

3. Concurrent enrollment in high school or college,
4. Content acceleration,
5. Advanced placement tests,
6. Early admission to college.

There are many more possibilities and programs available for the gifted child. This is only intended as a light overview of possibilities.

Note that the gifted child need not be bright in all areas or be a "straight A" student. There may be only one area of interest or special talent.

We as Christians have a special calling toward these covenant children. We must bring them up so they will honor and glorify His name. We must do all in our power to enhance their learning experience. In humility, knowing that He controls all, we need to ask God's guidance in this precious calling.

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## **Teaching Children to Read: The Parents' Role**

by Elaine Faber

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Learning to read. What a major accomplishment this is for young children. We expect children to learn to read and to read well. Often we hear statements such as, "In first grade you will learn to read." And so we imply that the responsibility of the teaching of reading belongs to the schools. But what should parents know about reading and why should we as covenant parents be interested in and concerned with this topic?

Many books and articles have been written and continue to be written on the subject of reading. Many of these are published because there is an awareness that many children fail to read well. Statistics of reading achievement are periodically compared on local and national levels. Often children do not measure up to that expected of them and it is said that Johnny can't read. Schools and teachers are blamed for not doing their job. It is said that standards are too low and incorrect

methods are taught. Educators advocate one method and then another. For example, some say that the phonics approach is the only way reading should be taught. Even though children become fluent readers, there is concern that comprehension is lacking. There is much disagreement as to how to teach reading, but it is recognized that knowing how to read well is very important for education and life.

Recently a report was released by the National Commission on Excellence in Education. The report is concerned with our country's status among other nations because its leadership is being severely challenged by the competence of other nations in commerce, in industry, in science, and in future technological advances. The reason for this, according to the report, is that society has become content with mediocre education. Standards have been lowered so that graduates of high schools and colleges do not now meet achievement levels of students in past years. Many young people and adults are illiterate. And so the schools are at fault. Yet the report also has a word for parents:

As surely as you are your child's first and most influential teacher, your child's ideas about education and its significance begin with you. You must be a *living* example of what you expect your children to honor and to emulate. Moreover, you bear a responsibility to participate actively in your child's education.<sup>1</sup>

The above report is concerned with educational excellence for the benefit of our democratic society. National goals and objectives would be reached. Everyone would have a better life as citizens in this country. Yet surely, as covenant parents, our objectives are not and may not be the same. Our reason to strive for high achievement in education is much more important. We are concerned with the leadership in our homes and in our churches. We want our children to be literate and learned so that they may be able to refute that which errs from the truth of God's Word.

Reading plays a very important role in the educational process. Most of the school's curriculum requires some degree of accomplishment in reading. What is reading? Reading has been defined as:

...a process whereby the individual makes meaningful interpretation of verbal symbols.<sup>2</sup>

Reading is more than looking at a word and saying it aloud. It is more than vocalizing the printed page. As people witness an event or a certain set of circumstances and relate it to others, they often tell different and sometimes even conflicting stories. They do so because of their individual differences. Their background, emotions, intelligence,

physical factors, and even spiritual maturity determine what is told. So too, as children learn to read, they bring with them their own individuality. No two children learn to read in exactly the same way. The skills that are easy for one child may be difficult for another child. It has been found that:

There are more than thirty separate processes of seeing, perceiving, understanding, and reacting involved in the total process of reading.<sup>3</sup>

As children learn to read the printed word, they see the letter-symbols. They must also find meaning in them. They must learn to evaluate and interpret. The whole process becomes very complex.

Realizing the importance of reading and its complex nature, what do we as parents then do? We usually feel that our schools have high standards, our students do well on achievement tests, our teachers are qualified and competent to teach reading skills. Our teachers even teach all the subjects in the light of God's Word, helping our children learn attitudes and values which we feel are desirable. So often we shift our responsibility to the school. We must realize that the attitudes children form towards reading and education begin in the home while they are very young. These attitudes are carried over into the school. The attitudes and values children learn at school will hardly ever be stronger than those developed in our homes.

To develop positive attitudes and values towards reading we must first of all look at ourselves. Are we readers? What do we read and how often? It's easy to spend time with the daily newspaper but what about more important literature? Do we use dictionaries, encyclopedias, Bible commentaries, and other study aids? Children recognize early in their lives the atmosphere set in the home towards learning. Children learn that reading is important and it becomes important to them.

Parents begin early in the teaching of reading, while their children are still infants. Parents talk to their children and they respond. Language skills begin to develop. As children explore their environment, they learn to identify objects by their shape. Later they identify words by their configuration. Children learn to recognize sounds. They often know that certain sounds go with certain letter symbols. As parents we will try to learn as much as possible about how children learn and what pre-reading activities and reading readiness experiences are important and necessary for children to learn before they enter school.

