

Training for Triumph E-Newsletter Issue 012 September 2006

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*Email Kara at trainingfortriumphhomeschool@mchsi.com if you wish to be taken off this mailing list—or to add a friend. Thanks!

1. Training for Triumph (TFT) Events and Announcements

*Letter From Donna—

Dear Readers,

Congratulations for beginning a new year of homeschooling! If you are new to homeschooling (this is your first year ever), please email us and we will send you a teaching cassette to encourage you. We love to help new homeschoolers!

I am sorry for the lateness of this “kick off the school year” newsletter. I had it written long ago, but we have problems with our email address list. As a matter of fact, if you know of an inexpensive system or program for managing email addresses and sending out mass emails, we would love to hear about it.

School has begun, and now fall is in the air. We are working hard to teach our last child how to read—and our fourth child how to drive. This is my first year in ten years to only have four children in school. Our school keeps shrinking, and while it is exciting to have more time to write and help others, I often long for the days of seven children ninth grade and under all at home learning together.

Ray had the opportunity to spread the good news of homeschooling to some civic groups in Bluffton, Indiana this summer—including the local Rotary Club and Optimist’s Club. He had good responses to his presentations. He has a power point of his presentation that we would love to send to anyone who might want to share

homeschooling to non-homeschooling audiences (even if you just want to take a look at it to help you get the courage to do it!). It is a great opportunity to inform people of the successes and goals of homeschooling; it also has statistics, including the higher levels of performance on tests, lower levels of television watching, etc. of homeschoolers over school attendees. Additionally, it has some interesting facts about homeschool teachers' qualifications—the test scores of their students indicate that the performance of homeschoolers on standardized testing is not affected by whether the homeschooling parent has a college degree or not. (Of course, we knew that all along, but people love statistics, so let's give them to them!)

Joshua (23, married to Lisa) is teaching more and more cottage classes for Training for Triumph, including doing some traveling to other towns to teach homeschool students speech and debate. Kayla is a sophomore in nursing school and ministry school (two different schools) and went on a missions trip to El Salvador this summer (her first overseas trip as we seek to have our children serve “in Jerusalem....and then the uttermost parts of the world”---their Jerusalem is their home (i.e. parents and siblings), then local people (homeschoolers and teen girls, specifically, for her in the past), the church at large, then the US (Katrina victims), **then** other countries). Anyway, in El Salvador, she got to do the two things she hopes to spend at least part of her life doing in a Latin American country: teach the Bible and bandage an injury. She came home more excited than ever to “go ye into all the world,” and we are practically having to tie her down with her stethoscope and blood pressure cuff to keep her here long enough to finish school! Cami is a sophomore in ministry school and co-directs a growing disability ministry at our church. She had ninety people with disabilities and their drivers, etc. at a sports day in which each disabled young man received a trophy for his participation—probably the first trophy he has ever received in his life! It was exciting. Even more exciting, however, is a couple of week's later when Cami carried a girl with cerebral palsy into the baptismal tank for the ministry's first baptism! There wasn't a dry eye in our row! Praise the Lord!

The younger four children have been busy doing summer school and the library's summer reading program, then starting into their fall school schedules. The three little boys each received Royal Ranger of the Year awards for their levels for our church's outpost. It was exciting for us to see the little boys taking leadership roles with their peers in structured environments. Additionally, Jonathan (age fourteen) received his Bronze Medal of Achievement, which required reading half of the Bible this year and many challenging tasks that he labored long and hard on.

Also, the ones still in school participated in two activities recently that might be of interest to other homeschoolers. First of all, Kara (16), Jonathan (14), and Josiah (11) all went with Cami to the local Red Cross to receive their CPR and first aid certifications. I know this is a common class, but I did not realize that it was offered to such young students (from age eleven on). Cami wanted to get the training for her work with disabled children and adults and Jonathan needed it for his Bronze Medal, so, in Reish fashion, four of them went! Josiah got a lot out of it in spite of his young age. It would be an ideal final step before a young teen begins babysitting alone.

Secondly, last week all four of the school-aged children participated in the Academy of Arts homeschool drama camp, which culminated in two performances—an

elementary pilgrim play and a junior/senior high drama about the persecution of Russian Christians. I tell you this because I can't recommend it enough to homeschool groups across the country. In a nutshell, the college-aged students (godly, strong Christians) from the academy come into a homeschool community for one week and teach two groups (elementary and junior/senior high) of students all they need to know to perform a dramatic presentation. They bring it all---the works---it's like moving into a new house! While the students are learning all about how to do make-up, sew and alter costumes, do stage lighting, and much more, they are also practicing for their drama, which will take place at the end of the week. The schedule is challenging—eight am until noon for elementary students and eight am until three for junior-senior high students with a twelve-hour+ day of dress rehearsal and a twelve hour+ day of practicing then performing. But that is part of the beauty of it—in one week, they learn and experience all of this right there in your own community, then it's over. No three month three nights a week rehearsals. Also, even if you do not have any “drama queens” (or drama kings, in Jonathan's case!), the experience is so educational in other areas as well—there are reader parts, lessons in lighting, costumes, and make-up, Christian teamwork, and much more. It is just an incredible service that I encourage any homeschool group to investigate. Check out their website (www.academyofarts.org) to learn more about bringing them to your community.

