

THE INSPIRED HOMESCHOOL

JENNIFER PEPITO



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The Importance of Vision



*With man this is impossible, but with
God all things are possible.*

Jesus (Matthew 19:26)

For each of my 27 years of homeschooling, morning time was a prominent feature of our days together. I didn't yet have a name for it when I began reading the story of Genesis to my three-year-old and putting animal stickers onto our creation collage, but that first gathering of the day—when we read the Bible and said our prayers—was a constant in our homeschool day. Morning time went through many iterations over the years as well. When we were in our fundamental

Christian phase, we copied portions of Scripture and sang hymns. When we were in our charismatic renewal phase, we listened to soaking music and journaled what we felt God was highlighting. The pendulum finally came to rest somewhere in the middle. We retained orthodox Christian doctrines and spiritual disciplines, but we gained a reliance on the empowering work of the Holy Spirit. In this centered place we recited the Apostles' Creed, read the Psalms, and prayed the Lord's Prayer, while still regularly memorizing Scripture, singing hymns, and being quiet and still with God.

Our morning time was a holy space where we grew our faith, and this precious daily practice was an anchor for our homeschool. Gathering each day became my favorite part of the entire journey. This time was more than Bible reading and soaking prayer too. This was also when we read and discussed books together, recited poetry aloud, and looked at art; this was when I really came to know my children and my Lord. Though grammar and math lessons came afterward, this initial time of reading and discussing functioned as the core of our homeschool. At first I relied on parent guides to help me lead my children. We used children's Bible resources such as *The Ology* and *Long Story Short* by Marty Machowski, *The Bible in Pictures for Little Eyes* by Kenneth N. Taylor, New City Catechism, Heidelberg Catechism, and even *Sword Fighting*, a topical devotional that inspired my children to race to be the first to find the verse. As someone who had been raised in a Christian home but lacked the basics of theology, I appreciated the opportunity these resources gave me to dive deeper into my own spiritual formation alongside my children.

As I developed more confidence as a homeschool mom, I switched to reading directly from the Bible to my children, letting the scriptures themselves shape our worldview and permeate our home. We continued to sing

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together, memorize verses, and copy from the Bible each day, knowing that hiding God's Word in our hearts is a hedge against deception. But our daily Bible reading wasn't the only way we nurtured our faith in homeschooling. Every book we read, every poem I introduced, every nature walk we took, and every history lesson we studied was considered through the lens of our faith. Ours was a sacred home, a home consecrated to God, so we saturated our learning with an awareness of God. My motto for life, which spilled over into our homeschool, is taken from an Elizabeth Barrett Browning poem:

Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God:
But only he who sees, takes off his shoes.¹

A VISION FOR A SACRED HOME

I wasn't keeping my children out of traditional schools only to protect them or give them a better education. I wanted them to be truly aware of God—to see his goodness, and to know how very real he is. “The world is charged with the grandeur of God,” Gerard Manley Hopkins writes, and as we read poems like these, we grew more aware of God.² As we read the Narnia stories aloud while studying European history with the Peaceful Press, our awe of God was expanded. We read about Ernest Shackleton, a polar explorer who claimed there was a third person with him and his men as they careened perilously over the ice on the treacherous journey to civilization, and Joan of Arc, who heard from angels and led her people to freedom. We learned about St. Benedict, who communed with God in a cave and created a structure for community that is still in practice today. Through these stories we were cultivating awareness of God and his power

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to transform culture. I wanted my children's wisdom for life to be rooted in recognizing the greatness of God. I had a vision for my homeschool; it was to be a place of spiritual formation, "a school for the service of the Lord,"³ and this vision both clarified the content and gave our days structure.

