

Tradition is a Bridge to the Past, A Foundation for the Future with Leila Lawler

Episode 266

Rachel Winchester [00:00:03]:

Have you ever looked around your house and wondered, what am I doing? If I were doing a good job, this house would look better. My children would be better behaved, and I would be less overwhelmed. But what if that isn't the best way to gauge whether we're doing a good job or not? What if God has a deep spiritual work in mind for us through our homemaking and child rearing? You're listening to the Homeschool Made Simple podcast. This is a podcast to help you homeschool simply, inexpensively, and enjoyably. Carol Joy Seid has been helping families homeschool for several decades now through his seminars and consulting services. And I'm Rachel Winchester, a fellow homeschool mom using this method with my own three kids. In this episode, Carol and I talk with Leila Lawler, author of *Summa Domestika*, about the collective memory our culture has lost and how we can all work together to build a culture worth passing on to others through our everyday ordinary labors at home. Listen in.

Carole Joy Seid [00:01:01]:

So I am beyond excited. I feel like I'm at my own birthday party. I am with my new best friend, Leila Lawler, and, and with Rachel, my adopted daughter. So I'm just living the dream over here. And we're gonna be talking about Leila and her life, her ministry, and the amazing book she wrote that Rachel and I are both reading, and they're like eating bonbons. We're loving them so much. So, Leila, welcome to Homeschool Made Simple.

Leila Lawler [00:01:34]:

Oh, thank you so much for having me. That was a glorious introduction, but I hope to live up to the to all these accolades.

Carole Joy Seid [00:01:43]:

I love it. Well, Leila, tell our listeners a little bit about your family and your history and then these three amazing books that you've written.

Leila Lawler [00:01:53]:

Well, I am the mother of seven grown children. My husband is I like to say he's my first husband. We've been married for forty five years, and we have 21 grandchildren. Oh. Our twenty first grandchild was just born, two weeks ago. Oh, okay. And, and we have another one on the way. The eldest of our grandchildren is 14.

Leila Lawler [00:02:25]:

So I feel like that's a lot of grandchildren all at once. Although, I am very, very grateful to God. And I live in Central Massachusetts, and, yeah, I'm a convert. I grew up in a very tumultuous time. My mother was a fallen away Methodist. She later became a very good Catholic. And, my father was a Muslim and was Egyptian. And yeah.

Leila Lawler [00:02:57]:

So I had a very chaotic childhood. Came to the church just by God's grace. And really, you know, also, the other thing people think people tend to think in terms of, like, twenty years ago. So there was kind of like, well, twenty years ago is when feminism started, but, no, I'm here to say that, you know, coming of age in the seventies that, feminism was an extremely strong probably the the strongest influence out there. And, actually, you know, even people think they care that my father was an Egyptian Muslim, and they think, oh, well, you know, he had old fashioned ideas. Well, he was the one who insisted that I was gonna go to grad school and become a professor like him. And, you know, so that for me to to want to get married and have children, I did think I was gonna go to grad school. I thought I was gonna go to grad school right up until I got married.

Leila Lawler [00:04:02]:

Where we lived and the people we lived with were all feminists. I really did not have any role models. I mean, my mother was a working mom because she was divorced. And certainly, a a lot of the people all the women I knew scorned housekeeping and staying home with your children. So, basically, kind of had to figure it all out for myself.

Carole Joy Seid [00:04:31]:

Yeah. What changed that? What changed that perspective? Because you had no one modeling it for you.

Leila Lawler [00:04:36]:

I mean, I just, you know, you have a you can get away with a lot when you have one baby, and you can get away with somewhat while you have two babies. But by the time you have three babies, you're kind of like, I better figure this out. And and yeah. And

you have to people have to remember, there was no Internet. So there was the library, and that was all. And books were very important to me, but, my mother was a good housekeeper, but she was also, she had a funny, character in that she had her idea of how things should be done, but she also was extremely indulgent towards me and a little afraid of me. So she wouldn't like many only children, especially not having a father around, I was a brat. And so if I was crossed, I would be cross.

