



MANAGEMENT FOR MOMS SERIES

ENCOURAGEMENT

for homeschool moms

MARCIA K. WASHBURN

BUILDING TOMORROW'S GENERATION

Encouragement for Homeschool Moms

To homeschooling mothers everywhere.
Through your daily sacrifices, you are building tomorrow's generation.
I salute you!

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©2013 by Marcia K. Washburn.

www.marciawashburn.com

marcia@marciawashburn.com

Formatted by Anna Storrie

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The Ideal Homeschool Mother

You are God's first choice as the mother of your children.

From all the women on earth God could have chosen, He selected you. Likewise, He chose your children to be raised in your family. Whether your children came into your family through birth, adoption, foster care, or by some other means, God has placed them in your family for you to love and nurture at this time.

You are God's first choice as the mother of your children.

In His loving wisdom, He created you for each other. He determined the unique mix of temperaments and gifts and love languages that make your family one-of-a kind. God has a unique life message that only you and your family can present to the world.

Sometimes—okay, frequently—we moms fall into the comparison game. We hold up in our minds a picture of The Ideal Homeschooling Mother, also known as the Proverbs 31 Homeschooler.

This woman has it all and does it all. She gardens, cans, freezes, cooks from scratch, and sews all of her family's clothing. She raises livestock for meat and dairy products. She runs a home business to supplement the family income. Her house is immaculate, and her dryer doesn't even eat socks!

She has at least ten children and homeschools them all, allowing for their different ages and learning styles. She finishes every book in every subject every year for every child, while developing creative side projects and unit studies.

 *The Ideal Homeschool Mother* 

She never gets behind on grading papers. Her lesson plans are completed for the entire school year in August. She is an expert on every curriculum, whether or not she's used it, and often counsels new homeschoolers.

She never raises her voice in anger to her children but is always calm, cool and collected. Her children, and even her pets, are perfectly behaved at home and away.

She is always dressed neatly and you will never see her children with dirty faces. She uses creative table settings every night at dinnertime and regularly shows hospitality. She is an exemplary wife to her husband and assists him in every way.

This Ideal Homeschooler volunteers for church and community groups. She leads the local support group and helps with the state conference. She is politically active, writes letters to the editor, and knows her representatives by name. She has devotions every day and memorizes Bible verses while going about her tasks.

*The Ideal Homeschooling
Mom for your family is YOU!*

It has never occurred to her (as it has to me) that sometimes she would just like to run away from home for a couple of days!

The Ideal Homeschooling Mom doesn't exist, of course—at least not as we have described her.

You must realize that the Ideal Homeschooling Mom for your family is YOU!

Yes, you—despite all your faults and insecurities and fears. When you don't feel adequate for the task, you are exactly where God wants you—realizing your own weakness and inability to do the job.

When we acknowledge our need for Him, He is quick to strengthen us for the task. God's will never leads us where God's grace cannot keep us. His power shows up best in weak people.

I have not graduated from the Management for Moms program at the School of Experience yet. Those who come into my home weekly for piano lessons know that I am very much a work-in-progress.

His power shows up best in weak people.

Our sunroom, which doubles as a waiting room for my students, is a staging area for the latest project or event at the Washburn household. Depending on the season, it may include county fair supplies, hunting clothes and equipment, or props for a musical production.

Sometimes dust takes up residence on the piano and piles of paper are not uncommon on the roll top desk. Our house serves us—we don't serve the house. Only by sticking to some basic routines do we keep from collapsing under clutter and drowning in dirt.

Many were the weeks that I didn't get my sons' schoolwork graded. Sometimes we would grade it together; sometimes we just moved on.

The boys would tell you we had more boring days than exciting days in school. And yet, perhaps the routine of an ordinary day is a better preparation for adult life than cultivating the expectation that every day will be a Disneyland Day.

You may have heard the story about the pastor who was discouraged to learn that his flock could seldom remember what he had preached on the previous Sunday, despite all the hours of preparation that went into each message.

A wise old parishioner said, "You know, Pastor, over the forty-six years my wife and I have been married, she must have made over two thousand dinners

for me and I can't recollect more than a few of them. But I 'spect that if she hadn't kept on making all those ordinary, forgettable meals through the years, I'd have starved to death by now.

"Don't you think it's the same for you and your people? Without your solid Biblical teaching week after week, we may have spiritually starved these last many years."

Every lesson needn't be a marvel of creativity and excitement; there will be a certain amount of slogging along in every homeschool.

It is easy for us to look at other moms and put them on a mental pedestal. We see only their public lives which seem to be so perfectly in order.

But God sees the heart and the behind-closed-doors life. When we elevate another person, we risk trying to copy *her* instead of becoming all that God designed us to be. You are the only person in the entire world who can be you. Be the genuine article—You—not a cheap imitation of someone else.

God sees the heart and the behind-closed-doors life. Be the genuine article—You—not a cheap imitation of someone else.

When we engage in hero worship, we set up ourselves for the inevitable disillusionment that comes when something the person we admire does disappoints us.

A pedestal is a very narrow platform—a step in any direction guarantees a fall.

Don't do that to your leaders or to yourself. To continue growing, they must, like us, keep moving on. This is impossible if they are trapped on the tiny platform of others' expectations.

I once saw an ad for a new women's magazine. They said their target audience is "the real woman...not the homemaker, but the educated, independent, serious woman and girl."

Obviously their editorial staff has a different view of the ideal woman than we do. Yes, we strive to be well-informed, whether through formal education or through self-education. And most of us are serious about what we do. But we wear our title of Homemaker as a badge of honor, not as a second-class citizen or in some way not a “real” woman.

Live your life in chapters. Don't try to be and do everything at once. Let your life unfold day by day. Scholars tell us that Proverbs 31 describes a woman's whole lifetime—she didn't do all of those things at once.

Live your life in chapters.

I am very much a work in progress—just ask my family and friends. I didn't begin serving beyond the local level until my children were well past the dependent stage. Writing and public speaking are new chapters in my life that I would never have attempted during the Survival Years of birthing, breastfeeding, and burping. I don't have all my ducks in a row--why would I try to organize ducks when I'm still working on me?

And this is what we want to model for our children

~a person who admits faults and asks forgiveness

~a person who is willing to stretch beyond her comfort zone and try new things

~a person who rejoices in her calling as a homemaker—the one who is privileged to care for her family, her husband, and her home.

When we try to do it all, we cheat ourselves of God's optimal plan for us. Clementine Churchill, wife of Winston Churchill, joked that her epithet should read: “Here lies a woman who was always tired, for she lived in a world where too much was required.”



Don't allow the world to determine what is required of you as a homeschooling mom. Give yourself permission to relax and enjoy the journey. As you delight yourself in the Lord, He will direct you along the paths He has selected for you. He will lead you on side trips you would never have chosen. And these serendipitous happenings will prepare you to share the unique message He created for you to leave as a legacy for your children and grandchildren.

*Give yourself permission
to relax . . . YOU are
God's first choice.*

Don't shortchange yourself, your family, or the world by trying to be like someone else. God has selected you to be your children's mother. Relish and rejoice in that role. Your children are blessed to have you. YOU are God's first choice.

God Knows Who You Are

God knows who you are. He knows where you live. And He knows what you need.