But we aren't the first homeschoolers who have had a clear vision for our homeschool. The Jewish culture in which Jesus grew up also had distinct values for family life. This ancient community took seriously God's command in Deuteronomy 6:6-7 (CSB):

These words that I am giving you today are to be in your heart. Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

In fact, much of Jesus's early childhood spiritual and educational formation most likely occurred at home with his parents. Although there is little written in Scripture about how he spent his school-age years, Jesus was the son of a builder, not a rabbi, so he probably spent his childhood working in the family trade with his earthly father. He wasn't raised in an elite religious family, with days devoted to learning; still, the purposeful guidelines for Jewish families required that parents pass on their faith to their children regardless of their profession. An article from the My Jewish Learning website described family life in this way:

Various talmudic and midrashic passages lead us to believe that the family unit was the basic context in which the continuity of Judaism was ensured. For example, the father is obligated to teach his son Torah; he can employ others to do this for him, but the responsibility remains his nonetheless.⁴

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It's unlikely that Joseph, Jesus's tradesman father, would have been financially able to send his child to school, and some scholars say compulsory Jewish schools weren't even established until AD 65 by Gamaliel, a significant leader in first-century Judaism. This means most of Jesus's education took place as he worked side by side with his earthly father and communed with his heavenly Father. Taxes were high in the Roman world, and a Jewish father toiled long hours to provide for his family. Joseph's sons, especially the eldest son, could have joined in the work as early as they were able. There are many opinions about how Jesus gained so much knowledge and insight about God and his Word, but he likely wasn't sitting at the feet of a learned rabbi every day, studying with the scribes. One verse in John suggests that Jesus didn't go to school at all: "The Jews therefore marveled, saying, 'How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?'" (John 7:15 ESV).

What Jesus lacked in formal learning, he made up for in clarity of vision. Jesus said, "So that the world may know that I love the Father, I do as the Father commanded me" (John 14:31 CSB). This laser focus on his purpose was what inspired Jesus to study without compulsion. The Christian Standard Bible translation of Proverbs 29:18 says, "Without revelation people run wild, but one who follows divine instruction will be happy"; and the English Standard Version of the same verse says, "Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint, but blessed is he who keeps the law."

Jesus knew the law through the instruction of his father, but he also had revelation from God about what he was called to do. Because his vision was clear, he was able to set his face like flint and take an earthly path that compelled people to mock him, attempt to stone him, revile him, betray him, and ultimately crucify him. Jesus wasn't distracted by what people thought

of him. He wasn't comparing his progress to his neighbors'; he was fully confident in who he was and what he was called to do. In an article from Blue Letter Bible, Don Stewart expresses it this way:

Jesus was fully aware of his identity. From age twelve until His death on Calvary's cross we find that Jesus was always certain of His identity. He never questioned His calling, never wavered on who He was. As to when He became certain of who He was the Bible does not tell us. What we do know is that on the first recorded occasion when He spoke with people, in the temple at age twelve, He knew exactly who He was—the Christ. He recognized that God was His Father in a unique way.⁵

I fully acknowledge that there is only one Jesus, only one perfect God in the form of a man who came to save humanity from sin. Though Jesus may have been taught at home for some of his childhood, this does not mean that we, too, can live with the same flawless vision and purpose in our homeschooling. However, Scripture does tell us to “be imitators of God, as beloved children” (Ephesians 5:1 esv)—so this clarity of purpose and vision exhibited by Jesus should be our goal, and through his power, it can be.

What practical things can we do to gain more confidence? If you feel God has called you to homeschool, or that homeschooling for a season is a better option for your family, don't wring your hands in worry about not doing enough. Do not be afraid your children aren't learning enough or that you are going to fail. Taking time to articulate a clear vision for *why* you are homeschooling—as well as articulating homeschooling's many benefits—will give you the confidence to persevere even when it's hard.

When I first started homeschooling my children, I hadn't read many books about it, and I didn't have a background in education. What I did

have was a vision. I read a book by homeschool pioneers Raymond and Dorothy Moore, and in this book, they included the stories of several homeschooling families and their daily routines. I can't remember which of their many books I read, but the picture they painted of days at home reading books together by a cozy fire, taking walks down their tree-lined road, and sipping tea and munching on peanut butter toast around a flickering candle while they discussed the day's learning lit a spark in me. I envisioned what my family's life together could be. As a child I had experienced the isolation of both private and public schools; I had felt alone in a sea of people, and I didn't want that for my children.

