

The Crucial Role of Dads in Homeschooling Part 1

Episode 244

Rachel Winchester [00:00:02]:

Oftentimes, we can think of homeschooling as mom's gig, which is really unfortunate. It is so important for dad to be on board and for both husband and wife to have a shared vision for their children's education. In this episode, we're talking about a dad's role in homeschooling. 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 her son, J. J. Seid, is a pastor and dad of 4 children who he and his wife, Kristen, homeschool. We hope this conversation encourages you as husband and wife to partner together in homeschooling. Listen in.

Carole Joy Seid [00:00:45]:

I'm just gonna kinda be throwing some thoughts and, you know, just questions and things to J. J. about why is it so important for the dad to be on board with homeschooling and what is the role of the father? Because, I think so often we think of homeschool as a mom's gig, and that to me is is really unfortunate.

JJ Seid [00:01:10]:

Yeah. Everything we do as a couple, we do together whether we're we realize it or not. So it's probably good for us to remind each other that so that we can be unified and do it in a way that serves each other and serves our kids.

Carole Joy Seid [00:01:23]:

Yes. So off air, we were talking a little bit about the idea of the calling, you know, that this is a supernatural call to do something hard. And, why is it so important for you as a dad to really carry that mantle of leadership in this area when things get rough?

JJ Seid [00:01:46]:

Everybody's always speculating about whether this generation is softer than the one that came before, and that could be such a rabbit trail. I think every generation in America has faced its own challenges. But something that's probably universal for all

parents is when something gets hard, it's really important to know whether or not, you should stay the course or it being hard as somehow a sign that you've taken a wrong turn. You know, if you exit onto a side road and all of a sudden you realize you're not on gravel anymore and you're driving over potholes, and then all of a sudden there's no road and you're in a pasture, you know, you might've gotten lost and you might be about to drive into a pond. But, as as a couple, if you pray and do your research and talk with people you trust who are older and have and have lived more life, and then you make a decision together as a couple to, for instance, homeschool. And then confusingly, in some ways, life gets harder. It's really important to be able to stop and say, okay. We prayed about this.

We sought wise counsel, for the unique situations that our children are facing, some convictions that we agree on. We still think this is what we should do in the season. So just because it got hard doesn't mean that we got off track. Mhmm. There may be an invitation for us to persevere and and to seek additional wise counsel and to remind ourselves that it won't always be this hard. Mhmm. But, yeah, I think you're right. The word calling is helpful, not to hint that homeschooling is inherently more spiritual, but to remind ourselves to stay the course on things we agreed on together in prayer and conversation. And that just because something's gotten hard doesn't mean it's wrong. It may just be an invitation to make some sacrifices for something we believe in. You know, pay now or pay later. There's some ways in which we invest in the care of our kids that feel like death now, but can lead to life later. And we have to remind ourselves that we're doing things that we believe in, even on the days when we're really tired.

Carole Joy Seid [00:03:53]:

Yes. Yes. And as a dad, do you feel like you are giving your wife that encouragement because she's so in the trenches with those kids. And you walk in the door, and can you bring some fresh air into her vision when she's just hanging by a thread?

JJ Seid [00:04:14]:

Yeah. I think a lot of homeschool dads, and this is true for me as well, can feel guilty. You know, you feel helpless because you're at work so many hours of the week. You actually spend the majority of your waking hours at work, if you're in a traditional setup like mine, a single income family, which is a privilege. I know not every family can afford that these days. But you still then carry a measure of guilt because you know how much your wife is carrying. And you wish that you could be there, at times of the week when you can't. But you're absolutely right.

The way you walk in the door probably does matter a great deal. You know, we need to be thanking our wives regularly. We need to be considering how we can lighten her

load. That might mean walking in the door and being willing to prepare dinner, because she's had such a long day. It might mean being sensitive to those times of the year when she panics and realizes she hasn't planned for the upcoming semester. And that can make you wanna quit homeschooling. You know? You're like, I don't have a plan. I don't know what we're doing.

Maybe we just need to hit eject. And a lot of times, it's a time for the husband to be supportive and ask his wife what would feel helpful. We've had those seasons. You know? Do you need a Saturday where you can spread everything out on the kitchen table and I take the kids to the zoo where the house is quiet, but you've got all your books at hand and you can just think and maybe find a few used books on Amazon or some half price books website and, you know, track down all your materials for the semester. Figure out what you're going to do because you're always interrupted and you never have silence. So sometimes it's that simple. Instead of us feeling a bunch of false guilt and feeling hopeless because we can't be there, there's small things we can do to show our wife that we're in the trenches with them, and we're willing to give them the support they need to sit down and think and plan ahead.