How often we forget these truths! We get bogged down in the daily details of making meals and making a living, teaching the kids and training the dog.

*God knows who
you are.*

God seems like some remote being, far removed from our daily lives. We call on Him only for emergencies—sickness, accidents, wayward children—and figure He is busy with the rest of the world the rest of the time.

It's as if we think we only get a limited number of answers to prayer, so we'd better save them up for when it's really important.

How little we understand our loving Father. Just as He was there forming our tiny bodies in the womb,¹ so He is as close as our next breath.

*He is as close as our
next breath.*

He knows when we are too weary to keep going.

He knows when we are at our wit's end in dealing with our children. He knows when our relationship with our spouse is deteriorating.

And He cares.²

He cares about the tiniest details of our lives. And His care shows up in some very interesting ways.

¹ Psalm 139

² I Peter 5:7



When I visited the North Carolina headquarters for Christian relief agency Samaritan's Purse,³ I was fascinated to learn some of the details involved in shipping millions of Operation Christmas Child boxes around the world each year.

For the Operation Christmas Child Project, people all over the country fill shoeboxes with school supplies, personal hygiene items, and toys for children who have very little. Often these children have never received a gift or heard the name of Jesus before.

Volunteers inspect each box before shipping, removing any items that might spill or melt. Other than that, they respect the integrity of the box—whatever the giver places in the box stays in the box.

Millions of boxes are shipped to countries all over the world. As the boxes are delivered, the Gospel is shared and many children and their parents come to Christ.

The guide at their warehouse told me three stories about the shoeboxes. At the distribution sites, no one knows what is in any individual box. They are labeled by age and gender only.

The first story she told was about a shoebox that contained seven toothbrushes. It was given to a little boy who had never owned a toothbrush before. And he had exactly seven people in his family. God knew who he was, where he lived, and what he needed.

The second box was stuffed with a CD player and several music and Bible CDs. The child who “just happened” to receive that box was blind. He would have had no use for crayons or other things that filled most of the boxes. God knew who he was, where he lived, and what he needed.

³ www.samaritanspurse.org



When a little girl living in an orphanage in Kazakhstan received her shoebox full of gifts, she confided to her house mother, “I appreciate the gift, but what I really need is parents.”

This Christian care-giver simply replied, “Well, let’s just pray and ask God for parents for you.”

After praying, the little girl opened her shoe box. Along with a wonderful assortment of gifts there was a card and a photo of the people who had given the box. They shared that they hoped that she liked the gifts and that they were praying for her to learn to love the Lord Jesus. They also mentioned that they had no children of their own.

With help from an orphanage worker, the little girl wrote to the donors, thanking them for the gifts and telling them how she was praying to God for parents. The American couple, touched by this little girl’s faith, found their way to her village in Kazakhstan to meet her and ended up adopting her.

Out of all the shoeboxes distributed that day, this box was given to her. And in meeting her need, the Heavenly Father also met the yearning need for a family in the adoptive couple, building a family in a most unexpected way.

God knew who that little girl was, where she lived, and what she needed.

Homeschool speaker and evangelist Richard “Little Bear” Wheeler told a story years ago about traveling evangelist Ken Gaub. Ken tells the story in *God’s Got Your Number*.⁴

While driving down Interstate 75 south of Dayton, Ohio, Ken and his family pulled off the highway for pizza. He was exhausted from ministering and wondered if God even knew where he was. He sent his family into the restaurant and went for a walk, hoping to unwind a bit.

⁴ *God’s Got Your Number* by Ken Gaub (New Leaf Press, 1994)



After buying a Coke, he started back toward their bus. A pay phone was ringing in a phone booth at a service station as he walked by. At first he ignored it, but when it continued to ring he figured he would tell the caller that he obviously had a wrong number.

Imagine his shock when the telephone operator said, “Long distance call for Ken Gaub.”

Astonished, he hardly knew what to say. He even considered that he might be on *Candid Camera*, the old television show that set up improbable situations and recorded people’s reactions.

When the operator connected the caller, she was weeping. Through her tears, she told Ken that as she was writing a suicide note, she began praying and telling God she really didn’t want to die. She had seen Ken on a TV show and thought if she could talk to him, he might be able to help her.

Not knowing how to contact him, she just wrote down the numbers that came to her mind. She decided to take a chance that the numbers would connect her with his office in Washington state.

But of course he wasn’t in his office in Washington. He was at a phone booth in Ohio.

Realizing that only God could have arranged for her to reach him, Ken counseled her and led her to the Lord. Then he gave her the name of a local pastor who could follow up with her.

As Ken walked back to the family bus, he realized again how, in His amazingly efficient way, God had met both of their needs—the suicidal woman’s need for hope and salvation and his own need to know that God hadn’t forgotten him.



God knew how to find Ken, even if He had to use a public phone booth to do so.

Many years ago, I was scheduled to direct a statewide choir at the annual homeschool conference. But I was hospitalized the week of the conference, nearly dying from a massive *E. coli* infection.

The choir needed a substitute director—fast!—someone with conducting experience and who already knew the music. The only rehearsals the singers would have together as a choir would be the day of the performance.

A year earlier, a homeschool mother with several children had given birth to a severely disabled child who needed constant nursing care. Exhausted from months spent caring for her child, she asked the Lord, “Will I ever be able to use my music again? Will I ever teach piano or direct a choir?”

Day after day she homeschooled her older children and cared for her very fragile baby. She faithfully taught the older children their music for the upcoming concert. And, you guessed it, she was the one tapped to direct the choir in my absence.

God knew the needs of both women, one for a replacement director, and one to realize that during this time of sacrifice for her child, He hadn’t forgotten her emotional need to again make music with others.

God knows who you are. He knows where you live. And He knows what you need.

*He knows where
you live.*

Joseph was just another slave in Egypt, but God knew where to find him.

Moses was just another Hebrew baby, but God knew his name and raised him from a basket in the bulrushes to lead the Exodus.



God Knows Who You Are



Mary and Joseph were just another young couple in a crowded town, but God met their need for shelter.

To a government census-taker you are only a number.

To your phone company you are only a number.

*God knows your
name.*

But God knows your name. You're not just another sheep in the flock. Like the Good Shepherd that He is, He calls you by name.

“Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.”⁵

God knows who you are. He knows where you live. He knows what you need. And He cares.

⁵ I Peter 5:6-7 (NKJV)

Homeschooling Through Difficult Times

Parenting puts you on your knees; homeschooling keeps you there.

Life doesn't stop just because you start homeschooling. Sometimes we wish everything else would just go away so we could concentrate on the educational tasks before us. Wouldn't it be great if our clothes suddenly never needed to be washed or mended? If meals just appeared on the table?

Parenting puts you on your knees; homeschooling keeps you there.

And, better yet, wouldn't it be wonderful if no one got sick or had financial struggles or felt sandwiched between caring for two generations of family at once? Then, we tell ourselves, we would have time for planning all of those creative lessons and grading all of those papers we've assigned.

But that is not how our wise and loving Heavenly Father has designed things. In His wisdom, He custom designs the events of our days to grow us into the image of Christ. How would we learn patience if no one ever did things to frustrate us? How would we learn to trust Him if we never experienced want?

