

Day 3

On your mark, continued

It's 10 am (my time) . . .do you know where your children are?

In our little dollhouse, it's pretty easy for me to answer that question at any given moment. Right now, for example, the littlest one is trying on her big sister's shoes in the entryway. The eldest is asking said big sister to remove herself from his bedroom, where she likes to hang out looking at his fish tank. My second eldest is talking to a friend on the phone in the kitchen, and my youngest son just walked through the living room with a (hopefully empty) squirtgun. My third, who is eight, is in his bedroom working on his novel (I kid you not.)

That isn't exactly what we need to know, however! The question is really more about where their hearts and minds are. Remember, we have to determine our starting point before we can figure out how to get where we're going.

I'm determined this year to do something I read about and fell in love with years ago. In the book, Little Men, Louisa May Alcott continues the story of Jo March from Little Women. Jo has married her German professor friend and opened a boarding school for boys in the home she inherited from her Aunt March. Jo introduces the little custom I love to a newly-arrived boy this way . . .

"This is one of the ways in which I try to help my boys," and she took down a thick book, which seemed half full of writing, and opened at a page on which there was one word at the top.

"Why, that's my name!" cried Nat, looking both surprised and interested.

"Yes, I have a page for each boy. I keep a little account of how he gets on through the week, and Sunday night I show him the record. If it is bad I am sorry and disappointed, if it is good I am glad and proud; but, whichever it is, the boys know I want to help them, and they try to do their best for love of me and Father Bhaer."

"I should think they would," said Nat, catching a glimpse of Tommy's name opposite his own, and wondering what was written under it.

Mrs. Bhaer saw his eye on the words, and shook her head, saying as she turned a leaf—

“No, I don’t show my records to any but the one to whom each belongs. I call this my conscience book; and only you and I will ever know what is to be written on the page below your name. Whether you will be pleased or ashamed to read it next Sunday depends upon yourself . . .”

**Little Men
Louisa May Alcott**

Isn’t that sweet? And yet in my opinion, pretty practical, too. A large part of the reason I educate my kids at home is that I want to be able to oversee closely the development of their characters. We’ve learned to prioritize Bible study and memorization by working on it first thing every morning. Still, I hadn’t developed a plan for keeping track of the progress being made (or not being made!) in terms of their development as people. We have grades for most subjects . . . shouldn’t we have some way to keep track of their characters?

This is the year I’ll begin!

I have many years to go with each of my children (some less than others, of course—frightening thought!) so I think that rather than putting notes on each one into a single book, I’m going to start one book for each child. I’ve seen nice journal-style books at the dollar store. You could use regular notebooks, of course, and even if you don’t add to the book weekly, you could develop some other schedule— every other week, or monthly, or even just on their birthdays if it seems that’s all you can manage. I think your kids will love whatever plan you come up with because it’s a tangible example of the priority you place on their hearts as expressed through their behavior, and you’ll love it for the same reason! I think it’ll give me special time with them, too, as we go over what’s been written each week.

So . . .where are your children? Ask the Lord to highlight things to you as you’re considering each area. It will help you determine your course for the next year, I promise! Now, there’s a wide variety out there re. number of children you’d need space for, so I’m just going to get you started with your first one! Grab your journals or notebook or the back of this piece of paper or whatever works for you, and write out your thoughts! Think about where each child is at spiritually (What is their relationship with God like? Are they spending time in prayer and Bible reading? Do they know why they should do that?)

emotionally (are they going through a difficult stage right now—toddlerdom, puberty, etc? Are they feeling good about themselves, or insecure?), academically (Are they ahead or behind in major curriculum areas like math and reading? Are they diligent with their schoolwork, generally? Are there areas they've expressed an interest in studying?), physically (Are they growing well? Getting exercise? Eating appropriately?), and relationally (How well do they relate to you? Do they feel secure in their relationship with you? How do they interact with their brothers and/or sisters? What about friends?).

Child _____

Spiritually _____

Emotionally _____

Academically _____

Physically _____

Relationally _____
