

Nurture Faith and Curiosity with Nature-Focused Learning

Episode 251

Rachel Winchester [00:00:01]:

A lot of times we can feel intimidated by teaching the subject of science in our homeschool. We ask questions like, do I need to be doing experiments with my kids? Can I help my kids learn what they need to know if I'm not a sciency person? What about physics and chemistry? You're not alone. In this episode, we are talking about why nature is the perfect place to start in our study and understanding of science. 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. Today, I'm joined by fellow podcaster and author Erin Lynum to talk about science, how nature points us to our creator God, and how to foster a curiosity about the world around us with our kids. For a full list of science and nature books we love, click the link in the show notes to access the free download. Listen in.

Well, today I have the joy of being joined by Erin Lynum, who is a mom and wife, mom to 4, and she lives in Colorado. She's written a few books. One that we're gonna talk about today is called *Rooted in Wonder*, and she's the host of the Nat Theo podcast. So welcome to the podcast, Erin.

Eryn Lynum [00:01:22]:

Thank you so much for having me.

Rachel Winchester [00:01:24]:

I'm excited to talk to you. I've been reading your book. And like I told you before we started, every single chapter, I was like, I can't wait to talk to Erin about this. So that's the danger of being able to talk to the author. It's like, oh, I'm gonna talk to her about this. Let's mark this page and see what she said here. And so thanks for writing it.

It's called *Rooted in Wonder: Nurturing Your Family's Faith Through God's Creation*. So what kind of led you to write this book?

Eryn Lynum [00:01:52]:

Yeah. Really, it was me seeing the power that we have in nature study to return nature study to its rightful place of theology and the study of God. And because there's so much talk these days about nature study and the benefits of it, of course, for mental health and physical health, but I believe also for spiritual health. And when I looked at the gospels, this is really how I saw Jesus teaching, that he's using things like olive branches and wildflowers and sparrows to drive home biblical truth. And so I thought, okay, if this is how Jesus taught when he was on earth, then I think there's something to this and that we can also teach this way. And so I really wrote it as a resource for parents and teachers and caregivers to be able to do exactly that wherever you are, whether you consider yourself outdoorsy or not so outdoorsy, that you can pick up this book and really understand the methodology, like the power of teaching by this method and that it is biblical like Romans 1:20 tells us that God makes himself known. His invisible attributes have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world through what has been seen. And so we can use nature study and science to reconnect the dots between creation and Creator.

Rachel Winchester [00:03:09]:

Yeah. I love that. I love that so much. We talk about, back in the day, like, the founders of the homeschool movement, the Moors, Dr. Raymond Moore and his wife, Dorothy. They talked about for like preschool years, like, look at the life of Jesus and look at what were his formative influences. And they talk about how nature was clearly such a formative influence in his life because he uses it over and over and over again to illustrate his points and to illustrate, like you're saying, theological truths. So I just love that you said.

Eryn Lynum:

I love that too. And I love that, like, looking even at Colossians. Colossians 1, we can see Jesus was present at creation. It says he was before all things, and in him, all things were created and all things hold together. And so I love that, like, when I think about Jesus teaching through nature, he was using everything that he and the father fashioned together at creation. Like, he is utilizing all these things and I wonder if his I mean, I'm sure his mind went back to when he and God created all of it together. Wow.

Rachel Winchester [00:04:09]:

That's so cool to think about. Yeah. So something that Carol always says is that we want our children to be naturalist before they are scientists. And would you agree with that statement? What do you think about that?

Eryn Lynum [00:04:28]:

I would. And that's actually my course. I certified as a naturalist 5 years ago. Oh my goodness. Yeah. 5, almost 6 years ago. And I really pursued that certification. 1st, basically, a naturalist. A master naturalist is a fancy term for a nature teacher. So someone that understands the local flora and fauna and habitats and ecosystems and can turn it into curriculum.

And I wanted to do that because I saw this method of teaching and how powerful it is to teach biblical truth. So I am a certified naturalist. I'm actually not a scientist. I don't have a degree in science, although I'm praying about pursuing that. But it was funny my son today, he is 13 and he was doing his own science work in homeschool And he called me a scientist. And I was like, I'm I'm actually not a scientist. He's like, you read a bunch of science books, you research, you make hypothesis, and you do experiments. I think you're a scientist.

And so, I mean, I was flattered, of course. But it's funny you bring that up because there is like this process, but I think all of it should be led by this natural god given curiosity. Mhmm. And, of course, that begins as children. And so I love that idea because we should be fueling what God has put in our children that God given awe and curiosity and maybe they'll pursue the sciences, maybe they won't, but they will be a naturalist in the biblical sense where they are drawing everything back to the creator.

