

A person wearing blue jeans with the cuffs rolled up is sitting on a tall stack of books. They are holding an open magazine or book in their lap. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

Homeschool

101

A Free Guidebook

Elizabeth Singler

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www.ElizabethSingler.com

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Homeschool 101

by Elizabeth Singler

Dear Reader,

This Homeschool chapter is offered for free to parents that are looking to homeschool their children. It is a standalone chapter that is part of my book, *Balanced Mama*. *Balanced Mama* is a book about balancing our lives with homeschool, parenting, and business ownership. Please don't be thrown off by my references to business. These homeschool starting tips are applicable to anyone, regardless of your profession.

My heart's greatest desire is to see families be successful in their homeschooling journey, which is why I offer this chapter to anyone, free of charge.

All references to other sections in this book are included with a plethora of other tips and strategies to balance your life. To get your own copy, please visit www.ElizabethSingler.com

Elizabeth

Homeschool 101

In the past few months, I have been asked countless times about my homeschool. The parents who are asking are usually parents who have kicked around homeschooling before, but have never gotten serious about it until a pandemic affected our country and schools.

I have had people sit across from me at my kitchen table, asking me, “How can I fit homeschool into my busy life?” Or “How can I run a business successfully while homeschooling?” The most important question though, is, “How do I get started with homeschooling?”

I must tell you that I am far from all knowledgeable on the subject of homeschooling. In this section, I will share my personal homeschool goals, and what I believe to be important when getting started. I will also share what works best in our household, but don't be afraid to try something different. I'll do my best to explain why I choose to do certain things. Please remember that every family is different, and each child learns differently. What works for me might not work for you. However, let this be a starting point for your homeschool journey.

Now, come sit at my kitchen table and let's chat a while...

Define the Purpose of Homeschooling

Before we get into the nitty gritty details of homeschooling, we need to start at the beginning. If you are going to successfully homeschool, you need to have a reason why you are homeschooling. There will be days you want to throw in the towel, and your reason is what you will need to come back to. The reason for homeschooling should be a moral one. I feel this

way because your decision needs to depend on you...not on other people. Let me explain by giving you an example.

Sally has always sent her daughter, Samantha, to public school. She has contemplated homeschooling before, but it wasn't a huge priority until now.

Lately, Sally feels like Samantha isn't getting the proper education that she needs. Even though Samantha is a grade A student, she frequently feels bored while waiting for her classmates to catch up. Samantha's teacher does her best in the class, but with the state's requirements, she is limited in what she can teach. This also limits her ability to challenge Samantha in school. On top of all of this, there are some nasty kids in Samantha's class that are gossiping and bullying.

Sally knows that she can homeschool her daughter, and that she can give her more opportunities at home. She knows that God calls us to "train our children when they are young, and when they are old, they will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6). However, up until this point, she has been satisfied with the school system. After great pondering, Sally makes the decision to remove Samantha from the public school and to homeschool her.

Why did Sally pull Samantha out of school? Was it because the teacher wasn't challenging her? Was the gossiping and the bullying the final reason? Nope.

Sally's reason for homeschooling must be a decision that she makes herself...without the comparison of others. Sally's decision to homeschool needs to be framed in a way that is positive toward herself and her abilities:

Sally knows that she can teach Samantha school while moving her ahead in the areas that she excels in. Sally is not limited in her teaching and knows that she can round Samantha's education by giving her

more variety than the public school has access to. Sally wants to give Samantha friendship opportunities with like-minded families. She ultimately decides to homeschool because she feels that is her calling by God to teach her children.

Like Sally, you need to make the decision to homeschool based on yourself. Your morals. Your ability to teach, the opportunities that you will offer your children. Do not choose to homeschool based on failure of the school system or discrepancy of others. Your decision to homeschool should not be formed by the negative attributes of what you are leaving. You will never be truly content in your homeschool, life, or business if you feel that you need to always “do better” than the one that failed. You will feel completely confident when you make a decision based on yourself.

Another reason you want to make a “reason for homeschooling” is the state may change your rights if you do not have a good reason. At the time of writing this book, COVID-19 is possibly going to affect the school systems in the United States drastically. In a world that is constantly changing, we need to have a plan. Our Freedom of Religion in the Bill of Rights is a good battle plan. Here’s an example.

Vaccines can be a controversial subject for many families. Whether you agree or disagree with vaccines, did you know that many states require vaccinations of all children? In most of these states, the only way you can get a vaccination waiver is a letter from your doctor, or because of religion. Your Freedom of Religion may eventually save the day in regards to homeschool too.

I recommend that you base your reason to homeschool primarily on a religious reason. I strongly suggest having a few Bible verses included in your “reason to homeschool” as well.

