

Homeschool Super Heroes

Speakers:

Ashley
Stef

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Ashley: Thank you so much for joining me. This is Ashley with Homeschool Superheroes and I'm so excited to have Stef Layton joining us tonight for our interview.

Stef is a mid-30s Christian wife. She's married to a traveling golf course architect and a mama to two amazing homeschooled boys where they live in sunny Florida and she's one of those "later to accept Jesus" statistics and she accepted Christ at the age of 26. So she likes to write about her growing faith as well as blog about homeschooling, weight loss, healthy habits, blogging 101s and easy home tips encouragement for every mom.

She wants to encourage moms that parenting can be joyful and fulfilling when they embrace Jesus and let him lead. She offers free downloads because she hopes that they can give all types of families time together, fun and opportunities to think.

Homeschooling living isn't necessarily what subject you teach or where you school but a love for learning all the time. She prays that all moms are able to spend time cuddling and laughing, reading, learning and exploring this great world with their children. Her goal is to share Christ with her boys. Let the Lord lead them and grow them closer as a family so they can shine for his glory. Thank you so much for joining us tonight, Stef.

Stef: Thank you. I'm glad that you called.

Ashley: Perfect. Just to get started, if you wouldn't mind just letting our listeners know maybe a little bit more about your family as well as your own approach to homeschooling.

Stef: Sure. We are a very active family, usually always outside. We love golf and tennis and wakeboarding. We also travel with my husband as much as possible around the southeast for his job and so we get to homeschool on the road a lot as well and our homeschool style has become very relaxed as we start our fifth year. I was very rigid and uptight and kind of scared about homeschooling when we started but now just embracing flexibility. It has changed everything for us.

Ashley: Perfect. So I know there's not necessarily a typical day in a homeschooler's world but if you wouldn't mind sort of describing what may be a typical day might look like for your family.

Stef: Sure. You're right. There are no typical days with us especially. Like I said, my husband travels so a lot of the time, we're either dropping him off at the airport in the morning or picking him up. So we don't have necessarily the same start time but after breakfast, we will start by either doing a devotional or prayer time or working on a character trait.

We choose virtues and so we really like to work on manners first and hopefully that will last through the homeschool day. Then we move on to subjects and as my son wants to do them, we pick them up rather than having Max start at a certain time or **Sterling** start at a certain time. We do everything but each day, we kind of flip flop on how we or when we start each subject and it kind of flows a little bit better.

Then we usually break for lunch and then after lunch, when the weather is nice, we go outside and we finish doing some science, reading together, having a little bit of playtime and then we kind of come back inside and then we work on our tactile stuff, our art, sculpting, drawing, building kind of projects.

Then we usually break off again and then we go outside a little bit more. We have dinner and then after dinner, we like to read together as a family. Usually my husband reads to us or if he's out of town, then I will read to the boys. Then we wrap up with the game night. We usually don't watch TV in the evenings. So we spend as much time in the weekend together while my husband is home.

Ashley: OK. I really like the idea you were saying about your son being able to choose which order he wants to do with the subjects. I think that's sort of cool because it gives them personal responsibility while schooling. I think that's a great idea.

Stef: Thanks. We notice that like you said, he has responsibility. He chose to do math first so he needs to get math done or if we don't want to do math right away, we can put it off a little bit and do something a little bit more fun or exciting and kind of work around and our schedule is never stale. I think a lot of moms burn out because they have the same schedule, nine, ten, eleven. It just doesn't change. It's groundhog's day. Changing it up a little bit has worked good for us.

Ashley: OK. Let me ask you. I know you mentioned a little bit about doing tactile stuff. I know that you have a column Tactile Tuesday. Would you mind explaining to our listeners what that is?

Stef: Sure. A few years ago, I realized that my son was not being disobedient. He just liked to use his hands. He likes to touch everything. He had to draw every lesson and at first it was so frustrating because we couldn't get through something

without him wanting to wrap up a subject drawing something else and I kept wanting to move on and just get the curriculum done. Then I started to really see him and learn about different learning styles and immediately he's visual and he's tactile. One day I decided to dump Play-Doh and Legos and paint on the table and that being one of our favorite days.

So rather than just doing one little project each day, we started doing a little project for each subject and the more that he was willing to make organs and brains out of Play-Doh, the more he learned and the more he got it rather than just reading plain text and seeing an occasional photo.

