

The Four Pillars of Christian Home Schooling

Darlene Sinclair

Back to the Basics

For twenty years I have been teaching my children at home and I often find myself faced with the question of why I chose home education. The answers to that question are as numerous and varied as the benefits afforded through home schooling. But I have simplified my response by getting back to the basics of what my husband and I hope to accomplish.

Let me tell you a story.

Several years ago now, I found myself halfway through a school year that was bogged down with complaining, frustration, disorder, and laziness. This had become a home schooling mother's worst nightmare! Deadlines, workbooks, textbooks, and academic demands had taken over. The cultural notion that academic prowess was the ultimate goal had infiltrated my home and caused me to panic. Were these children going to make it? Would they attain those college scholarships? Surely I needed to make sure that they got the highest possible grade on that test, no matter what it took! Day after day I would grumpily issue orders and assignments. At the end of the day, if a worksheet was unfinished, that became the primary concern rather than the character weakness that was the cause of it. Poorly written essays were my focal point while the issue of excellence went unaddressed.

Eventually we found ourselves in a quagmire; we were in over our heads. This was one of those downward spirals that would not end; a solution seemed completely elusive. The harder I pushed the worse they responded, and the more distressed I was the more miserable they became. The fun of being together and the adventure of learning as a team had disappeared; the joy was lost.

So I went to my knees and prayed. "Lord, what do I need to do? How can I get this to work? Help me to get back on track and find success once again."

God gently and faithfully reprimanded me. "Get back to the basics. Get back on track with what really matters." He showed me that I had lost sight of the real goal. I had bought into the world's idea of what successful home schooling looked like. Academics reigned supreme and all else was sacrificed at the altar of high test scores and impressive scholastic records.

But if academics were not the main goal, what was? What should the target be? Exactly what should we be trying to accomplish?

As God reviewed for me His heart for discipleship, His purpose for living, and His desire to use my children for the expansion of His Kingdom, I found myself repenting for losing focus in the training of my children, or to put it more correctly, *His children*.

As a result of this difficult season, He turned my attention afresh to certain Biblically based goals. I remembered once again that Christian home schooling should not be primarily about academics. My husband and I had not been given a mandate to teach them reading and writing, or math and science. Our mandate was to “bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.” **Eph. 6:4**

Is the Lord opposed to high standards of academics? Not at all! He commends diligence and excellence in everything that we do! The question He raised was in regard to priorities.

Rev. 3:15-19 *I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'--and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked-- I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.*

After reading this, would you want your children to be lukewarm? Indeed, they would be better off cold. So should we then leave them cold, untrained, “sowing their wild oats” (as so many are prone to think is necessary?)

Of course not. That is not an option. We have already seen that the scriptures place a mandate upon fathers to train them in the Lord’s ways.

We just read that “lukewarm” is not an option either.

lukewarm – *metaphorical: the condition of the soul wretchedly fluctuating between a torpor and a fervor of love.*

hot – *metaphorical: boiling anger, love, or zeal for what is good or bad; fervent in spirit*

We are not to be satisfied with good, moral children who are successful in the kingdom of this world. We are to desire “hot”, holy children who are successful in the kingdom of God. We are not to settle for anything less. God certainly will not!

When all is said and done, I want to see my children established in something far greater than completed workbooks, straight A’s, and curriculums that are finished and checked off. They will become who God created them to be by seeking Him first. **His will for us will never compromise our fire for Him or our service to His kingdom.**

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It was time to reconsider what we were doing and why. This booklet is the telling of what I feel God showed me.

## The First Pillar: Love the Lord

First and foremost, educating our children at home provides us with greater opportunity to establish them in God's ways and lead them into relationship with Him.

***Matt. 22:37, 38*** Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the first and great commandment.

Goal number one is to see them zealously love the Lord. Jesus Himself has appointed this as a priority for true Christian living.

