

Your 12-Year-Old *Still* Can't Read?!

Lisa Baughn

“Never give up and never let your child give up. Period. End of story.” (Emily Baughn)

Solomon tells us in Ecclesiastes that there is an appointed time for everything. *“To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.” (Ecclesiastes 3:1)* God is sovereign and He has appointed a time for all things, and that includes reading!

When we begin homeschooling, we all start with hopes and dreams. We submit our plans, children, and lives to the Lord and begin, confident that all will work out well. They are His children.

Throughout the Bible, we are admonished to read His perfect, inspired Word and to write it on our hearts. We automatically assume that our children will read; after all, how can they know His Word if they cannot read it? Our daughter Emily started out as an incredibly bright child, well on her way to law school in kindergarten. Inquisitive, funny, full of life, she was a delight. At the very least, she would be gifted, smart like her big sister Krista, able to learn things easily.

Imagine our surprise when she was unable to learn to read in public school kindergarten or after transferring into private Christian school for first grade. Her AWANA leader, a schoolteacher, made it a point to tell us how dumb she was and that she needed to be held back.

Emily slowly began withdrawing into a prison of inability. What had happened to our bright, gifted, funny child? Emily went on to struggle for years before finally beginning to read in the middle of seventh grade, at age 12.

When Mom is the teacher and the child isn't reading, there are waves of tremendous anxiety, guilt, shame, and fear for both the child and parents.

Satan works overtime to inspire insecurity, encouraging Mom to give up, put that child back in school, and “leave him to the experts where he belongs.” Friends and family can add to the confusion, and the “obvious answer” is always “put him back in school.”

As the years tick by, the reading doesn't come, and homeschooling becomes focused on figuring out what is wrong and fixing it. We change curriculum, try a new phonics program each year, go from simple to exotic bells and whistles, everyone in the family does flashcards to reinforce concepts, games, and workbooks—all are tried with the struggling learner. Life can become a confusing mass of doctors' appointments, specialists, diagnosis, and treatments.

Emily's brain was like a colander. Information flowed through it, filtering down through the holes—gone forever down the drain. She was diagnosed with dyslexia, dysgraphia, perceptual motor difficulties, auditory processing, right- and left-brain glitches . . . or is it ADHD? Learning specialists recommended additional programs, strategies, and exercises to help increase learning.

We adapted an organic diet and looked for food allergies. (Find specifics on what we did at www.ThePrudentWife.com.) Everyone recommended books. We traipsed to every convention,

conference, and person who might be able to help.

When your child struggles to read, a wilderness of information confronts you at every turn. If you have a checkbook or an insurance card, someone will have a solution. You pray and beg God to help, constantly bringing your child to the throne of grace. At times, He can *seem* silent. Be encouraged! Throughout that seeming silence, God is busy building character, strength, and perseverance in both of you.

Years later, we see how the Lord prepared us to grow the mind of our struggling learner. A few weeks after we started homeschooling, we attended a Carole Joy Seid seminar. Carole was amazing and so very reassuring, talking about developing your own philosophy of homeschooling, sharing the ideas of Raymond Moore and Ruth Beechick, encouraging us that later was better than early. We did not want to inoculate our children against learning by forcing it too fast. We agreed: learning was to be a joy! Carole challenged us to not let media run our kids' lives, to use great caution and limit it. She encouraged us to read aloud with our children, to foster a love of great literature by reading the best books.

We firmly believed that education was the lighting of a fire, not the filling of a bucket. We felt the freedom to experiment. We wanted to make our homeschool different, creative, to really consider the natural bents of our children and create an environment that encouraged and nurtured them. We have always told our girls that the Lord has a plan and purpose for their lives, and finding that purpose is one of the reasons we homeschool. God created them for His good pleasure, and He created them unique and special.

Since so many families have a struggling reader and *wonder* what goes on in the mind of their child, I briefly interviewed my almost-14-year-old daughter Emily, who has been reading fluently for only a year and a half. Passionately, she encourages you to never give up on your child, to run the course. You will reap the reward in the end.

Interview With Emily

- *What helped you endure the eight-year struggle to read?*

My mom always told me that God had a time for me to read. She encouraged me and told me how good it would be when I could read. My mom was patient. She didn't force, yet she still pushed me on, gently, and always encouraging me.

- *How did you feel when you could not read?*

I did not realize everything I was missing out on all those years. Sometimes I felt stupid inside, because I couldn't read and a bunch of younger kids could. But it is better to do something when you are ready for it than to force it. When you are ready—you will read and love it. If forced into it, you don't want to do it any more. I love to read now. I read all the time. My mom has to force me to go to bed at night!

- *What have been your favorite things in homeschooling?*

My favorite things are Civil War reenacting, putting the story circles on the map in *Five in a Row*, when my mom allowed me to play with money instead of blocks for math, all the books on tape or CD, and when Mama allowed me to do tax stuff (yes, a dyslexic kid helping with taxes!). I loved Bible

study and anything having to do with the Bible. Even though I could not read other books, I could kind of read the Bible. As long as I can read the Bible, the only book that really matters, I am okay. It has everything—a history book, how to live your life, everything you need to know, and even some math problems that you have to figure out.

- *What did your parents do right in your struggle to learn?*

They allowed and encouraged me to listen to books on tape, which encouraged me to read. I got the whole *Elsie Dinsmore series* in books and the first three books on CD. If I wanted to know what happened later, I had to read them to find out.

- *How did your parents keep the world open for you?*

By talking to me as though I was a person, not a stupid little child (like others did who knew I could not read). I knew one day I would read, and I didn't worry. I loved to pretend to play library, bookstore, and restaurant—anything that had to do with money or scanning. Doing math on paper is hard, but dealing with money is real.

We were able to do crafts, to sew real things, make quilts, and have fun homeschooling. Homeschooling is not a boring thing; it's different than "school at home." With "school at home," you give your child a book, and he does it. With homeschool, that is where you make the schoolwork come alive and then it isn't schoolwork because it is everyday living.

My mom made it fun. With *Five in a Row*, she read to me on the couch, and then we put the story circles on the map in the hallway. Every child should do that. (Mom's note: I had flare-ups of impatience—bought every phonics program, book, game, and flashcard known to man—and we went through them. We did six years of phonics, and Emily doesn't remember *any* of it—just the party with cupcakes at the end of a book. I was sure I made her crazy, and she doesn't remember *any* of that!)

- *What is the best advice you could give to other parents who have struggling learners?*

Never give up and never let your child give up. Period. End of story. No matter how many times you want to, or how much better it sounds to send your child off to school—don't. Homeschooling your child is the best thing in the world.

The Lord's Faithfulness

Eight years later, we can look back on the Lord's absolute faithfulness. There have been many struggles—days we felt like quitting, situations that overwhelmed us—but He was always there. What He calls us to do, He is faithful to equip us to complete in a myriad of ways. It may just be manna for the day, or it may be a miraculous change of heart. He perfectly models the relationship we are to build with our own children, and homeschooling gives us the freedom to pursue it.

May the Lord bless and keep you. Remember, the *joy* of the Lord is your strength!

Biographical Information

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Lisa loves to teach inductive Bible study, encourage other moms who have struggling learners, and teach women how to save time, money, and effort. More can be found at her website (www.ThePrudentWife.com), including articles and recipes about Building a Better Brain and specifics on what the Baughn family has tried over the years. Lisa is available to speak on many topics at conferences and conventions. Keep up on the adventures in Emily's life at her website (www.EmilyBaughn.com), and remember to never give up hope!