Truthfully, school had been mostly a feat of endurance for me. I spent my first few years of school facing a wall with a divider on either side of me, slogging through workbooks so I could earn the award for the most workbooks completed in a month. I was a motivated child, so I excelled at finishing these booklets and memorizing Scripture for awards, but I remember little from those early years aside from dynamic chapel sessions where the school principal would act out Bible stories with incredible comedic timing. The story of Elijah calling down fire on the prophets of Baal will never be forgotten thanks to one great teacher who gripped our attention with wild antics illustrating the crazy behavior of the pagan prophets. The fire of God suddenly brimming up from the makeshift altar in the form of shining red satin was the crowning moment. Later, in public school, I struggled to feel at home in an atmosphere where eagerness to learn made me the object of ridicule. Raising my hand too often and too excitedly to answer questions was met with frustration from teachers. My sense of wonder was stifled, and coming home to our forest on the coast of Oregon was a relief after confusing days under the fluorescent lights of the classroom. While

at school, I would often hide a book under my desk, sliding it out to read while I was supposed to be reading a textbook. I remember nothing that I learned during those early school days, but I vividly remember watching banana slugs making trails along the forest floor, and the scent of petrichor, of moist moss, dirt, and ferns that is prevalent after rain. I remember pouring my heart into poetry and starting a business sewing doll clothes for my one customer, a supportive younger sister. The projects I engaged in after school made an impression on me. I remember the books I chose to read, but not so much the days at my desk.

So the first step in creating a vision for your homeschool is to describe your ideal homeschool day. In later chapters, we will discuss the science of learning and why you don't have to imitate the school environment. I'll also share insights from scholars about why traditional school isn't the best option for many children. But before we get there, take some time to think about your child and your home. In their 12 years of childhood, what do you want them to experience and to remember? During their 18 years of being legally under your authority, what is important enough to pass on to them?

KNOW YOUR WHY

For me, the atmosphere and daily routines of our home were a means to introducing my children to their heavenly Father. I wanted to live by our motto of being awake to awe and wonder. With this goal in mind—the goal of enabling my children to see and experience the goodness of God—I needed to create a home life that offered margin. I did not set out to imitate traditional schools and try to keep up with them; I had a different goal altogether. Our days started with morning time, where we sang together, read the Bible, read beautiful stories from the Peaceful Press booklists, drank

tea or coffee, had discussions, and listened to each other and to God. We included math, science, history, grammar, and art, but we started by offering our days to God.

This desire to awaken my children to the goodness of God also meant being careful about how many extra outings we scheduled. As homeschoolers, we can easily fall into the trap of creating overly busy lives, especially since homeschooling is now a big business with a plethora of choices for classes and activities. However, our family had a clear vision, so we continually made choices that upheld our essentials and ideals. For example, we wanted to live in the country so our children could spend long afternoons playing in the forest and creeks (another spiritual formation tool). This also meant not being close to town and needing to take time to steward our land on the weekends. So our vision for time with God in nature made it easy to say no to sports in that season. If I had fewer children, or if my vision was more inclined toward teamwork or physical fitness, then sports might have been a higher priority. In his book *Essentialism*, Greg McKeown says, “Only once you give yourself permission to stop trying to do it all, to stop saying yes to everyone, can you make your highest contribution towards the things that really matter.”⁶ Knowing my own vision made it easy to stick to our essentials and live by our values.

My personal ideals for our homeschool don't have to be yours, but if you don't know your *why*, you will continually bow to outside pressures and create stress for your children in the process. So many choices are available to homeschool families, and there are many great education options; so taking time to write down your family values, the experiences you want your children to have in childhood, and your ideals for relationships will help you clarify what is important to you. While my desire for my children to know God was my

highest priority for our homeschool, I also wanted to be with them and have a close family. I wanted them to be healthy and to avoid some of the environmental toxins, viral loads, and stresses of regular school. I wanted them to read beautiful, hopeful books instead of just textbooks. I wanted them to spend time in nature and love it. I wanted them to love each other and not be conditioned to think siblings and parents are uncool. I wanted them to care about world events and the developing world, and natural wonders, and family time, and healthy living, and music, and art, and God.

