

LEA ANN GARFIAS

foreword by Vincent Iannelli, MD

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT HOMESCHOOLING

A Comprehensive, Easy-to-Use Guide for the Journey
from Early Learning through Graduation



Praise for *Everything You Need to Know about Homeschooling*

Lea Ann has hit a home run with her new book about homeschooling. How timely this book is in the midst of at least twenty million families now doing some form of schooling at home because of the pandemic. We know that many will try homeschooling as a result of getting their appetites whetted. What Lea Ann has provided is a one-stop shop for all you need to know about homeschooling, as well as all you need to know to be able to effectively homeschool. Not that homeschooling is easy—it's not—but this book makes it as easy as possible to do it. The book covers everything you will encounter in homeschooling and more in a very readable, easy-to-understand manner. *Everything You Need to Know about Homeschooling* is not hype. As moms and dads consider homeschooling, there will be many avenues presented. This book will direct you down the right road. It's a must buy for anyone contemplating homeschooling.

MIKE SMITH

President, Home School Legal Defense Association

A grab bag of homeschool help and how-to! Lea Ann covers every concern a new homeschool parent could have, from socialization to spelling to spiritual guidance. This book will equip parents to persevere past common pitfalls with confidence from preschool to graduation. No denim jumper required!

JENNIFER CABRERA

HifalutinHomeschooler.com

COMPELLING. If I only had one word to describe this book, THAT would be it! If you've ever mused about the possibility of homeschooling your brood, Lea Ann Garfias's book is the one to read. It provides a plethora of extremely valuable information and resources about the whole process—from A to Z. *Everything You Need to Know about Homeschooling* covers all the nuts and bolts with compelling anecdotes and a Q&A style that imparts valued information and stirs your imagination. By providing concise and accurate answers without wading into the weeds,

this book will move you to feel “I CAN DO THIS!” Even if you already homeschool, you will appreciate the thoroughness of this book as it will offer new insights, firm up your foundation, and strengthen your resolve. I’m thankful this book was written and highly recommend it!

RAY BALLMANN

Homeschool Author and Conference Speaker

Everything You Need to Know about Homeschooling is exactly the book I needed when I began homeschooling my boys almost a decade ago. Lea Ann offers practical and real-life ideas, support, and encouragement for the parent just getting started with homeschooling. I think this is a must read for new homeschoolers—like having another mom come alongside and help you along the way. Even veteran homeschoolers will find inspiration and encouragement as Lea Ann expertly provides solutions for every grade level. What a wonderful gift to the homeschooling community!

SHAWNA WINGERT

CEO of Different By Design Learning and Homeschool Mom of Two



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ABOUT HOMESCHOOLING



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FOREWORD

MANY PARENTS have had to unexpectedly facilitate their kids' education at home because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Not surprisingly, many of them have been very surprised that homeschooling is not what they expected it to be, even if this type of virtual schooling isn't necessarily true homeschooling. While some of these parents and kids like doing their schooling at home, others can't get past what seem like never-ending distractions, especially the lure of the TV, phone, computer, or video games. Others like the flexibility they have at home and find that they have fewer distractions, as they don't have to be concerned about other kids in the classroom.

So what is true homeschooling? Who homeschools their kids? Are these students able to play sports, have friends, or actually learn anything? There is a lot of mystery around these things, isn't there?

Even as a pediatrician, I was once misled into believing some of the stereotypes about homeschoolers. Luckily, I have also met some wonderful families who have helped teach me that homeschoolers are much like everyone else.

Lea Ann Garfias is a mom of one of those families.

She was homeschooled and has done a great job homeschooling her own children—all six of them!

Is homeschooling for everyone? Of course not. Unfortunately, I see some families jump into homeschooling thinking it will be easy or looking to correct a problem that can't be easily fixed just by leaving school.

Is homeschooling for you and your child? This book will help you figure that out. It is a great resource, both for parents who have just started thinking about homeschooling and for those who need some help along the way.

Unlike some books, *Everything You Need to Know about Homeschooling* doesn't sugarcoat things. It helps you to understand that whether your child is in public school, private school, or a homeschool, none of these things is guaranteed. It is your responsibility.

Vincent Iannelli, MD
Fellow of the American Academy of Pediatrics
and Author of The Everything Father's First Year Book

PREFACE

To the families who are
distance learning

SO I WROTE THIS BOOK, sent it to my publisher, and a few months later, *BOOM*: 2020 came and everything changed. Even homeschooling.

By the fall of that year, the percentage of American homeschoolers doubled from 5% to 10% of school children, for the first time exceeding the number of those enrolled in private schools.¹ Parents suddenly had to navigate distance learning and hybrid learning. Millions of children were studying outside the classroom, and parents became involved in their child's education like never before.

In uncertain times, homeschoolers proved themselves uniquely prepared. In the face of quarantine, these parents were able to provide continuity of education and a stable home environment. Many families struggling with distance learning craved that stability and looked at the benefits of homeschooling wistfully.

