

Homeschooling with a Wide Age Gap

Episode 227

Rachel Winchester [00:00:00]:

What if you had the chance to restart your homeschool journey? What would you do differently? What would remain the same? We all can ask those questions, but not everyone has the chance to start again after graduating their oldest. In today's episode, we'll talk with Rachel Reeves about her homeschooling journey and her unique experience of starting over with her youngest as her oldest daughter approaches high school graduation. You're listening to the Homeschool Made Simple podcast. This is a podcast to help you homeschool simply, inexpensively, and enjoyably. Carole Joy Seid has been helping families homeschool for several decades now, and I'm Rachel Winchester, a fellow homeschool mom to 3 kids and the director of operations for Homeschool Made Simple. In this episode, we interview Rachel Reeves, who is a homeschooling mom of 4 girls. Her family relocated from California to a little farm in Virginia several years ago. We've had Rachel on the podcast before to talk about current events and parenting. This time, we wanted to hear more about what she's learned over the years of homeschooling and what she'll do differently as she starts fresh with her youngest child. Listen in.

Welcome, Rachel.

Rachel Reeves [00:01:10]:

Thanks so much for having me again, ladies.

Carole Joy Seid [00:01:12]:

We love you. We're so happy to have you here. Now we're like the 3 Musketeers.

Rachel Reeves [00:01:17]:

I agree. I would gladly be a part of that trio.

Carole Joy Seid [00:01:23]:

Don't tempt us. We may draft you.

Rachel Winchester [00:01:27]:

Yeah. So first, Rachel, I want you to kind of tell us about your family. You have 4 girls and just kind of tell us about their ages. And, I, you know, I know that you have a really

young daughter and an older daughter. And so just the unique perspective that you have on mothering such a wide gap of range of ages. And so I just wanted to talk with you about that today.

Rachel Reeves [00:01:52]:

Sure. We do. We have 4 daughters. When we moved to Virginia from California about 6 years ago, we only had 3. But then the Lord blessed us about 15 months ago with a new baby. So our oldest daughter is 16a half. Our second born is 13. Our third child is gonna be 10 in September, and then we have Meg who's all the way down 15 months.

So, yeah, we have 4, and it's a it's a wide gap, and it has definitely turned some things on their head and made us reevaluate, shift, pivot, but also just understand that the Lord's gonna meet us wherever we are. And when he gives us these blessings, he's going to provide for us and really bless us through the change. So, yes, we do. We have a 6,15 year range between our 4.

Rachel Winchester [00:02:55]:

Wow. That's awesome.

Carole Joy Seid [00:02:58]:

And tell us about the reaction of the of the big girls. A lot of times when these late in life caboose babies come, everyone just kinda gasps and feels like someone pulled the floor out from under them. But my experience is that the caboose babies tend to unify the family in ways that no other child does, And, actually, they're very often many families tell me that this child was the greatest blessing of our lives. And tell me about your kids and how they've been walking through this change.

Rachel Reeves [00:03:30]:

I have to agree with that, Carole, what you said because well, the latter part of what you said because, of course, when you have 3 older daughters or older children, and then all of a sudden, 8 years later or 9 years later, you find out you're pregnant, you're you're somewhat concerned. What is this going to do? We have been this unit of 5 people for so long and a new baby. What's that going to do to the relationships of the girls, our relationship with them? How is that gonna impact their trajectory, really, educationally and socially? What's this gonna do? And, of course, when we told them, they were all so surprised and thrilled. And then she came. And from day 1 to just this afternoon, they all fight to get her up from her nap. They all want to they wanna feed her. They wanna hold her. They fight to change diapers.

They just wanna be around her all the time. So she is definitely their doll baby for sure. But I think it's it's I I don't get to hold her that often. But what you said was so right about about how it can unify because, of course, we always felt like we were, and we were a very strong family unit of 5. Mhmm. But when Meg came along, it was almost like, where has she been all this time? She was so obviously a part of our family. And so it almost seems weird that we've lived a whole life without you know, we lived a whole almost 9 years without her, and she'll never know that time. She won't know those jokes or those experiences.