Another great reason to homeschool is if your child has special needs. I personally know a couple of families who homeschool simply because of the special needs of their children. They want to see their children getting

personalized education and stimulation they require. No institution can provide every need of every child. You know what your child needs best.

Because of special needs, you may also get a written recommendation from a doctor, which will help your case to homeschool if you are ever required to carry this documentation.

When you write your “reason to homeschool”, type it out, and maybe even frame it on the wall. There will be days when you need to read it. There will be moments when you will wonder, “why on earth did I ever agree to this?!” During those moments, you will thank me for telling you to write the document. You’re welcome, mama.

Protection

Children are incredible learners. According to science, they are like learning sponges at a young age. For this reason, our society has placed education on a pedestal for young people. Because of this, there are also laws in place that protect children from being kept away from a formal education.

Homeschoolers tend to be watched more carefully because of these laws. This isn’t a problem if you have proper protection in place. In fact, homeschooling is incredibly accepted in 2020 as compared to twenty years ago. However, there are still the small minority who believe that parents do not have any business educating their children.

Child protective services (CPS) was designed to keep children safe. Since its origin, they have protected many children from precarious situations. Homeschooling is typically not a valid reason to have CPS involved; however, there are people (or neighbors) who think that calling CPS is doing society a favor.

If CPS gets called about your homeschool, they will likely want to do an “audit” of your schooling practices. In this circumstance, you will need

to provide documents and statements regarding homeschooling your children.

Most parents believe that CPS will give the benefit of the doubt for your homeschool, and for the good of your home and lifestyle. Unfortunately, sometimes parents are taken by surprise when a disgruntled state employee sees the home negatively. Some parents are even taken to court and required to jump through hoops to keep their children safe from removal. Sometimes these cases are legitimate; however, I have read a plethora of stories where it isn't. In these cases, some parents' rights become trampled if they are not legally protected.

Please don't be afraid; CPS is not a reason to avoid homeschooling. You simply need legal support. Almost like homeschool insurance. There is an absolute blessing of an organization called "Homeschool Legal Defense Association," or HSLDA. It is an organization that you pay membership to every year, and you get a phone number to call in the event you are audited by the state. If CPS calls or knocks, you call the lawyer on the card to do any speaking for you. They will protect you and your family with anything law-related. Become a member of HSLDA and have peace of mind in this area.

The HSLDA recommends that you keep certain documents and files to also prepare for a state audit. These are simple steps that you can prepare easily, once or twice a year, just to give yourself some extra insurance.

1. Be a good record-keeper.

Keep a record of your child's grades, special projects, achievements, and awards. These show that they are being schooled and socialized. Tracking these records throughout the year will keep you from being stressed as you finish your grading projects. Once your file is full, you can close the school year.

2. Write a yearly plan.

Each year, write a plan for every child in your homeschool. Write the subjects you will be teaching them, and what you hope to accomplish with them. Write how many days you plan to do school, and any field trips that you know you'll take.

3. Narrations for older children.

If you have children in third grade and older, have them write subject narrations at the end of the year. I typically will have my children write a one- or two-page essay for each subject or interest that they had that year. If they worked a job, or if they studied something on their own, I also have them write a narration for that. For instance, my daughter who loves history went through a phase of listening to podcasts about historical figures. She made a lovely narration of a compilation of people she learned about. My other daughter began a job of photo editing and customer service. She had to learn various computer programs to accomplish the job, so she wrote a narration for the job. Basically, anything that is educational, they should write a narration about at the end of the school year. This is perfect to include in your record-keeping file.

4. Become a member of a Co-op.

A co-op is a group of homeschoolers who get together for classes or events on a regular basis. They are typically a parent-run program and have memberships for which you must apply and be approved. Since homeschooling is becoming more common, co-ops are in most cities. It is unlikely that there isn't at least one homeschool co-op in your area. Look online for one to join. Often there are classes or even field trips these groups do together. By joining a local co-op, you will have the advantage of being affiliated with a larger homeschool community and group. You will get local homeschool news and events, as well as

be recognized by others in the area. Although this doesn't seem like a safety procedure, it shows the state that you are actively participating in a community. The state will prefer you if you are affiliated with a group. Regardless of the state, you and your children will love the opportunities that co-ops offer for socialization. I'll go more into detail later.

5. Calendar or journal everything.

I have two calendars. I have my everyday calendar, and I have my business calendar. Many, many, many parents have a homeschool planner, but I am not that girl. As a business owner, and juggling many different things, I certainly don't need one more calendar to fill out.

