

Home School Super Heroes Teleconference
Sally Clarkson

Speakers:

Gentry

Sally

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Gentry: Hi. I'm Gentry Beck of Homeschool Super Heroes and I'm thrilled to have Sally Clarkson as our super hero guest today. If you would like to listen to our other superheroes, make sure to visit www.homeschoolsuperheros.com. Sally is, first and foremost, a full-time stay at homeschooling mom. Her life has always revolved around her four whole hearted children, Sarah, Joel, Nathan, and Joy. In addition to her ministry to her family, God has also given her a ministry to other families and the homeschooling mothers through speaking and writing. Sally grew up in Texas and New Mexico, accepted Christ personally her freshman year at Texas Tech University, was active in Campus Crusade for Christ in college and joined staff upon graduation in 1975. She ministered at the University of Texas, lived and ministered in Eastern Europe under communist rule, and returned to Denver to work with executive women and singles, and with Clay, whom she married a year later. She's always been active in discipling women and began a church based home school support group in Nashville that is still active. Sally is a writer, speaker, discipler and blogger who also loves books, music, British films, baking and tea. Thank you so much for joining us today, Sally, how are you doing?

Sally: I'm doing great, thanks.

Gentry: Good. Well, just to start off, could you just tell us a little bit about your family and your approach to homeschooling your children?

Sally: I have four children, as you mentioned. Sarah is 27 and she is an author of 2 books. She's also pursuing ministry. She loves working with kids and orphans and is possibly going to be going into missions for a little bit. There's Joel who is a composer. He graduated with Honors in Berkley School of Music in Boston and is working as a film scorer in Hollywood.

Gentry: Oh Wow.

Sally: Then Nathan is my third child and he is currently working as a media consultant in Hollywood. He's also an actor and attended the New York Film Academy. Then I have Joy who is my youngest and she graduated this May and is beginning classes at our local college and she's an actor/singer/writer type too. So, we have a lot of arts in our family. As I look at our approach, I, of course, started in the

homeschooling many years ago, 28 years ago actually is the first time I even pursued the idea of it.

Before I even had my children I was involved in discipleship and influencing leaders in Europe and my husband and I were talking one day and he said, “You know, if the Lord ever gives us children, we should probably disciple them and build them into Godly leaders in our own home.” We read an article on homeschooling and started looking into it and I actually spoke on it before I had my kids. But, when I look back, I love, love, love what our philosophy was cultivated into. We lived in Europe and were working with, all the way from, diplomats to refugees. I could really see that most of the internationals that I met had a much deeper and broader education. They knew artists and musicians, they read books, they knew countries and history and philosophies. So that really was a foundation for us as we entered into our homeschooling arena.

We didn’t want our children just to be the typical American educational style which is fill in the blank and multiple choice. We wanted them to know how to be thinkers, how to be entrepreneurs, how to have convictions, how to articulate their philosophy. We wanted them, of course, to love the Lord and to have a sense of ownership for bringing His kingdom to bear in the world. So we really started out researching and looking into different kinds of education that really would undergird and give a foundation to children and would really enhance their ability to think, to be academic, to know, and to give them a broader base than I had been given in our own American schooling background. That’s how we wrote *Educating the Whole Hearted Child* many years ago because we loved using real books and exposing our kids to the best thinkers and taking them with us all over the world and really cultivating their unique gifts. Our philosophy was written down in *Educating the Whole Hearted Child* and we just finished a new version which is kind of our magnum opus. It’s the compendium of all of the ways that we influence our children and all of the things that we loved. We’re just so blessed to see them as thriving young adults who are really having an impact in their own worlds right now.

Gentry: You mentioned that your company is Whole Hearted Ministries and you’re educating the whole hearted child, I know you just explained how you got that idea, but how does it apply directly to homeschoolers and having them use that?