Our love for God is to supersede everything else. It requires all that we are and all that we have. Seeing our children's hearts, minds, and souls filled with this same love should, therefore, be an overriding goal of ours. No other thing should be as important; it is second to none. If we accomplish nothing more, let us be successful in leading them to the Lord. In all reality, if we cause them to succeed in numerous other arenas, but fail in this one, we have failed indeed. God wants them to belong to Him alone. This is His intent. Therefore it needs to be ours as well.

The Bible also tells us that when He is our children's first priority, great blessings will be their portion. This gets my attention because I want God's best for them. Just look at the promises that belong to those who diligently follow His ways.

***Deut. 11:22, 23*** For if you carefully keep all these commandments which I command you to do – to love the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, and to hold fast to Him – then the Lord will drive out all these nations from before you, and you will dispossess greater and mightier nations than yourselves.

These are wonderful promises. As parents, we not only want them for ourselves but for our children as well. Think of all they will accomplish and possess in Him if they learn to "hold fast to Him"!

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So the question begs to be answered: how do we accomplish this? What will this look like in our homes and lives?

The answer has everything to do with *our* love and devotion. Let's consider the old adage: *children learn what they see*. Words without actions are meaningless because they ring hollow and appear false. More than anything, our love for God lived out before them will bear good fruit. Surely a love this consuming which embodies absolute devotion and zeal will have effect on our daily choices and actions. A love this encompassing will certainly be visible in many ways.

At the same time there is another truth we must remember and put into practice: actions apart from words are also meaningless because words carry power. Explaining, enlightening by the Word of God, careful instruction of why we do what we do, is invaluable.

So we must model faithfully, throughout the day. (**Deut. 6:7** *You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.*)

And we must teach carefully, in a formal fashion. (**Deut. 6:7** *You shall **teach them diligently** to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.*)

To sum it up: We must live the Word and teach the Word.

If Jesus charges us to love Him wholeheartedly, the investment of our time as individuals and as a family should reflect the seriousness of such a command. Will our children understand the necessity of such supreme love if we fail to lead by example? Should we not demonstrate a love for worship, prayer, and the Word in practical ways? And shouldn't this example be daily? I believe it should be. If this is so, doesn't home education provide the perfect opportunity to see patterns of seeking and loving Him established? Yes!!

1 Timothy 1:5-7 *Now the purpose of the commandment is **love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith**, from which some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk, desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm.*

Our children should be well familiar with the workings of a genuine, sincere relationship with Jesus simply because they have observed the reality in our lives. They see that our faith is not set aside for work, school, or recreation. It is intact twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Being at home for their education only allows them to see it more clearly. Perfect!

2 Timothy 1:13 *Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.*

Paul was able to preach "sound words" because he lived them. The pattern he exhorted them to walk in was first demonstrated in his daily living. This is our great privilege and responsibility as parents.

Phil. 4:9 *The things which you learned and received and heard and **saw in me**, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.* (see also 1Cor.4:15,16; 1 Cor.11:1; Proverbs 6:20,21)

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What are some practical ways to live out our faith in the context of home?

Family devotions are imperative. Set aside time to seek the Lord as a family. Your devotional times do not need to be extravagant, lengthy, or lofty. But they need to be sincere and zealous. If we ourselves have no fire then how will our children become ablaze with passion? We want them to love the Lord with fervency! Therefore we must. And we must live out this love before them.

Take time to pray together. It can be as simple as going around the circle, each one praying in turn for whatever is on their heart. Or you could have an assigned person pray each day. Picking a prayer request from a hat and leading in prayer is another option. Incorporate prayer for issues that directly concern the children (ex: relatives' salvations, friends who need healing, school needs) and also prompt them to look beyond their own spheres (ex: missionaries, national concerns, current events). Consider keeping a journal of prayer requests as well as a record of God's answers. This provides an opportunity for the children to see God's hand of faithfulness in tangible ways.

Regularly spend time together in worship. Utilize any musical gifts within the home. If you are blessed with skilled musicians, make the most of this time to allow them to use their gifts for the Lord. Add dance as well as various instruments. Let them take turns leading one another. If no one plays an instrument, join together in a simple worship song from church and encourage them to make a joyful noise unto the Lord! Sing along with a worship CD. Learn some of the old hymns of the faith. Let someone read a Psalm out loud. Experiment!

