

“Building blocks of a healthy home”

contribution by Gerda Vorster © June 2014

Sometimes this homeschool road can be a lonely road (although there are many homeschoolers)... so I've learned that it is better to sit quietly at the feet of the King than to lend out my ears too much. Too many times I've panicked when I compared my children with somebody else's. We need friends that walk the road with us, but everyone's road is so unique! I would like to share something about our road with you:

This is our seventh homeschool year. I've learned that there are specific seasons in your life and that seven years are often the end of one season and the beginning of the next. It was very obvious at the end of 2012 when our soap factory burned down. Shortly before it happened, my husband and I felt that we should take a year off. After the fire it didn't look possible at all. It was as if the carpet under our feet has been yanked out from under us. My husband was crisis managing and the word "rest" was not part of his vocabulary! Two months later after he established a temporary factory, he came to one closed door after the other. The insurance didn't want to take liability, the banks didn't want to lend money and the dark cloud didn't have a silver lining... Or so we thought!

That morning he got a Scripture on which he responded, and that was a turning point in our lives. It was: *Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. Matt 6:33* He decided to fast 40 days from „work“. His heart had to return home. He took his feet out of the boat and gave the first step on the water. What a wonderful privilege to have taken this journey. It is actually a long testimony about everything that happened, but the short version is that things began turning very quickly for us. My husband was at home and although it took a while, his heart did come home! In those 40 days the insurance company let us know that they would pay for the damage. The bank was willing to give us a loan (which was not necessary anymore) and SARS paid money that was due two years ago. At the end of the 40 days my husband realized that there still is something like a modern Sabbath year and that God still is faithful and he agreed to „rest“ the rest of the year.

It was a wonderful year, in which we not only experienced the provision of God firsthand, but our family got to know each other well. We did lots of things together and my husband worked hard at his relationship with me and especially our children. In my own words I would describe it as the **rebuilding of the foundation of our family**. It was so needed! We rested in many aspects. We rested from extramural activities, formal school and put the absolute focus on **relationship building**. We really got to know each other. We can say that at least one year in our lives „was not a chase after the wind.“ Our focus shifted. Because we had no formal school, there was plenty of time to learn other important things. We have four children (between 6 and 12 at that stage). We could teach them for example how to manage their finances, how to cook, how to plant a vegetable garden, how to manage a household, and so much more! We started functioning as a team and the children had many more responsibilities than earlier. Together we informally learnt more than in all of the other years. As a family we went on some kind of outing weekly and my husband had an individual appointment each week with one of the children... they could choose what they wanted to do with him. At one stage I experienced that we should teach each of the children a new skill. The oldest two wanted to learn to play the guitar, our youngest daughter learned to type and our little boy learned German words. We had very little contact and visits with friends and at one stage I felt very isolated. Then I saw the vision of a borehole that was being drilled deep into the earth. Perhaps it was a lonely road, but the result was that we found sweet water that still bubbled up for us to enjoy!

Today we enjoy the fruits of that wonderful year in our lives. The children learned to look at each other through glasses of love. So easily we see each other's mistakes and it really takes practice to focus on the positive. We did it by means of games. For each of them we made a chart with a wall on. The wall has plenty of bricks. Every time that you „catch“ someone doing something nice, that is not part of their responsibilities, you and that person got a brick. For example the children would make our bed while we were in the bathroom, on own initiative. Or one would put away the other one's clean dishes, hold the door open or say those wonderful words: „You may first!“ On the wall there are levels where rewards waited. The secret though is that the rewards are for the whole team and that the team has to reach a specific point. Thus we motivate and help each other to come out at the top. It turned our

children's **hearts to each** other. We call it: "**Catch me do something good**". We did many other similar practical things and especially focused on the qualities that makes a home a "nice home" – which includes elements like trust, honesty, and working together as well as each person's role in the family. And of course we still gave attention to the discipline of "listening the first time"!

Children feel part of the family when they have specific responsibilities. Even if it is just to give dogs their water every day or to throw the peels on the compost heap – it really makes a difference. Today they do it voluntarily and mostly (;-) with a spring in their step. Discipline still has a place, but we learned that it helps a lot to **teach** them to do something, a step that is easily neglected.... A lot of things that we take in a matter of course don't come naturally to children, but with training it is possible. If you are wondering how it works – for example how do you teach children to wash dishes? We let them stand by when we do it. Then we let them do it while we stand by to help. Then we let them do it on their own, while we are close enough to help, and only then we can let them wash dishes independently.

We also wanted our children to get up earlier in the mornings. Then we got a wonderful plan to make it enjoyable and not a punishment! Now we wake them half an hour earlier. Then they climb into our bed and read a story, and then we use the opportunity to pray together before the day starts. From Ford Taylor we learned "**change will not happen, until the pain of staying the same, exceeds the pain of change**". This truth is a valuable tool, think carefully over this! Out of our own lives: When our children's beds are not made by a certain time, then they have to make someone else's bed as well as their own the next day.... This rule works well to make beds! We used many tools to build into our family to „make our house the nicest house in the whole world“. (that is our children's vision for the family)

So in this year I asked God what are the building blocks of a healthy (home) school. The following 12 points is what He put on my heart for us:

1. Wisdom starts with the serving of the Lord. (Prayer, prayer and prayer!)
2. Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness...
3. LOVE never fails.
4. Each of the children has a role to fill inside the school. Mom CAN NOT do everything for everyone.
5. You can be the world's best teacher and the worst mom at the same time.
6. The question at the end of the day: Did we build in each other's lives or broke each other down today?
7. Vision determines what happens.
8. Enough sleep.
9. I have to become less and HE has to become more.
10. Boundaries must be set.
11. Don't reinvent everything, use what is available.
12. Our school should be a show case for His glory.

Number 5 above made me ask the following personal question - What then are the qualities of a good mother? I experienced that there are many characteristics that makes a mother a mom. These are the eight, which the Father laid on my heart:

1. A mom **loves** and really cares.
2. A mom has **compassion** (empathy) and is interested.
3. A mom has **real understanding** for what you are going through.
4. A mom touches and **holds close** and gives a lot of hugs.
5. A mom is **available** on every level (physically, socially, spiritually and especially emotionally).
6. A mom **communicates** (positive and when needed discipline, but always to build up).
7. A mom has **time** (to listen, to help, to do, to read to, etc.).
8. A mom **cares for you** on different levels (physically, spiritually and emotionally).

Our home has changed. The atmosphere changed and each of us has changed! We are in the process to learn to put others above ourselves. It is not an easy road, but I can witness that it is possible! With the psalm writer I want to shout: *Rejoice to honor the Lord! Ps 100:1* As a family we are at a place where we enjoy the „journey“! No, everything doesn't go smoothly and there is still plenty of room for improvement, but I have hope! Thankful for the wonderful privilege of having the opportunity to build into our children's' lives!