Carole Joy Seid [00:06:02]:

Yeah. And talk about being the power behind the badge. Sometimes when I'm consulting with couples, I'm hearing that the children are very disrespectful to the mom during the day. But when dad walks in, they're like, oh, hi. And talk a little bit about, the conversations and how that empowers, Kristen.

JJ Seid [00:06:39]:

The name of the author is escaping me. There's a book called *The Masculine Mandate* by a great, former tank commander who was saved later in life and became a Presbyterian pastor. It's a great book. But he talks about that idea, you know, that it would be inappropriate to describe the dad as the bad cop. That's a caricature. And we would never wanna advocate harshness for fathers. But there is something to be said about your wife feeling protected by you or backed by you.

Familiarity can breed contempt when kids are home all day with mom sort of chipping away at her authority and and constantly poking at her. It can become exhausting. And that familiarity can cause them to behave at less than their best. So there is something to be said about dad coming home and quietly asking, "Is that how you talk to your mom when I'm not here?" And all of a sudden, your kid's looking at you going like, "I think there's a right answer to this question."

So it's good that dads would gently remind their kids that there's a very high standard for how mom is addressed, how she's obeyed, how quickly she's obeyed, how she's treated with gratitude.

The sacrifice that she's making by homeschooling when she could frankly be devoting her time to many other things. And, she's setting those things aside in order to give of herself in this way. And so from her kids, she deserves gratitude, kindness, prompt obedience. And, you know, they're humans just like their parents, and so they forget. And so, yeah, I think dads hold the line gently but firmly. They remind their kids and they treat, hopefully, their wives with respect and speak to their wives in such a way that it models for their kids how mom should be treated, spoken to and respected.

And it does seem like as dads, we have to come home and from time to time recalibrate that baseline. We get sloppy as a family. A mom gets increasingly mistreated and treated with ingratitude. And, yeah, it is probably you know, doing a podcast is horrible because all you're doing is indicting yourself as an imperfect parent.

But my my hope is that all of us dads can hopefully be asking ourselves, you know, am I helping my children to treat my wife with the respect and the dignity and the gratitude that she deserves?

Carole Joy Seid [00:08:54]:

So good. So good. Sometimes when I'm consulting with a couple, I'll say to the dad, I need you to take your son out for a walk or ice cream or whatever and say, mommy is the most precious thing in our house. And if you dishonor her, you are dishonoring my bride and you will wish you were never born. Like, there needs to be a major understanding that what you do to mommy, you're doing to me as a dad. And they need to see that because moms are more tender... they're you know... God made them that way. But like you said, the children wear them down.

JJ Seid [00:09:33]:

Yeah. Men and women have all different personality types. But there are some things that seem to be resident in gendered identity by God. And I think nurture is a pretty safe domain to name as something that God has uniquely gifted women to do. Carrying a human life in their body, giving birth to that life, sustaining it, having a sense of preservation and protection over that child. And so forcing that person who's maximally gifted in those areas to also turn around and police how their nurture is received can make a mother feel like she's having to be a mother and a father at the same time. So it is helpful for fathers to use masculine strength to remind their children, how precious it is to have a mother and how a mother should be treated.

Carole Joy Seid [00:10:21]:

Amen. Well put. Okay. There's 3 roles that I really wanna talk about in terms of dads. 1 is dad as a reader. How do you walk that out, and and how would you encourage other dads?

JJ Seid [00:10:36]:

Yeah. You know, our particular approach to homeschooling is what we call literature based approach. And that means that books can't just be a theoretical part of your life. They have to be a concrete, functional, ongoing part of your home, and that starts with dad. Dad is very interesting when he walks in the door because he hasn't been around.

Carole Joy Seid [00:10:55]:

That's right.

JJ Seid [00:10:56]:

Dad is somebody that people look to for what's appropriate or not appropriate. You know, my friends and I in times where we've fallen off the health bandwagon and we're you know, our kids find a candy bar on our side table, they think that's the juiciest piece of news ever. Right? Because they're paying close attention to how dad eats because that dictates in their minds how they can well, dad had a candy box. I saw it in the glove box of his car. So dad's reading is really significant. You know? As dads, if we're trying to champion a literature based approach to education, but our kids never see us reading. If they always see us disappearing into screens in our exhaustion, never picking up a book, never reading for pleasure it'll at the least, communicate an inconsistent message.

