

How Do You Do It All - Session 4

Accessibility vs. Boundaries	93
Boundaries of Time.....	94
Boundaries of Space	96
What's an Emergency?	98
Teaching Kids Independence	99
Teaching Kids Initiative.....	101
Teaching Kids Responsibility.....	102
Relationship Rewards and Challenges.....	105
Teach Your Children to Serve	106
Preserving Family Memories.....	106
Spending One-on-One Time with Children.....	107
Facilitating Children's Unique Gifts and Passions	108
Making Time for Family Fun	109
Family Traditions.....	110
Enjoy the Journey as Well as the Destination.....	111
Caring for Aging Parents	112
Homemaking.....	113
Opportunity Cost.....	115
Meals.....	116
Keeping Up with Papers and Activities	116
Hospitality vs. Entertaining	117
Homeschooling	117
Have Realistic Expectations	118
Teach Children Together	118
Encourage Independent Learning	119
Delegate	120
Establish Systems and Routines.....	122
Homeschooling Is about More Than Academics.....	123
Assignment	123

This is Mary Jo Tate at HowDoYouDoItAll.com, welcoming you to our fourth session on powerful strategies for balancing family life and home business. Tonight, our focus is going to be on family. Again, there will be some overlap because the general principles that I've been teaching apply in all the different areas.

What's interesting is that family is probably one of the main reasons you're working from home in the first place, and it's probably one of the main reasons you're on this call. It's a very great temptation when you're working from home **to be there but not really there**. That's one of the challenges that I want to address.

Barbara Bush gave a commencement speech at Wellesley College in 1990, and I imagine she took a lot of flak for it. One comment that she made was:

“At the end of your life, you will never regret not having passed one more test, not winning one more verdict, or not closing one more deal. You will regret time not spent with a husband, a child, a friend, or a parent.”

I've been talking a lot about efficiency and getting things done and strategies; tonight I'm going to look a lot more at relationships, although there will be strategies and efficiency built in as well. But we've got to remember that ultimately, **it's all about relationships**.

Some of the topics I'm going to look at tonight are accessibility versus boundaries; teaching our children independence, responsibility, and initiative; building strong relationships; home chores; and homeschooling.

Accessibility vs. Boundaries

First of all, the idea of accessibility versus boundaries. This is where **interruptions** come in: If you are accessible, you can be interrupted, and boundaries are supposed to prevent interruptions. Interruptions seemed to be one of the biggest grievances or the biggest challenges that came through in the survey that you all filled out.

Before I get into that, I want to share one statement from a single mother I've been coaching; this applies not only to single moms, but also to married moms and to dads as well. She said, “I don't want my worth in life and the way my children remember me to be that their mom worked all the time. I value them above my business, and I want to walk that out.”

That's the balance again that we have to strive for. We're working because we need to, we're working because we love what we do, and yet we still have to communicate

to our children that although our work is important, we value them more. And we've got to be there for them as well.

One way that we can do that is to **include our children in our work**. This isn't always possible, but when it can be done, it is very helpful. I'm an editor, and that's not really something that the children can help with very much, but I do have my second son, Andrew, do all my photocopying. I pay him a penny a page for that.

I take my kids to entrepreneurial conferences. I know other people who have businesses like selling homeschool curriculum; they have their children packaging orders, taking inventory, designing or maintaining the website, and handling customer service.

Think about ways that your children can be involved in your work. I know there's at least one family on this call where partnering with the parent on entrepreneurial ventures is one of their main activities, even part of their education. That's wonderful, and there are a lot of ways to learn to do that.

Including your children teaches them responsibility; it gives them skills they can use with their future families. It helps build their interest in your work so that they don't resent it, and it makes them feel like they are a part of the family enterprise. However, most people's work will not accommodate the children's involvement all the time, so we have to have some boundaries.

There are two basic kinds of boundaries. There are boundaries of time and boundaries of space.

Boundaries of Time

One of the age-old ways to work at home is to work during the kids' nap time or after they go to bed, or to get up in the morning before your kids and to work then. Those are some great ways to get some uninterrupted time. Those bits of time are usually not enough to build a whole business, but they can certainly be very valuable.

If that's the only uninterrupted time you have, use those precious quiet hours for the kind of work that requires concentrated thought, like writing a sales letter, working on your e-book, or something like that. Then, when the kids are up and about and you are more likely to be interrupted, use that for more routine tasks like bill-paying, or packing and shipping, or checking e-mail.

One of the big challenges, as I said, is **accessibility**. Because we are working at home, we can think, "Well, we're here." But I know very well from experience that I'm not always *here*. Try to **be really there** in your heart and in your head during

family time so that you're not always yearning back toward your work and thinking, "Well, I just need to write a couple more pages or ship a couple more boxes."

But when you're working, you do need to have some inaccessibility. **Being accessible doesn't mean being available on demand at all times.**

Again, this depends on the ages of your children, the number of your children, and so on. It's very different if you have infants in the house, or all children under the age of seven. But as your children mature, draw some boundaries around your time and teach them that you are not always available on demand.

At the same time, the idea of balance is to **be sensitive to important interruptions.** Sometimes a child really does need attention and can't wait; generally the younger the child, the more that's the case. So you have to use discernment and realize that sometimes the child's need to interrupt you for attention is more important than whatever it is that you are trying to focus on.

One of the strategies that I have used for many years is that I try to concentrate my homeschooling time with the boys in the morning—the time where we need to work together or they need one-on-one help; then have independent lessons, chores, and free time in the afternoons while I work; and then I also work in the evenings, especially after they go to bed.

I'm a night owl, so I don't do too well on getting up before them in the morning, but I have one friend who goes to bed early while her kids stay up late, and then she gets up early while they sleep late and they all try to meet at 10:00 in the morning. That way, the kids have some free time in the evenings, mom has some quiet time in the mornings to work, and it works beautifully for their family.

One person commented on the survey that interruptions are "usually caused by someone in my family needing my attention in order for them to complete what they need to do." And particularly when you are homeschooling, this is the case, because we don't generally just turn our kids loose with a pile of books and say hi to them next Friday. It requires a little more interaction than that.

You can **work in designated chunks of time**, so that the children know when you'll be available. Now this doesn't necessarily mean having specific office hours, although for some people it may. One of the things that I do is try to work in one-hour chunks of time, partly because it seems to work well for the kids and also because it's hard for me to sit at the computer for longer than an hour because of my back.

A one-hour chunk of time in the office is a good time frame for me, so before I head into my office to work, I'll tell the kids, "OK, I'm getting ready to work now. I'll be at my computer for an hour. Do you need anything from me now or in the next hour?"

If they need a copy of a math test or instruction on what to do next, I can take care of it before I start working and they are set for the next hour so they won't have to come running to me to say, "But, Mom, I'm not sure what I'm supposed to be doing now" or "You didn't give me the math test" or whatever.

Boundaries of Space

You also need boundaries of space. If it's at all possible, try to have a separate office area—preferably a separate room so you can close the door. I realize that in some large families or small houses, this is not always possible.

I have four kids and a four-bedroom house. The kids doubled up two to a room so that I can use the master bedroom downstairs as my office. It is full of bookcases, two desks, five filing cabinets, and a big laser printer, so it's very much a blessing that I am able to have a separate room. It also helps eliminate distractions so I can concentrate on editing, writing, and coaching.

Some people have to use a corner of their bedroom. That's the least ideal situation, but if that's where you are, you'll just learn to do that. If you can put up a free-standing folding screen or something like that, that might help to create a visual barrier.

