

how to start a
Scholé Sisters
group



the Scholé Sisters
with Dr. Christopher Perrin
and Christy Hissong

How to Start a Scholé Sisters Group

by the Scholé Sisters

with Dr. Christopher Perrin and Christy Hissong



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Starting a Scholé Sisters Group: Introduction

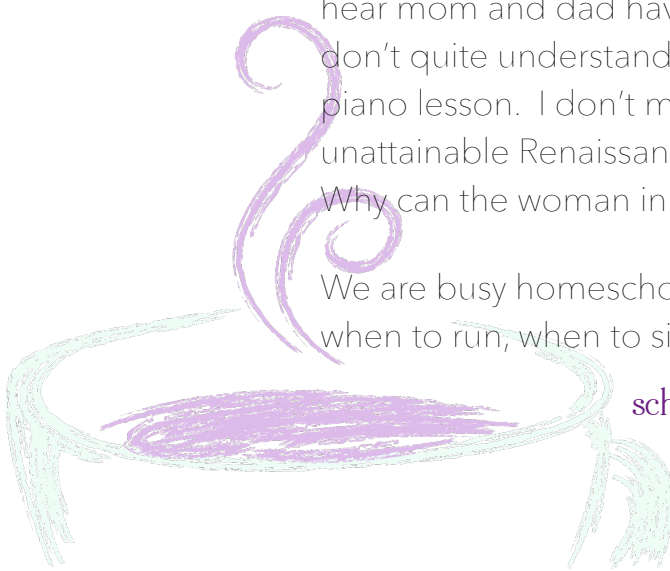
Christopher A. Perrin, PhD

If we only had time to get together to talk about the things that really matter. We rush about making life work for our homes and families, and indeed there is a good deal of important work to be done to run a household. Meaningful work is good and noble. Frenzy and anxiety are not.

We know this at some level, but it is still hard to avoid slipping into frenzy and worry. When we do, we transfer this in some measure to our children. They see our tension, irritation, our agitation. Many homeschooling parents have awakened to this problem and are addressing it, seeking to bring peace and rest back to the education of our children. Sarah McKenzie's book *Teaching from Rest* provides some valuable advice for recovering truly restful learning (scholé) to our homeschools. This brief guide speaks to the need parents have to find renewal with other adults—even if once a month.

Our children are watching us and learning an immense amount by how we live, what we model—what we are. That is why in addition to didactic, direct instruction (which is important) they need to see us reading, writing poetry, painting, singing and playing the violin. They need to hear mom and dad having interesting discussions about Dante that they don't quite understand. They need to witness mom going off—to her piano lesson. I don't mean to paint an ideal portrait of the unattainable Renaissance parent... but Proverb 31 does come to mind. Why can the woman in Proverbs 31 laugh at the days to come? Do we?

We are busy homeschoolers, yes, but we can be at peace. We can know when to run, when to sit with tea. We should be peaceful at all times,



even when quite active. Though very engaged with the teaching of our children, we should also know that there are times when we should find refreshment with our spouses and other friends. It is just this need—refreshment with friends—that is the purpose behind a Scholé Sisters group.

Homeschooling moms pursuing a scholé education need each other, need the refreshment that comes from finding unrushed time to talk about the things that really matter. Yes, you could go to a Bible Study (a good thing indeed) but scholé moms

know that they also need the fellowship and renewal that comes from talking with other parent educators pursuing the same aims.

Our children are watching us and learning an immense amount by how we live, what we model—what we are.

A Scholé Sisters group doesn't just talk about how homeschooling is going. These "sisters" do scholé. They give themselves ample time in a beautiful setting (with some good food and drink) to discuss great literature and art; they may play music, sing, recite poetry. They learn from one another and are restored and enlivened by the engagement of truth, goodness and beauty. Sure, they do talk about how homeschooling is going, but out of the context of enjoying the schooling they need for their own souls. Will this help our children? Is it a wise investment for their sake? If you think modeling is crucial to great teaching, you already know the answer.



Find Your Sisters

By Sarah Mackenzie

We know the importance of eating locally, but what about connecting locally?

In an age where the mantra is to feed your body with food from right where you are, what about feeding your soul the same way? The online community is fabulous, but we need some flesh-and-blood support, too- the kind that brings meals when there's a new baby or offers to babysit when we need a hand.

When I'm excited about something new I've learned, I really want to connect with someone about it. This is, I think, especially important when you decide to take on some weighty intellectual thinking. Thinking is the art of asking questions, and that's just not done terribly well in a vacuum. We were made for community!

What is a Scholé Sisters Group?

A Scholé Sisters group is a small gathering of women who desire to cultivate restful learning in their own personal life. Deciding to devote yourself to scholé- to cultivating truth, goodness, and beauty- not just in your kids, but in yourself- is deciding to be fully human.

We are wearied by checking off our to-do lists, only to draw up a whole new list the next day.

We are wells, offering of ourselves by the bucketful, but we must restore the well. Doing that with like-minded friends who are doing it too helps us live out the call to develop ourselves as full as we can and help others do the same.



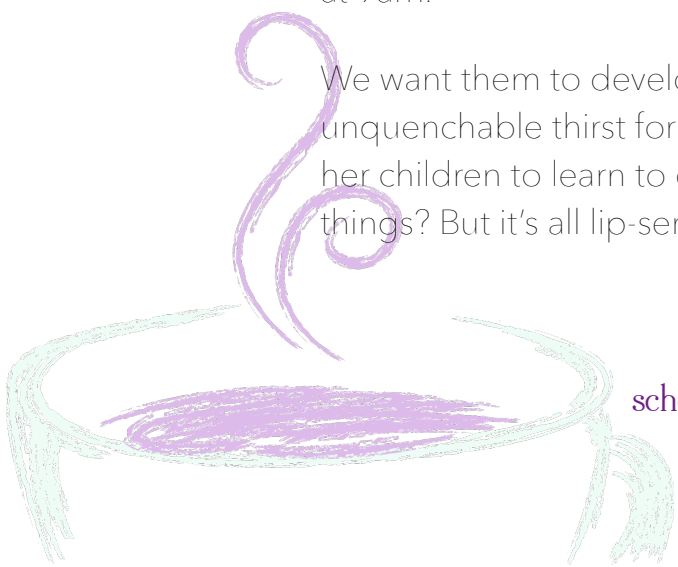
I know the challenge of carving out time to nourish your heart and mind. Of course there are many things that matter and that are worth making time for- our prayer lives, nurturing our marriages, spending time lavishly on our kids- all of those are things that matter. But so is reading, discussing, asking questions, and cultivating your intellect- that's all part of being fully human, and it matters too. I wonder how good of a job we can do at nurturing the beautiful humanity in our children if we are disengaged so thoroughly from our own.

