

# Nature Study Made Simple by Encouraging Curiosity and Awe

## Episode 252

Rachel Winchester [00:00:01]:

Maybe you've heard that nature study is a great introduction to science, but you have no idea where to start. In today's episode, we are talking about some ways to expand our understanding of nature alongside our kids in simple, easy to do ways. 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 of 3 and the director of operations here at Homeschool Made Simple. In this episode, I continue my conversation with Erin Lynum from the Nat Theo podcast about practical tips for nature study, the importance of naming things, and even how to talk with our kids about climate change. Listen in.

I am back with Erin Lynum, the author of *Rooted in Wonder* and the host of the Nat Theo podcast. If you missed last week's episode, be sure to go check that out. We talked more about nature study and why it's so important and how to integrate nature and theology into one understanding and how to use nature and creation as a way to grow in our understanding of who God is as our creator.

So thanks for joining me again, Eryn. So this week, I wanted to get more into the practical tips about nature study and what it looks like to raise naturalists. So, you have a podcast, the Nat Theo podcast, and my kids and I really enjoy listening to it. And what's maybe one of your favorite episodes that you've put together?

Eryn Lynum [00:02:52]:

Oh, that's so hard. Oh, my goodness. Well, the funny thing is I never meant to launch a podcast, and especially a podcast for kids. And when *Rooted in Wonder* was released, I believe God just gave me this little idea about what Jesus's favorite bird might have been. And that became the first episode, and we kinda just, like, went from there. And he totally took it and ran with it. And we've been just completely blown away by the growth in the response.

But I think one of my favorite episodes, which is this interesting, normally, my favorite episodes are something I have direct experience with because I can bring in personal

story like it. I did one about a mountain lion and having an experience with a mountain lion. But one of my favorite is actually an episode about a creature I have no personal experience with and that is a sloth. And I think it was because they are such a unique creature and they lead such fascinating lives. And so the researching for that episode and the research is my favorite part, it was really this deep dive into something just so foreign to me. And so I got to tap into that God given curiosity Instead of just relying on what I already knew and have experienced, I got to just become a kid again and learn alongside of the listeners.

Rachel Winchester [00:04:09]:

That's cool. That's fun. I would highly recommend the Nat Theo podcast for helping with your nature study for anyone who is looking for resources and things because I love listening to it. And then, Eryn, you put together where you can be a part of your club. Right? And then you are a member, and you get a little extra lesson, and so you could kind of really run with it if you wanted to.

Eryn Lynum [00:04:33]:

Yeah. It's meant to be a full Bible and science curriculum. So for every episode, and episodes are weekly now, the members receive a full 14 page lesson guide that comes with 4 pages of science and a devotional and activity pages to really turn it into a curriculum.

Rachel Winchester [00:04:51]:

That's great. And, a little girl in Sunday school class the other week, she mentioned the is the animal axolotl? The axolotl. So she mentioned that is her favorite animal.

And I was like, oh. And so I texted her mom the episode link that you did for that animal. And I was like, I think that she would like this. She mentioned it in class. She should check out the podcast.

Eryn Lynum [00:05:17]:

Oh, that's so fun. That's so fun.

Rachel Winchester [00:05:19]:

It's so fun how they get these little favorite creatures and they start to really do deep dives and just love these animals and stuff. But I thought we could just talk about some different ways. You provide prompts in your book that we kind of talked about last time of just ways to, as a parent, to kind of train ourselves. I feel like some of it's training ourselves to just guide our children. And like, I think you and I have opposite tendencies. You, you want to like make a lesson out of it. And I'm like, I just want to go

and be quiet and experience it and things will bubble up from that. And so figuring out some, like in the middle of where it's not a lecture, but it's also guided in to some degree or in some way that there is a pointing toward things.

Eryn Lynum [00:06:08]:

Yeah, absolutely.

Rachel Winchester [00:06:10]:

But just simply being outside, you think that's a great way to start with people?

