

# If I had only one more year to teach my children...

*As a tool in helping parents to draw together priorities for their children's instruction, Ruth Bechick offers a question. The homeschool author and holder of a doctorate in teaching and curriculum tells us to ask ourselves, "If I had only one more year to teach my children, what would I teach them this year?" In 1573, Janneken Munstdorp of the city of Antwerpen (today, Antwerp, Belgium) answered a similar question. She and her husband, Hans, were imprisoned and condemned to death for their faith in the gospel. Separated and in prison after only six months of marriage, she later gave birth to their first and only child, a daughter. She named her baby after herself, Janneken.*

*Her martyred husband gone, her sweet infant smuggled out of prison to the safety of believing friends, the young mother waited day after day for her own execution. Yet, her remaining time on earth was ample for her to consider and record the most important things she wanted to pass on to her daughter, in a very long and precious letter. As we read some of her words, we see how few of her priorities are taught in any curriculum. Rather, they are found in the pages of God's Word and overflowed from this mother's heart.*

"The true love of God and wisdom of the Father strengthen you in virtue, my dearest child...since the Lord has so ordered...that I must leave you here...deprived of father and mother, I will commend you to the Lord: let Him do with you according to His holy will. ...you shall have no lack here if you only fear God; for He will be the Father of the orphans.

"When you have attained your understanding...endeavor to fear God and see...for whose name we both died...Seek this narrow way...My dear child, if we would with Christ...inherit salvation, we must also help bear His cross...and follow His footsteps...For His sake all must be forsaken, father, mother, sister, brother, husband, child, yea one's own life.

"My dear child, I pray you that wherever you live when you are grown up...conduct yourself well and honestly, so that no one need have cause to complain of you...Always be faithful...Learn to carry your hands uprightly, and see that you like work...My dear Janneken, do not accustom your mouth to filthy talk, nor to ugly words...nor to lies...Run not in the street as other bad children do; rather take up a book, and learn to seek there that which concerns your salvation...Obey those whose bread you eat...Do not think of yourself too good for anything...and always honor the aged. I leave you here; oh, that it had pleased the Lord that I might have brought you up; I should gladly have done my best...I know that He faithfully keeps His promise.

"Thus, my poor orphan child, always be resigned...when you are old enough, give diligence to learn to read and write, since it is...most profitable in this distress...that you may sometimes read this letter, as also the other letters, which your father left you...Dear Janneken, we have not left you much of this world's goods...We leave you a good example to fear God, which is better than much of the temporal goods of this world.

"...My dear lamb, we can merit nothing, but must through grace inherit salvation...Always join those that seek to fear the Lord from the heart...Be honorable and courteous to all men, and let your modesty be manifest... "I leave you here among my friends; I hope that my father, and my stepmother, and my brothers and my sisters will do the best with you as long as they live. Be subject to them in everything, so far as it is not contrary to God... "Janneken, my dear lamb, who are yet very little and young, I leave you this letter...for a perpetual adieu...and kiss you heartily with a kiss of peace...I hope to seal this letter with my blood at the stake. Adieu.

"By me, your dearest mother, imprisoned for the Lord's sake, Janneken Munstdorp."