Indeed, the events of 2020 caused all parents to examine their child's education more closely and to intentionally choose what was best for their family. Regardless of whether their changes were temporary or permanent, parents became even more deliberate in educating their child. This is a very good thing for everyone.

You yourself may have chosen distance learning, or a hybrid of distance and classroom instruction, rather than full-on homeschooling. No matter what your at-home learning choice, there are many things you can learn

¹ Megan Brennan, "K-12 Parents' Satisfaction With Child's Education Slips," *Gallup*, August 25, 2020, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/317852/parents-satisfaction-child-education-slips.aspx>.

from the homeschool community. With time and experience, homeschool parents have developed unique tools and strategies to manage home education. We face many of the same challenges you do:

We struggle having our child home all day.

We wonder if our child is on track.

We worry we aren't prepared to teach our child or to help with his homework.

We are intimidated by hard subjects.

We are concerned if our child has a learning issue.

We are tired, discouraged, and frustrated.

We aren't struggling with all of these things all of the time. But we do face these issues at one time or another, maybe even much of the time. We have developed coping methods to overcome them. And I wrote this book to put these tools and information all in one place to support parents through each challenge.

So this book is for you, too.

Rather than read this book from beginning to end, you may want to jump right into some specific sections that will help with your unique distance-learning life:

If you want some tips for just getting started, turn to chapter 3.

There you'll find encouragement for starting off right from the very first day. Besides giving suggestions for your first day's schedule, I talk about working through the emotions of that beginning, even if you feel like you or your child are having a rough start.

If you feel uncertain about your ability to teach, turn to chapter 5.

You are doubtless already helping your child understand lessons and complete difficult homework assignments. This chapter will give you perspective on your own teaching abilities and encourage you that you definitely do have what it takes.

If you want to make learning easier for your child, turn to chapter 7.

This chapter provides several perspectives on how children process information. As you identify your child's learning style, you'll

understand how to help her learn and retain new information with fewer tears. This may be my favorite chapter.

If you want to know for sure your child is in the right grade, turn to chapter 9. There I discuss what grade levels mean and what determines if a child is on track. I'll also give you an overview of what to expect in the early learning, elementary school, middle school, and high school years.

If your child is in preschool or kindergarten, turn to chapter 10. In this chapter, you'll find benchmarks for physical, mental, social, and emotional development during this period, as well as thoughts on character development. I give you examples of what your child might learn in various subjects and suggestions for curriculum and supplies you might use. I'll even teach you how to teach reading.

If your child is in elementary school, turn to chapter 11. This chapter also provides benchmarks for physical, mental, social, and emotional development—and thoughts on how your child's personal character may develop during these years. For every school subject, I'll give you ideas of what he might be learning, and I'll answer your most common questions.

If your child is in middle school, turn to chapter 12. As with the previous two chapters, you will find benchmarks for physical, mental, social, and emotional development and an explanation of how your child is developing personal character during these years. For each subject, I give you ideas for what your child should be learning and how you can help. Then I answer common questions about middle schoolers: for example, questions addressing behavior and attitudes about schoolwork.

If your child is in high school, turn to chapter 13. I again begin with physical, mental, social, emotional, and character development you may see during these years. For each academic subject, I suggest which classes may fulfill the necessary graduation requirements. We look at some of the academic hurdles during these years and discuss how to meet each challenge. I answer a lot of graduation questions, including questions about honors credits, CLEP classes, and college entrance exams. I even tell you my secret to teaching subjects that are too hard for me.

If you feel tired, frustrated, or burned out, turn to chapter 15.

Of course I and the rest of homeschooling moms everywhere completely identify with these feelings. So in this chapter, I answer some of the biggest concerns we have about living with our children at home all day and how to manage the learn-at-home lifestyle with grace.

If you suspect your child has a learning difficulty or special needs, turn to chapter 16. There I explain some basics of special needs and give examples of what many special needs look like so you can decide if your child needs evaluation. I also explain where to first look for help and give ideas for how you can help your unique child learn.

If you have ever wondered if homeschooling might be right for you, go back to chapters 1 and 2. Chapter 1 gives information about homeschooling and how parents can decide if it is the right choice for their family. Chapter 2 answers many objections and concerns you might have about homeschooling.

If you want help right where you are, reach out to a homeschool mom. Tell her you aren't ready to convert fully to homeschooling, but you do want to learn some strategies to help your child learn at home. Ask her questions about how she manages the homework, how she juggles life and learning, and how she gets away from it all. Most homeschool moms would love to support you.

No matter how you choose to educate your child, she's *your* child. You are stepping up to take responsibility for her education, and you are putting your all into it. You have what it takes, and now you have the information you need. And most of all, you have an entire community just waiting to help you.

Enjoy the learn-at-home life.



INTRODUCTION

I NEVER WANTED TO HOMESCHOOL. I had the very best reason to avoid such a fate: I'm a homeschool graduate.

I was homeschooled in the late eighties and early nineties. This is the period known to our children now as the Late Stone Age, back when phones were attached to walls and computers took up entire floors of large office buildings and people wrote letters on paper with stamps to mail them and the news was also a paper that was thrown on your lawn every morning. Most children went to school on yellow buses or the wayback seat of station wagons, and few had ever heard of homeschooling and even if they had, they'd never met an actual homeschooler in real life.

