

EARLY YEARS' TRAINING IN THE HOME

(This speech was given at the March, 1982, meeting of the Mothers' Club of the Adams Street Christian School.)

The preschool years are extremely important for your child. It is during these early years of your child's life that the environment of the home and family are molding him. Because a child spends his first five years at home with his parents, they are his first teachers and his most important teachers. What a responsibility for our parents!

Let us look at who this child is that is being trained in your home. He is a covenant child. He is the Lord's heritage. Scripture says, "Lo, children are a heritage of the Lord" Psalm 127:3. He is God's child given to us for a little while to instruct in His fear. He is like an olive plant around your table. A tender olive plant that is easily inclined by a guiding hand. We must nourish these young olive plants in the Word of God. And how must we as parents nourish these children, these covenant children of God? From infancy on, these children must be instructed in the Scriptures. Deuteronomy 6 says, "And thou shalt teach them (that is the Word of God) diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house and when thou walkest by the way and when thou liest down and when thou risest up." Every day and every hour of the day we must busy ourselves with the task of instructing our children in the Scriptures. An impossible task, you say. Yes, by ourselves we cannot face this great and holy task. We must pray for grace from our Father above to provide us with understanding, patience, wisdom, love and joy for each day. These children are the covenant seed of the Lord.

What does it mean for us as parents to train the covenant seed of the Lord in His fear? Even as small children, reverence and respect for God and for His Word must be taught. As a small child sits on mother's lap during devotions at mealtime and listens to God's Word being read, reverence and respect are being taught. At a very young age children can be taught to pray in reverence to their Father in heaven. Children can learn that by means of prayer we speak to God and that for Jesus' sake God will surely hear our prayers. We must begin early to instruct our children in the simple truths of God's Word. God is great. God is

good. God loves me. I am a sinner. Jesus died for my sins. Read to your children Bible stories so that they learn to know the Bible. Approach God's Word with an attitude of deep reverence. In this way we teach our children reverence for God. We teach our children the facts of the Bible. They must learn to know the Bible. Seize every opportunity to teach your child God and His Word. Remember that we not only teach Christ through our words but also through our deeds. As parents we have a great responsibility to teach Christ by our manner of walk. Our attitude of devotion, humility and reverence must reflect Christ. Our children must be able to see Christ in us.

It is our calling as covenant parents to teach our children respect. Respect for God and for His Word. Respect for parents and teachers. In early childhood children must learn to obey. Teach your child obedience for God's sake. And demand obedience of your child. What a responsibility is ours! What we teach has eternal consequences! Let us not neglect this calling to teach our children in the ways of the Lord. "Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it" Proverbs 22:6. This is our privilege as covenant parents.

What are some of the experiences that you can provide for your child at home in his preschool years to prepare him for learning? Teach your child to listen. A child who is a good listener has a headstart in school. Children coming to school for the first time have had five years of listening experience in the home. From listening they have learned the language of the home. Yet young children generally have not been required to listen for some purpose. We can begin developing good listening skills in the preschool years. Have your child listen to and identify sounds around the house. Play listening games together. "Close your eyes and tell me what you hear." He may respond, "I hear the sound of the clock ticking." Or, "I hear the sound of water running." In this way we are training our children to listen carefully. Read nursery rhymes together and listen for rhyming words. Read poetry and make the child aware of the beauty of words, its rhythm and its rhyme. Listen to good music together. Read to your child. And read often. Make reading an enjoyable experience. And as you're reading to him, take the time to stop and ask questions to test his attentiveness and his listening ability. Or when you're finished reading the story have him tell part of the story in his own words. Reading aloud to your child is very important. I'm afraid we don't take the time to read good literature to our children as we should. In our day and age it is much easier just to use the TV as a babysitter. Do not let

the TV teach your child. It is your responsibility. And reading is important! I cannot emphasize enough the value of good books in the home. Books can develop good listening skills. Books are a valuable reading readiness tool. They broaden the child's experiential background. Books teach new concepts. Books promote the growth of new ideas and new vocabulary. By means of books your child develops a desire to learn to read. Preschoolers see that books are fun. They see that reading is fun. And they can't wait until they can read their own books. Preschoolers' attention spans are very short. But reading books to your child can increase his attention span. It is important to expose your child to a variety of good literature. Have good books in the home for your child. Go to the library and choose good books for him. And make reading an enjoyable experience for him.

