



Building Joy

In the six volumes of her *Home Education Series*, Charlotte Mason speaks of joy over 270 times. This is not surprising, for the consistent experience of joy is essential to a child's well-being. Through experience, parents and teachers know how difficult it is to help the sullen child move forward. Ms. Mason would take it a step farther, arguing that "The happiness of the child is the condition of his progress." Thus, "his lessons should be joyous and that occasions of friction in the schoolroom are greatly to be deprecated."

It is important to distinguish between "pleasing" our students and "joy-building." There is a kind of "pleasing" which occurs when we give a child what she wants. But this type of pleasing is ephemeral. It lasts only until the child's next "chance desire." We have seen far too many children enslaved by their own desires, unable to accept "no", and tyrannized by the denial of any desire. Such children could never be described as "joy-full." (In no way am I suggesting that we never grant a child her desires. It's just that such "pleasing" is secondary to more important concerns.)

There is another kind of "pleasing." It is the deep interpersonal delight, which we call joy. Joy is the first emotion sought by an infant. For a newborn, the concrete symbol of joy is the delight in a parent's face. An infant responds to the parent's delight with his/her own delight. Such delight stimulates and cultivates the joy centers of the brain. The face of a delighted parent symbolizes to an infant "it is good to be me (the infant) with you (the parent)." Joy cannot be experienced apart from a relationship with another.

But let us consider; the infant is exquisitely aware of every mood of his mother, the little face clouds with grief or beams with joy in response to the expression of hers. The two left to themselves have rare games. He jumps and pulls, crows and chuckles, crawls and kicks and gurgle with joy; and, amid all the play, is taught what he may not do. Hands and feet, legs and arms, fingers and toes, are continually going while he is awake; mouth, eyes and ears are agog. All is play without intention, and mother plays with baby as glad as he. (Charlotte Mason)

While joy-building must be an authentic interpersonal process and cannot be fabricated by a series of artificial steps, none-the-less, parents and teachers would do well to cultivate the following habits*:

- Smile whenever you greet your children or students and use sincere voice tones.
- Each week, take the time to invite each one individually to tell you truthfully how he/she is doing and what he/she is thinking. Listen intently without interrupting.
- Take a sincere interest in really knowing each of your children and students. Work hard to understand their fears, joys, hopes, passions, talents, and pain.

- Always treat these with dignity and respect. End discussions in a manner which affirms—neither deny a failure when a failure has occurred nor abandon a student to failure.
- Use appropriate touch appropriately: Grasp a hand, link arms, place a hand on the shoulder, hug younger children.
- Discover what brings each of your children and students joy: A time to talk, an encouraging note, a helping hand. Custom fit attempts to bring joy.
- When a student's eyes "light up," catch his/her eye. Allow yourself to share the joy and reflect it back. Joy builds as glances go back and forth.
- Cherish every child, establishing through words and actions that you are genuinely glad to be with him. If tragically there should be a student whom you struggle to cherish, own it as a profound defect of your own heart and humbly seek help.

As a final note, many a marriage could be spared, many a friendship deepened, and many a working alliance strengthened by the regular practice of these "joy-building" disciplines.

*Adapted from *The Life Model: Living from the Heart Jesus Gave You* by Friesen, Wilder et. al.