Back in those days of yore, there were basically two kinds of homeschoolers. The country kind lived in the boonies and ran barefoot through the tall grass reciting Latin and Shakespeare to the goats and reading classic literature to the cattle and making cheese and denim jumpers. That wasn't me.

I was the city kind of homeschooler, the ones that had desks in the basement loaded with school textbooks and posters of maps on the walls and a used microscope on the shelf and an American flag hanging prominently from the ceiling. Mornings began with pledges, chores, and worksheets. We basically were a school at home, with a mom teacher and a dad principal and regular field trips and tests and projects and the whole nine yards. Only we had to be very secretive about the whole setup because homeschoolers were being regularly removed from their parents or detained for

questioning since no one really believed parents could properly educate their own children in a basement.¹

And yet I survived being taught at home seventh through twelfth grade. I graduated one year early with a congratulatory proclamation from my state senator and a letter from then-president Bill Clinton and high enough test scores to warrant multiple college scholarship offers. I chose a private Christian college instead, however, dropping out two years later to marry a hot Latino, birth four children, adopt two more, and live happily ever after.²

So when my husband suggested that I homeschool our firstborn, I said, “No way!” And for a very good reason: I knew how hard it is to homeschool. And I knew how much pressure it is to homeschool. I knew homeschooling takes everything from the mother, every moment of every day. And sadly, I have met homeschoolers who have grown up to become very smart, highly trained adults who want nothing to do with their family.³

I didn’t want any of that. Not the denim jumpers, the fifteen-passenger vans, the spelling bees, or the basement desks. None of it.

My ever-optimistic husband, David, issued me a challenge, then, of a short-term experiment. What if we homeschooled our first son for just one year that didn’t even hardly count—preschool? What if we tried it out to see if we could do it differently, if we could break the mold and forge a new path? What if we could homeschool in a unique, specialized way that built our family rather than strained it? What if we could find the faith that God could use homeschooling for good in our lives and in the lives of our children?

If you give me a challenge, I have to accept. Homeschoolers are no losers. And seriously, what did I have to lose in just one preschool year? Alas, those are the famous last words for homeschooling; everyone starts for “just one year.” During those brief months, I found amazing joy and satisfaction and excitement and fulfillment in the everyday learning moments, those simple pleasures of reading and learning and talking and playing and growing together. And when my son sounded out his first word, when he taped words to his train cars to make sentences, when he sorted his shapes into a matrix across the floor, I found myself hopelessly addicted. No one was going to see all those “firsts” before I did! I wanted to be there with him every magical step of the way.

So “just one” preschool year became a new lifestyle. First at the kitchen

INTRODUCTION

table, then in an attic schoolroom with desks, and finally scattered across floors and tables and beds around the house, we created a homeschool that was uniquely us. A homeschool that was about building people, training young adults, molding minds. A homeschool that was about strengthening relationships and growing love. A homeschool that was filled with hard subjects and moral dilemmas and opposing worldviews and tricky calculations. A homeschool that was messy and frustrating and boring and terrifying and funny and relaxing and bold and beautiful. A homeschool of sinners seeking a Savior. A homeschool that changed us all.

Today, we have six homeschooled students: two elementary, one middle school, and one high school, plus that first preschooler and his younger sister, who are now working full time and in college, respectively. Most of our children have never sat in a schoolroom,⁴ and the ACT was our teens' first standardized test. We've been through hard days, we've questioned ourselves many times, and we've cried ourselves to sleep. We've changed curricula, changed course, and changed our minds. But we made the right decision. We found the faith that God could grow all of us, and we've seen him work every day.

Can homeschooling be different from the norm? I'm here to tell you that *homeschooling must be different*. Your homeschool must be different from mine, from your friend's, from the expert at the convention's. Your homeschool must be different from that of the previous generation, from that of the boxed set, from that of the how-to guide. Your homeschool must be as different as the family you lead. Because each child is unique, each family culture is unique, and each day has its own unique challenges.

But that's a terrifying statement, isn't it? If we throw out all the rules and guidelines and manuals, what does that leave us with? How do we know how to begin, what to do on the first day, or how to level up to the next stage of learning? How can a homeschool parent know what to expect? That's a paralyzing fear—that we won't know what to do next or that we might mess up our children or that we'll fail homeschooling.

I fear failure every day of the week. It's a very real problem I struggle with constantly. And there's nothing more serious than taking on the full-time training of a child. But what my husband realized all those years ago, and I learned slowly over time, was that we will fail. We'll get exhausted and overworked, we'll make mistakes and hurt our children, and they'll make mistakes and hurt us. But God is gracious in it all. He will forgive us, and

our families will find grace and forgiveness with each other as we humble ourselves to grow together.

