



The Gospel Core of Education

Hannah Ploegstra, January 2009

The Disciple Curriculum offers primarily Bible teaching resources for families who are committed to evangelizing and training their children in the Word of God.

But how does "Bible" fit into the larger academic education of a school-aged child? Is it just another subject? Is it something that should be done at church primarily, or at home, or both? The Bible's such a complicated, difficult to understand book. Should we wait until our kids are much older to really teach them how to understand it? If we "do Bible" first thing in the morning before we "start school" are we really giving our kids the impression that it is the foundation of their entire education (like many of us would say we believe)? And what are the proper goals as we teach our kids the Bible? Good character? High moral standards? Thorough knowledge of the timeline of ancient Israel? A "Christian worldview" that reflects some pre-conceived cultural standard, like that of the Puritans, or the founding fathers of our nation?

These are some of the hard questions that we have prayerfully and biblically tried to answer for our own home over the past 3 years. When we began homeschooling our children, we did so with the hopes of having the freedom to "train them up in the Lord." But very quickly we realized that, although we had stepped out of the "system" and all of its prescriptions for what "education" ought to be (guided, of course, by a humanistic way of thinking), we were left with little guidance for how to make decisions regarding our children's education. Our sense of freedom was quickly replaced by a nagging sense of cluelessness. If we were indeed leaving the public system for an eternity, kingdom-oriented education, why did it feel like all of our books, worksheets, scheduling, and instruction priorities were following the very pattern we had left, the pattern in which education serves to prepare students to pursue "the American dream" (security, prosperity, and success)?

The answers to these questions came to us over the course of several years of discussion, study, and prayer--not always pleasant, I might add. We were aching to know how GOD viewed education, yet the view that was ever before us was more and more obviously based on the agenda set by our culture's values, not on anything we saw in Scripture. "Suffer," "leave your possessions," "these are my mother and brothers," "store up treasures in heaven" -- these were the kinds of life-goals we kept hearing Christ give us, and yet the typical reasons for educating our children seemed quite the opposite: "follow your heart," "chase your dreams," "you can be a success," "get good grades so you can have a high-paying job someday."

For a while it felt like the only valid course of study for our children was the Bible. Should we be like the orthodox Jews who view the Torah as the only subject

worth studying? No, but then again, yes.

As the dust settled in our minds and God continued to unveil the answers to our questions, we realized that studies in math, science, history, literature, foreign languages, art, music, and all of the other pursuits that people take it in their heads to study are INDEED valid. But why? Because they lead to jobs? Because they fulfill our dreams? We believe that any study under the sun is a valid study because this world is filled to the brim with evidence that our God is the Creator and that he is the reigning King of Kings. As we pursue knowledge and satisfy our curiosity, we are (potentially) doing the very thing that God created us to do--we are, like little children, basking in the glory of all that he has revealed through what he has made and what he has done and is doing.

But to do this, to learn and study the universe with this kind of purity and God-centeredness, we must first be convinced that all things are his and that, because they are his, he is sovereign over all. Becoming convinced of this is no small task to our darkened, sin-depraved minds. It requires a clear, early ("from infancy"), and rigorous introduction to the gospel through Scripture. The GOSPEL is the core of a worship-driven education. Or, put another way, "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Those who begin their pursuit of knowledge in God's wide world without knowledge of God himself are doomed to erect idols, proclaim lies, and fall into traps which will lead them farther from, not closer to, the one important truth: God is glorified in what he has made.

The Bible is not merely another subject which our children must learn. Nor is it a book that can be used to teach all the subjects, as some very sincere Christians try to make it do. The Bible is the vessel of the Gospel story. It offers the central, absolute, and universal knowledge that every person must learn if they are to "succeed" in eternity, if they hope to find a "dream" that is worth following, if they care to follow a "heart" that won't lead them into hell. The Bible provides the foundation, the core, of the Christian's education. Only when academic subjects follow on the heels of a gospel education can they have the potential of being God-glorifying and kingdom-expanding. When we put off "Bible" till later (and often this means until post-graduate years in seminary for some fortunate Christians), we risk that our children's "Bible" education will be built on the sandy educational foundation of all that came before it--years of study accomplished for the wrong reasons and guided with the wrong assumptions.

Rather than write a math, history, or science curriculum, then, that is "Bible-centered," we have been led to write a Bible curriculum. We don't believe that math lessons have to have Bible verses written in the corners of each worksheet in order to be "biblical" or "Christian." The whole world is Christ's! Math is therefore his possession. The amazing order that we see in math was created, and should be studied, as something that brings him glory because of its beauty. Or, for another person, maybe music or history serves as the part of creation which causes them to fall to their knees in worship of the Creator of all things. It doesn't matter. You can study literally anything, and, if you are convinced of how mighty the Bible claims that God truly is, that study will cause you to worship him some way or another.

