

Homeschool Super Heroes

Speakers:

Ashley Ortega
Rachael Carman

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Ashley: Okay, thank you so much for joining us today on the Homeschool Super Heroes. My name is Ashley and I'm so excited to have Rachael Carman with us today. She's a homeschool mother of seven children, who's enjoyed speaking and encouraging homeschoolers for over 15 years. She loves challenging them to learn, live, and defend the Christian faith, daring to do so in a reckless obedience.

She's been on the board of the North Carolinians for Homeschool Education since 2002. A year later, she started Real Refreshment Retreats for homeschool moms, which has since expanded to Chicago, Austin, Atlanta, and Anchorage, Alaska.

In 2008, she and her husband, Davis, became the new owners of Apologia Educational Ministry and brought her moms' retreat under its umbrella.

Rachael has had the privilege of authoring a book for focus on the family in 2005 entitled *SoundBites from Heaven: What God Wants Us to Hear When We Talk to Our Kids*.

Thank you so much for joining us today, Rachael.

Rachael: Thank you for having me today.

Ashley: No problem. Just to get started, if you wouldn't mind, just telling our listeners a little bit more about yourself and your family and your approach to homeschooling.

Rachael: Okay. Well, first of all, I think it's important to note that homeschooling was not something that originally aspired to. We are reluctant homeschoolers, at least I was at the beginning. We just finished our 16th year and are looking at starting our 17th year very soon. But in the beginning, we thought homeschooling was for other people, actually it was anybody but us, until the Lord made it clear that's what he wanted us to do. And so when my oldest son first was getting ready to go to school, we looked for a house in what we thought was supposed to be the best school district in Charlotte, North Carolina where we lived and we purchased that house because we wanted the best for our son, right?

And we put him in school, he went to school, he's the only one of our 7 children who's gone to public school, he was there for 13 days, and then we pulled him

out, and it's a much longer story than that, but it's been a great adventure that I'm so grateful that God invited us on and has brought us into now 16 years later with 2 graduates, my first 2 sons have graduated from homeschooling. The seven children, I have two sons and then three daughters tucked in the middle and two little boys at the end.

And we just really enjoy learning together, seeking God, learning about who he is, watching his faithfulness, his provision. I tend to be eclectic when it comes to actual academia, I like to take a little from here and a little bit from there and put it all together and I enjoy new and I enjoy classics. So we just enjoy just seeing what God has for us each year and pursuing that.

Ashley: Perfect. Well, I know there's really no such thing as a typical day in a homeschooler's world.

Rachael: Right.

Ashley: But if you wouldn't mind just giving us a little bit, maybe about what your day looks like on a schooling day, just to give us an idea.

Rachael: Okay. You're right, there's no such thing as normal, especially here. I love that line, one of my favorite movies is *The Incredibles* and we joke about that movie a lot around the house and one of the things that she says in that, she talks about the mom makes a comment about normal, **** the only one's normal, and then the daughter, I think it's Violet, says, "What does this family know about normal?" And that's sort of an ongoing joke around here that what do we possibly know about normal? Absolutely nothing. Because our lives are so rich and so full and we tend to be on the go with all the different responsibilities and now with Apologia, and then as the kids get older, there's more and more to do, there's choir and all these other things.

But a normal day here, a day—I'll put it this way, the day that we would like to have here would start off in the morning with the kids getting up and us having some sort of a morning worship time together, and it's nothing elaborate for us, we just want to try to start off the day focusing on God and through blurry eyes and before coffee or tea in the morning, just to make sure that he's our focus for the day. So we usually sing a couple of songs and maybe read a scripture. And we were going through a book that we really enjoyed that was telling the back story of some of the hymns and we enjoyed that.

And then we have a few morning responsibilities that the kids do and then we go down and we try to have breakfast together. And then after breakfast, the kids have more responsibilities. I'm a whip-cracking mama, I think it's good for them to do things around the house. But the responsibilities after breakfast, we usually set a timer and everybody works diligently for 30 minutes on a variety of different things.

And then we hit the books. We start with Bible time, the boys, the younger boys, do **** so I work with them on those, and the girls are usually involved in some sort of study or memorization. And then they progress through their own assignment books that they have that they go top to bottom and do their various assignments. And many, many years ago, Debra Bell, who is one of my homeschool heroes, talked about kids that teach themselves and are independent learners. And I remember when I first heard her, I thought, oh, that would be grand! You know, before anybody was reading or anything, I was just drooling over the idea that my kids would be independent learning.