One of the benefits of having a separate office area besides keeping the kids out is that it helps keep you from getting sucked back into work when you are supposed to be doing something else, when you are supposed to be tending to the house, when you're supposed to be spending some time with the kids. If the office is a psychologically and physically separate place, you can break away from it more easily.

There are several different strategies for creating boundaries of space whether or not you have a separate office. If your kids are not working with you, and if you're not doing work you can do while they're playing at your feet or working nearby, you've got to find a way to separate yourself from your kids. This seems a bit contradictory because we are working from home because we want to be with our family, right?

But sometimes we have to have that quiet, concentrated time where we can get the really productive work done more efficiently, which then frees us up to have more focused time with our family.

Ironically, sometimes we have to be separated from our children to have more time with them.

Now that's going to start to sound like a case for sending the kids away to public school or daycare or something like that; that's absolutely not what I am advocating. That is one option that many people choose today; I definitely don't think that's the best choice; you're not available to them at all. I prefer to find options to keep the kids at home.

One option is for **you to leave**. This is not the same as leaving regularly for a job away from home, but it can be useful from time to time. Particularly when my children were very young, I would sometimes leave them with their dad or a sitter at our house, and I would leave. The kids would stay at home, and I would go to the library, or to the park, or sometimes to the Mexican restaurant, which I used to call my office away from home.

I was not immediately available to the children, but there was a responsible adult in charge, I was less than a mile away, and I could come back if I was needed; thank God for cell phones. Even if there was noise around me at the library or the Mexican restaurant or wherever, none of that noise was directed personally at me.

This is still a strategy I use from time to time, and in fact, I got some of my best ideas for this class over a basket of fried mushrooms at a local restaurant. Sometimes leaving can give you a creative burst or just that break you need from your other responsibilities. This works especially well with laptops and wireless Internet.

Another strategy that I used a lot when my children were very young is to **hire a sitter while you are at home**. When you do this, often you can use a younger sitter because you're there for emergencies. For several years I hired some homeschooled girls who were 11 or 12 years old, and they were a wonderful blessing to our family.

They would come in, I would nurse the infant, and then pass him off to Kathryn or Molly or Kathy, and they would take care of changing the diapers, making the macaroni and cheese for lunch, washing the dishes, folding the laundry, playing with the kids, taking them for a walk, and so on. I was writing my book upstairs, but I was still available for emergencies or for real needs where a kid really needs Mom. This works very well when your children are young.

Another thing you can do, especially with older children, is **provide your kids with activities to keep them occupied** while you work. There are a lot of things that kids can do to stay occupied. They can play outside, they can play in another room, they can play computer games or watch a video if you allow that (I recommend that be very limited). They can do outside chores, inside chores, homework, homeschool work, read, play board games, play chess, draw, and so on.

The most important thing is that you have to **teach them not to interrupt you** except for emergencies.

What's an Emergency?

It's very important to **define what constitutes an emergency**. What I want next Christmas is not an emergency. Can I have a Batman birthday party next year is not an emergency. I want to be a fireman when I grow up is not an emergency. Can we go play outside now is not an emergency. The problem with this is that the list of the things that do *not* constitute an emergency is infinite.

I began by defining *emergency* as something involving blood, fire, or water, but I quickly realized that had to get more specific. Blood does not mean one molecule of blood on your fingertip because the cat scratched you. It means a gaping head wound; fortunately, we haven't encountered that.

Water does not mean a teensy puddle on the kitchen floor because somebody dropped an ice cube and it melted. Water means the upstairs sink was left stopped, and the faucet was left dripping, and you left the house for three hours and came home and found the water pouring through the first floor ceiling down through the ceiling fan. Ask me how I know about that one.

Fire I always thought was fairly straightforward, but it turns out it was not, because one day last winter I was working in my office and thinking, "Wow, the kids are being so good! I'm getting so much done!"

After a while I started hearing some noise, and I thought, "Well, they're getting kind of rowdy, but they'd let me know if there was a problem because they never hesitate to interrupt me, so I guess everything's OK." Finally, the rowdiness increased, so I thought I'd better see what was going on.

I came out of my office and the kids were in hysterics, especially one of them who's our biggest animal lover. I could hardly understand what he was saying. Finally, he managed to gasp out, "Snoball is on fire!"

Snoball is one of our cats that really loved to lie on the rug in front of our wood stove. Well, a spark had popped out and landed on Snoball's back. Snoball was racing around the house in terror. The kids were racing around Snoball in terror, being afraid that their beloved cat was going to go up in flames.

Now, I love cats, but I was more concerned that the cat was going to ignite the furniture and that the *house* was going to go up in flames. One of the boys managed to trap the cat under the sofa and extinguish the spark with his finger. His finger was only slightly scorched; it didn't really even hurt after about a minute.

It took me 30 minutes to calm down the one who was the most hysterical. Finally, we got everything settled down. The cat's OK, the finger's OK, the hysteria's gone. So I

finally asked the question: “What were you thinking? **Why didn’t you tell me the cat was on fire?!?”**

They looked at me with all sincerity and said, “Well, Mom, we didn’t want to interrupt your work.” [Laughter]

So, no matter what rules you set up, no matter how well you try to define what is and is not an emergency, there’s always some fine-tuning to do. But make sure that your kids know that a flaming cat is, in fact, an emergency.

Teaching Kids Independence

There are three main things to teach our kids that will both benefit them and help us to be able to work at home while the kids are at home. There are many, many more, but these are the three that mostly come to my mind: independence, initiative, and responsibility.

Independence, again, is very dependent upon how old your children are. There are **seasons of life**. If you have an infant, things are going to be different. I finished my Master’s thesis when my first child was six weeks old, and just in case you are wondering, that’s not the order to do it in. Finish the thesis, and then have the baby, if you can possibly arrange it that way.

Then, during the time I was writing my first book, *F. Scott Fitzgerald A-Z*, I gave birth to my second and third children. I suspected for a while there was some connection between fertility and publishing deadlines. That’s never been documented, however. That was when I had the babysitters coming in and keeping the kids downstairs while I went to my office upstairs to write the book.

Just keep in mind that the seasons of life are different. If you have an infant, unless you have outside help, you probably are not going to be able to accomplish the same things you will when your kids are older. That’s OK. You’ve got different priorities in different seasons.

I’m going to be talking about a lot of the specific details for independence when I talk about homeschooling and also when I talk about dealing with household chores. I am just talking about some general principles right now.

The issue with independence is: How can you make sure they are doing what they are supposed to do if you let them be independent? Well, the rule is to **inspect what you expect**. That’s how you add accountability to independence.

I have had a tendency, because my kids are so responsible and independent, to let them slide too long and then maybe to discover that something hasn't gotten done, whereas if I inspect every day and check in with them every day, I can make sure things are getting done, stay on top of it, and hold them accountable.

I have learned that if I see their bedroom door closed too often, it usually means there's a catastrophe inside, usually involving some mixture of toys and laundry that has built up. I have tried to train them to keep their door open because that closed door is usually a signal they are hiding something.

Another guideline for independence is to ask them to stop before interrupting you and think about **how they would handle the situation if you weren't there.**

One of my strategies for survival that I didn't emphasize adequately in last week's section on taking care of yourself and getting enough rest is **naptime**. I have finally weaned myself from the need to take a nap, but for at least the first ten years of motherhood, I took a nap nearly every day.

My personal belief is that a mother is entitled to a nap from the time she conceives her first child until the time her youngest child graduates and moves away from home. (After that, you just don't let anyone know. ☺) If that's what you need to make it through the day, that's fine.

