Knowing How to Know

by Michelle Miller

Picture yourself at Macy’s department store—the big one in New York City with all the different departments, levels, and record-breaking square footage. Think of the millions of items sold there.

Now, imagine you are tired before you enter; you’d like to get in and out quickly. But you don’t have a predetermined item to buy. You’re not trying to find pants for Hubby, a polo shirt for Junior, or an Easter dress for Sissy. You’re just aimlessly shopping. How quickly could you be “done”? Who could even say when you are “done”? Would you feel confident you’d found the “right” item, if it doesn’t fulfill a particular need?

We can have that same “overwhelmification” in homeschool bookstores, catalogs, websites, and convention halls. So many choices! All the bright colors and claims. So many options! Too many?

But it only feels like too many choices if we don’t know exactly what we’re seeking. When we do know the need, oodles of options is the very definition of woman-fun!

Some trusting soul, for example, asked me to design our church’s renovation project, so I’ve been hunting for inexpensive drapery fabric that combines watery blues and greens with a warm taupe, in a naturalistic, yet contemporary, pattern. That’s a specific objective, so it then feels awesome (not awful) to see a store’s sample rack loaded with options in that scheme. I start rubbing my hands with glee! The glint in Columbus’s eye as he sighted the New World pales in comparison. “Aha!” I swagger in my best sea-chantey tone. Chances are good I’m about to find that “just-right” thing.

Know What You’re Looking For

This column is not about shopping, even if we gals are loath to leave that beloved topic. Rather, it is about knowing what you’re looking for in homeschooling, whether this is your first year or fifteenth. The needs of “the hunt” are the same.

Can I tell you what to grab at the next curriculum fair? Nope, I haven’t a clue. No one else does either because we don’t know God’s calling on your family—the unique makeup of your children, their future ministries, or how they would best learn at this stage of their development. But we all know Who does know.

The funny thing is that we tend to seek those answers from other homeschoolers around us. If a girlfriend likes something, it goes on our shopping list. We are swayed by her confidence in it. Why are we so ready to be led by others?

My Hypothesis

Here’s my hypothesis: We were not taught as young students what learning really is because our educational system was no longer centered on the Creator and His intent for education.
This is a really big deal. It means we are unlearned about learning. We enter into the homeschooling endeavor as timid sheep, following anyone who smells of confidence and direction. We duplicate what we did in school, for it is all we know; even though it was mere recitation of superficial, humanly selected, nonspiritual factoids from schoolbooks. But it caused us to assume that learning centers on materials, so we focus our homeschools and our confidence on the hunt for the “right” curriculum.

But what is the real source of confidence in homeschooling? Knowing God’s truth about education, knowing how it applies specifically to our family, and being convinced of His presence in our daily teaching is what we get our confidence. This is where we begin authentic homeschooling. This is when we leave behind the “system” we experienced and exchange it for His life-giving way of relational education. How can this release seem frightening when that to which we cling is the very source of our insecurity?

**His Way of Education**

Let’s leap into His way of education with anticipation, for what we have been doing these past generations has not built stronger families and nations. Besides, does God withhold truth? Doesn’t He actively share it? Let’s stop our convolutions and convulsions, our confusions and contusions and, instead, seek His teaching and direction.

Yes, we can learn from others: we can stand on the shoulders of giants, such as Charlotte Mason, who gave a lovely vision of education—education is the building of knowing relationships with God, other people of the past and present, and the wide world He has made. Take what you learn before the Father; let Him knead it into a recipe just for you. He will illuminate His goals, methods, and materials.

Be encouraged, for I’m not talking about theological ideals but trustworthy reality. My personal experience after eighteen years of homeschooling is that God cares deeply about how we prepare our children for their future lives and ministries, for He knows what lies ahead for them. Thus, He actively gives vibrant direction to any who ask.

**Do Not Fear**

The next time you open a homeschool catalog, do not fear. Filter the options through His master plan for your family. Don’t let the resources drive the homeschool, but allow your God-designed homeschool to drive the resources. When you know why you are homeschooling, you will know how to homeschool and which resources to use. The curriculum will be the servant not the ruler. You will set your face like flint to the fulfillment of His calling on your homeschool mission and will not turn aside to chase glittery diversions.

Let your confidence be in the Rock, not the elusive “right” book. That is when homeschooling (and homeschool shopping) becomes fun!

---

Michelle Miller likes homeschooling, which is convenient, since she began in 1992 and won’t finish until 2019! Her first two sons are now successful adults; a daughter-in-law and four grandsons are proof! Her youngest son, daughter, and hubby (thankfully!) are still at home in northern Michigan. She has authored a spiritually focused, in-depth, literature-based history curriculum: **TruthQuest History**, one of Cathy Duffy’s “Top 100 Picks.” You can learn about her unique vision of history, and her relational way of exploring it, at www.TruthQuestHistory.com. Michelle also operates a homeschool library, where she’s learned much about the best children’s literature.