

Myth: You Can't Home School if You Have Less Than Optimum Health

-by Maxine McLellan

God often calls the physically weak to educate their children at home. Deut. 6:4-9 is not addressed only to the physically strong! The apostle Paul speaks almost pointedly to the situation: "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my (God's) strength is made perfect in weakness," and "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." God does not call us educate our children at home without making a way for us to accomplish the task.

Three of the main challenges when educating children at home when you are physically weak are 1. other people; 2. academics; and 3. getting through the day. During my seventeen years in home education the most difficult challenge has been that of responding to well-meaning folks. If you do not stay in bed, pull down the blinds, avoid life, and put the children in school for their "good" and your "benefit," the conclusion is drawn that you are incapable of thinking clearly and obviously should not be educating at home! If God, in His infinite wisdom, does not grant divine healing, sometimes comments arise such as: *There must be some major unconfessed sin and/or bitterness in your life... You do not have enough faith for healing because it is God's divine will that everyone be completely healthy... It is God's will for you to follow diet XYZ... You WILL be healed: if you take products A-Z, each of which are God's gifts to mankind and the best on the market... pray the Prayer of Jabez for 30 consecutive days... and/or, send money to invest in the ministry of this particular organization. If you do not follow the so-called advice, then obviously you really do not want healing and perhaps enjoy the attention poor health brings you (this is implied or stated)!* So, now on top of feeling miserable, you have been run over by several dump trucks and a steam roller and you vow to never again mention your state of well-being or lack thereof! The word "fine" takes on a whole new definition, and, you will probably begin to doubt yourself and God and feel REALLY badly about that too. Talk about energy drainage! What a day!! Dealing with people: Remind yourself that they probably are genuinely concerned for you and are hopefully not just pushing their agenda or product. Yes, God created your body as His temple so you do need to care for it. It can be wise to investigate and try diets, remedies, treatments etc. that may strengthen you physically. There may be spiritual causes to deal with. Some suggestions people give may actually be keys for you, so here is my advice: listen graciously, take the information you need, and chuck the remainder! If necessary, have a trusted friend follow up the information for you and give it back to you in condensed form to act on. Regarding academics: Use resources that take a minimum of your energy to use. I am naturally attracted to the unit study, hands-on style, but I use more traditional resources that require little or no preparation and encourage independent study by the children. If and when I have the energy, we do a hands-on and field trip approach to a topic being studied in the workbooks we are using. We use numerous easy-to-use resources for English, an ungraded math curriculum that allows teaching of different ages simultaneously, and ACE worktexts for science and social studies. As we have time, other user-friendly resources cover character, building thinking skills, computer skills, piano, etc. Most of these require little or no help from me. Our girls and I keep our supplies in hanging file boxes that they bring to wherever we need them, even if I am in bed or laying on a couch. We use lightweight resources that do not sap my energy in holding them. My daughter Andrea helps me with the girls who, because of learning disabilities do require additional help. If I did not have her help,

we would just do less in our day. My view is that a child needs formal academic instruction only in math and English until about age nine or ten. At about late grade three or grade four, add in formal science and social studies. Until that time, lay strong foundations in math, English, character, Biblical principles and life skills. This plan gives the children time to be children and for you to train the older children to help with the training of the younger children! With solid foundations and training in how to learn independently, they can usually tackle any academics desired from age ten and beyond.

Getting through a day can be a challenge. My mother, who herself was never physically strong, had a rule: "You have three days to be sick. After that, you might as well get up and work it out of you and to keep your mind off of yourself!" The principle has some merit in long term weakness. Mom also said, "Rest when necessary but do not wallow in self pity. Do as much as you can with the strength God gives you each day." Getting through each day is a main goal. Perfection does not fit into that goal. Be content with what you CAN accomplish and what your children CAN do and do not grieve over what you CANNOT do. This is admittedly more easily said than done! Set main priorities such as: maintaining a strong relationship with God/spouse/children, getting dressed (it can make you feel better about the day), preparing or supervising basic meals, teaching your children their age-appropriate academics/life skills, and housekeeping tasks each day as strength allows. Allow others to help you. My husband has done all our grocery shopping for twenty-five years! My children started helping with meals and housework as toddlers. Patiently train your children to do as much as possible for themselves from a young age. Do not expect perfection. Even toddlers and young children can help set a table, get out some supplies, run messages, and get things for you. Have older children responsible for getting their academic work and house work done each day. You will be training them in character and work ethics! Humble yourself – ask a friend for help. Pace yourself. In keeping with your priorities, outside activity other than church once a week may be beyond you. Remember, field trips and group activities can be wonderful but are not essential to the learning and development of your children, so do not feel guilty if you cannot do them. In a two-storey home, plan so you do not have to go back upstairs during the day unless absolutely necessary. In your downstairs work area, keep on hand some pillows, blankets, and anything you or any member of the family will need during the day. Break tasks into small portions: do half the dishes now, half later. Dust one room today, sweep tomorrow. Do one load of laundry each day or two. Divide your teaching time into small portions. If possible, use resources allowing you to teach more than one child at a time. Answer keys may be expensive but can be worth the time saved in marking work. Yes, education is more than workbooks and yes, you will be educating your children in other ways as they learn to work by themselves and with you. Recommendations: never compare yourself to your perception of "home school super mom." Avoid thoughts of what might have been "if only". Never make major decisions on a day when you are particularly weak or have been angry at God for your state of health! Remember, God can handle your low times and will get you through whatever it is you are experiencing He will also help you and your family in the home education processes.

Maxine McLellan currently educates two learning challenged girls from her church. Her own two home educated children are now adults. For more information on home education and home schooling contact me at 519-925-9721 or mail@joycenter.on.ca Maxine McLellan JOY Center of Learning.

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