

TEACHING INFANTS

IF YOU HAVE A NEW INFANT IN YOUR FAMILY, CONGRATULATIONS! If you want to give your child a head start on education, perhaps the following information will be of interest to you. Here is a teaching program as old as Moses. It is found in the Holy Bible and is called the “Shema”, which is the Hebrew word for “hear”.

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them 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. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.” (Deut 6:4-9 KJV)

How simple! How profound! Moses wanted His people to teach their children. A major emphasis of this teaching involved giving God top priority in their lives. In the family, every day is a day of learning and parents are the primary teachers. Parents can play a positive or negative role in teaching children. If parents love God with all their heart, soul, and mind, their influence will be positive. Moses reminds us that it is not necessary to wait until kindergarten for children to be taught. Actually, the education of a child begins before they are even born. Yes! There is growing evidence that children actually learn in the womb. This helps us to understand why children raised by Russian parents speak Russian, and children raised by Chinese parents speak Chinese. Not only does the unborn infant hear their parent’s language while still in the womb, but God has given little babies a special ability to learn quickly. Learning a new language, for example, may be difficult for adults, but not for little children. One reason, of course, is that every day children are constantly exposed to the conversation of their parents. Infants also have the amazing ability to absorb like sponges what their parents are saying. This learning takes place while parents are sitting down, or walking, or going to bed, or getting up. It is not necessary for parents and grandparents to understand why little children learn so quickly, but it is important that we teach them well during this period of enhanced learning ability.

God knew that babies could learn in the womb long before modern science figured it out. Note, for example, this remarkable passage in Paul’s second letter to Timothy. **“But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” (2 Tim 3:14-15 KJV)** This Scripture makes clear a truth that ought to be of great interest to every parent, and every grandparent.

The versatile Greek language has at least six different words all translated as “child” in the KJV of the Bible. They are: *huios*, *teknon*, *pais*, *paidion*, *nepios*, and *brephros*. The word translated as “child” in our text is “*brephros*”. Thayer, in his Greek English Lexicon, defines the word as (1) An unborn child, embryo, fetus; (2) A newborn child, infant, babe. The NIV translates this word as “infancy”. *Brephros* occurs eight times in the N.T. Scriptures. They are listed here for your convenience.

- Luke 1:41 - “. . . the *babe* leaped her womb . . . “
- Luke 1:44 - “. . . the *babe* leaped in my womb for joy . . . “
- Luke 2:12 - “. . . ye shall find the *babe* wrapped in swaddling clothes . . . “
- Luke 2:16 - “. . . they came with haste and found . . . the *babe* lying in a manger.”
- Luke 18:15 - “. . . and they brought unto him *infants* that he would touch them .”
- Acts 7:19 - “. . . they cast out their *young children* to the end that they might not live”.
- 1 Pet. 2:2 - “. . . as *newborn babes* desire the sincere milk of the word . . . “
- 1 Tim. 3:15 - “. . . from a *child* thou has known the holy Scriptures . . .”

TIMOTHY ACTUALLY BEGAN LEARNING THE HOLY SCRIPTURES WHILE HE WAS STILL IN THE WOMB! His faith dwelt first in his grandmother Lois, and his mother Eunice, but ultimately in him (1 Tim. 1:5). These women were obviously his primary teachers. His father was a Greek (Acts 16:1) and apparently did not help Timothy to “know the holy Scriptures”. His mother, and grandmother, however, taught him the holy Scriptures from the time he was a “brephos”. That is, they taught him the Scriptures before he was born, and from the time of his “infancy”. They apparently did precisely what God commanded all of His people to do. They taught Timothy as they were lying down, rising up. Teaching was a part of all their daily activities. Since the Word of God was in their heart they talked about it all the time. Remember! Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks (Lk. 6:45).

