

A Dad's Role in Homeschooling

(Part 2)

Episode 166

Carole Joy Seid [00:00:45]:

Last week, I had the joy of interviewing my son, J. J., about the important contributions that dads make in a homeschool family's life. This week, I'm going to play part 2 of that interview because we were having so much fun. I just couldn't stop the recording. So I hope you enjoy.

Now, J. J., a lot of times, dads will say to me, "Carole, particularly my California dads, I'm gone 12 hours a day with my commute and this and that. What can I do?" And, of course, I start with, can you just read out loud? Always, that's my first choice. But then I'll say, okay. And plan number 2 is, can you be my nature boy? And they're like, I can do that.

They always love when I ask them to do that. That doesn't occur to them that that is part of the homeschool journey. Making your kids love nature and getting them out of the house, letting mom have a moment, like you said, of quiet and peace, strapping the little one on a back frame, you know, backpack, and throwing some raisins and nuts and water in a bag and off dad goes with the kids. And then the whole piece of encouraging families, you know, to pursue, like, nature in the wilderness. And so how have you kind of found, you know, ways to navigate that that would encourage some dads who are new at this?

J. J. Seid [00:02:12]:

Yeah. I like that you do that as I'm sitting here thinking about that. Again, some of the ways that God's wired men, they can feel like they're on the back foot with some of this. You know, these aren't things that they were taught to value growing up maybe. These aren't things that feel as natural to them.

But the truth is a massive part of our philosophy of education involves, connect with God's creation using our bodies, developing a work ethic, overcoming pain, you know, being taught that not everything that's painful is bad. Challenge, difficulty, you know, building our character in those ways. And the outdoors and nature do that in so many wonderful ways. Some of our greatest thinkers in church history like Jonathan Edwards

were basically, naturalists moonlighting as a pastor in essence. You know, Edwards, some of his greatest writing was about nature and the hours that he would spend in the outdoors. So I think it'd be interesting to talk to some of those dads. They might feel a sense of relief and almost a sense of reengagement with this process when you give them these kind of marching orders where a dad can go, oh, I'm actually really good in the outdoors, or I'm actually really good with my hands.

I would love to teach my kids how to repair things instead of just throwing them out and buying a new one at Walmart. Or I'd love to take my kids out in the woods and teach them about trees or teach them how to survive or teach them how to use a knife safely. So, hopefully, there's some dads listening to this whose hearts are stirred by that. We talk a lot about Richard Louv and his books, and he likes to joke that children increasingly have nature deficit disorder. And, it's really important that kids are outside.

Carole Joy Seid [00:03:54]:
What's the name of his book?

J. J. Seid [00:03:56]:
Last Child in the Woods. So he's calling people's attention to something that is sort of like the frog in the pot. We don't necessarily realize it's happened. The kids just don't go outside anymore. It's hot out there, and things poke and bite you. And so we've we've raised in kids who are afraid of the outdoors.

I remember taking a friend on a backpacking trip, and he'd never done that before. He was in his twenties, successful college athlete. Tough, strong. He was terrified the whole time we were out there that an animal was gonna leap out of the bushes and eat him, because he just hadn't been outdoors. And so I think dad's exposing their kids to nature at a young age, whether that's just an hour long hike on a Saturday. Even if you live somewhere where nature is not nearby, you just plan it in and you drive and you pack a lunch and you go. Woods. It needs to feel wild enough that your kids don't feel like they're in a park.

And there are places near you where you can do that even if you can only do it once a week. And studies have shown that, a walk in something that even approximates nature will cause cortisol levels to drop and stay at those reduced levels for 7 days. So in essence, if you could shoot to have one day. That's what I always think. In the woods.

Knock around in the woods, you know, one day a week. Kids are wired for this. They love it.