Interestingly enough, I found out that my children would respect my nap time better than they would respect my work time. At one point I finally told them, "OK, when I'm in my office, if you wouldn't wake me up if I'm taking a nap, don't interrupt my work. What would you do if I were asleep?"

Whether or not you nap, ask your kids, "How would you handle it if I weren't here? How would you get this done?"

I didn't advocate independence when my oldest child was very young because, of course, I didn't think he could do anything. He was a helpless little child and needed his mommy to do everything. As I grew older and wiser and had more and more kids, I wised up a little bit.

A couple of years ago, I walked into the kitchen and found the 5-year-old, who's my youngest, using the microwave. I said, "Um, Thomas, what are you doing?" He replied very matter-of-factly, "Cooking waffles," as if it were the most ordinary thing in the world. I said, "What do you *mean* you are cooking waffles?" He looked at me in disbelief and said, "Well, Perry taught me how to use the microwave." So, the 9-year-old had taught the 5-year-old how to microwave frozen waffles because he was tired of doing it for him. And the 5-year-old was perfectly capable of microwaving frozen waffles.

A couple of months after that I walked into the kitchen and found the second child teaching the third child how to use the dishwasher because he was tired of being the only one who knew how to run the dishwasher.

Older children training their younger siblings in how to be responsible and independent can be very useful. And kids can do a lot more than we think that they can do. We have to keep safety in mind, of course, and we have to make duties age-appropriate, but they can really live up to our expectations.

Teaching Kids Initiative

Another character trait that I really like to develop in my kids is initiative. In fact, a couple of years ago, we made that the word of the week. We went around talking all the time about taking initiative and doing things on your own initiative. This is basically just doing something yourself—you being the one to start it without being told.

For six months to maybe a year, my kids would come to me and excitedly report that they had done something on their own initiative, and I really praised that. That's where true efficiency comes in—when **you're not having to micromanage** because they are doing things on their own.

A couple of weeks ago, I saw my 12-year-old walking around with a screwdriver, a tape measure, a magic marker, a flashlight, and a pocketknife. I said, "Andrew, what are you doing with all that stuff?" He said, "Oh, I was fixing the bathroom doorknob." And I just loved that because he was so matter-of-fact about it.

He's always been the one who is fascinated by tools, who wants to know how things worked. He noticed the bathroom doorknob was not functioning properly—it wasn't locking, and so he went and got his equipment and took care of it. That was wonderful.

I've got to confess here: Somehow initiative does seem to apply to stray papers or random socks on the floor. We haven't reached perfection yet. But that is certainly something that you want to instill in your children.

After we had such success with the word *initiative*, I decided to introduce another word that I wanted them to learn, and that was **alacrity**. In fact, it's still posted on the refrigerator. *Alacrity* is defined as promptness in response, cheerful readiness. Don't you love that? **Prompt, cheerful, and ready**. That's what it means to do something with alacrity.

That's how I want to teach my children to behave in life: to take care of things promptly and cheerfully and to be ready to handle their responsibilities.

Teaching Kids Responsibility

I think it is very important for our children to have real responsibilities. These things build confidence and character. I'm not a big fan of the word *self-esteem*, but they also do build self-esteem. They build an honest evaluation of yourself and knowing what you can accomplish.

One of my favorite examples of how this works is when my oldest son was five years old, we lived in a little three-stoplight town. Our house was about two blocks from the old-fashioned courthouse square. We could walk about a two-block or half-mile radius from our home, and we could go to the library, pay the electric bill, go to the bank, go to the post office, pay the cable bill, and there were a couple of other places we could go on that route.

I would push the younger child in the stroller—or sometimes, if it was too hot or too cold, I would wait in the car—and Forrest would go into all these businesses at the age of about five and pay our bills.

The first time he went into each place, I went in with him, explained what we were doing, explained that we were homeschooling and that was why this underage child was showing up in their business in the middle of the day. We did that for about a year; that built such confidence in him. He was able to conduct the business of adult life at a very young age because I gave him that responsibility.

I was there at first. I wrote the check and introduced him to the people; I didn't just throw him into the water to sink or swim. The look on his face, like "Look what I did!" when he would walk out of the electric company with a receipt or the post office with his book of stamps was just wonderful.

I really believe in **delegating the running of the household to the children**. This may require lowering your standards a bit, and initially it takes more work to teach the kids to do the work than to do it yourself. But they need to know these things. I know quite a few families where the children do all the housework; they do most of it in mine.

My kids have become very self-sufficient so that they are capable of taking care of themselves when they need to. Recently, I was going to be gone at suppertime for a meeting, and a friend asked me, "What are your children going to have for supper while you are gone?" I said, "Well, whatever they fix. The pantry is stocked, the freezer is stocked, the refrigerator is stocked. They can fix some supper."

I don't want to fall into "whatever they fix" every night, of course, but they are very capable of preparing a meal—not using the stove, by the way, if I am out of the house, but the microwave is allowed.

Taking part in running the household really helps kids feel like they are making a **meaningful contribution** just like helping with the business does. They know they are needed.

A couple of strategies I use for household tasks are to **divide repetitive tasks** so that the same person doesn't get stuck with the same chore all the time, and also to **assign work to the youngest child who is capable of doing it**. That helps avoid the common pitfall of just piling everything on the oldest child. You don't want to do that. I would see who's the youngest one who can accomplish this and assign it there.

One of my general principles is that I almost never bend down to pick up something off the floor because there are four people in the family who are closer to the floor than I am, although my 15-year-old is about an inch taller than I am now, so there are only three people who are closer to the floor. But that's still plenty of people to pick up their own shoes off the floor.

The materials for this class include a sample chore chart which is just a simple Excel spreadsheet. I am amazed I was able to create it in Excel because I am not technologically proficient at all. But this is posted on our refrigerator. Each child has a section. There's a column for each day of the week and various different tasks. This will be modified as they grow older.

Mine is very specific. You'll see that I have things on there like a reminder to read their Bibles, make their beds, brush their teeth, and drink water because that's something that I think is important for their health, but if they don't have that reminder, they are likely to forget about it.

School assignments, putting away dirty clothes, putting away clean clothes. I mentioned dividing up repetitive tasks; I have the sweeping broken down. Everybody has a different day or two days to sweep, and then there's an X in their box on the days that they are off. They don't have to think about that.

There are other chores. The two middle children are responsible for cleaning the litter box, feeding our dog and cat, and washing and putting away the dishes. We rotate those so that whoever has the bad job in one department has the not-so-bad job in another. So, on the day they clean the litter box, they put away clean dishes, and on the day they wash dishes, they just feed the cats. (We later simplified this by assigning total kitchen duty and total pet duty on different days.)

Posting a chart that they have to check off in a public place like on the refrigerator helps eliminate arguments about whose turn it is. Hypothetically, it allows Mom not to have to repeat the same instructions and also to look at a glance and see what's been done.

I emphasize hypothetically because we still don't have this system working perfectly. I would love to be able to report to you that it works flawlessly, but this is still too new to have become totally ingrained. This chore chart is very much like my weekly plans and my daily action list; once they firmly establish these habits, I may remove some of these line items from their chore chart. But right now all of these things need to be on there.

One of my rules for both chores and for homeschool is if it's not marked off, it didn't happen. Or to be a little looser about it, if it's not marked off, it's not finished yet. If your job is to wash the dishes, the job is not finished until you have hung up the wet dish towel to dry and checked "wash dishes" off your list. If your job is to empty the dishwasher, that job is not finished until you have put the dishwasher detergent box back under the sink, because we leave it out on the counter as the signal that this is a load of clean dishes, and until you have checked it off on the chart.