And we all have seasons where we ebb and flow in our reading habits. But the hope would be that we are pacesetters in our home where, they don't see reading as something that only mom does, but that it's something dad enjoys. It's something he values. It's something he doesn't just do, to cram for a meeting, but also something he does for pleasure. And that's infectious. You know? Kids are gonna be interested in what their dad is interested in as a rule. And so dad needs to model being a reader.

And, of course, we talk a lot about reading aloud. But it does start with the kids realizing that dad enjoys books, is interested in books. Books are a valuable part of his life.

Carole Joy Seid [00:12:22]:

I think Spurgeon was who said, show me a man's bank book, and I'll show you his heart. Of course, paraphrasing Jesus where your treasure is, that's where your heart is. So a dad buys books. He buys books for his children. When he goes on business trips, he doesn't buy t-shirts at the airport store, but he takes that money and wisely buys an investment book that they've all been coveting and dreaming about. You know, that they're you're modeling, you buy books for yourself, but you also buy books for your children because books are what you value.

JJ Seid [00:12:55]:

Yeah. And I'm addicted to books. So I can't really put it in the category of virtue. For me, it's more of a vice. But, if it's a vice that can be turned into a virtue, then I guess that's a good thing.

But I know that for a lot of guys, these are new habits that they're learning, and they're new muscles that they're exercising. And that's okay. I don't think any of us need to feel self-conscious about that. But we can take small steps, especially in the same way that we would come alongside one of our sons who is struggling to be interested in reading, you know. We can stop and ask ourselves, what are things that we're interested in and naturally passionate about? And then go find books about those subjects. And we'll discover alongside of our sons that reading can actually be not only painless, but pleasurable.

Start with what you know and what you like and go from there. So I think many men sometimes feel like novices when it comes to reading, but I think most of us have more of an interest and a capacity for it than we realize. Yeah. If we'll start with things that we already enjoy.

Carole Joy Seid [00:13:53]:

So as a young man, I remember you were reading some, biographies that really impacted you. I don't remember the name, like, a basketball player that really you like?

JJ Seid [00:14:03]:

Yes. I mean, because I was playing basketball 7 days a week when I discovered the basketball section of our local public library.

I knew what Dewey Decimal number all those books were filed under in the nonfiction section. And I would just go and scour it. You know?

Carole Joy Seid [00:14:19]:
And they were biographies.

JJ Seid [00:14:21]:
Right. I stumbled across, you know, a book called *Foul, the Connie Hawkins Story*.

Carole Joy Seid [00:14:24]:
That's it.

JJ Seid [00:14:25]:
That's it. That's what you're thinking.

Carole Joy Seid [00:14:27]:
I remember you just loving that book.

JJ Seid [00:14:28]:
Yeah. Connie Hawkins was one of the great sort of forgotten basketball players the last 100 years. You know, wearing shoes, 2 sizes too small, and languishing in the ABA took them a long time to make to the NBA. Getting caught up in the point shaving scandal in college basketball at the time, and probably getting unfairly blamed. His story was in many ways tragic. So I would read that book over and over again or Rick Teelander's book, *Heaven as a Playground*, which, I think, President Obama said was the greatest basketball book he'd ever read. So when I was stumbling across these books, they were all incredible. You know, they're books that have stood the test of time.

Carole Joy Seid [00:15:02]:
So Pistol Pete?

JJ Seid [00:15:03]:
Yeah. I've read multiple biographies on Pistol Pete. I read his autobiography. So it's something that I was doing 7 days a week Right. That, you know, people might not consider that to be elite or, you know, highly intellectual. Classical literature.

Carole Joy Seid [00:15:16]:
That's right.

JJ Seid [00:15:17]:
But I wouldn't look down my nose at any of that. Those are wonderful memories. I learned a lot about culture, sociology, American history, overcoming adversity. You

know, we could sit and talk about virtue ethics as it relates to the basketball section of the nonfiction area of the library. But there's something really beautiful about reading things that interest you and not and not getting too fussy about that.

You know, Alan Jacobs, professor at Baylor, head of the great books program there, former professor of mine at Wheaton, has written a great book called *The Pleasures of Reading in an Age of Distraction*.

And in that book, he says, my role is to follow the rule of whim. Read what you like. And, of course, people are saying, oh, come on, Jacobs. You know, you've read *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* and Plato's *Republic*, and there's no way you're just following your whim that you read things like that for pleasure. And Jacob's point is if you'll start with the things that interest you and sort of build your reading muscles. Then you can slowly begin to incorporate in books that do require a little more discipline, but actually are a lot more fun than if you tried to start with Plato's *Republic*.