What do you want your children to care about? What do you want them to remember about life in your home? Describe it in detail, because if you can't define what you want for your children, you will be an easy target for the many conflicting messages about what really matters. You can start defining your *why* by brainstorming a big list of your values and the things you want for your children. Describe what you loved and didn't love about your own childhood, and journal about your own school experience. You might list the habits you deem important enough to pass on, or the virtues you esteem important. Every yes is a no to something else, and knowing what is important to you will help you be clear on your best yes.

While we can all have different visions with different ways of living them out, as Christian parents, some specific considerations will set us apart. Charlotte Mason, an educator from the early twentieth century, developed a philosophy of education that has inspired countless homeschool families, and she summarized her philosophy in a list of 20 principles for every school. The final principle—and my favorite—states,

We allow no separation to grow up between the intellectual and “spiritual” life of children, but teach them that the Divine Spirit has

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constant access to their spirits, and is their continual Helper in all the interests, duties and joys of life.⁷

Mason reminds us that as Christians, we shouldn't separate learning from our faith. Rather, we must integrate the intellectual and spiritual lives of our children. In their book *Teaching the Trivium*, Harvey and Laurie Blue-dorn teach us that the first and greatest commandment urges us to love the Lord with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength. They further illustrate this point by saying,

If anyone should slight us for using the Bible throughout our school curriculum, then we should correct them with the first and the great commandment. How grievously this contrasts with state-controlled schools, where God is not to be mentioned—at least not with reverence—all the day long. The school day thus becomes a daily lesson in practical atheism, which has a subtle and insidious, yet nevertheless cumulative and disastrous effect upon us all. Our culture has thereby lost the knowledge of God, and because of this, we suffer in every area of life.⁸

I chose to homeschool for many reasons, and one of the most important was that I didn't want my children to learn within a system that is hostile to our faith. I know there are individual teachers who are amazing Christians, as well as administrators who love the Lord. But we were made to worship, and when you create a school system that sidelines God, people will still worship something. You can see this vividly depicted in the history of France. The French Revolution erased centuries of devotion to God, and the general public of France replaced God with food, or riots, or romance. You can see this in the schools as well. Without the beautiful

boundary lines of faith and hope in God, without prayer and Bible reading in schools, temptation increases for students (and their parents) to worship success in sports, test scores, or college acceptance rates. But when you as a family break free from that system of approval and begin to live in the light of God's revelation and the calling he has put on your life, you can lead your children into this kind of courage as well.

We have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb (Ephesians 1:7), seated with him in heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6), and called to noble living as “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9 esv). When you recognize the high calling on your life and the power of God to lead you, and when you let go of people-pleasing and misplaced value systems and proving yourself to others, you begin to understand Jesus's clarity of vision. He faced the cross knowing full well what it would cost him, saying, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me—nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done” (Luke 22:42 CSB).

Jesus was so close to the Father and so sure of his calling that not even death could sway him from his vision. He wasn't looking for approval from people. He wasn't invested in conforming to expectations. He was on a mission, and he obeyed to the end.

QUESTIONS AND SELF-DOUBT

Though we are called to follow Jesus and let his power transform us into his image, most of us don't have the same level of obedience and faith. Most of us will have questions about whether our vision for our family is a good one, and whether we are even good parents. Some homeschool days

thoroughly tested my vision. During lonely seasons, I questioned my ability and whether this choice was right for my children. At moments, I wondered if someone else could teach my children better, and at other moments, I worried my kids were missing out. One of my children had special needs, and it took me years to teach her to read—so you can be assured that I questioned my ability to teach her. I had another very gifted child with some ADHD thrown in, and I could have doubted my ability to teach him too. But my desire to nurture their faith and hope in God, to guard their childhoods and wonderment, and to fuel the flame of connection and creativity helped me shake off those fears and continue on the path of homeschooling my children. They all learned to read, but more importantly, they all learned to love God and us, and to pursue his vision for their lives.