Leila Lawler [00:05:30]:

And so she was a little I think she was scared to tell me what to do, but, I mean, I was really a difficult child. And then little by little and I guess this is how I learn. I just have to learn by doing it. I figured things out. But then when my, youngest child was around 10 years old, I realized that because by then, the Internet was a thing and blogs were a thing. And young women, it's young women, because they had a blog, they were sort of had a voice that was almost like an authoritative voice. And they were promoting and just passing on a lot of the mistakes and errors. And they kind of got a little bit, a little bit nervous, honestly, like, wait, are we going to have like, our fourth generation of people having the same issues of I kinda want to be like, I have this baby.

Leila Lawler [00:06:28]:

I love this baby. I want to take care of my baby, but the world is telling me I've gotta go make my mark on society. And though so all that conflict and everything. But then, also, a lot of it comes down to being overwhelmed by not knowing what to do. So I decided to jump in. So I kinda that's when I started blogging. And then once I had blogged for eight or so years, people started to say, this should be a book. You should write a book.

Leila Lawler [00:06:55]:

And that's it's so funny because I had started out with a vague idea. Maybe these posts could be, someday, they could be a draft for a book. But I just there's so much to write about. Well, by the time, like, eight years had gone by, I thought, oh my goodness. There's just so much. There's so much I've already written. How would I ever Because I didn't want to just slap a bunch of stuff down. There are some books that are just blog posts, and I just didn't wanna do that.

Leila Lawler [00:07:28]:

So it just took another couple years to really, pull it out together.

Carole Joy Seid [00:07:34]:

Well, let's talk about Summa Domestika. So it's three volumes. The first volume is on family life, the second is on education, and the third is on housekeeping. And, Rachel

and I were talking about this, Leila, before we got on with you and that is that, most of us in the Christian world, we're protestants, you're Catholic, but I think it's universal that we have not had role models. We haven't had someone to teach us in these really practical areas. Rachel is just raising three small children. My son I have four grandchildren, so, of course, he's grown. He and his wife are raising four.

Carole Joy Seid [00:08:13]:

But you have done, something that is so unique because you're sassy, you're funny, you're very common sense in the way that you talk about children. It isn't like, oh, the little darlings. You know, you're very honest about their sinful ways in a really, you know, beguiling way, and your books are just irresistible. I can't put them down. When I was a young Christian, at 21, I started reading the books by a woman named Edith Schafer, and she and her husband

Leila Lawler [00:08:46]:

Oh, yeah.

Carole Joy Seid [00:08:47]:

Started a ministry, as you know, in Switzerland at La Brie, and she taught me so many of the things in the same way what that I had never been taught, that everything that we do is sacred. Everything we do is under the lord. The way we change our baby's diaper, the way we arrange flowers at dinner or little rocks or little wildflowers or how we go on nature walks or how we buy remnants of fabric and make beautiful curtains because we're poor, but we love beauty. And you have done the same thing, and you fleshed it out. You're also a homeschool mother, which really excites us because, of course, that's something that we're really passionate about. Your love for literature, your love for doctor Raymond Moore and Dorothy, and the better late than early approach just made my heart sing when I was reading it. So these books just blew my mind. I want Rachel to jump in here, because she has some things that she wanted to share and and maybe ask about as well.

Rachel Winchester [00:09:50]:

Yeah. I really love how you name the collective memory on your blog and in your books. You talk about the body of knowledge that women once had and passed on from one generation to the next. But since that doesn't happen as readily these days, we have to rebuild it. I think that's at the heart of why a lot of moms my age feel overwhelmed. We don't have that collective memory, and I think that's what a lot of those bloggers you're talking about are trying to do and trying to get when they share the information they know and are learning. But we can only speak from the experience that we have, which is, you know, I only have a nine year old, so that's the only

experience I can speak to. So I was wondering about the price of losing that collective memory, and what is the cost of losing that generational knowledge that passes from one group of people, one group of women to another?

Leila Lawler [00:10:41]:

Oh, yeah. The price is the loss of a culture. It's Mhmm. It's really frightening, actually. So full credit goes to my daughter, Rosie, for coming up with that with that phrase collective memory. And at first, when the blog started, we were literally trying to put into the collective memory things that we like to do. We like to go thrifting and we like to do little DIY projects. And so when we we wanted to have some sort of visual to say, this is now in the collective memory and we can, see you know, when I'm talking about that that chair I recovered, you'll you'll have an image in your mind type of thing.

