

# Delight-Directed Studies

## *In This Chapter*

- ◆ Defining delight-directed learning.
- ◆ Delight-directed studies are Biblical.
- ◆ Sample of the delight-directed method used with multiple ages.
- ◆ Delight-directed combined with the four-step cycle of learning.

All children love to learn—at least before they go to school! Anyone who has been around babies, toddlers, and preschool children has seen that they are constantly seeking out new things to explore—to see, hear, touch, smell, and especially taste! But by the time a toddler becomes a teenager, all too often, their love of learning has been squelched, many times leaving a sullen student, slumped in the back of a classroom while a teacher tries to pour meaningless facts into their mind.

A delight-directed study is like a wonderful fire in the mind of a student. It starts small, but as it grows, it begins to consume vast amounts of information until it bursts into a roaring blaze of insight, understanding, and creativity. It takes on a life of its own.

—Gregg Harris

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The forced learning that takes place in many of our schools today can destroy the natural love for learning that all children are born with. Children and teenagers who are locked into studying something they find boring behave no differently than adults who are locked into boring, irrelevant meetings at work. If adults cannot see the relevance of the material covered in a meeting, they will either tune out or drop out—in much the same way that children will if they do not see how the subject being studied relates to the concerns of their lives. Would you, for example, be reading this book if it were entitled *Basic Plumbing Concepts*? Probably not—unless your kitchen sink were leaking or you had a basement full of water! If that were the case, you would probably be participating in a delight-directed study of your own!

A large part of the Heart of Wisdom philosophy of education involves the concept of delight-directed studies. This is an active, learner-centered approach. There is an interactive relationship between teachers, learners, and the resources used that involves learners in making significant decisions about how and what they will learn, how they will assess what they learn, and how they will use what they have learned in meaningful ways. In sum, your children's education needs to be guided by what delights them, not just by a textbook or a set curriculum. This will not only stimulate them in the here and now, but will foster within them their inborn natural love of learning, and inspire them to make learning a lifelong pursuit.

Delight-directed learning places students in charge of their own learning process, helping them to discover what they want to accomplish and then giving them the tools they need to get it done. The delight-directed approach uses the student's own natural curiosity as a strong motivator, and basic skills such as reading, writing, and researching are learned during the process of examining the topic of interest. Less control by the parent or teacher can actually mean more learning!

Gregg Harris describes the delight-directed approach, "The child's delight is the spark that ignites everything. Once established, like a fire, it is self-sustaining. The student begins to study for his own personal satisfaction, and the fruits of his study begin to flow outward to others. This approach is especially helpful for the child who has become burned out on school because it can reignite his love for learning. But delight-directed study is more than just a method of remedial instruction; as we shall see, it is the foundation for all true scholarship. Once the basic concepts of delight are understood, the approach is easy to implement."<sup>1</sup>

Remember, the core focus in the Heart of Wisdom approach is God-directed, and the central focus of each day is Bible study. We blend the delight-directed method with the four-step lessons (in the study of both God's Word and God's world) by allowing

learners to make choices that grow out of their interests and concerns. Learners of all ages can and will make good choices and contribute meaningfully when they are regularly given, with proper preparation and within developmentally appropriate boundaries, opportunities to participate in making decisions that will affect their lives.

If we allow our children free choice in what they want to learn, they can then concentrate on learning what they may actually need in their lives; and freedom to choose what not to study provides the freedom to learn more about what they care about, including the freedom to explore new interests.

## Defining Delight-Directed Learning

Marilyn Howshall provides one of the best definitions and explanations of delight-directed learning:

To delight in something is *to take a high degree of pleasure or satisfaction of mind in something*. Delight is of a permanent nature as opposed to fun, or a sudden burst of joy which lasts for the moment. There is no moral nature to delight. It is neither good nor bad. Rather it is the object of delight that will determine its moral quality or educational value. Children will delight in something whether it is fruitless, divertive entertainment, or something of educational value. With this in mind, delight as a vital sign must be viewed with the goal that the thing delighted in has dimension, substance, quality, and purpose.

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The child's personal interests in life should not be looked upon as having mere fringe educational benefits, but should be recognized as central to his development. These interests can give direction to his future studies, and provide current opportunities for rich spiritual lessons. Likewise, the parent can draw from the child's interests for the content needed to develop his language skills. As one interest is allowed to develop, it will begin a natural overflow into other areas of interest and into a more mature expression as the child develops. *You will not reap a learning delight in your children if you attempt to prematurely expect all their activities to yield a polished product.* Quality products that are a true outgrowth of the child's learning pursuits require time to surface...