So can we avoid burnout, failure, and conflict? I don't think so. I think, instead, we have to expect it. We have to expect that if we are fallen, sinful parents raising our own crop of sinners, it will be tough going. We have to expect that we'll mess up and need to apologize regularly. We'll have to expect that our children will mess up and say hurtful things and act disrespectfully and get bad grades and scare us to death. If we plan for all of that, if we realize that all of that comes with parenting and teaching, then we'll know that these difficulties don't mean the end of our relationship with our children. Instead, these challenges are the beginning of the most important lessons.

We need to understand that our most frustrating, difficult, scary home-school moments are actually our most powerful teaching opportunities. How we handle these trials, how we love and forgive and seek forgiveness and persevere—these actions set powerful examples our children will follow throughout their lives. Those survival moments are sacred lessons. The F in science is the most important test paper our child receives. The year we slow down and complete only one chapter of a math book—over and over, ad nauseam—is the year we learn the most. The months we struggle with homework, character issues, and hormones are the months our family grows the most. Our most lasting lessons come not from those books but from these lives.

The answer, then, to the dilemma about how to shape a bold, new, different homeschool is in relationships—between mother and father, parent and child, and child and sibling. Those relationships impact each of us for eternity. Homeschooling gives each of us an exciting opportunity to grow alongside our child, to teach him while we ourselves learn from the Savior, to humble ourselves each day yet more and more as we marvel at how greatly God works.

I want to be your companion through that journey. This book is a resource to get you started on day one of your own unique homeschool journey, and it's a steaming cup of coffee with a smile on the tough days when you feel like giving up. In each section, I'll answer your questions on a variety of topics to help you get going and keep going.

First, in part one, we'll look at how to make the decision to homeschool and how to solidify your commitment. We'll also look at how you

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can answer those hard-to-answer objections to homeschooling from those around you.

Next, in part two, I'll help you get started on that very first year—first day, even—of homeschooling. We'll explore how your homeschool is vastly different from a traditional school, and I'll give you some basic tips on excelling as a teacher. Then we'll look at different homeschool teaching styles so you can consider how you most enjoy teaching and which style might be the best fit for your family. We'll also discuss the various learning styles and how they describe the ways your student may approach new subject matter. Then we can look at how you want to choose the books and materials right for you.

In part three, we'll dive into the meat of homeschooling: determining your child's grade and knowing what your child should be learning each step of the way from early learning and elementary school to middle school and high school. The chapters in this section discuss the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual developments typical of each age, which I hope will help you find assurance that your child is not behind—or know which areas to address to strengthen his skills. In each chapter I'll also answer your questions on how to teach academic subjects at each stage.

Finally, in part four, I'll talk about some obstacles you may face in homeschooling. We'll look first at some of the dangers inherent to homeschooling and how to avoid them. We'll look at the ins and outs of homeschool life and how we can make things easier. Finally, I discuss special needs issues and how to help your child if you suspect he is struggling.

The appendices contain goodies to help you out. There's a survey to help you find your teaching style and some sample homeschool routines to peruse. There are helps to edit and grade your students' essays. I share a sample homeschool transcript so you can easily create one of your own. Then I list a gazillion homeschool resources to meet your needs.

Since the majority of homeschool teaching typically falls to Mom, I'm primarily speaking to her in this book. However, a growing number of fathers are taking over teaching the family's homeschool. I address them personally in section 15.4. I applaud these men and encourage them to apply this book's suggestions to their own endeavors.

I'm still learning, but what I share with you here comes from homeschooling for two decades with my marriage and my family and my sanity (mostly) intact. I know how exciting it is to start homeschooling, the thrill

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT HOMESCHOOLING

of watching a child read his first words, the anxiety of standardized tests, and the satisfaction of graduation. And I know my friends have overcome trials and difficulties to emerge quite successfully on the other side. So I have every faith in you. I know that God will keep giving you wisdom when you seek him, and I know he plans for your family to have an extraordinary impact on each other and the world around you through your homeschooling experience.

So let's get started!

PART ONE

**MAKING AND DEFENDING
THE DECISION**

LIKE YOU, my parents did not make the decision to homeschool my sister and me lightly. It is a big decision to take your child out of school. Besides the scary reality of taking on the oversight of an entire education, homeschooling can feel like a lonely, countercultural path. In other words, most of your friends probably don't homeschool. Who wants to be the weirdo friend?

Not me.

My mom had long wanted to homeschool. She spent hours teaching my younger sister to read, gathering her own large children's library, taking us on field trips, and doing crafts. Teaching—especially early education—was in her bones.

So her outlet was school volunteering. She was always the class mom, the field trip chaperone, even one of the lunch ladies. You'd better believe her bake sale contributions were on point. She regularly tutored students during school hours in her favorite subject of reading.

My dad was also very involved in our education. He was a driven man, intent on providing the very best of everything for his family. And that

included education. He took pride in sending us to a good private school and taking an acute interest in our progress. I learned to spell (okay, not great, but at least a little) and to memorize my multiplication facts only because of his patient drilling.

My mom brought up homeschooling once in a while, but my dad was not interested.