Some have asked how you can pray for Training for Triumph. We so appreciate you thinking of us and would love to have families praying for us. In the short term, we need God's wisdom in developing our parent teaching tapes and workshops (especially as our young adults try to focus on what information from their young lives would best help or inspire homeschoolers), direction in CQLA distribution, and sales increase in the spring that will pay for our speaking travels. Currently, Ray and the children are doing a couple of paper routes delivering newspapers to businesses in surrounding areas, but in the spring when we begin to travel more, we will need to have enough sales to cover TFT expenses, rather than relying so much on paper routes to do so (since time will be limited with traveling, we will rely on our paper route subs more). In the long run, we dream of a day when our publications will produce enough income to fund TFT entirely.

Love,
Donna

P.S. If you are new to our newsletter and would like to read past e-newsletters, go to our website where you will find the ten previous e-newsletters to print off and read.

***Calendar of Events for TFT**

Tuesday, October 10th: Ray and Donna will be going to Marysville, Ohio to speak about language arts.

Thursday, November 16th : Our last day of cottage classes in Fort Wayne, Indiana for the first semester.

November 1st: First day to register for second semester classes to be held north of Fort Wayne, Indiana and in our learning center near Ossian, Indiana

Updated TFT Cottage Class Schedule—

Our newest class schedule for the second semester cottage classes should be posted at our website (along with the registration form) by November 1st. Check out our second semester offerings—and be sure to register early for any writing classes you desire (composition, story writing, or research paper writing).

2. Spotlight on One of Our Products—New Product Available From Training for Triumph: *What My Parents Taught Me About....cassettes* by Joshua, Kayla, and Cami

We have begun a new cassette series (and new set of workshops for conventions and other homeschool gatherings) by our three oldest children entitled *What My Parents Taught Me About....* We have two of the workshops and tapes made, with several more following. Watch our website for additions to this series. We have some special tapes planned! In the meantime, we are offering the first two: *What My Parents Taught Me About Marriage* (by Joshua) and *What My Parents Taught Me About Being Ministry-Minded* (by Kayla and Cami).

What My Parents Taught Me About Marriage is Joshua's perspective of marriage—and what we taught him about married life. He discusses what he learned at home about communication, selflessness, finances, and much more, as each one pertains to marriage. This tape would be good for young men about to be married, but even moreso, it is great for any homeschooling father who wants a fresh, youthful, non-cynical look at marriage. Also extremely interesting to see what things from Joshua's growing-up years affected his ideals and goals in marriage the most.

What My Parents Taught Me About Being Ministry-Minded is eye-opening for even me and Ray—and we're the parents who supposedly taught them all of this! ☺ It is amazing to me all of the little things that go into parenting—and the effect those little things (choices, decisions, teachings, outlooks, priorities---I guess they're not so little after all!) have on our children. Kayla and Cami (along with their sixteen-year-old sister) are some of the most selfless teens and young adults I have ever met—and I pray that we can repeat those same character

traits in their younger brothers. (Joshua is selfless too, but he is busy being selfless towards one person right now (besides the Lord)---the one we taught him should have his love, intimacy, attention, and affirmation during this stage of his life.) From avoiding child-centered parenting and indulging children with too many “things” to raising them in a way that puts their focus off of themselves (and their own activities) and onto others—especially their siblings during their growing up years--Kayla and Cami share from their hearts about what causes them to want to live their lives for others rather than for themselves.

3. Method to Our Madness— Why CQLA is the way it is.... six hundred to seven hundred pages -- shrink-wrapped and three-hole punched

In the spring of 2007, *The Old Schoolhouse* will run an article about *Character Quality Language Arts* and Training for Triumph. This article will be accompanied by a review in which TOS says the following about CQLA: “Bar none, this is the best language arts program we have ever seen.” We are excited and grateful for their upcoming “cheerleading” for us!

As I said in the last newsletter, this section will be devoted to explaining why CQLA is the way it is. CQLA was not just randomly put together over the past seven years (in May). Its components are purposeful and desired by moms everywhere. Anytime we alter CQLA or omit something, it is because we have tested and re-tested it (or listened to the suggestions of CQLA users) and found a better way. We are constantly doing this and will continue to do so.

Many have asked us why CQLA does not come in one huge, bound book. We have tossed this idea around—and if it would make it better or more economical, we would consider this. In the meantime, CQLA comes three-hole punched and shrink-wrapped for several reasons:

1. CQLA books (especially Volume III right now and the other volumes in the future) are huge—up to seven hundred pages in length. They are this long because they cover five major areas of language arts: comprehension, vocabulary, spelling, grammar/usage, and composition (all types of writing) in one. A bound book of this length and heaviness would (a) fall apart before the end of the year; (b) be too heavy for a child to cart around; and (c) be overwhelming to a student.
2. The three holes make it easier for the student to put his unit in a thin three-ring binder and the teacher to put her lesson plans (Teacher’s Helps) and Answer Keys in her binder.
3. Unbound pages makes it easier to remove one unit at a time to give to your student, so he will not be overwhelmed by an entire six or seven hundred page volume.