Sally: I think it’s really important for homeschoolers to understand that the most important resource in their home is themselves. If the teacher of the students is engaged in thinking and in reading and in studying and in scripture and loves to learn, then that is really what is going to pass on to her children, a love for education. It’s not about the exact curriculum or the books or what they cover; it’s that your whole home should be an environment of learning. We have book baskets everywhere. We have devotions every morning because I had devotions first and so I’m sharing from the whole heart. We eat dinner every night together. We light the candles, no matter if we’re having toast and oatmeal or filet mignon,

we light candles, we put on music and we have great discussions about ideas and people and thoughts. So really the magnitude of a child's education - it's not picking the right curriculum, it's having the right philosophy and using your whole home, every aspect of it, the traditions you celebrate, the Saturday night movie nights or whatever you choose to do in your family, the way you celebrate birthdays. As I look back on our family life, it was me seeing our home as my arena; I'm kind of the CEO, so to speak, of a grand organization. I'm the conductor of the music of the souls of my children. So, it's very important to see everything that you do is what will be a part of your children's education. It's not the individual year or the individual book, it's about learning; loving learning; valuing learning; and valuing life and the life of God and the life of thoughts and knowledge and discussing it all the time, everywhere, no matter where you are.

Our Book is 84 pages, it tells very specifically how we implemented that and what we did. We had a lot of fun and have a great relationship with our kids because of the wonderful memories of doing all these things.

Gentry: What are some ways you could minister to the whole child and get their whole heart and their education?

Sally: I think the reason that we use literature as a base for our educational model is that we are people and our children are people who love stories, love to think that they are part of history. We read all the time. We read hundreds, if not thousands, of books to our children and, in an interesting way, by giving them stories that captured their hearts, we gave them models for what they wanted to become. But, I think too that the most important that a mom can know about securing the heart of her children is that she has to first invest time - individual, focused, affirming, "I love you" time with each child. She needs to embrace who God made that child. If they're an extroverted loud boy, she needs to say, "I wonder if God has made my child a warrior?" If they're an introverted, shy son or, as one of my boys was, he was a very introverted composer type. He became a composer, but I had to understand that he was living in his brain and he was always creating, doing something with Legos, he didn't always hear me.

I think that the people that are going to always have the most profound influence on anyone are those who know how to love, affirm, accept and spend focused time. So I built that into my routine. I would have times that I would bring my kids into my room, make them their own cup of hot chocolate, light candles, say "How are you doing?, What are you thinking?, and "What's going on"? If they were children that were extroverts, I gave them lots of time to talk to me and tell me all that they were doing and every place they were going. If they were introverts, I gave them lots of quiet time with me. But, the older they became, I would take them out by themselves. If I invested in what was important to them, then they would want to follow the God that I followed. So, I thought, how can I do this? I looked to Christ as my model. He loved his disciples, he served them,

he washed their feet, he gave them words of life: Peter, you're the rock; Thomas, you're the man in whom there's no guile; John, you're the one I love. He was my model for everything I did.

I wrote a book called *Ministry of Motherhood* really focusing on how did Jesus so influence his disciples so that they were all willing to give their lives for his cause. The foundation of everything he did, the God that created the universe became the friend of common people and spent three years, loving, encouraging, befriending, and walking with them. So, I think that no matter what else you do, if you don't build that foundation of love, then you're not going to secure the hearts of your children.

Gentry: You just shared with us some ideas about spending individual time with the children. But, what are some ideas that you could do if you have younger kids at home? What are some ideas that they could use in homeschooling and using literature and things like that? What are some ideas that you would give to moms with younger kids?

Sally: Every morning, I would, while my oldest children, and they weren't a lot older I had three children in less than five years, so three of four of my children were very close in age. We would have breakfast together and we would read some kind of devotional and I would hold the littlest one in my lap. Then while my oldest children were putting dishes in the dishwasher, or cleaning up the kitchen, I would go and spend very focused time on the little ones. I would either read to them, play with them, go on a little walk outside. I really tried to fill their emotional cup first so that they would be willing to sit down.