Eryn Lynum [00:06:15]:

I do. And sometimes that's a big step for people if they're not very comfortable or they don't know where to go. And so I would add to that, be outside with friends. Mhmm. It becomes a whole lot more approachable when you're with friends. For 1, the kids are interacting with each other, so they are building off each other's energy and excitement and curiosity, and they're coming up with games together. Like, let's go build this stick bridge or cross the creek here or go find a tree swing or whatnot. And so they're really just encouraging each other in that play outside, and then it's easier for us adults when we're with friends as well. So I would say just start with getting outside, and then you're looking for those opportunities to start. Like, we talked about on the last episode, the language that we use and asking your child, like, what do you think God was thinking when he made that shiny beetle on the leaf? Or what does this flower reflect? Like, does it show us God's creativity or maybe his wisdom or his wonder? Just starting these conversations and they might feel forced or awkward at first and that's okay. Like, keep going and looking for those opportunities.

Rachel Winchester [00:07:31]:

Another way to learn about nature with our kids is through books so I have a collection of nature books, but then there's always just like limitless topics that you could possibly learn about. So it's not my goal to have a book on every single topic, but, I got a book at the library. It's by Jim Arnosky. I don't know if you're familiar with him. But his book had a bibliography in the back. So I would definitely recommend that kind of stuff to parents. Find good nature books, and then see which books they reference to go deeper into the topic.

And so he wrote *All About Frogs*, *All About Lizards*, *All About Turtles*. But then he referenced all these others because I've been wanting to do learn about rivers and streams with my kids because we have a lot of that in our local areas, like, tons of just rivers and streams. And it's like, where does this even come from? You know, like, they do start to ask me those kind of questions, you know, like, where did this come from?

Or what is the name of this river? And that sort of thing. And, so I think the library is a great source. And then finding those authors and then being like, okay, what else did they write? Or what bibliography did they use so that I can get more books that would be good quality? Because sometimes they're not good quality, or they're just like way over the kids' heads or they're like boring.

Eryn Lynum [00:08:45]:

Oh, yeah. I have the same problem if it's a problem. We have nature books everywhere, like, stacks of them around our house. One way I love finding them is used to bookstores or our local libraries have, little bookstores inside of them of books that they're phasing out at the library. I find a lot of fun vintage nature books in those. And so those ones are just really fun. Like, my husband at the dump, I kid you not, at the dump, the city dump, he found, because there's a place you can put books, a full color Audobon nature encyclopedia set with 12 volumes and they have the original painted plates in them.

And so, when we're studying something, we'll just lay those out just for inspiration because the pictures are beautiful. But, yeah, just this whole idea of a feast, like, giving your child a feast during homeschooling where you're just laying out beautiful resources. I love doing that with books and then things like, a magnifying glass and rocks and leaves and just giving them all these things to interact with and not guiding it but just letting them interact with these materials and resources as they feel led.

Rachel Winchester [00:09:56]:

Yeah. At my church, I was cleaning out the books in our kids area, and there were all these vintage ones of the Let's-Read-and-Find-Out series. And so now I have those, and they're just so readable. And then my kids were, like, draw coloring watercoloring, you know, a copy of the duck or whatever when we read about ducks the other day. But, my friend actually this morning sent me a picture of her daughter with a microscope. And she was like, you guys have to get this, you know, add it to your kid's birthday and Christmas list, this microscope. And it came with 10 slides, I think, and then some blank ones. Her girls were just loving that. They were finding and putting everything under the microscope.

Eryn Lynum [00:10:39]:

I would totally second that. We did that last year, and it was a rich, rich part of our homeschool study. We did a whole unit on microbiology. I ended up turning one of them into an episode on Nat Theo about how bad germs show us God's good grace. And it was so much fun just having the microscope out, and we bought some prepared slides. You can get like on Amazon like 50 slides with things already in them, but then

they can, of course, make their own as well. And for them to get this super up close glimpse in, again, to those details of what God has made and to see that there truly is design in all of this.

Rachel Winchester [00:11:31]:

And something you talked about was naming things. So could you talk about the power of naming stuff in creation?