If teaching is the art of imitation, then we ought to make ourselves worthy of imitation. By our very nature, as mothers we are saying "imitate me," whether or not we are worthy of imitating, and whether or not we want to be imitated. Cultivating intellectual growth, nurturing your creative side, diving into good books, learning a new skill, working refreshment into your busy routine- that is what scholé is all about. Forming a small group of women who meet on a regular basis to do it together and to encourage one another along the way is what sisterhood is all about.

I'm already overwhelmed! How can I possibly add this to my schedule?

When most of your day is centered on keeping everything afloat, it's so easy to lose track of the things that matter most. We've got to be intentional about making time for the first things- the most important things. We spend so much time encouraging our children to make learning a life habit rather than a thing they do only on Monday morning at 9am.

We want them to develop a love of learning and cultivate an unquenchable thirst for wonder and curiosity. What mother doesn't want her children to learn to carve out time for reading and learning new things? But it's all lip-service unless we're doing that ourselves.





When we meet regularly with other women to read a classic, do an hour of nature study, or learn to watercolor, we are demonstrating with our very lives that the world is worth learning about, our minds are worth cultivating, and people are worth loving. We model delight in learning something new, and we demonstrate what it looks like to find like-minded peers to encourage and to be encouraged by. Isn't this the very thing we long for our children to do?

It doesn't have to be extravagant, frequent, or expensive. It can be a simple regular phone call with a friend to discuss *The Great Gatsby*. It can be a meeting once a month, at a beautifully lit restaurant with candles and calm music to discuss Hamlet. It can be meeting at a state park or wildlife refuge one Saturday morning a month to learn the names of a few local trees. A class at the art studio to learn the basics of watercolor. A gathering at your house every other month to have a nice breakfast and read poetry. It can be a writing club, a knitting club, a book club, a cooking club.

Schol  is the art of restful, deep, and meaningful learning. Sisterhood is the art of connecting with the women God has placed in our lives.



A Scholé Sisters group is simply a way to cultivate our minds while cultivating our friendships. It's a way to model what we so desire for our children to embrace. Put it that way, and I'm pretty sure I can't afford not to add this to my schedule.



Why We Need Scholé

by Mystie Winckler

"We work in order to be at leisure."

What is your reaction to that statement? None other than Aristotle said it, but it is hard in our pragmatic age to grasp his meaning. In *Leisure the Basis of Culture*, Joseph Pieper tells us that a literal translation would read like this:

"We are not-at-leisure in order to be-at-leisure."

Whether we call it leisure or rest or contemplation, it can be a confusing concept. Isn't the work itself the point? Or perhaps the point of the work is the product at the end? How can the point of work be rest or leisure or relaxation?

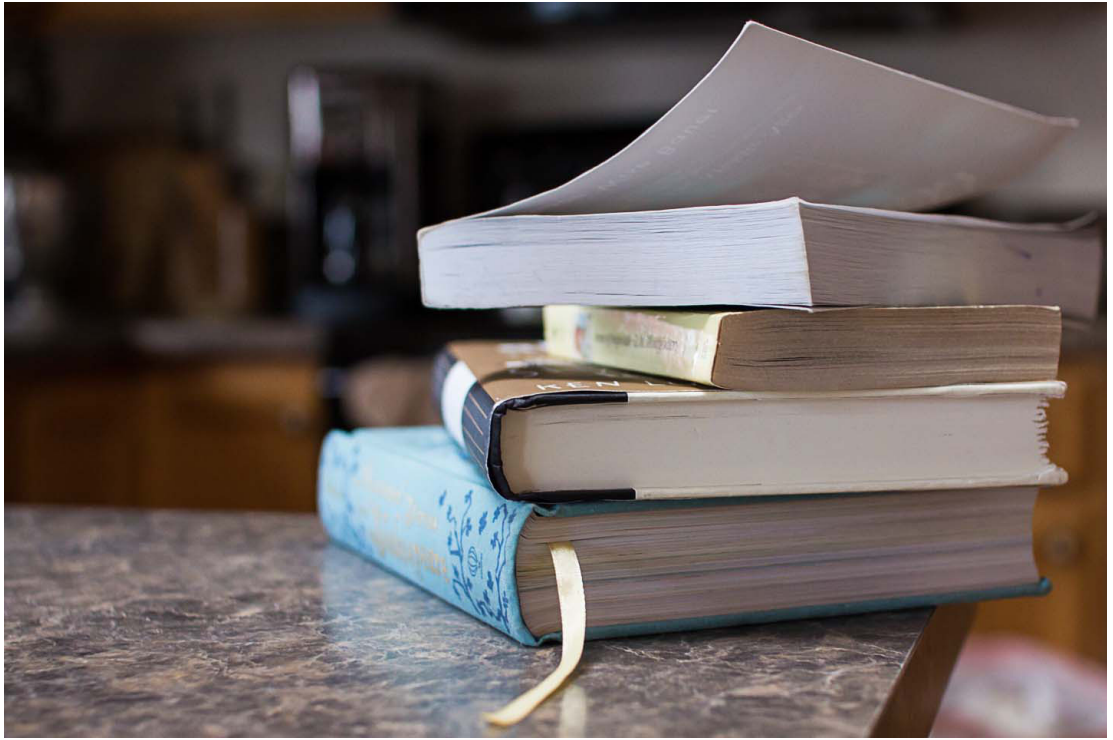
When we think of leisure or rest we tend to think of vacations, naps, or putting our feet up. But rest and leisure are much more about being than doing. Pieper writes, "Leisure, then, is a condition of the soul." We read, we contemplate, we muse, but we do these activities in order to foster an internal, abiding peace. They are not activities that we do to check them off our lists or feel productive.

It does take intention, focus, and doing to build a state of rest in our minds and our souls, but it is an activity of leisure, of quiet, of purpose rather than of production. We quiet our souls from the hustle and bustle of daily activities in order to connect to the deeper realities of the world and of eternity.

