

The Beauty of School Time

By Jan Murray



Even as a veteran reading specialist, the beginning of school still made me itch to do things. I would clean my house from top to bottom (knowing nothing else would be done until at least fall break!), and run around buying organizing tools, a cool new pencil or notepad, and something cute for my desk at school. I had worked most of the summer thinking about curricula and going to workshops, but by the end of July, I had planned what I would teach, how I would teach it, and some new twist that might help my students do better. I would race to be the first to the Xerox machine at school so I could begin getting the beginning of year information done. I would reclean my classroom and start the arduous but exciting task of labeling new books.

School time is exciting for children also. My children and I always made a special trip to the store to start the school year with all the lists of supplies teachers inevitably want, new underwear and socks, maybe shoes, and one new outfit for the first day of school. This included me! I believed in being involved, and I tried to make orientation meetings with my children, even when my son in junior high, and later in high school, desperately tried to get me to stay at home, fearing I would somehow embarrass him.

In Ecclesiastes 3:1 the Bible says, “There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven...” An event means something valuable. When the writer of Ecclesiastes goes on to list those things, he mentions birth and death, planting and harvesting at the very top, because they are basic to life. In God's eyes, our children are very precious and deserve the time needed to plant good things into their lives so later there will be a bountiful harvest.

School time in our children's lives is crucial. They are growing, and some things that are being planted in them may not be what we would like to see planted. If we have been tilling the soil since babyhood (and even before), planting good seeds and watering them with God's Word, the Bible promises us a harvest. It also says that what is planted can be uprooted, so that if there are things we see and hear from them that ring a spiritual alarm in us, there is a time to uproot the bad seed and replant good ones. I thought parenting would be easier when I got the children out of diapers, and then I thought it would be easier once they didn't need my constant supervision. I was wrong. Parenting changes. It's just a different time in both our lives, but our children still need us.

As this new school year begins, I would like to offer some questions for you to ponder.

Where are you in your spiritual walk with Jesus? It matters. It impacts your children in ways you may never know, but they are following your example. There are too many things that can happen in our family lives for us to be dependent on ourselves for most of Life's answers. Perhaps this would be a good time to start spending time with the Lord sometime during your day. It doesn't have to be long. Ruminant on a Bible verse that's special to you, and take time to pray, asking God for protection and guidance for your day and your family's day.

Do you make a point to go to your children's events even when it is inconvenient? It matters. The same parent doesn't have to go to the events or even go to all events if you are a single parent, but your presence in their lives means you care. Yes, even when you are dead tired. Go in junior high and high school, even if your child begs you not to do so!

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Can your child's teacher(s) identify you by face or name? It matters. Start by going to orientation and making a point of introducing yourself to your child's teacher(s). As a teacher, it means you are there at home to support him in his teaching efforts. It's easier to do in elementary school, but keep making that effort in secondary school too. It is only human nature for teachers to spend more time helping students whose parents show they care.

Do you talk to the teacher or principal if your child comes home with a school problem or incident? It matters. I have found that a lot of parents are reluctant to voice a possible problem. School intimidates many people who may not have had a happy time there. Parents also have a tendency to think that everything that happens at school is well known to school personnel, so nothing else can be done. Often times the teacher may not be aware of the problem if it happens on the playground or at lunch and he is not on duty. Messages to the principal or vice-principal get lost. Give it a week or two. If your child still complains about a school problem, it is time to talk. If something violent has happened and no one at school has called, make it a point to call immediately!

Do you always think your child is right or will not lie? It grieves me to say this, but our children, even when taught how to live righteously, don't always do so if it is not what they think is in their best interest. Therefore, give the teacher or administrator some room for doubt. Your child may have only told you part of the truth. I remember one parent vigorously defended her son by saying, "My son would never lie to me!" Words to eat crow by. I felt insulted because that meant I was the one lying! When she was confronted by evidence of the truth, it was a difficult, embarrassing blow for her. On the other hand, do not assume that your child is lying or enlarging the issue. Try to go in with enough of an open mind and a calm spirit that you can get a clearer picture of the situation. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you do this. Remember that both of you want to help solve the problem.

Do you make a point of asking about your child's day? It matters. For one thing, it helps children analyze past events and put them into perspective. What may have seemed to be a horrible moment of not knowing the math answer at the blackboard becomes less of a tragedy at the end of the day. For another, you have a chance to talk to your child. Even if the answer is "Fine" or "Nothing", something may trigger a thought later on that he might voice. Dinner at home is such a valuable tool for this activity. Forced companionship. I have a son who spent most of his secondary school time saying, "Fine", "Nothing". I have a daughter who tells me what happened during her day for the entire 8 hours she was away. Even Mr. "Fine-Nothing" manages to say something else in the face of his sister's onslaught of information.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 says, "He has made everything beautiful in its time..." This school time is a beautiful, appointed time for both parent and child. Make the most of this valuable event. Enjoy your new year!

Jan Murray is a retired school teacher who has taught people from kindergarten through adults for 35 years. She currently serves as Prayer Minister at Prayer of Faith Church. She enjoys sharing her spiritual insights and praying with those around her.