a different path. We must get our priorities in order and keep them in order, and our very first, absolute highest priority must be GOD.

Not only this, but we must acknowledge and act on this foundational truth. It is our responsibility (not that of the church or anyone else) to do what is necessary, through both modeling and active teaching, to see to it that our children grow up with the same priorities. Deuteronomy 6:7 talks about this very thing.

You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.

Consider Joseph. He would have been between ten and thirteen when his brothers sold him into slavery. Even so, his parents had done such an excellent job of teaching him about God and the ways of God that he continued to grow spiritually for the next fifteen years. He grew spiritually in spite of the fact that he received no further teaching and was completely surrounded by “the world.” How many of us have done so well by our ten-year-olds that we can know the same would hold true for them? Oh, the rewards of doing it God’s way!

Proverbs 3:5-6 promises...

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.

Here, in two verses, are both what it means to love the Lord with all one’s heart, soul and mind, and a marvelous promise. First, we choose to trust Him with all our hearts. This can be challenging for many reasons, but it is something we are capable of doing or He would not tell us to do it. The key lies in the

power of choice. If I can trust an airplane to take me safely where I need to go, then surely I can trust my God, the Creator of the Universe.

The next step is to set aside our own understanding and lean on the Holy Spirit. My understanding at any given time is limited by my combined knowledge, experience, and perspective. Compared to God, I know nothing. When I choose to defer to Him; to do things His way as expressed in His Word and through that still, small voice; when I acknowledge him in all my ways even when what He's asking me to do makes no sense to me, then His promise manifests. He makes my paths straight. Of course, having God as my first priority really does mean acknowledging Him, putting Him first, in all my ways, ways like...

## Money

This seems to be the hardest thing for many people. It is certainly an avidly argued issue, and almost all of us know more than one person for whom money has become a god. That is certainly an old story. The book of Malachi is a conversation between God and a people in trouble. "We have all these problems!" they cry, and God answers, "You brought them on yourselves by robbing me of tithes and offerings." (This is my paraphrase. For the quote, see Malachi 3:8-9)

"But that's a people under the Law," some might say, "and we're under grace!" True, that event happened under the law and yes, we are under grace. Tithing and the giving of offerings, however, predate both. In the garden, God commanded man to leave one tree for Him alone. Later, Cain and Abel brought their offerings to God, and their offerings mattered.

Then there are the references (Hebrews 5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:11, 17, 21) to Jesus being a "a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." We only know of three specific things Melchizedek did as priest; he blessed Abram, blessed God, and received Abram's tithe. Jesus has been referred to repeatedly as "a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." This implies to me that we will still be giving tithes and offerings in Heaven. Understand it? Maybe not, but I still believe it and choose accordingly, to acknowledge God in my money ways.

## A Homeschool that Handles the Hard Times

Many Christians feel they cannot afford to tithe, but my husband and I learned the hard way that just the opposite is true; we can't afford not to. While we began our life together as tithers and givers, we did reach one point at which we decided we could not afford to tithe. The decision to stop tithing was one of the most foolish we ever made. We only thought we couldn't afford to tithe at that time. Within a few months, we really were in a deplorable state, financially speaking, and it wasn't until we repented and were once again tithers and givers that things improved. You see, tithing and giving bring certain blessings and those blessings make an enormous difference in your finances.

I remember someone telling me once, "I need to borrow the tithe this week. Surely God understands that." Yes, I'm sure He did understand even better than the person knew, but understanding wasn't the issue. If we pay our tithes and give our offerings first, then God can bless the money that remains in our hands, making it go further than is naturally possible. If I had kept records, I could show years on end when the numbers did not add up, times during which we lived much more comfortably than our income supposedly allowed for. This happened, and still happens, because God is a God of increase. As we acknowledge Him in all our money ways—not only through tithing, giving, and missionary giving, but also by consulting Him as we spend the money we keep—He makes those paths straight. He makes the way.

I go shopping with the Holy Ghost regularly, and He leads me straight down the paths that take me to the very best sales and highest values. He also opens surprising doors. For instance, during one of our hardest financial years, God led me into a situation where I was able to barter for a brand new laptop computer. In addition, there were years during which I worked with a vendor during the summer book fair season in exchange for books and curriculum. Early on, when I was doing unit studies with two young boys and working outside the home was not an option, He prompted a friend to send me over \$500 worth of brand new books. These are only a few of the examples I could give of God rewarding us for acknowledging Him in all of our money ways.

## Time for Church

Time is another important, and challenging, area in which we must acknowledge Him. Earlier I asked a question: “Where do you invest most of your time, energy, and money?” The answer really does reveal one’s priorities.