Then the next thing I did is we would always have our reading time first because I knew reading was the foundation of what we did. We'd always start out with picture books no matter how old my children became because everyone loves picture books, everyone loves a good story and, that way, I could hold the little ones in my lap and say, "Let's read this really wonderful book today about American History" and it would be a picture book or, "Let's read about this great country China" and I would have a picture book from China.

Then my rule—and I trained my little ones to this little by little, is—now that mommy's spent time with you and we've had a really good time talking, playing, whatever it was, now's my time with the older kids and you can stay with us, and I would always provide them with a special little basket of toys or Legos or a little basket of popcorn, I would change it all the time, or a picture to color or something to do, I would say, "You may do this and be quiet or you may go in your room and play, what would you choose?" Almost always, all of my children wanted to be together. I'd also give my older kids something to draw, Legos to play with as long as they could narrate back to me what they were doing, what they had read.

Then, they would have the privilege of playing, drawing, or doing something with their hands while I was reading out loud to them. But, if they complained, whined, or couldn't listen, then I said, "Now I'm going to read it all over to you again and I will keep reading it until you sit still and can tell me what I said". It just trained into them that listening and being together and actually, most of the time, except for those days when they argued about, somebody touched my toe or came across the couch on my couch. Most days that weren't necessarily like that, they loved being read to, they loved our stories. I did it dramatically. We shared and talked and cuddled on the couch in our jammies and I literally read thousands, and thousands, and thousands of pages of books because that was our routine, we did it every day.

I think that there's just a juggle you have to go through times. Sometimes, I would draw Joy who's my youngest daughter—6 years younger than the next oldest, almost 7 years younger—I would draw a bubble bath for her or I'd give her a bottle a bubbles to go outside and play with or I'd give her a little cup of cheerios. But, it's kind of a juggle to try to figure out how to do it. I think if you establish routines and build habits, it's the most important thing to do. Because of my philosophy that said I'm going to home school all my children together, the only thing they did independently was math and just a little bit of language arts. Because we read profoundly and always together, I didn't have to have individual difficult curriculums for the children. The interesting thing is that families were created by God from the First to be the place that was enough for genius, enough to create great leaders. What I've seen in my own house is that when I really focused on the relationship, the discipleship, the life-giving, the chores - my children have all been able to achieve academic excellence as just a consequence of having an excellent foundation for education, that my goal was relationships and discipleship and that also came.

Gentry: I know that you talk about the three areas of home and I was going to see if we could talk a little bit about the home nurturing, home discipleship, and home education. My first question for you would be; If you could give homeschoolers one piece of advice about home education, what would it be?

Sally: I've pretty much said it already. But, I can say it again, if you want me to, in a different way. The teacher, the mom, has got to see herself as the biggest resource for her children. So, whether she's washing dishes, whether she's doing her chores. Whatever she's doing, that the grid from her point of view is, how can I pass on a love for learning, a love for God, a love for all that is moral and good and beautiful and the other thing is just creating her home to be the best place for her children to be, that at every point there is interest, beauty, color, books to read, magazines to glance at. The mom is the most important cultivator, purveyor of knowledge, truth, beauty, goodness and the life of Christ in her home. If a mom doesn't plan for that, if she's exhausted, if she's not taking care of herself, if she never gets a break, then she's going to burn out. If you're constantly pouring out, you have to refill in order to have more to pour out. So,

the mom is the key to the success, the atmosphere, and the life-giving of her homeschooling.

Gentry: I know that you talked about, earlier, doing family devotions, things like that. But, when you're trying to balance all areas of life from keeping up with the house, cooking food, you running your business, still schooling these children, taking them around...how do you balance all of that and also fit in home discipleship?

Sally: It all depends on what your focus is and discipleship was my focus. So it was the first thing that was always on my mind. But, a part of discipleship is also living life. I think that what's really important for a mom is to establish rhythms in her day, so that even if her homeschooling gets disrupted, she'll be able to do that. But, I knew that my children were the book that people would read. I can write many books, if I neglect my children; also...I think that right now it's very difficult for a lot of women because of Facebook it's a temptation, and twitter and reading blogs and the computer in general, phone calls.