Then my sixth-grade year was less than stellar. My class had two different teachers and made very little progress. Most of the class fell behind. I spent most of each day doing my homework during the lesson time then trying to hide the book I was reading. My parents found themselves tutoring many of my fellow students in language arts and math. They ended the year dissatisfied with the quality of the education we received and wondering if they could do better. But they did go ahead and register both my sister and me for the following school year.

So they were surprised when *two* families they knew well decided to begin homeschooling that coming school year. That was weird. One family would be strange, two was mind-boggling. How could they do that?

Then one family invited my mom and dad to travel from Michigan down to Ohio to a homeschool convention. There they listened to seminars and perused curricula from new and established publishers. They became convinced that, though people might think *they* had become the weirdos, they could try this out for themselves.

Thus began my parents' one-year experiment that turned into a complete homeschool education. I graduated homeschooled after completing seventh through twelfth grade in five years. My sister was homeschooled from third grade on. It wasn't always easy, but we did it. And I'm glad we did.

Yes, people thought we were strange, even prideful to have left a great school to do things ourselves. My parents became so uncomfortable with the reaction from their friends that they changed churches. But it seemed like the more questions they got, the more committed they became to the decision they had made.

And as I homeschool my own children, I find that to be the case for me as well. The more I need to explain or even defend homeschooling, the more I reaffirm my own commitment. Explaining my own *why* and how we live this life helps me recognize God's plan and provision in our lives. I know God wants me to homeschool, and now I'm bold to tell you so.

MAKING AND DEFENDING THE DECISION

You may not be at that place, though. Maybe you are still casting about, trying to figure out if this is right for you. Maybe you bought this book “just in case I want to later.” Perhaps you are starting out for the first time. Or maybe you’ve been homeschooling for a long time, but your purpose has become muddled a little. That’s okay. Because now we are looking at all of that together.

In this section, we’ll consider some reasons people choose to homeschool and how to make a decision that is right for your family based on your fundamental *why*. Then we’ll discuss quick but substantive answers to others’ questions about our decision—and maybe to some questions of our own.

I’m cheering you on. You can do this if God leads. Look around you, dig deep in your soul, seek God in prayer, and find your homeschool *why* right now.



FINDING YOUR HOMESCHOOL WHY

“WHY WOULD YOU WANT TO DO THAT?”

My fork froze midair, Southwest chicken salad dangling from the tines, as my mouth choked on a response. The restaurant owner gazed at me steadily, waiting for my defense of homeschooling and condemnation of her own life choices. I’m sure she expected me to answer as confidently and proudly as she had just listed off her own accomplishments: the stores she owned, the magnet schools her children attended, the awards each one had won. But in that moment, in the midst of a real-life Mommy War scenario, I couldn’t do anything but stammer, “Because I like it.”

Homeschool mom FAIL.

The fact of the matter is I haven’t always *wanted* to homeschool. That day I was particularly tired and frustrated with all of it—books, children, papers, messy house, the whole nine yards. Go ahead and be shocked, but I’m not going to say every homeschool day is a bed of roses and tweeting birds and cold Mocha Frappuccinos.

But I’ve never, not for one minute, regretted any of it. Pretty much.

Several years have passed since my chicken salad inquisition, and I’d like to think I have a better answer to the question now. I’ve made it past

the busy preschool stage (hooray, everyone can use the bathroom on their own!), I've learned how to survive through the tough family trials (maybe even thrive!), and I've seen two of my children make it all the way past graduation (hallelujah, give me a medal!).

So if that confrontational restaurateur asked me the question today, I'd be able to answer her quite simply and confidently (no choking required)—because I know my *why*.

The decade ahead presents an exciting time for students. There is so much to learn, so many facts and applications and philosophies and subjects to explore. And in this generation, the range of educational choices available to parents grows broader than at any time in history. Our children enjoy a bright, shiny future ahead of them full of amazing opportunities to work and to serve.

But the responsibilities loom great, too, for us as parents. We are responsible for who is training our children, and we are responsible for what they are taught. We are responsible for the beliefs and philosophies and world-views being presented to our children, and we are responsible for protecting the truth for our next generation.

It is that *responsibility* that drove my husband and me to homeschool our children from preschool through graduation. And it's that *responsibility* that drives us to ensure each of our children has the best possible education we can provide—the best spiritual and academic preparation possible for the wide opportunities God will bring in the years to come.

I can do all things through
him who strengthens me.

PHILIPPIANS 4:13

That responsibility lies so heavy at times. As parents, we can lose sleep over it. As homeschool moms, we can burn out from it. But this God-given responsibility doesn't have to defeat us. We

can educate our children confidently, knowing they are compiling the tools they need for a lifetime of success. We can choose homeschooling boldly, knowing we have what it takes to educate our children wisely. And we can live every day guilt-free, knowing God will use our ordinary efforts as part of his extraordinary plan for each family member each day.

Should you homeschool? And if you've already started, should you continue? To answer these questions, you must understand your *why*.