Reason compels us to believe that Lois and Eunice were also regular in worship at the synagogue and sought out the companionship of others who shared their faith. It seems that these godly women were teaching Timothy in much the same way that Jesus taught His disciples. Every moment with Jesus is a learning experience. Many of His greatest lessons did not come in a formal class, but as a result of interruptions. For example, in Mark 2:1 - 12 we are told that Jesus was preaching in a crowded house. Then He was interrupted. What Jesus was teaching fades into the background and the interruption becomes the story. Four men who couldn't get in through the door, broke a hole in the roof and lowered a paralyzed friend into the presence of Jesus. Nothing happened by accident to Jesus. God orchestrated His life and ministry so that everything was working together for good. The interruption provided Jesus a unique opportunity to teach eternal truth. As you reflect on the life of Christ you will observe that the Gospels reveal a pattern of constant “interruptions”. Following the example of Christ, parents and grandparents can also take advantage of “unplanned” interruptions to teach eternal truth. While we cannot be dogmatic about all the teaching techniques of Lois and Eunice, we can be dogmatic about the fact that Timothy knew the holy Scriptures from the time he was a “brephos”.

EVIL MEN AND SEDUCERS

But now let us return to 2 Timothy and consider the verse before and the verses after Paul's reference to brephos. In the verse before, Paul wrote: “**But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.**” (2 Tim 3:13 KJV). Unfortunately, Timothy, like many in our own day, was raised in a bad neighborhood. He grew up in the vicinity of Lystra and Iconium (Acts 16:2). These were pagan cities that worshiped false gods like Jupiter and Mercury. Not only were these people involved in the degrading immorality of paganism, they were also so unstable that they went immediately from wanting to worship Paul to wanting to kill him (Acts 14:12 -19). Timothy was therefore already familiar with evil men and seducers, but Paul warns of the stern reality that these bad social conditions were going to grow worse.

After reminding Timothy of his early training as a brephos, Paul declared that **“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” (2 Tim 3:16 - 17 KJV)** How beautiful! How appropriate! How practical! The Word of God that Timothy had learned from infancy helped him to develop in every area of his life! Note also that the Scriptures do not merely provide “information”, they provide “wisdom”. From a “child” Timothy knew the holy Scriptures which were able to make him “wise unto salvation” (2 Tim. 3:15).

It is doubtful that Lois and Eunice were able to completely shield young Timothy from the pagan influence around him. We assume that he saw the pagan temples, knew pagan people, and was subjected to the deceptive practices of evil men and seducers. Yet, the training he received in the home gave him a shield of faith to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. If Lois and Eunice could raise a godly child in a bad neighborhood with an unchristian father, so can we!

FACTS YOU NEED TO FACE

As you reflect upon the new child in your family, it is important to remember that all life ultimately comes from God! This is true of plants and animals, but of special interest to you is the fact that **THE GIFT OF LIFE IN YOUR CHILD HAS COME FROM GOD!** No child is born by accident. The life in every child is a gift from God!

Wise King Solomon helps us to understand this lesson. He was selected by God to inherit the throne of his father David. As a young man he married Naamah, an Ammonite princess, and they had a little baby boy named Rehoboam (2 Chron. 12:13). By comparing 1 Ki. 11:42 and 14:21 we know Rehoboam was born before Solomon became king. The name “Rehoboam” means “the people (family) is extended”. This probably indicates that Solomon expected to have a large family.

Hebrew men were proud of their sons. Ahab had seventy sons (2 Ki. 10:1). Gideon had seventy sons (Judges 9:5). Rehoboam himself had 18 wives, 60 concubines, 28 sons, and 60 daughters (2 Chron. 11:21).

In this regard it is important to note that Scriptures only tell us that **“Solomon’s son was Rehoboam” (1 Chronicles 3:10)**. We therefore know that Solomon had a son named Rehoboam, but we are never told of any other son. This leads to the assumption that this was his only son. David, and other kings, had many sons. As we have already pointed out Rehoboam himself had 28 sons. At the risk of being redundant, the Bible only mentions one son born to the wise, rich, and powerful King Solomon. Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines (1 Kings 11:3, but the Bible only tells of one son. Two daughters are mentioned in 1 Kings 4:11, and 4:15, but we are still faced with the intriguing statement of Scripture that Solomon’s son was Rehoboam. After sexual relations with a thousand women, and only one son, Solomon finally concluded, as all of us should also conclude: **“Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that built it . . .” (Ps. 127:1)**

Life in the womb is a miracle from God. It cannot be purchased with money or produced by science, and not even by repetitive sexual encounters. No child is an accident, for life in the womb can only be achieved by a partnership with God!