Scholé refills us

Teaching is a constant pouring out of ourselves into others, serving and loving and guiding them along their journey. Mothering is the same. All





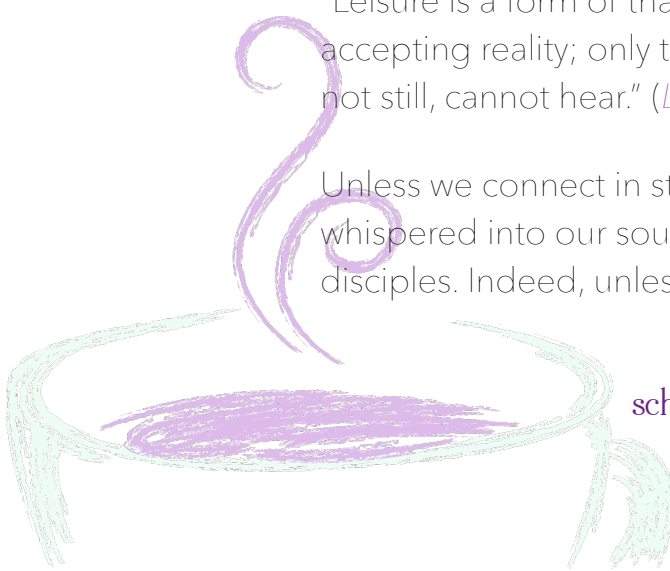
day long, we water our children's minds and lives by pouring ourselves out.

In order to have something to pour out, we must be connected to a source ourselves. If we would continue in this role without burning out, we must dig a deep well and keep the lines clean and flowing, from sources of truth and beauty and goodness, through our own lives, and thence into our children.

Scholé renews us

"Leisure is a form of that stillness that is the necessary preparation for accepting reality; only the person who is still can hear, and whoever is not still, cannot hear." (*Leisure, the Basis of Culture*)

Unless we connect in stillness to deeper realities and hear truth whispered into our souls, we cannot preach and teach our young disciples. Indeed, unless we are disciples ourselves, sitting at the feet of



Truth and soaking it (and Him) in, we cannot make others disciples of Truth.

When our days are full of mundane details - dishes, meals, laundry, snotty noses, and dirty diapers - it is easy to be so immersed in the tangible neediness of our families that we don't even realize how drained our souls are. It is not that service to others itself drains our souls; after all, Proverbs tells us that "he who waters will himself be watered."

However, it is true that when we focus only on the physical needs that surround us, it is easy to overlook the soul needs of both ourselves and our children. Unless we all

have times of stillness, of reconnecting with realities that are deeper than that which we see and touch and taste, we will run dry. We are whole beings, requiring both our physical and our spiritual lives to be watered. Just as we cannot nurse our babies unless we first eat, we cannot feed our children's souls if our own souls are not connected to spiritual, emotional, and intellectual lifelines.

"Leisure is a form of that stillness that is the necessary preparation for accepting reality; only the person who is still can hear, and whoever is not still, cannot hear."

"Leisure is the disposition of receptive understanding, of contemplative beholding, and immersion - in the real." (*Leisure, the Basis of Culture*)

Our own scholé makes our children's scholé possible

As Brandy will tell us in the next chapter, reading and thinking and meditating and discussing is not selfish. It is eating. It is nourishing



ourselves so that we can offer conversation, questions, and connections with our children. Education is a human endeavor. Mothers are human. And mothers, by their own habits, show their children how to be human.

If we want to raise lifelong learners, we ourselves must be open to that life of learning - and not only open to it. No, in our hustle and bustle, we must intentionally carve out that life. We are makers of lives of learning, for ourselves and for our children. And what we carve out must include leisure.

That leisure will prove to be the space for the really real, the connection that we long for, in our helter-skelter. It is worth seeking out.



It's Not Selfish

by Brandy Vencel

It's almost dinnertime, and I'm rushing. I'm rushing because tonight I have a meeting, and I don't want to be late. Tonight we're learning about language arts, and I've already filled my bag with a book to use for a written narration immersion, my journal and pens, and, of course, my notes from the reading assignments. Tonight, you see, is a *scholé* night for me.

Our group meets every four to six weeks on a weekday evening. We've been doing this for over two years now, though much of it all seems fresh and new to me.

I leave the house before my husband even gets home because this is his day to work late. I muster up my meanest mommy look and remind my five-year-old son that he simply must obey his twelve-year-old brother until his father gets home. I explain to my girls about how to dish up and serve dinner. I grab a bite of something.

And then?

Then I leave.

All by myself.

As I back down the driveway, I take a deep breath. I try to let the stresses and pressures of the day go. The weight slowly leaves my shoulders.

I'm ready.

Mommy Me Time

The debates over Mommy Me Time have been going on ever since mothers have had leisure time on their hands. It is one of the earliest





mothering issues I recall reading about outside of discipline and basic baby/toddler care.

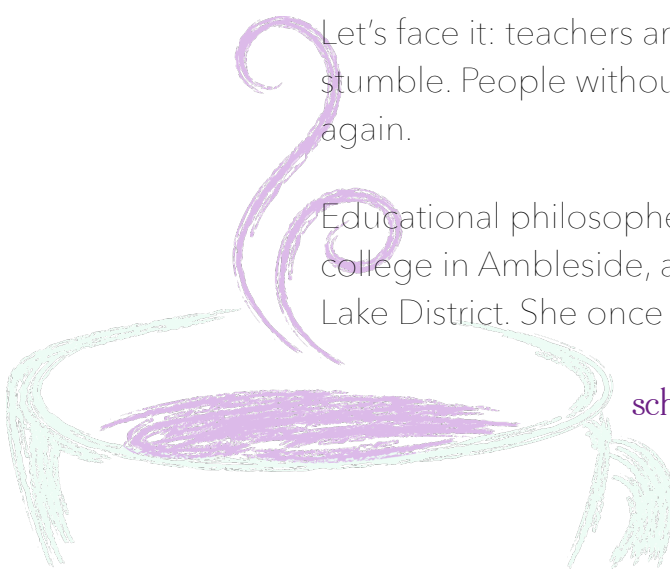
Me Time at its worst is when Mom is taking time out to indulge her sinful passions. I've heard moms use Me Time as justification for reading bad books, watching bad movies, being a bad steward of the family finances, and more.

So let's be clear that this is not what scholé is about.