But in fact, God has been good and this year I will really only be actively teaching the two youngest boys here, eight and ten, because the other children have become independent learners. And I'll check on them and we'll do some reading together and that sort of thing, but I won't be really actively involved because they have launched into their own studies, which is great, but it's a transition for mom.

And so then we'll go through the day and then we'll have lunch together usually and I try to kick the little boys out of the house after lunch. I mean, I think that that's good. They need to get out, run around, catch frogs, chase squirrels, and be little boys. And then the girls maybe finish up an hour, maybe, after lunch.

So yeah, that would be the goal for a day here.

Ashley: Perfect. I know you and Davis invested in Apologia several years ago. With so many homeschoolers using Apologia curriculum, would you mind just sharing a quick version of how that came about?

Rachael: Wow, that was such an incredible, an incredible faith journey, the way that Apologia came, that God gave us the opportunity to own this company. My husband is actually a mechanical engineer by educational trade, and he had lost his job and was looking, frankly, for another mechanical engineering job, when someone asked him, you know, "If you could do anything, what would you do?" And he said, "Well, if I could do anything, I would like to encourage homeschool families, work from home, and have some sort of a ministry that provided for our family."

And I remember, this is not my most submissive, supportive moment as a wife, I remember thinking, listening to him say that, going, "Yeah, right, that's really going to work." Because I just, I couldn't see a way. It's almost like Sarah laughing when the angels, you know, when she heard that she was going to have a child and she was like, "Yeah, that's pretty funny." That's sort of how I felt, I was just like, "Yeah, that's going to happen." And then over the course of the next 18 months, God brought it to be. We learned that Apologia was for sale and Davis called and spoke to the founder and owner and they talked for a long time.

And then we battled it out with the banks. We were actually, not a really well-known fact, but we were actually discriminated against in terms of finding funding for Apologia, because it was considered too Christian. And so we walked through that. And the total time of our unemployment, between the time that Davis was laid off and the time we actually finalized the purchase, was 22 months, before we were actually able to close.

Ashley: Wow.

Rachael: Yes, and it was just truly incredible because God met our every need and through the body of Christ, people brought us groceries and meals, people brought tennis shoes and socks for my kids, and it was just such an incredible time of blessing. It was a wilderness experience, but it was such an incredible time of blessing for all of us also. We just celebrated four years, we closed on June the 25th of 2008 and so it's, we're confident that this is God's plan because we know the story of how he provided and moved and did the impossible in order for us to own the company.

Ashley: That's really neat. It's really awesome to hear how God just works in each and every person's life and brings things about like that. And I know it's one of your goals to encourage people in, you know, hard times, but also just homeschooling and being a mom and things like that.

As you encourage moms across the country, what can you tell them about taking that first step to having a heart for your children?

Rachael: Oh, wow. I think in so many ways, in the culture we're in, the culture tells moms, it's going to sound like it's not true, but I really believe this, I feel like I see it and I feel like other moms, we can see it, but maybe we can't articulate what it is we're seeing, but I feel like this culture in many ways says don't invest in your kids. I mean, invest insofar as you take them to Disney, or insofar as you buy them a cute, stylish outfit. Or invest in them materially, but not really invest in them in their heart, in a discipleship, and in an emotional and a spiritual level.

And so I believe a lot of moms end up shutting, trying, working diligently to shut that part of them down so that they're not invested, so that they don't have to deal with, because investing in your children makes you vulnerable, right? It makes you open, I mean, they can hurt you, they can walk away from you because you've invested in them.

And so I really think the first step—well, in the book, and I stand by this, the first step in having a heart for your kids is having a heart for God, but even that is making yourself vulnerable. You know, when you submit to holy, mighty God, you are making yourself vulnerable, you are saying I really can't, but I trust that you can and you will.

And for our kids, it's saying to God, "You know, they're not mine, they're yours. And I don't know what you want me to do with them, I don't know how to do what they need me to do, but I'm going to trust that you do." And it's just, it's so completely counter-culture to admit that kind of inability, to admit that need. Goes against, I believe, everything that young moms are told today.