A CLOSER LOOK AT LIFE IN THE WOMB

We know that a child is formed in the womb when the sperm (seed) of the father, unites with the ovum (egg) of the mother. God grants this new life through the combination of 23 chromosomes and 15,000 genes from each parent. The medical term for this microscopic union is “zygote”. “Zygos” is a Greek word that means “joined”. Remember! Life does not occur without the involvement of God. Note these examples from Scripture. Sarah was barren (Gen. 11:30). All the women in the house of Abimelech were barren (Gen. 20:18). Rebekah was barren (Gen. 25:21). Rachel was barren (Gen. 29:31). The wife of Manoah was barren (Judges 13:2). Hannah was barren (1 Sam. 1:2). Elizabeth was barren (Lk. 1:7). All of these barren women gave birth to children, but not without the help of God. As we have said before, all life ultimately comes from Him. This is why we say with confidence that life does not occur in the womb without a partnership with God. The Psalmist said it like this: **“He maketh the barren woman to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children. Praise ye the LORD.” (Ps 113:9 KJV).** IT IS SOBERING TO REALIZE THAT THE MIRACLE OF LIFE IN YOUR CHILD HAS COME FROM GOD!

From the very moment of conception your new baby was given a unique identity by God. Gary Bergel and Dr. C. Everett Koop point this out in the booklet *“When You Were Formed in Secret”*. They state that *“the genes, like letters of a divine alphabet, spell out the unique characteristics of the new individual. The color of eyes, hair and skin, facial features, body types, and certain qualities of personality and intelligence are all determined by this genetic coding”*.

The complexity of this genetic coding is beyond human comprehension. God placed a divine blueprint in your baby when it was microscopic in size. That blueprint contained detailed instructions for the formation of all body parts like hands and feet, and eyes and ears. Just as one star differs from another star in glory (1 Cor. 15:41), so also God makes every child unique. Your baby, for example, has it’s own fingerprints that will never be assigned to any other person. God also placed in the zygote the blueprint for your baby’s brain, eyes, ears, and all the other intricate organs of the body. Written in this DNA code is the development of bone marrow capable of manufacturing new hemoglobin and kidneys that can purify 180 quarts of blood every day. God designed your baby with arteries that relax when the heart beats and contract between beats. This pulsing system provides a steady flow of blood to the tiniest branches of the circulatory system. This genetic code also provides for both baby teeth and permanent teeth. Written in the blueprint are instructions for puberty, even though they will not be implemented for years. All of this, and much much more, was given by God to your child through a physical seed that can be traced back to Adam. Truly we are “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Ps. 139:14).

Perhaps it is appropriate at this time to introduce the subject of the new birth. The most important part of parental responsibilities involves the new birth and eternal salvation. Remember! The Bible speaks of two Adams. The Adam God created in Eden is the first Adam, and Jesus is the Last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45). Just as the first Adam produced a physical race, the Last Adam produced a spiritual race. Both races come from seeds. The physical seed produces physical life, and spiritual seed produces spiritual life. This means that as we have borne the image of the earthy, we can also bear the image of the heavenly (1 Cor. 15:49). Remember! As Jesus said to Nicodemus, flesh gives birth to flesh, and Spirit gives birth to Spirit (John 3:6). The only way your baby can receive spiritual life is from a spiritual seed. This is why everyone needs to be “born again” in order to have eternal life.

THE INCORRUPTIBLE SEED AND THE NEW COVENANT

We remind you again of what Jesus said to Nicodemus: **“That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”** (John 3:6 KJV) How simple! How profound!

It is a fact that your baby has physical life that came from a physical seed. Flesh and blood, however, cannot inherit the Kingdom of God (1 Cor. 15:50). If the Lord should tarry, your precious little baby will grow old and die. **“And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:”** (Heb 9:27 KJV).

Many believe that the worst thing that can happen to a person is to die and go to hell. Unfortunately, there is something even worse than that. Just imagine how terrible it would be to die and go to hell and then discover that you brought your children with you!