1.1 START WITH YOUR WHY

Way back in the Dark Ages when I was homeschooled—we're talking late eighties here—I actually attended an entire schoolroom in my basement. I sat at a desk with textbooks in it, surrounded by whiteboards and time lines and maps and posters, just like a classroom. It was just in my basement, and my mom was my teacher, and my little sister in the desk beside me was my only classmate. And that's where I graduated. Well, I did come up out of the basement to graduate, but you know what I mean.

So when I started homeschooling my first son, I tried very hard to set up the same scenario. I bought a heavy, expensive box of curriculum with teachers' manuals and textbooks and workbooks and posters and classroom games and flash cards and the whole nine yards.

For my three-year-old. Bless his heart.

And it's not like we were rich, either. We were living hand-to-mouth in a basement apartment (I apparently have a thing for basements), and my husband was working two jobs to keep food in our mouths. We probably ate spaghetti every day for a month, but we had shiny new flash cards and wall posters to remind us what the ABCs were everywhere we looked.

I kept at it like that for a couple of years, obediently buying every single thing the curriculum catalog told me to, convinced that's what a good homeschool teacher did. I schooled that little boy very nearly to death, poor thing, making him copy pages of phonics and complete workbook after workbook of math. Other homeschool moms tried to tell me I didn't need to do all of that, but I wouldn't listen. I was sure those books and flash cards *were* homeschooling.

It wasn't until much later, when I was homeschooling two, then three, young children at once, that I began to recognize my problem. To me, homeschool equaled piles of books and educational *stuff* that I bought and pointed to and forced my children to consume until we were all nauseated from the bloat. As time went on and we added more subjects and more children and more ministry and more *real life*, it all became so tedious. But homeschooling shouldn't be drudgery I check off my to-do list, any more than parenting or marriage, right? It should be a lifetime of loving to learn.

I had to resolve my *why*. Why was I homeschooling in the first place? It wasn't simply because I had been homeschooled; I was nowhere *required*

ARE YOU READY TO HOMESCHOOL?

- Are you passionate about raising your child?
- Is *why* your child learns as important to you as *what* he learns?
- Is his preparation for adulthood important to you?
- Do you (sometimes) enjoy training your child?
- Do you like to both be at home and leave the house?
- Do you make mistakes but sometimes learn from them?
- Can you provide a library card and a pencil?
- Can you attempt to dissuade your child from writing in the library book with the pencil?
- Do you drink coffee or some other nonalcoholic beverage that could possibly endow you with supernatural or natural powers?
- Do you own pajamas or yoga pants?
- Do you love your child?

If you said yes to any of these questions, you are ready to homeschool.

to teach my children the same way I was taught. In fact, there were public and private schools that I could enroll them in just fine. I even taught in the school next door for several years, walking back home to teach my own children after class. So I knew homeschooling was not simply the easiest or the most obvious choice. Homeschool parents—all parents, even—need to know *why* they have chosen their educational path.

1.2 WHY THAT SCHOOL?

There are lots of reasons people choose their child's school. I think the default reason is most common. We just do **what comes naturally**. For most parents, that's sending their children to public school. It's similar to how they themselves learned, there's that convenient bus, and there are several locations nearby. Our tax money even pays for it. Public school seems like the obvious choice.

Private schools are the answer for many parents. I went to private Christian schools for all of preschool and elementary, in fact. For parents

who want to make sure their child gets a better education within a particular worldview or belief system and who can afford to spend a little more on education, private schools represent a simple solution.

Homeschooling, however, is rarely a default for any parent. It takes some courage, some intentionality, some guts to say, “I think I can do better,” and then spend years dedicated to proving just that. Really, hats off to everyone who goes that road less traveled.

Public, private, or homeschool, there are at least five major considerations parents discuss when choosing their child’s school.

1.2.1 To instill a deep faith

Many parents choose their child’s education because of **religion**. Religious reasons influence the decision for over 50% of homeschoolers, and 16% say this is the most important reason to homeschool.¹ They find a private school that teaches Christianity (or Islam, or Judaism, or another faith tradition) and place the child there. Sometimes that’s because passing on their values and beliefs is very important to them, and they want to make sure the teachers are “backing them up” in school.

Then some parents, like my friend Angie, send their child to religious school to teach them the beliefs and practices they themselves don’t know. They hope the teacher can fill in all the particulars—the important details of *how the child views the world and himself and his relationship to his God*. When I asked another mom why she chose her son’s elementary school, she said, “Because I just don’t know those Bible stories. They can teach him.”

Christian homeschool parents often choose to teach their children for this very reason—their beliefs are too important to them to delegate to someone else. They are passionate about sharing their walk with God with their children, helping them develop biblical discernment, protecting them from the errors of false teaching, and building the foundation of their future ministry. It’s a priority relationship they simply must transmit. They don’t claim to have all the answers and the sinless life and the sanctified teachings. But they know they are growing in grace, and they yearn to bring their children along on that journey with them.

1.2.2 To prepare your children academically

In my area, most parents choose their child’s school for **academic** reasons. They find the right public or private schools based on test scores, STEM

subjects, gifted or special education programs, even arts opportunities. My friend Natalie spends hours every day driving her children across two cities to three different schools and then various after-school programs, all to give them the best academic training she can find.

