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Fido—The story you are about to read is based on a true story. The dog's name was changed to protect his dignity. You may draw your own conclusions as to the moral of this story and its applicability to "learning disabilities."

Fido was no ordinary dog. For as long as anyone could remember, Fido had been "fetch disabled." Fido had been tested by numerous experts and all agreed that Fido should be put on witalin so he could function on a daily basis. After taking this drug, Fido still could not fetch, but at least he would sit quietly at the end of his rope and not disturb his masters. Nevertheless, the resulting changes in Fido's "personality" were disturbing.

One day there came a stranger who saw that Fido was unable to fetch, but did not see this as a permanent condition. He knew the consequences of growing up with such a label in a dog-eat-dog world. He sought to pinpoint the problem and then devised a remedy. Fido's attention span and visual tracking were adequate to follow a stick as it flew through the air. Fido's fine motor skills were sufficiently developed that he could pick up a stick. His sequencing ability and short-term memory were such that he could return with the stick. But he could not be persuaded to release the stick. Fido could not stay on task and would resort to his own game of "keep away."

The stranger used Fido's natural inclination to chase a stick to overcome his deficiency. Just as Fido was returning with the first stick, the stranger threw a second stick. Fido's attention was momentarily diverted long enough to drop the first stick. Five minutes of this training cured Fido, made him ineligible for pity or government funding, and forced him to remove the "fetch disabled" label from his resumé.

Life at Our House—Jessica (now age 17) was a volunteer teacher assistant at Zoo Academy. In January and February, the Memphis Zoo held classes for home educators. Each class met for five consecutive days from 10 am to 3 pm. In addition to studying real animals, the students got to go "behind the scenes" at many of the exhibits and met several of the zoo keepers.

Hosanna (age two and a half) has learned to look through the telescope. One night I held her up to the telescope which was pointed at the moon, and positioned her eye so that the resulting beam of moonlight shone in her pupil. Her face brightened with amazement. Now she takes her turn at the microscope and binoculars as well. We are also working on age-appropriate skills such as potty training.

Effective lessons begin with the familiar. Recently, we saw a splendid double rainbow at sunset. Afterwards, we read a few articles about interesting details and characteristics of rainbows. Have you ever viewed a rainbow through a pair of polarized sunglasses? The results might surprise you.

We have been doing a unit study on *unseen things* such as wind. The effects can be seen and the presence of the unseen inferred. What weather is likely when the wind is from the north? What can we learn from the ant? To the hypocrites Jesus said, "Ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?"¹ They were unable to discern spiritual things because they did not know the LORD of all. From the natural world we can learn many lessons. Our sons helped sow a 65 by 30 foot garden; they planted eleven rows of corn, three kernels per hole with forty holes per row. If each plant produces two ears, the yield could be about 2640 ears of corn. If the kernels of corn are arranged in sixteen rows around the ear, with 34 kernels in each row, how many ears of corn would be needed to seed the same field next year? What lessons can be learned about fruitfulness? Comprehending natural things can give insight into the world of spiritual things because the same God rules them both. What parallels and analogies can you draw with spiritual things? Ask the LORD for wisdom and insight.

I read aloud the biography of Samuel Morris, the son of an African chieftain, who became a Christian with great spiritual power. As we were reading, we studied the physical geography of Africa and its effect on history and commerce. We have now finished reading *Just David*, the story of a boy who grew up sheltered from many things.

Although she has not had phonics lessons, Berakkah (age 6) was examining the concordance which I had open. She pointed out a word in the middle of the page and asked, "Does that say 'Levites?'" I told her it did and then suggested she look at the Bible itself because the concordance was just an index to help find things in the Bible. When I told her that I was checking to see what the Bible said about leaven, she

responded, "Leven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen. Dad, I can count to a hundred. Do you want to hear me?" For her, leaven was a lesson for another day. We later researched the influence of leaven in bread making and wine making. We crushed some grapes, let the juice ferment, and examined the yeast cells under the microscope. We are contemplating the Scriptures contrasting new wine and old.