Eryn Lynum [00:11:31]:

Absolutely. Like, that is the first job that God gave humanity was to name things. And so I think even just that is powerful. But then when we look at it, when we understand the name of something, the identity of something, we tend to care more about it. And so this really began in my family with bird watching. My husband, several years ago, he started getting really interested in birdwatching. And I thought, like, okay, this is really cute, but it's also kind of strange. And he just wanted to always go out and find birds. And then our oldest son, who was about 9 or 10 at the time quickly caught on, and he just wanted to go find birds. And then all of us just followed suit. And so we're learning.

We're always just out there finding these birds to the point where my oldest son and I took a three day intensive birding workshop in the shop in the Rocky Mountains. It was an adult class. He was the only child. He, like, wrote a grant and got and was awarded a grant to take this class, and then our our kids have competed in a statewide birding competition. And it's just it's been this really fun thing that has made us so much more aware of creation around us because we learn the names of the birds, we learn their behaviors and really see their identity and how God created them especially and how God provides for them. Like, I'll give you one example. A very common bird is a house sparrow. It's known as a cosmopolitan species, so it lives on every continent except Antarctica.

You probably have them in your yard. I have them in my yard all the time. They nest in our yard every year. And the oldest fossil of a house sparrow ever discovered was in a cave outside Bethlehem. And so it's very likely that these birds were around when Jesus was teaching and using birds in his teaching including sparrows and so I love to think about that and of course there's the scripture in the Bible about how God carefully takes care of and provides for the birds. And if he so carefully feeds the birds, will he not also care for us as children? That verse became so much more profound to me when I learned how much it takes to raise a baby sparrow because it takes parent sparrows about 3 to 4000 insects to raise their nest of young. And so they are going to

and from the nest about 200 times every single day, And they won't just raise 1 brood a year. They're doing this multiple times.

And so 3000 to 4000 insects. And you think about that and that back at creation, God was designing entire ecosystems, the plants, and then the plants to support the insects and the insects to support these sparrows. That is the planning that he put in to caring for that sparrow. So much more so does he plan to provide for us. And so when we learned about the house sparrow and we named the house sparrow, my kids can remember that lesson because they connect with it more deeply.

Rachel Winchester [00:14:25]:

There's so many things that could be ministered to each one of us. I'm sure about that. Like, just, wow. Okay. If she feeds her babies thousands of bugs each day, I think I can do 3 meals. Like, it's gonna be okay.

Eryn Lynum [00:14:42]:

It's gonna be okay. We could do this. We could do dinner again. So true.

Rachel Winchester [00:14:50]:

But I loved how you said in your book, "The more we come to know a place, the more we care for it. Our actions bend toward protecting that which we care for. Perhaps it's why back in the Garden of Eden, the first task God gave Adam was to name the creatures. Knowing their names and connecting with their identities, he would be a better caretaker. What if we all pursued this Edenic familiarity with the land around us? Maybe it will change how we view preservation, and perhaps it will help us all become better wonder conservationists."

Which kind of leads us to the topic it might be good to end with. How do you kind of approach the topic of, like, climate change with your kids or, you know, speak of these type of things that are talked about or that they might hear or read about in books and things?

Eryn Lynum [00:15:38]:

Yeah. I think it is important to talk about it, just to make that point. Because they're hearing about it and culture all around them. And a lot of times what they're hearing is alarming because it's talked about in a very exaggerated manner. And let that be my second point that it is very exaggerated. Now I talk about on my blog and in my book, and I do have an episode on the podcast about this to help kids better understand climate change from a biblical perspective. And I talk about how, yes, the world is warming up.

We can see that in the numbers and the true science, but it is extremely slow and gradual. It is nowhere near what alarmist or saying it is, and we see these patterns throughout history. There have been other times in history when the world warmed up for a time even more drastically than we're seeing now. And so to to start even considering and helping your kids to to grapple with these questions of, okay, well, maybe this has happened before and maybe this is a a built in cycle of the planet. Maybe this is more natural than we realize. Now I will say that, like, it's very possible that some of it is human caused as well, and that's where the topic of conservation comes in. We need to protect what God has made. But first and foremost, helping our kids understand they don't have to be afraid.