But the information we need in order to be worshippers comes from a thorough knowledge of the Bible--not just of all its many details, but of the main

point of the whole Book. This gospel is the core of the education offered by God.

So, The Disciple Curriculum offers only Bible materials. But we hope that those who use them will become convinced through Scripture, as we have, that "Bible" is not just a slot in the daily line-up of tasks or studies. We view Bible instruction to be distinct from the other studies in the following ways:

- Bible instruction ought to start **early**, that is, in "infancy" (2 Timothy 3:14) This does not mean sit-him-down-and-make-him-learn kind of instruction at 2 years old, but it does mean (we believe) intentional, regular teaching on the part of the parent which is age-appropriate and effective.
- The Bible, more than any other subject, should be **memorized**. (Proverbs 3:1-6) In Scripture, "knowing" something always implies intimacy, as when a man "knows" his wife or when a person "knows" Christ. The way to become intimate with words is to memorize them.
- Bible instruction must aim at the **whole person**--body, mind, and soul--and not merely one part or the other. Our goal is not to train Bible scholars but to "make disciples" of Christ. Faith and obedience are the "outcomes" of a biblical education. (Bible instruction results in faith when God grants it through his Holy Spirit. Simply teaching your children the Bible will not guarantee their response. However, when the instruction given is consistent, gospel-centered, and presented by zealous parents, we can rest in the knowledge that we have been faithful witnesses and that God will work his wisdom to glorify himself in our children.)
- Children should perceive that their parents view Bible study to be the single most **important** part of their education. The only way to tell if your kids are in fact perceiving this is to ask them, "What is the most important thing you are learning?" or, "What do Daddy and Mommy want you to learn more than any other thing?" Kids are a painfully accurate mirror of the truth...
- Bible instruction should involve learning to **listen**. Children should be trained to listen actively, humbly, and with the intent to learn. In Scripture, knowledge-giving is frequently preceded by the command to listen. And, in Hebrew, the word "listen" implies obedience. One has not "listened" in the biblical sense unless he has also obeyed. Modern educators shy away from requiring children to listen because children naturally do not want to listen. But why don't they? Could it be that listening requires such humility, such respect, and such discipline that we really aren't naturally inclined to do it? Yet the Bible requires it as a posture for obedience. So, if children are to be expected to obey, they must also be taught to listen.
- Bible instruction should have **continuity**. Too often we approach the Bible as though it were a grab-bag of advice for moral living. It's a story, primarily--a living story with truth to be gleaned. Effective Bible training should be evidenced by an increasing clarity in articulating the meaning of this story, and a growing sense that we are in fact living characters in this story.

- Bible instruction is always given for the purpose of **glorifying God** and increasing our **imitation of Christ**. Occasionally, this results in "success" that the world might recognize as such (as the Proverbs imply), but more often, especially in the New Testament, the result of having listened, learned, and obeyed is suffering, persecution, and giving up of worldly claims to "success."

Beware of the world's educational philosophies, which champion few, if any, of the above listed educational values. When we step in time with the worldly educational rhythms, we are prone to neglecting the values that Scripture lays out for us. The throbbing question of our hearts, "WHAT IS GOD TEACHING ME?" is answered on every page of Scripture, but when that question is replaced with the questions of the world --"How do I teach math?" "What subjects should my kids be studying to qualify for that scholarship?" "How can I make my kid's transcript sparkle at all the right colleges?" "What jobs pay the most money, and what should I be learning to get them?"--when these questions dominate our thinking as we educate our kids, we find that the Bible has few answers, little "practical" advice, seemingly no guidance at times. We're asking the wrong questions.

We say, anything's fair game! Once you have your priorities aligned with Scripture, and you know that Scripture is the foundation of meaningful, life-giving knowledge, teach whatever else you want. Is your family musical? Then you will want to pass that on to your kids. Do you live in a part of town where there are physical needs like hunger, poverty, homelessness? Then train your children in skills that will allow your family to demonstrate the love of Christ. Does Dad build houses? Then teach and talk about engineering, math, carpentry, architecture! Does Mom speak Spanish? Teach the kids Spanish, too, and look for ways to honor Christ by speaking it to others!

It's absolutely important that our children learn about the world in which they live, and that they go away from us having skills and knowledge which will allow them to feed their own families, contribute in their own churches and neighborhoods, and be good citizens in the country where God has placed them. But what those skills and knowledge are, that is, what they go away knowing and being able to do, could be virtually anything, so long as they are grounded in the Word of God and are set on seeking his glory. Don't let the public school, or the ancient classical school, or any school tell you what your children "ought" to know. The Bible is clear--God wants us to know himself. He wants us to know Christ, and the power of the resurrection. He wants us to walk through this world with eyes of faith and worship, and with servants' hands and hearts. As we train our children to walk in the world, we must be sure to give them the proper path.