

Missing in Action or Mentoring in Action?



Jeannie Fulbright

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Introduction

When I began my journey with God, my heart's cry was for an older, wiser woman to come alongside and mentor me. I wasn't demanding a wizened grandmother, just someone a few years ahead who could counsel me, giving warnings, prayer, and advice, and understand the fears and temptations I faced. But alas, these sought-after mentors were MIA—missing in action, indeed. Where were they? Why didn't they have time to pour into my unsanctified, misguided life? Forlorn that there was no one to fill this gap, I resolved that when the time arrived, I would not neglect my duties as a mentor. My, how easy promises are to make.

Mentoring in Snippets

Now, here I am, closing in on 40, and I'm loath to admit that I'm becoming a full-fledged member of the neglectful MIA bunch. Life races vigorously around me with sports, classes, friends, speaking, writing, and striving to be a godly wife. The truth is, I really haven't a spare second to my name. But having learned my spiritual lessons the hard way—through experience—I have a heart for mentoring: longing to see others avoid my missteps and experience the freedom of submission to God's guiding hand upon their lives. But how could I mentor other homeschool moms without neglecting my duties to my family? The answer: snippets.

Yes, I'm learning that mentoring in snippets, if you will, can be quite valuable for the kingdom of God. This became evident to me at the last homeschool convention. I share this story because I want to encourage busy homeschool moms that just because they may not have time for intense one-on-one mentoring does not mean that they have to be MIA to the younger homeschool moms who need us.

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Mentoring in Action at the Annual Homeschool Convention

You see, attending the annual convention is such a tradition that when the Georgia convention rolled around, although I needed absolutely nothing, I still made plans with friends, pulled out the kids' walkie-

talkies, and packed up the family to go. Why? I had no idea. Perhaps I was drawn by my love for the sights, smells, and sounds of homeschool conventions. I love seeing the booths, the books, and the people who labor to create materials for our families. There's always something new that will, in a few years, be "the thing" everyone must have. I like seeing it first, hearing its details from the newly published, nervous author. I relish the experience of seeing thousands of people gathered with a common purpose, people who have given up lives of leisure and still, clean houses in order to pour into their children's lives.

Or maybe I went because conventions are the social event of the year, where I see homeschool moms that I lost track of years ago, as well as the friends I see regularly whose children band together with mine, roaming the aisles with their walkie-talkies and crisp ten-dollar bills to spend on books or science baubles. We moms leisurely stroll about, catching up on each other's lives, and "do lunch" together at Chick-Fil-A®. We always have a glorious time. All of this may have motivated me to go; however, before long I learned the real reason the Lord had me there. As usual, it wasn't

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about me, after all. God had me there to be available to those who, like me years ago, are anxiously looking for someone to steer them in the right direction, whether to persuade their hearts to be at peace, or to guide them toward the best spelling curriculum for a particular child. God wanted me, who'd for so long been missing in action, right in the middle of the action—where I was needed most. I was now a new kind of MIA: mentoring in action.

Many moms just needed someone to tell them it was okay not to teach grammar in second grade or that they were perfectly qualified to give their middle schooler an excellent education. I sought to calm their fears concerning academics, discipline, motivation, and everything in between. I found myself asking questions to help them choose the right curriculum or simply putting my arm around their shoulders to pray for strength and for God to lead them. Later, I reunited with my companions only to learn that they were doing the same thing I was. We thought we were going to the convention to socialize, yet God had a different plan for us.

By the end of the conference, we had separately counseled, advised, and prayed for many women, including one ready to give up on homeschooling. It was a wonderful revelation to her that she could trust God to lead her to

the curriculum He wanted for her family. How many other moms gave up on homeschooling that day because they had no one to fill their hearts with courage and cheer them on to continue the journey with the help of God, who promises, "And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, 'This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left'" (Isaiah 30:21). We need to tell them that this promise applies to buying curriculum and getting through each day of their lives. He will guide us just as He promises, if we let Him.

Conventions Need Experienced Homeschool Moms

The astonishing thing is that there were so many books and curricula available— so many titles and companies—yet so few advisors for the hundreds of moms that meandered through each booth. Once upon a time, homeschool conventions were bursting at the seams with experienced homeschool moms, all wizened women who could calm the fears of the neophytes. Today, conventions are populated with resellers, huge discounters, young single employees, colleges looking to recruit, and sometimes people so concerned with selling that they miss the opportunity to minister. Sparsely scattered are the booths of judicious women who can steer women's hearts to seek God, looking beyond this "method" or that "model" and consider individually the children whom God has given them. Because of this, those of us who have a few years under our belts are so needed to fill the role of mentor at the homeschool conventions. Though we may no longer need conventions, the conventions desperately need us. These conventions are overflowing with wide-eyed, frightened, and frantic mothers, who worry that they will ruin their children forever by not selecting just the right curriculum.