We have begun family Spanish lessons at our home. We have a tutor who comes to our house weekly for supper and to teach Spanish to our whole family. These lessons are oral; only occasionally does the tutor write or spell something for clarification. During our Spanish lessons, he speaks entirely in *Español* and we are not permitted to speak to him in English. We are not using a book, because the goal of our tutor is that we learn to *speak* Spanish. And to speak Spanish you have to *think* in Spanish. To avoid the translation mentality (i.e. learning an English word for each Spanish word) we are learning the words for things that are before us. In one lesson, the tutor picked a green leafy vegetable out of his tossed salad and said, "*Esto es lechuga.*"

From the Heart – Education for citizenship. Are you training your children for citizenship in an earthly kingdom or a heavenly kingdom? As Christians, we believe there is another King above Caesar. In what area more than education is the following Scripture applicable: "Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind"?² Should Christian parents delegate their God-given parental authority to the civil government? One author wrote that there are "only three viable alternatives for state education: 1) One is to force the religion of the majority on the children of the minority of the people. 2) A second solution . . . consists in aiding the citizens of different religions to gather their children in separate schools, in which religious instruction may be given suited to the views of the parents and all paid for by the state alike. 3) The third alternative proposed is to limit the teaching of the state schools in every case to secular learning, leaving the parents to supply such religious instruction. . . ." ³ None of these is workable. Civil government should get out of the arena of education because education requires religious instruction. "A liberal arts curriculum is . . . a practical answer to the question, *What is liberty?* and, *How does a man prepare himself to be a free man?* . . . It is the means whereby a culture saves its children from the encroaching evils and threats, and prepares them for life in terms of the knowledge, skill or discipline of character required to be a free man. And this is inescapably a religious task."⁴ The results of "public" schooling tragically demonstrate the consequences of ignoring the soul and spirit.

Secular education, by its nature, omits and ignores God. As a result, its organization and classification into "subjects" as well as its priorities are twisted and confused. To try to follow the same pattern by adding God and religious instruction implies that God is not a God of order, relevance, and reality.

What must you teach your children? When must you teach it? Who is to decide? Christians are told to "submit to every ordinance of man."⁵ Does this mean you should do what the public schools do? Statism believes that civil government is supreme and controls every aspect of life. For the statist, "the chief end of man, a political and social animal, was to glorify the state and to serve and enjoy it all the days of his life. It is not surprising, therefore, that Christianity came into rapid conflict. . . . It was a battle between Christ and Caesar, between the City of God and the City of Man, for the control of the world and history. On the one hand, the emphasis was on the triune God and on His eternal decree, on the other hand, the emphasis was on the primacy of time, on the civil order as the order of incarnation and divinity, and on the temporal decree of the total state."⁶

What is the authority of the public schools? The legislature created the public school system, and is therefore entitled to determine class size, teacher salaries, school calendar, curriculum choice, etc. However, whatever authority this public school system has over little Johnny himself does not come from the same source. Authority over the child is given by God to the parents. In light of this, the Tennessee legislature recognized the position of the schools and teachers *in loco parentis*⁷ (i.e. by authority delegated to them by the parents). God has ordained that parents are responsible for educating their children. Civil government is ordained by the Lord to *punish* evildoers. Civil government is given the power of the sword to implement its authority. The sword is a very appropriate tool for punishing evildoers, but not for teaching children. Civil government has exceeded its authority when it tries to control the mind.

What happens if Christian parents teach just like the schools? This approach involves carefully *including* the same material in a year as a school. What can be added to a curriculum that "covers"

everything? The one thing that needs to be added to the traditional curriculum is life, reality, relevance, interesting facts, flexibility, depth, human interest, practical application, historical background, scientific investigation, curiosity, self-motivation, current affairs, context, significance, anecdotes, geographical perspective, artistic skill, musical harmony, biographical detail, conversational interaction, community participation, godliness, mercy, compassion, kindness, humility, faith, love, thankfulness, self-control, virtue, compassion, resourcefulness, insight, understanding, and wisdom. This is like a dietary elixir, which claims to provide a completely balanced diet *if* served with a completely balanced diet.

Not often considered are the things *excluded* by the traditional approach. Books written for schools had better not get off the subject. Math textbooks leave out all traces of science, science textbooks steer clear of history, history textbooks have no room for literature, etc. Each "subject" is carefully isolated. Things which are to be "covered" in later years are carefully excluded lest they confuse students. Most would not even consider introducing decimals to a 7-year old. Recently, I assigned Jessica to estimate the square root of two by squaring a series of decimal numbers (1.0^2 , 1.1^2 , 1.2^2 , 1.3^2 , 1.4^2 , 1.5^2) When I looked later, the series had been continued 1.6, 1.7, 1.8, 1.9. But, looking closer, I realized that the seven was written backwards. This was the work of Hannah (age 7). No one had ever told her that decimals were hard, or forbidden until junior high. Typically, interesting details are left out in order to convey the "essential" information. The common stress on definitions, rules, and theories necessarily deemphasizes the lives, the character, and the struggles of individuals in favor of more "academic" considerations. The usual focus on things, places, and dates often crowds out people, the crowning work of God's creation. I have heard it said that knowledge of the world of *things* comes by seeing, while knowledge of the world of *people* comes by hearing. Tell your children about *all* that the LORD has made.