You know, we just found that our boys were building a shelter out in the gully behind our house with branches and old boards and, you know, and that makes me so happy. And, my 9 year olds just got the the permission to use pocket knives on their 9th birthday. And so we had to do knife safety. And sure enough, one of them cut himself right before we could have the knife safety lesson. You know? Like, he'd unwrapped the knife 2 minutes ago. But to not panic when that happens. And then we did knife safety. And then the next day, we did knife safety again because I caught them breaking some of the rules.

But now they're outside whittling and you know?

Carole Joy Seid [00:05:56]:

And they got that amazing book from their other grandma.

J. J. Seid [00:05:59]:

That's right.

Carole Joy Seid [00:05:59]:

And I think it's called whittling.

J. J. Seid [00:06:02]:

I haven't even had a chance to look at it yet. It's brilliant. But there's about 10,000 shavings on my back porch now. You know? But, and now the thing about getting into carving with wooden spoons, you know? So giving our kids these opportunities to interact with God's creation even something as simple as whittling. Or building a shelter out in the wood. Kids wanna do this. And they have a lot of fun doing it.

A good mutual friend of ours, their 3 boys went outside and built an entire village out behind their house in the acreage and came up with an entire economy and a means of exchange and rules. And neighbor kids were out there camping with them, and they made them actually waterproof by weaving sticks together. You know? So this is like, there's almost no limit to what kids can come up with. That's right.

You know, they really want to conquer and bring order and explore and vent. And nature gives them the materials to do that. But the average suburban backyard, any attempt at that will just get them yelled at. You know, you go dig a hole in my yard. I'm not gonna respond well.

So taking kids to places where they can dig holes and climb trees. And for those of us living in the suburbs, it takes more creativity. The last thing I'll say is because we live in the suburbs, I've tried to counteract that with wilderness trips.

Carole Joy Seid [00:07:26]:
Yes. Talk about that.

J. J. Seid [00:07:27]:
So all 3 of my boys have now gone on at least one trip. So the 9 year old twins have now gone twice because they're old enough. Brinker, my 6 year old, after he turned 6, I told him he could come. Because Brinker honestly just wanders off. So I'm scared. I was pretty scared of losing this kid in the backcountry.

Because he's just fearless, which is not helpful in the backcountry. So he came this last time. And sure enough, once he did try to wander off, and it scared the snot out of him. And when he was found coming around the side of an outcropping crying, you know, I think it was actually probably a good lesson for him. And I told him, I said, Brinker, this is why obedience matters. You know, in the backcountry, people can die. But the boys just had a blast. You know? And, we're carrying everything we need on our back.

We got backcountry passes. We had to plan ahead. We had to schedule time online. You have to make a reservation. They only allow so many people into this backcountry area. But what that means is you're not stumbling across old beer cans. And, fast food wrappers. You know? It's pristine wilderness. Bison are wandering into our campsite. You can hear the coyotes at night when you're trying to fall asleep. They startled a snake. You know, they got they got to do a lot of really fun things.

And, they were really tough. I was impressed with their toughness. And their resilience. We scrambled up a little 2,000 foot incline. They got to feel that sense of accomplishment of, in a sense, climbing a little tiny mountain and, doing hard things. And the adventure of falling asleep under the stars, you know, hearing the sounds of nature, looking at how bright the night sky is when you get away from city lights. So, you know, it took weeks of planning and rounding up all the gear to be out for 2 nights. And it was horrible rain, one night, horrible freezing winds the other night.

But it was really good for us. You know? We had to be resilient and get creative. So we only do that once a year. But, again, it's something that they think back on. You know, Brinker was looking forward to that for a couple years and was really excited when he

was finally old enough to come with his older brothers. So those are little things that we can do.

I don't have the margin in my schedule to do that 4 times a year. But even once a year, I can tell that it's something we can kinda live off of. And now my boys are more confident outside. It's a memory we share together. It's a form of bonding, and they're getting to experience creation sort of unfiltered. A big dose of the wildness in nature.