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Rescue Mission: Our Local Homeschool Convention

As you know, I really didn't go to the convention intending to fulfill my role as a mentor. It just happened that way, and in fact, I didn't even realize the extent of it until a month later when a young mother approached me at church, exclaiming, "I just want to thank you for all the help you were to me at the convention. We love the grammar curriculum you recommended for my girls. Thanks for taking the time to talk to me!" I'd always wanted to mentor this sweet mother but never had the time. At that moment I realized that, for once, I had not been missing in action

when I was most needed. Undeniably, my little snippets of counsel clearly had a lasting impact; whether in small things, like which grammar curriculum to use, or in big things, like whether to continue homeschooling. It's humbling to realize that I went without a plan to encourage new homeschoolers, but God was able to use me anyway. How much more could He have used me if I had been prayerful and purposeful when attending the convention? Though I enjoyed the time I spent encouraging and advising the women I knew, I could have allowed the Lord full reign of my thoughts, plans, words, and actions, asking Him to lead to me those who most needed encouragement, those who were extra burdened—even women I didn't know. I could have been His vessel to use for His purposes as He wished.

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Despite the fact that many of us find ourselves delinquent when it comes to mentoring, I believe we can make a huge difference by just showing up where we are most needed, on that rescue mission—if you will—to our local homeschool convention. Not only will it delight us to be there for personal reasons, but it will delight the Lord to use us for higher purposes in His mighty plan to strengthen

those mothers whom He has called out of the world to pour His Truth into the next generation. Indeed, the Lord has proclaimed that rivers of living water should overflow from us so that others will find refreshment; He desires that older women teach the younger women; He wants us to encourage one another so that none of us will be hardened by the deceiver (John 7:38, Hebrews 3:13). Though we, as homeschool moms, are busier than ever before, we can pass out little bits of wisdom: "a word spoken in due season, how good it is!" (Proverbs 15:23). A few simple words of encouragement could have lasting eternal value for generations.

Let's look forward to this convention season together. Besides the joy of seeing old friends, admiring all the amazing books around us, and checking in with our kids on the walkie-talkie, we can prayerfully have our eyes and ears attentive to the voice of God, and to those special moments when a conversation with a stranger or a friend may provide us the opportunity to live out God's calling upon our life to disciple others. I believe that we will be able to fulfill God's purpose in our lives to be "as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land" (Isaiah 32:2).

Further Resources

- ✓ [2009 Homeschool Conferences and Conventions](#)
- ✓ Audio Book: [Homeschool Dialogues](#)
- ✓ Audio Book: [Secrets of Successful Homeschooling](#)
- ✓ [Easy Homeschooling Companion](#)
- ✓ [Homeschooling: The Journey is the Reward](#)



*Jeannie Fulbright is a homeschooling mother of four ranging in age from high school to second grade. She dedicates much of her time to encouraging homeschool parents and students to grow in their love for God and strengthening them to successfully homeschool. In addition to authoring the **Apologia** elementary science series Exploring Creation with Astronomy, Botany, Zoology I, II, and III, and Anatomy (available 2009), which are in-depth, Creation science courses that follow a Charlotte Mason approach for ages seven to twelve, she speaks throughout the U.S., and sends out an occasional newsletter with tips for homeschooling. Visit her website at www.JeannieFulbright.com to read her encouraging articles or to contact her for questions or speaking queries.*

Appendix

How to Begin Homeschooling

- 1. Discuss With Your Spouse:** Educating your child at home is a huge decision and should be one that is made with your spouse. Do not begin unless you are in agreement about this decision. You will need the support of your spouse not only at the beginning, but also throughout the year.
- 2. Research the Homeschool Laws Applicable in your Area:** Be fully aware of the legal requirements before you begin and especially before you take a child out of public school. For the U.S., each state's legal requirements can be found on the www.HomeschoolLegal.com website. Internationally, refer to www.HSLDA.org.
- 3. Research Styles of Home Education:** There is no single right way to educate your child at home; however, there are many differing philosophies you may want to consider.
 - **Charlotte Mason:** Based on a method introduced by nineteenth-century educator Charlotte Mason, this approach includes nature studies/journaling, narration, and living books.
 - **Classical:** Based on Dorothy Sayers' *The Lost Tools of Learning*, in which child development is broken up into three "stages" of learning commonly called "the Trivium."
 - **Delight Directed:** This puts the learning in the hands of the child, based on his or her interests. Parents help facilitate this type of learning with appropriate instructional materials.
 - **Eclectic:** A mix of philosophies and curricula to accommodate each child's abilities and interests. Parents choose from any method or style only those components that fit their specific needs.
 - **The Principle Approach:** An approach based on the principles of our Founding Fathers and an emphasis on God's Word as the basis for every subject.
 - **Traditional Textbook:** Normally uses a full-range, packaged, textbook-type curriculum that also may include a scope and sequence, testing, and recordkeeping.
 - **Unit Studies:** All or most core subjects are covered while studying any one topic or unit of study, using a variety of resources and supplemental activities.
 - **Unschooling:** A relaxed setting where learning is directed by the child. Parts of this philosophy are based on research by John Taylor Gatto and John Holt.

