

The Fruits of Our Labor

By Marcia Neill

In contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. (Gal. 5:22)

More and more parents are inquiring about home education because of the success of home educating families. Home schooled students are joyful, loving, kind and inquisitive. There is an innocence in their nature, and yet a strength of character. Academic achievement scores averaging about the 80th percentile indicate that the average home school student ranks higher than his counterpart in public education by 30 percentile points. (<http://www.hslda.org/docs/study/ray2009/default.asp>) Whether the parents have a college education or only a high school diploma is not significant in the success of their children's academic achievement.

While many recognize that our society suffers many ills, home schooling is attracting attention for the successes and achievements of home schooling families. In the past, many chose to educate their children at home principally because of the schools ~ both because of what they contained and what they were missing. Now, many families are drawn to home study by observing home educated children and families within society. News articles on local TV, in national newspapers, and in magazines report the successes of many role model home educating families. The number of home schooling families continues to grow by about 7 to 15 percent per year. (Reaching the Homeschool Market by Mark Lardas, October 2003). Today, the Home School Legal Defense Association reported that there were over 80,000 member families in the HSLDA organization and estimates that there are over 2 million home educating students in the US.

We have witnessed how home education strengthens the family. Home study does require a shared commitment by family members. Styles of home education vary as widely as the personalities of families. Parents are constantly adapting to growth and change in their children, considering how each child learns at his age level and how he relates to the teaching style of his parents. Learning how to learn is one of the most important life skills that we can teach our children.

What life style do you desire for your family? Children do not require more "schooling". They need free unstructured time to discover and develop their God-given talents. Instructed by Christ to live our lives in joy, we are tempted to replace joy with the more predictable motivation of discipline. Home schooling must first of all nurture children and parents. It must be joyful. It is this joy that sustains our children and ourselves, and beckons others to follow our example.

As we come to the end of the semester, we should take time for reflection for the second semester. What have our children learned? One major lesson should be that it takes work and self-discipline to achieve mastery. We are surrounded by a culture that demands instant gratification. Our society has lost sight of the labor required to develop mastery. For example, learning to read takes effort but brings a child great joy and pride in his work. His self-esteem increases because of his accomplishment. It would be an error to teach self-esteem without teaching the child to take the time, use the tools, and make the effort it takes to develop a skill.

Like learning to play the piano, it takes repetition and practice. Students benefit from trial and error. Through the frustrations of failure comes the process of growth. Time must be spent in formation. The work of practicing the piano is rewarded by the joy of being able to make beautiful music.

Consider it all joy, my brothers, when you encounter various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. And let perseverance be perfect, so that you may be perfect and complete lacking in nothing. (James 1:2- 4)