One way in which He expects us to acknowledge Him with our time is in *church attendance*. Hebrews 10:25 makes it quite clear, to the one who will see it, that church attendance is mandatory as far as God is concerned.

not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

If one continues on to verse 26, the wording of which indicates that that it refers to something said previously, one sees this.

For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,

Again, Jesus set us a clear example. Repeatedly in the scriptures, we see that it was His custom to be in the House of God. I even realized recently that He set us a more specific example. I lost count, years ago, of the people who had told me that they would not go to church because there were too many hypocrites there. If anyone in history had the right to use that excuse, it was Jesus; Hypocrites surrounded Him every time He entered the Temple, but He would not permit them to keep Him away.

If we acknowledge God in all of our church ways, we understand not only that He wants us to be in the church when the doors are open, but also that He has already chosen a specific church for each of us to be in and has given us jobs to do there. (Corinthians 12:18 and Ephesians 4:16) Our lives have purpose, and our highest purposes are His.

## Time for Prayer

*Prayer* is another vital way in which we must acknowledge Him. I have said before that these priorities really are about relationship, and the growth of our relationship with God directly correlates with the amount of time we spend in His presence, in fellowship with Him. Jesus, our example, was ever speaking with His father, and in I Thessalonians 5:17 we are told to “pray without ceasing.” This sounds like a ludicrous thing, but I find that this is pretty much what I do now. Put simply, while I do begin my days with prayer, I also talk to God continually all day long as if He were standing right beside me.

Actually, He is at my side all the time; that’s part of what makes life with Him so wonderful. We discuss all sorts of things throughout the day; the worrisome things, yes, but also the glory of the rainbow in the sky, the silliness of the cats He gave us, how thankful I am for our wonderful children and grandson, and how very much I love HIM. He is not only my Father, but because of the time we’ve spent fellowshiping over the years He has become my best friend.

## Time for Bible Study

In II Timothy 2:15 He tells us to...

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

We cannot be workers (More of that time stuff; work requires time!) who are able to rightly divide the Word of Truth if we do not spend time studying that word. We study it in church, yes, but we must also allow time for personal study, preferably on a daily basis. Homeschoolers should understand this better than anyone; if you wish to truly learn something, you don’t pick it up casually on occasion, when it is convenient. Rather, you study it diligently.

While we may think we already study diligently, I imagine most of us don’t. (I don’t spend anywhere near enough time in the Word, and I know it!) I

## A Homeschool that Handles the Hard Times

saw something in the Scriptures not long ago, however, that has spurred me to greater diligence. Look at the following from Matthew 22:29.

Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God."

I have read this passage many times through the years, but only recently did I really think about this group of people. To whom was Jesus speaking? The Sadducees! He was rebuking a people who certainly should have known both the Scriptures and the power of God more than the average man. If He told them that they were in error because they did not know the Scriptures, then I really need to be studying!

We should also consider that the Word is the Sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17), which is an offensive weapon. It is also God's Truth, which Psalm 91:4 says is our shield and buckler; these are pieces of defensive armor. The wise soldier, knowing he is destined for battle (And, like it or not, in this world we are all destined for battle.), trains diligently in the use of both weapons and armor; he will not be caught unprepared!

Finally, consider this. John 1:1 says...

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

You can continue reading in John, but for now let's skip to verse 14.

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

"The Word was God." "The Word was made flesh." Jesus and the Word are one. God and the Word are one. If we want to know Jesus, if we want to know God, we must know the Word. There is no getting around it.

## Time for Witnessing

*Witnessing* is also vitally important to God. Jesus was the greatest witness of all time, and Matthew 28:19-20 applies to us today as much as it did to the men He was speaking to when He gave what we know as The Great Commission.

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: and, lo, I am with you alway, [even] unto the end of the world. Amen.

As Paul said in Romans 1, we owe a debt to the world. I obviously cannot literally go to all nations, which is why I give generously to missions. I can witness in my own back yard, however, by sharing the Good News with those I encounter, spreading the word through books and articles, and living a life that is a witness to God's wonderful love.

## Trouble

The last of the ways that I will mention is our times of trouble. It is easy for our troubles to become our gods, to act as the moon does during a solar eclipse, getting between us and the Creator of Everything. Think about it; the moon is a tiny thing when compared to the heavenly bodies that surround it and yet, when it slips between us and the sun, the sun seems to disappear. The same holds true with our problems. From God's perspective, they are tiny, but if we permit them to get between us and Him, if we focus on them, He seems to disappear. He is no further away than He ever was, and is just as willing to help us, but He is a gentleman; He will not force us to focus on Him or accept His aid.