I knew that they had to have integrity at home for them to be able to become the people that I wanted them to be. So, the first thing is you have to control your schedule. I got up very early in the morning, that's just the best time for me to have my own devotion. It was a brick in my day, it was a commitment I made, and it was an important commitment. If I believe in discipleship, then I have to spend time with the Lord. If I believe in passing on a love for scripture and a love for God to my children, then I have to make that the first thing we do every day.

Then I did most of my homeschooling in the mornings. We had anchors in our day; we'd clean the kitchen after breakfast. We sorted out things at lunchtime and straightened up the kitchen then. Then at 5:00 every afternoon, I put on loud, fun, interesting music, and everybody took a room and straightened it before my husband came home at night. I had an hour reading time every afternoon that we were home for all my kids. I would make them tea, coffee, hot chocolate, whatever they wanted, but everybody had to go to someplace in the house and be quiet and I gave each of them books to read or magazines or something. You have to really grow little by little, and it took me a long time and I didn't always feel in control. You have to grow as a home manager and then you have to focus on the things that you intend to pass on. Again, if a mom is not spending time with the Lord, and if she isn't spending time in the Word, then she is never going to pass on discipleship to her kids. If she says it's important, then she has to do it and it's as simple as that.

Gentry: The last area of the home was home nurturing. Can you explain what you mean by that, I know you've touched on it a little throughout, and then what can our listeners do to add this into their home and day to day lives?

Sally: I think that one of my children once said to me, “You know it’s such a shame that so many of our friends, their God is in the box and he’s not very interesting” and he said, “I’m so glad that our God is out of the box”. And I said, “What do you mean”? And he said, “Well our God is a God who created chili peppers for fajitas and porches to sleep out under the stars and music to dance to because we have music on all the time and puppy dogs to love and great stories to pretend” and he said, “I can believe in a God who is a God of life and not just a God who is a God of rules”.

So I think that for a woman to understand that God isn’t just a theological thought to be passed on, but he is the color of the sunsets in the morning, the beauty of the stars at night, the tastes of food, the way that she decorates her home. We always called our traditions feasts. We would have a feast every Sunday morning. I get up and I make something wonderful, light candles, put on music and then my husband reads scripture to the kids. We would celebrate birthdays wildly, we would have tea times every afternoon for 50 minutes.

I think that building the atmosphere of the home where it’s a home of grace, and love and beauty and goodness and interest. If my children were interested in art or music, then I would give them special art pencils or paints. If they were interested in acting, I would engage them in drama clubs. So setting the atmosphere of the home is really establishing this place of beauty, art, interest according to what God has given your family interest in. We take care of it, we all add to it. There’s a constant stress between having it a fun, beautiful place and then cleaning it back up again. That’s just something that will happen for eternity.

I love the verse that says where there are no oxen, the stalls are clean. I have six oxen in my home almost all the time and so our stalls were rarely clean. They were straightened and then they’d get messy again, straightened and then messy again. But the overall context of my home was creating a picture of a God who’s creative, who’s beautiful, who’s loving, who smiles, who laughs, all the things that God created for us to enjoy, my home became the place for me to express that. It’s because of the atmosphere and the traditions and the anchors of love and beauty that all of my children say, because they live all over the world now, they say, “Mom, that’s what I miss, I miss having like-minded souls of people who celebrate life, who love God and who think deeply”. So when a mom can understand that creating atmosphere, adding traditions and beauty, that is the foundation of them loving life, loving God and loving education, then she will have a work that will require the best of her for her whole life.

Gentry: That’s some great advice for our listeners, right there. You’ve been in the homeschooling world for, you said, 28 years. Through all of that, if you look back and they always say hindsight’s 20/20, but what would you do differently? If there is something that you would do differently, what would it be?