God is the ultimate homeschool teacher. He individualizes a curriculum for each of us, carefully selecting experiences and people that will draw us closer to Him. There are even pop quizzes, as well as big tests, along the way. And He chooses all of the courses—we don't get to select the electives in His school.

*God is the ultimate
homeschool teacher.*



His goal is mastery learning; He will take us through a lesson as many times as necessary to help us learn what we need to know. But, unlike our children, we have the option to ignore His assignments or to do them in our own way instead of in a way that is pleasing to Him.

Remember how He led the Israelites through the wilderness for forty years? Do you ever feel like you're making yet another trip around Mount Sinai until the road is so deeply rutted that your wagon is high-centered? The more times we refuse to learn, the tougher it gets. Rebellion reaps its own reward.

Gary Thomas maintains that God gives us children so He can grow *us* up.¹ God must have figured I needed a lot of remedial work when he sent us five boys to raise!

But oh, the joys of struggling along together! These sons provided the pop quizzes to test how I was progressing in the character department. Through them, I learned to trade laziness for self-control (most of the time!), judgmental words for a quiet answer, and an independent spirit for trusting God's faithfulness and timing.

Homeschoolers aren't immune to the challenges that face many families today.

Homeschoolers aren't immune to the challenges that face many families today. Our family has experienced many of these tests: finances, separation, illness, and others. Through them, we have grown closer to each other and closer to our Father.

Early in our marriage, my husband Kieth often worked out-of-state for weeks or months at a time. He would come home as many weekends as his deadline-driven schedule allowed.

1 *Sacred Parenting: How Raising Children Shapes Our Souls* by Gary Thomas (Zondervan: 2005)



One Sunday afternoon as he was leaving yet again, one of the boys said, “Thanks for coming to visit us, Daddy.”

The very next weekend Kieth announced that he had rented an apartment near his job site so we could be together as a family. We loaded up children, clothes, diapers, the sewing machine, and other essentials and moved into a basement apartment in Guernsey, Wyoming.

Suddenly, I was a stranger in a strange land. Kieth had our only car during the day, so I packed up the children, stroller and all, to visit the Laundromat, the park, and the post office—no home delivery in Guernsey. I willed myself not to show my life-long fear of dogs as we made our way past yard after yard of the barking beasts.

Our newborn was a fussy baby, so my time was spent trying to soothe him during the daytime so he wouldn't disturb our landlord upstairs. At night I had to keep him quiet so Kieth could get some much-needed rest.

I never knew when someone from upstairs might walk through my kitchen on the way to throw a load in the washer. Showers were taken with caution as our shower stall was in the landlord's laundry room.

In the midst of all my trials, God sent a dear woman who offered us rides to the Bible study at her church. Those sweet ladies opened their arms to my little ones, too, since I didn't know a soul who could babysit for them. All week long I looked forward to that bit of adult companionship and sharing in the Word.

Three other times Kieth's job called us to that windy little town. We lived in a camper trailer one summer, a motel room one fall, and later a rented house, all to be close to Daddy. Homeschooling permitted us the flexibility to join him, regardless of what the calendar said.



We were so thankful to be homeschooling when our eleven-year-old was diagnosed with diabetes. How difficult it would have been to help him learn all of the new procedures for caring for himself if he had been away at school all day. When he got home from the hospital, we simply started where we had left off in his studies—no make-up work to turn in!

At the next support group activity day, the two of us did a presentation on diabetes so his friends would understand his new lifestyle and their parents would know what to watch for if he needed help while spending time with them. Instead of rejection, our son was a hero to all of his homeschool friends, especially the boys, when they learned that he gave himself shots every day.

One of our greatest family challenges came during my fourth pregnancy. We were excited to learn that I was carrying twins, then devastated when the ultrasound showed that one of the twins had died at eighteen weeks gestation and the surviving twin had heart, kidney, and brain abnormalities.

The specialist informed us that I would most certainly deliver extremely prematurely due to the demise of the first twin--probably no later than 22 weeks, much too early for the remaining twin to survive. She was concerned that I might develop a blood coagulation disease, as well. She gently suggested that we “terminate the pregnancy” and “try again.”

God gave us faith to refuse her recommendation, so she sent us to another specialist that same day for further testing. The ultrasound there, just three hours later, revealed a perfectly formed living baby with no sign of abnormalities in the brain or elsewhere!

The doctors had no medical explanation for why two such different ultrasound pictures could be taken within such a short time, but we knew that God had touched our little one.



When we arrived back home, we looked up the meaning of Josiah, the name we had chosen for the baby before we knew of any medical complications. Josiah means “he is healed by God.” Needless to say, this was a tremendous faith-builder. We named his twin Enoch because, as with his Old Testament namesake, “God took him.”

Contrary to the specialist’s dire predictions, we carried the twins sixteen weeks past Enoch’s death. This was twelve weeks longer than any medical journals had ever recorded following the death of one twin. The twins were born at 36 weeks. Josiah needed some support for his breathing, but was otherwise perfectly normal.

Enoch’s little body was perfectly formed, down to his tiny button nose. He looked just like a petite version of all of the other Washburn babies, although a bit flattened from sharing the womb with his growing brother. We had a memorial service for him and buried his tiny body at the foot of a favorite uncle’s grave in an oak casket my husband had lovingly constructed.

How does this relate to homeschooling? The same way everything else God brings into a family’s life does. When we first told our older sons that we were having twins and that one of them had died, our seven-year-old commented, “Well, he can just show us around heaven when we get there.” Would he have had that same spontaneous faith if he hadn’t spent hours every day hearing us talk about heaven as a real place? I doubt it.

During the sixteen weeks I was on complete bed rest, I continued homeschooling from the living room couch. We didn’t do any fancy unit studies during that time, but the boys learned a lot about how the Body of Christ works as people from our church faithfully brought in meals, cleaned the house, and took them on outings that Mom couldn’t participate in. And the boys learned to serve, being my feet to fetch schoolbooks, diapers, and drinks.



Over the years, we have homeschooled while adding five rooms onto our home (while we lived in it). We homeschooled while caring for an aunt who was suddenly-blinded due to a medical test. We homeschooled when we had no idea how the budget would stretch another dollar.

In so many ways, homeschooling made the difficulties easier, not harder. We could operate on our own schedule. If we had to be up late one evening, we could start school a little later the next day instead of rushing to catch a school bus.

We didn't have to miss school for snow days or even for most illnesses. A child is seldom so ill that he can't at least listen while you read aloud to the rest of the family. The only time illness totally shut down the Washburn Family Academy was when all five boys came down with chicken pox within twenty-four hours of each other. Now that was a memorable week!

Homeschooling made the difficulties easier, not harder.

Will you experience the same challenges we have faced in our family? Not likely. God will tailor-make classes just for you.

God is building a unique life message in each of us, using our life experiences, temperament types, and spiritual gifts to advance the kingdom of Christ on earth through us in distinctive ways. No one else has exactly the same

life message to share as you do. God doesn't use cookie cutters to make us nor to design our life curriculum.

God is building a unique life message in each of us.

Will you learn the lessons in the curriculum He has selected for you the first time they're presented? Probably not. We certainly didn't. Some days you will fly, but most days you will plod. And isn't that true of every job?