Ashley: Yeah. As you well know, it can be very noisy when you're raising children. How do you steer God with all the commotion going on every single day?

Rachael: Oh, I love that question, in fact, I'm developing a new talk now, quiet time in a loud house. Because it's just, it's funny, too, that we would have this interview, this was intentionally chosen this time by me, because all seven of my children are gone right now. They have gone to visit my mom and dad in Texas and so my husband and I are in a very quiet house for three days. And it is amazing how much the decibel level goes up when everybody's here. Even if everybody's quiet, there's still a hum, you know, just of working and that kind of thing. But it is, it's difficult, I think for me, I had a predetermined definition of what that quiet time would look like and it would be quiet and it would be, I would be alone and I wouldn't be doing anything else, and no one would interrupt me and all of these kind of things.

And I've really had to change that definition. I've really had to let go of what I thought was going to be the ideal. And let God show me a new definition and redefine that.

And for me, my quiet time, it is time in the word, it is time reading the word, it's not always as much time as I want it to be, or it's not always all the scriptures I want it to be. But even if it's just stealing away a psalm or a proverb or a chapter or sometimes even just a verse, I find that God multiplies that for me, anything that I give him. Any investment that I make in his word, he multiplies, which is so good.

But another thing that I've learned that is a huge blessing to me is, many years ago when Charles, who's my oldest, he's 21 now, he was a baby, I had a woman pour into me, and one of her best pieces of advice that just continues to bless me was, she talked to me about how to redeem the responsibilities I had around the house. So cleaning, chores, laundry, anything that I had to do around the house, those mundane things that we, well, many of us don't enjoy and we don't look forward to. She said that the way to redeem those things was to worship through them. And so very often I will sing hymns while I'm folding mounds of laundry. And so that is my quiet time, that is my time of worship, that I'm having right there. And it doesn't take a really bright person to realize that if there are nine of us here, that's a lot of laundry. And so I have my hymn book set up on my dryer upstairs and I just go through and just sing the hymns and just praise him while I'm just doing the laundry.

And now that the kids are older, very often, one or two of my daughters will come in and they'll sing with me, or the boys will come in, the younger boys, and they don't always know all the words, but they'll sit there and they'll fold or they'll smile, and they sing what they know, and it's just a real blessing.

So I think it's maybe breaking out of the traditional definition of what that looks like and not putting it off, but finding ways to still worship.

Ashley: Yeah. No, I like that idea a lot, it's something that I've sort of had to learn. I don't have kids yet, but I've been working full time, my husband's getting his Master's in school.

Rachael: Oh, how exciting.

Ashley: It's a blast! And I'm actually starting a new job in a couple weeks, so I'm excited.

Rachael: Wow.

Ashley: But just to be gone so much, because I am working full time, I don't have the time throughout the day to put into a quiet time like I did during college or high school or things like that.

Rachael: Yeah.

Ashley: And so you have to be able to find those moments here and there that you can, you know, sing a song or read a verse or something to help you along.

Rachael: Exactly.

Ashley: Well, transitioning just a little bit, would you mind explaining what notebooking is to our listeners and why it could be better for homeschool kids?

Rachael: Oh, I'd be happy to. The whole idea of notebooking is to give your students, your kids, a place to process what you're reading to them in a way that is a lot less intimidating and a lot more effective in terms of them actually learning the material. I was raised on all the worksheets. And I even remember the ditto machine, which probably dates me, when everything was blue or purple copies, it wasn't even black and white, and someone else predetermined, based on some reading passage, what was important, or what was interesting. And so I was merely, actually at the end of the day, just trying to please the person who predetermined what was important. I didn't have a say in what I thought was interesting or what I thought was important. Somebody else determined that for me, and then subsequently I was generally tested on the worksheet that someone else had decided about. And I didn't have any investment, no one asked me. And so it just became almost a game, just trying to figure out what was important to

this other person and the teacher. But it was never, I never had the opportunity to think for myself, what was important, what do I find interesting. And frankly, what part of this might God be drawing me to in whatever area of study is going on.