It really worked and we've been going on a year I guess of just using our resources for more tactile stuff and decided to share it on my blog because other parents started to realize, "Hey wait, this works and it's fun and it's visual and it's hands-on and it's creative and our kids get to really step out of the box and get creative rather than just filling in another answer on a worksheet," and I love worksheets. That's my comfort zone. So it took a lot for me to just put that aside and say, "Just show me. Make it. Build it. Draw it." And he loves it.

Ashley: Perfect. Would you mind giving us a couple of examples? I mean can you just use it in science where you're building brains and organs and things like that or are there ways to incorporate it into math or reading or something that's a little bit more rigid as well?

Stef: No, absolutely. For instance, geography. We will learn about a famous building and he will go build it with his Legos and it's an exact replica and he will explain who built it and when they built it and what this was about or why they chose this. We did columns, great columns and he can go through and point you in the neighborhood now because he was able to draw the different kinds of columns that he can pick them out and that's Doric or that's Ionic. We do that for geography.

For math, we actually dump money on the table and that's how he started counting money. Rather than to see it in the book, he was holding it. He was seeing the sizes and seeing the difference of it.

For math, we took a clock and he manipulated the hands. So he could count. In two more hours, it's going to be this. In four more hours, it's going to be this. Obviously for science, it's very easy to use tactile resources. We're setting bones and the inside of bones. He couldn't just wrap his head around the text and what that meant. So we got Play-Doh. We just kept wrapping different colored Play-Doh to make the different layers.

We did the same thing with the earth's core and the crust and the mantle. I hardboiled an egg and then we just cut it right down the middle. Then we had the

shell and the egg and the yolk. I mean we just kind of labeled those. It's just a matter of getting creative.

Spelling, we love all about spelling because you can move the tiles around and literally spell your words and see your words and see how that works.

As far as reading, I haven't really found a tactile way of doing reading yet but whenever we do read a lesson, we go ahead and either draw what happened or for instance we did mystery of history last year and all of our reading after we read, he would go ahead and build Jericho out of Legos. He would make tents in his room when we talked about Abraham and so I guess not necessarily during the reading but after the reading. We definitely incorporated tactile activities.

Ashley: That's perfect and I think it challenges your son to be able to think about it deeper and further. Like you were saying draw the story and see the work on that reading comprehension instead of maybe not reading every word but being able to take it to that next level which I think is really neat.

Stef: Yeah. All the projects are always done after a lesson and it's usually he's showing me this is what I learned. This is what I understand. That way, I know for sure he comprehended the lesson.

Ashley: Perfect. Now, you're saying that you're more of a person that likes worksheets and things like that, not necessarily like your son but for moms that are more like you, they're stressed out about the idea of throwing Play-Doh down and letting kids just play with it. Are there any tips that you can give to these moms to help them along?

Stef: The only tip I have is when we started taking pictures and documenting it on the blog as well as if I needed to print out a picture and three-hole punch it, I would have him write the date and write what the project was on it.

That way, that was also our proof that we did something that day. When people are wondering you didn't do anything and you're homeschoolers. This is kind of the proof that we have. It's also when we go back and finish a year. We can flip through this book and look at all the neat things we made.

Ashley: I like that idea a lot because it gives you as a mom and also as a child a sense of accomplishment that you've actually been able to accomplish something and you've learned something and know about it.

Stef: We also like to see the growth. We only made this little thing at the beginning of the year but by the end of the year, we had this great, big medieval castle. In that way, he can see his own progress.

Ashley: Perfect. Now, how would you say that notebooking can integrate into tactile learning?

Stef: Well, we're brand new to notebooking as of this summer. We decided to do geography and just learned European countries, where they were basically. We're talking about the map and looking at the globe and all of these things and I really wanted a way to drive home something and have him not just know where it is but something about it.

So I kind of cheated. I didn't create this myself. I went to The Notebooking Fairy. She has a great website that has all of these free resources. You would print out these worksheets or like I said, they're called notebooking pages and then he can draw pictures as well as write what he's learning along with it and then they're little mini unit lessons I would say that they only last a week. So, we're not getting into great, deep, in-depth conversations of countries and dictatorships or ancient Olympics or what not.