But the joy for the Christian homeschooler is in remembering that we get a fresh start every new day. As the Bible chorus reminds us, “The steadfast love of the Lord never faileth; His mercies, they never come to an end. They are new every morning. Great is His faithfulness.”

Hang onto that promise as you work through the daily challenges of life on Earth. After all, we are tallest when we are on our knees in prayer, and homeschooling certainly keeps you there.

*We are tallest when we are
on our knees in prayer.*

Special Days

Perhaps you have seen the Rose is Rose comic strip by Pat Brady. A young child spends the day working alongside his parents repairing the back steps, planting the garden, stirring soup for dinner, and eating apples while sitting on the porch swing.

His comments include,

~“This *looks* like a nothing special day.”

~“This *feels* like a nothing special day.”

~“This *tastes* like a nothing special day.”

In the final frame of the comic, he peeks out from under the covers on his bed and says,

~“Who would have guessed it was something special all the time?”

How often do we forget how special our ordinary, “nothing special” days are? We get caught up in the routine of fixing meals, changing diapers, answering the phone, and kissing boo-boos, all the while attempting to teach our children the three R’s.

With the hundreds of tasks a mother performs every day, it is easy to lose sight of the big picture. And often the big picture is only visible one puzzle piece at a time.

I once sat down and figured out how much additional time I got to spend with each child because of our decision to homeschool. Allowing for time on the bus and a 180-day school year, I was astonished to learn that we shared an

additional 1620 hours *per year* that would have been lost as a family if we had used a conventional education system!

A family who homeschools for twelve years would gain 19,440 hours or almost 3½ years of additional waking hours together. What a blessing to have our little (and not-so-little) ones around us during those formative years!

What a challenge to use those hours wisely!

I usually tried to “stop and smell the roses,” enjoying each season of life as my little ones grew into young saplings towering over me. But I confess that

I sometimes wished away the days with, “I can’t wait until they’re all potty-trained” or “feeding themselves” or “reading” or whatever the next stage was.

Then God sent me a wake-up call that forever changed my attitude toward the specialness of each day. I learned that we don’t always have another day to look forward to.

Several years ago, I developed a severe *E. coli* infection that led to a condition called sepsis. Our family’s life was turned upside down overnight as their always-healthy wife and mother was suddenly and literally on her deathbed. My lungs, kidneys, bone marrow, and other major body systems shut down.

Before inserting the ventilator tube to assist my breathing, the nurse asked if there was anything I wanted to tell my children. Needless to say, I was unprepared to make a deathbed speech. I was just a homeschool mom who had planned to volunteer at the state conference that week. It occurred to me

I was unprepared to make a deathbed speech.

that if I hadn’t already taught them what they needed to know, it was too late to start now. I barely had enough breath to whisper anyway.

A family who homeschools gains almost 3 ½ years of additional waking hours together.

Thinking for a moment, I told the boys the same thing I told them whenever they left the house: “I love you. Shine for Jesus!”

Although the lab tests wouldn’t confirm the *E. coli* diagnosis until two weeks later, the doctors suspected that whatever was killing me was centered in my gall bladder. The twelve lines of medication running into my veins were not effective in controlling the infection nor in raising my blood pressure sufficiently for the necessary surgery. My blood pressure sank to 40/17. Normal is 120/80. Surgery was impossible—the anesthesia would have killed me.

The surgeon drew my husband into the hallway and gently explained that sepsis has an over 90% mortality rate—that all medical options had been pursued—that they could do nothing more for me—and that he should call in the family.

Meanwhile, our nurse, a Christian, suggested that our sons pray for me. They gathered around my bed in the ICU and prayed for a couple of minutes. Following their prayer, she was shocked to see that my blood pressure had shot up thirty points! She called for the surgeon, who rushed in to see what had happened.

The surgeon, unbelieving, asked, “What did you do to her?”

The nurse replied, “We prayed.”

“Yeah, right,” he muttered. Convinced that the blood pressure cuff was defective, he took two additional readings. Confirming the heightened blood pressure, he agreed that I was stable enough for the necessary surgery, although I was still marginal.

I came out of surgery with limbs the color of denim blue jeans. Three of my toes had turned black for lack of circulation. My post-operative fever was 105.4 degrees. But I was alive!

After five days on the ventilator and eleven days in the hospital, I came home—extremely weak, but with a new understanding of how sweet home is. Our lovely flower garden, the pictures of our five sons on the wall, even the dust on the piano—they all became more dear to me. Even my toes eventually returned to normal—I can wear flip-flops in the summer. I took joy in my returning strength: being strong enough to put my empty glass in the dishwasher or stay awake for more than an hour at a time—little victories, but oh, so precious!

We as a family and as a church body noted a new tenderness toward each other. I especially noted misty eyes in the men as they greeted us—they realized that one of their own, my husband Kieth, had come very close to becoming a widower at a young age. I noted their increased gentleness toward their own wives. Our friends provided meals for weeks until I was strong enough to take on the duties of homemaking again.

Remember that each day, however ordinary, is special.

It is easy to focus on life's Big Events: births, graduations, weddings, special trips, and, yes, major illnesses. It is easy to just “get through” the ordinary days. But let's remember that each day, however ordinary, is special, too.

As the little boy in the comic commented, “Who would have guessed . . . (today) . . . was something special all the time?”

Go give your kids a hug.

Caring for His Temple

God is in the Extreme Makeover business.

As Max Lucado writes, “God loves you just the way you are, but he refuses to leave you there. He wants you to be just like Jesus.”¹

*God is in the Extreme
Makeover business.*

Our Father makes it His business to know everything there is to know about us—

- ~every hair and every hang-up,
- ~every thought and every temptation,
- ~every vice and every victory.

And He wants to bring every part of us into the captivity of His love.

With God there is no sacred and secular—it all matters to Him. Many of us have the idea that God only cares about our character. We forget that He

*With God there is no
sacred and secular—it all
matters to Him.*

came in the flesh not just to save our souls, but to identify with us and to show us how to walk in human bodies that sometimes get tired and sick and broken.

Our bodies were made to serve God. Keeping our bodies as strong and healthy as possible is part of our Christian duty.

¹ Max Lucado, *Just Like Jesus: Learning to Have a Heart Like His* (Thomas Nelson: 2003)



My Great-Aunt Lettie, who lived to be 102, once said, “If I’d known I would live so long, I would’ve taken better care of myself.”

People of her generation didn’t give a lot of thought to wellness: they simply ate homegrown foods, worked hard from sunup to sundown, and slept the sleep of the weary. No one who plowed the fields with a team of horses or carried in wood for the stove needed a fitness center—their daily tasks gave them all the exercise they needed. They respected the simple rhythms of daily life: rise at dawn, eat, work, eat, and fall into bed at nightfall.

At Creation, God designed seasons and rhythms for life. Each day’s sunrise, each week’s Sabbath, and each year’s seasons and festivals—all reflect the orderliness of the universe and its Creator. And when our lives are well-ordered, they reflect that Creator.

When our lives are well-ordered, they reflect the Creator.