- 4. Find Support:** After finding your style of choice (or a mix of more than one choice), you may want to choose a support group that reflects that specific style or just a general homeschool support group in your area. Meeting with other home educators offers encouragement as well as knowledge and assistance with your homeschool questions. Often, organized classes or activities for your children are offered through support groups as well. For information about homeschool support groups in your area, check these listings:

U.S.:

www.TheHomeschoolMagazine.com/Homeschool_Nations/State_Listings.php
www.HomeschoolLegal.com

UK:

<http://www.home-service.org/>
<http://www.heas.org.uk/>

New Zealand:

<http://www.che.org.nz/>
<http://hef.org.nz/>
<http://www.ahe.org.nz/>
<http://www.homeschoolers.wellington.net.nz/>
<http://community.library.org.nz/cgi-bin/display.pl?id=296>

Guam:

www.HomeschoolBlogger.com/guam
<http://www.tumon.com/ghsa>

Australia:

<http://www.hea.asn.au/hea/>

Canada:

www.shbe.info
www.machs.mb.ca
www.aheaonline.com
<http://nshea.webcentre.ca/>
<http://www.eho.org/support/canada.asp>

- 5. Gather Resources:** Some families start with a complete curriculum package, while others start with a notebook and a library card. Choosing your resources depends on your style or method of education and your own interests. If you are financially burdened, there are free homeschooling resources on the web, as well as discounted, used books in abundance.

You Can Do This! Parents around the world are taking back their God-given responsibility to educate their children, and you can too. We have developed two downloads to help you get started:

- ✓ **Homeschool With Confidence**
- ✓ **Simple Recipes for Successful Homeschooling**

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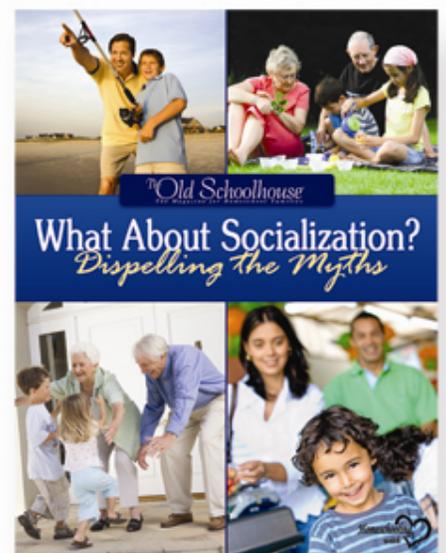
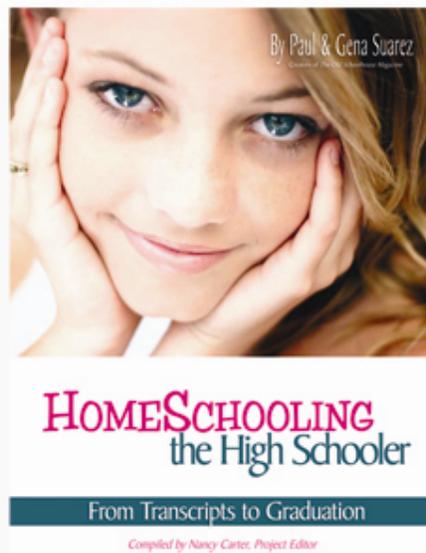
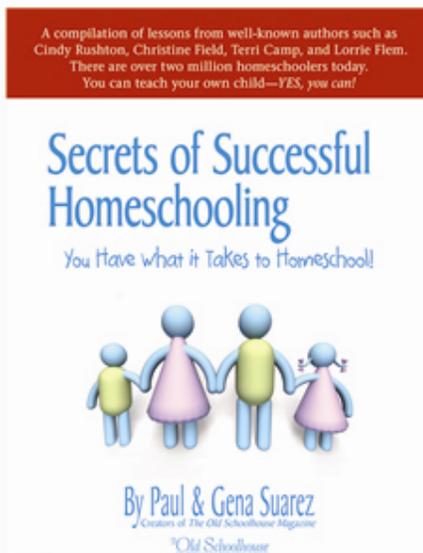
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