Rachel Winchester [00:05:50]:

Yeah. So how would you differentiate those two? What is a naturalist versus what would be a scientist?

Eryn Lynum [00:05:57]:

I think a scientist is someone who's doing the in-depth work of scientific research, and so it's more of a career. While a naturalist, you can turn it into a career I have, but it can also be more of a hobby. And so I think it's also a bit more localized. Like, my work as a naturalist is mainly focused on the Rocky Mountains at Colorado where I live. And when I teach hikes, I'm focusing on teaching kids the local wildflowers and animals and birds. So it's really kinda localized, although it is starting to expand. And whenever I go anywhere, I love exploring the new habitats.

So it's more I don't know. I I hesitate to call it a hobby because for me, it's much more than a hobby, but it is just that constantly feeding that curiosity and that wonder whether or not you decide to turn it into a career.

Rachel Winchester [00:06:48]:

Yeah. So, I loved how in the book you talk about the scientific revolution, which I think maybe somebody's listening to this because they want to know about nature study, and they're like, why are we talking about the scientific revolution? Who cares about that? But I just love that you brought it up because it really changed things for people. And maybe you could talk about how it changed the way that just normal everyday people and scientists themselves viewed science, viewed nature, viewed creation, and kinda called into question, I guess, is was this created and it kinda started this divergence, I guess, would you say?

Eryn Lynum [00:07:39]:

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. That's exactly the word I would use. I've always struggled with history. It's never been a topic I'm very passionate about until I started studying the history of science and scientific progress. That's when I got really fascinated because a lot of theology comes into this because we see that science actually began as a Christian pursuit. It was theologians, people, clergymen, wanting to understand God better through what he had made. And so, like, just like when you study a design or a piece of art, the more you look at it, the more you can really perceive of the person that made it, and the same is true creation.

And so that's how science began. Like, one of my favorite examples is Kepler and he was a renowned astronomer and mathematician, and he talked about seeing the fingerprints of God all over nature and how he was he used his math and his science to help others better understand the creator. And so this is how science began. And then I think it was one of the biggest schemes of the enemy that took this big divergence where people in the scientific revolution, yes, of course, Darwin, but also those before him and those after him and those around him. It wasn't just him. He had a major role in it.

But they weren't willing to accept God as a viable answer to everything on Earth. They wanted something testable and provable. And so they start coming up with these other theories and, basically, science took this huge split where people began saying science and God cannot go together. But the thing that we've seen with Darwin's evolution and every form of evolution after, so Neo Darwinism, which is like a modern Darwinism based in genetics and chemical evolution. All these other theories have been these attempts to separate God from creation. Mathematically and scientifically, they all fail. Darwin's evolution is mathematically impossible. Secular scientists say this, but the story still moves forward because one, the enemy schemes are strong and it's a good story and people want good stories.

And so this falsehood has continued forward in a very big way and really created this split when when we truly look at it like God and science go together because God wrote science. He created science, and the crazy thing that we're seeing now is with modern technology and understanding about the sciences, the more we study, the more we're seeing the fine tuning of the universe. We see so much design and so much engineering that secular mainstream science, evolutionary biologists are having a very difficult time trying to come up with, like, how this could have happened without an intelligent mind to the point where some people like, this is a rare kind of outlier, but some people are even saying like, oh, aliens must have made us because they are so desperate.

Rachel Winchester [00:10:49]:

Yeah. Something had to be behind this.

Eryn Lynum [00:10:52]:

They see something, but they will not say God. And so I really think that God is making himself known through the sciences the more the world understands the world around us.

Rachel Winchester [00:11:04]:

Yeah. Let's see. On page 52, you talked about it. And you said, "At times it is difficult to picture the substance of our faith. Yet every moment we spend in prayer, each time we open God's word, and every step we take toward him creates a living and active foundation. The same is true for your children. Never underestimate the power of one conversation or an hour spent out in creation. All of this creates a solid foundation from which their faith will grow."

And just how basically the scientific revolution caused people to abandon this assumption of a creator God. And you say society wanted the foundation without the cornerstone. I love that line. "They unwound the creator from the creation and erosion began chipping away at the core. This was the work of naturalism and modern thinking to do away with anything supernatural or intangible." So, yeah, there's just this spiritual cosmic thing that's happening even if we don't follow the light of creation to its source, then it's like we're missing the fullness of creation. And I wondered if you could talk a little bit about, you know, you don't say to not say nature. Like nature is not a bad word or anything.

But I do think it's an interesting distinction that we have we do have this word nature versus kind of creation. And, you know, secular people would probably not use creation

because creation was created by someone. And so maybe you could talk about that distinction a little bit.