Another way of thinking of it is to consider ourselves as children. We may instinctively run to our Father when we are in trouble, when we are afraid, when we are under attack, and this is good. Unfortunately, we can too often be like the little girl with the broken doll; she wanted her father to repair it, but

## A Homeschool that Handles the Hard Times

was unwilling to let go long enough for him to do so. As a result, no matter how much he wanted to make his child happy, the doll stayed in its broken condition.

We cannot carry the load on our own, and He has never asked us to. Jesus said, in Matthew 11:28-30...

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

You would use a yoke to put two horses, oxen, etc., together so that they can work in unison to pull a load. If we try to pull the load on our own, we are destined to struggle and often to fail. When we get yoked up with Jesus, however, and let Him teach us how to walk in unity with Him, He bears the load with us and it suddenly seems as nothing when compared to what we'd been trying to drag around alone.

These are only a few examples of “all the ways” in which we should acknowledge Him. It's really not all that hard to do if we follow one, basic rule. *Stay focused on Jesus.* Peter is an excellent example of the power of staying focused on Jesus. In Matthew 14, we read one of those stories every Sunday school seems to teach. The disciples were in a boat, tossed about by the waves, when they suddenly saw Jesus walking on the water. Peter called out to Jesus and the Lord invited him to walk on the water too. The wind still blew and the waves continued to toss the boat as Peter stepped out, but he walked on the water anyway as long as he stayed focused on Jesus. Only when he let his focus shift, when he permitted the wind and waves to capture his attention, did he begin to sink. Even so, as he began to sink, he cried out for help and Jesus was there instantly, lifting him up again; then the two of them continued to walk on the water, all the way back to the boat.

Refusing to give God first place, to acknowledge Him in all our ways, is foolish. I could share many examples from my own life, but will limit myself to one. I once suffered a nervous breakdown. Many factors contributed to my

## A Homeschool that Handles the Hard Times

problem, but the root of it was that God told me to do one thing, to stop serving in a specific ministry in the church, and I told Him no. Only when I repented and obeyed, almost the instant I repented and obeyed, did I truly begin to recover. Telling God, “No,” failing to truly love Him with all our hearts, souls, and minds, is dangerous.

We have nothing to lose and everything to gain when we allow God to have first place in our lives. We have victory (I Corinthians 15:57), straight paths (Proverbs 3:5-6), all things working together for our good (Romans 8:28), peace (John 16:33), the promise that it will be well with us and our children (Deuteronomy 5:29), and more.

God comes first. Period.

## Chapter 3

### Spouse

Most homeschoolers are fully aware of the importance of family; I would dare say it has a lot to do with why the majority of us homeschool. Unfortunately, in too many instances, the homeschooler is as likely as the next person to forget how vital the husband-wife relationship is to family health, and how much it takes to maintain that relationship.

Willard F. Harley, Jr., in *His Needs Her Needs for Parents*, recommends that husbands and wives spend fifteen hours a week together—communicating, interacting, maintaining and even building their relationships. This may seem a ridiculous amount of time to some, and perhaps completely unattainable to most busy parents, but I see his point. I have experienced, personally, the results of losing touch with your partner.

Young mothers often find themselves completely absorbed by their children, and when those mothers homeschool the absorption can be even more pronounced. My husband and I had not been homeschooling many years before I woke up one day and realized that the man I was married to was a stranger. I had, quite unintentionally, let homeschooling and our children move too high up in the priority list. I still had God up there as #1, but my husband was no

## A Homeschool that Handles the Hard Times

longer in his rightful place; it was shared by two boys and that thing we called homeschool.

Studies have shown that three things everyone desires are love, acceptance, and recognition. When I stopped giving my husband his fair share of these, he sought out companions who would. The companions met the need I'd been failing to meet, and his relationships with them eventually became more important to him than his relationships with his immediate family. The damage was great, nearly irreparable, and even after I realized what was going on and started doing what I could to work towards making things right, the outlook was bleak. I faced seemingly endless and agonizing months when those few around us who knew what was happening had to have wondered if our marriage wasn't destined to fail completely. It did not, bless God, and we have a great marriage today. Our marriage is strong today specifically because we have learned from such mistakes. I wish I had taken time, in those early years, to read such books as *His Needs Her Needs for Parents*, and put into action the good advice those books can give. While not all published marriage and parenting advice is appropriate for every family, and we must follow God's leading in all things, learning from other people and their experiences is much better than learning by trial and error on our own.

After God, your spouse must, absolutely must, come first, and he or she cannot be expected to share their spot with your children (or your church or your job or your business or...). One way you can help ensure this does not happen is to refuse to be one of those couples that never goes anywhere alone (read: without children). No matter how important family time is it cannot, absolutely must not, take the place of one-on-one time with your spouse. Once my husband and I got our mutual act together, understanding that marriage, like a prized rose bush, takes constant care, we made it a habit to have a date night at least every other week.