Our bodies have rhythms, too. Our hearts beat, reflecting the pace we keep. Our digestive system absorbs nutrients to fuel our bodies and eliminates what is no longer needed. We can truly say with the Psalmist, “I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well.”²

Paul writes, “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.”³

Whenever I read passages about honoring God with my body, I want to hurry on to something more comfortable, something more “spiritual.”

I find that it is easier to *talk* the walk than to *take* a walk.

2 Psalm 139:14 (KJV)

3 I Corinthians 6:19–20



As one pundit said, “Whenever I say the word ‘exercise,’ I wash my mouth out with chocolate.”

It is easier to talk the walk than to take a walk.

But my Heavenly Homeschool Father doesn’t let me off so easily. He reminds me that I am not my own, that I was bought with a price, and that I must be a good steward of all the gifts He has given me, including my overweight, under-exercised body.

Indeed, I should be especially aware of how precious a healthy body is. In 2001 I nearly died from multiple organ failure due to a severe *E. coli* infection. It shames me to admit that I don’t always treat my now-healthy body as the twice-redeemed treasure that it is.

I suspect that God’s idea of being in shape differs from the model-perfect images the media present. He looks beyond fad-directed appearance and into the heart.

Are we being good stewards of these bodies He gave us? Are we doing what is necessary to make them strong and keep them strong so we can serve our families and serve the Kingdom? Let’s examine some building blocks for healthy living.

Food. Mark 7:18–20 teaches that all foods are acceptable as clean. But a diet majoring in chips, chocolate, and cheesecake does not a healthy body make.

And it doesn’t take much to tip the balance. A person who gains only three ounces per month—the weight of about one-third cup of water—will gain two pounds per year. That’s sixty pounds in thirty years, enough to push most of us into the obese category on the doctors’ charts.

In defining moderation someone said, "Strength is the capacity to break a chocolate bar into four pieces with your bare hands and then eat just one piece."



Alex Bogusky writes about moderation in *The 9-Inch Diet*. He notes that in 1963 a standard dinner plate was nine inches in diameter and held roughly 810 calories of food. Through the years those numbers have changed. By 2004, a standard dinner plate measured twelve inches and held 1870 calories.⁴ No wonder Americans are steadily gaining weight!

"The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."⁵

Although He doesn't care if we look like a cover girl, the Lord does expect our obedience. He doesn't want our appetites to control us. Gluttony, after all, is listed as a sin. Overeating can be as much an addiction as using tobacco, street drugs, or alcohol. These are heart issues that manifest themselves in our bodies.

Exercise. Exercise isn't just for athletes. Find something you like to do, or can at least tolerate doing, and then do it. Walking is free and a great break from studies. Use a pedometer; aim for 10,000 steps each day. Deliver the children's laundry to the upstairs bedrooms yourself if you need the exercise. Park farther from the store to get in a few extra steps.

Make up your own family exercise regimen.

Some families sign up for a family membership at the gym. Others stay in shape by playing sports together. Join your children for a quick game of tag or

Fox-Fox-Goose. Grab a Christian exercise video and get moving.

Make up your own family exercise regimen. Mix in stretching, calisthenics, cardio exercise, and cool down. Develop a circuit that each of you can do each day.

⁴ Jennifer LaRue Huget, *The Washington Post*, in an article reprinted in *The Denver Post*, Nov. 30, 2009
⁵ I Samuel 16:7b

Pretend you are training to rescue people after a disaster—what kinds of obstacles would you need to climb over or under? Invent fun ways to incorporate many muscles: jump to touch the top of a doorway while passing to the next room to do some stair-stepping; crawl under a table on the way to doing jumping-jacks. Your house is a wonderland of exercise opportunities. Your yard or a nearby park can provide many additional options.

If you have health issues or serious weight issues, check with your doctor before starting an exercise routine. Even if you can only sit in a chair and do leg lifts and arm waves, do something. The more you do, the more you will be able to do.

Rest. Do it! God designed our bodies and minds to need daily rest. Our muscles and bones, worked hard during the day, replenish themselves as we sleep. Our brains perform countless tasks throughout the day and sort and file when we rest. Sleep gives rest for our souls (and our soles!).

During my twelve-plus years of pregnancy and breastfeeding, the boys and I all rested after lunch. The older ones usually did not fall asleep, but they were required to remain on their beds doing something quiet such as reading. I was a much better mother for having had a mid-day break, especially during the years of interrupted nighttime sleep.

Ignore the temptation to stay up long after the children's bedtime in the evening to "get some things done." You need your rest more than you need a dusted house.

Likewise, don't use Sunday as a catch-up-on-projects day. I find that I get more done Monday through Saturday when I rest on Sunday. Also, I seldom get sick when I'm well-rested, despite hosting three dozen often-germy piano students in my home each week.

Caring for your body is a part of your spiritual service to the Lord. If you have neglected or abused yours, allow the Divine Makeover Coach to lead you into a healthier lifestyle for His glory. Who knows? He may intend for you to serve Him on this planet for much longer than you expected, just like my Aunt Lettie.

*Caring for your body is
a part of your spiritual
service to the Lord.*

In His Image: Creativity for Christians

“In the beginning, God created . . .”¹

We see evidences of God’s creativity everywhere around us, from the miracle of birth to the wonder of the water cycle. We are awed by the grandeur of the Grand Canyon, the power of Niagara Falls, and awe-inspiring views from outer space.

Creativity begins with God.

Creativity begins with God, but is extended to us. Made in His image, we reflect His creativity every day, often in ways we don’t recognize.

We are in awe of people past and present who have created the music and artwork that lift our hearts and spirits. We marvel at those who invent computers and discover medical cures.

But so often we wistfully say to ourselves, “I wish I was more creative.” We don’t recognize the creativity within.

Perhaps you recall a time when something you worked hard on was rejected as “not good enough” and that experience convinced you that you weren’t very creative.

I, for one, never received higher than a “satisfactory” grade in art as a child, and I still don’t draw well. My watercolor-painted paper-mache cat didn’t even pass muster in my eight-year-old eyes.

No one is exempt from criticism, especially in creative matters. Walt Disney was once fired by a newspaper editor because “he had no good ideas.” But

¹ Genesis 1:1



it's our self-criticism that is often the most damaging. We resign ourselves to remaining outside the creative circle, always looking in at others whom we believe have more creativity.

Everyone is creative

“God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him.”²

We are created in God's image. That means that we, in a limited fashion, resemble Him. Since He is creative, we are, too.

Recognize that creativity is a part of who you are. God didn't decide when creating you that you would be that one exception, that one person on the planet who would not be made in His image, an image that includes His creativity.

Each of us is given something to do in life that reveals who God is. We each carry a unique life message to impart to others. Some of us are creative in the visual or performing arts. Others are creative in the kitchen or in home decorating. Some sew or do crafts, while others find creative ways to teach a new concept to a child. Some can visualize a new building before even drawing it out on paper or invent a medical device for a specialized surgery.

*Since He is creative,
we are too.*

However, creativity isn't limited to original creativity, developing a brand new idea. It includes those who take others' ideas and develop new ways to combine and use them. This is known as adaptive creativity. Look at the creative ways others have developed the original concept of the Internet far beyond the imaginations of those pioneers in the Department of Defense.