In my everyday calendar, I write down everything. If I have a dentist appointment, I write it down. If we unexpectedly go to a friend's house, I add it to the calendar. I write down how many days we are in school (many states require 180 days). If we haul wood for a grandparent, I write it down. If my teen has a work schedule, I write it down. Anything that could be counted as medical, learning, socialization, or community service, I write it in the calendar. This way, if I was ever audited, I have a very detailed list of their socialization, and how many days they've been in school.

In Chapter 2: Structure, I discuss how to keep the calendar. It's an excellent way to keep track of homeschool and your entire home. Make sure that you don't miss these amazing tips.

Requirements

Homeschool requirements are different in each state. When you become a member of the HSLDA, you will be given multiple resources. One of these resources is a list of requirements of your state. I live in Michigan, which is a very lenient state, and the tiny list of homeschool requirements are very

vague. Because of the vague laws, it leaves a lot to be interpreted. Although many parents find the vagueness to be freeing in their homeschool, I want to make sure that my family is prepared for any situation. Since there is wiggle room in the text of the law, I try to make sure that I am fully following it by going beyond the requirements.

Even though Michigan has few laws regarding what subjects to teach, and they don't require me to keep records as I do, I keep significant records anyway. I also try to make sure that my children are following the same class schedule as their peers in public school. For instance, public schools require teenagers to take Algebra 1 and 2, Geometry, and another higher learning math program in high school. Michigan public schools have multiple credit requirements that are not required for homeschool programs. I follow the requirements of the public school so my children are at pace with their peers. When I plan my children's high school, I carefully map out all four years for them, so they will take all public school required classes. I strongly recommend that when you enter into high school years, you take the time to map out their entire high school. This will give you a plan that you won't need to think about later.

Colleges also have some requirements to consider. Most colleges and trade schools are welcoming to homeschoolers, but it's always a good idea to check with potential colleges of interest.

Many times, colleges still want an SAT or ACT test. These tests are typically taken in the junior and senior years of high school. They cost a minimal fee, and any school-age child can take them.

You'll find information for these testing opportunities by doing a simple Google search. Plan ahead for these when you are planning your school year. You don't want to get caught off-guard. A simple way to being a successful businesswoman and homeschooling mom is having a solid plan. This will help you keep balance.

Some parents are concerned about requirements in state-level testing. In

my state, it isn't required at this time, but it is required in many other states. Research the guidelines for your state and make the plan to take state testing if necessary. Write it in the calendar and don't fret. If it isn't required in your state, I wouldn't bother to take the state tests. In my opinion, all it does is invite state input into your home, and I think that is unnecessary stress.

Alternatively, if you want to check the grade level of your children, there are many curricula which have a "placement test" for placing your children into the proper grade. Feel free to utilize these programs, but again, don't fret. I don't use them. Every curriculum teaches information at different stages and levels. I try to keep my children in the grade level or above grade level as their peers. If a child is struggling to keep up in one area, consider adding supplemental resources at that time until the child is solid.

Socialization

I'm sure you've heard the myth that homeschooled kids aren't as prepared socially as peers in traditional schools. This is not true! Some of the sweetest, and most well-mannered children are homeschooled. They have excellent conversations and social skills. My children are confident speakers, and enjoy conversing with whomever they meet.

It's incredibly important to spend time talking with your children. Speak with them like they are intelligent human beings. They are! Include them in your adult conversations, and don't try to "dumb down" your speech when they are around.

Talking with your children intelligently, including them in adult conversation, and expecting their mature response is where they will learn the best social skills. Do not expect that "outside sources" will teach your children to socialize better than you can. In fact, use socialization as a way to get a "temperature" of the social skills of your child.

Regardless of the age of your children, it's very important that you find

other homeschoolers as a “home base.” Being able to bounce ideas off of other moms, and seeing them interact with their children, is a great way you can learn. Going to my local co-op has been an excellent way for me to connect with other parents.

Many co-ops have classes available for parents to volunteer or charge to teach classes. The co-op classes are meant for the children; however, adult relationships thrive during this time. Troubleshooting tough courses, curriculum ideas, and getting new ideas are only a few things that are beneficial for parents when you can be a member of a co-op.

Many local co-ops also do field trips together. Similarly to public schools, homeschoolers can get group rates, group tours, and special passes that are not available to the public. Oftentimes, co-op groups ask for field trip ideas, so keep a list of the places you'd like to share with your children.

Field trips are a fantastic way to be involved in a co-op, even if you don't have a “class day.” Your children will develop friendships with you close by, and they will have great learning experiences with other children. By taking advantage of field trips through a local homeschool co-op, you can expand your children's scope and experiences.

If co-ops aren't your thing, or if they don't fit in your schedule, you can also get your children involved in various interest groups. Groups and classes such as music, theater, sports, martial arts, swim, and gym classes are available in many communities. The diverse array of people who attend are an added benefit of interest groups for your kids. Use this type of experience for your child to develop relationships with children and adults of all ages and backgrounds.