We went on a date night every week when time and finances permitted. Sometimes we splurged and had dinner out, but other times we talked over ice cream cones or drove thirty minutes into Houston (talking during that thirty-minute drive, of course) to our favorite bookstore or newsstand. We also tried to take at least a couple of weekend trips a year so that we could take advantage of several hours of uninterrupted talk time in the car. Today, of course, getting that uninterrupted talk time requires silencing the cell phones.

## A Homeschool that Handles the Hard Times

Talking, truly spending time communicating, is essential to a healthy marriage, and today's fast-paced, cell-phone-filled lifestyle makes such times seem unattainable, but attain them we must or we risk the most dangerous consequences, even the possibility of a spouse finding a soul mate elsewhere.

It is common, today, to see a husband and wife divorce after their children leave home. In most cases, the reason for divorce seems simply to be that the two have become strangers, that they don't love each other anymore. Through my own experiences, I have learned that this can be remedied if both parties are willing, and can be avoided if both parties invest in their relationship. Love is not merely some elusive emotional state that one falls into or out of. It is a choice—a choice that requires action. At the lowest point in our marriage, I could have chosen not to love my husband any more, I could have walked out, and it is likely that no one but my children (and God, who certainly knew my share in the responsibility for our problems) would have blamed me. I chose to love my husband and to fight for what God had given me in him and our life together. Not surprisingly, the fight began on my knees, in prayer. Prayer is undoubtedly one of the most powerful tools (and weapons) that we, as Christians, have available to us.

Pray for your spouse daily, continually lifting them up before the Father and reminding Him of all the great things He's said about them, all He has promised them. Even if you have been facing challenges and have a hard time "feeling love" for that person at first, you will find love growing as you invest time in praying specifically for them. (Of course, this holds true of pretty much anyone we take time to pray for.) Then ask God what you need to do in order to strengthen your marriage, and to be Jesus to that person. I guarantee that making yourself available to your spouse will be one of the things He requires.

I made myself available to my husband in various ways. I learned to enjoy watching NASCAR races on TV. I learned to look forward to concerts my husband and sons asked me to attend. I even learned to go out to dinner with him as often as possible, no matter how tired or busy I had been, because my relationship with him is more important than my own exhaustion or desire to stay home.

Lest you think I am the only one who has made changes through the years, let me say that we are both continually growing and there have been many times in our life together when he has made abrupt, astonishing changes

## A Homeschool that Handles the Hard Times

seemingly overnight. I should note, also, that every one of these major changes in him was preceded by a major change in ME.

The best example of this type of occurrence happened before we ever started homeschooling. I was on a trip with friends who knew us well and felt that my husband was lacking in several areas. Of course, they felt this because I had been complaining to them. (Naturally, when we complain we only share the bad, not the good.) Listening to them discuss him, though, made me see things a little differently, and in a single instant, between two breaths even, my whole attitude shifted. I remember exactly where I was standing in the hotel room when I was hit with a revelation. (Mind you, I was quite a bit younger in the Lord back then, so my language was less than ideal.) I thought to myself, “You know what? Yeah, I’m married to an S.O.B., but hey, if I have to live the rest of my life with him acting like this, I can!” I did not say any of this aloud, of course, but the very loud thought heralded a radical change in my heart. In that instant, I decided that I could love him, and would love him, no matter what. A few minutes later we were all out the door and the conversation was forgotten, BUT.

I came home to a different man, a man who made me the envy of every woman I knew by bringing me breakfast in bed every Saturday morning for months. I cannot help but wonder how long God had been waiting on me to stop bellyaching, to change my own attitudes towards my husband so that He could work changes in my husband. How long had I been holding things back by criticizing every bad thing I saw instead of focusing on his positive traits and trusting God with the rest? Too long, I’m sure. Like I said, I’ve learned many things from my many mistakes. I also have to admit that I necessarily keep relearning certain lessons, because there are still many things I don’t get quite right, but I continue to work at it.

A strong marriage makes a strong family, one that has what it takes to meet life’s challenges and come out victorious. Likewise, a weak marriage weakens the family, leaving it open to attack. If you want a homeschool that handles the hard times, put your marriage first by keeping your spouse in second place after God. With these first two priorities in their proper order, the rest fall into place much more readily.

## Chapter 4

### Children

We're homeschoolers, so it would seem unnecessary to even mention the importance of keeping our children high on the priorities list. After all, they are why we homeschool, correct? Unfortunately, I have seen through the years that our priorities can shift with surprising ease once homeschooling begins. Too often homeschoolers allow academic instruction, and even great extras like Little League, to take a higher position than the children being homeschooled. Too, though I hate to say it, you see far too many homeschooling parents permit other people's opinions to carry too much weight.