² Genesis 1:27



Creativity grows with use

Think you're not creative? Take action on just one little idea, and soon you will have more ideas. It's like planting a seed. If you plant nothing, you grow nothing.

Our pastor once stated, "It is criminal to live overly-cautiously—to hide our talents. The message of the parable of the talents in Matthew 25 is to take intentional risks."

*If you plant nothing,
you grow nothing.*

Edith Shaffer challenges us in her book, *The Hidden Art of Homemaking*,³ to look around for some little thing that we can change to bring a slice of beauty into our homes. Perhaps you will arrange some pretty shells or twigs on a table, or play quiet worship music each morning as you wake your family.

If you are unsure about your own creativity, start by doing little things. Creativity is not just painting or playing the violin.

What's in your hand?

- A mixing bowl? Tweak that recipe a bit to see if you can improve it.
- A dust cloth? Arrange those knickknacks in a different way or, perhaps, move some of them to a different room.
- The door to your closet? Update your wardrobe at no cost by looking for new ways to combine the clothes and accessories you already own.

³ *The Hidden Art of Homemaking* by Edith Schaeffer (Tyndale House: 1985). This classic is still in print for good reason. Schaeffer encourages us to make wherever we live, mansion or motel room, into a place of personal beauty. She offers do-able designs, not the expensive, time-consuming ideas that many decorating magazines suggest. Her philosophy of creativity has impacted and encouraged people all over the world.



Bobb Biehl wisely reminds us, “Art . . . created by family members [or] friends is typically far more valuable to one’s heart than the art sold for millions at the Sotheby’s art auction in New York City!”⁴

We often compare our own creativity with that of the most skilled painters, musicians, and chefs, feeling that we have nothing of value to offer. But our loving Father chose to bless us with the creative gifts that He did for good reason. Each of us has a unique combination of gifts, talents, and personality that will reflect His creativity in a distinctive way.

Henry Van Dyke reminds us, “Use what talent you possess: the woods would be very silent if no birds sang except those that sang best.”

For many years I refused to sing for audiences when speaking at home education conferences. As I piano major in college, I had taken enough voice lessons to realize that I would never have a solo quality voice. I consistently earned only Cs for my efforts.

My singing voice is very average; I was embarrassed to share it with my audiences. Then God convicted me of pride and selfishness: I was withholding the blessing of songs that would help to bring home His message for the audience. Since then, I have sung for several events. Because my voice is so average, people can focus on the words and melody without being distracted by the quality of my voice. More importantly, I am obeying my Lord.

Boredom is the breeding ground of genius.

Creativity thrives in the unstructured hours of the day

Someone has said, “Boredom is the breeding ground of genius.”

⁴ <http://www.bobbbiehl.com/>



American parents tend to over-structure their children's days. When was the last time you refused to rescue your child who complained of being bored?

Children who learn to amuse themselves will develop creativity far beyond those who must be entertained by video games, organized sports, and scheduled play dates.

We were blessed to raise our five sons in a rural area. It was not as tempting to sign them up for countless organized activities when each practice or meeting involved a drive into town. They found many ways to entertain themselves and, even now as adults, those self-organized activities are the ones they reminisce about most.

The boys spent many happy hours making countless paper airplanes for tournaments in the loft of our barn. The cost? A ream of paper, some markers, and unstructured time. Each plane had a name and identifying colors. They experimented with various designs to see which would fly the farthest.

One year the boys spent several months digging a car-sized hole in our backyard. My husband helped them build a safe ceiling for it and they had a wonderful hideaway, complete with a stovepipe to ventilate smoke from their candles. A couple of them slept in it for a few nights one cold January to better understand what men living in the Hooverilles of the Great Depression experienced.

Charlotte Mason was known for allowing children to explore and create in their own ways. She wrote, "The part of the mother or teacher in the early years (indeed, all through life) is to sow opportunities, and then to keep in



the background, ready with a guiding or restraining hand only when these are badly wanted.”⁵

A 2010 Kaiser study of over two thousand American children between the ages of eight and eighteen determined that average participants spent 7.5 hours a day tethered to electronic media of some sort—smart phones, computers, or television. And this didn’t include time actually sending or receiving messages.

The mother is to sow opportunities.

Communicating with these devices added another 1.5 hours each day, for a total of nine hours daily looking at a screen. The reason most often given: these kids were terrified of being bored.

“This ‘boredom’ is ‘in most cases . . . the state of mind of those who lack imagination and therefore require all kinds of stimuli to prevent them from losing interest in things, and even in life.’ That’s why people, adults as well as kids, are ‘constantly fiddling with their cell phone.’

“The alternative to all this fiddling is being alone with your own thoughts, which terrifies people used to the constant stimulation provided by our media-saturated culture. . . Neuroscientists tell us that many, if not most, of our most creative and productive moments come when we step back from all the stimulation and let our minds be free. In other words, what many people call ‘boredom’ is good for us in ways that the constantly-stimulated can’t begin to imagine.”⁶

5 Charlotte Mason, Vol. 1, pp. 192, 193. See <http://SimplyCharlotteMason.com/books/masterly-inactivity> for a free e-book including her thoughts on raising children with a balance of discipline and liberty.

6 Mark Early, *Breakpoint*, Feb. 3, 2010 (<http://www.breakpoint.org/commentaries/14307-the-courage-to-be-bored>)



Creativity thrives with adequate sleep

There are more reasons to get enough rest than preventing grumpiness the next morning. Biochemical studies of the brain indicate that memories are restructured before they are stored; creativity also appears to be enhanced in the process. This restructuring takes place while we sleep.

German scientist Jan Born states, “It appears that memories start deep in an area of the brain called the hippocampus, and are eventually pushed outward to the neocortex to be consolidated. The changes leading to creativity or problem-solving insight occur during the ‘slow-wave’ or deep sleep, which typically occurs in the first four hours of the sleep cycle.”⁷

God expects us to use our creativity to bless others

I Peter 4:10 reminds us that each of us should use whatever gifts we have received to serve others; in this way we can administer God’s grace in its various forms. One could say that we are carrying on where God left off.

As we develop our own creativity and help our children to do the same, we must always seek ways to share it with others.

Are you and your children musical? Share your music with lonely residents at a nursing home.

Are you good with a camera? Offer to take family portraits for those who can’t afford them: single parents, families of prisoners, widows, and others.

Is landscaping your skill? Many elderly people would love to have your help making their yards a pleasure to enjoy from their front porches.

Take what’s in your hand and sow it liberally. Soon you will find creativity blooming in new and unexpected ways.

7 <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2004/01/21/tech/main594879.shtml>



Creativity is a reflection of the Creator. If we open our eyes, we will begin to see things as He sees them. We will notice His Creation in new ways, resulting in on-going praise for the Father of all creation.

*Creativity is a reflection
of the Creator.*

Keep on Walkin'

Are there times as a homeschooler when you wonder what on earth you have gotten yourself into? Perhaps you are saying to yourself:

"This whole home education thing is too much work."

"I never have time for myself."

"All of our 'extra' money goes toward microscopes and math manipulatives."

"The routine of day-to-day instruction is boring us all to tears, and my children don't appreciate the sacrifices I am making to teach them at home."

"My family and friends think we're nuts."