But now we can't imagine just the 5 of us anymore. So it's definitely brought us they're very protective of her. They always wanna be helping with her. In fact, I do have to say, and we can get into this later, but my oldest daughter was very keen on, moving away to college And, lately, she has been asking more questions like, well, if I stay, can I live downstairs? Because we have a downstairs basement. And maybe wallpaper the walls and make that more like my space. Because I feel like they understand that so much living is gonna so much of her growth is gonna happen while they're not here that they want to kind of have as much time as possible, if that makes sense, with her in that in that way. Yeah. So, yeah, it's been extremely unifying for our whole family very much.

Carole Joy Seid [00:06:10]:

That is so beautiful. I love that. You know, in Uganda, the prepubescent girls are, the way that the mothers wear their babies as the child gets older, they face the baby out and they, you know, wear the baby outwards. And I read some research on this that they do this at the time that their other daughters are in that kind of prepubescent period where they're eye to eye with the baby constantly. The baby is never laid down in Uganda, and they learn to bond, and it's the ultimate preparation for their own mothering journey when they get older. And that sounds like just what's happening at your house.

Rachel Reeves [00:06:53]:

Yeah. And I never heard another little anecdote. I never really heard I might have once or twice heard my my daughter say, when I grow up, I really want to homeschool and have a lot of babies. I mean, sure, they would say, oh, I'm never putting my kid in public school or something like that. But, I always wondered if that was just because that was something I said. But since having Meg, all 3 of my daughters at one time or another have said, oh, I I want lots of babies, and I wanna stay home. It was something about watching a baby being born and raised and and just something that none of them actually got to see. My eldest was, I think, 5 or 6 when her youngest sister was born or the our 3rd daughter was born, and she doesn't recall it very much.

Carole Joy Seid [00:07:43]:
Yeah. Right.

Rachel Reeves [00:07:44]:
So there was something really, really rich about watching the baby be born, taking it taking care of her at all stages. It, I think, really kind of infused them with this admiration for that that period of time, that stage. So that's been wonderful.

Carole Joy Seid [00:08:03]:
That is so beautiful. Wow. Children are a gift, and and and our culture tells us they're not a gift. They're a burden. There's a financial, you know, ball and chain around your ankle and on and on and on. But either God's right or our society's right. They can't both be right.

Rachel Reeves [00:08:24]:
That's right.

Carole Joy Seid [00:08:25]:
And God says children are a gift and a blessing, and who can have too many gifts and blessings.

Rachel Reeves [00:08:33]:
Right. I agree. I agree. Totally.

Rachel Winchester [00:09:15]:
So I have a sister who's, like, 9 years old younger than me.

And so I had a similar experience of just I remember her being a baby and taking care of her, and she was our little doll baby. Yes.

Rachel Reeves [00:09:25]:
But That's true.

Rachel Winchester [00:09:26]:
Yeah. So how has going starting to go through, you know, now you're getting to those, like, she's becoming a toddler and stuff.

Rachel Reeves [00:09:33]:
Mhmm.

Rachel Winchester [00:09:34]:

And maybe what are some of the things that you for sure wanna do the same or that you are doing differently this time around as you start over?

Rachel Reeves [00:09:44]:

Well, differently, I can already tell you because I've done it now three times with these girls. And I could tell you differently, I will not be as stressed out as I was with my first two with Meg. It just it won't even be a consideration because I'm not gonna waste her time and mine, Worried about, reaching some sort of, you know, mystical pretend milestone that people who don't even know what they're talking about make up for my child. And I think that, I think what I will do is concentrate less on pushing, reading and writing and arithmetic so early and rather concentrate on the, the life skills of living, with her through reading and tangible learning, which I didn't do as much with my first, especially because I was so honed in on making sure she could spell, making sure she could read at a young age, making sure she understood her her, addition tables and multiplication tables. And so I just I think with Meg, it'll be a totally different ballgame. I'll be more relaxed because I've seen that anxiety driven education benefits nobody Yes. Especially the child. And then I think I'll probably be careful to not over commit our time.