Over 60% of homeschool parents are motivated to provide academic advantages, and 17% consider this the most important reason to homeschool. Twenty percent of homeschoolers made the decision, at least in part, because of their child's special needs.² The superiority of one-on-one instruction and impressive homeschool test score results lures ambitious parents into investing more time and attention in their student's learning. Personalized education and therapy allow parents to give students with special needs invaluable support. And with the extra time saved by staying home, these students often invest more in the arts, sports, and hands-on learning opportunities.

1.2.3 To encourage positive social connections

I know many parents who make a **social** choice to keep their child in traditional schools. They choose to send their child to a particular school district or private school because of income or ethnic demographics. They want their child to learn in a more diverse environment, or they want to protect their child from crime, bullying, and gang elements. They may be

I think parents need to begin with the end in mind. Too often they just send their kids to public schools because that's what you do. But they should be asking what they want their kids to be and then search for a method that will create that. It makes no sense to me to blindly send your kids to public school and hope they turn out the way you want.

With all that said, I'm not someone who pushes homeschool as if it's the only way. Each family needs to choose what works best for them and will get the results they want. But I do believe that whatever they do they should do it intentionally. Don't just send your kids to public school because that's what you do. Make it a choice.

TEACHING HOMESCHOOL DAD CHAD KENT

looking for an educational environment that more closely represents the world they imagine their child living in as an adult.

Even 80 percent of homeschoolers consider public school environment a factor in their choice.³ They may be pulling their child out of a classroom with bullying. Or they may be protecting their child from growing ethnic unrest in a particular district. Minorities, particularly black homeschoolers, are often reacting against the “school to prison pipeline.” They feel they can better train their children to live and work and serve in the real world outside a race- or age-segregated environment.⁴ Over one-third of homeschoolers say school environment is the single most important reason to homeschool—the most important reason found in a 2016 survey.⁵

1.2.4 To save money

In addition, many parents make a **financial** choice for where their child goes to school, sending their child to public school because it’s free. Some sacrifice to send the student to private schools, working multiple jobs to pay the increasing cost of specialized education. Many feel forced into their choice of school since both parents work, struggling to juggle the demands of managing a two-income household.

Surprisingly, though, homeschool families have found ways to educate their children without the high cost of private tuition. In fact, I have found that the longer I homeschool, the less expensive it is for us every year. Homeschool products and curricula are easier to obtain and more affordable than even a decade ago. And experience has taught me how little a student needs to thrive; I wish I could have my money back from those thick teachers’ manuals of years gone by!

1.2.5 To pass on your cultural heritage

Many minority parents also choose to homeschool, at least in part, to **pass on their culture and history**. This is, according to Hispanic homeschool advocate Monica Olivera, the second most common reason for minorities to homeschool, after avoiding the public school environment. The author of *The Latino Family’s Guide to Homeschooling* and founder of the Mommy Maestra support blog, Monica says, “Passing on cultural heritage and maintaining bilingualism is extremely important to a lot of Hispanics right now.”⁶ A CDC study conducted in 2009 indicated that when Latino children were raised to understand and be proud of their heritage, they had

higher self-esteem and lower incidence of drug use, aggressive behavior, and social problems.⁷ Pier Penic, founder of the Culture at Home support group for black homeschoolers in Washington, DC, cites this as the driving force for around 85 percent of African American homeschool families. “Many of them have said [as parents] that they want to incorporate [into their kids’ schooling] the experience and legacy of being an African American in this country. . . . They want their children to understand . . . that their ancestors were beaten, sold, killed just [for] learning to read one letter.”⁸ Ethnically diverse homeschool parents are often motivated by the prejudiced rhetoric around them, choosing instead to instill cultural pride in their children.

1.3 WHY WE HOMESCHOOL

The reasons laid out in the preceding section are all valid ones for making school choices, but I wasn’t even thinking about these things when my husband first challenged me to homeschool. Quite frankly, the decision was made for just one year, at least in my mind. My husband says he always knew we’d homeschool “all the way,” but one year was all he could talk me into at first.

His argument became, “Why not? If we can provide an excellent education, if we can train our children to love God and love others, if we can avoid the high costs of private tuition, if we can protect our children from bullying, peer pressure, bad influences, and disrespect, why not do it? What do we have to lose?”

If we can fulfill God’s command to teach our children through our lives together, why would we not wholeheartedly follow him?

Here are some distinctives of our family’s *why* when it comes to homeschooling:

1. We want to **share God’s love** with our children. We want them to know God personally and to know he desires a personal relationship with them. They need to know that even though we all are sinners, that we all make mistakes, that we all fall short of God’s glory (Romans 3:23) he still loves us unconditionally. His love for us is so powerful it led him to death, the bloody death on the cross to pay for our sins (Romans 5:8). And we can each know God’s free gift of salvation by simply accepting his

love for ourselves (Ephesians 2:8). Then we can enjoy a personal relationship with God. That's the love God wants us to know and to share with our children.