Many churches also offer various groups that are available for children. For instance, Mothers Of Preschoolers (MOPS) is a nationwide program in which many churches participate. MOPs groups often meet during the daytime, and have child care available. Even though MOPS is for mothers, the children usually are spending time playing, doing crafts, and generally socializing.

For older children, consider checking out some youth groups in your community. Many churches have youth programs in which Christian teenagers get together to build friendships and learn more about faith. This is a great opportunity for your kids to build relationships within the church.

Another option, and one of my favorite ways to get my children socialized, is to allow them to work at a job. By encouraging your children to work, or to make a business of their own, it gives them ownership and pride. This type of socialization also allows your children to be around others who are working toward the same goal. You will find that a job will encourage your child to pursue excellent work ethics, and teach them the value of working hard.

For children who are too young to have a paying job, consider setting up an internship with a trusted adult who has a hobby or occupation that interests your child. Many children are interested to learn things that their parents are not knowledgeable about. By allowing your child to study from a new perspective, there is more opportunity for learning.

Curriculum

In this section, I am offering my personal experience in regards to curriculum. Please remember that many families are different, and what works for me may not be the best for your family. However, I have had great success with the choices I have made. The curriculum options I choose allow me to balance homeschooling five children and run my business successfully.

Self-Lead Learning

When you are running a business, a home, training your children, and homeschooling, you need time. You absolutely can't waste a single moment. What I have found profoundly helpful is teaching my children

to “self-teach”. Self-lead learning isn’t a new thing. In fact, if you think back to when schools were K-12 in one room, the children couldn’t all wait on their teacher for everything. They had to do their work on their own. Self-lead learning in the home is similar. Starting as soon as the child is holding a writing utensil, give them instruction, and walk away. Start this in small increments. You will feel like you are getting nowhere for a while, but it will sink in. I promise you.

After a time of walking away for a few minutes at a time, start to increase your time away. Give your child freedom to go ahead in their coloring books or workbooks. Encourage children who work by themselves without help. If they need your help, come to them for a short time and walk away again. This begins the habit of self-lead learning very early in your homeschooling.

If your child has been in public school before or is an older child, this process is much easier to begin. However, it may be something you still have to train. Be consistent. Walk away. If a child needs help in an area, and you cannot come right away, allow them to skip the problem and to move on. This solidifies in the mind of a child that they are capable of learning without your help. By the way, if you haven’t read the Parenting chapter in this book, don’t miss out. I discuss training in significant detail.

Self-lead learning is crucial to a mother with multiple children and to the business owner. You simply cannot sit every second beside your children while they learn. It’s not healthy for them, as they need to process and think for themselves. It’s also not healthy for you, as you’ll be stressing about all the things you need to get done.

When you are picking a curriculum, try to choose easy to understand material that does not require the teacher’s constant supervision. If you must get a teacher’s manual, chances are this is not a self-lead learning style of a curriculum.

Mastery vs. Spiral Learning

As your child progresses through school, you'll find lessons repeating themselves. You'll learn about the same presidents, the same history lessons, the same science lessons, and language lessons. Repeating is important because it solidifies precepts in your child's mind. As they get older, they will delve deeper into the subjects. Each time they learn about something, it will come with more information and they will learn more about it. This is common across all curricula.

Math curricula have a different approach: Mastery and Spiral. Allow me to introduce you to each concept so you will give your children the opportunity for success in math.

Mastery

Mastery-style math programs are what we grew up with prior to 2005. When you think of how you were taught addition, then subtraction, then multiplication, then division, it is mastery—the student “masters” a concept before proceeding to the next, more challenging step. A student spends countless days doing drills and flashcards. A student does worksheet after worksheet, and when they have completed the section, they are confident and sure-footed in the subject. Mastery doesn't leave much room for variety from day to day and can be boring for some students.

I prefer mastery curricula for math because it requires less of my intervention and teaching time. It allows my kids to do more lessons on their own, without my help. If I am going to be successful at running my home, teaching school, and running a business, time is something to be saved. My favorite math program for 3–8 grade is called Strayer Upton. It's very old-fashioned, but it is thorough and student paced. Unfortunately, this program is not self-grading. However, choosing mastery programs, gives me a

balanced approach to teaching math to my children.

Spiral

Many curricula are starting to embrace spiral math. You can think of spiral math like a spring or slinky. As you go up the spring, you are gaining momentum, but at a slower rate. The children will learn a little about this, and a little of that. The school work will seem below grade level in some cases, but in other cases, you feel that they are beyond their grade.