When my boys are gone to visit their dad on weekends, it really comes home to me just how much work they do. When they are gone, I'm the one who has to empty the litter boxes, feed the cats, take out the dog, wash the dishes, and sweep (of course, there's not as much dirt on the floor when they are gone). They are taking care of a lot of things, and I am very grateful for that.

How much my boys help also struck me in another way that was really funny. About a month ago, in what I can only attribute to temporary insanity, I scheduled my 7-year-old son's birthday party from 1:00 to 3:00 on a Friday afternoon to make it convenient for the other moms in our homeschool co-op, because the kids up through second grade get out at 1:00 and the older kids don't get out till 3:00.

I forgot that my three older boys, who are my right-hand men, would still be in class. Well, I'd already sent the invitations and everybody had already accepted; they thought it was a great idea. So I thought, surely a single mom with four boys can handle six boys ages six to eight for two hours on her own. Right!

We didn't have any serious problems; it was just the stress of preventing potential disasters. Remember, all of these children were boys. It was the strain of keeping them all in the same area—upstairs or down, inside or out—because I couldn't be in both places at the same time. I needed to supervise their ongoing reenactment of every battle known to man using swords, Nerf guns, light sabers, and Civil-War-style wooden muskets.

I'm used to delegating most of this to my lieutenants...but my lieutenants were AWOL in logic class and music class. The moms picked up their kids around 3:00 just as my 11-year-old son's friends came for his party. I was being so efficient with back-to-back parties, don't you think?

The 11-year-old bunch was much more self sufficient, and my two older boys were home by then to help with crowd control. I sat down to rest and actually dozed off on the couch for a few minutes even though there was activity at full volume going on all around me.

When I regained consciousness and sanity, I was reminded of what a tremendous blessing my four boys are. We have been on our own for nearly six years now, and they have become so responsible and independent, and that is a huge contribution to my ability to work from home and continue homeschooling them even as a single mom.

It's just amazing to see what our children can do when we raise our expectations. It's reassuring to see their confidence in their capabilities and think how well those experiences will serve them in the years ahead.

Relationship Rewards and Challenges

Relationships showed up heavily in the class survey in response to the questions about what brings you the greatest satisfaction and what's your biggest challenge or what's missing in your life.

What that says to me is that we value family relationships highly and they bring us tremendous satisfaction, but somehow they're getting shoved onto the back burner by our other responsibilities with home and business. There's the balance challenge again.

Here's a sample of some of the answers people gave. The greatest satisfaction: teaching my children when they get excited about a topic and want to pursue it; being available to go and do and play with my husband and my girls when they are available—they have busy lives and I want to be available when they are; being with my children, homeschooling them, sharing with my husband, enjoying our family.

The one that really spoke to me the most was the lady who wrote, "My greatest satisfaction comes from accomplishing tasks, teaching a class, launching a product, but today I spent an hour talking to my son about spiritual things, and it was the most satisfying of all, to give him my undivided attention and have him share his heart."

I was just so blessed to read that, and that's one of my desires in teaching this class is to try to help each of us, myself included, find ways to make space and make time for just that kind of thing.

On the flip side, the biggest challenge, one mom wrote that she's always enjoyed her children on a daily basis, felt blessed and joyful with them, but she's feeling the joy leaving due to the overwhelming feeling of not getting done what needs to be done.

Another mom wrote that she's in empty nest stage. Her biggest challenge is letting her children make their own mistakes after they are grown up, and it's very hard parenting, even harder than the early baby days. Another mom noted that her biggest challenge is giving the kids the attention they need, but not pushing them too hard. You all know your own variations of those challenges in your own lives.

Teach Your Children to Serve

Here are some of my strategies for building strong relationships between parents and children and between siblings, in fairly random order.

I've talked before about how I like to **use language** to teach things like initiative and alacrity. I think the words that we use are important. One of my favorite phrases around this house is "**Serve your brother.**" Very often if I'm asking one of the boys to do something for another one, I won't just say, "Will you take this to Forrest?" I'll say, "Will you serve your brother Forrest by taking him this?"

Or, "Will you serve your brother Perry? He's not feeling well today, so would you take over his responsibility to wash the dishes?" It's amazing what a different attitude that puts on it. It's not just, "Oh, more work for me to do." But it's the spiritual attitude of service and being a blessing to someone else.

I encourage you to incorporate that phrase—serve your brother, serve your father, serve your sister, serve your mother—into your instructions to your children. This is just one little snippet that doesn't really fit anywhere, but this was one of my favorite strategies, especially when the kids were young.

Preserving Family Memories

We talked in one of the earlier classes in a Q&A session about how to take care of family photographs, and another aspect of that is how to **document those family memories**. With my first child, I had a little baby calendar with all these cute little squares and Peter Rabbit pictures and all that. You're supposed to write things down in the baby book.

Well, I never felt like I had the time to get out my good pen and use my best handwriting and all that, so I developed an alternative that I call **microwave journaling**. It's a really high-tech strategy that involves leaving an 8½x11 yellow legal pad on top of the microwave. The microwave is always in Action Alley, right? Leave it there with a pen or a pencil.

Every time somebody lost a tooth or took a first step or said a cute thing or reached some major milestone, I just scrawled it on the pad on top of the microwave. Then, later on, when I got around to working on the baby books or the scrapbooks, I could go back to those notes and fill those things in along with the date. That's a way to take off the pressure of doing it beautifully, doing it perfectly. Just scrawl those things down and then you've got a record of what went on.

Spending One-on-One Time with Children

One of the issues that came up on the survey was how to **spend time with individual children**, especially if you have lots of children. There are two moms in our class who have seven children each, and they both brought up that issue of making time for children on a one-on-one basis.

Well, I only have four children, but there's just one of me and four of the kids. I figure I'm about equal to a two-parent family with eight kids.☺ I don't know if that's accurate or not. The point is, no matter how many children you have, spending time one on one with them is very important, but it can also be challenging.

A couple of things that I have done are to take one child at a time with me on trips. When I go to a conference, I often take one child with me, and that will be some special time away with his mom. We get to eat out some, go to a different place, maybe take a little side trip.

You can also **take one child with you while you run errands**. This is something I just discovered recently. Instead of leaving them all at home with a sitter or older child while I go to the grocery store, the library, and the bank, I'll take one child with me. It will be a different child every time, and we have time together just in the course of driving about town and running errands, whether or not we stop for a snack or just take care of our business that has to be done.

That's some time just one on one, and it's amazing how often they'll use that time to bring up the issues that are on their heart because they know they've got my attention without interruptions from their brothers. So those are a couple of ways to build in one-on-one time with the children.

You've got to make it happen because I have found that if we don't give that, they will find a way to get it. Kids need their mama. If they don't get it as promised in the day time, they—at least my kids—are going to be hovering at the top of the stairs late at night when I come up to go to bed. When I'm ready to crash, that's when they want to talk. They know they can get me and I can't get away. I found that if I am more intentional about it and give them that focused one-on-one time throughout the week in the daytime, that helps meet their needs.

One way for us to build strong relationships and to get everything done is to **try to stay home**, and I'm going to talk about that more a little bit later in tonight's session. If you are running around, having to leave the house too often, that takes so much time out of the schedule and also creates stress and frustration.