Open the Word together on a regular basis. Teach them to cherish the Word. Discuss a passage together, helping them see the relevance of the scriptures even at a young age. Remember, this does not need to be a full length Bible course! A Proverb each day is sufficient. Or read a passage that seems especially applicable to an issue your family is facing. You may want to consider reading from a Bible study book, or share freely what the Lord has shown you in your own private study times. This means you need to be studying the Word. You cannot lead them down a path you are not walking in yourself!

If you have older children, consider assigning them a Bible topic or passage. Teach them to use a concordance or topical Bible. Show them how to cross reference a given verse. At an appointed time have them share what they have learned. This gives them training in small group leading and will prepare them to instruct others in the future! How wonderful!

You should consider incorporating scripture memorization in your devotional time. Practicing a chosen passage together as a group is a good way to get started. For instance, our family routinely reviews Psalm 1. We commit it to memory. Then we talk about what it means together. Young and old alike learn to apply the principles to their own situations. They see that the Word speaks to them. Assigning one verse per week, choosing from a variety of scriptures covering different topics is also valuable. A working knowledge of the Word will serve to strengthen your children for the rest of their years.

A required portion of each school day (not necessarily long, but regular) should be spent in private individual prayer and study of the Word. Have them keep journals of their time with the Lord. Teach them to record what passages they read, what God shows them, and what questions went unanswered. Encourage them to invest time in diligent prayer and keep a record of requests and answers. Help them develop a prayer plan that works for them. They could cover seven different areas, one each day

of the week, adding specific needs as they arise. For example, Monday they would pray for the family, Tuesday they pray for the nation, Wednesday's prayer is for the local church, etc. A friend of mine uses this approach for her children: she hands out a prayer card with a particular need listed (government leaders, family, missions, local church, etc.) and they pray for that concern all week. Then the following week they exchange the card for a new one. There are numerous ways to approach prayer – ask for ideas, be creative, or read books. God will give you a plan.

Children learn best by example. When you teach your children at home, you spend the majority of your time together. They see you relate to Jesus throughout the day. As issues arise, you immediately turn to the Word of God for answers, or you go to Him in prayer. When you sin, you repent immediately to the Lord, and to them, if need be. Let them see and hear you pray. Observing the validity of your relationship with God will allow them to grow in an understanding of the relevance of Christianity. This is a real, living thing! Because they have seen you repent when you fail, they now know what to do when they fail. Your willingness to humble yourself before Him lets them see that He is worthy to bow before. They know that God is an immediate help in trouble because they have seen you go to Him with your difficulties. They grow to trust Him simply because you do.



Love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Keeping this as the number one goal for you and your children is vital to the success of establishing a Christian home school.

## **The Second Pillar: A Love of Family & Home**

One of the greatest benefits of home education is just that – it takes place at home. There are so many lessons to be learned within the context of home. What better place, for instance, to learn to honor father and mother! We find once again that a blessing will follow those who walk in this precious principle. And once again, I want my children to be blessed.

***Deut. 5:16*** Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may be well with you in the land which the Lord your God is giving you.

In modern Western culture, the honoring of mother and father is viewed as archaic. It is truly becoming a lost notion, present only in old-fashioned storybooks - quaint, but highly irrelevant. If we are to reclaim Biblical principles in our families, we must take a fresh look at the scriptures and walk accordingly. We ourselves must make a commitment to honoring our parents.

Consider this: we reap what we sow. (Gal. 6:7) If we sow dishonor into our relationship with our parents, we can expect to reap dishonor from our children. We must turn this around so that we experience the Lord's blessing.

As well as honoring parents, we also find that the Bible declares an expectation of long-term commitment on the part of children to care for their parents.

