

Rachel Winchester [00:00:02]:

If you're just getting started homeschooling or even a few years in, you might be wondering how to set realistic expectations for the school year. It's easy to bite off more than we can chew, but it's also easy to underestimate all that we are capable of doing in 1 year's time. In today's episode, we're talking about setting realistic expectations for

the school year that will guide you, but not weigh you down. You're listening to the Homeschool Made Simple podcast. This is a podcast to help you homeschool simply, inexpensively, and enjoyably. I'm Rachel Winchester, a fellow homeschool mom to 3 kids, and the director of operations for Homeschool Made Simple. I'm joined by JJ Side, a homeschooling dad of 4 kids who teaches in our seminars. We both understand how easy it can be to be too rigid or too loose with our plans. Today, JJ and I share some tips for planning your upcoming school year. Listen in.

Carole Joy Seid [00:00:56]:

Hi, friends. Carole Seid here. Before we jump into this conversation, I wanted to let you know about some exciting changes that are happening at Homeschool Made Simple. Over the last few years, our team has expanded to include JJ Side and Rachel Winchester. I'm not going anywhere anytime soon, Lord willing, but you will hear from them more and more on the podcast as we become a multigenerational ministry. As many of you know, JJ is a pastor and husband. He and his wife homeschool their 4 children, and Rachel is the director of operations for Homeschool Made Simple. She's also a wife and mother, and she and her husband homeschool 3 young children.

While it's wonderful to have spiritual parents speak into our lives, we also benefit from brothers and sisters in the faith as well. We at Homeschool Made Simple are excited for this new season, and I know you'll benefit from JJ and Rachel as they share from their experience of homeschooling their own families. Enjoy the episode.

Rachel Winchester [00:02:03]:

Well, today, I'm back with JJ's side to talk about something that really relates to the deep core question that every homeschooling parent has, and that is, am I doing enough for my kids? Am I doing the best that I can? I think we all wrestle with that question at one point or another, if not for long seasons. So if you've ever wrestled with that question, I think it's actually closely related to how we end up planning our school year. So today, we're gonna talk about how to make a realistic plan for the school year, and sometimes we set out with a big grand plan or we try to take on someone else's plan that ends up being not a great fit for us. And so then we wonder, well, why can't I do this? Why am I not doing what everyone else is doing? And so to me, these

questions sort of go hand in hand of how do I plan a school year that is enough? And if you ever talk to any other homeschooling parents, I'm sure that you've heard them ask this question. Isn't that right, JJ?

JJ Seid [00:03:02]:

Yeah. Absolutely. And I you know, as you're talking, it reminds me of something that probably nobody's gonna expect me to be reminded of. It's a book called The Omnivore's Dilemma by a guy named Michael Pollan, a famous writer, a journalism professor at Berkeley. And what's so brilliant about the book is he said, all of us Americans have food issues. All of us Westerners have food issues, and it's the omnivore's dilemma. A plant eating animal just eats plants. They eat what they're programmed to eat.

You know, lions kill meat when they get hungry. But we could eat anything, which means we could drive through McDonald's 7 days a week, or we could eat vegan. And sort of like that omnivores dilemma, we're not carnivores, we're not herbivores, we're omnivores, is precisely the problem because we have to decide what to eat. And that brings with it a lot of anxiety and the potential to mess up our diets or to become overly obsessed with our diets, all sorts of ditches. And so I think for those who are transitioning to homeschooling, particularly for the first time, they're probably feeling the weight of that in new ways. Because if you've been a part of a classical Christian school or your kids are in public or private school, you're showing up and doing what's asked of you. And oftentimes, if you ask those parents what they're doing, they're usually just gonna tell you, man, we're just trying to keep up. Someone else is setting the tempo, and you're just trying to dance to it and not get dragged behind the truck.

And then you come into homeschooling, and you're the one setting the tempo. And you're the one with the omnivore's dilemma. How much do we program our week? You know, how many hours a day should we be sitting at the kitchen table doing formal work? My kids are saying that their eyes are tired. Does that mean I have unrealistic expectations? It's hard to know. And I think one thing you and I have named in the past is we forget that we're not trying to keep up with the Joneses as it were, as it relates to, say, the average school day schedule. As though our kid was having learning poured into their head without interruption for 7 straight hours. And so when they come home, they need to do that at the kitchen table. Because, of course, if you followed your kid around all day at a school, no matter how good a school it was, that's not what was happening.