That's one of the reasons that I have always, up until this year, avoided sports. I'm not against sports, but I never did the Little League thing with any of my boys, but there are a couple of them who would have liked it. I just saw how that was so utterly all-consuming; the entire family would be engulfed for two or three months, however long the season is, where everything revolved around the Little League schedule.

I've always avoided that, but this year my oldest son became very interested in running, and he had the opportunity to practice running cross-country with the local high school team. He can't compete with them, but they're allowing him to practice and train with them. That has been such a tremendous blessing in his life. I've seen him grow in commitment. I've seen his health and physical fitness improve. I've really seen him become much more self-disciplined, and I'm hoping that will rub off on his school work as well.

I'm actually leaving the house every day to drive him to cross-country practice. It's about to kill me. I love to have days when I don't have to set foot out the door except to check the mailbox, but as I mentioned in session 2, I really believe in facilitating the unique gifts and passions of each of our children in a way that doesn't consume the whole family.

Facilitating Children's Unique Gifts and Passions

Some other examples of the ways I've done that... Forrest has been very interested in business in years past—that's sort of pushed to the back burner right now with this emphasis on running—but he's gone with me to several business seminars.

My second son, Andrew, is very much a scientist and mathematician, I have taken him to a chess workshop. He went with me to the conference in Phoenix and to the Grand Canyon. I've already mentioned how he nudged me out of my comfort zone to get a little closer to the edge.

One of the things that I just treasured about that trip besides the glory of seeing the Grand Canyon was when I asked Andrew, who was ten at the time, “What was your favorite part about this trip?” We had been to the North Rim, we had been to the South Rim, he had spoken in front of a crowd of 200 people, we’d done all sorts of amazing things, and what he said touched my heart so much.

He said, “Well, Mom, my favorite part was sitting on the front porch of our cabin with you looking at the stars.” Oh, I just love that boy. He could have had anything he wanted at that time.

But that really spoke to me. It wasn’t necessarily the grand things that we were doing, even though it was quite grand, but it was that time with me that meant the most to him. I think that may have been the thing that triggered me to begin taking the boys with me one on one more on local errands.

My third son, Perry, is an artist, and I realized that one day I wanted to try take him to Paris to the Louvre. Well, that is not quite in our budget or our time frame right now, but just a week or so after I realized that that was a goal I wanted to set with him for someday down the road, I got an announcement there was going to be a huge exhibit from the Louvre in Atlanta, which is only six hours from where we live in Mississippi.

So Perry and I went to Atlanta to the Louvre exhibit, and he just sat there for an hour and copied a Renoir painting that he saw. And he stood there for an hour and copied Raphael’s portrait of Baldassare Castiglione. That was a way, again, to facilitate his unique interests and passions.

Making Time for Family Fun

We talked last week about the importance of making time for fun for yourself, some personal time, some “me time.” Tonight I want to talk about making time for fun as a family.

This can be a challenge when you work at home because it is hard to know when your work day is over. When deadlines are looming and bills are due, it can be hard to pull away and there’s no regular nine-to-five clock to punch. But **taking a break is good for you as well as your children**. We’ve already talked about how it can make your work time more efficient.

What worked for my family is no matter how busy I am during the week, no matter what deadlines I have, my boys know that on Friday night I’m all theirs because **Family Night** is a firm commitment around our house.

One person mentioned on the survey that one of the things that's missing in their lives is things they love to do as a family because there's not always the time or the budget for them. I encourage you to start inexpensively to do easy, simple, inexpensive, or even free local things because the main thing is spending the time with the family—not necessarily a grand plan or the Grand Canyon.

When we lived in another town, we used to go spend the day at a lake that was about 15 minutes away from our house. We'd take a picnic and maybe take a book. The boys would take a ball to throw while I sat there and read. We had a wonderful time, and it didn't cost anything.

Family Traditions

Another thing that you can do is to have family traditions. When you can say “We always do this,” there's something very comforting and reassuring about knowing that this is a family tradition; this is something we always do.

One of our family traditions is a **family time** on Friday night. We might watch a movie together or we might play a game. My boys like to play Lord of the Rings Trivial Pursuit. Six -year-old Thomas actually won one time.

Another of our family traditions is **Homeschool Freedom Day**. I know most of the people on this call are homeschoolers. Other people listening will just have to bear with me on this one, but one of the things I love about homeschooling is the flexibility to set our own schedule.

Quite a few years ago, I realized that I wanted to make that an occasion. So, on the first day of public school where we live, we do not do schoolwork even if we've already started our school year. We will take a quilt and a picnic to a local park and just spend some time enjoying one another and enjoying the trees and the breeze and the sun and have that time together.

I share that now because when I blogged about that one time, the response to it was just tremendous. Everyone loved the idea of celebrating the freedom that we have. Of course, we don't want to abuse that freedom, but the privilege to set our own schedule is a wonderful blessing.

Another thing that I've done for family fun and building traditions is having **candles at the table at dinner time** even if it's not a fancy meal. I have one child who is very sentimental, and he's always the one who wants flowers or candles on the dinner table. I have some pewter plates that I picked up at a yard sale, and they look sort of medieval, so every now and then when we have a special meal, we'll pull out our

medieval plates and have a medieval dinner. Now, there's absolutely nothing medieval about the menu or the decorations or anything other than the fact that we have these pewter plates, but the kids think that's cool, a lot of fun.

One way to build in some time for **family vacation**, as I've already mentioned, is adding travel to a business trip. Usually, I take kids one on one. One of the things I knew I wanted to do with the kids one day was take them to Disney World because I loved it so much when I was a child.

About the time I decided that, my friend Rhea Perry scheduled her next entrepreneur conference to be in Orlando, Florida. So, I left the youngest child, who was too young to haul around Disney World, with Grandmamma and Daddy for a few days, and we went down to Orlando for Rhea's Days and for Disney World...and for Hurricane Jeanne. It was even a little more adventure than we had bargained for!

Enjoy the Journey as Well as the Destination

When you're traveling, I encourage you to enjoy the journey as well as the destination. I realized this when I was driving from Tupelo to Jackson on the Natchez Trace and I passed a rest stop where my family had often stopped when I was growing up. I lived in Jackson for several years, and we would drive the Natchez Trace to go visit my grandmother. There was a little marker about a lookout point on the top of the hill, but we had never once driven up there.

A couple of years ago, when I stopped there to use the restroom, I thought, "I'm going to drive up there and see what's at the top of that hill." Oh my goodness, there were all these gorgeous trees, up this little winding road to the top of the hill. It only took a minute to get to the top of the hill, and it was one of the most gorgeous views I have seen short of the Grand Canyon and the Rocky Mountains.

It was just glorious. There we had been, all those years growing up, and we were so focused on getting to our destination that we never looked at the glorious view at the top of the hill. Any time I take that route now, I make sure I have at least 15 or 20 minutes to go up the top of the hill, to get out and walk around and stretch my legs and just soak in the beautiful view.

Once I changed my mindset with that experience, I began looking for other ways to stop. When Perry and I were traveling to Nashville for a conference when he was 10, we made a pit stop on the way to the Parthenon. There's a life-size replica of the Parthenon in Nashville, Tennessee, and they have an art museum there as well. Perry and I were trying to get there in time to have several hours at the Parthenon.

Well, we stopped along the way, and there were some rocks. Perry has loved to climb since before he could walk, so he begged for some time to climb on the rocks. I looked at my watch and thought, “We need to hurry up and get to Nashville because we want to make sure we have lots of time at the Parthenon.” He said, “Oh, Mom, please! I just love to climb. I was born to climb! Let me climb these rocks.”