2. We want to **pass on our values** to our children. We want to reinforce, through our day-to-day lives, that we believe what we say. As God helps us live out those principles from his Word, we pray that our children will know him and desire to know more about him. We want to share the love and truths of God consistently through our own lives.
3. We want to **reveal God's plan and purpose through their academics**. No truth occurs in a vacuum; each principle is created and sustained by God. How and why we communicate (language arts), the consistent patterns that hold all of creation together (math), the record of God's dealing with mankind (history), the wonder of God's creative plan (science)—these all reveal the glory of God, and we want to revel in it along with our children.
4. We want to **prepare our children for adulthood**. The schooling years are not only a celebration of the joy of childhood. These are the years to prepare for the rest of their lives. Taking part in this journey, guiding their privileges and responsibilities even in academics, allows us to be a greater part of this transformation.
5. We want to **teach our children through relationships**. Indeed, we will see in chapter 6 that this overriding principle is the basis for every homeschool teaching style. Education itself is a teacher/student relationship, a relationship that can build and solidify over time through learning. We want to strengthen that relationship with God and within our family. We want to demonstrate the most important commandments of God, the relationships he prizes most: love for him and love for others.

In fact, my relationship with my husband is why I started homeschooling twenty years ago. He always wanted me to homeschool our son, but I was skeptical about how it would affect our family. I loved my husband, so for the sake of our marriage, I tried for just one year.

Our relationship as husband and wife has only grown more intimate

since then, and homeschooling had a lot to do with it. We are in this together, and we can only succeed by working together. That means a lot of creative problem solving, decision making, and hand holding. It demands late-night talks and early morning planning sessions. We invest not only our funds and my career and all our family vacations but also our time, our date nights, and our long-term goals into making this endeavor work for our family.

You shall teach [God's words] to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.

DEUTERONOMY 11:19

Homeschooling has molded my relationship with my children. Obviously, we can't live together 24-7 and not influence each other in a big way. But living every day right with my children, letting them see me in all the ordinary struggles and frustrations and joys and hilarity of daily life, has drawn us together, even as they have grown older.

That intimacy and trust built over countless hours and prayers and projects and lessons and apologies and graces pays off in deeper, fuller relationships with my teens. We genuinely enjoy being together, traveling together, running errands together, and working together. And that's in large part because of homeschooling.

But most of all, homeschooling changed my relationship with God. Taking on the responsibility of teaching my children, of guiding them into adulthood, of discipling them to a personal relationship with Christ, I feel keenly the enormous burden of it all. There is no way I could be all that and a bottle of hot sauce for my children and my husband, so I must rely on the Lord every moment of each day.

That relationship with the Lord is also the very reason I homeschool in the first place. I know God gave these children to me as a stewardship, a responsibility to him. He has a specific plan for each of their lives, a ministry and a calling he is preparing them to realize. They may be in the ministry, or they may serve in secular jobs. One dreams of being a business owner, another is studying for a lifetime in academia, another is praying over a ministry in professional sports. Whatever God designed them to do, they must do it for his glory and to the very best of the abilities he gave them.

Homeschooling changes relationships—our relationships with our

spouses and with our children and each child's relationships with his parents and siblings. All of us are transformed in our relationship with God as we depend on him for each subject, each assignment, each day. We grow in our understanding of him. We see his love for us every day.

That is my greatest homeschool *why*: transformed relationships, relationships that last for eternity.



While all of the reasons I've mentioned have become a sufficient rationale for our own homeschooling, friends and acquaintances often push for more. Why should a family go through the expense, the frustration, the drain of homeschooling . . . embarking on a project that, with multiple children, will take decades to complete? And why would one or both spouses sacrifice career, privacy, and *sanity* to take on such a Herculean task? And even, when the going gets tough—the mom becomes chronically ill, the family faces financial setback, the student rebels, real life intrudes on schooling—why would the family continue prioritizing homeschooling? Why this radical lifestyle when there are so many alternatives?

This is the reason why before embarking on the homeschool journey *you must connect with your own why*. You and your spouse must *know* why you are homeschooling and what you want out of it. And you need to know how you will define homeschool success.

Because if you know what *homeschool success* looks like in your family, if you know what your own unique homeschool *why* is all about, then you can homeschool with confidence. When the learning difficulties emerge, when the character problems arise, when the subject matter gets tough and the days grow longer, you will continue undistracted. Because that's not what you are about. You measure success differently.

Though your own plans may—and probably will—run amok, God's plan for your homeschool will be a success.

Take a few minutes, before you continue reading, and define your own homeschool *why*. Consider the results you want in your relationships. List

Many are the plans in
the mind of a man, but
it is the purpose of the
LORD that will stand.

PROVERBS 19:21

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT HOMESCHOOLING

the outcomes you expect in your children's academics, social skills, and spiritual lives. Then pray about how God will change *you* yourself through the homeschool journey. If you're married, discuss these issues with your spouse, even write down your mutual goals. Come to terms with your homeschool *why*—then pursue it with joy. Filter not only this book but all of your homeschooling through the lens of this *why*, through the expectation of what God will accomplish in your lives.