On that front, let me say this. When we keep our priorities in their proper order, we tend to hear those other voices in their proper perspective as well. It can still hurt when our parents don't understand and our co-workers ridicule us, but we are much less inclined to doubt ourselves, and where most people are concerned it is the self-doubt that is most dangerous of all. When we walk in confidence, it makes a difference in all areas of life.

For our children to be high priority means developing and maintaining strong relationships with them. This, of course, requires spending time with them, and even though homeschoolers naturally have more time than system

## A Homeschool that Handles the Hard Times

schoolers (those who put their children into educational systems), even we can forget how easy it is to lose control of our time. The word “time” breaks down interestingly. Have you noticed? T\*I\*ME *I* am the problem where my time is concerned; it is *ME* who decides how I will spend it, no matter how much I would like to believe otherwise. It is my responsibility to say no when I should say no and yes when I should say yes.

It is my responsibility, even now that they are adults, to spend enough time with my children that I truly know them. It is my responsibility to do all I can to understand them. One tool I wish I'd had when my two were younger is *The Birth Order Book: Why You Are the Way You Are*, by Dr. Kevin Leman. This book helped me understand not only my children, but also my husband and myself; not surprisingly, we are all very different. Parents have been learning for ages, too often the hard way, that what works in discipling and disciplining the oldest often has exactly the opposite results with the middle child or the youngest. Their birth order determines a great many of these differences and Dr. Leman's book explains the variations and helps parents learn how to work with them. Spend time with your children, get to know and appreciate them as individuals, develop strong relationships with them, and then they will be ready to truly receive from you as their teacher. After all, every one of us receives the most from those with whom we have relationships.

One of the most powerful things you can do, as you intentionally build relationships with your children, is read aloud to them. Begin when they are babes in your arms and continue as long as you can, even when they have babes in their arms if possible. Laugh if you will, but I am serious. I stopped reading aloud when my sons were able to read to themselves and I have regretted my action for years. Not only did we lose the prime bonding time, but also as a homeschooler it upsets me that I helped create a problem that never should have been. Prior to this, reading had been a thing of wonder to them; at this point, it became work. Now, though both of their parents love to read, the boys are not overly interested, and I take much of the blame.

If I had it to do over again, I would read to them daily as long as possible and, even when they were older, I would continue to read at least once a week. They might be in their late teens and going out with friends, but they would know that there was at least one point in the week when I would be reading aloud, even if the only ones I had to read to were the cats. Reading aloud offers

## A Homeschool that Handles the Hard Times

so many advantages that I strongly suggest, if you've never really considered reading aloud to your own children, investing in one of the excellent books that have been written on the subject. (*The Read-Aloud Handbook*, by Jim Trelease, comes to mind.)

Also, remember that even as your child's teacher, your #1 priority is God. Bringing our children into strong relationship with their heavenly Father is our first "educational" priority and the only one with eternal results. As God asked me, I ask you. Which will matter a thousand years from now, that your son knows math or that your son knows God? This is not a responsibility we can palm off on anyone else: It is not the church's; it is not the village's; it is ours.

Parents in the Old Testament knew this. It is why we have stories about the three Hebrew boys, about David, about Joseph... I mentioned Joseph earlier, but it bears repeating that he was a child—only 10-13 years old—when he was sold into slavery by his brothers. Even so, his parents had done such an excellent job of teaching him about God and His ways that, years later, though surrounded by a world that believed nothing he believed, he was a strong man of God whom God used to affect the course of history.

Not long ago, I learned of another advantage to helping your children develop a strong relationship with God. I was told of some recent studies that indicate that the part of the brain responsible for making long-term decisions does not even begin to develop until a child is 18 years old. If this is true, then children who have a strong relationship with God, those who know His voice and how to follow it, have a distinct advantage over those who do not. They need make no long-term decisions on their own; they need only listen to their heavenly Father and do as He says. Truly, life is easier on the one who walks with God.

As we focus on teaching our children eternal truths, homeschooling truly becomes a natural part of our lives rather than merely a thing we do. We are leading our children into deeper relationships with God, so of course we also lead them in learning the wonders of the world He has created. Yes, it takes work, but when our hearts are fully involved we tend to find the adventure much more exciting.

## Chapter 5

### Church

I covered much about the church priority when I discussed our relationship with God. Church is not about us and our needs or wants; it is about God and what He desires for, and from, us. I Corinthians 12:18 says, “But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as he pleased.” In this chapter, Paul is talking about the unity we are to have as believers, comparing the body of Christ to the human body, and noting how carefully God has planned the specific placement of the parts of each.

