

THE BUSY PARENT'S GUIDE

TO SELECTING

HOMESCHOOL CURRICULUM



While every homeschool parent has their own unique schedules, challenges, and circumstances, there's one word we can safely assume describes nearly everyone's daily routine—*busy*!

With so much on your plate, the thought of poring over hundreds (if not thousands) of different curriculum options is enough to make your head spin. If you're reading this guide, chances are you already feel like you're drowning in the philosophies, approaches, and choices available today.

And you know the stakes are high. Selecting the right curriculum is important—really important. You only get one shot at raising your children, and these curriculum choices will impact both your child's academic and spiritual well-being.

“All educational approaches are not created equal.”

All educational approaches are not created equal. All philosophies are not the same. There is such a thing as a right and a wrong way. There is the good, the bad, and the ugly—not to mention the better and the best. Moreover, as Christians, we don't want our children taken captive by the philosophies of the “basic principles” of a humanist worldview rather than what is “according to Christ” (Col. 2:8). This happened to Christian families in the first century, and it is still happening to families today.

For many moms and dads, these decisions can be daunting. It's intimidating to think about where to begin. The good news is: finding the right curriculum doesn't have to be complicated! There's a simple answer to this question!

But first of all, remember that you're not alone because **God is with you in this.** He has a vested interest in your kids. He tells us that these children need to be brought up “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”

THE SIMPLE ANSWER

Begin with prayer. Pray for wisdom, and He will give it to you. Secondly, acknowledge Him in the decision by tying Proverbs 1:7 and Deuteronomy 6:7-9 into every decision you make. When looking over a new curriculum, always ask yourself:

Does this curriculum honor God and teach my children the awesomeness of God on every page or in every chapter?

Does this curriculum keep the Word of God before my children's eyes? Does His Word permeate every page? Is it like verses written on every wall of the house and every chapter of the book?

MORE TO SAY

But there's more to say on this. As you begin your search, we encourage you to ask the right questions. In this way, you can effectively tune out all the noise, keep it simple, and make Christ-honoring decisions.

In this *Busy Parent's Guide to Selecting Homeschool Curriculum*, we've boiled the selection "criteria" down to seven things: two errors to avoid and five simple questions to ask.

First, the two errors:

ERROR #1

A Good Education Is Worldview Neutral

Some folks believe that facts are neutral. Some claim that if a book is well written, it must be good no matter what its underlying bias may be. In fact, many truly believe that the "bare facts" of history, literature, or any other academic discipline can and should be transmitted in an unbiased manner. After all, they say, that's supposed to be the business of a good education.

The problem with this line of thinking is that it just isn't honest. Every book on the market is biased, though today the humanist worldview is touted as the completely neutral and unbiased position and the Christian worldview is looked upon as the biased and prejudiced approach.

At the least, we should all be honest about this. We're biased. They're biased. Everyone is biased according to their basic view of reality, truth, and ethics. For example, one's worldview chooses the historical events that are most important. One's worldview determines the ethical position or significance of this action or that action in history. An evolutionary approach to science is hardly neutral. It posits a universe that originated in and continues to operate by a principle of random chance. It staunchly rejects an intelligent God who created and continues to sustain His universe by the Word of His power. Whatever the bias may be, education is never worldview neutral.

ERROR #2

Education Must Be Secular

The second error which has become very popular in the field of education is the *separation of the sacred and the secular*. It is the separation of God from school, the separation of faith and worship from curriculum. This mindset declares that Scripture is irrelevant when it comes to the claims of science, history, and literature. This way of thinking has been institutionalized in education for at least a hundred years. This is the basis for eliminating all Scripture, all prayer, all worship, and all fear of God from the business of schooling.

But returning to God's Word, we find that reverence for the awesomeness of God is the *very beginning of knowledge* (Prov. 1:7). You can't get to knowledge without the fear of God. Deuteronomy 6:7 urges parents to keep the Word of God as a frontlet before their children's eyes. The Scriptures should be closely integrated into every learning experience in a child's life. God's Word is to permeate children's lives as they rise up, as they lie down, and as they walk by the way.

Our method of education must follow God's Word.

Always remember: education must be Christian.

Simply put, only a distinctively Christian approach to education will do. There should be no separation of God and His truth from the curriculum. The best bias will be the "God bias." The only sure foundation for truth can be found in Scripture—the revelation of God. All other philosophies of men are fraught with error, and they make for bad foundations.