**1 Timothy 5:4** *But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God.*

In this passage, Paul exhorts children and grandchildren to care for their elderly parents. It is their responsibility, but even more, it is their privilege. It is not merely duty; it is *good*. Our children must be taught this through instruction and example.

According to this scripture children also should desire to repay their parents. This means our children need to recognize and appreciate our sacrificial love. We don't lord it over them or use it as leverage for manipulation, but in time, if there has been sacrifice, children will understand and appreciate the sacrifice that was made, and they will respond accordingly.



I was first drawn to home education, in part, because I wanted to be the primary influence in the lives of my children. I was not ready to share that privilege with anyone else. I knew full well that a teacher gains significant status in a child's mind and many a time, much to my dismay, I have heard a student choose to acknowledge the teacher's counsel above that of the parent. I did not want that to be the case with my children. Therefore until my place of honor was well established I would need to guard it jealously.

This requires something of me - I need to earn their respect and love. This is both my privilege and responsibility. Let me say that it is well worth winning their hearts. As they trust me, they will trust my counsel, and my counsel will point them to Him, securing for them a place in eternity.

How do I earn this respect? Live a life of genuine faith that is clearly communicated. Some people call it "tying strings"; others refer to it as "building bridges". However you choose to depict it, it comes down to this: share your heart with them. Talk with them by the way. Tell them your dreams as they lie down at night. What He speaks is precious to you – now share it with your child and let him cherish it as well. He will respect you, not because you are perfect in all you do, but because you are honest, humble, and sincere in your claims.

**Deut. 6:7** *You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.*

This should be the essence of your life at home. It will draw them to your heart and to His. Building bridges from your heart to theirs and back again is essential. It requires time, energy, and creativity. It will cause you to tap into His grace and grow. In the long run, you will benefit as much as they do.

Learn to listen to their heart as well. *Stop and hear what they have to say.* Cherish their willingness to take you into their world. Express your appreciation of their heartfelt words and show them that you think they are important. Let me say it again: *Stop and hear what they have to say.*



The Old Testament is filled with pictures of strong family lineage. We see mothers sacrificing for their children, fathers blessing their heritage, brothers covering brothers in death and need. The finest stories depict such goodness. Contrarily, some of the saddest stories are those where this loving relationship has broken down, having been pillaged by disrespect, jealousy, and anger.

If you have more than one child, you already know that opportunities abound to learn relationship skills. Just imagine the occasions for training you will encounter when you spend the majority of the week together! Some may flinch at the mere thought, but let's be honest. Will anyone else tackle the job as faithfully as you? Does anyone else have such a vested interest in seeing your children succeed? And doesn't their future success hinge a great deal on learning to deal honestly and uprightly in close relationships? The Godly principles of relationship that you establish in them now will benefit their spouse, your grandchildren, Christian co-laborers, and others in the community. It will impact future generations!

At home I find myself reminding our children regularly that the relationships they enjoy with one another are intended by God to be long lasting. Friends may come and go, but family should always be there. These are the people with whom we celebrate holidays, special events, and various important milestones such as weddings and births. Life's difficult moments are shared together as well. So let's learn to invest wisely in our family.

By keeping this goal front and center you will learn to deal with relational conflict immediately, rather than sweeping it under the rug. Disrespect is not allowed. Everything is dropped in order to settle an argument or deal with cross, unkind words. School is interrupted, chores are set aside, and social outings are delayed. The priority becomes obvious to them as they see that nothing is more important than a sister, brother, or parent. Your children will grow to be close and will be secure in their friendship; you will be able to keep your relationship with them healthy and clean as well.

Lost in our culture today is a sense of family pride and loyalty. We would do well to regain such things. My children learn to stand up for their sibling if he is the subject of a less than edifying conversation. Private family matters are to remain exclusively that: private. Never should they indulge in gossiping about a sibling or parent, nor should they allow gossip to be shared in their presence. At home, they need to encourage and never put down one another. Nothing causes this mom to get quite so righteously angry as when I find one of them laughing unkindly at the expense of another. Let me suffice to say – “We don't do that here. *Never.*”





Helping our children grow in love and support of family members while learning to honor God-given relationships is truly one of the most precious gifts we can give to them – Christian home schools should major in such lessons.