4. By not having a bound book, it allows us to put everything all in one---the student's book and the teacher's pages. This keeps us from having to have a student's book and a teacher's book for each volume for each level (though some have said that it would make it more economical because if the teacher did not desire to purchase the teacher's parts, she could just skip them and save money; we're still not sure how that meshes with our desire to keep everything together for simplicity's sake).

As I said before, we are open to improvements, and if the distribution of CQLA would better be met with another format, we would consider that too. However, the all-in-one, user-friendly format of CQLA is "the method to our madness."

4. Penmanship Program on CD website

Some gals on a loop I am on were discussing good programs for penmanship—ones in which the teacher can make her own worksheets, using appropriate fonts for various ages, etc. The one I am linking you to below sounds especially nice as it is low cost but sounds fairly loaded. So...if you're using CQLA and you would like to type those verses, character definitions, poems, and songs provided for Penmanship Further Study into the computer in your child's type of penmanship (cursive, manuscript, D'Nealian, etc.), you might really enjoy this program. (Or anyone who wants to tailor her students' penmanship to areas of study would like it. I would have loved this years ago when my older children kept "Quotable" in a journal each day.) Note that I haven't used it myself, but I am going to look into it when I unbury myself from projects!

"Fonts 4 Teachers" It sells for \$14.98

Here' what you get for \$14.98 :

- 6 fonts D'Nealian style
- 6 fonts Manuscript
- 6 fonts Cursive
- 2 fonts Phonics
- 2 Fonts American Sign Language
- 3 Fonts (abc Math & abc Clocks)
- 6 Decorative fonts

Go to www.fonts4teachers (http://www.fonts4teachers) to order it.

5. Thoughts from TFT--- Dreading School

As the start of school draws near every summer/fall, I hear homeschooling moms say over and over how they are either (1) dreading the start of school (for various reasons cited below) or (2) welcoming the first of school so they can have some semblance of order again! The ones who say they are dreading the start of

school often cite many reasons for this, but these reasons usually fall into a few definite categories. It is these reasons for dreading school that I would like to address in these “thoughts.”

Reason #1: Hard to get back into a routine. The funny thing about this reason is that as many people who cite it for a reason to not want to get back into school also cite it as a reason to want to get back into school---they want the order and routine that a school schedule affords. I won't spend a lot of time on this reason since I discuss it below in my Ten Tips for a Great School Year Part I article, but I will say that the more order and schedule you develop in your children's lives all of the time, the easier it will be to get back into school each fall.

Reason #2: Dreading dealing with the discipline issues involved in making children do what they need to do in school. I have dealt with this through the years many times, so I understand how this feels. There have been times in my homeschooling life that I dreaded getting out of bed in the morning because I didn't want to deal with a child's behavior or lack of cooperation. It is a terrible feeling—one that homeschoolers, especially, cannot afford to have. We are responsible for our children's education, and if there are character, behavior, or cooperation issues, it will make it impossible (or nearly so) to provide our children with a good education.

As Christian parents, we have an obligation before the Lord to try to turn our children's behavior problems around. The Bible makes it clear that we are disobeying if we do not discipline our children. If our child's attitudes or behavior makes it such that we dread school, we have to do something about it.

As I mentioned earlier, this dread of school due to behavior issues (in two year olds *and* twelve years---all ages) has happened to me many times throughout the years. Thankfully, Ray is a better disciplinarian than I am, and no discipline problem has been too big for him yet, so that has helped me turn things around a lot. But in general, we talk through the situation, trying to pinpoint the root of the problem (in a two year old, too many choices too early; in a twelve year old boy, the need for Ray to take over much of the accountability and follow-through; my lack of consistency; an overemphasis on academics while neglecting character; too much busy-ness; too many peer-related activities, etc. etc.) and try to act on it. It usually takes both of us working hard to solve the problem, and sometimes I don't even realize it has been solved—I just wake up and realize that I no longer dread dealing with that child—and I look forward to school again.

I cannot emphasize enough the need to get a handle on the discipline problems in our children. I am amazed at the number of homeschoolers who dislike dealing with their children. Everything is a battle; every assignment another argument; every chore another task to be debated; every rule another reason to complain. I don't know how a mom can handle homeschooling with ongoing discipline problems like those. Don't get me wrong. Every family has its moments; every homeschool has its moments; every child has his moments; for that matter, every

mother has her moments. However, every day should not be a battle that has to be fought or an hour-by-hour struggle.