As Meg grows, I did that a little bit too much with my oldest. I did a lot with my oldest because they're the guinea pig. They're they're they're the guinea pig. You know what I mean? Yeah. Yeah. But, just not, not saddle her with too much. Just let her live a life that is slowly disappearing from the childhood landscape, the like, the uncomplicated playing outside, being in nature, reading, very limited technology, which we've tried to do a very good job of, but even we have allowed it in with our oldest to to a point where when we had to scale back, it was difficult. And I just want to nip out of the bud and not even allow it to happen with my 4th.

So we live and learn, and even with the best of intentions, we we give in sometimes. And but when we know better, we do better. And I I hope for Meg, she will reap the benefits. I mean, I know that there's gonna be some things about being the 4th child she's just gonna hate. But I hope that she can benefit from the things that we made mistakes on with with our oldest.

Carole Joy Seid [00:12:46]:

Yeah. I find that homeschool moms get more and more confident with each child they have. And the first child, we tend to have school at home, and we're very intense and driven and neurotic, and they're all in therapy. Just kidding. But then as the the by the time number 4 comes along, you're like, oh, whatever. It's just the motto of the family,

and it's so great that every child could be a 4th child. But then there probably wouldn't be CEOs and presidents of major corporations without without firstborns.

Rachel Reeves [00:13:17]:

That's right.

Carole Joy Seid [00:13:18]:

So Yep. Absolutely. They get both. Our firstborns get a lot of attention that the others don't get, but the others get the attention from one another, which is so precious. My dad is one of 17 children, and he was number he was number 16. And really his his siblings really raised him because his parents were so old. And so his siblings just loved on him and spoiled him, and and he was the golden boy of the family. 4 of the children died of childhood diseases.

So there weren't actually that many children, you know, all at one time. But, but there's just something about being in a big family. People start to fret about, well, I'm not gonna be able to give this one the time that I gave, you know, maybe my first or whatever. But I say to them, but the siblings will more than make up for what you can't give them. And it's a blessing to your siblings. Don't rob the kids Mhmm. Of the joy of helping to raise a child and preparing their heart for parenthood.

Carole Joy Seid [00:14:24]:

Such a such an important gift.

Rachel Reeves [00:14:27]:

Yeah. And I also think about, there's so much emphasis these days. Of course, like you said in your, when we prayed before we started recording that the world doesn't see children as blessings. And so they'll they'll craft these narratives like, oh, well, you don't wanna have more than 2 or more than 3 because your mom and dad aren't gonna be able to give them enough time. And what I think that they're leaving out, except I mean, obviously, it's just another excuse not to have children and be inconvenienced. But I think one thing that they leave out from that is that my relationship and love for my children will, of course, be obvious, but it's not the only relationship in the family that's important. And what like you said, what I'm unable to give them because I'm not gonna be able to give them everything. What I'm unable to give them, our family unit my family unit as it's grown is filling in all those cracks.

And it's so, you know, I'm not able to give Meg, you know, probably half of what I gave my oldest. But my 3 other daughters and my husband are all filling in those cracks, you know, in a way that a child who has the full attention of their parents might not have.

And so I don't ever wanna underestimate the point of that, you know, the the importance of that.

Carole Joy Seid [00:15:48]:

Yes. Because a child from a larger family is so blessed because they always have playmates. They always have someone to listen to them or read to them or help them, and they also don't grow up thinking they're the center of the universe. And that's a huge gift that we can give to a child.

Rachel Winchester [00:16:08]:

And it makes for very fun family gatherings as you get older and you have children. You know, everyone has kids and it just makes it it becomes a bigger and bigger party.

Rachel Reeves [00:16:20]:

I cannot wait. I can't wait.

Rachel Winchester [00:16:22]:

So fun. So in light of all that, you've got a lot going on at your house. So how do you kind of do it all? You've got your 4 girls that you're taking care of. You guys kind of live on some land, have some animals, and you are involved in your church. You keep up with the news. You know, you've got a lot going on in your life. So just maybe you could speak to how you how you do it all.