Leila Lawler [00:11:20]:

And then after a while, it struck me, oh, but the collective memory is much deeper than that. It's just so different to have been given it through experience, as you're saying, from someone who went before you. And it's kind of pulling yourself up by the bootstraps if all the people who went before you are kind of like, well, we're done with that, and now we're gonna break it all into pieces and figure something else out. A culture cannot survive that way because no one generation has the time or resources to come up with all the answers to everything. The culture is the true progression, which is not, like, growth in material wealth or something like that necessarily, but is the reverence for what what went before, the building on it, the correcting of mistakes, but the acknowledgment that some people before me figured these things out, and I better preserve that so that we don't all have to go through it all over again. So I guess I kind of looked at my previous you know, my early self getting married, being super alone, having been raised as an only child, you know, with my mother not there all day long, raised with teachers who were pretty committed to a pretty destructive ideology. Like, only in the lockdown where people kind of, like, oh my goodness. They're teaching all this stuff to our kids in school.

Leila Lawler [00:13:01]:

And, my first reaction is kind of, I do not know where you have been. We have literally been writing about this. My husband has been writing about it. I've been talking about it. Like, how can you possibly only know have do you know they're giving kids books to kids that are about two mommies? Yeah. That's why we started homeschooling in the early nineties, the late eighties, because we already saw that for so for me, like, in the February and the twenty twenties, to have people be like, do you realize what they're saying to our kids? I'm kinda like, yes. I do realize. And but that is the effect of losing

the collective memory is that you're you are consigned to this deciphen world of having to push that rock back up the hill to have it only roll back down yet.

Leila Lawler [00:13:53]:

And if you've read enough and you've immersed yourself in enough of what has gone before, if you try to remember I mean, I am old enough to remember, some of the things that my grandmother would do. And even my mother, like, she grew up in a in a big family in a rural place. And so she did have some thoughts and habits that were from that era. Or even for instance, I had a pediatric I remember my pediatrician who was quite old when I was a child. But interestingly, the first pediatrician I had with my children was on the verge of retirement. So he was actually formed, I would say, in, like, the late forties, early fifties. But even though it was the seventies well, they were my early my kids were born in early eighty. '80 '80 and '82.

Leila Lawler [00:14:54]:

Those were the ages that I had when I went to this pediatrician. So I can remember things that he said to me and advice that he gave to me, and practical things. And it's almost like you're reaching back into the the deepest recesses of your mind and saying, well, if there's something I can pull out and, and give to people. And in a way, I feel like that that character in the book of Job who, you know, comes up and gasps and tells him something and says, I alone am left to tell you. It's kind of like, that's me. You know? I know.

Carole Joy Seid [00:15:28]:

I know. Leila, both Rachel and I commented that as we read your books, we laugh out loud. Like, you are so witty. You're talking about rich deep things, but you do it with humor. And, I mean, my book is marked on every page with reds all over it with big x's, stars. I just you are a kindred spirit. I feel like we were, like, sisters from separate mothers. Something happened like, we got separated at birth, but, really, you are my you're my sister.

Carole Joy Seid [00:16:01]:

Rachel, did you have that same experience?

Rachel Winchester [00:16:03]:

Can I read a sentence that I thought was that had me chuckling? Women Please. This is on page 72 of the first volume. It says, women and anyone doing a hard job are better off resolving not to try to prove to everyone, even to themselves, that things are going smoothly since they won't be, most likely, because kids are involved, with their

irrationality and ingratitude and all. We want instant results, but in this case, time must be allowed to pass. Just you clearly know what it's like.

Leila Lawler [00:16:39]:

Yeah. I do. I had someone today leave a comment on on my, post, and she said, are you auntie Leila, are you is there a camera which actually, I have gotten this comment before. Is there a camera, like, in my kitchen that you're seeing all these things? Because this is, like, not the first time that I'm actually guilty of what you've said. My first response is to say, yes. Yes. I am everywhere. But then, but then I have to admit, no, my dear.

Leila Lawler [00:17:07]:

It's because I It's universal. Have made that move. That's right.

Carole Joy Seid [00:17:12]:

That's right.