You know, there was crowd control, there was air traffic control, there was bathroom breaks, there was discipline, There was being transported back and forth or

interruptions. There was your child staring out the window while the teacher explained the math problem for the 7th time to this other kid. All these things are happening. And if you actually boil down the, quote, unquote, learning in that day, what are we talking about? 2 hours? Maybe? It's easy to forget that. And so what we don't wanna do is then transition to homeschooling and try to have our kids having things beaten into their brain 6 hours a day, because that's not what was happening even in an elite private school. And I'm not making fun of those other things. I'm just saying that's the nature of being transported to a place and trying to learn in a community where you all get along and make sure you eat lunch and go to the bathroom and get to your class on time. And with large student to teacher ratio ratios, just some dynamics that are inherent in the structures and systems.

We have to remember that we're gonna accomplish in just a couple hours a day if we're focused, and we didn't sleep in till 10:30. We're not trying to do, you know, homeschool in our PJs starting at noon. You know, we wanna we wanna be functioning humans, and maybe we don't get up at 6, but, you know, we're hitting the ground running by 9 maybe. You know, everyone's at breakfast and we're dressed and in our right mind. And, yeah, we turn phones off and we're focused. And then by lunchtime, depending on the age of your kids, you're off doing other stuff. You're on a nature hike, they're playing outside, you're doing chores, you're serving in your community. So that's probably the first thing I'd say is it's really hard for people to believe they don't need to be doing formal learning 6 hours a day because it feels like they're cheating.

But the first thing they need to know is that nobody's doing formal learning 6 hours a day. And if they are, they're miserable. And a kid's brain isn't wired to assimilate that much information in a day anyway.

Rachel Winchester [00:06:55]:

Yeah. Doctor Raymond Moore talked about if you're gonna do school at home, it would be better to just send your kids to school because at least then they get breaks for recess and lunch and going to the bathroom and all those things. Like, if you're gonna try them like, if you're gonna bring them home to do school at home, please don't do that. It is not the kind option for your kids.

JJ Seid [00:07:17]:

That's so right. Yeah. If you're gonna pledge allegiance to the flag at 9 AM in your living room, do hours of formal work, and never serve and never learn a work ethic and never play and never go outside, it's like, yeah, at least send them to school where they can get prom and banned because if this is homeschooling, I don't want any part of it. You know? Yeah. If homeschooling is school at home, there's no wonder that kids

who are homeschooled like that grow up to vow to never homeschool their kids. You know? Whereas people in my generation and your generation who are now 2nd generation, it's because we didn't experience school at home. You know, we experienced the 3 legged stool that we try to talk about so often, which we didn't invent, but, you know, we can't say enough. There's study, but there's also work and service.

And homeschooling is actually this opportunity multiplier. We're not trying to imitate anything and provide a poorer, more boring version of. We're actually saying, hey, now I can go intern for free and find out if I would actually enjoy this career. All sorts of things that I didn't necessarily have the opportunity to do. I remember when I was in a private school for a brief season of my life where tuition was very expensive, it actually made the local papers when they rolled out internship, and they sort of funneled each of the students into the community for maybe an hour to a week, you know, to to intern somewhere as though that was the most cutting edge innovative thing in the world. And I'm not making fun of it. Simply to say, homeschoolers are doing stuff like that all the time, and nobody's necessarily writing articles about it, nor is it rolled out with a lot of fanfare. But if you're using this philosophy of homeschooling in the way we encourage you to, you're not gonna be chained to a desk all day.

You're gonna do your book work. You're gonna do your math. You're gonna be focused on the subjects you need to be focused on, but you're gonna spend a ton of time reading, a ton of time serving, a ton of time working, and you're gonna be building all sorts of skills and all sorts of muscles and have a really well rounded, fun, exciting life.