Rachel Reeves [00:16:48]:

Well, I think the first thing to say is that I don't do it all. Amen. I have a I have a husband who works at home, and is a wonderful leader in our house, and he's a wonderful partner. And he is he's the type of guy that he sees a, sink full of dishes. He washes them. He is extremely hands on. Secondly, my kids are older now. So the things I'm doing now, homeschooling while running a little kind of side job, a business online, with my news account, I would never have been able to do that 4, 5, 6 years ago.

So when people are coming into me who are homeschool moms who are earlier on in their journey, and they're like, I can't do that. How do you do that? I really wanna make it clear. Like, I could not have done this 5, 6, 7 years ago. There's no chance. If I did it, it would have been to the detriment of my kids. So I'm able to do it now because, a, my husband, after COVID hit, started working from home. So we kind of are able to tag team some things, so that I'm able to do some work, and he obviously is able to, you know, do his his full time job. But, also, my girls are older.

So I have a almost 17 year old and a 13 year old and a 10 year old who are extremely helpful. And if I need to hop on a podcast or I need 2 hours to get some work done, I say, okay. You hover the 1st hour. You hover the 2nd hour. Again, couldn't have done that even 5 years ago, really, because my you know, it was different. And then when it comes to homeschooling, the beautiful part about homeschooling that no one tells you is if you do it well in the, in the front end, then when they get older, they are self teaching. You know? They they don't need me to be over their shoulder and saying, okay. Now read that sentence again.

You need to do this. I I really give them a lot of free rein. I they have their responsibilities for their work that they need to get done, their reading, their composition, their, mathematics. They it's all written out for them. They have their chores they need to do every single day, and then the rest of the day is theirs. So I it's a different ballgame than when I was teaching them to read or we were working on our, our spelling or our letters or, you know, out doing, lots of science experiments for fun. It's not that way, and it will change again. When Meg turns 5, 6, 7 years old, it I'll have to I'll have to pivot because I'll be doing it over again with her.

But for right now, I'm kind of in a sweet spot where I'm able to have a little more freedom. But it also is time. And I think that people have to be able to be honest with themselves about the sacrifices they're willing to make. You know, there's some things that we choose not to do as a family so that, I can have a small business. And knowing and telling the girls these are the choices we're making because, for instance, me doing this small business has allowed us to save money to go on a trip or things like that. So we're able to talk about those choices together. But, yes, certainly not doing it all. And I really want I I wish that I hope people know that because no one's doing it all.

And I'm not even doing I'm not even doing all the things I'd like to do. There's people in my line of work online that are doing amazing things and going all over the the country, as journalists, and they're getting to go to these amazing places and speak, and I can't do that right now. I I wouldn't even be able to do it if someone offered it. So that also has to be really I I hope people understand that. Like Yeah. No one's doing it all. That's good. So

Carole Joy Seid [00:20:48]:

And you put first things first. You know? So second things have to be second things, when we're parenting. And so you're putting first things first. And, and if you saw first things falling through the cracks, what what would your response be at that point?

Rachel Reeves [00:21:07]:

Well, they do happen. There's times when I'm sitting here and I'm in the middle of a project, or I really wanna get something out, and I really wanna do something, and the baby starts crying, or my daughter's sick, or our Internet goes out because we live, you know, in the sticks. And my husband's like, no. Go to the coffee shop. Just go get it done. And inside, I just know, like, no. Forget it. I'll just do it another time or not at all.

Rachel Reeves [00:21:32]:

And that happens, you know, at least several times a week when there's things I would like to do in my self interest, and you just say I can't. And and it stinks. But that's not in the end, I'm always happy for the choice I make. The Lord always blesses me in those moments a lot. I think because he knows that when we are are unable to do something we've really thought was gonna be the right thing for us, and then we're we're unable to do it, there's this heartsickness about it sometimes because it's they're all good things. Mhmm. But then, you know, I enter into this other activity or doing something, and it's even better.