If the worst form of Me Time is sinful self-indulgence, then the best of scholé is selfless soul-improvement. Scholé isn't just about rest and peace, though those are at its core. It's about becoming better than we already are. Learning something. Doing something. Loving something. It's being stretched and challenged and encouraged, that we might fill up and overflow. It's gaining new knowledge and, with it, a vision.

Let's face it: teachers are just people, and people without vision? They stumble. People without community? They have trouble getting up again.

Educational philosopher Charlotte Mason trained a lot of teachers at her college in Ambleside, a beautiful town nestled in England's gorgeous Lake District. She once asked one of her students why she had come to



the school. Why are you here? The student replied, I have come here to learn to teach. Miss Mason promptly corrected her: "My dear, you have come here to learn to live."

We later learn, from this same student, after her education has reached its full bloom:

Teaching is not a technique exercised by the skilled upon the unskilled. It is a sharing of the effort to know.

Schol  gets us to the heart of what it really means to teach.

In order to teach, we must first be students. We must have the disposition of receiver -- we show up, ready to come to know. The heart of the true teacher and the heart of the true student are the same: they have the humility that says, "I do not yet know. I have deficiencies."

But we don't stop at this awareness of deficiency. We become seekers. We become listeners. We become pray-ers. We ask God for the grace of knowledge that He has given to so many men before us, and we know that He delights to give to us -- to His children -- as well.

When we spend our days with our children, earnestly desiring to help them come to know, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that education begins with a qualified teacher, and while we all learn many things from books, it matters what the teacher embodies. The teacher who has lost her way, drowning in the diaper changes and meal preparation and mountains of laundry -- the teacher who has forgotten the delight of sharing in the effort to know -- is the teacher headed toward burnout.

That is a little secret about schol : it's the world's greatest burnout prevention plan.

It isn't selfish to get burned out, but it also isn't selfish to prevent it. In fact, burnout prevention may be the most selfless thing you do for your family, especially when you are far enough down the path that you'd rather stay home and veg in front of the television.



Is it selfish to be human?

When we group Scholé Time in with Me Time and call it selfish -- and I've heard this done, so I know it happens -- we do our homes a great disservice. Is it selfish to read your Bible? To take a shower? To do the things that humans do?

Selfishness is, at its core, the pursuit of our own interests, or seeking a private advantage. Scholé is the pursuit of truth. Of goodness. Of beauty. It seeks not private advantage, but the advantage of the whole world. While selfishness coddles the crumpled little grasping soul, scholé seeks to expand, to challenge, and to improve.

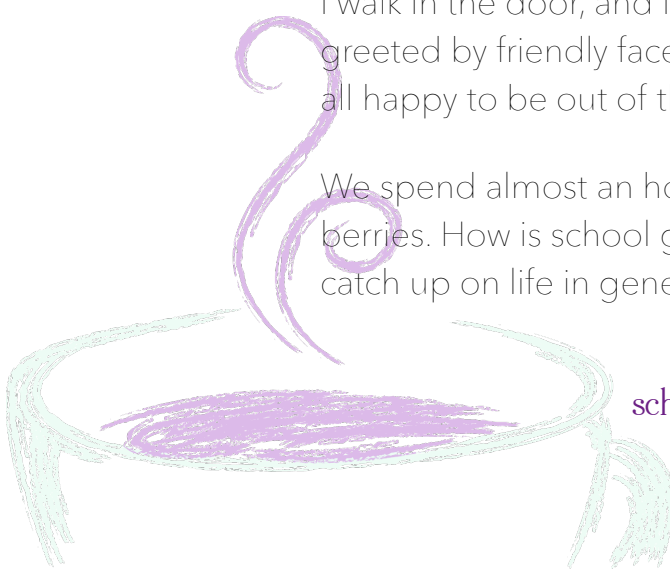
Selfishness and scholé are about as opposite as it gets.

The day has been a hard one, and too many days like this one bring me close to growing weary in doing good. This meeting has come right on time. I look forward to it every single month because I know that I can expect refreshment, friendship, camaraderie, encouragement.

Selfishness is, at its core, the pursuit of our own interests, or seeking a private advantage. Scholé is the pursuit of truth. Of goodness. Of beauty.

I walk in the door, and I'm greeted by friendly faces, and more of them arriving each minute. We're all happy to be out of the house.

We spend almost an hour chatting and drinking coffee and eating berries. How is school going these days? We troubleshoot problems, or catch up on life in general.



The meeting is called to order. After prayer and some introductions, we start off with an oral narration immersion. We all hold our breaths while one of us feebly tries to retell what we just heard -- who knew that Aesop was so difficult?

We laugh.

We discuss our reading assignments. We wander off on a million rabbit trails, but always come back to our purpose.

Around 9:30 pm, we close the formal part of the meeting so that those with nursing babies can escape before the phone calls start. But many of us stay. We chat some more. We help each other. We talk about application.

It's almost midnight by the time I get home, and I know I'll be tired tomorrow. If this were a nightly habit, it'd be a terrible one, for it is also my duty to get enough rest in order to approach my children cheerfully.

But for one night a month, staying up late makes me better. I come away inspired. I've encountered moms who give me hope. I've heard good ideas I can use right away, and others I'm tucking away for the future. I didn't just learn how to be better, I was inspired to want to be better. This meeting of minds and souls changed my heart. It exposed some rough edges and gently filed them away.

Tomorrow is a new day, and I came home a new mom.

Is scholé selfish? Not a chance!



Learning How to Live

by Brandy Vencel

Before we can talk about the practical, we really should discuss the impractical -- or, at least, the not-immediately-practical.

It's really, really important to get at the heart of scholé. It's easy to look at all of this and just see the immediate -- the fact that we can study and when we do we will most certainly know more.

And it's good to know more. I don't know about you, but I like knowing more.

This is, however, a utilitarian world, which wants to see immediate benefit. When we say "do X and you will know more," it seems to fit in with that scheme of things.

But our ultimate goal is so much more than that.