So the notebooking journal idea is the Charlotte Mason, it pulls off the Charlotte Mason model, that the mom reads living books, good literature, whether it's history or science, fiction, non-fiction, but it's reading to the kids, and then they have a notebook where they're processing that. Where they're pulling out what's fascinating to them, what's interesting to them. And they have an opportunity to express what they're learning and what their understanding is.

And the beauty of it is that it draws them in and they become invested and they get excited because it's theirs. They're deciding what goes in there and what they illustrate and what they tell about. It's fascinating, all the kids are getting older now, like I said earlier, but at one point the Young Explorer series that Apologia does, I taught one of those titles to my five youngest kids simultaneously. So I was reading the same text out loud to all five, but their notebooking journals looked completely different. What Savannah Ann found interesting, you know, Elizabeth didn't, she thought something else was interesting, and then Molly found something else, and then of course the boys, being boys, found something totally different from what the girls found interesting. And then their diagrams were different and their facts were different.

So it was just, it's a great opportunity for them to own their education, even from a younger age, and for that to be validated. Because they have a showcase, they have a place to put it. It helps them in their writing, helps them in their self-expression.

And then as a mom, I can, you know, "Why don't you share, Joseph, we read this today and you've worked now in your notebooking journal, why don't you share with us, Joseph, what is it that you heard today that was fascinating to you?" Well, he's so proud! So he stands up and he tells all of us, you know, what he learned. And in that moment, obviously without a red pen, if there's something wrong or he didn't hear it correctly or a misunderstanding, I can, I still have the opportunity to correct that or to enhance it or help him go deeper if he's excited about, let's say he's excited about that. And he said, and, "And I'd really like to look this up," I can take that opportunity to help him go deeper, I can correct him in a very safe circumstance.

I think it's just a beautiful way of drawing them out and encouraging them to pursue and to own their education as they get older. And my experience has been, interestingly, my older children, Savannah Ann actually will be a junior this year, she has created her own notebooks for things that are interesting to her, because she started one for herbs, because we have herbs out in our garden. In fact, they're the thing that has done the best in the garden this year because we have

fought the heat and the deer have really delighted in our garden this year. But her herbs have gone untouched. But she started a journal on her herbs and she looks up how to dry them and she's tried different mixtures for teas and she's made oils, so, you know, the notebooking journals we did when she was younger have transformed now into her creating her own, based on her interest. So that's been a beautiful thing also.

Ashley: Yeah. Do you have any tips for moms, do you think, that notebooking are really great for their kids, if they sort of feel inadequate to get started?

Rachael: Well, I would just say that everybody's notebooking journal experience is going to look different and be different. In the beginning, I used, Miller Pad and Paper has some journals that are half ruled and half blank, and that was primarily the tool that I used in the beginning because it was all that we had. And then of course at Apologia, we've developed actual notebooking journals that there're already template pages in there that, really our goal is for it to be a tool for moms who are crunched for time, as I think we all are.

But even if you use our notebooking journals that have the template pages that are blank, that are not predetermined what goes where, they're still all going to look different. I talk to moms all across the country and some of them say, "Oh, we just love this part of your notebooking journal, but we never do this part." Well, praise the Lord! You're finding something that's working for you and this other doesn't work for you, well, just skip it.

So I think it's easy to get into that obsessive-compulsive, "We have to do every last page, and every last experiment and project," and we don't. It's the kind of situation where you can use them and do what works for your family, where you're interested and just move through it, use it as a tool, that's really our intention, is that it's just a tool.

Ashley: Good. What are some of your favorite, or kids' favorite activities that they've done with their notebooks?

Rachael: Let's see, they love to show them off, that's probably their favorite thing. One of my favorite things to say, too, is it's a great, a great tool for people or relatives in your life that think that you don't do anything, to have those notebooking journals out at family reunions or holidays, it just goes a million miles in validating what you do as a homeschool family. Because there it is, a tangible representation of the kids learning. They are doing something. You really aren't just sitting around in your pajamas all day. You really aren't sleeping until noon. You're really accomplishing something. And for the grandparents or the friends, neighbors, pastors, whoever, who will dare to take the time with one of your kids and say, "Oh, I see your **** notebook's right here, why don't you tell me about it." They are going to learn a ton from that kid because that kid is so excited because

they've essentially written their own book and they have an opportunity then to show it off. I think that's their favorite thing.