Because for one, we need to not cave to the alarmists, but instead look at what that the real science and what's actually happening. And we need to understand it from a biblical perspective. God tells us very clearly in scripture that this world is temporary, that he is going to make a new heaven and a new earth, so we don't need to be afraid. Now we don't want to hasten that process or make the planet a less desirable place to live while we're here. And so doing our part as stewards of God's good earth and taking care of it. But, yeah, I would say just helping them to think critically about what's actually going on. And I have those numbers in my podcast and on my blog looking at the real science of it. Helping them to think critically, but most importantly, to think biblically and to remember that this is a broken world.

This world has been changing and degrading since Eden. We know that biblically. This is all part of the story that we already know. And so to be able to look at it from that perspective and see God has a plan, he has a great plan, and he is going to make all things new.

Rachel Winchester [00:18:08]:

Yeah. And then like you talked about, this balances in the tension of and we want to conserve with God's good creation. And so it's not something that we're celebrating, you know, oh, the world is gonna end one day. But it's something that we want to conserve because we see the beauty, we see the goodness of God's creation. And so how do you maybe encourage conservation and like you talked about in that quote, I guess.

Eryn Lynum [00:18:37]:

Yeah. Again, I like to always bring it back to the Bible and show my kids, like, this is an important job that God has given us to do. I honestly think conservation is a gospel issue, and I talk about that in the book as well because as we've already talked about the last episode, nature is evidence for God. And so we can use the materials in nature to point others to the Creator. And I know people personally that that has been a very poignant part of their story of coming to faith, was coming to faith through science, coming to faith through experiences in nature that of course we need the gospel. That's primary. You always need the gospel and that comes from scripture not nature. But God used nature as a part of their story and so we conserve and we protect what God has made one because he called it good.

Point blank. He called it good and so we should also. Secondly, because it's evidence for his existence and it helps us better understand him. And so really bringing it back to those points for our kids, God called it good and it helps us teach others about him. And then making it real practical. So some things with my kids, of course, we all know you can go and pick up trash from a natural area, but another 1 my kids and I really love doing is, collecting fishing line from around rivers, streams, lakes, wherever people fish because it gets caught in the trees and birds will use it to create nests and a lot of birds die that way because they end up caught in the wire or the line. And then a more positive 1 we like doing is creating wildlife habitat. And so we just have a little less than a third of an acre, but we have created rich bird habitat with just hanging birdhouses and bird feeders.

We plant native pollinator gardens to help pollinating species, insects, and birds. Next year, our project is bat boxes because we've been learning all about bats and how they are very important in God's creation as gardeners. And so just learning about the important jobs that God's animals and plants have and supporting them in your own yard or community.

Rachel Winchester [00:20:39]:

Yeah. I love that. That's so fun. And just each and not having to be all at once. It's like a little bit over time and Yeah. It adds up, and then you have this amazing little place that birds like to come and live.

Eryn Lynum [00:20:53]:

Yeah. That's cool. Yeah. So true.

Rachel Winchester [00:20:54]:



Yeah. So where can people find you if they want to learn more and hear your podcast and spend more time with you?

Eryn Lynum [00:21:02]:

Thank you. Yeah. The podcast is available on my website, and it's my name, which is spelled funny. It's Erin Lynum, e r y n l y n u m, dot com. And there's a little button up top to listen to the podcast or it's available on, Apple Podcasts, Spotify. On YouTube, we include visuals, if you wanna turn it more into, like, a homeschool curriculum or something like that. But, yeah, ErinLynum.com and then my books are available on Amazon. And I have a new book coming out in the spring, the nature of rest, and it's all about biblical rest and Sabbath as we see it in creation and in scripture.

Rachel Winchester [00:21:40]:

I love that. We might have to have you on again to talk about that because Sabbath is one of our big passions over here.

Eryn Lynum [00:21:46]:

Yes. Yes. It's so important. So important.

Rachel Winchester [00:21:50]:

Yeah. Well, that's awesome. Well, thanks for spending some time with us today, and I look forward to talking again another time.

Eryn Lynum [00:21:57]:

Thanks so much. Thanks for having me.

Rachel Winchester [00:21:59]:

For a full list of science and nature books we love, click the link in the show notes to access the free download. 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 podcast 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.