Carole Joy Seid [00:16:22]:

That's right.

JJ Seid [00:16:23]:

So it really is true that you should read what interests you and fall in love with reading first, and then you can worry about the western canon later.

Carole Joy Seid [00:16:31]:

Definitely. So talk about the high point of the day, which is daddy reading at night. If you work a traditional, you know, schedule, some might, you know, work nights, and then they're reading at breakfast or whatever. But daddy reading, to me, that's like the high point of any homeschool family's day. If it's at all possible for dad to do that, talk about that.

JJ Seid [00:16:53]:

Yeah. What would you like me to say? What are you thinking of?

Carole Joy Seid [00:16:55]:

I don't really have any agenda here. I've watched you and your family. You've got a pretty big age span. Yes. So, you know, Brinker gets, you know, picture books. He's very demanding. He doesn't wanna listen to long books since he complains if we read long books. So then he goes to bed.

Then you read your twins. And they have voracious appetite for long, descriptive, may you know, like, I'm reading *Little Britches* to them now. We just finished *Dirk's Dog*,

Bellow. Like, they will sit through anything. And hang on every word. But then Eisley has a very different opinion and taste, and then you read to her separately, which is an all night affair, what I've just described here.

JJ Seid [00:17:38]:

We've probably made every mistake in the book and then tried to circle the wagons back.

So, yeah, based on those comments, I I guess a couple things I'd say are, we're currently reading aloud *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeline L'engle. So that's really exciting because that was a trilogy. The first three books that she wrote in that trilogy are just, incredible. And I read those over and over as a child, so it feels really meaningful to now get to read them to my kids for the first time. Eisley has already read them over and over and over. She's 14. But for the 9 year old boys, I felt like they were finally old enough to be able to apprehend and appreciate those books. They have some mature themes, and there's some scary bits.

So I think that also helped to have them be a little bit older. Brinker is 6. And, so, yeah, it's out of his wheelhouse, and he's annoyed about it. And so, you know, sometimes to quote a famous, deceased, Jewish therapist, Edwin Friedman, who famously wrote about anxiety and family systems. Friedman would say that as a leader, your job is to be the strength in the system, to be the strength in the system. And so I've realized that almost like a surge protector, our job as parents is to pick great books, to trust our own judgment, and to ride out the anxiety and the criticism. You know? Because our kids will try to shout down certain book choices. And then 3 chapters in, they're begging me to read another chapter.

Carole Joy Seid [00:19:06]:

That's right.

JJ Seid [00:19:06]:

You know? And then I really shouldn't. But because I'm human, I have to pause and go, "Oh, you want me to read another chapter of this book that you begged me not to read?" "Yes, dad." So, you know, there are reminders that, you know, it's not like we're trying to shove things down our kids' throats. But a book is like a new relationship in some ways. You know? And so there is the awkward first conversation by analogy and getting to know the book. And then if you stick with it long enough, if it's a great book, you're gonna be hooked, and your kids are gonna be begging to read another chapter.

But, yes, there are moments where the 6 year old tries to foment an insurrection. So currently, what we've done this is a snapshot of all of our failures and successes, trying

to find a book that would unite the clans. You know, that's not easy to do. No. And so Easley did a great job of saying, I think we should read *A Wrinkle in Time*. So in that sense, we had her buy it because it was one of her favorites, and she was in the mood to have it reread to her. So that helped.

Yeah. Then I knew that the twins would buy it because they're the right age for it. And then Brinker is just gonna have to just deal with it. But he gets to cuddle and play with something, a fidget toy or color. You know, some of them are coloring now while we're reading at bedtime.

And then as a compromise, when we finish reading chapter in *A Wrinkle in Time*, Kristen will take him, tuck him into bed, and read him a picture book. So he gets his consolation prize after we meet as a family. So that's sort of how we've navigated 6 to 14, which feels like a big stretch. And all 4 of them have strong opinions.

None of them are sort of go along kids. I remember I won't out of my name, but I remember sitting years ago with an elder in the church I served in who had 2 adult daughters who were rather compliant and said to me very smugly, that the idea of a strong willed child is just a myth. And I didn't say anything, but I silently thought to myself, well, that's just because you've never had one. But I have 4. So I know it's not a myth.