Delight's counterfeit comes in the form of anything that is fun for the moment. Enjoying or simply being agreeable to an activity that has been

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parent-generated is not the same as taking delight in it. Often the parent is making stabs in the dark in her effort to provide educational experiences for her child. In fact, too many activities of this nature, in which the child never goes beyond surface curiosity or interest, may actually keep the void in his life from being recognized and effectively addressed.

Destructive forces of boredom may be present within the home. If this is true, then it may be necessary to begin tempering less desirable interests and indulgences, while at the same time directing activity into more fruitful areas. This can be a challenge with adolescents whose value systems are already set. Approaching change within the context of their personal relationship with God is the best place to begin. A pure, teachable heart is essential to developing a learning delight and [delight in the] learning process—first in ourselves, then in our children.<sup>2</sup>

## Delight-Directed Studies Are Biblical

When the indulgence factor is removed from delight-directed study, it becomes a highly biblical form of education. The Scriptures instruct parents to recognize that each child is a unique individual, with a way of learning already established and grounded within him that needs to be recognized, acknowledged, and encouraged by means of the truth of Scripture.

*Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.*  
—Proverbs 22:6 (emphasis mine)

This verse reveals that a parent's training of their children must be based on knowing their children. In the original Hebrew text, a personal pronoun is attached to the noun *way*, and it actually reads his way, not simply in the way he should go. The word *way* here is the Hebrew word *derek*, which means way, road, journey, or manner.<sup>3</sup> Parents need to recognize the way, or manner, each of their children is bent by the way or manner God has designed each of them. If parents fail to recognize this in their children, they may also fail to launch their children into God's plan for their lives.

## Get to Know Your Children

Because delight-directed studies build as much of the child's education as possible on their interests rather than a set course of study from a generic textbook or workbook, it is

imperative for a parent to get to know their children—to begin to see them with new eyes of understanding.

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Learn what makes your child tick. What is that activity or interest that they tend to gravitate toward time after time? What motivates them to learn? What is truly the inner delight of their life? What gifts and talents has God given to them that are unique to them alone? *Who has God created them to be?*

God has a unique plan for your child’s life—and He has breathed into them the gifts and talents that they will need to accomplish His purpose. The challenge is in discovering them—unearthing them from beneath the piles of textbooks and curricula that threaten to squelch them out of existence—and then developing them for the glory of God.

*For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.—Ephesians 2:10*

God has prepared unique works for your child to perform. Your job is to prepare the child to complete those tasks, and the best way to do that is through delight-directed studies. The spark that God has placed within your child will be the thing that evokes their own enthusiasm for certain topics and ideas—and you can then begin to prepare them for their life ahead by fostering that enthusiasm and causing it to grow.

## How Can You Use This Method With a Structured Plan?

Is it possible to allow a child to study what he wants and still be sure you cover all the bases? Can you instruct using the delight-directed method with a structured curriculum plan? Yes, and yes. The delight-directed method flows beautifully with the four-step cycle of instruction in all Heart of Wisdom unit studies.

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Each lesson can be skimmed, covering the basic concepts, while allowing the time needed to dwell on the things that delight the student. It’s like introducing new foods—the child won’t know if he likes or dislikes a food until he tries it. If it’s not his cup of tea, you can move quickly on to the next lesson, always looking for a spark of interest. Once you notice the spark, fan it until it grows into a flame.

*Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark.—James 1:5.*

## Planning and Looking for the Spark

Delight-directed learning, with a set plan like Heart of Wisdom unit studies, begins by allowing children to be a part of the planning process. During the planning phase, allow the student to participate in choosing the resources for that unit (fiction novel, colorful reference book, video, Internet site, interactive multi-media, etc.). It's very possible that a child might balk at the unit as a whole but later find a spark in one of the individual lessons. To continue with the food analogy, a child might, say, groan over something he sees cooking, but after a taste, finds it pleasing to his palate.

### Example

Mother is teaching Jenny (fifteen), John (thirteen), and Joseph (ten) a unit on the Middle Ages. During the unit planning the three decide together on the resources. They look through the resources at Homeschool-Books.com or in the back of this book at the Middle Ages Resources. The three choose *Kingfisher Illustrated Encyclopedia*, and *Eyewitness Medieval Life* from their home library. Mother orders a novel, *The Door in the Wall* (from the library or a vendor) to read aloud during the unit. While reviewing the lessons the children show the most interest in knights, castles, and medieval feasts. Before the unit begins they will pick up books on these topics from the library.

Several opportunities will occur during the steps in each lesson to bring into play the delight-directed methods. Let's look at an example of how each of the three children might discover their own level of interest in the lesson on knights.