I know I sound like a broken record, and I am sorry for that. I just want homeschoolers everywhere to succeed. I want to help homeschooling families raise children who love the Lord and serve others and Jesus Christ. I want to raise children who love the Lord and serve others and Jesus Christ. This is nearly impossible in a home in which children rule. I cannot emphasize enough the need for homeschooling parents to get help with their discipline problems. Check out Gary Ezzo's *Growing Kids God's Way*, James Dobson's *Strong-Willed Child*, SM Davis parenting tapes, Reb Bradley's materials, or others. Get into a parenting support group or small group, especially one filled with homeschoolers who have the same goals you have. We went through *Growing Kids God's Way* (GKGW) a dozen years ago with fellow homeschoolers (and then led some other GKGW groups), and it literally changed nearly every family in it. We still share our successes and goals as a result of taking that class together.

Reason #3: Too much summer freedom for Mom! Homeschooling moms deserve breaks! I say Friday lunch out and scrapbooking for all homeschooling moms around the world every week! 😊 Unfortunately, it doesn't work that way. Those with younger children find it difficult to find someone to care for the littles. School doesn't just happen without mom there to supervise. Those with older children often find it challenging to get away without the older children needing something—either taken to lessons, tutored, or disciplined. Homeschooling moms are busy people!

Because of the demands of homeschooling, I see many moms shutting down in the summer—in more ways than just academically. We are all ready by May to turn our attention to other things. For many of us, we just need some time off from school to get household projects done that simply didn't get done during the school year. For others, it is a time to enjoy the sun and traveling. Whatever the reason, we can, if we are not careful, shut down as mothers too.

Moms whose children are involved in summer sports and activities can find themselves separated from their children as much as if the children were in school. Without realizing what is happening, we start shuttling kids to their things in the summer, and then we are no longer teacher, and sometimes no longer mom (in terms of meeting emotional and spiritual needs, disciplining, and training). It becomes easy to not have to deal with sibling disputes (they're each on a different team), undone chores (easier to do ourselves while the kids are at practice), uncooperativeness (they cooperate for summer teachers and coaches), and more. We go to the games, sit in the stands and visit with friends, then take everyone home and start again the next day. Before we know it, fall is over, and we have to resume our many roles—after having had time to garden, tan, read, and visit with friends. (I'm not saying any of that is bad; it is just different than our normal routine and makes it difficult to want to get back to the hard work of school.)

Even if our children are not being shuttled to activities all summer, they might play with neighbor kids, go to camp, go swimming, or fish with grandpa more than usual—and we get some much-needed free time to finally read or nap some afternoons. Or we decide (as I have in the past) that *I'm going to scrapbook every week this summer—I haven't gotten to scrapbook in four months, and I owe this to myself*. Regardless of the circumstances, summer free time for Mom can make the start of school look less than inviting!

It is too late this fall, but I urge you to evaluate your summer activities carefully next summer. Be sure training is still ongoing, so you don't have a lot of undoing to do once school starts. Be sure you have a good balance of activities—not too much peer interaction for kids nor too much extravagance for Mom. Either extreme can make school books and lesson plans seem overwhelming come September.

Reason #4: Feelings of inadequacy. I describe in great detail the dangers of comparing ourselves with others in our prioritizing tape (and I do not have space in this newsletter to convince you that it is not a good thing to do), so I won't go into a lot of detail about that now. I also realize that no matter how often we are reminded of the dangers of comparing ourselves to others, we all still have lapses into that damaging pastime. So...I instead will address the result of comparing: feelings of inadequacy.

As homeschooling moms we can have feelings of inadequacy in any number of areas—our children's character, our children's academic achievements (or lack thereof), the season of life we are in, teaching not being a strength, and much more. I won't spend much time on our children's character making us feel inadequate. We have all been there—everybody else's kids are perfect, and ours are impossible! I fell into this rut so much when my older kids were younger that they actually acted good in order to keep me from stressing out! (We now talk about it in great detail and I realize how damaging that can be to kids; I don't repeat that with my younger ones.) Character issues make us not want to start school at all (as described above). Of course, the anecdote is not skipping school this year! It is digging in and facing the behavior and character issues as described in the article below.

A major area of feelings of inadequacy in homeschooling moms is that of our children's academic achievements. We often dread starting school if we have a child with a learning problem. It is tough to face. We are sure that we are ruining that child. (Been there, done that!)

First of all, we have to understand that many, many homeschoolers have children with learning problems. (We always think others' situations are ideal, and this just isn't so.) I have had two children who did not learn to read until they were nearly nine—and one of which who never learned to spell above about a junior high level due to learning difficulties. Learning to read and write was a struggle with each of these children. I have one now who is over eight years old and still struggling with short vowel families. I can become discouraged, sure that he

would be better off in school, or I can keep pressing on and try to make reading happen for him.

Second of all, we have to believe (see writing your homeschool vision in the article below!) that homeschooling our children is God's best. We have to believe that not sending them away to school is truly superior. We might need help along the way (there are sources of help for those dealing with vision/tracking difficulties and dyslexic tendencies nowadays that were not available to me fifteen years ago), but our children belong at home with us.