When we began our homeschool journey, I began with a spiral curriculum. It was very difficult for my children, which made it difficult for me. They struggled to remember everything they had been taught, only to introduce a new concept the next day. Because they didn't master a concept, there wasn't much practice, and I had to supplement the curriculum often. This required more thinking time and research on my part.

Many parents and children love the variety of spiral math programs. A favorite math program among my homeschool friends is Teaching Textbooks. It automatically grades and is very user friendly.

However, in my home, I need to be more hands-off than a spiral math program allows. This should be carefully considered as you choose a math curriculum.

The Littles and the Bigs

In my home we have a vast gap between two "sets" of children. We have the Littles and we have the Bigs. My Littles are ages three, five, and seven. My Bigs are fifteen and sixteen years old.

It's important that you recognize each age set of children have

similarities, but they also have different needs in your homeschooling.

Littles

Children who are younger than third grade are so much fun. This is the most impressionable time of their learning and when the joy of learning can manifest. They learn to read and they start to gobble up books. During this time, I find fun books they are interested in and let them pour over them. It's okay if they aren't classic books, and it's okay if there is a couple of pictures in the book. The point is for them to develop a love for reading. My seven-year-old is reading a set of dragon books right now. The subject matter is definitely not my style, but the books are clean reading, and her vocabulary is exploding!

Many parents struggle with their children not wanting to read. However, if you get the books they are excited to read, and you encourage them to read, and even schedule a time for them to read, they will blossom.

Littles are easy to purchase curriculum for as well. I typically find workbooks on Amazon for any children who are below third grade. This is affordable and also a great way for children to have a sense of ownership as the books are generally easy to maneuver with self-lead learning. I love the depth of Christian curricula that have amazing options. However, for young students, I have discovered that Spectrum or 180 Days brands are absolutely perfect.

Remember to check with your homeschool state laws to see what subjects you need to teach. It's important that you teach a well-rounded curriculum.

Please don't forget to get your child a good Bible program. A new favorite of mine is Bob Jones Video Learning for our Bible class. It's a video that guides the entire year of Bible class and all of my Littles

can participate. That's a half-hour gained to take a shower or put some dinner on while the babies learn about Jesus. Perfect.

Utilize programs that multiple children can share the learning together. For instance, The Bible program that I just mentioned is perfect for my Littles to do together. They can talk about it with each other and sit together to watch it. This encourages kindness with each other and friendship between them as well.

Another idea is to use audio programs for your children. An example of this would be listening to audiobooks on historical figures. Set the timer for thirty minutes, and you have an excellent history lesson that requires nothing of you. Some parents like to take this approach if they are spending time in a vehicle. I personally enjoy using this time as practice for them to sit still and listen intently. This year I ordered Story of the World as our history curriculum for the Littles. They love it, and it gives me a few minutes to get chores done. There are workbooks and tests available online for this audiobook. However, I choose to allow them to soak it all in at this age without the stress of a workbook for history. Another amazing audio option is "YWAM." They come on CDs or MP3s and they focus on historical figures in great detail.

Before third grade, you want to get your child familiar with a computer. This can be in the form of educational games (also saving time for you while keeping them busy), and typing practice. In third grade, most online and digital curricula become available, and you may want to take advantage of one. It'll change your homeschool for the better!

The final thing that I want to mention about Littles, and this might come as a shock: I don't keep daily lesson plans. At the beginning of the year, I write a plan as far as what books I'll be using and what the children are going to learn. However, when it comes to the day-

to-day teaching, I don't write a plan.

Here's what I do instead:

At the beginning of the year, I make a weekly chart for each child. Each day of the week has a checklist of subjects to do. The children, who are self-directed learners, see what they need to do, go to the next page in their book, and they do it! I use the same chart for the entire year.

When you homeschool, things change all the time; someone gets sick, you go to the library instead of a history lesson, or any number of reasons plans will change. By not having a daily lesson plan, I am free to change up my homeschool as I need to. This was a huge area of stress that the Lord freed me from. I implore you: do not get bogged down by your school planner. It isn't healthy for you to stress about it.

Bigs

After third grade, things start to pick up in learning intensity. This is the time when math programs really start to “amp” up, and when online courses become available. By the time your child is in third grade, it's a good idea for them to know how to use a computer. They should have control over the mouse and have a general idea of where the keys are to type. They should also understand how to navigate through tabs on a browser and find things on the computer.

Once a child is older than third grade, this is where you will want to choose your math program carefully. You'll need to decide which direction you want to go. Once you start down mastery, it's best to stay with it. If you start down the spiral path, it's difficult to transition into mastery. However, it can be done—don't let me scare you. Remember, I started with spiral and went to mastery. It set us

back a little at the time, but we caught up with a two-year plan.