God has plans for every one of His children, every part of His body (Jeremiah 29:11), and those plans include the specific church He wants each one of us to be planted in as well as the precise positions He has chosen for us to fill there. It is your responsibility, as His child, to seek His face, learn His will, and then fit into both the church He has called you to and the position He has assigned to you.

Ephesians 4:16 says...

from whom the whole body, joined and knit together  
by what every joint supplies, according to the effective

## A Homeschool that Handles the Hard Times

working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

The goal is the growth of the body and the edifying of itself in love—and we are each to do our part to reach this goal. Surely, we must desire this for we are part of that body whether we wish to admit it or not. If it had an option, would my knee choose not to fit in, would it refuse to do its part? I should certainly hope not, because if it did my whole body (and it!) would suffer. In point of fact, there have been times in most of our lives when just such a thing has happened—for a back to “go out,” for instance, wreaks havoc with the human body, sometimes stopping the sufferer from doing anything productive at all.

Read the verse again.

from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

- He has joined and knit the body together
- Every joint supplies
- Every part does its share

You and each member of your family are part of that “every.” Yes, even the youngest child has a place and purpose in the body of Christ, even a toddler can be fitly joined together, and even a 5-year-old can “do his part.” Teach your children from a young age—both by setting an example and having expectations of them—to be fitly joined together with the rest of the members of the body of Christ in your local church.

We made sure that our boys had age-appropriate responsibilities when they were young. We also required them to serve in a ministry within the church as soon as they were old enough to officially be accepted for service. Being fitly joined to the church has always been a part of their lives and now they are both highly respected by those who know them. In fact, our oldest is

## A Homeschool that Handles the Hard Times

on staff and serves in the sanctuary as our bandleader, lead guitarist, and chief soundman.

God never asks anything of us without giving us much more in return. Our being fitly joined together benefits us individually as well as corporately and those benefits are far greater than any price He would ever ask us to pay. Even beyond the spiritual benefits, our family's church is, in a very real sense, our extended family, and its members stand by us as members of our birth family do. This has always been true, but I saw it manifested in a greater way than ever before a few years ago when my husband had two strokes. They were mini-strokes and, on the surface, he seemed perfectly fine after a few weeks of recuperation, but he was nowhere near as ready to face life as he appeared and many other members of the body were sensitive enough to see it. Their support was like a lifeline, and it was a line we would not have had were we not fitly joined together with the rest of the body. These relationships are part of our firm foundation and, once again, that foundation proved itself able to handle the hard times.

## Chapter 6

### **Academics/Job/Family Business**

Finally, as we walk through our list of priorities, come academic studies, jobs, and the family business. I lump them together here as a reminder that they are all last on this list. No father should ever let his job come before his spouse, his children, or his church. Likewise, no mother should let the academic part of homeschooling displace a higher priority. Yes, even family businesses have their place after the rest. Again, this is not some arbitrary list I have compiled. It is, rather, an order that I find in the Scriptures and one I have seen hold true repeatedly through the years. We can each arrange our priorities any way we wish, but for a foundation that handles the hard times this is the only order I have known to be consistently successful. It is a fact; God honors us when we honor Him in all our ways, keeping our priorities in line with His.

There are many books out there that deal with all three of these topics and my goal with this eBook is to keep it short and sweet. With that in mind, I simply share a few, choice things I have discovered about homeschooling through the years, things I wish I had learned early on.

## Philosophy of Education

I strongly advise that every homeschooling family, husband and wife together, develop their own philosophy of education. If you are unfamiliar with this term, you may wish to purchase Cathy Duffy's *100 Top Picks for Homeschool Curriculum*. In this book, she not only explains the value of a firm philosophy of education, but also walks you step-by-step through developing your own.

Trust me in this. My oldest was in high school before I fully understood what I believed about education, and gaining that understanding made all the difference in how I viewed homeschooling, how I chose curriculum, how I anticipated the future...everything.

## Learning Styles

Take time to study learning styles and discover not only each student's learning style, but your teaching style as well. (Cathy Duffy's book also deals with this topic!) Learning styles have everything to do with selecting the right teaching approach for yourself, your students, and your homeschool as a whole. Yes, each student is quite likely to learn differently from his or her siblings. Realizing that each is unique and may well require a personalized curriculum is one good step to take towards having a successful homeschool.

## Worry

Don't worry!

Worry is not just unproductive. Worry is not merely destructive. Worry is sin. Watch Jesus with His disciples and others and you will see Him repeatedly commanding them to stop worrying. This should tell you two things: That worry is wrong, and that it is possible to stop worrying. Do not let worry control you!