We are brainwashed into believing that “real” teachers can do a better job with our children than we can. To that, I have two answers: (1) Nobody knows and loves your child more than you; and (2) Real teachers are not necessarily good at teaching. I was a trained teacher, nearly finished with a reading specialist's master's degree (and I had a 4.0 grade point average) when my second child was learning to read. Yet I had no idea how to help her. Public school teachers learn to teach by teaching (not from teacher's training in college)—the same way homeschool teachers learn to teach. (Teachers learn classroom management, grouping children, lesson planning, scheduling, bulletin board and game making, and similar things in college.)

My latest inadequacy has been interesting: that of feeling inadequate because of my season of life. I feel like a “has been”! I envy young moms so much and find myself crying because I'm no longer one of them. (I'm not sad because of my age; I've never been one to care about getting older in terms of numbers; however, I do care that I will never be a mother of young children again.) What a strange thing! Young moms wish they were in a different season (one that looks easier to them from a distance), and older moms long for the “good ol' days.” I don't have a real solution for this inadequacy—especially not in the fall of the year when my season of life and past losses are the most pronounced. I do know that despite my feelings of inadequacy in this area, I must enjoy the season that I am in (which I do) and not let those feelings of inadequacy get in the way of having a terrific school year! ☺

Because I love teaching (and I love learning how to teach as I go through the years teaching my children and tutoring), I have never dreaded the start of school because of my not enjoying teaching. However, I have come to look at this whole “all homeschoolers have to love teaching school” concept differently in years past. It suddenly dawned on me how blessed I am to be homeschooling since I love teaching so much. I mean, teaching is fun! I adore it. When my older kids were little and Ray worked twelve hour days, I used to “do school” eight to ten hours a day most days. It was my hobby.

Anyway, then I began thinking about moms who studied biology or business (or anything other than teaching), and it hit me: not all homeschooling moms love teaching. (Okay, I'm a slow learner!) There are many whose major area of interest is not education. There are those who would rather draw blood and analyze it (aghh..) than teach school. There are those who enjoy working on

computers (double aghh..) rather than educating. There are those who would rather do almost anything than teach (like I would rather do anything than draw blood or work on computers!).

If it is dealing with or biblically training your children that causes you to dread starting school, then you need to take that up with the Lord. He doesn't leave those things as options according to whether we enjoy them or not. We are called to those.

However, I also feel that we are called to homeschool. Does that mean that every homeschooler has to love teaching academics? I don't necessarily believe this is true anymore. There is so much more to homeschooling than teaching math lessons. If it is the actual "teaching" that is causing you to dread school, and you can afford to get some video classes, cd studies, internet courses, and/or pace-type workbooks for your children, I say, go for it. Just because you homeschool does not mean that you have to "teach" six subjects a day to each child.

A major part of homeschool success stems from doing what works for you and your family. If getting a video teacher or self-teaching program helps you meet your homeschool goals, you should do it. If teaching eight hours a day works for you, you should do that. All homeschoolers are teachers—teachers of God's Word and ways, teachers of character, teachers of life principles, and much more. Just because you don't like teaching math does not mean that you should dread starting school.

So...what's making you dread the start of school? Let whatever it is go, and enjoy your school year. There are great things in store for you and your children as you learn together at home! 😊

5. Book Review Just for You---*Margin*, reviewed by guest reviewer, Barb Powers

Ray and I were in the middle of reading the book *Margin* by Dr. Richard A. Swenson when the Fort Wayne Area Homeschoolers newsletter arrived containing a book review of this book by a fellow debate/speech mom, Barb Powers. Since Ray and I were in the middle of it and gleaning from it, I decided to ask Barb if I could use her review for this newsletter. It is an excellent book, but I must warn you that it is laborious to read aloud. We started reading it together a few years ago and were overwhelmed by it, so now we are plodding through it again. I say that not to scare you away from it; it truly is a remarkable, enlightening book, but you won't want to go into it thinking it is a quick read or easily read aloud. Barb did say that his first book *Overload Syndrome* is

somewhat easier to read, so you might want to start with that if you get overwhelmed by “heady” books like I do. (I guess we’re just simple kind of people! ☺)

MARGIN

Author: Richard A Swenson, M.D.

Review by Barbara Powers

Do you find yourself using words like exhausted, overcommitted, or overwhelmed to describe your life? Is your calendar covered with black ink but your checkbook is often showing red? Do you feel guilty when your little ones ask for a story and you say no . . . again? Is the thought of a private spiritual retreat a fantasy? If any of these questions receive a “yes” answer, you *ARE* living a margin-less, overloaded lifestyle.

The stress filled, overloaded lifestyle is an American epidemic we have learned to call normal. Homeschoolers have a high risk of succumbing to its bondage. After all, the burden of academic excellence falls to us. We want our kids to participate in a myriad of extra curricular activities, have many good friends, get all the technological privileges of public schooled kids and develop their talents to the full. Multiply this by six kids and you have a scheduling nightmare on your hands. Then there are church obligations, adult friendships to maintain, and . . . the infamous laundry battle. You get the picture. We all live in the same scenario.