So, first and foremost, parents, let us commit ourselves to a biblically-saturated, biblical-worldview-based, Christ-centered approach to education. Let us seek God's blessing, "and all these things shall be added to you."

Also, we mustn't forget that *our method of education must follow God's Word*.

Amid the cacophony of voices arguing for this approach or that approach in education, thankfully God speaks. His Word really does give us a clue. The Bible doesn't argue for classical education or the unit study approach or kinesthetic teaching styles. There isn't a one-size-fits-all approach to education for every family and for every child. But there are basic biblical principles we want to follow and respect. And we want to be sure that those who design our curriculum are sensitive to these principles.

Here are some basic elements to God's method of education:

- The Bible urges parental involvement in education (Deut. 6:7, Eph. 6:4, Prov. 1-31).
- Jesus prefers walk-along, talk-along discipleship over classroom lectures.
- Faith and character should be integrated into each lesson. This is the model set forth in Proverbs and the Jesus method.
- Knowledge must be life integrated. Jesus always applied His teaching in a real-life context.

FIVE QUESTIONS

Now that we've dealt with the two errors, let's move on to the five questions:

1. What Philosophy of Education Does the Curriculum Follow?
2. What is the Curriculum's Chief Goal or Objective?
3. Who Wrote the Curriculum?
4. Is the Curriculum Relevant & Easy to Use?
5. Does This Curriculum Fit into My Budget?

Question #1: What Philosophy of Education Does the Curriculum Follow?

Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. (Col. 2:8)

By the word "philosophy" we're not talking about whether the curriculum uses workbooks, unit studies, kinesthetic learning, online learning, or the thousands of other approaches recommended by curriculum suppliers. What we're looking for is the *basic* "philosophy" or "worldview" of the authors.

Is this curriculum grounded in a biblical view of history, science, ethics, origins, and truth? Are its authors committed to the basic principles of education contained in God's Word? Is God's wisdom consciously applied throughout the curriculum? Do the authors fear God and consider the fear of God as the beginning of knowledge?

You may be asking, "How do I identify a curriculum's underlying philosophy or worldview?" This isn't always easy. Just looking at the floors or walls of a house won't necessarily reveal the kind of foundation used in the house. The foundation undergirds and holds up everything else, but it isn't always visible.

First, there is the seat-of-the-pants analysis. As you review the curriculum, do you find a respect for God's Word, God's Wisdom, and God's Truth? Are the truths of God's Word tied in to the material—the history, the science, and the literature? Is Scripture present? And, more importantly, are the Bible verses relevant to the material?

Second, consider the focal point of the curriculum. Does it emphasize the achievements and works of men? Or does it emphasize the glory and works of God? Does every chapter of the science book praise God and glorify the Creator? Or does the curriculum glorify the minds of scientists for figuring out a few things about God's world?

“Does your curriculum emphasize the glory and works of God?”

Question #2: What is the Curriculum's Chief Goal or Objective?

Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. (Matt. 6:31-33)

Every educational approach is directed toward a goal—whether that goal is stated or unstated. Sometimes that goal is to raise up “better,” well-socialized citizens for a socialist state. Sometimes it is to prepare a child to get into a good college and make a lot of money in life. Far too often, we are tempted to pursue educational options whose purpose is to glorify man for his achievements, his intelligence, and his success. This is the essence of the deception that undergirds humanism and all humanist institutions in the Western world.

The battle of the worldviews is a vicious battle. The curriculum you choose will make a big difference in steering your children toward or away from a Christ-oriented discipleship and a Christ-centered life. Always remember to ask the question: What is the goal laid out by the producers of this or that curriculum?

The first question of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* presents man's chief end as “to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.” Matthew 6:33 encourages parents not to seek a good job and lots of money for their kids. First seek the interests of God's kingdom, and He will be sure to provide your children with everything they will need in life.

Education should be defined as discipleship in which a child is prepared intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, and physically for worship and service in life and eternity. But what are we doing in life and eternity? Hopefully, we are loving God, serving God, seeking God's kingdom, and glorifying God. We should be more interested in seeking God's kingdom than in building the kingdoms of men which come and go and rise and fall every century or so. Thus, education itself should provide an opportunity for worship and praise. As children study the world in literature, history, and science, they should come to know God and worship Him. This purpose for education should be realized on every page. This is not knowledge for the sake of knowledge or for the sake of pride. It is knowledge for the sake of knowing God and worshiping and serving Him.