This is much easier to do when keeping your priorities in order, because you will find yourself listening to His voice more, hearing what He has to say, and following His instructions. When you know that you know that you know

## A Homeschool that Handles the Hard Times

that you are doing exactly what God has told you to, you are naturally less inclined to worry.

For those other times, however, when co-workers or family members say things that make you question your homeschool's success, you must choose. Every time a worry-filled thought enters your mind, refuse to entertain it. II Corinthians 10:5 talks about...

Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

This is an action each and every one of us must take, usually several times a day.

### **Use the Curriculum**

One thing I wish I had learned in my first year of homeschooling is, "Use the curriculum; never let it use you!" Always remember that your curriculum is supposed to be a tool that serves you, not a taskmaster that orders you around. If you find yourself in bondage to it, consider a mercy killing or, at the very least, get that monster in line. Go through it and determine how to work it into your homeschooling lifestyle rather than attempting to force your homeschooling to fit into its mold.

Along with this, I share another lesson learned the hard way. We have no doubt all heard the valuable reminder, "If it's not broken, don't fix it." I now offer another, parallel truth. If it is broken, stop trying to force it to work. Yes, it may have been an expensive mistake but, if it was a mistake, you need to admit it and go on. It is far better to "waste" expensive curriculum than it is to permit that curriculum to damage to your child's ability to learn. Yes, I speak from experience yet again. Attendees of my Hard Times workshops usually get to hear the details of that sad story. In short, I permitted the wrong curriculum and my own fears to destroy my oldest son's confidence in his ability to learn math. Please, do not make the same mistake.

## Strive for Significance

When giving your children projects and assignments, do your best to make them meaningful—meaningful for your students. Most of us remember how much we hated being handed lists to memorize, boring book report sheets, and more. Why force our children to endure the same drudgery?

Think of yourself and how you learn. I would be willing to bet that most of the things you learn come because of interest or need. Bearing this in mind, I advise you to approach academic studies with a plan that involves creating interest and helping your students perceive immediate need. (Not, “You will need this ten years from now when you get to college.”) For instance, writing assignments are always more fun when they serve a purpose—letters to the editor, short stories that they will submit to magazines, a novel you will self-publish for your family and friends...

One thing unschoolers learn early on is that, if they want their children to pick up a new area of study, their best bet is to whet appetites by doing something interesting that points in that topic’s direction. You can use this approach even if you school-at-home. It just takes a little forethought and planning.

## Learning Happens

Another thing unschoolers understand is that if you will only give them room and resources, your children will learn. It is inevitable and seems to happen as easily as breathing as long as you do not train the desire to learn out of them or crush their self-confidence. If you have pulled a child out of a system school, that desire may have been trampled, may have to be rebuilt, but it can be. If you have (or the school has) used a curriculum that damaged a child’s confidence in his or her ability to learn, that will have to be dealt with. In general, however, learning happens naturally when the environment is right.

Again, I speak from experience. We once had houseguests for 17 months and did very little formal schooling during that time, but our children still learned. In fact, when we finally were in position to give them placement tests, to see how far we had fallen behind, we found that they had learned about as much as they would have if we had been working through their curriculum.

Astounding? Oh yes, and the revelation led me on a fascinating voyage of discovery into the realities of learning.

## Developmental Readiness

Another of my life lessons involved developmental readiness. Our oldest son learned to read at six with no problem, so I expected the same out of our younger son. It did not happen.

When he failed to learn with the first phonics program, I tried a second. When he failed to learn with the second...

Notice my use of the word “failed”? I say “he failed,” but in fact I felt like an utter and complete failure as a homeschooling parent, because my son wasn’t learning the way I thought he should, when everyone else expected him to.

Then a friend who had been talking to me for months about developmental readiness finally managed to get her message through my thick skull. A child will learn to read, or do anything, when he is developmentally ready to, and trying to force matters early leads to frustration and pain.

My youngest son was obviously intelligent; he was highly verbal and blowing through his math book like crazy. His brain was just busy making connections in areas other than those that related to reading at that point. So I quit, and I do mean quit. We completely dropped all reading lessons and I vowed not to pick the curriculum up again until I had some indication that he was developmentally ready to learn to read.

Months went by. I am not certain how many, but I would guess about six to nine. Then, shortly after his eighth birthday, we were sitting in a museum’s theater, waiting for the crowd to clear out, when I suddenly heard him reading the credits (*The credits!*) aloud. I did not dare say a word; I just sat there listening while crying tears of joy. In that moment, my pride in him knew no bounds; he was reading, and not just reading, but doing his best (And his best was remarkable!) to make phonetic sense of words and names that would make an adult cringe.