Richard Swenson, in his book, *Margin* deals with this exact topic. While this is not a homeschool book, it is deeply practical for homeschoolers. He defines what overload is and what it looks like in various areas of our lives. We can easily see activity overload. But Dr. Swenson also reveals clearly how we become overloaded in other areas: physical, emotional, spiritual, financial, relational, etc. Then he offers prescriptions for healing by creating margin. *Margin is the space between our workload and our limits.* The greater our margin, the greater availability we have to the Lord.

After finding myself described perfectly in this book, I was next deeply convicted by his comparison of Jesus to me. “To Jesus, the most important thing in the world was the person standing in front of him at that moment. To us, the person standing in front of us is an obstacle to get to the next obligation.” It was God himself who created man with limits and Jesus demonstrated those limits as a man. If I continue to overload my life, behaving as if I have no limits, I have committed idolatry against the God who *alone* is limitless.

Read the book. Find in it permission to set boundaries and say “no.” Discover practical ways to regain your margins and restore personal and family health. See your overwhelmed life a little more from God’s perspective. Richard A. Swenson’s book *Margin* as well as his earlier book on the same topic, “The Overload Syndrome,” can both be found at *many public libraries*.

6. Article from TFT

Ten Tips for a Great School Year Part I

By Donna Reish

School is just around the corner---or already begun for most of us---and as I was pondering the beginning of school and a “kick off the school year” Training for Triumph e-newsletter, I thought about what I would want someone to tell me if I were a new homeschooler (or a homeschooler who needs encouragement) at the beginning of the academic year. Thus, my ten tips for a great school year .

1. **Dig out or rewrite your homeschool vision.** Sometime during this year (mid February, maybe?) there is a strong possibility that you will need to be reminded why you are doing what you are doing. Be prepared by either finding or writing your homeschool vision---during a time that you can clearly see and remember that vision. Your homeschool vision may be as simple as a statement saying, “We homeschool our children because it is the best way to educate them—socially, academically, spiritually, and physically and because God called us to this during the year 1983.” (I know, I’m dating myself here! That was the year we learned of homeschooling and homeschooled my younger sister.) Or your vision may be as detailed as journaling the how’s and why’s of your early calling to homeschool including the benefits of homeschooling your children in every area, along with relevant verses that God has spoken to you through the years concerning the training of your children—perhaps even signed, dated, and notarized! 😊 Whatever it is, get it ready for those potential mid-winter blues!
2. **Start up slowly.** We school at least part time during the summer, so when it is time to “start school” in the fall, it usually involves changing what we’re doing (gone are those long afternoons at the library!) to less fun activities and more academically-intense ones. To bridge this gap (or to bridge the gap from no school to beginning school again in some people’s cases), we gradually end our

summer activities and gradually add in our fall school books, routines, and classes. We start out with partial days, allowing us to continue mowing, summer cleaning (that didn't get done yet!), and outdoor activities (bonfires, handball, grilling out, etc.). Gradually, as daylight shortens, we continue adding more of our regular routine in, until by the first of October or so, we are going full steam in all areas. You might not have the luxury of doing this if you have not acquired a couple of dozen school days during the summer (if you live in an area where a set number of school days is required) or if you are bound by your state's standards or curricula; however, even easing into the books in general might be less overwhelming to your students (especially if school has been a foreign concept all summer). For students who have not read or written all summer, easing into school allows more time (and less pressure) to review those forgotten skills.

As a side note here, we have found our school to be more successful when we have the same exact schedule the first two or three hours of the day nearly everyday---including summertime---at least forty-eight weeks of the year or so (obviously, Christmas break, heavy travel weeks, and other breaks and "deadlines" don't allow us to do this all the time). What I mean is that everybody, ever since Joshua (first born, age twenty-three) was a preschooler, has had a similar schedule year 'round during the first two to three hours of the day---morning routines, Chore I, Bible alone, Bible with Dad (sometimes this has only been done in the evenings throughout the years, as our life/work schedule has changed), morning reading with Mom (devotional and chapter books), breakfast, and breakfast clean up. By maintaining this schedule consistently, there are no summer days in which children get up, eat cereal in front of the television, start out their days playing on the computer, etc. Real life involves getting up and doing what you need to do before playing (most of the time), so they may as well get used to it early on! (Of course, being the fun mom that I am,

there have been (and continue to be!) times when I surprised the kids and said, “It’s raining. Let’s not do school today, but let’s listen to story tapes all day and play with Legos!” or “It’s too cold to get out of bed, let’s snuggle in Mommy’s bed, eat peanut butter sandwiches in bed for breakfast, and watch a video instead of doing our work!” (I’m not a complete bore, you know!))

3. Be flexible. A willingness to change---whether it be curriculum, approach, schedule, or other---has been one of the foundations of homeschool success for us. We simply do not continue with what doesn’t work. (On the other hand, when something does work, like *Calculadders* math drill or *Character Sketch* character/Bible program, we do it forever!) Flexibility is truly a key to homeschool success.

In my *Homeschool Helps for Moms* tape series, I describe how the schedule often needs changed every physical season when you have a baby—the newborn in your arms and the bassinette soon becomes a creeping, curious baby, and what you are able to do at certain times of the day also changes. Taking that thinking one step further, what if a month into the school schedule your brilliant idea to do math with your second grader right after lunch just isn’t working---he is either too tired/distracted or you have to get the younger ones down for naps sooner in the day than you anticipated when you designed your fall school schedule? Rather than being frustrated the whole school year, pull your schedule out and see what can be altered to create a successful school day.