There are many things we can do to promote reading readiness experiences. We can surround our children with books. Books should

be within reach in every room of the house. Books can be placed in the car so that they are available when children are confined in a small area while going on trips or going about town with mother on those boring errands. We should read daily to our children in an expressive manner, showing that reading is an enjoyable experience. We discuss the pictures and stories, helping them comprehend and evaluate. Early in life we help them learn to be selective, recognizing that many books have ideas contrary to God's law. Do our pre-school children have a Bible? They are often delighted in trying to read portions they have memorized. We can provide the smaller *Psalter* so that they can follow along in congregational singing. Their Bibles and *Psalters* become very special to them and also help them develop some reading readiness skills.

Books are important for pre-school children, but many other activities and experiences are necessary before formal reading instruction can begin. Children must have a certain degree of coordination of their large and small muscles. Auditory and visual discrimination and perception is important. A large background of experiences in the neighborhood and community is very helpful. As parents with young children we are not always aware of what we can do to help in these reading readiness areas. Local libraries and bookstores offer books with many suggestions, and we should take advantage of them. They also provide a variety of records and tapes. Many simple toys and games can be made in the home. Empty cereal boxes provide cardboard on which pictures can be pasted with letters or words printed beneath. Other educational toys and games can be purchased such as "Speak 'n Spell." Often we may be reluctant to spend our money on toys, but if they are such that they motivate and stimulate learning among young children, their use should be encouraged. Pre-school children have the capability of learning so much, but we often fail to recognize it and neglect their learning needs.

Although many of the reading readiness activities are learned in an incidental or informal manner, as parents we must still be very conscious of what a child must be able to do before sending him off to school. Often we must be very patient, offering much encouragement, particularly to some children who have difficulty in mastering certain skills. Sometimes as mothers with young children we become too busy with household tasks and family duties, forgetting to take careful note of the educational needs of our children. We quickly respond to their physical needs but not their intellectual. We must spend time *with* our children in accomplishing reading readiness.

Having spent much time in various and many learning activities with our children, we know our children well. As parents we have been their teachers. We know when they are ready to go to school to begin more formal instruction. Often parents think that because their child is five years old by a certain date, he is ready to begin kindergarten. Research has been done on this subject:

Early studies of the relation of age to success in beginning reading indicate that a child of normal intelligence learns most successfully at the age of six and one-half. For some, even six and one-half is too early.<sup>4</sup>

In many countries, children begin school at a later age. If we know our children well, we will not send them too soon. If there is pressure to learn that for which they are not ready, anxieties and problems may develop. Learning to read is work, hard work for children.

When children begin to read at school, we as parents must continue to be involved with our children's progress. We should talk to the teacher soon after school begins, or even before, to learn how reading is taught. We learn what materials are used and how we can help at home. After children begin school we have very few hours to spend with them, especially if they ride the school bus. A routine should be established so that some time, perhaps immediately after the supper hour, can be spent reviewing skills taught at school. We continue to give praise and encouragement for each small accomplishment. As our children become independent readers, we continue to read to them and with them. We also check to see what they are reading, helping them evaluate articles, magazines, and books in the light of Scripture.

The reading readiness experiences provided in the home, along with formal reading instruction in the primary grades help set a solid foundation for effective reading and instruction for years to follow. Because so much of the school's curriculum requires reading, as parents we are concerned with quality education at the elementary level. We encourage the school board to provide small classes so that children can receive as much individual instruction as possible. Teachers must be qualified and committed. Provisions should be made for them so that they may be able to attend classes or seminars which keep them up-to-date on the changing educational scene, especially as new methods and materials become available in this computer age. Often we spend much on the physical aspects of our schools, but neglect to purchase instructional tools and materials which help students academically. We must encourage tutoring and remedial reading programs, even volunteering our time, making it possible for more children to receive more help in mastering reading skills. We make sure that the school has a good

library with a variety of materials. We can help in the suggesting and/or purchasing of books that we have read. Because there is so much to learn and know in this technological age, we should examine the possibility of shorter summer vacations with perhaps extending the vacations during the school year. Teachers often lament the fact that so much time, six weeks or more, must be spent in review of that which was taught the previous spring. This is unnecessary and says something about us as parents. We should not be content with this. For concrete learning to take place, there must be continuity in the educational process.

The role of parents in the teaching of reading is that of active participation from early childhood through the teenage years. As parents, we know the backgrounds, personalities, interests, and needs of our children best. We must provide guidance in their reading because through reading children learn to communicate and make better judgments to face their responsibility and work in life.

We face a great task in the teaching of reading to our children. Let us often pray that the Lord may give us the patience, diligence, and wisdom necessary to perform our responsibility in this work. As we see our children master reading skills, may we also see them develop spiritual maturity in their reading habits. It is our goal and objective that they become, above all, diligent readers of God's Holy Word so that they may teach our continuing generations His truth. May the Bible become their most precious book as it directs and guides them through life. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" Psalm 119:105.

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