

Not for the Faint of Heart

By Jeff Rockwell, OCHEC Board Chairman

I heard it again recently in a conversation with a Christian mom whose children are all attending public school. “You guys are amazing. I know I would never have the patience to teach my kids at home.” As usual, I bit my tongue so I wouldn’t be tempted to point out that patience is a character trait which can be acquired through submission of our will to the design and plan of our Lord. As I thought about the encounter later (and the many others like it that I’ve experienced) I found my thoughts coalescing around a central theme. The truth is that home education does require patience – sometimes by the truckload! We have to be patient with our children, ourselves, our economic limitations, the fact that nobody can work 24/7 and the resultant reality that YOU WILL NEVER FULLY CATCH UP! But that’s not all. In fact, not only is home education “patience intensive,” it is also physically exhausting, socially constricting, fiscally straining and emotionally draining. It can stress fundamental relationships, and bring misguided censure. As if all this isn’t enough, in some jurisdictions, the government feels it necessary to add to the burden with unwanted intrusion. In other words, home educating is HARD.

Now that assertion will come as no surprise to the vast majority of those who read this column. In fact, some of you may be thinking I left out quite a bit! Unfortunately, it is my sense that many people of our generation have lost track of the simple truth that the very difficulty of any endeavour is often directly proportional to its worth. We have made a cult of the “easy way,” and we have become listless and shallow, vaguely distraught, but with no idea what might be wrong. Now at this point, you may be thinking, “shouldn’t a home education leader be a little more sales oriented?” I mean, really, admitting right up front that home education is difficult and demanding doesn’t seem like a good way to entice new families into the fold. Am I not working at cross purposes with the movement I purport to serve? If you will allow, I would like to offer a defence against that reasonable charge.

When I was in college, I witnessed an encounter that has stayed with me to this day, not only in detail, but in import. One time in a training room the school provided for anyone who wanted to stay or get in shape, I saw one of the school’s star athletes impressively lift a large amount of weight over his head. Though his technique was flawless, it still required a gargantuan effort on his part. Just as the weight reached its triumphant apex, another student who had sauntered by

inquired in dry tones whether the bar was heavy. Owing perhaps to the exertion of the moment and the fact that the athlete was rather enamoured of himself, his response was indignant and challenging. After the star had left, the other student, a quiet farm boy who had spent a number of years logging with his father, walked over to the bar. Without any apparent effort, or style for that matter, he grabbed the bar with one hand, threw it up over head, dropped it to the mat and strolled off without a word! Everyone in the room learned a lesson that day. In the physical realm, there is nothing that creates strength like hard work. All the fancy training in the world is no substitute for the hardening that comes to a body subjected to hour after hour of heavy labour.

It occurs to me that the same principle applies in the realm of spiritual and emotional maturity. When we tackle hard tasks like home education, the inevitable effect for those who persist and endure is a strengthening of the inner person. James, the half brother of Jesus, explains the principle in unequivocal terms:

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”
(Jas. 1:2-4)

One of the hidden benefits of the admittedly challenging task of educating and discipling your children at home is the resolve and conviction that are slowly built up in your own heart over time. It is important to clarify that I do not believe this inner strength is self generated. Rather, the mechanism by which we grow is the paradox of our own weakness finding resolution in the strength that God alone can supply. In other words, the inner muscle developed is that of humility and dependence on God. The apostle Paul explained it this way:

“My (*God's*) grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore, I (*Paul*) will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.” (II Cor. 12:9)

Not only does the embrace of a difficult long term commitment bring strength, but I believe it also brings joy. By joy, I do not mean the ephemeral happiness that any momentary pleasure or satisfaction of the senses might bring. Of course, I believe every home school has its moments of discovery and delight, love and laughter. But I'm referring to that deep rooted and abiding satisfaction derived from the

certain conviction that one has accepted a noble calling from God, and that pursuit of that calling is a worthy expenditure of one's life energies. Joy that is rooted in confidence of the rightness of one's mission and the favour of one's Master is not easily eroded by momentary crises.

So, yes, home educating your children, and indeed, discipling them as ambassadors of the King of kings is not for the faint of heart, or the conflicted of purpose. It is difficult and costly, and perhaps one of the most rewarding endeavours you will ever undertake.

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