

Walking by the Way

by **Tedd Tripp**

EDUCATION IS A PRIMARY concern of Christian parents. That concern focuses on two points: We want to ensure that our children's fund of knowledge is rich enough to equip them for life, and we want them to be people who know and love God.

In our culture, the paradigm for education is the state school. Most states enacted compulsory school attendance laws in the 1800s. Through the years since then, even Christian parents have come to accept the notion that education is the state's task.

But what does the Word of God say? Deuteronomy 6 provides us with biblical non-negotiables for the education of our children.

One of the first things we notice in this seminal passage is that education is a family task. The chapter is replete with references to family. Moses said he was laying out God's statutes and judgments for the benefit of "you and your son and your grandson" (v. 2). Parents are exhorted to diligently teach "your children" (v. 7). They are told to teach God's statutes "in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up" (v. 7). In fact, the house itself is described as the place of ongoing education, education predicated on the assumption that children can read, for the law of God is to be written on the doorposts and gates (v. 9). So the Christian home is to be a learning community, and it is the parents' task to teach the children, not the state's. Education is a family task.

The next thing we see in Deuteronomy 6 is that education is a spiritual task. Verses 5 and 6 remind us that "you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart." This command was given directly to the Israelites then living, the ones who would be teaching the next generation. That means the spiritual condition of our children's teachers is not a matter of indifference. Educators have profound influence, so it is not enough for them simply to know the subject matter. Those who teach must know God. We cannot turn this task over to state educators who may or may not know Him. We must teach as those who are dazzled by God ourselves; we love Him with our whole hearts, and our hearts are moved by those things we teach.

We also see here the goal of education - that our children and grandchildren "may fear the LORD your God" all the days of their lives (v. 2). The goal is not a good job or prestige. Recently, I asked a group of church children, "Why learn?" Sadly, their answers were along these lines: "To get into a good college, or to get a good job someday." That may be the answer to the question in the state school, but not in God's primary learning center. Proverbs 1:2-4 tells us why we learn. Education is provided "to know wisdom and instruction, to perceive the words of understanding, to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, judgment and equity; to give prudence to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion." In short, education is undertaken to help our children know the glory of God.

To reach that goal, education must enable our children to understand the reality in which they live. There is a God who has made them and all things. He is glorious beyond describing. All the created reality - from the physical earth and its peoples to the world of ideas - has been made to bring glory to this God. Everything has been made by Him and for Him, and He is at work in His creation. The earth is continually renewed and kept verdant by His power. "You renew the face of the earth," the psalmist exclaimed in Psalm 104:30. This God is in the storm! We are reminded in Job 38:35, "Can you send out lightnings, that they may go, and say to you, 'Here we are!'"? Seeing the work of God in His creation is so important for our children, because it is the God who is in the storm who promises blessing and peace to His people in Psalm 29.

Education is unpacking this view of reality for our children so that they, like us, might be dazzled by the God who made them. Sadly, state education assigns all the glorious activity of God to the created order, robbing our children of a sense of the immanence of God in His creation.

Listen to how Psalm 145:1-5 describes the parents' educational task "I will extol You, my God, O King; and I will bless Your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless You, and I will praise Your name forever and

ever. Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall praise Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts [That's education!]. I will meditate on the glorious splendor of Your majesty, and on Your wondrous works."

How can I give this task to the state? The state is committed to the idea that the knowledge of God cannot enter into the educational task. The state cannot and will not acknowledge that God, by being the Creator and Sustainer of the physical universe, sends out the lightning bolts. So how can it teach our children the truth about lightning? It cannot.

Deuteronomy 6 gives us still another dimension of this educational task. It is the task of transmitting to our children the history of God's covenant faithfulness. God delivered the Israelites from the bondage of Egypt (Deut. 6:2-1). As a result, they would live in cities they did not build. They would drink from wells they did not dig. They would eat from vineyards and olive groves they did not plant (Deut. 6: 10-11). God called them to do what was right and good in the sight of the Lord so they might know God's continued blessing (Deut. 6:18). There are necessary ethical implications of being a family so blessed by God. The Lord commands that we observe His statutes and fear the Lord "for our good always, that He might preserve us alive" (Deut 6:24).

Education involves knowing the saving acts of God. Parents are to remind their children of God's mercy and deliverance. God calls children to believe and obey. How can the state school undertake that task? Will it inculcate in our children a deep sense of gratitude for God's covenant faithfulness? Will it help them to see the ethical implications of God's right to rule over them? The answers are obvious. Not easy, but obvious.

This kind of education will not be undertaken by the state. It is not the state's task; it is the parents' task. It is this realization that has driven many parents to educate their children at home. They have owned the task. Some may choose to send their children to a Christian school, and one can argue from Scripture that employing others to teach for you is a valid choice (Gal. 4:1-2). But either way, education is the task of the parent. Teachers, if we must make use of them, are simply the "hired help" in getting the job done. The Christian family is designed to be an educational community.

What happens when parents fail to do this work? Judges 2:7-15 tells us. It is a tragic story, one of the saddest in redemptive history. It underscores the importance of the family's role in the education of children. We are told here that the first generation that grew up in the Promised Land "did not know the LORD nor the work which He had done for Israel" (Judg. 2:10b). Think of that! These are shocking words. The very first generation to grow up in the Land of Promise knew nothing about the promises. They did not even know God or His deliverance.

What happened? How could they not know about Moses and the burning bush? How could they not know about Pharaoh and the plagues? How could they not know about the Red Sea, Mount Sinai, manna and quail? How could these children grow up comfortably worshipping false gods? What went wrong?

Did Israel's prophets fail? Were the priests unfaithful? No, the failure was not there. Families failed to do what God called them to do in Deuteronomy 6. A generation of children had not been taught the ways of God. They did not know of His power and glory, nor of His redemptive acts. God's plan was that the family would be the primary educational force in Israel. But fathers had failed to teach their sons and daughters. The family had not been the school it had been called to be.

There is no better context for instructing and inculcating in children the ways of God than the home. Parents are with their children every day. They lie down and rise up together, they walk by the way together. All this daily living is a classroom. The home is a school in which children are to learn the power, mercy, and grace of God.

We long to see one generation following another in the ways of God. We want to see the peace of God on our children's children. While this is a work of God's grace, God uses means. And one of the primary means He uses is the educational work of the home.

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Reprinted from **TABLETALK**, August, 1999.