In third grade, you'll also find the requirements of spelling and language arts programs increase for students. It's important during the third- and fourth-grade years to not go overboard with trying to do too much. You'll overwhelm your child and they could start to have a distaste for school. If you choose to try too many subjects or too many books, you'll get overwhelmed and not have time for your morning coffee, much less your business. This is not balanced.

By fifth grade, I would highly recommend you take advantage of some of the online programs that are available for parents. There are academies where a teacher will literally teach your children at home (these are extremely expensive). There are also more affordable parent-lead programs which self-grade their work.

The self-grading program I use is called "Monarch." It's easy for me, and it's a blessing for my children. I have to read and grade essays, but the program stores everything and does most of the grading tasks for me. The program sets up the children's daily tasks and you can adjust your schedule at any time. In fact, if you take off a day, it will recalibrate your lesson plans too! You won't have to touch a thing!

As your children's workload increases, I strongly suggest getting a self-guided program. Find a program that does not include a teacher's manual. A self-grading program is best. Our homeschool opportunities in 2020 are incredible. Please use the wonderful resources available to us, so you can stay at home with your children and run your home business.

Something else to think about with older children is the concept of open- or closed-book learning. When I was young, the schools used the closed-book method. "Closed book" is when a child has to memorize things for a test or quiz. Open book is when a child is

allowed to find the answer in a book or on Google.

Some people are preoccupied with teaching how to know from heart how to do everything, when in reality, a quick YouTube or Google search can provide the answers to nearly anything! I want my children to know how to find the answer to any question they have...not necessarily to know it all from the start.

In my life as a successful adult, I use an open-book method. If I can't remember a fact, or if I need help to do an algebraic equation, I look it up on Google. I use this same method for teaching my children to be successful in life.

In fact, I use open books for tests and quizzes as well. This not only empowers them to get their school done well, but it allows them the same resources we have, as adults, in the real world.

The greatest thing you can give your child is the ability to know how to learn, and to find the answers that will make them successful. In my homeschool, I encourage my children to find the answer to their questions on their own. This not only drives them in their self-lead learning, but it also teaches them how to find answers without dependency on others. It teaches your children how easy it is to look it up in a book, or how easy it is to look it up online.

My disclaimer though? They aren't allowed to get less than ninety percent. In my opinion, there is no reason they should get anything wrong with the open-book method. If they get less than ninety percent, they are required to wipe the lesson and do the entire thing over again.

Another thing to consider in regards to the open-book method is our relationship with God. The Bible is God's Word, and 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says: "All Scripture is breathed out by God and

profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work” (ESV).

As Christians, we are instructed to use the Bible to learn, teach, correct, and train. We are always allowed and encouraged to be reading the Bible as our source of truth. The Bible is an “open book” for us so “that the man of God may be competent” (2 Timothy 3:17). I believe my school should take the same approach.

By having the open-book system in place, my children are incredible learners. They are well beyond their grade levels and retain much more knowledge than I ever did in high school.

On top of all that, it also gives me the ability to be nearly hands-off. It keeps me from getting frustrated at them or feeling like we need to work on something a little more. If they don’t understand the lesson, they search their books, they watch videos, they read articles—anything to understand it. It’s freeing to me and completely teaches my children in ways I never could. As you set up your homeschool, please consider allowing your children to use an open-book method. At least in part. You’ll find their learning and confidence skyrockets.

School Files

Once you decide to homeschool, and keep records, you’ll need a place to keep them. I buy plastic filing boxes with lids where I keep all of my children’s things for each year. I also have a “master” box, in which I keep the extra important things I will discuss later.

Student Work Files

The “Student Work Files” are the files I work with each year. Each year gets a box, and all of the articles I keep for each child go into the box.

Sometimes I keep entire workbooks in these files. It doesn't have to be a lot, but should be enough to show the state the progress the children have made if you were ever audited.

Important Files

This is a separate box that has our most important documents in it. I'm including some important documents I have in my important files. You may add more or less throughout your homeschooling adventure.

Cumulative Record Per Child

The Cumulative Record is a file folder that will allow you to keep track of your child's subjects and grades. It also has important school location information: address, contact information, academic record, and graduation date. If you pull your child out of public school, your children already have a cumulative record. You should get any files the public school has so you can add it to their individual file.

The Cumulative Record is also an excellent place to store awards and achievements your student has received. You can purchase these files on Amazon or ChristianBook.com.

Reason for Homeschooling

As we discussed earlier in this chapter, it is important to have a reason for homeschooling written and signed. Keep a copy of this document in your important files.

HSLDA Paperwork

The HSLDA will give you a phone number and information to call if there is ever an issue with the school system or state. It is important to always keep the most updated copy of your HSLDA

membership available. This is also an excellent place to keep any state requirements you've printed.