It's more about where the country is, some wild animals that you would find there. Maybe some of their big exports. What's the terrain like? I'm going back to tactile learning. Not just drawing it but making a 3D map of Germany and seeing these are mountains and these are the flat lands. So that was kind of three-hole punching that and putting that in the notebook. In that way, since we homeschool year around during the summer in Florida, it's just too hot to be outside. We're inside and we're working on these different projects together.

Ashley: That's neat. I remember you were talking about three maps that my mom – we made a 3D map of Egypt one time when we were younger. I think we were probably in elementary school but we were studying Egypt and the pyramids and that kind of thing and it was one of our favorite things. We probably made a mess all over the kitchen in the process because there are three of us working on it at one time. But I mean I remember things like that to this day from the different activities that my mom used for us.

Stef: Yeah, that's how learning is not plain by any means and that's also another thing. I kind of had to let go with my expectation of how the homeschool table and kitchen and living room were going to be all day and [0:15:09] [Indiscernible] have to clean up your mess that for a hands-active kid, it's just plain just isn't work and learning.

Ashley: Perfect. Can you explain a little bit maybe about what notebooking is and how you found it? I mean is it just drawing and writing or how does that work with it?

Stef: Well, I think I saw a few people notebooking certain topics and subjects in books. They would read a book and then they would create a notebook and there would be pages of blank lines where they would write and we did one for Harry Potter and we did a character sketch for each character. We talked about their character

qualities and what that equated to as far as good or bad, also where that is in the bible.

We went through and obviously you can't really do geography with Harry Potter but we definitely tried to use other, I guess, pages more so about the plot, the theme, all of those things, and they're not just blank papers. There are different notebooking pages with boxes and things you can fill out and fill in that would be to complete a notebook. We've done animals. Like I said, we're doing geography and we've only done a few books.

Ashley: Perfect. I know that you've recently started a new blog called *Reclaiming my Family*. Would you mind sort of telling us why you started this blog and sort of what it's about?

Stef: Yeah. We had a guest speaker, Dr. **Trip [0:16:57] [Phonetic]** at our church and he was just talking about the family unit and how our society has grown to really not have a core tight knit family anymore. We're always so busy and kids are in so many different activities and moms are running around as a soccer mom and even certain roles that the husband and wife play; female, male roles also and just how if we really want our kids to grow up with a strong, confident faith, that we have to model it in our home and we also have to put family first. Family comes above interruptions. Family comes above TV. Family comes above other things and that was my heart and just starting this and just writing where God is leading us even in health.

I've been a little overweight since my youngest has been born and he's five now and to really be active in my kids' lives. I have to keep up with them so I need to be a healthy mom in order to do that and sometimes that means unplugging and turning off the computer and spending time with them when they need me rather than trying to make this great blog a huge success and that's kind of more on the faith side of family and definitely not the education side but just how we are being active as far as making our family a priority.

Ashley: That's perfect. I like that a lot. I'm not a parent yet. I hope to be someday but I know between me and my husband, it has been something that we've had to even strive for in our marriage over the last couple of years is to be intentional with each other instead of letting TV or all the different things we could sign up for taking over. So I think it's a great thing to be alert for at the same time.

Stef: Yeah. And it's subtle things. My husband and I were playing words with friends on the couch right next to each other one night and we looked at each other and just laughed. I was like, "Let's not do this. Let's talk. Let's take our kids out. Let's take them on vacation." Not that being away from your kids is bad but just including them and what you're doing and making these memories because my son is nine. He's already halfway out of the house. Where did that time go? So like you said, being intentional with the time we do have.

Ashley: Yeah. I know that you've recently written a little bit on your blog about intentional parenting. What are your thoughts on that?

Stef: Well, I think it's more than just words. I think it has to have some kind of heart behind it and it's great to say we want to be intentional with our time, our bible time, our exercise because if we're really not being diligent and protecting it and striving for it, then it just kind of sounds nice.

To truly be an intentional mom is being selfless and our society really doesn't promote that. It's all about me and you deserve it and we're just kind of – I wouldn't say being brainwashed but there are too many appealing things out there and especially for a stay-at-home mom who's trying to find her value and worth who isn't finding it in her family. She's looking for it somewhere else and to be intentional is to set up a guard. Pray for protection for your family and your heart and what you're watching and what you're reading and what you're doing.