*Developmental readiness.* Remember that phrase in case you ever have a young child who is not learning something as fast as you believe he should. Yes, he may face learning challenges that need to be addressed, but he may simply be

too busy growing in other areas; he may need time to develop in the specific areas necessary for processing the information you want him to learn.

## The Way THEY Should Go

My final bit of advice is to train up your children in the way they should go (Proverbs 22:6), allowing them both time and resources to follow their passions. God creates each of us for a reason, with our ultimate purpose in mind, and I have found that a child's passions often figure greatly in their futures. One of the benefits of homeschooling is that we can encourage and nurture those passions, even when it seems illogical to do so.

For instance, my oldest took up the electric guitar in high school and it immediately became a bona fide passion. He spent literal hours, every single day, first teaching himself to play and then studying what he learned from others. Some thought he should spend more time "getting ready for real life," but his father and I saw things differently. We saw that God had given him an undeniable gift and surely meant for that gift to be of use in his "real life."

Today, as a young man, he not only plays lead guitar in our church band, but can play several of the other instruments as well and serves as our bandleader. His passion for music also led him to study sound engineering and he is over our soundmen. What does he do for a living, you ask? It just so happens that he is on full time staff at our church as well. He took care of grooming himself to fill the ministry position God chose for him, and God gave him the way to provide for his family.

The same held true for our youngest. His passion was for computer graphics and we made room for that passion. Today he works in that field and has a vision for one day owning his own computer graphics business.

While it is true that both of these young men could have pursued their passions after graduation, I cannot help but wonder how many budding musicians would have. I do not know all that many who do. How many times has God given young men and women gifts that He intended for them to use to His glory only to have them be forced to set aside those gifts as taking too much time away from "getting ready for their real job"? I'm not only talking about musicians here, of course; they're just the obvious example because we probably

## A Homeschool that Handles the Hard Times

all know frustrated musicians who hate their jobs, but continue in them because they need to earn a living and can't see being able to do it with what they love.

We made a choice. We permitted our sons to follow their passions while they were young. As a result, the skills that relate to those passions were already well honed by the time they were in position to get out there and face their futures. They could have chosen to go on to college and get any degree they wanted, but in both their cases, they are, in their early twenties, already working in fields they enjoy. That is what I call being a step ahead.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Final Thoughts**

No single book, especially one kept intentionally brief as this one is, can share everything you need to know about any of the topics I have raised here, but there is a God who can. Seek His face every morning, let the Holy Spirit be the Teacher and Guide He longs to be, and watch what happens. The waves will come; the winds will blow, but the house built firmly on The Rock will always stand.

Be blessed!

## End Notes

From Page 9

<sup>1</sup> From the report: “Born again Christians” were defined in these surveys as people who said they have made “a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their life today” and who also indicated they believe that when they die they will go to Heaven because they had confessed their sins and had accepted Jesus Christ as their savior. Respondents were not asked to describe themselves as “born again.” Being classified as “born again” is not dependent upon church or denominational affiliation or involvement.

<http://www.barna.org>

From Pages 20, 21

**His Needs, Her Needs for Parents: Keeping Romance Alive**

Author: Willard F. Harley Jr.

Publisher: Revell

ISBN-10: 080071833X

ISBN-13: 978-0800718336

From Page 25

**The Birth Order Book: Why You Are the Way You Are**

Author: Dr. Kevin Leman

Publisher: Revell

ISBN-10: 080075977X

ISBN-13: 978-0800759773

From Page 26

**The Read-Aloud Handbook: Sixth Edition**

Author: Jim Trelease

Publisher: Penguin

ISBN-10: 0143037390

ISBN-13: 978-0143037392

From Page 31

**100 Top Picks For Homeschool Curriculum: Choosing The Right Curriculum And Approach For Your Child's Learning Style**

Author: Cathy Duffy

Publisher: B&H Publishing Group

ISBN-10: 0805431381

ISBN-13: 978-0805431384

## *CJ Press Supports*

### *Mission of Joy*



CJ Press is committed to world missions and has chosen to do its part in sharing the Gospel with the world by supporting **Mission of Joy**, a non-profit organization that is also recognized as “tax exempt” by India, the country it serves.

**Mission of Joy** supports orphanages and native missionaries, helps build churches, holds evangelistic crusades and serves thousands of meals to hungry people every week.

For more information about **Mission of Joy** or about sponsoring a child or native missionary...

web: <http://missionjoy.org>  
email: [jeffreyoleary@jeffoleary.com](mailto:jeffreyoleary@jeffoleary.com)  
mail: Mission of Joy  
PO Box 64914  
Tacoma WA 98464

For information on more CJ Press  
products, visit our website....

[www.CJPress.net](http://www.CJPress.net)