Facing down my doubts and staying clear on my vision to homeschool so we could make time with God a priority didn't mean doggedly doing it all without any help. I didn't ignore the wisdom from my community. With my learning-disabled child, I brought in speech therapists and occupational therapists to help her gain new skills. We joined homeschool co-ops for the accountability of our community and to foster social skills and academic progress. When my children reached high school, I knew they needed more challenges, such as college classes, speech, debate, work experience, and tutoring. These opportunities helped them connect with mentors, push themselves out of their comfort zones, and practice virtues of courtesy and care for others. We were still able to spend time with God, each other, and nature, but because my vision was clear, I was able to make adjustments when the situation called for it.

My friend Renee Harris and her husband, Jonathan, have a vision for their children too. Theirs is to develop talent that can produce income by

the time their kids graduate from high school. This means they start focusing on their children's interests and skill sets as early as age 12, even prioritizing them above traditional curricula. "Rather than filling the buckets that conventional education has deemed important, we start with their interests and talents and make the academic subjects serve their talents," says Renee.⁹

One Harris son supports his family as a computerized machine shop owner. Another son is a software developer for financial institutions. Their daughter is a graphic artist and has illustrated books for a Christian publisher. Their most recent graduate works remotely as a video editor. As they graduated from high school and moved out, they were all able to immediately support themselves without any college (or other) debt. "By the time they leave the home," says Renee, "our children are 'producers' in a career field that they're excited about."

Another dear friend, Rachel Kovac, has two students pursuing medical degrees at Texas A&M. They both earned scholarships for their academic excellence, but in her homeschool years, Rachel continued setting aside time for daily Bible reading, deep conversations about faith, or loving neighbors. Having a vision for your homeschool, and being clear about it, won't cost you traditional dreams for your children, but it will bring you time, clarity, and joy as you lay aside stress, striving, and people-pleasing to enjoy your children and nurture their souls.

Starting this book with a chapter about Jesus sets the bar high, and though future chapters will feature the educations of regular humans like you and me, Jesus's perfection is good news for us. We don't have to be perfect in our parenting or our homeschooling. We don't have to know exactly how we will manage high school when our children are starting kindergarten. We don't have to be math whizzes or history scholars on our first day

of homeschooling. Jesus's perfection covers our sins, and we can approach every part of life and parenting and homeschooling with childlike faith. Where he calls, he will equip, and nothing is impossible with God.

STUDENT GUIDE

Each chapter includes a study guide for putting these principles into practice. I encourage you to grab a notebook so you can record your journey toward an inspired homeschool.

- Write a list of your family values. What is important to your family? Here are some examples: *integrity, honesty, love, joy, kindness, generosity, faith, diligence, patience, tolerance, wisdom, fun, hope, peace, temperance*
- What is your family motto or verse?
- What are your family essentials?
- What activities bring joy to your family?
- Think about your own childhood. What do you remember about life in your home of origin?
- What games did you play as a child?
- If you didn't have a happy childhood, or if your home didn't feel safe, take time to process that with God. Write a letter of comfort to your small self, tell your story to a friend, or book an appointment with a therapist. Processing your past childhood pain can help you articulate a clear vision for your family now.
- Is there anyone you should forgive? Bitterness is like drinking poison and waiting for your enemy to die; when we forgive, our vision becomes clearer.
- What would you love for your children to remember about life in your home?

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- How would you like your children to describe you?
- What do you want your children to learn before they leave your home? Download a helpful list of life skills at the Peaceful Press website.¹⁰

If you need more guidance in creating a family vision, check out the Restoration Home Community: www.RestorationHomeCommunity.com

FURTHER READING

For the Children's Sake by Susan Schaeffer Macaulay

Essentialism by Greg McKeown

A Charlotte Mason Companion by Karen Andreola