



MANAGING DOUBTS

In our early years of homeschooling, the greatest hindrances to school were the doubts with which we wrestled, especially Teri. There were many uncertainties and more questions than answers. Now that we have brought four children all the way through a homeschool education and lifestyle, we no longer struggle with those doubts as we home educate our last four children. We know the outcome. Perhaps some portion of our experience can be beneficial to you in overcoming and managing any doubts that might plague you as you homeschool.

For you to have a picture of the reasons Teri was dealing with doubts about homeschooling, we will share with you a letter she wrote to her parents just before we started homeschooling.

The Letter

Dear Dad and Mom,

I almost called you today to tell you what I am going to write in this letter but decided to give you some time to digest this information before we talk rather than have you try to conceal your shock and figure out what to say. Now I'm sure I have your curiosity aroused.

I am going to homeschool the boys this year and maybe a few more if this works out. I can hear the silent pause at your end now—you literally can't believe that last sentence. From anyone but me perhaps, but not Teri—not the Teri who often questions whether she loves her kids, who can't stand to be around her boys' fussing, who has such emotional downs and doesn't think she is mother material.

Well you know, as I know, God's economy isn't always our economy, and Steve and I can't figure this out but can see God's possibilities. I have always had a little desire, since I know some did, to homeschool.

I always discounted it because I knew I couldn't do it. I couldn't even get Nathan to do his homework without a shouting match. The last three weeks that desire has grown and grown among much reasoning on my part that there was no way.

Finally I brought it up to Steve, and we began to discuss it and pray about it. Last week for three days, we practiced school. That is why you got a letter. It seems much more logical to practice writing by doing a letter than by copying sentences. We made our decision this weekend with the proviso of trying again this week.

I found some amazing things as we practiced school. First, I wasn't fighting to get Nathan to accomplish what the teacher had said he had to in the way she said. We just did what I said and worked on it for a set amount of time. Although we did have a confrontation, it was the type of thing we had virtually every day after school last spring, and this was only one incident in three days with several concentrated hours together each day. Also, I began to see good qualities in them as we worked together rather than only seeing the fighting and fussing.

A major reason we are doing this is to give them more time to pursue their interests. There won't be time for everything, but now there is time for none. Even if it takes as many teaching hours at home, they will gain the two hours they now spend on the bus to and from school.

Amazingly, without trying to bias, just presenting facts, the boys both (that is unbelievable in itself) want to do it. I didn't think Nathan would want to give up peer time. Also, because I so often, as a mother, view myself negatively I couldn't imagine

them wanting to be home with me all day, every day. Nathan said he will miss his friends, but it will be okay because he won't have to go to the board to work a problem and be embarrassed if he messes up.

We plan to do this for at least a year. Only if I am a total basket case will we quit after Christmas. If it is just not a great situation, then we finish the year, and they go back to Christian school next year. That is for a sense of commitment for me so I don't throw up my hands one day and try to enroll them back in school the next.

August 24th is a homeschool conference near here which will be a great learning chance.

Bye and love,

Teri

Reason to Doubt

Teri didn't appear to be a very good homeschool-mom candidate, as you probably guessed from reading this letter. She only had three children at the time. One was finishing second grade, one kindergarten, and she could hardly wait until the third was in school as well. She would cry at the thought of summer and all three children being home from school all day, every day. You can see in the letter that the reasons we were feeling God's direction to homeschool weren't spiritual ones. Through the years, the Lord has refined our homeschooling vision and changed the focus of our main purpose in homeschooling, but in the beginning the call was based on the boys having time to be little boys. You can likely anticipate that managing doubts would play a major role as we began homeschooling.

When God calls us to a task, He also enables. “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Philippians 4:13). “And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. . .” (2 Corinthians 12:9). While we knew the truth of these verses, Teri was nonetheless struggling through the reality of how this works out in daily life. Early on, Teri doubted whether she was a good enough mom to homeschool; she was dealing with anger and depression. She didn’t think she was qualified to teach the children because she was so easily frustrated and impatient with them.