High School Plan

If you have high schoolers, you'll want to have a plan mapped out for them in regards to what classes they will be taking so they can get all the credits required. This is a good idea to keep in this box, or in the cumulative record of the child.

School Year Goals

Each school year, you will make goals and plan for your homeschool. It's a good idea to put it in their Cumulative folder. Many families choose to do one document instead of individual student goals. This would need to be saved in the important files as well.

Using Business to Enhance Learning

If you are a business owner or are soon to be a business owner, it's a wise idea to include your children in your work. This will help them understand your goals and how important it is that they do their part. Your child inherently wants to please you, so show them how they can help you.

When your children see that you love something, or are passionate about your business, they will want to be involved. Sometimes, they might not be crazy about the process, but will come to enjoy being part of the family business. They will feel included and needed. On top of that, to include your children in your business also means you can get more work done. I've included a small list of ideas your children can help you with. This is very small, and can't compare to the infinite options you can dream up for your children.

Typing Projects

Remember what I said about typing? By the time your child is in third grade, you can have them type projects or notes for you. This is an excellent skill and helpful for you! Simply have them type out your handwritten notes, or have them write some reviews. You'll be surprised at how well they take to such tasks. Not only is this excellent practice at typing and gathering information, but it is also an opportunity for language skills, spelling, and grammar.

Organizing

We discussed structure and organizing in Chapter 2, but are you aware that your children can and should be helping you organize? Whether you are having Littles organize your buttons, or your Bigs organizing your product photos, this is an excellent way to involve your children.

Article Writing

An excellent way older children can improve their language and writing skills is to have them write articles for your business. It's a learning curve, but absolutely worth putting the effort into teaching.

Idea-Forming

Littles and Bigs enjoy this practice so much you'll need to take notes! Get your children involved in the brainstorm process. Encourage their goofy ideas as well as the impossible ones. Then discuss these ideas and see which ones would be a valuable asset to your business. What an amazing boost to your children to see their ideas utilized in their family's business! We want our children to be creative and to make the impossible possible. This is so important to teach them, and your business is the perfect outlet for them to see it in practice.

Product-Making

Do you have a physical product you make and sell? Maybe you make

soap, or jewelry, or clothes. Maybe you are a woodworker, or an artist. Regardless of what your business is, let your children work at it with you. Let them help you pour the soap. Let them help you organize the jewelry and string some beads. Let them help you sew a little and snip some strings. Regardless of your product, encourage and allow your children to be creative with you.

Product Packaging

If you ship goods, let your children help you print labels and package. This will make a tedious job much more fun, and give them a life skill.

Article and Information Learning

If your business requires a learning curve, give your children the tools that they will need to help you. For instance, if your business requires photo editing, have your child take an online class in Photoshop. If your business requires research, have your child do research for you!

Hired Jobs

I'll talk more about hiring jobs in Chapter 10: Gaining Traction, but I just want to insert a snippet here: Your kids need money and a paying job too. If you have older children who are capable of learning how to manage your Facebook, send e-mails, to manage Instagram or customer service, train and hire them to work for you. It will give them life skills and a wonderful way they can earn money while being part of the family business.

Homeschool Day-to-Day Structure

In Chapter 2: Structure, we discussed how to incorporate structure into your home. So what does a structured schedule look like? I know you're wondering how to fit it all in, so I wanted to write out a typical schedule I work with. Please feel free to modify my example to fit your own parenting style and children's needs.

6:00 a.m.

This is my time. I sip my coffee, read my Bible, and think. I have two notebooks with me; one is my “prayer” journal, and the other is my regular journal. I turn my regular journal to a new page and use it as a “thinking” page. I believe that I am most creative and clear-headed at this time of day.

My Bible reading and prayer will often spur some thoughts about business, so I want to have a separate place to write them down. This has proved to be the most valuable part of my day. I also like to write a small list of my plans for the day during this time. I discussed this at length in Chapter 4: Spiritual Health.

7:00 a.m.

This is my Bigs’ time to get up. They stay in their room or bathroom. They have reading time to themselves, and also get ready for the day. This is also when I get myself prepared for the day and do anything that I need to do before little feet hit the ground.

8:00 a.m.

This is when the Littles come out of their rooms. They brush their teeth, start their morning chores, and everyone gathers for breakfast. During breakfast, we discuss the day’s events and anything else that we need to have a family discussion about. Remember how I told you about the light-up clock? This clock is exactly how I taught my young children to stay in their beds until eight.

8:30–9:00 a.m.

This is when we have family Bible reading or discussion of anything pressing. We typically will read one chapter together, discuss, pray, and go on our way.

After Bible time, my husband works, my Bigs begin a load of laundry, clean up breakfast dishes, feed the animals, and go do school (usually in their room or basement), and my Littles are ready to start their day.