The same thing is true of curricula and classes. We have already discovered that Kara (age sixteen; who continually takes more “classes” than she has time for with speech, debate, editing, and music) will simply not be able to squeeze the US History in this fall that she wanted to do (in spite of her already doing US History via debate and unit studies for years!).

That curriculum got shelved; she hopes to pull it out during the second semester. Last year's phonics attempt for our then-first grader is being replaced this year with a curriculum that was developed with his type of learning style in mind (despite the fact that I used the same curriculum to teach my other six kids to read). The science book that we used last year for our unit study has been thrown out in favor of the real books we formerly used with success. (There's a sample of when I shouldn't have changed in the first place; for fifteen years I have used real books for elementary science. My boys' library cart is filled with real books about science topics (and even moreso, history topics) every week, so why didn't I stick with the tried and true last year?)

The point is that books and curricula are tools for you. When you become slaves to them—and dread school because you are using something that doesn't fit your child's learning style, your family's schedule, your time allotment for one-on-one work, etc., it is time to make a change (even if it is a Training for Triumph item!). ☺

4. Provide accountability for your students. I hear moms say all of the time (and I say it too when my charts are not done or when my charts are being "tweaked" and I'm not using them faithfully) that "Joey just won't do his work without a hassle" or "Susie doesn't finish everything by the end of the day." Ray has a philosophy that he uses on me sometimes---though he has learned when to say it and when not to say it (!)---"Our children are just doing what we want them to do." When I am not in the mood to hear this, he goes on to try to explain, "Donna, if we are letting him/her do this (not do his chores, not finish her math, etc. etc.), it must be what we want him to do. If we didn't want him to continue in that behavior, we would put a stop to it." Aggghh....okay, he does have a point. If I wanted the child to do something, I would parent him to help him learn to do it. In a way, the child is doing what I

want. I must not want the change too badly if I allow the bad behavior to continue unchecked.

One of the best ways I have found through the years to be sure the children do what they are supposed to do is to provide accountability. Let's face it, all of us have tendencies to not do what we are supposed to do—Paul even did (“things I want to do, I don't do; things I don't want to do, I do”). How much truer is this in the life of a child (“who thinks like a child”) than in an adult? Why do we think we can rattle off a list of things to do and expect an eight year old to go do it---without any motivation, accountability, and instruction?

Enter the chart. Yep, the chore chart, the school schedule, the independent work chart, the morning routine board, and much more. I have used them all through the years (and the more I have used and the more consistently I have used them, the better school year I have had). In a nutshell, if you want your child to complete a certain list of items each day---whether those are school items, spiritual growth activities, chores, or whatever—providing him with an ongoing list of some type (wipe and write chart, photocopied daily list, etc.) *and* following up on that list each day (or whenever you expect it to be completed) is the answer.

The follow up, of course, is another challenge. For younger boys (twelve and under) or our girls (who didn't really need daily charts or consequences from age twelve on, at least), we have had the most success when there are definite consequences for unfinished or poorly-done work. (Discerning between childishness and foolishness is another aspect of follow up and consequences that should be considered when determining rewards, punishments, and consequences.)

For example, if laundry is not done by a certain time of the day (and the items on the list are in the order in which they need done, sometimes with deadline times listed), more work is given (usually fifteen to thirty minutes, depending on age of child). If

the evening meal was not planned ahead and the person needed everyone's help at the last minute because of poor planning or not starting early enough, etc. (and he has been fully trained in that area), that person had to assist another person on his dinner night, etc. (For more information about childishness/foolishness, check out our *Homeschooling With Young Children* tape series; for more information about reality discipline, check out Dr. Kevin Leman's *Making Children Mind Without Losing Yours*.) For boys over twelve, so far, it has been different, based on the child's personality (why doesn't he get done—because of dawdling?), but generally, speaking, that aged boy reports to Ray with his charts (and meets with him and me to plan his work).

One caution: don't get caught up in silly punishments that have no effect on future behavior, such as sitting in a laundry basket for ten minutes when he didn't finish the laundry or sitting down holding hands with a sibling when they argue. The reality of the situation is that if you don't do your work, you usually just have more work---not that you sit in the laundry basket or climb up the stairs on your hands and knees!

5. Just say "no." I recently read Cathy Duffy's description of the early days of homeschooling during the early 1980s. (I realize people were homeschooling before then, but this was what many consider to be the beginning of the "movement.") It took me back to 1983--the year I homeschooled for the first time. I was a married, twenty-one year old mother of a toddler, and my sister was a cognitively disabled eighth grader having trouble in school. The thing that Mrs. Duffy said that I remember vividly was how few choices there were—in curriculum, in activities, in support systems, etc. We were blessed when Abeka quietly began selling their Christian school books to homeschoolers. (Of course, we were especially blessed by the pioneering efforts of Dr. Raymond Moore and Gregg

Harris.) And yet, I look back now in longing to those days, at times. We had support group meetings in our living room that first year (imagine a twenty-one year old mother of a toddler and her twenty-four year old husband trying to help people homeschool—thanks be for the grace of God!). We planned a few field trips and a handful of gym times/family gatherings. Even fast-forwarding to as few as fourteen years ago, my five children ten and under and I rarely left the house during the day more than once or twice a week. We stayed home and “did the stuff.” There truly is something to be said for fewer choices.