When It Crashed In

There were at least two days—terrible days in Teri’s mind because the children weren’t cooperating with her, they weren’t being nice to each other, and she was upset with all of them—that she called the local Christian school to see if they had openings in the three grades our children would need to be in if they were returned to school. When Steve came home those nights, Teri announced to him that she couldn’t homeschool anymore and that the children needed to go back to school. She informed him of her phone call to the Christian school and that there were openings.

Steve was a little more than mildly shocked by this turn of events. There had previously been many evenings when Teri had shared similar thoughts of failure and gloom with him. He had always encouraged her with the truth of remembering that God had directed them to homeschool. Her qualifications to follow that calling were not to be based on her ability, merits, or goodness, but on those of the Lord Jesus Christ and His work in her life. Steve could see this work and would assure Teri it was happening.

Steve was particularly quiet those two evenings as he prayed about the situation. Teri’s doubts and fears were very real. However, the Lord had led them to homeschool, and Steve was convinced He would not lead them away from it by the vehicle of doubt.

“Be strong and of a good courage. . .” (Joshua 1:6). Four times in the first chapter of Joshua, we find this same encouragement. A venture of homeschooling is analogous to the Israelite nation being instructed to take over the Promised Land. They would face many enemies and trials in their conquest; we will face them in ours.

Steve determined in his heart that, with the Lord’s help, he would be strong and courageous in helping Teri through her enemy of doubt and discouragement. After the children were in bed, he came to her with a possible solution.

“Teri, dear, do you think you could babysit the children during the day? I will assign each of them a room to stay in so they won’t be able to bicker with each other. They can play in their rooms tomorrow, but when I get home from work I will do the homeschooling. The next day they will have schoolwork to do in their rooms. You will only need to make sure they are fed and safe. Could you do that?”

Teri considered his words for a few moments but fairly quickly agreed that under those conditions she would be able to babysit them through the day. These verses became experientially real to Teri when she awoke the next morning: “This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. *It is of the LORD’S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness*” (Lamentations 3:21-23).

The following day, as life began under the tense conditions of Daddy heading to work with the plan to homeschool the children in the evening, the children playing in separate rooms, and Mommy being a babysitter, Teri's mommy heart was finding itself filled with those new mercies of the Lord. As she thought about the loneliness of the children without their siblings to play with, the lack of family time in the evening because of homeschooling, and what she would do with all of her time, Teri decided to try school one more day. Of course, it wasn't a day like the day before, and they were back on track again.

Steve's comment later to others concerning the whole situation was: "Lest you think too highly of me, I was sure glad I never had to do what I said I would do." He would have done it if he had needed to, but he also realized the impact it would have had on our family life in general.

Doubt Management

Teri didn't change overnight, but the Lord has worked a mighty work in her life, and she most certainly is not the woman today that she was when we began homeschooling. She writes in detail about her emotional struggles in *Homeschooling with a Meek and Quiet Spirit* (see Appendix F). Doubt management was a key to some of that change for her.

Doubt management is rooted in the Word—in Truth. When you have doubts, what are you doing with those doubts? Where are you turning your thoughts? It should be to the Word. Teri needed Steve's help and support to get her through those tough times and help her focus on Truth. Steve had to look to the Lord for a discernment of His direction and an understanding that God doesn't redirect our course through doubts and fears. Are you as a couple encouraging each other biblically

and practically when doubts creep into your hearts? If one is weak, is the other one holding that person up and helping him to stay the course?

2 Corinthians 10:5 became one of Teri's favorite verses: "Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." When the doubts came, she had to put them aside—out of her mind. It was all a matter of what she would do with her thoughts. Would she allow them to dwell on the doubts—would she feed her mind on those doubts and let them root and grow? Or would she take her thoughts captive and use God's Word to replace her doubts with His truth?

Socialization?

Perhaps one of the most universal doubts and frequent questions asked of a homeschool family is, "How will the children be socialized?" We faced that same doubt, but having had our children in a private, Christian school for three years, we could see that the school wasn't doing a very good job of positively socializing our children.

At school our children were being socialized by their immature classmates. They were learning bad attitudes, disrespect, unkindness, worldliness, pride, peer dependence, and a host of other negative traits. We really didn't think we could do much worse at socializing our children than the school was doing.