Sally: I think I really wouldn't change my philosophy. I loved what we did. I would study about what mattered educationally and then we did it and I loved that, I wouldn't change that. But, I wouldn't get upset, I wouldn't be impatient, I would just trust God more. I would kiss them more. I would tell them God loves them and I love them too more. I would just have enjoyed every day more because home and life and raising children is a process and it's a long term journey and I think that when we read in scriptures, it says God's will is good and acceptable and perfect and if it's God's will for us to home school, then it's good and acceptable and perfect. My son once said to me, "Mom, when you're upset about the chores, and all of that", he said, "We can always get it cleaned up again and then it'll get messy again and then we can clean again", but he said, "When you're unhappy, we feel guilty and when you're happy we all feel like we're a success, so lighten up mom". As I look back, I realize that's really what I would just do. I'd just rest more, relax more in the moment. I would probably still have as much work as ever, but I would open my eyes to see the joy, the beauty, the fun, and trust that all children eventually grow up and they do move forward educationally and that the most important thing for me to do is just to say this is the day that the lord has made, I will rejoice and enjoy it.

Gentry: One other question, I know that you have been able to balance owning your own business and homeschooling the children. How did you handle all of that?

Sally: You know, I don't think there is a balance in life. I have a great friend who is a leader of an organization and he said that when you look at a fulcrum, the handle on a clock that ticks, it's only in balance at one point. It's always going one direction or the other but always trying to get back into the center and, again, I think that I keep doing this all the time too, I'm always having to reorganize my life and say "What are my priorities? What can I let go"? I think that there is an illusion that any woman can do it all and of course my husband and I do our ministry full time but I mainly stay home and home school the kids. I always am the speaker and the face but he manages our ministry and he also does writing. It took both of us to do all of it.

But I think, too, that a part of our ministry was having our children come with us and be a part of it and encourage them and when they worked hard for conferences, then we would always take them out and bless them and spoil them afterwards and do fun things with them. But I just had to learn that there were days when I would be on top of things and days when everything would fall apart and so I would have to keep going back to that center, "What is my center purpose? Who do I need to drop?" I can drop people and emails and phone calls but if I drop my children and their needs, and if they had big needs I would drop everything else and focus on those needs. I think there's an illusion that there's ever a time when anyone is totally in control or on top of things but it's just keeping going, keeping trying to center, keeping planning, and always cutting out the things that aren't the focus of my life and saying no to people and not performing for people. We kept a pretty tight rein on the inner circle of our

family and tried not to make performing for people or pleasing everyone the center of our attention, but keeping focus on our family.

Gentry: One of our last questions is where can people find you? Online, email? Can you give us some ideas about some of the resources that people can get from you?

Sally: Sure, my husband and I have a website. Its www.wholeheart.org and we have a website there where people can see our books and see that we have moms' conferences every year and I also travel internationally to at least one place a year because we have a lot of followers all over the world. Our books are in 6 languages, 5 or 6 languages. So if you want to keep up with what we're doing, go to wholeheart.org I also have a blog, itakejoy.com, and I write 4-6 days a week and we put on interviews and books and resources so they can also find us on itakejoy.com. Of course, almost everything that we've written is also on amazon. We have lots of moms books and we do bible studies and we work with networks of people and on our website, we have a prayer list where people can pray with us and for our ministry as well as we send out letters to people who sign up, email letters, telling them about our events and where we'll be speaking. That's at wholeheart.org.

Gentry: Sounds like you have a lot of resources there and I really like the idea of the prayer list, that's a really neat idea. Well, Sally, thank you so much for spending some of your time with us today. I know I've been encouraged and just heard some great ideas from listening to you talk. I'm sure our listeners have also come away with some great ideas that they can apply to their homeschooling and that they've been encouraged and taken a different perspective on everything. So thank you very much for spending your time with us.

Sally: It was great to be with you. Thank you for giving me this opportunity and the lord bless you.

Gentry: The lord bless you too.

Sally: Bye, bye.

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