It doesn't have to be that way, of course. God is not willing that any should perish, but that all come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9). God knew all about your baby from the moment of conception. David put it like this: **“For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.”** (Ps 139:13-16 KJV)

If you are faithful in teaching your children the Scriptures they can possess eternal life and live forever and forever. Peter put it like this: **“Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.”** (1 Peter 1:23 - 25 KJV).

Since one of the eight uses of “brephos” is used by Peter in this passage, let us continue the quotation. After pointing out that the word of God is an incorruptible seed, Peter continued: **“Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.”** (1 Peter 2:1-3 KJV).

If a newborn baby is not hungry for milk something is wrong! If a newborn Christian is not hungry for the Scriptures something is also wrong!

MANNA FROM HEAVEN

The Hebrew people in the wilderness were fed by manna from heaven. Christians are sustained by the Bible, which is also like manna from heaven. The Scriptures teach that there is an association to be made between gathering manna, and studying the Bible. Please ponder these inspired words:

“And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live.” (Deut 8:3 KJV)

These words from Deuteronomy, as you know, were quoted by Jesus when He was tempted in the wilderness (Matt. 4:4; Lk. 4:4). Please note that God fed His people with manna “that he might make thee know that man does not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live.”

God did indeed humble His people. Their pride was greatly reduced when they had no food or water. God, however, also caused His people to hunger. Their hunger for food was a strong motivation to get out of bed and gather manna. The more hungry they were, the more diligent they were in seeking for food. If God had not caused His people to hunger, they would have died of starvation for manna was not easy to obtain. Please consider:

- The manna that fell from heaven was obviously gathered outside of the camp.
- The camp was large and contained several million people.
- Since the Hebrews owned cattle, sheep, and goats, we assume that they gathered their manna beyond the area where these animals were kept.
- There was only a small window of opportunity to gather manna. The manna did not appear until the dew was gone (Ex. 16:14) and it disappeared when the sun waxed hot (Ex. 16:21).
- The manna was like “thin flakes” or “hoar frost” (Ex. 16:14) and every person had to gather his own personal quota (about two quarts - Ex. 16:16).
- The manna had to be gathered daily. Anything left over would breed worms and stink (Ex. 16:20). An exception was made on the sixth day to honor the Sabbath day (Ex. 16:22 - 30).
- The manna had to be washed and cooked, but water and wood were scarce and difficult to obtain in the wilderness.
- The point is, even though manna was bread from heaven, it was still not easy to obtain. Only those hungry enough to seek the manna survived.

But now let us extrapolate this lesson to the study of the Scriptures. We are told that the people of Berea were more noble than those of Thessalonica because of their diligence in studying the Bible. The Bereans received the word with all readiness of mind and searched the Scriptures daily to see if Paul’s teaching was true (Acts 17:11). Please consider:

- As we have pointed out before, the printing press would not be invented by Gutenberg for over 1,000 years. Copies of the Bible were therefore extremely rare and expensive.
- Yet, just as the Hebrews gathered manna every day, the noble Bereans also studied the Scriptures every day.
- Just as the Hebrews had to leave their homes, the Bereans also would have to go to the synagogue in order to study the Scriptures.
- Just as the Hebrews faced competition in the gathering of manna, the Bereans also faced competition as many people lined up to study the Scriptures. Imagine how difficult it would be to study the Bible if each congregation had only one copy of the Scriptures.
- Just as the Hebrews had to gather, wash, and cook the manna, the Bereans had difficulty finding passages of Scripture. Remember! The Bible was not divided into chapters for 1,200 years, and not divided into verses for 1,500 years.

- Remember also that God fed His people with manna to teach us that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God

A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY

Parents and grandparents need to remember that during the formative years of infancy and childhood we have a golden opportunity to teach spiritual truth to our children. We have the promise that when we train up a child in the way they should go, when they are old they will not depart from it (Prov. 22:6). Dr. Garland Bare was a missionary in Asia. His daughter, though brain damaged at birth, could speak and understand three languages by the age of three. Other children in the same area could speak even more languages. It is undeniable that there is a time when children learn rapidly. It is wise indeed for parents and grandparents to take advantage of this window of opportunity to teach eternal truth. If we fail during those formative years we cannot turn back the clock for a second chance.