Eryn Lynum [00:12:43]:

Yeah. I do think language is important, and I use them interchangeably a lot. I probably use creation more. But what I try to do is even when I'm using the term nature, the other language around it is always supporting this truth that there is a creator. And so a lot of times I'll talk about God as the master artist or architect or designer or, like, today in our homeschool studies, we were learning about so we always start with Bible and we were learning today that God is in control. And we looked at Colossians 1, that same verse I mentioned earlier that Jesus holds all things together. And in Hebrews, we see that God holds all things. He sustains and upholds all things by the power of his word.

And then we were doing our science studies and learning about all these systems in the ocean and with the ocean currents that support all of this marine life and really like keep the world in balance in so many ways. And I was telling my kids like, look at this. This is all examples of how God holds all things together. And so if we see him in the universe finally tuning these things and holding everything together, do you think he can also hold together the details of our lives? And they agreed. So they're seeing this play out that there is a God who is in control, that he is the master architect, designer, engineer. They're seeing that it is him behind all of these things. That's awesome.

Rachel Winchester [00:14:09]:

Yeah. I love how also in your book, you give at the end of the chapters, you kind of help the reader and parents, start to think and exercise those muscles because I will say, like, I've always taken my kids out in nature, and it had a pretty like hands off approach. Like I explained, you know, maybe we talk about flora and fauna and that sort of stuff. But not I don't want to over explain and I really want to let nature do its work on them. But I think so for me, finding this balance of, not saying too much, but also not saying too little so that then there really is this pointing to the creator and using these object lessons in a sense for my mind to really be tuned to, like, what is how would God want to reveal himself to us today as we are walking through these woods or as we're seeing these mountains or beside the creek or, whatever. So maybe did this come really naturally to you or did you kind of have to learn how to do this? Do you, you know, what's your own personal journey or how you how you would help someone learn to do that?

Eryn Lynum [00:15:21]:

It is still a tension, a big tension today because my tendency, like, I am an educator and so I want to lead them to a conclusion or I want to teach them something really cool that I see and I've been learning about. But more and more and more, I'm challenging myself to follow their curiosity and also invite them into my curiosity. And so there is a place for lessons. Like, we have a local hiking group that I lead and on those, I teach nature lessons and there's a place for that and there's a place for, like, on my podcast, the lessons are laid out and even in our science studies and homeschool. But I wanna balance that with unchoreographed time outside. And so our family, personally, we hike a lot. We enjoy night hikes, which is like just experiencing nature very differently. We love just going up into the mountains and letting kids play or going to a lake and swimming.

And so I do think that there is a place for those lessons but also that parents shouldn't be overwhelmed by that thinking like I can't write nature lessons. I don't know nature. I don't know science. That's okay. Start with just going outside with your child and really pay attention to when they wanna show you something. And I still struggle with this, but my kids will come to me and they'll have something they wanna show me and just following that curiosity, helping them identify what it is using guidebooks or apps for identification and just really awarding their curiosity with your attention.

Rachel Winchester [00:16:55]:

Yeah. Which I don't necessarily have any children that bring a lot of stuff to me and and things. But we do, like, experience things. So I think even if your kids don't bring you stuff to show or maybe they do you know, my 3 year old will, like, collect leaves or things like that. But as I was reading your chapter about scientific revelation, I was thinking, you know, really that divergence really caused this disintegration of education. Like and we kind of can copy that of that. Okay. We go and we have our bible lesson, and then we have our science lesson later, and that those are not related to one another.

And I was just really struck by, no, this is all integrated so much. Like you were saying, you know, I divorced, and made divorced nature and science from theology. And that that was really where it started. And so I think that was my big takeaway from that chapter was just like, I want to make sure that these things are integrated. And not keep these things separate of like, oh, this is cool about just this exist in nature, but this doesn't show us anything about God or, like, not encouraging them to start thinking down this path of like, oh, what does this tell us about God? If if the heavens declare the glory of God, what is it telling us? And to start having my own eyes open to, not

just, oh, this is such a beautiful scenery. Or I love growing flowers. Or I love working in the yard. But, like, what is God communicating through the reality of his creation?

Eryn Lynam [00:18:35]:

Yeah. Absolutely. I love that that's what you took from it because that's been the aim and the prayer of all my work because it's been powerful in our own family and just reintegrating those and bringing them back together as God meant them to be. They were never meant to be separated. And so powerful things happen when we reintegrate both science and nature and the Bible back together. I love that.

Rachel Winchester [00:18:57]:

Well, thanks for joining me in this episode. And next time, we will talk about really get into the nitty gritty of how to do nature study and stuff. Thanks, Eryn.

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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.