So you can be with your family. You can be involved. You are aware of problems or what is happening around you so you can just be there. I mean so many moms want to go and make a name for themselves especially online and it's so appealing to strive for more page views and more ad space and all of this kind of crazy things and then we look back and we look at our kids. That really should be our first responsibility.

Ashley: No, I think that's great. I think it's real easy to get wrapped up in everything else and especially I don't know from experience but I know my mom at times struggled with – she was home all day with these little ones and so you're doing the same thing everyday and it gets monotonous at times. But just taking that time to remember why you're staying at home and why you're doing the things that you're doing.

Stef: Absolutely. We always meet people and they want to know, "What do you do for a living?" You say, "Well, I'm a stay-at-home mom," or "I'm a home school mom." They're like, "Oh, so you don't have a job." And it's like, "Are you kidding? I've got the hardest job in the world."

Ashley: So what would you say that a deliberate, purposeful mom looks like? Are there practical things that someone can be doing if they really want to become that type of mother?

Stef: Well, she doesn't look like me because I stumble and fall constantly with this one but I hope that she would look like a woman who spends time in God's word and not just to tweet about it because she honestly wants to live it. A mom who gives to her kids and serves them.

I think so often we look at our kids and we feel like they're a chore. We've got to do this today and we've got to do that today and the joy of serving our children and our families is gone. So hopefully she's a woman who's strong in her faith. She's surrounded by faithful friends who are also praying for her and she prays for their families as well. She's teaching the word to her children. She doesn't leave it up to the church to do, that she takes that responsibility and she loves her husband above all things.

So many women don't want to talk about that but I think a woman who respects her husband and puts his needs above her own is one who is an intentional wife, mother, believer.

Ashley: No, that's perfect. It's something hard to do and I've even been just recently – and even hearing you say it – convicted again of how easy it is to put my needs above my husband's or things that I'm right in this or that we should do it this way because that's what I want to do instead of swallowing my pride and saying, "No, it's OK. It's really not that big a deal if we do it this way or that way."

Stef: As homeschool moms, we like to plan and we plan our kids' education and we plan our days and we kind of air a little bit too much on planning for the family when our husbands are called to be the spiritual leaders.

Ashley: That's true and I think that's something that I struggle with. I'm an oldest child as well and I'm a teacher right now before we have kids. So it's something that I do on a daily basis. I write lesson plans and I want to be in charge and it's hard for me when I'm not that person. So just being able to lay it aside and say that God has given him responsibility and allowing him to be able to use or accomplish that responsibility as well.

Stef: Absolutely.

Ashley: So switching gears back a little bit towards a little bit more about homeschooling again, I noticed that you said that you have your nine-year-old but as well as a five-year-old. What are some things that you can do using the tactile skills and stuff even with the younger one? Is it something that you use certain things for certain ages or are there things that you can do now or are you even – there are sort of a lot of questions I want. But in the process, starting the homeschool stage with him or where do you really start that, I guess is my question.

Stef: That's a great question because a lot of homeschool moms will disagree with you or agree with you and say that as soon as they're born, you're homeschooling. I personally don't consider myself homeschooling my littlest one until we sign up with the county and are officially homeschooling.

However, we bring him along for every activity and he's not as much tactile as his brother. He's more auditory so he loves music and songs and singing a lot all the

time but a few things that we've done with him, we have the Crayola washable paints and we will paint on our kitchen tiles.

We paint the alphabet and we paint big letters and little letters and then we will get bean bags and I will say "big I" and he will have to throw the bean bags on the big I and then we will also have balloons and we will write on balloons and we will pop balloons or sometimes we will write on eggs and have a **[0:26:04]** *[Indiscernible]* lesson and go throw eggs outside.

So we include him in what we're doing and right now for him it's just basically learning the alphabet, learning opposites. He sits in for the animals. He can't really draw anything right now but for him mostly, it's painting stamps are a great thing.

Magnetic letters, we take them off the refrigerator and we get flash cards and we have him match them up instead of having them sit there. We have giant-sized dice so we can start counting. There are plenty of things to include him with. He will still try to make an animal out of Play-Doh but it's not a nine-year-old's ability obviously.

