

## Getting Started Homeschooling

By Debra Bell

So you're ready to take your first plunge into homeschooling. I remember the butterflies that generated in me twelve years ago. My good friend, Marie, an experienced homeschooler, said, "The first year's the hardest. It gets easier after that." I didn't really believe her. I mean I was only tackling kindergarten back then. I couldn't imagine *that* being harder than, say, high school physics. Now speaking from the other side of high school physics, Marie was right. *Figuring out how to homeschool* is really the toughest task of all. Once you find your groove, and that usually takes a year or two, it becomes a comfortable fit for most families.

Here are a few tips I think will help you get in the zone quickly:

- 1. Recognize there is a learning curve.** And you're just at the beginning. Tell your kids to expect the unexpected. In fact, the first year of homeschooling is really about finding out what doesn't work. Ask any veteran, they'll tell you, "Nobody does what they did the first year again!" So relax. Enjoy the process. That's part of the fun. There isn't just one way to homeschool your kids. You have a lot of options. It's okay to try out a few different resources, schedules, philosophies, curricula, etc. until you finally settle into a groove. And just when you think you've found that groove, your kids' needs will change; your family circumstances will shift; new options will come down the pike; and you'll be on the upside of that learning curve again.
- 2. Enjoy the choices.** A decade ago, we didn't have a lot of options. There were only a few curricula suppliers about; co-operative activities for homeschoolers were non-existent; the Internet was in its infancy. Today, the challenge is sifting through all the choices available. There are any number of good phonics-based reading programs you can try; conventions are held in nearly every state with a full slate of speakers and a vendor hall filled with wares; support groups and co-ops in many places offer monthly opportunities for moms and kids; and even those of us living remotely can find virtual classes and support online.
- 3. Get plugged in.** Don't try to do this alone. Find out where your local homeschool community is hanging out (try the public library for instance) and start networking like a pro. Your best advice is going to come from those in your neck of the woods. They'll know the ins and outs of complying with state regulations; they can recommend the resources that have worked best for them; they can keep you abreast of all that's happening in your area. Your kids will likely enjoy homeschooling more if they have their own network of support as well. So don't be so enslaved to your curricula that you don't seize opportunities to take field trips with others or join in some co-operative classes; such as, a homeschool chorus, Spanish class or basketball team.
- 4. Exploit the advantages of homeschooling.** Don't re-create institutionalized learning in your home. There's no need to. Homeschooling looks more like mentoring or tutoring. You don't have to use materials created for a classroom of 20 kids – you can use your local library for a lot of stuff – and it is usually more engaging.. Tests and quizzes don't need to be your own method of evaluations. You have time for projects, papers and performances – the kinds of activities that kids will remember and value. Get out of the house and into the world, you have the time and freedom to explore. When I was a classroom teacher, I could only take one field trip a year with my students. With my own kids, we do a dozen or more a year. Some are pre-planned and carefully built into the

curricula; but some of the best were on a whim often after catching a notice in the morning's paper. I'm almost to the end of my homeschooling years with our four children – and their favorite memories are the travel, the projects, the friendships, the plays, the interesting people we've met and the wonderful children's literature we've shared together. And you know what? They all love to learn, and that was one of our primary goals in choosing this option. Because now that my kids love to learn, I know they are equipped to go out and learn what ever content or skills I may have missed teaching them in the process. (And I'm sure I skipped a lot).

5. **Rely on the grace of God.** Homeschooling is a wonderful context in which to shore up your foundation in Christ and deepen your walk with the Lord – because it sure isn't something most of us can do in our own strength without falling flat on our faces. So rejoice in that. Homeschooling is probably a great educational opportunity for your children; but I promise God has a lot in it for you as well. And in the end, you will be most grateful for how much better you know your Savior than you did when you began. So even if you totally disregard my first 4 points; don't neglect this one. God's grace is our life-blood. Crying out daily for His help; acknowledging our great need; gratefully accepting His help in humility == that's the great secret of success in homeschooling.

And you know what – that's the most important lesson our children will learn from us at home.

In His Sovereign Grace,

Debra