Of course, what we discovered in our homeschooling was that our children could be socialized without being in a school setting. After all, who is more qualified to be a proper teacher of socialization: socialized parents or not socialized fellow students? Simply by the amount of time we were spending with our children, we were



MANAGING MEETINGS AND END OF THE SCHOOL YEAR

While there are many ways to facilitate homeschooling, Teri has come to love the personal interactions with each of her children when she has her daily school meetings with them. For her, tutoring builds relationships and is peaceful, productive, and efficient. Managing the one-on-one meetings is important to the overall success of our homeschooling.

At the end of the school year, some details must be completed to fully wrap it up. The documentation of the year's work and archiving it for future reference, if it would ever be needed, is a part of the homeschool process for our family. In addition, as we manage the final aspects of one school year, we are already setting the stage for the next year.

One-on-One Meetings

On school days, Teri has a scheduled time to accomplish individual tutoring with each of our school-age children who need teacher direction and help. Most years, overall, this has entailed about five hours a day for her. Now that our children are growing older and require less teaching, she is investing only two hours or less in this aspect of our homeschool.

Teri determines how much of her time is scheduled per child according to the children's ages, academic needs, and her availability. Our kindergarten to second graders generally need one to two hours of tutoring time—either Teri's or an older sibling's—per day. Teri's meetings with our third- to sixth-grade children are usually thirty to sixty minutes, while the seventh-grade and up meetings require fifteen to thirty minutes. By looking at our school schedules in Appendix C, you can see how these tutoring time blocks varied from school year to school year. They are prayerfully determined when working on the school schedule prior to starting a new school year, but they can be revised once we have started if there is a need to do so.

Individual Meeting Length	
K-2nd	1-2 hours
3rd-6th	30-60 minutes
7th-12th	15-30 minutes

During meeting time, Teri has a plan for what she wants to accomplish. She orders how she tackles the subjects according to priority. That way if she runs out of time to cover everything, they will have completed what is the most important. Many days she will get through all that she wants to do, but there are occasional days when the schedule says “stop” before they are through. Spelling, English, and math are the three most important subjects and are tackled first. For the subjects that Teri introduces and teaches during one-on-one meetings, the children will have time allotted in the school schedule to complete the day’s assigned portions of the textbooks or workbooks.

Spelling in Meetings

Teri begins the meeting time by dictating the child’s spelling words to him. On Monday, the child simply makes his best guess at the spelling of the dictated words based on the phonics rules he knows and his memory. Whatever words he misses, Teri goes over with him showing him where he made his mistakes, and she has him write the word correctly. She does the same on Tuesday and Wednesday, but by then he has the advantage of learning from his errors of the previous day and from his workbook assignments for the week’s spelling lessons. If the child is still missing words Wednesday that he missed on Monday and Tuesday, Teri has him do some extra practice on them. She has him write each of the misspelled words five to ten times, sounding them out carefully as he spells them correctly.

On Thursday, the dictation of the spelling list becomes the actual spelling test. Whatever words are incorrect on Thursday’s spelling test will become part of the next week’s spelling list. Teri writes the missed words at the top of the page of the next week’s spelling list in the teacher’s edition with the child’s name beside the words, since we have several children who have all gone through the same spelling book.

If we have a child who is having difficulty with spelling, we have him keep a personal dictionary where he has a section of his school binder that he can write down words from his writing that he has misspelled. We make the personal dictionary by having a side of a page of notebook paper titled with the letter “A.” Any misspelled words that begin with “A” are put on that page, although they aren’t alphabetized on the page because they come in a random order as they are misspelled. The personal dictionary is set up in a like manner for the rest of the alphabet.

Whenever the child has a misspelled word in his daily writing assignment, Teri first has the child slowly sound out the word and try to spell it on his own again. If he is successful, he not only writes the word in his piece of writing but also in his personal dictionary. If he doesn’t spell the word correctly, she has him look in his personal dictionary to see if the word is there. If it is, he is to spell it correctly in his writing using his dictionary to assist him—and sounding the word out loud as he spells it. If the word isn’t in his dictionary, Teri helps the child spell the word correctly into his personal dictionary and then copy it into his writing assignment. Once the child is no longer in a spelling textbook, if time permits, Teri will use the personal dictionary words for the child’s daily spelling word dictation.