But now we include him right there and that's what he thinks school is all about and it's kind of fun because he has this eagerness. When my nine-year-old was little, he was kind of, "Like what are we doing? This is so weird," and I wasn't really embracing tactile learning at the time so he had to sit down to worksheets. Well, my younger one is, "What are we doing today? Can we do school?" and he's more excited.

Ashley: That's awesome. Now I guess you're throwing all these amazing ideas out there as far painting on your kitchen tiles or using eggs to write letters on and things like that. How do you come up with all these ideas? Is it just creativity or do you use pictures or where do you get a lot of your ideas?

Stef: No, I do have a Pinterest account. I usually search that for food recipes. No, I don't know. Honestly, it just kind of comes to me, some of the things. We have seen other friends. Homeschool Creations is a great preschool site. Spell Out Loud, that's another great preschool site that we go to and we occasionally get ideas from. But for the most part, it's just spending the time doing something and realizing this is a great idea and sometimes it's just we're painting on the floor again but we're using a different color or we're going to play a different game or we're going to do the chicken dance along with just kind of adding to it, changing it up just a little bit. I have no idea why I felt we should paint on our floor.

It was one of those, "I hope this comes out after we already did it. Is it really washable?" ... picked it up immediately so that was more of a relief than anything. But yeah, we kind of just wing it and that's also the beauty of not having this planned out schedule of events and this is going to happen because

when it doesn't work out, you're sitting there looking at it like I'm a failure. This is horrible.

So sometimes these are kind of like hey, look, it actually turned into this. Great. Whew. I'm a genius and it's just pure luck. Some things are definitely I try to strive to do but other things are kind of just, "This sounds like it would be really neat."

Ashley: It sounds too just listening to you that it's a lot of fun too and I think sometimes you can get so wrapped up and we've got to cover these subjects and we've got to cover these things, that you lose the fun of having school and being in school.

Stef: Yeah, I was not a good student just because I hated school. It was not fun. If you know me personally, I'm a fun gal. I like to do fun things and laugh a lot and sometimes play jokes and we greet daddy with water balloons and pillow fights, kind of keep it light-hearted but also have an objective to I want you to understand this and learn this. But as learning is presented as a fun way especially at this age, oh they can't wait to do it.

Ashley: Yeah. No, and I think that's great especially as they're younger. You just want them to just have that I-can't-wait attitude. The parts where they're going to have to write research papers and things like that are going to come eventually but to just enjoy them as a kid and I think that's one thing. Because I am a teacher, I see that we do try to have fun in the classroom but there's a lot of time where you necessarily can't get to this activity or that thing or we have to meet this requirement and so you lose some of that funness all the time and I think that's one thing that I love about homeschooling and why hopefully eventually I can homeschool my kids. It's just to keep that relationship but also the funness of everything as well.

Stef: I agree. There are so much of moms being discouraged and tired that their kids don't like their lessons and granted, believe me, I hate math. Math is not fun. I've never liked math but it's also not just a homeschool day. It's called Tuesday in the Layton home. This is our time together. How am I going to enjoy it?

Ashley: Yeah, I like that. Well, Stef, I want to thank you so much for joining us and giving us all these amazing ideas and sort of the idea of just bringing fun back into school. I was going to ask you if there's one any other advice that you would like to give our listeners as well as if you wouldn't mind sharing your website or any ways that our listeners could contact you if they want to be able to learn some more about all the amazing ideas that you have.

Stef: Thanks. Yeah, my website is EducatingLaytons.com and that is Laytons and the reason was because I'm learning right alongside them. It's not just me teaching them. We're all learning something. I am on Twitter, @StefLayton, and I share a ton of our pictures up there just to give other homeschool moms encouragement

that it doesn't have to look like a box. It doesn't have to look like a worksheet. It's still school and your kids are always learning even if it's at 7 o'clock at night.

I would say my advice is to relax. A lot of homeschool moms are nervous and they think they're going to get it wrong and God has given you those children and he thinks that you're the right one for them and he's also in control of your homeschool. So always be praying for sure.

Ashley: Perfect. Well, Stef, thank you so much again for joining us and sharing with us some of your wisdom and I really appreciate it.

Stef: Thanks so much, Ashley. I had fun.

Ashley: All right. Have a great day.

Stef: You too.

Ashley: Thank you. Bye.

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