We ended up staying there about 30 minutes for him to climb the rocks, and I just walked around and went to a little stream, and it was a very refreshing time. During the time that we were there, somebody else pulled up, and we chatted for a moment. The lady mentioned that just two miles up the road there was a waterfall. We decided we’d take a little bit more time to detour and see the waterfall. It turns out that it was just a mile past where we would have turned off the Trace if we had just been following our directions to Nashville.

The waterfall was just beautiful, and I even let Perry climb down the trail and go stick his feet in the water. He was just amazed. It was like watching Huckleberry Finn down there at the bottom of the hill. That was just one of the most delightful times of his life because I was willing to enjoy the journey as well as the destination.

So think about my little barefoot Perry and the waterfall on the Natchez Trace when you’re in a hurry to get to where you’re going.

Caring for Aging Parents

I have talked mostly about children because that’s been my experience, and that’s the experience and the challenge and the place in life where most of the people on this call are. But I know there are a couple of people on this call who are caring for aging parents.

There’s one lady in this class who is a single woman with no children. I was very touched by what she wrote in the survey about her biggest family challenge, so I asked for her permission to share this with you all.

She said her biggest family challenge is: “Concerns for the ongoing quality care for my mother. She is fine now, but I am concerned about her care as I grow busier. My siblings are inactive and otherwise occupied with their own lives and family. Regarding my growing busier with my business, this is also part of my incentive to be successful as an entrepreneur, the desire to have financial gain and time flexibility to attend to what might be needed in the future. My aging mother is giving me a nest to rebuild my life these days, and I want to be able to reciprocate graciously if she needs special care in the later years, especially in the area of affording to pay for private help if needed. I realize this is a common concern for those of us of this certain age and time of life.”

This is what really struck me. She added: “The family challenge is not the same as those of your students who are dealing with children in the home and husbands, etc. I share my thoughts as a solo woman who still feels a sense of family connection, even though society sees people like me as alone and without these kinds of cares.”

I was really struck by that, and I just share that first because I want to celebrate her commitment to her mother and also because I know there are several other people in this class who do have children at home who are also dealing with caring for aging parents. I’m probably right on the brink of dealing with that myself as well.

I don’t have any particular solutions or strategies to recommend for this other than the general principles we’ve already talked about of doing what is important. And certainly caring for our parents who have cared for us all these years is important. I appreciate this lady sharing her concerns and her desires with us.

Homemaking

Chores and daily duties showed up frequently in the question about the biggest frustration and the biggest family challenge. Interestingly, in a couple of cases, they also showed up in the question about what brings you the greatest satisfaction.

One mom wrote, “What brings me the greatest satisfaction is having a clean home with a well-maintained schedule.” Another one wrote, “When I have had a great homeschool day, done a good job with meals, and gotten enough website work done.”

More people focused on the challenges than the satisfaction in this area. Challenges included: keeping our home running smoothly; chores are always there getting in the way; food; preparing three healthy meals a day; I’m creative, so daily duties are an intrusion.

I appreciated one mom’s transparency in sharing this struggle: “I really have problems getting motivated for my at-home duties. I am a person who loves to go and explore and experience with my kids, and I get so overwhelmed and underenthused about what I have to do at home that I often accomplish less in a full day than I do in a day where I try to get as much done by noon so we can go somewhere.”

Several interesting things in there. She was able to discern that when they have a goal to work toward like leaving at noon to go somewhere interesting and exciting, they could get their work done in much less time.

I share these challenges. I don’t enjoy housework, and I have mentioned that I outsource most of it to my kids. But the fact is, these sorts of things—feeding our

family, keeping the home running smoothly, taking care of the chores and the daily duties—these are just the necessities.

In a way, they fall into all three of those categories that I talked about at the very beginning. The need to take care of our home is an irreducible fact. How we choose to accomplish that, though, is a matter of priority and preference and choice. There are several approaches we can take in how to handle the necessary tasks.

Some of you are not going to like this first one, and some of you are going to be relieved to hear it: We can **lower our standards**. We do not have to pass the white glove test—except when my mother comes to visit.

Some people can spend their whole life cleaning house and never build a relationship with their family. When I look at some of the books about what you should do daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, yearly in your home—when they start getting into the baseboards and all sorts of obscure things—I’m thinking, “Oh my goodness. I’ve got too much else going on to do some of this stuff.” So my house might not pass the white glove test, but it’s clean enough, it’s sanitary enough, it’s orderly enough, and I can live with that.

I’ve already mentioned the strategy of **multitasking** while you are doing basic household chores—cooking dinner you can be going over phonics or spelling with a child or folding laundry while watching an educational video.

You can also **delegate** housework to your children or **outsource** it to paid help. There are many, many successful business people who take that approach. They figure if they’re making \$25 or \$50 or \$100 an hour, or whatever they’re making, there is actually a loss of money for them to do some of these things themselves. So they just outsource it—have somebody come in and do the housekeeping. Frankly, it’s one of my goals to do that someday soon.

Now, one lady really shared her heart in response to the question about frustrations: “More than anything, I want to be a good homemaker. It bothers me that I cannot pour out my heart into that. However, I’m extremely thankful to be able to work from home and stay with my girls. I also rather love website designing, but I guess it’s just difficult to manage good homemaking and website designing with homeschooling.

Well, that’s true. That is a difficult challenge, and I appreciate her heart in wanting to be a good homemaker. That’s a worthy goal, a Biblical goal. But what does it mean to be a good homemaker? I just wonder if there’s an underlying burden of a false ideal that she may feel she has to live up to, and that may apply to others as well. Who wrote the books about homemaking? Were they running home businesses? Did they have as many children as you? Are they single moms?

Don't let yourself fall into false guilt traps of living up to a standard that's set by someone who's not in the same situation you're in. I'm not saying don't worry about being a good homemaker. I'm not implying that at all, but I'm saying think about what it really means for you to be a good homemaker in the place, the situation, the circumstance in which God has put you.

I had recently talked with another single mom really wants to be a good mother and to spend time with her children, and she started citing a lot of the books she had read about what that meant. I said, "Wait just a minute. Who wrote those books?" In every case, it was a married mother with no business responsibilities.

I said, "The things she's saying are wonderful. I'm not disagreeing with her at all, but she has her entire day to devote to those things. You don't. You don't have a husband to support you. You have a business to run. You cannot set this woman's standards of homemaking and mothering as your model."

I hope that will bring freedom to somebody on this call to think about what it means for you in your situation, whether it's having aging parents, having a lot of children, being a single mom, or having a home business. Whatever your other responsibilities are besides caring for your house, think about that and be realistic. Remember back when we started with the very first class—accepting and finding peace in the gap between the ideal and reality.

A few more strategies for taking care of things around the home—and this is just a random list of some of the things that have been the most useful for me. If you can **consolidate errands** that require leaving the house into one day a week, I really recommend that. Routine tasks, like grocery shopping, going to the bank or the post office, the doctor's office, can consume far too much time if you're not careful. I've noticed that I feel most overwhelmed when I'm on the go too much.

Opportunity Cost

Another idea that has been very valuable to me is the idea of **opportunity cost**. This applies in business as well, but this is a way to think about prioritizing. Every choice you make has a potential opportunity cost.

Homeschoolers and people with large families tend to be a frugal lot, so this may seem counterintuitive, but if you spend an extra hour driving to several different stores to save \$5 on groceries, that doesn't necessarily mean that you saved \$5. If you could have earned \$20 by working that hour instead of driving around, you have actually lost \$15 by saving \$5. I'm not against comparison shopping, but if it's a choice between working for income or driving around to use double coupons, you have to evaluate the true costs for that opportunity.