## The Third Pillar: A Love of Work

**Proverbs 12:27** *The lazy man does not roast what he took in hunting, But diligence is man's precious possession.*

I love to review the book of Proverbs. What a wealth of wisdom is to be discovered for those who will look therein. In this book we learn of the preciousness of diligence. You will find the principle of hard work taught, as well as lessons about the rewards belonging to those who develop this wonderful character trait. Here I observe more blessings to be owned by my children if I will but help them learn and apply this principle.

What are the benefits of learning to work with joy and faithfulness? Here are a few:

1. Financial security

**Proverbs 10:4** *He who has a slack hand becomes poor, But the hand of the diligent makes rich.*

The outcome of slackness is poverty.

2. Authority

**Proverbs 12:24** *The hand of the diligent will rule, But the lazy man will be put to forced labor.*

Our children will find a place of authority, and will not be subject to the whims of a difficult tyrant.

3. Happiness

**Proverbs 13:4** *The soul of a lazy man desires, and has nothing; But the soul of the diligent shall be made rich.*

Their very souls will prosper! I like that!

4. Success and plenty

**Proverbs 21:5** *The plans of the diligent lead surely to plenty, But those of everyone who is hasty, surely to poverty.*

They will have all they need and more.

## 5. Influence

**Proverbs 22:29** *Do you see a man who excels in his work? He will stand before kings; He will not stand before unknown men.*

The man who learns to work with excellence and diligence will find a place of influence. He will gain audience with important people.

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God created us for work. Before the curse, he placed Adam in the garden to tend and care for it. We were made for this. It is His plan and, as we just saw, He blesses our labors. I want my children to understand this and to find joy in their work.

Watching a TV documentary about the Amish culture in America taught me an important lesson. They were filming a group of 8-10 year old boys digging holes for fence posts. A long field lay before them and behind them was an equally long row of posts. They worked quickly and were pleasant and cooperative. The Amish woman narrator explained that they are taught good work habits as children so that they will be happy adults. "After all," she explained, "most of their adult life will be spent in work so they should learn to enjoy it." Point well made.

So we want to train them in good work habits. If you feel administratively challenged, the thought of managing a crew of workers can be overwhelming, but there are resources and people who will be glad to help you in this worthwhile endeavor.

You want to begin with a work plan. We must be creative but orderly. Children benefit from having a schedule as much as we do and they deserve the courtesy of a well-devised plan. It is true that we all need to learn to serve spontaneously, but as much as possible, it is nice for them to know what will be expected of them that day and week.

I have found that children of all ages can and should be incorporated in family work patterns. They experience ownership (this is "my" family, "my" home), responsibility, and a real sense of belonging as they work together. They also experience working as a team for the benefit of others (the family). These are invaluable lessons for kingdom living.

Wonderful character traits are established through industry. Taking ownership for a job well done causes them to grow in self-confidence, so be generous with your praise and appreciation of their efforts. A simple reward system can be put into place so that they learn the consequences of their faithful work. As their surroundings are positively affected by their diligence, they learn to cherish the resulting order. Through the use of charts and routines, they will acquire an ability to plan and pace their work.

Best of all, they grow in influence outside of the home. In Sunday school, clubs, sports teams, music groups, or wherever they go, the good habits instilled through learning to

work diligently will be noticed and appreciated by those in authority. Soon they are handling responsibilities that are only entrusted to those who are rising above the norm. As Christians, they will be finding places of influence in the community. A good name will be gained as well as an open avenue for the Gospel. They are well on their way to a successful and happy adulthood.



Pardon me if I have I said it already but let me reiterate: I want my children to be happy, blessed, and useful in God's Kingdom. Learning the principle of diligence will insure good success.

The Fourth Pillar: A Lifelong Love of Learning

Let's take a look at Proverbs again. In chapter 1 & 2 we are exhorted to seek after wisdom, to find knowledge, and to receive instruction.