Rachel Winchester [00:17:12]:

Yes. It was in your chapter where you're talking about going things going well, quote, going well, and looking for the affirmation in the thick of things, which is what the chapter title is called. And, yeah, that just really stuck out to me because I do think that sometimes we get so overwhelmed because I'm looking in this moment immediately to see the result or to look at my house in any moment and just say, okay. I am doing good because of the way it looks or the way my kids are acting. And kind of how do you how do you actually determine if things are going well or not?

Carole Joy Seid [00:17:51]:

Leila, can I answer that for you? Because you have a line that really impacted me, and then you can expand on this. You said when you're in a situation like Rachel just expressed, that we need to get close to God and look through his eyes at the situation. Like, what what Rachel's talking about is the difference between the short term and the long the long vision. Right? So do you wanna expand on that?

Leila Lawler [00:18:19]:

Yeah. And and, you know, I think we if we have any spiritual experience and, you know, have tried to look at the past and try to understand what God has done with us. We realized that sometimes he does permit difficulties because then we get stronger. And it's just like with your children, It's a foolish mother who I mean, I have such a vivid image in my mind of that nine month old child who's, you know, trying to go from holding on to the coffee table to grabbing on to the sofa and falls down, and it is the

foolish, foolish mother who rushes over to pick him up. And the wise mother knows that he has to fall. And if he does not fall, he will actually, there will be something physically wrong with him. And I actually was quite disturbed one time when I saw a mother and it was not her first child. And we actually were in a room in the living room of another family who they did not actually have very much furniture at all.

Leila Lawler [00:19:39]:

And so in a way, this living room where we were was the ideal place for little children because there was very little furniture and he was kind of this shadow, I think the child was maybe 18 months old, so not even that young. And she hovered over him to the point that I mean I mean, I am a very interfering person. I'm not gonna usually be that person who doesn't say anything, but I did. Like, after watching her for ten minutes, I was kind of like, he's gonna be fine. And she's she looked at me and she said, oh, I just don't want him to fall. And I said, he has to fall. And this is the ideal place for him to do that. And, like, it was carpeted.

Leila Lawler [00:20:22]:

What more do you want? You know? And then I really thought God has designed this child to pretty much bounce when he falls. But in another couple of years, he's not gonna bounce anymore. And if he doesn't get that muscle memory and that self control now, he will not be a physically formed person later on. Okay. That's something that I think, you know, is common sense. But when we apply it to ourselves, I think we start to have a different perspective because we we are most of us are a little bit whiny, and we kind of just want God to rescue us, and we don't understand why he doesn't smooth our way. And I guess I'm there to say, well, don't you want to learn self control, and don't you want to be stronger? Because sometimes I'll even say to God, like, I don't know why you let me be so ignorant all those years in so many areas. Like, I didn't send or I'll get jealous.

Leila Lawler [00:21:25]:

I'll, like, hear of, you know, things that other people learned when they were very young. I think, well, you didn't send anybody to me to tell me any of that. Then I I do have to laugh at myself because if I had not gone through all of that nonsense of my own making, I would not have very much empathy for any of these women because that I would I'm just that kind of person. If I haven't lived through it, I have no patience for it. So he he knew that. But the other thing is not be taken in by what I will characterize as prosperity gospel because it is not our lord Jesus Christ died on the cross. He is not any kind of teacher of prosperity gospel. And you could say his is the gospel of failure and poverty Yes.

Leila Lawler [00:22:16]:
If you look at that cross.

Carole Joy Seid [00:22:17]:
Yeah.

Leila Lawler [00:22:18]:
So is it really possible that he would give us a life where everything where we would know that we were doing well in his eyes because we could say everything is going well? Well, that's not when he looked out from the cross, he wasn't saying, oh, well, I guess I'm a pretty good God because everything is going so well. No. They are about to put me to death. So I guess we have to this is a really deep spiritual thing that women have to really grapple with that, you know, my crummy day is in a way just a participation in the real gospel, and that's okay. And when we see it with through God's eyes that way, then I think we can be a little patient with ourselves and we can, you know, lie down and take a nap. That's probably what we need. Say I can do a little better. Let me at least do this one thing.

Leila Lawler [00:23:15]:
But if not, it's okay. This is what it means to be Mhmm. A fallen creature. God has pity on us.

Carole Joy Seid [00:23:22]:
Yes.

Rachel Winchester [00:23:24]:
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