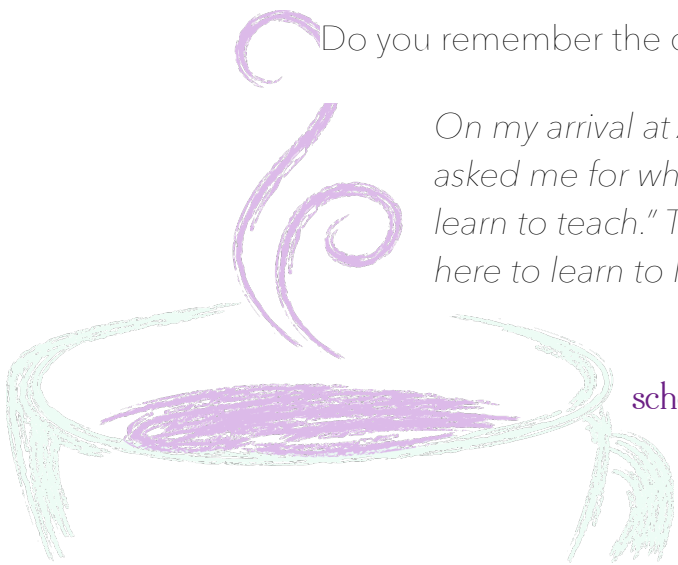
The truth is, "do X, and you just might be different on the other side of it."

You might be transformed.

Because this is about the heart. We don't do all of this so that we can simply know more stuff. Google knows it all, and we can look it up. Knowing more for the sake of knowing more probably just breeds pride.

Do you remember the original quote that I mentioned before?

On my arrival at Ambleside I was interviewed by Miss Mason who asked me for what purpose I had come. I replied, "I have come to learn to teach." The Miss Mason said: "My dear, you have come here to learn to live."



Likewise, I say, we have not come to this table in order to know. We have come in order to be transformed. We've come to learn how to live.

What is living?

What does this really mean? This “learning how to live?” Well, in context, Miss Mason meant that the lifestyle the students were taught at her college was real living. So keeping a nature journal and regularly hiking, or dancing, or reading -- these things were the stuff of life, not something they did to get to some other end. When they spent their days growing as a person, they were really living. It was expected that they would maintain the practices they learned at the school after they left to go teach.

My college tennis instructor comes to mind. She was old, as far as tennis instructors go {in her 70s, maybe}, but she was spunky and she would always say she tried to learn one new thing each day because when you stop learning, you start dying.

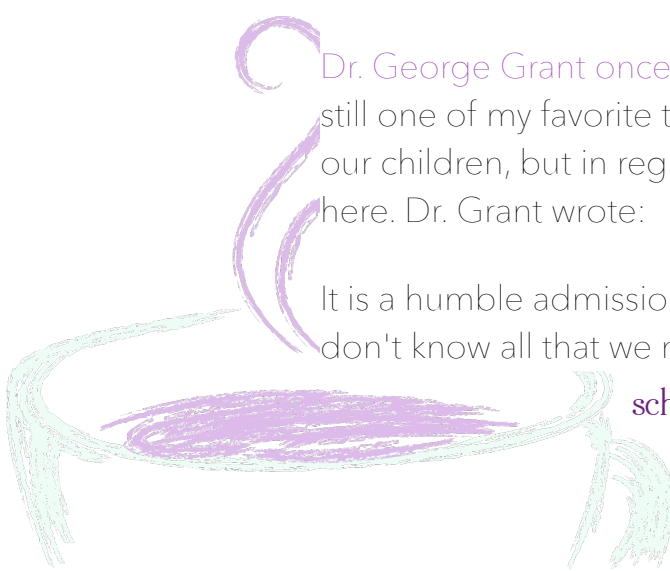
That's the key: learning is living, and living is being transformed. The only other alternative is decay.

That's the key: learning is living, and living is being transformed. The only other alternative is decay.

The repentance factor

Dr. George Grant once remarked that education is repentance. This is still one of my favorite thoughts about education -- not just in regard to our children, but in regard to the self-education we've been discussing here. Dr. Grant wrote:

It is a humble admission that we've not read all that we need to read, we don't know all that we need to know, and we've not yet become all that





we are called to become. Education is that unique form of discipleship that brings us to the place of admitting our inadequacies. It is that remarkable rebuke of autonomy and independence so powerful and so evident that we actually shut up and pay heed for a change.

In reading we are improved, if we are doing it right. That's where the repentance comes in: we're constantly course-correcting. Sometimes, it's little things. And sometimes, it's something big, like actually being convicted that we don't love something that is worthy of love -- realizing that we need to have our affections shaped.

Let's take a more obvious example of course correction. Let's say I'm crocheting something, and I realize that I've been doing it wrong. So I undo what I did, and start doing it right. That's course correction, or maybe we could call it "amoral repentance."

I see this happening all the time. Sometimes it is more of a rounding out, or a slight course correction (as compared to a true, 180* repentance). So, let's say I think a good leader is like X. X is the picture I have in my head of what a good leader is like. While I'm right, my picture might still fall short of the fullness of what it means to be a good leader. As I read more, I realize that a good leader must also be like Y. So, I

mentally change my picture of what a good leader is like to include both X and Y. That's a course correction, too.

Or, in reading through Charlotte Mason's second volume, *Parents and Children*, with some friends, I realized that some of my youngest child's issues -- he is my most difficult child -- are completely my fault. I'd not been taking him in hand as I should. So I needed to do a course correction in my handling of him. In this case, I needed to not grow weary in doing good -- to be more consistent in holding him to certain behavioral standards.

There are a million ways to make a course correction, to repent. It depends on you, your blind spots, your places of ignorance, what you already know, and what you're learning about as far as how repentance will actually look in your life.

You will not be the same

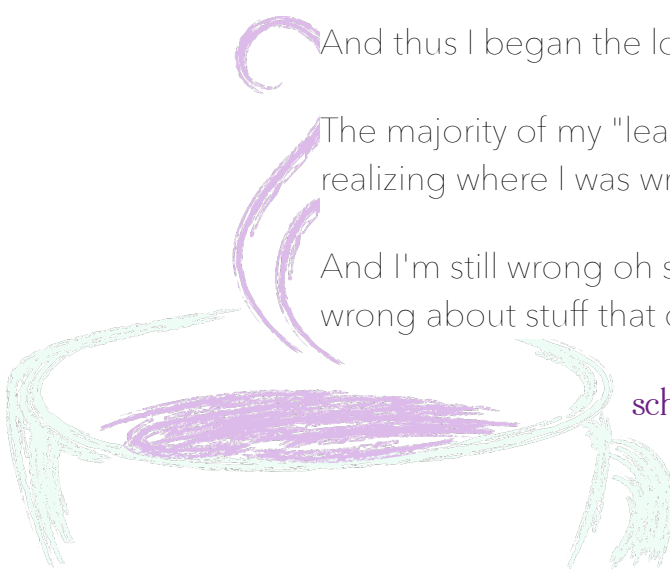
The point, though, is this: if you go down this road, you will not be the same person you were before. I cannot tell you how different I am from that 20-something young woman who first read Charlotte Mason and James Taylor and David Hicks so many years ago. I had no idea that everything would be different. But I learned one thing: I was wrong. I was wrong about what I knew {or thought I knew}. I was wrong about what I thought in regard to education. I was wrong about the best way to spend my time.