The other favorite thing though, I just thought of this, is they love to go back and look at ones that they've done years ago. That is a ton of fun for them. To go back and go, "Oh, my goodness, look what I wrote here, look at my handwriting!" The girls are always about the handwriting, so, right? So they're just like, "I can't believe I used to write like that."

But the older boys, I have Charles and Anderson's notebooking journals from when they were little guys. And so now Joseph and Benjamin can look at Charles and Anderson's notebooking journals and it's such a huge encouragement to them and it makes Charles and Anderson laugh, but it's a great tool across the generations.

And I think some day when they have their own kids, what a great gift for their kids to be able to look through those notebooking journals and see what their mom and dad did.

Ashley: That's really neat. I like that idea and two, you can see the growth and from where you started to where you are now, which is always something positive to see.

Rachael: Definitely, definitely.

Ashley: So as you well know, it can be difficult to juggle being married, raising kids, trying to keep up with your home, homeschooling, business, doing it all. Do you have any advice on trying to stay sane throughout the whole process?

Rachael: Oh, isn't that just the, that's the challenge that we all face, is trying to maintain some semblance of sanity in the midst of it all. Well, a couple of things. Two things that I would say, you know, you can talk for hours on this subject alone, whole books have been developed on this subject. But two things I would say, I would say do spend time with God. In whatever capacity. Again, a psalm, a proverb, a song, journaling, spend some time with him each day. If it's as simple as waking up and going, "Okay, God, there is a child right here beside my bed and I'm not even out of bed, I was up twice last night, Lord Jesus, just be with me today, help me today, I know what you're my strength and I really need you." I mean, just something simple. Just acknowledging his presence and his ability to walk with you and to worship him in that way.

Sing with your little guys "Jesus Loves Me," I know that when the kids were all younger, and just singing those little children songs with them, those words of those children's songs just take on brand new dimensions as a mom. "Jesus loves me, this I know." On those really hard days, "Jesus loves me," on the days that you've messed up, "Jesus loves me." So that's really powerful.

And the other thing I would say that I think makes all the difference, is give yourself permission to smile. Give yourself permission to laugh. We get so stressed and we get so caught up in our list of things to do and our schedule and what we think we have to accomplish today. And the best thing we can do is enjoy them, more than anything else, enjoy them. Enjoy what they're learning, enjoy their wonder of creation, enjoy how God made them, in their questions, in their interests, in their minds, in their accomplishments, and smile at them. And just enjoy them. And show that to them, that you love them.

I think those are two things that could make a big difference.

Ashley: Perfect. I know that Apologia has a section called Missions. Our family used to take several mission trips to small villages in Mexico, we live in Texas, so we would drive down there with the college students and stuff. And I know that definitely had an impact on me. We would do Christmas's where we would take, you know, a more needy family, you know, food or gifts or what they needed at that time, and it's something that's translated even into my adult life. In college, I worked with kids, specifically at-risk kids and things like that.

What do you suggest for families that do want to get involved in mission work, whether it's overseas or in the States, or what are your suggestions on that?

Rachael: Do it. It's never a waste of time. It is such a blessing and we've been so blessed in the homeschool community, God has given us so much. Our relationships with him, our relationships with each other, to have an opportunity to go out and share as a family, there's really, really nothing like that, to work together and do that.

We, actually as a family, go to go to Hungary a couple years ago with Apologia Mission. We went there to encourage homeschool families in Europe. And many of them are in oppressive situations and they come together once a year for a week just to be encouraged as homeschool families, as Christians, as fathers, as mothers. And the journey that they're taking to not only proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, but to disciple their own children. And so to go and see that had a profound impact on our kids. That we are blessed in the United States to be able to do this and to encourage other people. So it's really, really powerful.

My husband took my older boys on trips to the Dominican and I was able to take my one daughter to China on a mission trip. And going and seeing God move, whether it's just raising the money to get there, because that's always a journey in and of itself, but to work side by side, you learn so much about yourself and so much about God, it's just a huge blessing. And I think the freedom that we have as homeschooling families to actually go and do that, we forget sometimes the freedom that we have to take advantage of that opportunity.