Carole Joy Seid [00:09:59]:

And then talk about Coldwater.

J. J. Seid [00:10:03]:

So now Eisley, our oldest, gets to go away on a true wilderness expedition, in a program, Coldwater, created by, Kevin and Jen Sutton. Kevin was my trainer as a wilderness instructor 20 years ago. And so now myself and others are getting to experience second generation mentoring from Kevin and Jen, which is just priceless. And he's up near the boundary waters in Minnesota, some of the most pristine wilderness that's near us. That's not Alaska or Canada. And, it's much more affordable than some of these sort of boujee, you know, upper middle class summer camps. I don't know who can afford these camps, but it's none of my friends.

But you can send your kid on a true wilderness expedition for more like 4 or 500, dollars, \$800. As opposed to 1,000 of dollars. And, they come back changed. You know? Eisley came back from her first trip and really quietly said to me a phrase we've never used in our house. So I know she wasn't just parading us.

She said, "Dad, I think I really grew in my faith." And I was like, tell me more. And where do I send extra money to Kevin Sutton? So, you know, you have young adult leaders who spend months preparing and training with wilderness first aid and Bible studies that they write for the students. They design these incredibly meaningful experiences in the backcountry. And that confluence of nature and mentoring and scripture engagement and taking turns leading with map and compass and sometimes the sky just opens up and dumps water on you for days. You know, you don't have to manufacture challenges in the wilderness. They find you.

And that's the beauty of it. It's not a controlled environment. And you learn a lot about yourself. You learn a lot about God. You learn a lot about overcoming adversity. And so every year, our kids, my friends and I, when our kids come back to us, they seem to have grown a lot more than someone should have grown in a week of being gone. But we see some of the developmental leaps they make, because they're being tested and

challenged and mentored and invited into experiences that are very different than the typical day to day life of the average suburbanite American.

Carole Joy Seid [00:12:23]:

So true.

J. J. Seid [00:12:23]:

So I just can't say enough for that. It goes all the way back to the teachings of a guy named Kurt Hahn, who asked after the war, you know, what do we do to raise, men? It used to be that war taught them about discipline and overcoming adversity. So if they're not going to war, how are we gonna teach them? And he realized that nature was the best classroom. And that's where Outward Bound and Knowles and some of these other very famous and established programs came from.

Kevin Sutton is sort of the spiritual son of a man named Ken Kalish who ran the wilderness programs at Wheaton College when I was a student there. And I count it one of the great privileges of my life to have met Ken. And he wrote a book that I think was probably part of his doctoral work when he was a young man. I think that was published the year I was born in 1979 that became the manual for outward bound instructors that I think is still being used to this day.

So Ken is a fascinating character. He left Wheaton and ran the wilderness programs at Montreat College. He and his wife are now retired. But, Ken has influenced an entire generation of wilderness instructors who are now scattered all over the world. But Kevin and Ken have stayed in close contact. And I think Ken probably gives thanks to the Lord for the work that Kevin is doing at Coldwater, that Kevin and Jen are doing because it is the direct descent of of the things that Ken taught a whole generation of wilderness instructors.

Carole Joy Seid [00:13:55]:

That's right. So true. So last thing I wanna talk about is a father's role as kind of the visionary quarterback to get his children to do hard things at home, that little four letter word: work. It's hard for mom to get kids to work sometimes as they get older. But what is a dad's role in creating kind of that culture of positive association to doing hard things with work.

J. J. Seid [00:14:28]:

Yeah. Something we try to remind our kids of is that work existed before the Fall. So work is not evil. Work is not something that came in with thorns and sin and death. What happened after the Fall is that work got harder and got uniquely problematic in

some ways. Things don't stay put. You know, they're subject to entropy. Work is subject to frustration, and that's true for everybody. So we can name that for our kids. We can say, "Hey, because of sin, you know, until Jesus comes back, work can be uniquely frustrating. You have to go back to the hardware store 6 times on a Saturday or you bang your thumb, make yourself bleed trying to repair things around your house or you go to fix something and you break it worse. You know? That's all part of the curse. But work itself is meaningful. It's something God gave to us that's a gift and a joy."