I used to spend a lot of time running around to yard sales every Saturday morning, partly because it was fun, but also because I was trying to save money. I finally realized I could do much better by going to the stores that I knew had the blue jeans my boys needed in the sizes they needed, buying them, and then going home and spending the rest of the morning editing and making much more than enough money to buy that pair of blue jeans.

Think in terms of opportunity costs. When you choose to do one thing, whether it's with your home or your business or your family, what is the hidden cost of that, and what are you're saying no to?

Meals

Several people mentioned meals, and that's probably my Achilles' heel. I'm not a great cook, and my kids probably do fend for themselves in the kitchen too much although I've been doing a lot better on that lately. They really love it when Mom cooks, so I try to make that a higher priority.

One of my strategies is **cook once, eat twice**. I always make enough so that we can have leftovers for lunch the next day or the next evening. I know in some very large families that may not be possible. I have a friend with eight kids, and she couldn't cook once, eat twice because seven of those are boys. It's impossible for her to have leftovers. But for many families that will work.

You might also check out some of the books about **freezer cooking** or once-a-month cooking. I have not done that all the way, but I do things like buying a lot of ground chuck when it goes on sale, brown it all, and freeze it already browned so that it will be easy to use when I want to make tacos or Hamburger Helper.

Those are my only two tips strictly related to meals. There are plenty of other resources to help with ideas for that.

Keeping Up with Papers and Activities

At least one person mentioned having a hard time keeping up with invitations to go places and activities and newsletters and things like that.

I have a **phone notebook** in the same drawer where we keep the telephone book. I keep a three-ring binder with my list of phone numbers of friends and family members that we call often. It also has a list of emergency phone numbers for people my children could call if they need help when I'm not there. (I do have a son who's

almost 16 years old, so I'm not leaving young kids alone in the house.) I also keep in there the phone directory for my homeschool support group, the phone directory for my church, the phone directory from our homeschool co-op, and so on. All our phone numbers are in one place.

I have another binder where I keep my monthly calendars, except for the current one posted on the mirror. I also use it to store newsletters from our homeschool support group, flyers about activities that are coming up that we want to attend, and so on. Next week I want to go hear the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields Chamber Ensemble in Oxford. Isn't that going to be glorious? I hole-punched the flyer about that and put it in that notebook so all the details about time and place and tickets are readily at hand.

When I was talking about dealing with our stuff, I mentioned that one of the principle rules is have a place for everything and everything in its place. So, I'm not going to go into that in detail anymore here.

Hospitality vs. Entertaining

The home is a place of service and ministry and hospitality as well as a refuge for the family. I think it's easy to think, "Well, I can't do entertaining; I don't have the time or the means for that." I encourage you to think in terms of hospitality rather than entertaining. That takes off the pressure to perform and helps you serve instead from a mindset of ministry.

Homeschooling

Last, I am going to give some very specific suggestions for homeschooling. I know that some people either on this call or who use this course down the road may not be homeschooling, but I encourage you to listen to these suggestions anyway.

Not all of them will apply to your family, but as I mentioned in the first class, look for the underlying principle, pull it away from my application, and see how you can apply it to your own situation. So when I'm talking about organizing homeschool supplies and notebooks and assignments, think how you can take that principle and apply it to dealing with your kids' homework if they go to school.

This was another area on the survey where a lot of people mentioned challenges. One mom wrote, "I get distracted so I don't always remember to check how my kids are progressing." Another mom had a concern about teaching multiple grades. Another one wanted to know how to help younger kids be more independent. We've talked

about that a bit already, and I'll add some specific ideas about independence in homeschooling.

A couple of people mentioned children with learning disabilities. This is another area where I don't have personal experience, so I don't have specific strategies for children with learning disabilities. But again, look for the principle and see how you can apply it. I think that the ultimate principle, which I'm sure you know much better than I do, is simply that dealing with the extra help these children may need has to be a priority, and other things in your life are going to have to give way around that. We'll look for ways to help them be more independent.

I do have one practical suggestion. A friend has a high-school-age daughter who is severely dyslexic, and she has a very difficult time getting her thoughts from her head to paper for writing assignments. They are going to experiment with using word recognition software such as Dragon Naturally Speaking. It's a program you can connect to your computer, and there may be a voice function in some of the later editions of Microsoft Word. I'm not sure about that. But if you use a voice recognition software, that way the student could speak her paper and the computer will actually transcribe it as she speaks. That is one tool that I have not used personally, but when I was discussing that idea with this mom, she thought that sounded like me a great solution for her daughter.

Have Realistic Expectations

Whatever your kids' challenges, whatever their ages, remember to be realistic in your expectations about what you can do.

In the first session, when I was talking about the gap between the ideal and reality, I mentioned that I would love to sit around for hours daily reading aloud to my children, discussing ideas, and tutoring them one on one intensively, but because I'm earning a living as a single mom, I can't do that to the extent that I would like.

I love to build my own eclectic curriculum, but it's practical for me to use some prepared lesson plans because they save time. I've learned to come up with a realistic plan that we can actually implement rather than wasting time fretting over the gap between theory and practice. That's one of those general principles that applies in homeschooling as well.

Teach Children Together

It makes sense to teach children together whenever possible. This is one of the great advantages that homeschooling has over any kind of institutional schooling, whether

it's public or private or a church-related school. Skills such as math and phonics have to be taught at individual levels, of course, but most subjects can be taught to multiple ages at the same time.

The schedule that my family followed for several years was that we would begin our school time with the whole family coming together for Bible reading, prayer, Scripture memorization, poetry, and classic literature. Then the boys would split up for independent work and one-on-one instruction from me in phonics and math. Then they would continue their independent work while I went about working in my business.

Some subjects that it's particularly easy and useful to do this in would be having your children study the same topics in science and especially to study the same period of history. If you're all talking about, say, Ancient Egypt, the children can do independent work at varying levels of difficulty.

When we studied early American history, for example, we were involved in a weekly co-op where the boys did hands-on activities and presented reports at a meeting each Friday. During the week, Forrest, who was 13 at the time, would read high-school and adult-level history books. Andrew, who was 10, would read intermediate-level books, and he would also read easier books aloud to his younger brothers who weren't independent readers yet. They were all studying the same thing but on age-appropriate levels.

Encourage Independent Learning

As soon as my children become confident readers on their own—as soon as they master phonics and become fluent in their reading—I encourage independent learning. This is not just out of necessity; it happens to be a necessity, but that's not the only reason for doing so. I have seen some moms who hold their children's hands too much academically, and I really think they are handicapping their children by doing too much for them.

Once again, you've got to find the balance between independence and the right amount of assistance and instruction. I often have my boys read on their own, and then we use our time together to narrate what they've read, answer questions, or discuss what they've read.

Learning to take responsibility for their own education teaches children important skills that will be useful in college and adult life. It also gives them opportunities to pursue their own special interests.

Delegate

Another strategy that I like is delegating. You know I'm all about delegating. You can have older children instruct or help younger children. I take responsibility for introducing new concepts in math and phonics, but an older child may help a younger child review phonics flash cards, listen to him practice reading aloud, or help him do his map work for geography.

Even before he was an independent reader, Perry was helping Thomas, the youngest one, to learn his letters and numbers. He would also teach him how to draw simple figures since Perry's the artist and Thomas wanted to do that too.