You know, so figuring out how to get everybody around the table. Sometimes we read over dinner

When it took too long to prepare dinner or we came back from an event and we're eating late. So we'll sort of we the kids are really anxious that we don't miss reading a chapter of *Wrinkle in Time*. So as a compromise, I'll eat quickly, which I do anyway because I have bad table manners. And then I can read while they eat, which also helps the kids focus and eat better. So we've come up with little compromises.

Sometimes I've read aloud to them in the minivan while Kristen is driving us somewhere which also helps when kids can be cranky in the car. So we've learned to incorporate reading into different rhythms of our life and to make compromises with our schedule.

But what's cool is if you do it enough to create an appetite and an expectation for it in your kids, even kids that you would never expect to have that appetite, if you persist over time, kids who seem to be more interested in video games than books will begin to gain an appetite for being read to and will begin begging for it in ways that will

surprise you. And then it's sort of like a flywheel. It takes a lot of energy to get it spun up. But once it gets going, it doesn't take much energy to maintain that momentum.

Carole Joy Seid [00:22:19]:
Yes.

JJ Seid [00:22:20]:
And so it's fun to have your kids going, "Are we gonna get to read tonight? I hope we get to read tonight." And you'll think back to say, man, 6 months ago or a year ago, I never would have imagined when we started unplugging as a family that they would be begging me to read to them. But kids really will get the bug, you know, if you stay the course and if you pick good books.

Carole Joy Seid [00:22:41]:
And if you show that leadership like you talked about in the beginning.

JJ Seid [00:22:44]:
Be the strength in the system.

Carole Joy Seid [00:22:45]:
That's right.

JJ Seid [00:22:46]:
Yeah. We don't have to be a jerk about it, but we can be confident in our decision making.

Carole Joy Seid [00:22:50]:
And we can keep doing it until they get the hang of it. So good, J. J. I have to just give a little disclaimer because we will get letters. The book you mentioned, Madeline L'engle was a wonderful writer, but a terrible theologian.

JJ Seid [00:23:05]:
Yeah. There's universalist themes in that first book. I just came to one of those paragraphs, but that's the beauty of reading aloud. I just edited on the fly, because Easley's read the book 10 times, she caught that I had skipped a section, and she discreetly asked me about it later that night. And so it was a great opportunity to talk with a thoughtful teenager about how much we love Madeleine L'Engle, how much of those books, ring true. And yet she was sort of lumping in Jesus with Gandhi and, Churchill, you know, in a paragraph.

And in a way that I find insufferable and Buddha. And so capacious. And so I just explained it. Well, she also threw inventors in there. It was a very bizarre paragraph. But I understand. You know? And I just said to Eiseley, I hope L'engle wasn't pandering because that's the kind of paragraph that'll get you a lot of praise in certain circles.

Carole Joy Seid [00:23:53]:
Yeah.

JJ Seid [00:23:54]:
I hope she wrote that paragraph because she really believed it. At least that would be authentic. But it was sort of tired and warmed over sort of Universalism and theological liberalism of a 100 years ago.

Carole Joy Seid [00:24:06]:
Exactly.

JJ Seid [00:24:07]:
So but I'm not threatened by that. You know, we're constantly exposing our kids to truth. And so for Eiseley to read that on her own doesn't bother me. You know, she can ask me questions. But I told her that for the 9 year olds, I chose not for the 9 year olds and the 6 year olds, I chose to not read that paragraph because I don't think they're old enough to have to wrestle with what L'engle's doing there whereas I wasn't afraid of Eiseley doing that when she was older.

Carole Joy Seid [00:24:30]:
Yeah. Yeah. The book that you read with Eiseley when, before bed, helped me remember that.

JJ Seid [00:24:36]:
Yeah. It's a really long title. Rebecca McLaughlin, is a great Christian apologist, Oxford educated PhD in Renaissance literature, I believe, has become one of our premier apologist. She wrote a book called *Confronting Christianity*, which won Christianity Today's Beautiful Orthodoxy Book of the Year in 2019. Yeah. And then she went on to write a version for teenagers called 10 questions every teen should ask and answer about Christianity, I believe.

And, so Eiseley and I read that aloud together. I failed a lot as a dad, but that was one thing that I'm glad we did, and I think it was meaningful. We got to have open and honest conversations about a lot of really tough and overwhelming topics, and I got to have a premier apologist at my elbow helping me to have those conversations. So if

we're catechizing our kids, we don't need to be afraid of ideas as long as the truth is also given a fair hearing.

Rachel Winchester [00:25:34]:

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