One way to graphically illustrate this truth is by citing examples of children who were raised without any parents at all. These children are called “feral children”. The word “feral” means “fierce” or “wild”. Even though this condition is rare, there are still dozens of well documented examples. Consider, for example, the sad story of a Ukrainian girl named Oxana Malaya who was raised by dogs. She was discovered in 1991. After many years of therapy, however, she has almost no language skills and as of 2010 was confined to a home for the mentally handicapped. Then there is the story of the bird boy in Volgograd, Russia.. The newspaper Pravda reported that his mother did not starve or physically mistreat him, she just never spoke to him. Since his primary companions were birds, he does not speak words like a human, but chirps and flaps his arms like a bird. He was first placed in an asylum, but later moved to a center of psychological care. Another well documented case is that of Rochom P’ngieng, also known as the “Jungle Girl”. She was first observed in northeastern Cambodia on Jan. 13, 2007. Her father identified her by a scar on her back and stated that she had disappeared in the jungle at the age of 8 while herding buffalo with her sister. She was captured, but despite the best efforts of her family to civilize her, she preferred to live like an animal and in May 2010 fled back to the jungle.

Not all “feral” children live in the jungle. Many live in the city and some even attend public schools. While they may wear clothes they have still passed through those critical formative years with little or no parental guidance. Often functionally illiterate and socially retarded, these unfortunate children gravitate to gangs. In this antisocial environment they learn the language of the streets and adopt the harmful habits of their mentors. Yes! They can be converted to Christ and forgiven of sins, but their formative years of easy learning are gone forever. There was a time when they could learn three languages by the age of three, but not any longer. There was a time, when like a tender twig, the direction of their lives could be easily changed. Unfortunately, those tender days do not last forever.

TODAY, DON'T HARDEN YOUR HEART

David wrote in the 95th Psalm: **“O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker. For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness: When your fathers tempted**

me, proved me, and saw my work. Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said, It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways: Unto whom I swear in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest.” (Ps 95:6-11 KJV)

These words of David, as you know, were quoted by the inspired writer of Hebrews (see Hebrews 4:7 - 13). It seems that every generation faces the same danger. Just as the ancient Hebrews forgot God and hardened their hearts, we can also forget God and harden our hearts. The passage in Hebrews reminds us that the Word of God is quick and powerful. It is sharper than a two edged sword. It cannot transform those, however, who do not know it. That's why it is so important to teach the Scriptures to our children from the earliest moments of their lives. Please don't harden your hearts!

The greatest journey begins with a single step. You can take that step today! Here are suggestions for you to prayerfully consider.

1 - Examine yourself to see if you are in the faith (2 Cor. 13:5). Once you have given diligence to make your own salvation sure, you will be in a much better position to teach others.

2 - Begin today to pray earnestly for wisdom. Before Samson was born, his father prayed to God for wisdom on how to raise him (Judges 13:8). If we ask in faith, nothing doubting, God has also promised to give us wisdom (Ja. 1:5)

3 - Even though Jesus was God manifest in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16), He advanced in wisdom, in stature, and in favor with God and man (Lk. 2:52). It was His parents who made this possible. Please begin today to develop a well rounded program of development for your child!

4 - Please also closely monitor those outside influences that can adversely affect your child. Radio and television programs, for example, can infect the mind of your child as surely as a virus can affect his body.

5 - Note that most who have learned a foreign language as an adult, speak with an accent. This helps to emphasize the importance of giving proper training to your child from the earliest moments. It is not an accident that children born into a musical family have musical ability. They started their music lessons in the womb listening to the family play and sing. It is not an accident that Timothy became a great Christian worker. That's the way he was trained!

6 - Establish priorities that recognize the true importance of the child God has entrusted to you. Many children are placed in day care so that both parents can help pay for a nice house and a new car. We need to reexamine our priorities, for man does not live by bread alone.

7 - Even in single parent homes it is still possible to prioritize your child. Famous newsman, Paul Harvey, was raised in a single parent home. His police officer father was killed in the line of duty when Paul was only 2 years old. His mother chose to take in boarders so that she might spend more time with her child. With God's help we too can devise creative ways to spend time with our children.

Please prayerfully consider this information, and may the development of your child be as important to you as it is to God.

Boyce Mouton
bmouton@joplin.com