Carole Joy Seid [00:22:15]:

The good is the enemy of the best. And so the eternal things, you know, are people. People are eternal. Everything else is transitory. And so putting people first, particularly little people who can't who can't fight for themselves.

Rachel Reeves [00:22:35]:

Yes. Yeah. Yeah. Absolutely. Mhmm.

Rachel Winchester [00:22:39]:

Yeah. And I kind of ask the question a little tongue in cheek because we can't do it all, and we all just do what we No. We do the things that we can, and we seek to be faithful with what God has put in front of us and understand that prioritization of not everyone. Everything is on equal footing as far as my kids are not as important as like you're saying, the my personal work that I'm doing, but that if I am just faithful with the little that God gives me, that I trust that he will bless that little.

Rachel Reeves [00:23:12]:

That's right. But we do try and do the thing. Like, I try to do it all, and we just it's so, you know, it's the definition of insanity where you keep trying to do the same thing and you, you know or and it's like, why are you doing this, you know, and get a different result. But I, I do try and do it all sometimes, and every time I'm cut down to size. Because first of all, it's selfish, Very selfish of me. But, also, usually, when I try to jam things in so I can do it all and really try and meet this quota in my mind. Usually, the

content that I create or the words I say, they fall flat anyways because they they weren't created to honor God. They were just trying to pump out stuff.

Rachel Reeves [00:24:02]:

And, so I try to remember that too. Usually, when I push push push push, it it never really amounts to anything.

Carole Joy Seid [00:24:11]:

So so true.

Rachel Winchester [00:24:13]:

Well, I think this is definitely it's just definitely something that we can all relate to and that we're all trying to live in our boundary lines that God's made. And the Internet kind of complicates that that we can have more options than we would have otherwise. You know, I you can put all these things out. You can be active, you know, quote, active in these places that otherwise wouldn't exist if there if the Internet wasn't around. And so it creates this temptation or this, you know, pressure that wasn't that wouldn't be there otherwise.

Carole Joy Seid [00:24:47]:

I think of the scripture in Lamentations that says it's of the Lord's mercies were not consumed because his compassions fail not. They're new every morning. Great is thy faithfulness. The Lord is my portion, says my soul. Therefore, will I hope in him. The Lord is good to them that wait for him, to the soul that seeks him. It's good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.

Rachel Reeves [00:25:20]:

Yeah.

Carole Joy Seid [00:25:21]:

Those are good marching orders.

Rachel Reeves [00:25:24]:

Yes.

Rachel Winchester [00:25:24]:

Well, thank you for sharing with us, Rachel. I know that I just really enjoyed this conversation. Should we maybe pray for other moms that are listening to us or parents that are listening?

Rachel Reeves [00:25:37]:

Yes. Dear lord, thank you so much for an opportunity to talk about your goodness that is so obviously on display, within the family unit, through the embrace of children, through their tiny words and their learning and, their discovering of the world. Thank you for letting us, bear witness to that. You created us to begin as children and that's for a reason. Because we get a glimpse of just, innocence and purity, and really what heaven might look like. And we thank you so much for, families and for parenthood, for mothering. And I just thank you, Lord, for your love for us, that you would even give us the opportunity to raise children.

And, I thank you, Lord, for just today and the opportunity to speak about your blessings in my life, and I thank you for Carole and Rachel and their ministry, to families all over, the world. And we love you so much, and we thank you for your goodness in our lives. In your name. Amen. Mhmm.

Carole Joy Seid [00:27:01]:

Amen.

Rachel Winchester [00:27:02]:

Thank you so much.

Carole Joy Seid [00:27:03]:

This is a blast. Thank you.

Rachel Winchester [00:27:07]:

You've been listening to the Homeschool Made Simple podcast. If you like what you heard in this episode, please leave a rating and review on Apple Podcasts or Spotify. Or share this episode with a friend. It means so much when you help us spread the message of Homeschool Made Simple with others. 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.