Rachel Winchester [00:09:15]:

For sure. We recently recorded a series all about our philosophy in a nutshell and then breaking it down to what that looks like in preschool, elementary, middle school, and high school. So if you haven't listened to those, be sure to go back through episodes 212 through 216. Those will really unpack what we're talking about of what the 3 legged stool looks like in all these different stages of a child's development and learning. And sometimes when people may come to a seminar, they hear the podcast, they're really interested, and they buy it in the online store, you know, they listen and get the book list, And then they're like, what do I do? It can feel overwhelming if you've been handed an example of something, and now you have to make it your own. You know, I've downloaded some of the curriculums that are available out there just to get a little preview of what they send you in the mail when you purchase the whole thing. And so it's a very comprehensive plan, all the subjects that they provide and it lists out every single week. And then each week, it tells what you're gonna read and

the specific pages and all these different things, which can be really helpful because then it's just right there.

All you have to do is, you know, it's called open and go. All you have to do is open and bam. But it's kind of like if you are doing a bible reading plan and you miss a day or something. Like, I know people who, well, I missed this week, so I have to completely start over or I have to go back and make up all the days that I missed or I can't use this plan anymore. I can't just pick up where I am because then I know that I didn't do those days, so I just completely missed all those chapters. Okay. Well, we're still on week 8, but as the teacher, I know we're, quote, supposed to be on week 32 or whatever. And that's an extreme example, but I think that maybe that's some of the benefit of using our book list and not having really rigid plans.

The point the whole time isn't to be on certain pages at certain on certain days or certain weeks. The point is to be deciding a trajectory for your family and for your kids during that time. And so the book list and just our whole model really gives the flexibility to choose what you want to do with your kids and at the pace that you want to do it. But then that can be overwhelming with families because they could potentially do anything like you were saying at the beginning with the omnivore example. There does have to be some sort of focusing and deciding what will be the guidelines. So taking our book list and making a plan that's realistic that still gives my kids a good education and helps me know that I can sit down and know what to do, but is also not bringing up some of those problems that I'm trying to avoid of being too rigid or always feeling behind or just having way too much to do in a day.

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We are taking a quick break from this episode to let you know about our ebook, 5 essential parts of a great education. We wrote this ebook to introduce you to the homeschool made simple method of homeschooling.

It lays out what we consider to be the 5 essential parts of a great education, and you can get the ebook on our website at homeschoolmadesimple.net/ebook. And did I mention that it's free? If you like what you hear in this episode, the ebook will build on the ideas we share here. Download it today and begin deciding what matters most in your child's education. Now back to the show.

Rachel Winchester:

So you were homeschooled and have been homeschooling your own kids for several years now. So do you have any tips on how to work through that tension a little bit?

JJ Seid [00:12:49]:

Yeah. I think that's good. I think Kristen and I often feel like we should be doing more, and that's as 2 people who've sort of been raised in this philosophy. And so I think that's revelatory. If you're feeling that, you're not alone. If you're feeling behind, that's sort of the reflex of a Western human is is, is to think to yourself, I should be doing more. I'm not doing enough. I'm behind.

That's not just the mantra of the homeschooler. That's the mantra of the westerner. Whether we realize it or not, we've all assimilated this idea of outcome based education. You know, you gotta get to a good school so you can get a good job, so you can make enough money. But education used to be about cultivation of virtue, that we were trying to create citizens who knew how to live in the world and be virtuous people and also be excellent because that's a part of virtue. But education wasn't about making money. It was about acquiring wisdom. And if you think about that, that's a very different way to approach this.

You know, as you were talking, I was thinking about somebody trying to kindle a fire with flint and tinder. You know? And you're kneeling there on the ground. Maybe it just rained and everything's damp, and you're just trying to catch a spark. And it's a very delicate process. And then you finally catch a spark, and you blow on it and nurse it and try to keep it from going out, and then you try to feed it. There's something sort of meditative and slow about it. And I think if we had that perspective, it would help us. What we're trying to do is cultivate lifelong love for learning and our kids, more than cram their head full of a bunch of facts that we've predetermined will make them win at life.