### Unit: Middle Ages. Lesson: Knights

1. In Step One (Excite) Mother is watching each student for a spark. Step One activities evoke feedback which shows how interested each child is in the topic and suggests the possible duration of the lesson. As they brainstorm to make lists, John and Joshua both show an intense interest in this topic.
2. In Step Two, Mother reads the provided text in the unit, and then turns to the resources chosen during the unit planning phase. She reads aloud from the suggested pages in the *Kingfisher Illustrated Encyclopedia* and *Eyewitness Medieval Life*. John and Joseph spend time reading through the suggested web sites and library resources, and print out several illustrations of a knight's armor and weapons. Jenny also browses the Internet sites and chooses an image of a knight to add to her portfolio, but she leaves the boys to explore the sites as she moves on to Step Three assignments.
3. In Step Three, Mother allows each child to choose an activity:

- John (13) chooses to complete a writing assignment. Mother encourages this assignment because he needs more writing practice and he enjoys this topic. John writes a separate draft paragraph for each of several topics: tournaments, jousting, suits of armor, crossbows, and the Crusades. He searches or uses the Internet to find illustrations for each summary.
- Joseph (10) chooses to create a shield with a coat of arms. He uses colored pencils to design a coat of arms similar to those he viewed from the resources. He then makes the shield from cardboard and pastes or glues the coat of arms onto the shield.
- Jenny is not as interested in this topic so she copies a paragraph from *Eyewitness Medieval Life* and moves on to a math lesson (more about Jenny later).

4. In Step Four the students choose how they will share their work.

- During this step, Mother and John are busy revising and correcting John's drafts. After the corrections John glues illustrations to the summary pages and includes them in his portfolio. He chooses to add more on this topic to his portfolio and shares it with his grandparents.
- Joseph shows his shield to his father and explains his coat of arms.
- Jenny adds her writing and illustrations to her portfolio and shares the work with her brothers.

In this example all three children have learned about knights. John has obviously learned the most. We know all three have learned significantly more than they would in a typical school where the children would read perhaps one boring paragraph about knights.

John and Joseph will continue on this topic in the coming weeks by choosing a novel and/or illustrated reference books from the library on knights, or by learning more from the Internet. Their wise mother will continue to fan the flame as long as the fire burns (weeks or months). If no spark had appeared during this lesson the amount of time spent on this lesson would have been dramatically different.

Jenny did not do a lot with the lesson on knights because she did not have a spark of interest. Later, however, Jenny's spark shows up in the "Food in the Middle Ages" lesson. She ends up spending several hours researching and planning an authentic medieval feast for her family. She designs an elaborate menu for her portfolio and reads the library book *Medieval Feasts* to Joshua.

## Four-Steps Summary

1. During Step One, look for the spark.
2. In Step Two, the spark will be your signal to encourage your student(s) to go on to more resources. If the lesson ignites a spark for one child and not another (which will probably be the case) don't force all the students into spending time on further study. Take a trip to the library, or order books, or allow computer time for Internet research.
3. In Step Three, allow each child to choose the activity in which to do something with what he or she just learned.
4. In Step Four, allow each child to choose how to share the material.

While your children are given the freedom to choose their courses of study, they are also given parameters within which they must work.

Teaching is much more than providing facts—real teaching means causing to learn. The delight-directed methods work when we provide opportunities for meaningful experiences, and then wait and watch for moments when children's eyes light up. Then they're off and running, determined and motivated to learn!

## Delight-Directed Does Not Equal Indulgence!

An immediate misconception arises in many parents' minds when they hear the term *delight-directed*, and that misconception will remain unless and until the term is defined properly. To allow your child's education to be delight-directed does not mean that you as the parent/teacher will no longer have any say in what will be studied!

In the Heart of Wisdom teaching approach the parent presents the material and looks for the spark at the same time. It is essential to maintain a consistent routine. We do not encourage allowing children to follow just any path of learning that delights them, with no rhyme, reason or pattern to guide them. While your children are given the freedom to choose their courses of study, they are also given parameters within which they must work.

Terry Camp explains the freedom in the delight-directed approach in her delightful book *Ignite the Fire*:

FIRE stands for Freedom Is Real Education. What do I mean by freedom? I do not mean allowing our children to have ultimate liberty. I do not mean that we allow our children to play computer games ceaselessly. I do not mean our children are allowed

to watch movies, even “good” movies all day long. The History Channel has some great educational programs on it, but it will not teach our children to think and grow for themselves. Instead, it will develop in them a passive learning process. An occasional show or two will not harm them, but if it becomes your habit to “see if there’s something good on,” then your children are missing out. I would rather they never watch anything than that they become educational vegetables.

Delight-directed does not mean indulging every whim and fancy of the child. Godly child training includes a disciplined—not a haphazard—lifestyle.