And so we can teach our kids that work is not an evil necessity. It's something meaningful and noble. We are made to work. If you've ever watched somebody go into early retirement, you learn pretty quickly that humans don't do well when they don't have work to set their hands to.

Carole Joy Seid [00:15:44]:
So true.

J. J. Seid [00:15:45]:
And you don't have to take a paycheck home for it. Maybe you retire and run a nonprofit and collect a dollar a year in payment. But you might be working harder than before you retired because of how passionate you are about your work. So work isn't just 9 to 5. Work isn't just something dad does in a single income home. We all work.

And as you always are reminding people, as soon as kids can walk, they can work. And so we begin to give our kids an appetite for work by telling them it's not evil, by doing it with them, by not just sending them off to work. And this is hard because I complain and grumble myself, and those are sins. But having a good attitude about it ourselves and going, "Alright, team, we're gonna tackle the house. There's a lot to do today. Everyone's gonna be working. So there's nobody to blame. You know, mom and dad aren't gonna be sitting on the back porch sipping lemonade. We're tired. That actually sounds really nice, but we're gonna work with you. Mom's gonna work with these kids in this part of the house. Dad's gonna work out in the garage with these kids."

And so they see us working, and they're invited into work alongside us. And, you know, for instance, on Memorial Day, I cleaned the garage, and it took, I don't know, 8 hours.

It's a long day. But, man, the pleasure that I've derived from that, you know, as one of my mentors says, like, "If I wanna assess a man, I wanna see his garage."

Carole Joy Seid [00:17:05]:
You know? Oh, really?

J. J. Seid [00:17:06]:

So every time I clean my garage, I think about that statement. And I'm like, well, I guess today he maybe give me a B. You know? But, there is something about having a clean garage. Not tripping over stuff and feeling you know, it's like, there's a lot of my life that's out of control or feels like it's in disarray. But when I go out in my garage, there's at least one area where I've exercised dominion, you know, as Adam was invited to do in the garden. So that was a really meaningful way to spend that Memorial Day. And the kids hear us talking about it, and the positive benefit that comes from exercising dominion and stewardship over your possessions. You know, we don't maybe have the nicest things, but we try to take care of them.

Carole Joy Seid [00:17:47]:

Yes.

J. J. Seid [00:17:49]:

Our house isn't decorated, the way we would decorate it if we had limitless money. But at least it's clean. And it's not filled with junk. And the closets aren't, you know, bursting with clutter. It's amazing how much nicer all your stuff looks when it's clean and organized and you get rid of a lot of it. You know? So it's like we try to teach our kids to take care of what we do have, to be grateful for what we have, and to steward what we have. So I'm sort of rambling now, but I think those are some of the ways that we invite our kids into work.

We model for them that it's not evil, that it's a way to steward the things we have, and then we celebrate together a job well done. And we put on a movie together or we go out to eat or we have a nice dessert or a treat of another kind to show that, like, we work hard and then we rest well. That we don't work incessantly. We're not dredges.

But we're not afraid of work. We're not slothful. And that after we work, we rest. And that makes the rest twice as enjoyable. The ice cream tastes better. The movie's even funnier, because we did something hard together. And there's a sense of accomplishment and stewardship that comes with that.

Carole Joy Seid [00:18:54]:

Wow. And what a blessing as your children someday marry that you have birth that work ethic and the joy of work in your children. And I know, like, a lot of people are not raised to work. And when they get married, it really blows up. It's a really traumatic thing in their lives.

J. J. Seid [00:19:15]:

Yeah. I don't wanna pick on men, but I'm a man so I'll speak to other men in this moment just to say, you know, there was maybe a vision of what a man was meant to contribute a couple generations ago, which was "I pay the bills. I bring home a paycheck. There should be a hot dinner on the table, and I've done my duty. Don't bother me. Bring me a beer. I'll be in the den watching the game."