Now, it is difficult to say no to the many, many choices of activities, classes, lessons, clubs, sporting events, ministry opportunities, etc. available for homeschoolers. We offer cottage classes in our learning center (formerly our garage) and in a church in the Fort Wayne, Indiana area. I am amazed at the kids who come to our classes and tell me the activities they are in that force them to run at least every afternoon and often some mornings (and then evenings for sporting events, clubs, and church activities) too—some up to a dozen activities a week. Do I think our cottage classes are beneficial? Yes. Do I think they help families in their homeschooling efforts? Yes. But that doesn't mean I think they are for everyone—nor that people should do our classes along with too many other clubs, classes, sports, etc.

How can we “do the stuff” at home if we take a child to a dozen clubs, classes, lessons, games, and practices each week (per child!)? When we run everyday with our kids in tow, how much school do they truly get done? How many chores and household responsibilities do they learn if they are not there consistently to learn them? It is time for homeschoolers to “just say no.” Look at your schedule. Decide what is really best for each student in your family. Do only the best of the best (which is different for each child/for each family). Say no to the rest.

(For more help in this area, check out *our Prioritizing Your Life, School, and Home* tape.)

It is difficult to say no. Others are sometimes offended by our saying no. We are afraid our children will miss out on something too valuable. We are sure that without all of these activities, our children will not “keep up with the Joneses.” And yet, how much character and skills are built by doing the normal, daily ins and outs? Could it be more than the activity would provide? How about hour for hour or minute for minute comparisons? (See *Home Court Advantage* by Dr. Kevin Leman for more on this.)

We need some kinds of checks and balances in place to ensure that we do not try. We have a tendency to say, “Oh, this activity looks good.” Or “Oh, Johnny wants to do this” and then do it—without considering if it is truly the best thing for that child and for our family. We need to examine our time and priorities more closely than most of us are. Each day, each hour, each minute affects our lives. Yes, we need relaxation—and I enjoy entertainment just as much as the next person, but we fill our lives (and our children’s lives) with busy-ness that often has no eternal or long-term effect.

We are each here for a purpose—including our children. All of our activities, time, skills, interests, intellect, creativity, time in history, family make-up, and much more shape that purpose—or help develop it. We should live purposeful lives. Our choices should reflect the fact that we are created for a higher purpose than simply living. We need to help our children do this as well, instead of just going through the motions, without considering why we are doing what we are doing. We need to have benchmarks, checks and balances, and purpose in choosing our and our children’s activities and education.

I will give you a few benchmarks that we use to evaluate whether we (or the kids) do an activity, class, sport, club, lesson, etc.:

1. Can more than one child do it at the same time (biggie for us with seven children within fifteen years)?
2. Is it something we cannot do better, more easily, less expensively, or just as well at home? (For example, we didn't even own a fishing rod or camping chair two years ago; we cannot do at home easily or inexpensively what the boys can do at Royal Rangers; it's better to do speech and debate in a group to critique each other, have various opponents, etc.; outside teachers in piano, Spanish, sewing, and biology have done for our children what I either could not do or would not do nearly as well for the time allotment, etc.).
3. Is it an activity that builds their character or spiritual life (that still cannot be done at home or truly is done in a superior way if we take part in something—like maybe Awanas or an accountability club or something similar)?
4. Is it a lot of bang for our buck—timewise? (With us living thirty miles from church, we have to really evaluate whether or not each activity gives us enough advantage over something at home for the amount of time it takes to drive there, etc.)
5. For older kids only (twelve to fourteen, at least), does it seem to have something to do with what God has for their future (i.e. music, drama, speaking, clowning, signing, office skills, computer skills, photography or video training, etc.) (We have never felt that “trying” dozens of things from age six to twelve via outside activities is that beneficial.)?
6. Is it an opportunity to serve that we cannot provide ourselves or that is provided in a unique way—a service opportunity that we truly think will benefit them and others (no twenty-four hour rock-a-thons, please!)?

7. Does it not influence them in a negative way (i.e. too much unstructured peer time, too much emphasis on self or winning, too much independence from parents and siblings, negative peer influence, etc.)?
8. Does it line up with our priorities—those things that we have listed that are the most important things for our family? Does it help accomplish those priorities or does it detract from those priorities?

You will have a more successful school year, enjoy homeschooling more, and provide more training for your children in the long run if you “just say no.”

Next issue: final five tips---teach children to work at home, put God first in your homeschool (that probably should have been number one!), incorporate fun, keep things simple, and prepare yourself spiritually and educationally.

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