Somehow, immersion in a real world filled with amazing variety and intricate detail and described by an equally peculiar vocabulary is a marvelous approach to learning. Little by little, children begin to comprehend the incomprehensible world in which they live. Somehow, they are not overwhelmed by the complexity that fills their eyes, their ears, and their minds. They ask, and they seek, and they knock. Natural curiosity compels them to figure out why things are as they are. It is almost as if the mind were programmed to seek understanding of the real world. Before children go to "school," education happens almost automatically. The average child learns naturally until the age of five or six years, when this process is interrupted by school.

Traditional education tries to teach children many of the things which life would have taught them were they not in school and many things they would never need to know in life were it not for the artificial world of school. Traditional education emphasizes the content of an educational program with little regard for application or context. A completed worksheet or a passing grade on a test often satisfies both teacher and student that the topic has been "mastered." The material has been "covered" and the teacher moves on. (It will probably be taught again another year, providing job security for teachers.)

Is the goal of home education to pass tests? Testing evaluates what the student has learned in the short term. Cramming the night before can give a temporary appearance of understanding a jumble. Surely you passed tests about many things in school, but much of what you "learned" did not accompany you in life. What went wrong? What should be done differently?

One family who had home educated for many years was challenged by a visiting guest speaker to refrain from written tests for a year. This parent said it was the hardest year because everything within screamed, "But if I don't test the children every week how will I know whether they are learning anything?" Learning *for* the test had led to forgetting *after* the test. Without written tests, their children tended to ponder what they had learned, considering its applicability and usefulness. When you are confident your children have learned and they can use what they have learned, you do not need written tests to prove their success to yourself.

Learning things in a relevant context provides a natural "connectedness" that fosters understanding. With the biographical approach, focusing on the lives of real people, information is woven together in a real context. At our house recently, I was having difficulty getting a wedge started in the end of some firewood I was trying to split. Jeffrey (age 10) suggested that I use an ax to begin the split, then remove the

ax and put the wedge into the ax cut. When I asked him where he got such a good idea, he said he read it in a biography of Harry S. Truman. Much practical information can be learned by reading about the lives of real people.

Learning from someone else or from history shows the place of revelation in education. Very simple things can be so obvious *after* someone has shown you. To learn from others or seek their counsel and experience requires humility. The I-can-do-this-by-myself attitude is pride. Recall that "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble."⁸ Learning requires the student to willingly receive instruction. Right relationship and a right heart attitude are required for learning. Proverbs 2 instructs:

My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.⁹

The Lord who is enthroned above sees your heart and that of your child. He is the one who opens hearts and minds to understanding. Jesus said, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."¹⁰ These verses certainly include the education of your children. The Lord's ways are not burdensome. The traditional textbook approach, seeking to "cover" everything, can be a hard and heavy burden. In contrast to this, consider what Moses wrote:

My doctrine [teaching] shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distill as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass: because I will publish the name of the LORD: ascribe ye greatness unto our God. He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he. . . . For the Lord's portion is his people. . . He led him about, He instructed him. . . .¹¹

By His Spirit, we are led about today, for "the steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD."¹² Consider life as it unfolds. An evil heart ignores God in all of life. "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful"¹³ Christian education should teach and train children to glorify God in all He does, and to be thankful for everything He has given. It is essential that you consider God's handiwork. It is your responsibility to teach your children what can be known about God, both from the testimony of His creation and from the testimony of the Scriptures.

The testimony approach to education demonstrates childlike faith. Go-and-tell is to be the primary method of spreading the Gospel. Children naturally listen to the reports of other children rather than experts. Children don't care about publications or initials strung onto a person's name. They want to see for themselves. Children enthusiastically tell what they have found and even try things suggested by their friends (though not always wisely). After doing a certain science experiment for my children, I repeated it at the office for the boys of another family. A few days later another parent said his boys wanted to see the same demonstration. This is very different from coercive education. Enthusiastic education can spread faster than chicken pox. Enthusiasm can only teach what it knows to be true.

One little light,

Greg Stablein

1Matthew 16:3

2Romans 12:2a

3*Robert Lewis Dabney: The Prophet Speaks*, Edited by Douglas W. Phillips

4*Philosophy of the Christian Curriculum*, by Rousas J. Rushdoony, 1981

5I Peter 2:13

6*Philosophy of the Christian Curriculum*, by Rousas J. Rushdoony, 1981

7T.C.A. § 49-6-4203

8James 4:6

9Proverbs 2:1-4

10Matthew 11:28-30

11Deuteronomy 32: 2- 4, 9-10

12Psalm 37: 23

13Romans 1:20-21a