The freedom that I refer to is a freedom that comes only from following God. *Now the Lord is the Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.*  
—II Corinthians 3:17

Galatians chapter 5 is a great chapter on freedom. It begins, *It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery* (5:1). Verses 13 through 15 say, *You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command. Love your neighbor as yourself. If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.*

What does this mean for me in light of homeschooling? It means that I have had my yoke taken from me. Christ has set me free from my burdens. As a homeschooling mom trying to follow a standard curriculum, I found myself bound. I found myself burdened. It wasn’t until I gave up our homeschooling to Jesus, that I once again found that freedom.

I often found myself wanting to study a certain area with my children, but I felt confined by the books I was using. I felt like I was giving them more work in what I felt was an already overloaded day. I was finding myself struggling with the promptings of the Holy Spirit in my life. He would prompt me to study a certain area with the children, and I would reason that there just wasn’t enough time.

Now that I am turning to the Lord FIRST, I find the promptings from Him get done. It’s a great feeling knowing that your children are learning what the Holy Spirit wants them to learn.<sup>4</sup>

Children need boundaries, and they need guidance in the learning process. Delight-directed does not mean indulging every whim and fancy of the child. Godly child training includes a disciplined—not a haphazard—lifestyle. Delight-directed studies need to take place in a routine—however flexible—that is orderly and makes sense.

In addition, it is important to note that the delights that this chapter refers to are not necessarily objects (such as dolls, Legos, or bicycles), but they are those ideas, activities, and interests that spark the child's enthusiasm about learning something new.

## **Individualized Education**

In *Engines for Education*, Roger Schank, from The Institute for the Learning Sciences, explains the importance of individualized education:

Depending on an individual's situation and goals, there are many things that might be worth learning. In order to give a very detailed prescription for what knowledge a student should acquire, we must take into account that not every child will need or want to do the same things. A curriculum must therefore be individualized. It must be built around an understanding of what situations a particular learner might want to be in, or might have to be in later in life, and what abilities he will require in those situations.

Nevertheless, for many people, the notion of mandating the same knowledge for every student is appealing. Building lists of facts that one claims everyone should know is relatively simple to do. Furthermore, there is the attraction of providing standards that can be easily measured. But from the perspective of the teacher and the student, this approach spells trouble. Each mandated bit of knowledge removes more local control and drives the system towards fixed curricula and standardized tests, which not only diminishes teacher flexibility but also student choice, and therefore, student interest and initiative.

When we ask how our children are doing in school, we usually mean, "Are they measuring up to the prevailing standards?" rather than, "Are they having a good time and feeling excited about learning?"

In public schools from first through twelfth grades, much of the classroom routine is shaped by an emphasis on rote learning, a strict adherence to standardized textbooks and workbooks, and a curriculum that is often enforced with drill and practice. The methods and the curriculum are molded by the questions that appear on the standardized achievement tests administered to every child from the fourth grade on. Success no longer means being able to do. Success comes to mean "academic success," a matter of learning to function within the system, of learning the "correct" answer, and of doing well at multiple-choice exams. Success also means, sadly, learning not to ask difficult questions. When we ask how our children are doing in school, we usually mean, "Are they measuring up to the prevailing

standards?” rather than, “Are they having a good time and feeling excited about learning?”

We should purpose to be flexible in the way we try to tap into our children’s innate interests. When we are interacting with the student we can evaluate whether learning has taken place. If one approach doesn’t work, we can drop it and try another.<sup>5</sup>

## Delight-Directed Learning in Real Life

All of this may sound wonderful to you, but you may be asking, “How can I make this work in real life?” We all want the education of our children to have meaning beyond just circling the correct answer on an exam or filling in the blanks correctly in a workbook. *Delight-directed learning in real life means to look at the entirety of life as your child’s curriculum, to help them find what they are interested in, and then allow them to dig in as deeply as they want.* Learning this way is never dumbed down, and children can rise quickly to levels beyond a traditional high-school education. Because the learning process belongs to them, they begin to care about developing skills like writing and reading comprehension. They *want* to improve and know more about the subjects that interest them, and they spend most of their waking hours actually learning.

Delight-directed learning in real life means to look at the entirety of life as your child’s curriculum, to help them find what they are interested in, and then allow them to dig in as deeply as they want to.

This type of learning is not inferior to a traditional education in any way—in fact, it is superior, because a love of learning is being fostered rather than rote facts being memorized. In real life, however, it can take more dedication on the part of the parent/teacher to make it work, because the education of every child in the family will be very different, based on their talents, interests, and speed of learning.

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Doesn’t delight-directed learning sound like fun? The good news is—it is, and it should be fun! That’s what delight-directed study is all about: putting the delight back into the educational process and fostering children who love to learn and who will make learning a lifelong avocation.

For more details see [Heart of Wisdom.com](http://HeartofWisdom.com)