I was wrong on so much.

And thus I began the long road of repentance known as education.

The majority of my "learning" before was about being right, rather than realizing where I was wrong.

And I'm still wrong oh so often. It doesn't change. You just realize you're wrong about stuff that didn't catch your attention earlier on.



Essentially, it's about realizing where we aren't thinking, doing, being, or loving the way we ought to be.

And education centers on that word ought. A real education does, anyhow. It's about the should. It's about coming to terms with both reality as well as the ideal.

So I have a blessing for you as you commit yourself -- or recommit yourself -- to this journey we call scholé:

May you be wrong.

A thousand times and more.

And may you repent.

And at the end of the journey, may you have wisdom.

Because, after all, this is life...and we're just learning how to live it.



Book Discussion 101

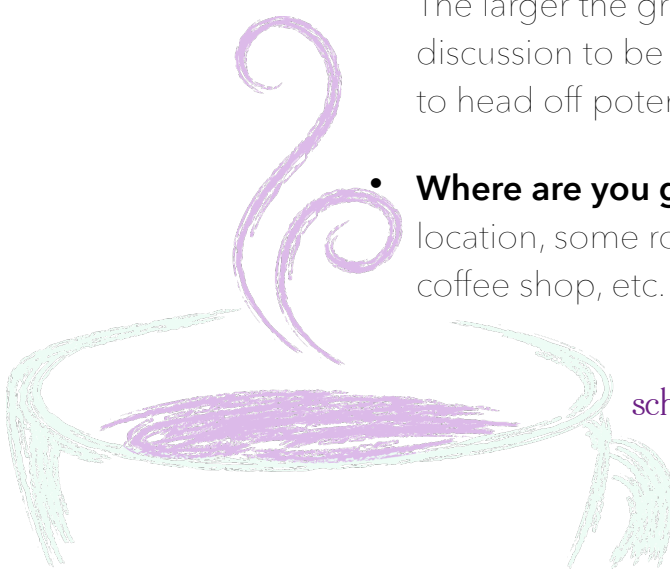
by Christy Hissong

Ah, how good it is to be among people who are reading!
– Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*

Before Oprah, even before Mortimer Adler, there were books and people who read and discussed them together. There are neighborhood book clubs, literary societies, library discussion groups and study groups -- all formed for different reasons and with varied goals, and there are as many ways to lead book discussions as there are venues, groups and leaders themselves! Yet there are general ground rules and tips that apply to all of the above, so if you're interested in starting, joining, nurturing or leading a group of people who read and discuss books together, read on!

Setting Ground Rules

- **Who will lead?** Book groups are vastly more enjoyable when only one person is directing the flow of ideas that occur in a discussion. One person could lead every meeting, or you could rotate. In some groups, members take turns choosing the book and leading the discussion of the book they choose.
- **How large/small will the group be?** In my experience, groups that exceed 15 people are often too big, with 8-12 being ideal. The larger the group, the more the leader needs to monitor the discussion to be sure everyone who wants to can participate, and to head off potential conflict.
- **Where are you going to meet?** Some groups meet at a set location, some rotate homes, and some meet at a library, church, coffee shop, etc.



- **How often will you meet?** Many groups meet once a month on an agreed-upon schedule, or choose the date and time at the previous meeting.
- **How long will your meetings run?** Plan on 1 to 1.5 hours, but that will be longer if food is involved {the higher the tea, the longer, yes?}
- **What will you read?** Often groups are very decided in their choices: Science fiction, biographies, non-fiction, classics. But consider this: Trying something new is part of the adventure, so don't limit the list to books by the same author or books with themes that are too similar.
- **Cost and availability are big factors in choosing books.** Will your group choose to read only paperbacks? Only shorter books? Only library books? Will the leader order books for the whole group or is everyone responsible for finding his own copy? Books should be chosen in advance so titles can be procured long before the discussion. Planning ahead is immensely helpful because it keeps the group cohesive and productive. Your librarian can help you locate multiple copies of books through interlibrary loan.
- **How will books be chosen?** They need to be more than a good story to generate discussion. The writing, characters and subject matter must be able to sustain at least an hour's worth of comments. Controversial books are terrific fodder for discussion, but the leader must keep the discussion impersonal and keep the group away from emotional exchanges. {A plug for my beloved classics here: It's much easier to discuss controversial ideas when the people involved are far removed from our own time and place.} Groups have many methods of book selection. In some, the leader will propose several books and members vote for their favorites. In other groups, each member chooses one book for



the group to read, and then leads the group through that book they have chosen. {This also cuts down on leader burn-out.}



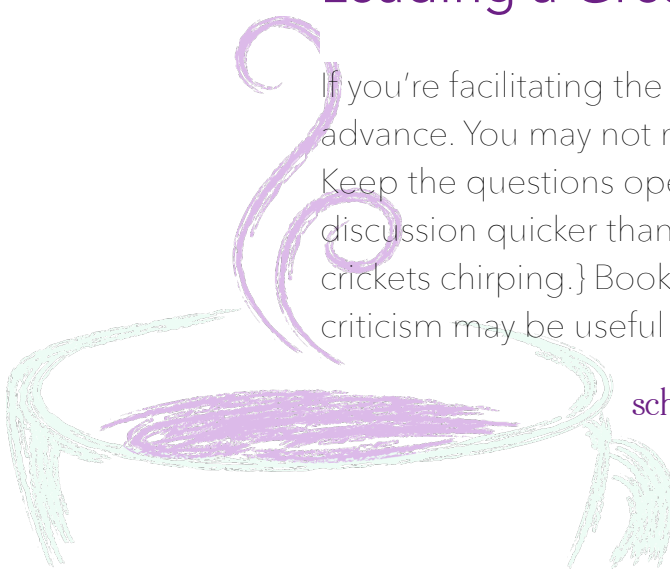
Participant Prep

Read the book actively, making margin notes and/or generating questions. Pause at the end of each chapter. What prompts a strong response in you? Have you made any connections to previous reading or ideas? Briefly narrate what you've read either to yourself, in writing, or to someone else.