Proverbs 1:5 *A wise man will hear and increase learning, And a man of understanding will attain wise counsel...*

Proverbs 2:1-5 *My son, if you receive my words, And treasure my commands within you, So that you incline your ear to wisdom, And apply your heart to understanding; Yes, if you cry out for discernment, And lift up your voice for understanding, If you seek her as silver, And search for her as for hidden treasures; Then you will understand the fear of the Lord, And find the knowledge of God.*

This is to be a lifestyle, our posture throughout our days. We make a mistake if we instill in our children a faulty understanding of education. If they are satisfied with learning the facts needed to pass the test and then stop there, we have failed. If the literature curriculum requires them to read a certain novel but they never read another, we have been unsuccessful.

We want to whet in them an appetite for knowledge. They need to be inspired to develop a hunger "to be more tomorrow than I am today". A love for learning is directly related to a love for growing, exploring, adventure, and creativity. There needs to be a fascination with God's world, His creation.

Consider this: everything in all of creation points to God. Everything presently existing and happening is from Him. All of history has His fingerprints on it. We, therefore, of all people, should be eager to learn. This is the premise for knowledge: it all begins with Him.

Once again, we must lead by example because children are imitators. "You teach what you know; you impart who you are." If you want them to be a learner, you must be a learner. Read. Be curious. Talk with experts. Tell your children what you are learning and how exciting it is. Remember, it starts with us.

Home schooling provides a wonderful forum for exciting educational excursions. When my young son was found reading the encyclopedia instead of doing his math session because he was so intrigued with the article that he couldn't put it down, I encouraged him to finish the reading. In a classroom setting, he would have had to close the encyclopedia, open the math book, and "poof" - the interest would have been lost. At home, I am free to fan the flame of natural curiosity.

Similarly, if one of them has an interest in the history of horses I will let them practice their research skills on that subject matter rather than the one prescribed in the curriculum. Or they can read "Black Beauty" rather than "Little Women".

Tailor-make the assignments for them. If they are curious about the stars, find a video about astronomy. Borrow a telescope. Study Galileo. They will grow to love learning.



If your students graduate from your Christian home school having only begun their quest for wisdom, instruction, and knowledge, they will find God and His Holy ways. They will be useful in their homes, businesses, and communities. And they will be growing in the kingdom of God.

The Marks of Success

God has chosen you and your home for your children. No mistake has been made. He will equip you to train and nurture these precious ones that He has given to you so that they will rise up and serve Him. You must know and believe that this is so. You must walk in the confidence of His call upon you.

Sometimes we see only the mistakes we make and are overwhelmed with our personal weaknesses. Because of our propensity to sin, there will always be error in us. But do not be disheartened for we know that *"...it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure."* **(Phil 2:13)**

Don't look for marks of failure; look for the marks of success. Consider if you have tailored your home for growth in the four areas that were presented in this booklet. Take inventory of your priorities and regroup if necessary. Procure help if you feel ill equipped in some aspect of your plan. Do whatever it takes to lay hold of the principles, and put them into action. Pray! Do not waste your precious time with your children. That time is severely limited, but it is enough. God will always give us enough.

Be aware that the principles and concepts discussed here do take time to establish in our homes and in our lives. This will not happen overnight. You will encounter setbacks, seasons of loss, times of discouragement. When failure has been your portion, get back on track. Repent and let Him cover you. He is not undone by your mistakes and He will be faithful to renew you in the vision. Pick yourself up, get a fresh plan and get

going again. Don't give up. Just get back to the basics. Review them and regroup accordingly.



Your children will be successfully established in eternal objectives and life-long Godly principles when you keep these simple but strategic goals in mind. And seeing our children and children's children love and serve the Lord is worth our every effort.

Deuteronomy 12:28 *Observe and obey all these words which I command you, that it may go well with you and your children after you forever, when you do what is good and right in the sight of the Lord your God.*

May your efforts be blessed as you seek to invest in the next generation!