Now that's become so silly that, obviously, I don't know any men that are actually believe that anymore. But some of us were raised by people who believe that. And so in that sense, there could be some sort of 2nd generation derivative gaps in some men's understanding that when we come home, we're tired. But the job that we now step into is actually more important than the one we've been getting paid for, and that can be confusing. But there's a sense in which we need to leave work at work, and we need to come home without self pity. And we may be tired, but so is our wife. And we need to come home and be prepared to work some more.

There's gonna be some dishes to do. There's gonna maybe be some laundry to fold. There's gonna be a honey-do list of things in the house that need to be repaired. There's some hard conversations to have around discipline and instruction with our kids. And there's gonna be some people longing for our attention. And so, you know, the husbands, dads need to go to bed tired. They need to know that they didn't leave anything in the tank. And work doesn't stop when we clock out of our jobs.

You know? We're gonna be working on Saturday. That's why Sabbath is so important. Frankly, we're in a season where we're terrible at sabbathing, and we're trying to figure out how to regain those rhythms.

But we actually work 6 days a week. You know? There's a lot of things to do around the house for a family to have peace. You need food in the fridge. You know? The money needs to be budgeted. Laundry needs to be folded. Things need to be repaired that are broken. And that that means everybody has to roll up their sleeves and be willing to work.

It's not enough to just bring home a paycheck. I don't even think that's probably a biblical vision of work and stewardship.

Carole Joy Seid [00:21:18]:

Right. Well, because you're modeling being a servant leader as the dad. And the kids don't feel like their nose is out of joint if daddy's working. And you have the anointing, like, because you're more of a novelty than a mom is. If you're gone all day, a lot of

dads now are home a lot, which is great after COVID. A lot of my dads that I work with consulting, they're like, well, I work in the bedroom. I'm like, okay, well, we have to rethink this a little bit because you aren't quite the novelty that you used to be when you walked in at 5:30 or 7 or whatever time. But, as they see you working and loving working, kids just wanna do whatever dad's doing.

J. J. Seid [00:21:56]:
Mhmm. Yeah.

Carole Joy Seid [00:21:57]:
If you're going to the hardware store, they'd rather go there than Europe. Like, it's you just have magnetism as a man for your children, and you can really play that card and win their heart.

J. J. Seid [00:22:09]:
Well and I learned this from you, but, you know, there's a window of time where it's fun to work with dad, and then that window closes. Unfortunately, that's also the time when your kids are least helpful. And so we have to preach to ourselves. It's worth it for this job to take longer, because it's more important than my kid catch a vision for work that it is that I'm efficient.

And that's hard when you're tired on a Saturday and you got a long list of things to do. But you've always raised me to remember that it's more important that your kids be invited into those things and catch a vision, because later you're gonna be really glad. After that window of novelty closes, they hopefully have caught a vision for it.

Carole Joy Seid [00:22:52]:
So true, JJ. Well, would you like to close with praying for the dads that are listening?

J. J. Seid [00:22:59]:
Yeah. Absolutely. Thank you. Lord, every day we wake up and and the things that we're called to are beyond our ability, beyond our capacity. So we ask that you would teach us to not be afraid of weakness and dependence. Give us words to speak to you, to ask for help, to ask for wisdom and strength. Lord, on the days when we're most tempted to self pity, when we don't feel like we have anything left in the tank, we pray that you would sustain us, strengthen us, give us a long view that present suffering is not worth being compared with eternal glory. Give us endurance and steadfastness, and and give us joy even in the midst of hardship and setbacks and disappointment and exhaustion. Help us to finish well as Christians, as husbands, as dads. We pray for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Carole Joy Seid [00:24:02]:

Amen.

Rachel Winchester [00:24:04]:

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