"Maybe we should just put them in school next year. Maybe public school really isn't so bad. After all, our pastor's kids go there. Maybe I should just quit."

Ever feel like this? Like homeschooling is just too hard?

Then join the club. Nearly everyone who has homeschooled longer than a month knows exactly how you feel. I know I do.

But then, just as we're about to give it up, God reveals His perspective in some new and interesting way. Perhaps it is through a word of encouragement from a friend. Maybe your parents notice how respectful your children have become. A word of scripture may have leapt out from your daily reading, speaking to a place deep within your heart.

*Ever feel like homeschooling
is just too hard?*

A few years ago, God chose an unusual way to stretch and encourage me. I had the privilege of introducing the Shuar Indians of eastern Ecuador to home education.

*Just as we homeschool
our children, God
homeschools us.*

When the Shuar Church Association invited me to present a homeschool seminar, I was, to put it mildly, not enthusiastic. As a comfort-oriented non-adventurous retired homeschooling mom, I confess to having some doubts about flying off to a developing country to live and work in a jungle for two weeks.

I don't like dirt, insects, snakes, heat, humidity, or the outdoors, and I had arranged my life to successfully avoid all of the above. But God had a better idea. Just as we homeschool our children, God homeschools us. It was time for Marcia to take a new class.

Looking back, I see how He had graciously prepared me to stretch for this new Kingdom opportunity many years before.

Born in the city and raised in the suburbs, the thought of living on a farm was as foreign as, well, being a missionary in the jungle. When my husband Kieth decided to move our family to a country acreage, God let me get used to the idea for a full year while we fixed up the hundred-year-old farmhouse. By the time we finally made the move, I was actually looking forward to it—sort of.

But it has turned out to be a wonderful place to raise five sons and I hope to live here the rest of my days on earth. Quiet and peaceful, I feel much closer to my Creator as I can see the sun rising across the Eastern Colorado plains with no buildings to obstruct my view. I have learned that my Father could be trusted in any location.

When I was invited to speak in the jungle, I hesitated, but then realized that God lives in Ecuador, too. And He graciously gave me seven months to get used to the idea—seven months to wonder what life in the jungle would be like.

I couldn't imagine what homeschooling in the jungle might look like. Where would they get books? What did their children really need to know? Would they accept what a white American woman had to say? Only God's peace reassured me that I had anything of value to share with these people whose lifestyle was so different from my own.

*I couldn't imagine what
homeschooling in the
jungle might look like.*

I was soon to witness just how much these parents love their children and are willing to sacrifice for their future, in much the same way as American parents sacrifice to homeschool their children.

- ◆ A young father of five had hiked and ridden buses for two days, coming from near the Peruvian border, and spending about a month's income on the trip.
- ◆ A grandmother walked six hours with her daughter and grandchildren. They juggled their eighteen-month-old throughout the entire conference.
- ◆ Another mother and daughter could only stay for one afternoon before repeating their five-hour-plus walk home in the dark.

Three schoolteachers arranged for substitutes so they could attend. They were unsure if participating in home education would impact their jobs, but they were among the most vocal in urging the church to host the conference.

Rain waterfalled from the sky on Day 1 of the conference, but soon the rookie homeschoolers arrived, using banana leaves as umbrellas.

I have never spoken to a group so eager to learn. They sat for hours on narrow benches, attentively listening as a local missionary translated my English words into Spanish. Although they understood some concepts, Spanish was only their second language.

Then a tribal Bible teacher translated the Spanish into Shuar, their heart language. That is when a look of true comprehension lit up their faces. They nodded their heads and scribbled notes as they began to understand what Scripture says about parenting children.

Led by the Holy Spirit, their teacher often spoke at length about what I had just said and then moved ahead to my next point as though he could read my teaching notes—truly God at work, reducing the time needed for translating through three languages!

The concept of a lecture is foreign to the Shuar culture. This was truly a workshop. They freely shared comments and asked questions; lengthy discussions often ensued.

These parents were quick to see the connection between homeschooling and parenting as a whole, not assuming that homeschooling merely related to the children's academic training alone.

They discussed everything from textbooks to television, birth control to daycare centers.

As a village with access to electricity, those from Makuma were more aware of the outside world than many who had never travelled from their distant villages. Indeed, one family's thatched hut sported a television antenna supported by a bamboo rod.

They spent break times copying every poster we hung on the walls and confessing to each other their shortcomings as parents. The hours were long—eight hours of class on Thursday and over ten hours on Friday.¹

The Shuar were astonished to learn that American parents had the same concerns they did about homeschooling:

- ◆ *What if I don't teach my children well and they don't learn what they should?*
- ◆ *How will I teach them things I don't know about myself?*
- ◆ *Where will I get books and how will I pay for them?*
- ◆ *What about socialization? (Yep! They wondered about this, too!)*
- ◆ *How will I take care of my babies and little ones while I am teaching my older children?*
- ◆ *Homeschooling is so much extra work—let the teachers do it.*

This last objection was certainly understandable. The typical Shuar mother cooks over an open fire in a dirt-floored kitchen. Most villages don't have electricity and their only running water is the river down the hill. Families grow most of their own food in gardens, supplementing it with fishing and hunting. Convenience foods and microwave ovens are unknown. Clothes are beaten clean against a wood bench or rock and draped on bushes to dry.

No wonder many felt that homeschooling takes too much time. And yet these parents came from great distances to learn more about this option and some decided to commit to home teaching.

¹ They had considered continuing into Saturday morning, but national elections were Sunday and every citizen is required to vote in his hometown. There is a \$50 fine for not voting—double a month's income for many families. Even at that, there were those who were willing to pay the fine if the conference continued on Saturday and they couldn't hike the trails to get home in time to vote.

These brand-new teaching parents specifically asked homeschoolers in America to pray for them. They will probably not have the advantage of support groups anytime soon. Distance is a huge factor: there are no roads into their villages, only jungle trails. Getting together for a conference is considered a once-a-year option at best.

There is no telephone service in these communities, so communication with other homeschoolers would be available only by mail or messenger. And most families don't live in a village but in the jungle, so even forming a support group would be a challenge.

These new homeschoolers can expect spiritual attack, as well. Satan has witnessed how home education has brought spiritual renewal to families and churches elsewhere and he certainly will not be eager to give up ground that he has held for so long.

There is a parallel between jungle trails and homeschooling. Along both paths are plants that amaze, views that astonish, and mud holes to slip in (as I once did before an amused crowd of little boys!). There are insects that nip at your shins and people that touch your heart.

The daily work of homeschooling—and it is work—will both bless and perplex you. The trail will have its ups and its downs, its laughs and its lumps. But every day will bring something to smile about if you look for it.

Most homeschool days aren't Disneyland days—and this is a good thing. The routines of everyday living prepare our children for adult life much better than the false expectation that every day will be filled with excitement and every lesson will be a wonder of creativity.

*The longest hike is
accomplished one
step at a time.*

The longest hike is accomplished one step at a time. Homeschooling is the same way. It's just putting one foot in front of

the other, over and over again—and then, suddenly, your child is an adult and you can't believe he has grown up so fast.

There is an old spiritual whose words encourage me:

“Keep on walkin’, Pilgrim—we’re heading for the Promised Land . . .