After your reading, you might be interested in knowing more about the author, and what literary critics or other readers have to say. Maybe the reading sparked a new idea or interest in your mind -- now is the time to investigate and ruminate so you can bring something to the table when your group meets to discuss.

Leading a Great Discussion

If you're facilitating the discussion, prepare a list of 20 questions in advance. You may not need them, but nothing is worse than dead air. Keep the questions open-ended {how and why} -- nothing shuts down discussion quicker than starting with, "So, did you like the book?" {Insert crickets chirping.} Book reviews, author biographies and some literary criticism may be useful when prepping a discussion.



Sometimes it's useful to begin a discussion by asking for volunteers to narrate the story from the beginning, changing narrators every few minutes. Invariably someone will disagree with another person's "take" and your discussion will be off and running! Here are some suggestions for other discussion-prompts:

- How did the author draw the characters – with a full description or did a picture gradually emerge from details? Did the characters seem real and why? Did you identify with them and if so, how so? How did the author make you care about the characters and outcome? If not, why not?
- Why do you think the author set the book in that particular location? Did you learn anything new from being there?
- What drew you into the book and made you keep reading?
- What did you think of the author's use of language? How did it affect your reading or enjoyment of the book? Are there any passages of special beauty or effectiveness that you'd like to highlight?
- Was the author making a particular point in the story? How was your thinking affected?
- If this was a book that will stay with you a while, why?

It's often useful to ask participants to consider whether their response to the book or characters are intellectually motivated {above the neck} or emotionally motivated {below-the-neck}. If discussion is getting heated, encourage participants to, "Check your necks!"

Leader Tips

There is no definite right or wrong in the art of literary interpretation, but encourage your group to form opinions based on details from the text.



Listen attentively so you can ask appropriate follow-up questions. Linking your questions to previous answers results in better conversation. It may mean skipping around in your questioning. Remember to be confident and unafraid to take charge.

Disagreement is good! Ask WHY they didn't like the protagonist or WHAT bothered them about the book. Ask how they would have changed the storyline or author's handling of it. If necessary, play devil's advocate and ask a question that you know will get them going {even if you already know the answer}.

As you're winding down, be sure to allow time for open discussion, and ask for questions from others. "What else has everyone been reading?" is a nice segue to social time.

Keep a list of what your group reads and ask participants to rate each book.

Keeping it Moving and Troubleshooting

Ask each person to come to the meeting with three questions and/or three specific passages to discuss.

Begin each talk with a gentle reminder about how to behave: "Before we begin, let's remember to be respectful of one another. Please don't interrupt and when you have the floor keep your remarks brief and to the point so everyone has a chance to contribute."

Take charge. Some people don't "get" groups -- they talk too much, they insult others, or they sit like stones. If your group has someone who monopolizes the discussion, or insists that his interpretation is the only one possible, or never reads the book but expects everyone to listen to their lengthy opinion of it, you have to confront the problem or your group will die a slow death. Obviously, this is best done privately.





When you identify a problem {typically these offenders announce themselves early and often}, suggest that the group spend a few minutes discussing rules of behavior: Be kind, listen, take turns, share. Give it a meeting or two to see if it takes.

If someone is monopolizing, say, "You made an excellent point on _____ -- what does everyone else think?" If discussion goes off on a tangent, break in and ask a question like, "What was in the book that made you think of this?"

No personal attacks allowed -- it's fine to disagree but not to belittle other group members or their views. If your group has been meeting a while and you're bored, here are some ideas for breathing new life into your group:

- You may need new blood. Invite new people to join the group. The first time someone new shows up, everyone will be at his or her scintillating best – it's human nature!



- Ask everyone to rate the book BEFORE the discussion starts, and then again AFTER you've talked about it for an hour or so. Did minds change? Why?
- Change your format or venue.
- Suggest members read one or both of two books that are somehow related. For instance, *Fahrenheit 451* and *1984* or *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *The Day They Came to Arrest the Book*. This sets up automatic comparisons and contrasts between the works and leads to a bountiful exchange of ideas.
- Choose an author with a large body of work and have everyone read a different offering. Talk about earlier versus later work with regard to character development, plot and themes.

The bottom line? You can do this. Start a reading group or join a book club. Your reading life will increase exponentially as you consider ideas with others. In the immortal words of Edmund Wilson, "No two persons ever read the same book." Exactly.



How to Begin Your Own Scholé Sisters Group

by Pam Barnhill

Starting and running my Scholé Sisters Group has been one of the highlights of my homeschooling. The other moms and I have been meeting for almost two years now, and each meeting means fun, camaraderie, and learning in a supportive environment.

For many the idea of starting a group of this nature is intimidating, but it doesn't have to be. Here are a few suggestions for getting your own group started.

Begin by advertising your group in your local homeschool circles. Reach out to large Facebook and other online communities and ask if it is ok to "advertise" your new Scholé Sister's Group.

You will want to give an explanation of what a Scholé Sister's Group is (send them to download this guide!) and explain a little about what your group plans to do at each meeting. In our group we meet for dinner about once a month. While we love to meet at someone's home when that option is available, usually we eat out at an affordable (and semi-quiet) restaurant so no one has to cook, clean, or distract the family.

A few times each year we advertise in these larger, more general homeschooling groups again to see if anyone else is interested in joining us. We want to be sure to catch any newbies to the area or see if someone else has finally gotten curious enough to check us out. We usually have a few takers at that time, whom I add to our private group.





