

New Year, New Vision

August, 2000

Fall is definitely my favorite time of year. I love soft flannel shirts and the wonderful smell of crisp morning air. There is another scent I associate with fall – the smell of new books! Most of us are starting a new school year and are surrounded by new educational material. Of course, we began to indulge ourselves in this aromatherapy back in May and June during the height of book fair season. We began to amass our supplies for the new year and delighted in each new purchase. We spent the months of July and August diligently working on our lesson plans for the upcoming school session. Yes, it was a lot of hard work, but we entertained ourselves with images of our children gathered around our feet in true Charlotte Mason style... eyes wide open as we read aloud from some great classic (Dickens or Austen, no doubt), begging "Please, dearest Mother, read more!"

In the James household, we usually begin the new school year the first week of September. Prior to starting school, I spend about a month decluttering and reorganizing our school room. Since I have several very young students, I like to decorate the walls with colorful posters and learning aids. I spend time packing away all the work from the previous year and organizing folders for filing the schoolwork of the current year. I gather manipulatives and learning games and store them in an easy to access yet out of the way place. (Mothers of preschoolers will understand that contradiction...) I stock up on notebook paper, spiral notebooks, pencils, glue and markers when the local stores have their back-to-school sales. The highlight of the last week before school is when each child goes to the store to pick out their own school box to hold their supplies for the new year. By this time, the children have caught the enthusiasm and start each day with, "Is it time for school yet?!" Even my high schooler has trouble being believed when he grumbles about school work – there is an edge of excitement to his moaning and complaining, and he has even been known to pick up his school books and thumb through them!



The first day of school is usually a good day in our house. God has always smiled on us in that regard, for we always seem to start on time after a hearty breakfast and we manage to stay on track all day and finish right on schedule. Dad comes home to smiling faces, eager to inform him, "today was a school day!" At supper that night we begin our household tradition of answering Dad's question, "What did YOU do in school today?" Of course, everyone is bubbling over with details of their day – new books, new supplies, new subjects. There is usually one child who has just experienced his very first day of school and he feels

such pride at having joined the ranks of the educated. Since this is a perfect day, we are having this conversation over a delicious dinner, because I was clever enough to cook ahead or do a crockpot meal. Ahhh... we love this homeschool lifestyle!

Our enthusiasm holds for at least four or five weeks, but shorter days seem to bring shorter tempers. School work is beginning to be a drudgery for the children and the lesson plans I so carefully created in July just aren't holding up to reality. Six weeks into school I'm already a week behind! Where did we get off track? Well, there was that week of allergy attacks... and the visit from an out-of-town relative... not to mention that the baby's nap schedule is NOT what I expected it to be. There have also been several episodes of frustration and resistance – Algebra is a nightmare, cursive handwriting is a major headache, and the kindergartener is much more interested in losing manipulatives than in learning his alphabet. By the time the Thanksgiving holiday rolls around, we are mostly thankful that school is out for a while! In our house, we usually stop school at Thanksgiving and do not return until after New Year's Day. We spend this time really enjoying the holidays, doing lots of arts and crafts and baking, and playing outside in the cooler weather. I spend this time reevaluating my school schedule and trying to fix the problems we are experiencing in our book work. We return to school after the long break without the intense excitement of September, but with a level of energy that we were lacking in early November. Having removed our rose-colored glasses, we hold steady until early March, when we begin to dream of Spring Break and another respite from school work. By this time, my lesson plans are so far off track I'm ready to scrap them altogether! I convince myself that the sensible thing to do is to hold on until the summer break and do a better job next year... And so the cycle goes...

As I enter my eleventh year of homeschooling, I feel compelled to break this cycle. I have been giving a great deal of thought to my vision of homeschooling, my vision for my family. What am I trying to build? What am I trying to accomplish? I turned to Webster's 1828 dictionary to understand the word "vision" and found that there are two primary uses of the word. A vision is either something imaginary or supernatural, as a specter, or it is the act of seeing an actual object. The sentence given to illustrate the latter definition is wonderful – "Faith here is turned into vision there." God has given me a vision for my family and has called me to homeschool my children as part of that vision. In order to hold that vision in focus, it is imperative that I turn to its Artist and place my faith in Him. Only by doing this will that vision be realized as something that can actually be seen with the human eye. As I toil over my lesson plans, I must ask God what He would have me teach my children. I must ask Him to help me schedule my day, help me understand my children, help me run my household. I want to look through HIS eyes. I want my vision to be HIS vision.

The following item, which was circulated via e-mail recently, has had a huge impact on my life –

REFINER'S FIRE

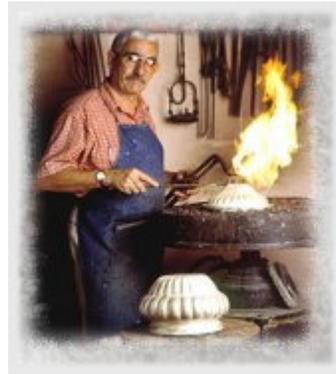
Some time ago, a few ladies met to study the scriptures. While reading the third chapter of Malachi, they came upon a remarkable expression in the third verse:

And He [God] shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver" (Malachi 3:3).

One lady decided to visit a silversmith to learn about the process of refining silver. After the smith had described it to her, she asked, "But Sir, do you sit while the work of refining is going on?"

"Oh yes, Madam," replied the silversmith; "I must sit with my eye steadily fixed on the furnace, for if the time necessary for refining be exceeded in the slightest degree, the silver will be injured."

The lady at once saw the beauty, and comfort too, of the expression, "He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver."



God sees it needful to put His children into a furnace; His eye is steadily intent on the work of purifying, and His wisdom and love are both engaged in the best manner for us. Our trials do not come at random, and He will not let us be tested beyond what we can endure.

Before she left, the lady asked one final question, "When do you know the process is complete?"

"Why that is quite simple," replied the silversmith. "When I can see my own image in the silver, the refining process is finished."

How do I maintain my vision? How do I keep from burning out three times a year? How do I build patience into my character and stay on course in my desire to train my children? Rather than being the primary craftsman in molding my children, I need to be, instead, an apprentice. I need to sit by the side of the Silversmith and fix my eye steadily on Him, as he fixes His eye steadily on each child. As He leads me in fulfilling my tasks in the areas of reading, writing and arithmetic, may I remember why I have chosen this lifestyle – I want to see HIS image in the silver of my children. May this vision be the one that drives me daily. May this prayer be the one on my lips as I greet each new school day: "Lord, use me to do

Your will in my children's lives. Use our lifestyle to draw us closer to You. Help me to teach my children in the way You desire. Keep us on track and renew our enthusiasm so that we will continue to grow in wisdom and knowledge of You."