Don’t be weary, Pilgrim—we’re heading for the Promised Land.”

As you trek along your own trail, try to remember the reasons you started homeschooling in the first place. List them on paper, including insights that you have gained since you began. Refer to your notes often when you find yourself growing discouraged.

Our Heavenly Father is the ultimate homeschool parent. Our time-conscious society says to find the shortest way to do everything. But God doesn't look for the shortest way. He lays out the best way to grow us into the full maturity of Christ.

Our Father is more interested in our character than our comfort, so He customizes a homeschool curriculum for each of us as parents. We don't always appreciate our assigned classes and we wish that we could take more electives. No one enjoys ill health or heartache, foul weather or foul attitudes.

Our Father is more interested in our character than our comfort

But, in God's hands, they draw us closer to Him. And the closer we get to Him, the more we are transformed into His image.

Sometimes He enrolls us in classes we would never have considered—new adventures—whether caring for a disabled child or an elderly relative as some of you do, ministering in the jungle as I did, or homeschooling in a chonta wood hut as the Shuar will.

The Shuar have family, spiritual, and environmental challenges. So do we.

Life goes on whether or not you homeschool. You will still have to discipline children and balance the budget. You will still drop the pizza upside down on the kitchen floor sometimes. Children will still get the stomach flu. Don't blame all of life's challenges on homeschooling.

Don't blame all of life's challenges on homeschooling.

On days when you question your decision to homeschool, when things seem to bog down (or blow up!), remember those brand-new homeschoolers in Ecuador.

- ◆ Mothers will be teaching while keeping the toddler from falling into the fire on the hard-packed earth floor.
- ◆ Fathers will be teaching while fishing for the day's protein.
- ◆ Families will be sharing God's Word as they eat their bowls of rice and noodles.

Indeed, they will teach the next generation in the manner of Deuteronomy 6:6–7. Transliterated from the Shuar language, these verses read:

“And these command words I am teaching you today: know them very well in your heart. Doing that, teach the command words without interruption at all times to your children where you are in your house, when you walk on the trail and when you sleep and when you awake.”

May we do the same, hiking the trail and finishing the course God has placed before us.²

² Kevin Swanson of Generations Radio has interviewed Marcia about her ministry trips to Ecuador. Click [here](#) to listen to the interviews.

Just Pedal

At first I saw God as my observer, my judge,
keeping track of the things I did wrong,
so as to know whether I merited heaven or hell when I die.

He was out there sort of like a president.
I recognized His picture but I didn't really know him.

But later on, when I met Christ,
it seemed as though life were rather like a bike ride.
But it was a tandem bike,
and I noticed that Christ was in the back helping me pedal.

I don't know just when it was that He suggested we change places,
but life has not been the same since.

When I had control, I knew the way.
It was rather boring and predictable.
It was the shortest distance between two points.

But when He took the lead,
He knew delightful long cuts up mountains
And through rocky places at break-neck speeds.
It was all I could do to hang on!
Even though it looked like madness, He said, "Pedal!"

I worried and was anxious and asked, “Where are you taking me?”

He laughed and didn't answer, and I started to learn to trust.

I forgot my boring life and entered into the adventure.

And when I'd say, “I'm scared!” He'd lean back and touch my hand.

He took me to people with gifts that I needed—

gifts of healing, acceptance, and joy.

They gave me gifts to take on my journey, my Lord's and mine,

And we were off again.

He said, “Give the gifts away—they're extra baggage, too much weight.”

So I did, to the people we met,

and I found that in giving I received,

and still our burden was light.

I did not trust Him, at first, in control of my life—I thought He'd wreck it.

But he knows bike secrets,

knows how to make it bend to make sharp corners,

knows how to jump to clear high rocks,

knows how to fly to shorten scary passages.

And I am learning to shut up and pedal in the strangest places,

and beginning to enjoy the view,

and the cool breeze on my face

with my delightful constant companion, JESUS CHRIST.

And when I'm sure I just can't do anymore, He just smiles and says, “Pedal.”¹

¹ The author of this delightful essay is unknown. It was forwarded to me many years ago and has also appeared as “The Journey” and “A Bike Ride with God.” If you can identify the author, please let me know so I can credit him or her.

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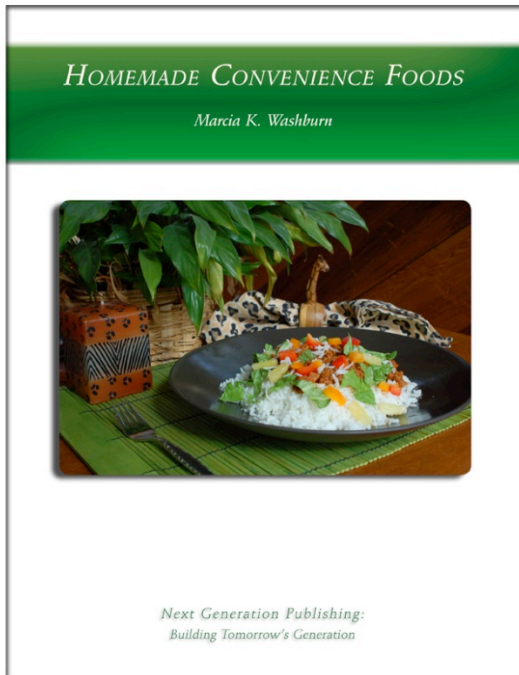
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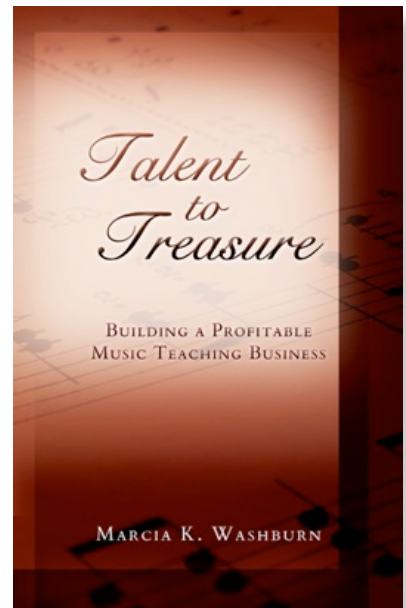
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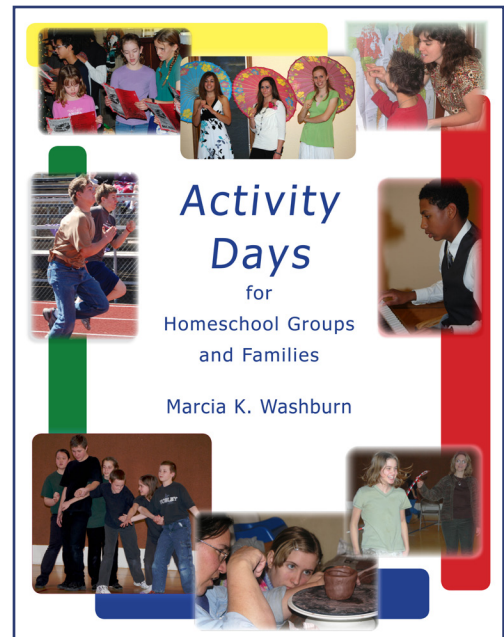
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