When facts appear random and life seems purposeless, education will often be viewed as boring and irrelevant to children. In fact, education can be quite dangerous if our children think of it as purposeless or just forced memorization of a host of random facts. As they study science, they should find a personal God behind it all. They should be able to trace the fingers of the great Genius Creator in all His works. As they study math, they should learn about a God of order and precision. As they study history, they should rejoice in a God who rules the world and works out His sovereign plan in the lives of people and nations. Everything they learn should be full of purpose, meaning, and application to life.

Question #3: Who Wrote the Curriculum?

A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher. (Luke 6:40)

Teachers are important. That's what Jesus tells us here in Luke 6:40. And parents are the most important teachers in the homeschool endeavor. However, a large part of our children's schooling will be determined by the authors of the curriculum we use and the books our children read. Usually, we give our children the best books written by competent writers or the greatest authors of all time. However, keep in mind that the great writers are great teachers. They may lead our children to the truth, or they may lead them to error. A good question to always ask is: "Who wrote these textbooks? Who wrote these classics? Were the authors humble men and women? Did they fear God and trust in Christ?" Checking out the life of the author is one of the best and quickest ways to determine whether he or she would be a good teacher for your children. That applies as much to Nathaniel Hawthorne, William Shakespeare, and Mark Twain as it does to John Bunyan or Augustine.

Paul further encourages us in Colossians 2 to seek after Christ, “in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” When it comes to selecting curriculum, the authors you choose should have the single-minded goal of teaching people what it means to know, serve, and love Christ with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Two attributes will characterize the best teachers and the best books:

They Will Integrate the Bible Everywhere

Simply put, the best teachers are those who know, utilize, and saturate their works with Scripture. Charles Spurgeon once said of John Bunyan that “his blood was Bibline” because his writings were so full of the Bible!

Some people are concerned that such a focus on biblically saturated books might leave their children incapable of ministering to the world around them. But what better material could be found for ministering to a broken and dying world? If you want your children to be ready to speak hope into the life of someone with terminal cancer, would you rather they had read Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men* or Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*? If you want your children to be ready to affect the lives of others for the cause of Christ, the Word of God and the writings of the great Christian men and women of history are the most “relevant” materials they could ever study.

They Will Withstand the Test of Time

Part of the confusion for parents looking for the best curriculum is just that there’s so much to choose from. But once again, let’s keep this simple. Would you rather commit to buying 20,000 books recently published for your children’s education, or would it be simpler and wiser to use 20 solid books that have stood the test of time, published again and again over hundreds of years? Instead of trying to figure out all the best resources for your children’s education, let time be the great tester for you. One of the choicest gifts that God has given to His church is the ability to learn from some of the greatest Christian thinkers and writers throughout history. These gems have been passed down and used to bless God’s people throughout the ages. Your children will pick up much wisdom about life while developing a Christian worldview and character by reading the works of these great men and women of God who, although long dead, still speak.

Question #4: Is the Curriculum Relevant and Easy to Use?

With much of modern education, countless disconnected facts are thrown at kids—terms to memorize, dates and events in history, and all the rest. Think of it in terms of one little formula:

Boring Books + Pointless Assignments = Less Learned

So let's put ourselves in the seat of the student as we glance over a few pages of the curriculum and ask the questions: "What is the unifying principle? How is this relevant to our lives?" ***Homeschooling should never be boring!*** We want our children to see the relevance of the information and the knowledge they are learning on every single page. They need to know ***why*** they are learning what they're learning.

Another thing to note about curriculum selection is that assignments should be easy enough that parents can understand them and explain the work to their children. If you're left scratching your head, your child will be too. Textbooks and literature shouldn't be presented in a way that requires experienced teachers to explain the concepts behind them.

The best curriculum will also include lesson schedules and answer keys to make grading quick and easy.

Easy-to-use curriculum prevents the academics from becoming too overwhelming and all-consuming for parent or child. Instead of spending all day doing bookwork, we recommend you set aside time for family economy, practical learning, field trips, planting gardens, and doing real life. To neglect the life integration component is to leave out one of the most important biblical components in the education-discipleship program God wants for your child.