Another invaluable readiness skill is teaching your child to listen to and follow directions. Begin by giving very simple directions that require only one thing to remember and then increase to two or three directions. But state the directions only once. In this way you are getting the child to pay attention the first time you speak. Help your child understand the spatial concepts of "on," "under," "above," "below," "next to," etc.

Listening experiences are important. Good listening experiences provide the foundation for reading, speaking, and writing experiences. They are important for your child's success at school.

Many varied real experiences provide a meaningful background for your preschooler. Real experiences give an opportunity for children to talk about their ideas and their observations. Take your child to the zoo, the nature center, the museum, the pet store and talk about these experiences together. In this way he is forming correct ideas. Or take a walk in the fall of the year through the woods and talk about the beauty of God's creation. Let him use his five senses to experience that beauty. He can very vividly experience God's creation by seeing the beautiful changing colors of the leaves, by smelling the fragrance of the woods, by touching the fall flowers, and by hearing the rustle of his feet in the woods. Or observe the birds of the air getting their food in your backyard and talk about God's care for His creation. Even as God cares for the birds of the air, He will also care for you and for me.

Language development is very important in the preschool years. What can you do at home to develop good language skills in your child? First of all, be a good model for proper language. Remember your child learns his language by your example. It is important that you speak clearly, distinctly and properly. Use good language to your child.

Never use baby talk. Give your child opportunities to talk. Take the time to talk with him not just to him. Let him express his own ideas. Take the time to answer his questions. Books are an excellent means for stimulating oral expression. Let the child tell the story by reading the pictures. In this way he is learning to follow the story line and to express it in words. Never laugh at a child's language mistakes. But rather repeat the word or phrase correctly for him. In this way he is learning good language. When children come to kindergarten they come with a variety of language abilities. Some will hardly speak at all. Others speak in one word answers. Some are using complete sentences. And others can tell a whole story by themselves. A child's language development depends in part on how much stimulation he gets from the people around him. The more we talk to him and listen to him, the more he will try to communicate to us.

Number readiness is another important area in which you can prepare your child at home. Count with your child. Use everyday experiences for counting practice. As an example, ask "How many people are in our family? Let's set the table. How many plates will we need? How many glasses will we need if each person is to have a glass?" The child is learning one-to-one relationships through these experiences. Counting regularly with your child is not only fun for him but also develops within him an awareness of the world of numbers. Much of this instruction can be done in a very informal manner. As you work around the home, as you ride in the car, seize every opportunity to teach. Books such as *Count and See* by Tana Hoban, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* and *The Rooster Who Set Out to See the World* both by Eric Carle introduce the child to numbers in a very enjoyable manner. There are many more good number books available at the library for your use with preschoolers.

To prepare your child socially for school, give him many opportunities to play, share and take turns with other children his age. Teach him to respect the rights of others. Teach him to be kind. Teach him to share his toys with others. Teach him that he will not always be first but will need to take turns with others. Your child will be happier in school if he has learned to work and play in group situations.

There are so many experiences that you can provide for your child to help prepare him for school. Develop an awareness of colors. Develop an awareness of letters, of likenesses and differences. As his small muscles develop he can learn to use crayons, pencils, and scissors.

I have mentioned just a few of the areas in which you as parents can help your preschoolers. Preschool years are extremely important! The

training that we as parents provide in the early years of their lives help prepare them for their place as God's covenant children. We have a great calling and responsibility given to us by God to train our children to the utmost of our ability. This is the vow we took at baptism time. As parents we must pray for love, wisdom, patience, and understanding to fulfill this responsibility.

Lord, who am I to teach Thy way
To these Thy children day by day
So prone myself to go astray?
I teach them knowledge, but I know
How faint they flicker and how low
The candles of my knowledge glow.

I teach them power to will and do,
But only now to learn anew
My own great weakness thru and thru.
Lord, if their guide I still must be,
Then let my children clearly see
That I am leaning hard on Thee.

Marilyn Decker

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"...teaching as commitment should not be confused with teaching as calling. Calling is not of human origin; it is God's choosing and equipping of His servants for their particular functions. Commitment in Christ is the called person's affirmative response to selection. Commitment, then, is the self-consecrating, unswerving response to God's call."

Education in the Truth, p. 146
by Norman DeJong

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"If there is any one mark of unrighteousness that characterizes the secular educator, it is that he refuses to let the light of Scripture illuminate the concepts of history, jurisprudence, medicine, chemistry, and every other so-called secular subject. Even the designation of these subjects as secular, that is, outside the influence of God, is an indication of the devil's devious working. For the Christian, no subject is or may be secular."

Education in the Truth, pp. 96, 97
by Norman DeJong