Because who could ever know what those things were? Now we can identify virtues. Scripture is gonna tell us the kind of virtues they're gonna need to succeed in life. But as far as getting just the right information, well, that's a wash. You know, even if you look at college graduates, I think the statistics the last time I worked in student affairs a lifetime ago, something like 3 or 4 out of 5 students are working in a field totally unrelated to their major within 5 years of graduation. So even in that period from 18 to 22, and then from 22 to 27, people are going, wow. I never expected to be in this field. So then you have to ask yourself, is it really about making sure they get the right information? Because that didn't even work for them at the collegiate level. They paid \$80 to study something that they're not even quote unquote working in the field of now.

So then the real question is, well, did they develop the ability to think? Do they know how to solve problems? If they don't know the answer to something, do they know where to look? Are they actually curious, or do they have that cauterized by years of meaningless drudgery that they never understood the why of other than I just have to do this so I can pass and my parents will be mad at me, and then I can make a lot of money. It's not usually about doing more, but it's about kindling a spark in our kids. And that means that they have to have some breathing space in their life. Their whole life can't just be being chained to the plow. So we're not unschooling barefoot children that are like running wild in the streets, you know, so the DHS gets called. We wanna have discipline, but we also wanna have some constraints and say, like, yeah, we're gonna focus hard for a couple hours, and then we're gonna put that stuff aside. And you know what? It's okay that we're moving a little slower than I thought because what boxes are being checked? My kids engaged. They're not filled with anxiety.

They are curious. Their mind is awake. They're engaging with the things we're learning, and they're having fun. And their appetite for learning is being wedded. It's like, okay, that's the ultimate goal. Would I love to finish the math curriculum we picked that says we're supposed to be this far in the year, and we're 40% of the way through, and we're supposed to be Okay. That's a healthy tension to live in. As you joked earlier, it doesn't mean we're 10% of the way through.

You know, like, we've just punted, and we have no discipline. But is it really that big a deal that you're 40% of the way through it when the math book says you're supposed to be 60% of the way through? When your son is 27, is anyone gonna remember that? That you got through 80% of that math book this year rather than a 100? Or is what matters that is that your son sat with the material long enough to actually learn it. So then when he goes on to add to those things in his next year of math, he's actually building on things he learned and retained and enjoys by some miracle and doesn't hate. And then if we press ourselves even farther, a math book is sort of objective. Okay. We're doing 7th grade math. He's supposed to finish it by the end of the year so he can do 8th grade math. You know, that's pretty objective.

But as you've named to me, Rachel, we have people who've invented all sorts of arbitrary goals for their year. We're gonna get all these things done. And if you and I sat with them and said, who says? They'd be like, well, I don't know. I just felt like a realistic goal. Well, because we're all afraid of ruining our kids and we're certainly afraid of unschooling most of us, we're probably going to over torque our year. We're going to over torque our goals, and then we're going to spend the rest of the year beating ourselves up that we've fallen behind the arbitrary standards we've set for ourselves. If you're a planner, you're probably never gonna accomplish as much as you thought you

would. And if you're not a planner, planning would help you accomplish a lot more than you ever could imagine.

So it's good to know yourself. You know, some of us need to stretch ourselves and be more diligent, but a lot of us are wound pretty tight and need to just remind ourselves that we're not ruining our kids. And this is gonna end really well, and they're gonna be okay.

Rachel Winchester [00:18:23]:

Yeah. I have 3 kids, and my oldest was in 1st grade this past year, and I had a kindergartener as well. And so I was kind of trying to buy some time before I start the American history cycle that we do, that we teach in our seminars, and so we did a trip around the world. And I will just say that the pace I was trying to keep was rather unrealistic. I was trying to go to all these different countries basically on a 2 week rotation, And it was just so incredibly intense to keep up with in terms of requesting books from the library and finding books to use and making sure I went to the library that often and just all these things just because I had some arbitrary thing in my mind of that we've got to get to all the continents and not just not just all the continents, but specific countries. And then I need to have books for those specific countries and all this stuff. And so then toward the end, I was I just progressively really stripped it down over time and more so returned to what my original vision for it was, which was to just to learn about missionary stories and to travel to different continents through these stories. And so it ended up with just that missionary story book with as the spine and atlases and just things that I already had around the house, which was the whole point of it anyway just to introduce my kids to other countries and other cultures in the world without it having to be so stressful, but I really realized that I had set a really difficult cadence for myself.