Question #5: Does This Curriculum Fit into My Budget?

Last but not least, families are concerned about the expense of the curriculum. Single income homeschool families (in some cases blessed with a large brood of little ones) can't always afford to spend \$400 - \$800 per child on curriculum.

Why is curriculum so expensive? Keep in mind some curriculum is super expensive because of the sheer magnitude of the content included. Too much of this is busywork; it's designed to keep kids busy in school, doing headwork for 6-8 hours a day. That's not the homeschool regimen.

Good homeschool curriculum doesn't need to be so expensive. But finding academically-rigorous, God-glorifying material for a price that fits into your budget can be a challenge.

HOW GENERATIONS CAN HELP

Our goal with this short guide is to boil the decision down to five simple questions. With that, we hope parents can gain more confidence (and less stress) in the curriculum search.

Most importantly, however, please remember the focus should be on the relationship, discipleship, faith, and character of your children. Curriculum is less important by far than the love God has put in your heart for your children and the time you spend with them. Relationships, one-on-one discipleship opportunities, and faith and character development will turn out to be far more important than academic training in knowledge and practical skills.

At Generations, equipping the busy homeschool parent with everything they need to fulfill their God-given calling of discipling their children is at the very heart of everything we do. When our founder Kevin Swanson was a young father, he scoured the market for a simple “out-of-the-box” homeschool curriculum that would meet these criteria and fit with a Christian Discipleship method of education. Unfortunately, there wasn't much of this approach available on the market. Today, Generations is striving to fill that void.

At Generations, we offer a twelve-year curriculum produced by homeschoolers for homeschoolers. Over the past few decades, the homeschooling movement has grown to 5,000,000! We have come into our own, and it's time for Christian homeschoolers to be writing curriculum for homeschools in the 21st century.

The Generations team has spent the past fifteen years developing a line of distinctively Christian homeschool curriculum that helps parents integrate God's Word into every subject. If you have a vision for home-based education and family discipleship, this curriculum was created for you. Some families may wish to use pieces of our curriculum as a supplement to their core curriculum. Others may wish to purchase whole packages for our best prices. We know how difficult it is to find good curriculum for a price you can afford. That's why Generations has committed making our grade packages as affordable as possible. Also, our quality hardbacks can be reused for multiple children. That's critical for larger families.

We are working hard to accommodate families around the world who share this vision. We're humbled to see how God is using our curriculum ministry to bless and equip parents across the globe. Here is some of the feedback we've gotten from homeschool parents just like you:

"We have all levels of the literature curriculum. For a busy mom of many, this has been a God-send! My kids love the books and I love the built-in accountability and deep thinking required to follow through with assignments. We have wonderful discussions sparked by the questions and essays. My kids are learning a lot and becoming better writers by reading such wonderful classics."

—Kim F. (Virginia, United States)

"Finally a history curriculum that teaches God's providence in all of history! Told from a biographical, first person view, the events in history come alive for my children. My high school age boys LOVE history now and retain much of what they learn. This curriculum glorifies God and teaches HIS-Story!"

—Terri M. (Idaho, United States)

"Two of my children have been going through the history curriculum from Generations and are loving their work! This says a lot about the quality of their material. It is amazing to see how they are being challenged to be critical thinkers. They have both, at different times talked to me about how a situation in their own lives reminded them of something they read in their school work, they were able to parallel and think through things with greater clarity. It is a great blessing and encouragement to me to know their worldview and character is being pointed to Christ, even in their schoolwork."

—Kristi Wilbanks (Missouri, United States)

"We have been so thankful for the Worldviews in Conflict, Taking the World for Jesus and America in God's Providence books. They have been just what we have prayed for in teaching materials: easy to use, interesting, full of Scripture application, and thoroughly submitted to the sovereignty of God. Our children have enjoyed learning from them and we often hear them making connections with what they've learned in their lives."

—Kelle S. (Michigan, United States)

LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR CURRICULUM RESOURCES

You can learn more about our God-centered homeschool curriculum, and browse our selection of 1st-12th grade resources at generations.org/curriculum.

You can also contact us at mail@generations.org if you have any questions. We'll be happy to help you in any way we can.

May God continue to bless you as you seek to raise your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Thanks for reading!



Generations