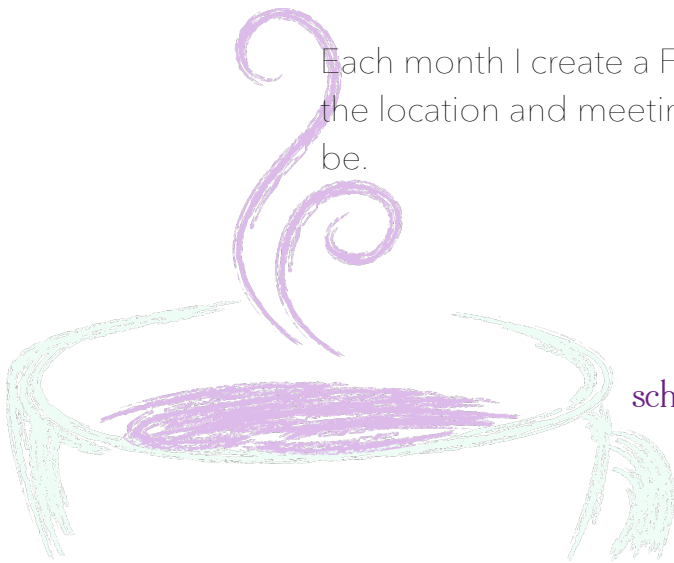
Communication

Once you have a few interested parties, you will need a way to communicate. We use a private Facebook group for communication. You could also use email.

When your group members and method of communication is in place, determine a meeting day and time. I highly recommend that you find one day that is best for most members and stick with that day each month. Our group meets on the last Monday of each month. Having a steady date makes it easier for people to remember and commit to the date.

Keep in mind that you will never please everyone in a group. You will come to find that those who want to attend will make being in the group a priority.

Each month I create a Facebook event on our private group advertising the location and meeting time along with what our current activity will be.



What to DO in Your Scholé Sisters Group

For the most part we read and discuss books. We have settled into a rhythm where we read one chapter of a book each month and then meet and talk about it. I try to help my members by providing them with some thought-provoking questions about a week before the meeting. Writing the questions helps me to come to a better understanding of the text and also is valuable for leading the discussion.

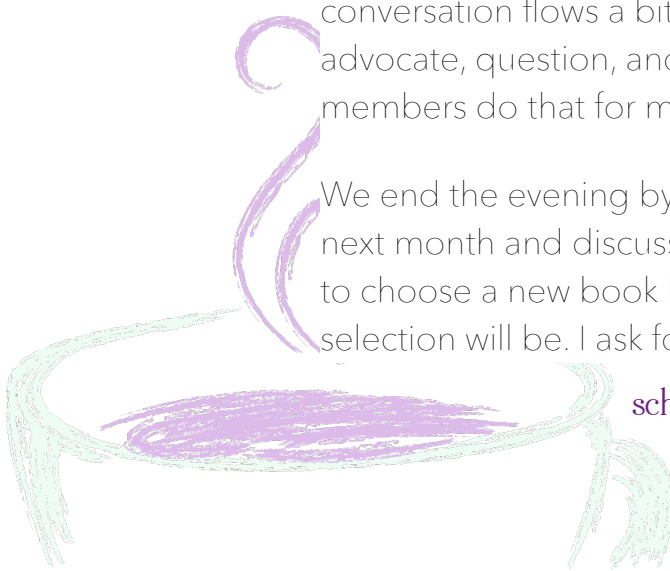
Some books we have read include:

- *For the Children's Sake*
- *The Abolition of Man*
- *Fahrenheit 451*
- *The Innocence of Father Brown*
- *The Core*
- *Teaching from Rest: A Homeschooler's Guide to Unshakeable Peace*
- *Ten Ways to Destroy the Imagination of Your Child*

Structure of a Meeting

Once we arrive at the meeting we spend about the first 30-45 minutes waiting for everyone to arrive, ordering dinner, and chit-chatting about our month, homeschool issues, and anything else on our minds. Before the first hour is up, I will launch into the first question and the conversation flows a bit organically from there. I love to play the devil's advocate, question, and promote deeper thought. Sometimes other members do that for me as well.

We end the evening by making sure everyone is on the same page for next month and discussing new book options if needed. If we do need to choose a new book I will often use a poll to determine what our next selection will be. I ask for suggestions and then enter all of the



suggested books into an online poll and ask members to vote, announcing the winners on our Facebook page.

Other Group Activities

Your Scholé Sisters group is not required to be a book group. Scholé is about restful learning, so any kind of learning could apply.

Our group mostly reads books together, but occasionally we branch out into other enjoyable activities. Some other things we have done include:

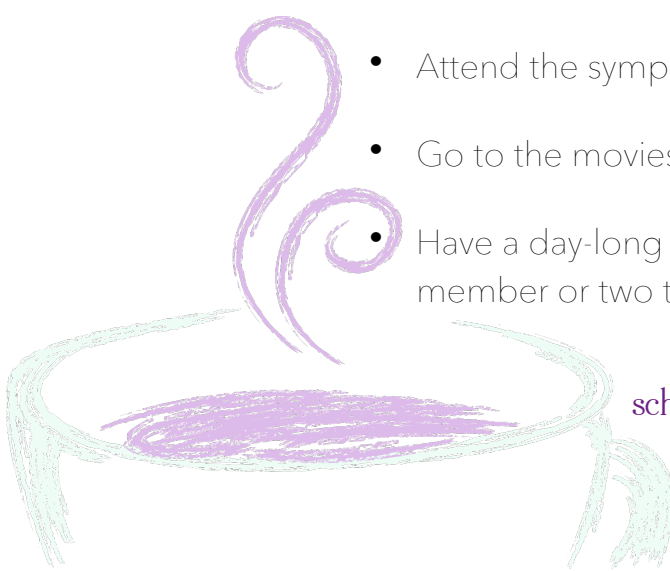
Reading a Nature Study Book. After reading this selection we met for breakfast one Saturday morning to discuss and then headed out on our own quiet nature walk sans kids. We even took our art supplies and tried a little nature journaling ourselves.

Jane Austen Movie Night. We loved this fun get together with friends. One of our members, who has a gift of hospitality, hosted our group for a beautiful potluck dinner with all the trimmings and fancy china. The evening was full of good conversation and an enjoyable Austen flick.

Christmas Party. One Christmas we simply went out to dinner and played Dirty Santa with white elephant gifts from our homeschool rooms. It was the perfect way to come together without the pressure of finishing a book during the busy holiday times.

Other suggestions:

- Attend an art or paint-your-own pottery class together.
- Attend the symphony or theater together.
- Go to the movies for a worthy, discussion-provoking show.
- Have a day-long or overnight retreat at a restful location. Ask a member or two to prepare a devotion, reflection or short lecture.



- Cook a dinner together.
- Visit a tea room for afternoon tea.

It really is just that easy. With a little time and a little effort, before long you will have a group of homeschoolers who you feel like you just can't homeschool without. And with this tough job we do, people who can share the highs and lows of our day are a necessity to our success and sanity.