That was such a tight turnaround that it became so stressful and that my kids were not trying to keep up any sort of pace. You know, they weren't dedicated to a 2 week pace, but they're not concerned about how fast we were going or how many countries we got to in the year. They would be so fine if we just went from one continent to the next and just I think one of the struggles of motherhood and maybe parenting in general is just entering into our children's world and their pace of living that they are not in a hurry and that it's really good for us to slow down and enter into that slowness seeming slowness for us and into it because that is how they experience discovery because they're not in a hurry. They're so happy to bend over and look at the amp pile and pull out the rocks from the pile and pick up the leaves and all the things, but I can even take, like, a stance in how I'm pacing us so that then I'm in a hurry and now all of it's not because of them. It's not even because they need that sort, frequency of of

changing the countries and all of that kind of stuff. It's just because I set out to do this. And so I feel like that is gonna be a really great thing about using the American history handout just to say we're gonna look at this specific time period and we're gonna go to the library, gather things, and I'm not gonna be trying to do it in 2 weeks' time. We're gonna have a longer period of time to really immerse into a specific point in history and then learn about so many other facets of the world and life in that time through that one specific spot.

So it kinda gives us that space, I think.

JJ Seid [00:21:41]:

I think that's so wise. Yeah. What you said was really helpful. It's like the difference between thinking you have to make 7 completely unique meals, 7 nights a week, or you're a failure as a homemaker or recognizing, hey, we're gonna shake the menu up occasionally, but we've also got our tried and true dishes. And we're having leftovers tonight because I make double batches because I'm not trying to kill myself. You know? So, yeah, there are analogies to homeschooling. It's like, I'm not trying to turn the page every time I turn around and reinvent the wheel. It's like, yeah, we can stay in Portugal for a couple of weeks.

It wouldn't kill us. You and I experienced this when we were planning the board meeting for Homeschool Made Simple where, you know, we have a CFO flying in from across the country, law professor, you know, people who are so graciously giving of their time to serve on the board of this ministry. And my greatest fear is that we would waste their time. And so you and I planned and we wrote things down and we programmed out the time, and I think that was right. If all those people showed up and realized that we are winging it, I think that would have been really disrespectful and unhelpful. But, of course, you and I chuckled because we didn't get to everything we'd planned. You know, what did we get? Maybe 70% of it, I guess? And I don't think that was a failure. Right? That was us realizing that we were so afraid to not plan at all.

And so we planned, which was good. And then also when we're in the moment, we could chuckle and go, oh, that one question we threw out, we spent 45 minutes answering that question together. And that was a really productive use of our time. There's analogies there for homeschooling. Let's be diligent. You know, you don't wanna get to a Friday and go, oh, we only sat down and did, quote, unquote, school one day this week. Well, yeah, that's a problem. You know, like, it would have been better if that was 3 or 4 days, or maybe even 5.

So if you were engaged at least 4 days and you were present and you were working your plan, that's great. It doesn't matter if, like you said, the kids stopped to smell the roses so many times. That means it's working. If your caravan is traveling slowly because your kids are actually noticing bugs and feeling bark and picking up leaves, that's great. We don't need to tell them to move faster. That means this goal of unlocking curiosity in our children and hopefully creating lifelong learners is probably working. And if we hold that long view in mind, I think it'll help us be less anxious. When we say to our spouse or our friend, we're behind, you know, and hopefully they can say to us, behind who? And who says? Well, I don't know.

This voice in my head that's always telling me I'm behind.

Rachel Winchester [00:24:12]:

Yes. That is so encouraging. Just keep at it. Keep building into the relationships that homeschooling offers for us to have with our kids and to take note of the things that are happening in front of us if they're developing that work ethic to learn. If they're still curious and they still have that light in their eyes, that's a really good sign. Thanks for having this conversation with me, JJ.

JJ Seid [00:24:33]:

You bet. It was fun.

Rachel Winchester [00:24:35]:

You've been listening to the Homeschool Made Simple podcast. If you enjoy this podcast, help us share the message with others by leaving a rating and review. Your words are such an encouragement to us and help others know what to expect when finding the show. Thanks for joining us this week on the Homeschool Made Simple podcast. Remember, Jesus' commandments are not burdensome. What He calls you to do, He will enable you to do. Blessings.