So I would say make it a priority. It's like the ultimate field trip. There's so many things that, if you're one of those moms that has to count it as something, there's so many things that you can count a field trip, I mean, I can list them for you, I mean, it can be history, they can keep a journal, it can be writing, it can be geography, it can be math as you save up the money, or people mail in the money. I mean, it's across the curriculum, it counts for everything. And then on top of that is the spiritual development that happens as a result.

So I would really encourage families to make it a priority to do that.

Ashley: Perfect. If there's one thing, I know you still have little ones at home, so you would be able to do this, but if this is one thing that you could do differently from the time you started, is there anything? And if so, what would that be?

Rachael: Oh, definitely. There's definitely things I would do better. My oldest son and I often laugh, he'll comment that I'm not the woman I was when it was him. And I'll say, "And aren't you glad?" And he'll just laugh. Because it's true. God has been so good to grow me and I'm so grateful for the changes and I've still got a lot of work to do.

What I was just talking about is the thing I would change. I wish I could have learned to relax earlier. That there were things that I held onto that I needed to let go of and I was willing to be miserable personally and to make kids miserable to get my list done, to get through my lesson plan. And that should never have been true. I should have been more willing to chase the butterflies and the frogs and to make cookies and to just relax and read another chapter and not be so caught up on the plan, but really just enjoy them more.

I will say, you know, God is, he's so good, my youngest two, are getting a different experience than my oldest two did. And sometimes it makes me sad because they're different, because their situation is so different. But I know that God providentially put them here as the last two, and I'm so grateful for all I've learned. I'm so grateful for their experience. I'm at a place now where if I feel or sense that stress coming on, we're doing fractions—I think fractions cause everyone stress, so we just need to acknowledge that and embrace it. But if I see that it's coming on, and I've got a little guy that's getting discouraged, I'm a place now where I can close that book and go, "You know what? Let's just do this another day. Let's go do something else." And 15 years ago, I didn't do that. 15 years ago, this was on the lesson plan and we're going to knock this out if it takes us till 3:00. And nobody wins.

But to realize that that's not helping, and what that kid needs you to do at that moment is to acknowledge that they're not ready or it's just not their day for it, it's not a good day, they've had a, maybe they've had a bad morning. And to love them enough to be able to go on to something else. And I think that's huge. And that is something I wish I—and I don't that I could have done it earlier, but that's

something I wish I had. But I'm confident that God's a great redeemer and I'm grateful that Charles and I can laugh about it now. But yeah, that's what I would encourage moms to do.

Ashley: Okay. Well, I want to thank you so much, Rachael, for joining us. I don't know if there's any other advice or comments that you would like to add for new or veteran homeschool families, as well as if you want to give out any information for contacts, if our listeners would like to get back in contact with you.

Rachael: Well, I would really encourage the moms out there to get in relationship with some other moms, to have some people that you can call on a bad day that are supportive. Not people that are going to say, "You need to put them on the bus," or "Give up," that kind of person. I'm talking about someone who's going to say, "I've got your back," someone who's going to pray with you on the phone, someone that's going to encourage you to keep on keeping on. I would really encourage the moms to do that.

And I would invite all the moms to one of our Real Refreshment Retreats, we'd love to have you come in fellowship with us. We have five homeschool speaker moms, veteran moms, who many of them have graduates. I'm the youngin' on the docket. We would love to have you come. We have two hours at the retreats, both the retreats, just to pray. And I think that's the part of the retreat that sets it apart from any other women's event I've ever been at, is we actually, we don't just talk about praying, but we actually pray.

So any mom that would like information on that you can go to Apologia.com and get information on how to join us at a Real Refreshment Retreat and we would just love to have them, but make sure that you're seeking God first and you're following him and not comparing yourself to anybody else.

Ashley: Okay. I think that's so important. I was just reading another book this morning and it was talking about all the different, not necessarily homeschool topics, but just the idea of not comparing ourselves to other women or our husbands to other men.

Rachael: Yeah.

Ashley: And I think it's something that's so easy, especially as women, to do, and those things, and that's not glorifying to God in—

Rachael: That's right.

Ashley: Well, Rachael, I think you so much for joining us today and all the advice and wisdom that you've given to our listeners. I really appreciate your time.

Rachael: Thank you so much, Ashley, it was a pleasure to talk with you today. You have a great day.

Ashley: You, too.

Rachael: Thanks.

Ashley: No problem. Bye.

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