That not only gives value to the younger children and frees up some of your time, but it's also good for the older child. It's not just using them and taking advantage of them; it's not that at all, because if they have to explain something to someone else, that really solidifies their own understanding of it.

Another sneaky benefit is that way they are willing to read books that they might otherwise consider too childish to be worthy of their time. Reading a very simple children's book on a topic is a wonderful way to get an overview of the subject.

If you're studying science, for example, the wonderful little series *Let's Read and Find Out Science* is a great way to find out why the leaves change colors in the fall or about the planets in the solar system. They are a great, very simple, very logically organized overview. So, having a middle-school-age child read that aloud to a younger child also gives him a subtle overview on a very simple level.

You can also **outsource some instruction to outside instructors**. Homeschoolers often tend to be resistant to this, but the mom or the dad doesn't always have to be the direct instructor for 100% of everything. Some families hire outside tutors. There's a new business in our community called Mathnasium where a lot of people are going for tutoring in math.

You can participate in a **co-op**; that's a way of delegating part of your children's instruction; I'm doing that right now.

You can also delegate to **technological tutoring**. My children have recently started using a math curriculum called Teaching Textbooks created by two Harvard graduates. It's on a CD-ROM that they view on the computer, and then they do the problems in the book and check the work. The CD includes video examples of every single problem in the entire book so that if they don't understand something, they can go back and get that. Especially with higher-level subjects like higher math that are difficult for parents sometimes, a technological tutor can be a very great assistant.

Keep in mind that you don't want the kids to spend too much time on the computer or watching videos; I don't particularly care for curriculum where kids sit in front of the computer or the DVD player all day. I hope I'm not stepping on any toes, but that's my opinion. Use technological tutors with discretion and balance.

My kids are also learning how to type using *Mavis Beacon Teaches Typing*, a computer-based instruction program, and we'll probably start using Rosetta Stone for foreign language. There are some times when using computer or video-based instruction can actually enhance your learning.

Another of my favorite technological tutors is using **audiotapes or CDs**. These can be wonderful for reviewing math facts, learning history dates, and so on. Recorded books are a wonderful tool to help you supplement live family read-aloud time.

My oldest boys used to listen to Diana Waring's history tapes and my younger ones to Jim Weiss's storytelling tapes at night as they were drifting off to sleep. We listen to audios while we are riding in the van, while we are out walking, and while we are doing chores. A child who is having difficulty reading might benefit from listening to an audio while following along with the print book. Sometimes we listen to a history tape during dinner and talk about what we heard.

Two of the best resources for books on tape are www.Audible.com and www.BlackstoneAudio.com. If they don't have it, it probably doesn't exist.

BlackstoneAudio.com offers a 50% discount to homeschoolers on purchases, but I don't think on rentals. You have to phone in your order to get that homeschool discount. Go to their website, make out your shopping list, and then call in your order for a 50% discount.

I talked to the lady at Blackstone just today to verify that they still have that discount, and they mentioned that they have it because the owner of the company is himself a homeschooler. It's great that he wants to encourage and assist homeschooling families that way.

Another fairly new resource for audio is www.YouNeedAStory.com. This is a business run by a dear friend of mine, Robert Green, who is a wonderful storyteller. Every week he makes a free audio story available through his website, and you can sign up for an e-mail to receive the link each week. He's also been developing some CDs that you can buy.

You can just sign up at www.YouNeedAStory.com and get a wonderful free story in your inbox each week. Robert's wife is one of my very dearest friends, and I've seen Robert just mesmerize children around a fireplace while he reads a tale.

A couple of our other favorite resources are Diana Waring's history tapes. You can go to www.DianaWaring.com. For years, Forrest would spout off random history

facts, and I'd say, "Where did you learn that?" The answer was either *The Kingfisher Illustrated History of the World* or Diana Waring's tapes, *What In the World Is Going On Here?*, which is an overview of history.

Jim Weiss is a great storyteller. His tapes are available at www.Greathall.com.

There are some wonderful tapes that dramatize American history. They are called *The Living Principles of America*, and they are available from another great website called www.SingNLearn.com. They also have math songs from AudioMemory that are quite good for reviewing math facts. They even have Lyrical Life Science so you can memorize scientific terminology set to music.

Establish Systems and Routines

I've talked before about establishing systems. Some families work well with a schedule: Certain things happen at a certain time. Other families work well with a routine: Things don't happen necessarily at a certain time, but they usually happen in a predictable sequence. I'm more of a routine person than a schedule person. Use whatever works for your family.

My main strategy that helps our homeschool week run smoothly is that on the weekends I type up a list for each of my oldest three boys. The youngest one still needs more hands-on help at this time. I'll type a week's worth of assignments, designated for a particular day, and print a list for each child. This way the boys know what to do even if I'm not available. I list all the independent lessons as well as the studies that require my direct instruction like a math lesson, or things we'll do as a family like reading the Bible or reading poems or reading aloud.

The boys are supposed to check off each item as they complete it. Just like with chores, our rule for schoolwork is it's not finished until it's checked off the list. They boys are very tired of hearing me say, "If it's not marked, it didn't happen." But that does help keep them accountable to document the work they've completed.

Here's the fun part about this system: Just like our weekly plans become our record when we go back and record our goals and our actuals, this weekly assignment sheet accomplishes the same thing. The assignment sheets become our record-keeping system.

Because I type them on the computer, if we have to make any adjustments, I can go in and change that because sometimes life intervenes, right? A kid gets sick, and you end up at the doctor instead of doing math that morning. Or sometimes we add something extra or rearrange something.

At the end of the week, just like I evaluate my weekly plans and goals, I'll evaluate the kids' schoolwork, update it if needed, print out a clean copy if the old copy's not usable, and save it in the binder as a permanent record of their work. That also is nice down the road when a younger child is covering the same ground; I can cut and paste old assignments and reuse them to create a new lesson plan.

Homeschooling Is about More Than Academics

Last, I encourage you to remember that homeschooling is not just about academics; it's **also about character and about relationships.**

When Thomas was four, I had not really done any formal schoolwork with him yet, and he came to me one day and said, "Is today a school day?" I said, "Well, yeah." He said, "Well, I want to do school." I asked, "What kind of schoolwork do you want to do?" And he said, "I want to do the kind of school where the whole family sits down together and draws or reads a story. That's the kind of school I like."

I thought, "You know, that's the kind of school I like too—where the whole family sits down together and draws or reads a story." So, make sure that you make room in your life and your day and your week for the whole family sitting down together because that's the kind of school we all like.

A list of my favorite homeschooling books is on the download page. I call this my desert island list. If I had to go to a desert island, what are the top ten homeschooling books I would take with me?

Assignment

Your action item for this week is going to be more independent. We've been talking about independence, so I'm going to allow you to be independent and responsible and to choose your own action item. Here's what I want you to do.

Pick one strategy from tonight's call, whether it's something to do with homeschooling, or something to do with teaching your children independence and responsibility, or maybe the chore chart—anything you prefer.

Pick one strategy and implement it in your family this week. Then, post to our Yahoo group and let us know what you did and how it went and if you have any questions or if you met any challenges along the way.

Only a couple of people have reported about what they did for fun the previous week, so I want to encourage you to do something fun this week as well. It doesn't have to

be dramatic and creative and impressive. It can be as simple as taking half an hour just to take a walk outdoors if you don't normally do that.

It can be very useful to make yourself accountable to other people who are trying the same thing. I encourage you to post, and I thank those of you who have already posted about the fun things you did.

You all have a great week. Go have some fun with your family. Try something new, and let us know how it goes. Good night.