During this time, we prepare food for the day. Lunch items like rice or beans are perfect for cooking early. Dinner items like meats or soups are easily made at this time as well. The Littles finish unloading the dishwasher, gather remaining laundry, and water our plants. This is not playtime, and the children know that when they are done with their chores, we begin our school day. My Littles all have their own duties to do, and they do them each day.

10:00–10:30 a.m.

This is when we begin our school day with the Littles. We start by sitting down in the living room and doing our Bible lesson. Bible is always first because it's the most important. If you get nothing else done in your day, Bible class is the one you should aim for. Because we are doing Bible class on video, it gives me time to shower or finish any dinner plans, garden picking, cleaning, or a quick phone call. It's also a great time to get some sit-ups and push-ups in.

11:00 a.m.

Once the Bible lesson is over, we move on to our remaining subjects. I like to do reading lessons with my two smallest children, while the third does schoolwork independently. When reading is finished, we work on other bookwork until lunchtime.

12:00 p.m.

Lunch time. Everyone meets for lunch. We discuss our school and anything else that we can laugh about. After lunch, the Bigs do some clean-up while the littles play outside, or have Lego® time on rainy days.

Rainy days are also a great time to play educational computer games for computer learning. I prefer this to be free-play time for my littles.

1:00–3:00 p.m.

Rest time for the two littlest, school time for middle, and school time for Bigs. This is also the time that I use for my business. In fact, I try to work from 1–5 twice per week if I can plan ahead. My children know that they cannot interrupt me. If the school gets finished, the remainder of the rest time is for reading only. If the Bigs finish school during this time, they do their chores, music practice, or exercise.

I also like to use this time to take a thirty-minute walk a couple of times a week. It's easy to do some more in-depth learning for your business while you walk on the treadmill. You may also have client phone calls while you are walking. Utilize time, sister.

3:00 p.m.

Snack time. Everyone always wakes up and comes running for snack time. I'll typically have my Bigs make a snack for my Littles, but if you don't have Bigs of your own, it would be easy to have string cheese and an apple on hand. After snack time, we have a history or literature lesson. I like to listen to our history lesson on audio to get some sit time in for the children. This also allows me to finish whatever business project I was working on before snack.

4:00 p.m.

Errand time. If we are going to go to the library or the grocery store, this is the time of day that I prefer to do it. If I'm not doing errands, the children have free play time while I do other things that need to get done. I do things like meal planning, garden tending, cleaning, etc. This is also a great time of day to connect with the older children, give

them jobs to do with the business, or have a phone call with a friend. The children can also play computer games or do a typing lesson at this time. We greatly enjoy using YouTube channels for art learning and extra science lessons.

If I have a babysitter or grandparent that is planning to spend time with my children while I work, this is the time that I plan it. I will also often use this opportunity for busy boxes for my Littles. I'll talk more about this later.

6:00 p.m.

Dinner time. We all convene for dinner at this time. After dinner, we clean up and usually do something together, whether it is a game or a movie. Sometimes we go for walks, and sometimes we even exercise together. If the Bigs have youth group, this is when they would leave to do that. My husband and I love to communicate during this time, and we have two hours of just being together as a family without distraction.

8:00 p.m.

Bed time. This is when the Littles go to bed. I'll try to get some work done after they go to sleep. I'm usually in bed sleeping by 9:30–10:00 p.m. Sometimes you'll find me up until 11 p.m. though when I'm finishing a project.

9:00 p.m.

Curfew for Bigs. Just thought I'd mention it.

This schedule is fantastic for a Monday–Friday routine. It allows about fifteen to twenty-five hours' worth of work per week. Some parents even choose to continue through Saturday with Sundays off. You'll learn to greatly appreciate the freedom it gives you from complaining children,

because they will automatically go to the next structured part of your day. It takes practice, but it's well worth the effort.

Any grandma time or weekend time is a bonus for work. If you have a co-op or playgroup your children get to attend, use that time for action! If you have plans in the morning for your children to have a playdate, use this time. You'll get tasks done while they play, and you can swap your school to the afternoon.

Fifteen to twenty-five hours might not be enough work time for you during the week. Sometimes I also have that dilemma. During these times, it's perfectly acceptable to work for an entire day once per week. Older children can do school without your help. However, younger children need something to do. During these days, I will ask a grandparent or a friend to spend time with the small children for one day per week (I usually do Fridays). If you are comfortable with a daycare setting, this is also an option, but my least favorite.

You can do this, mama. It is totally possible to run a business and homeschool your children.

If you have very young children who are not school age, here is a small list of ideas that I have used successfully during the school day. These are great ideas to gain time for work, or to help my other children during homeschool lessons.

Practice Sit Time

Practicing sit time is extremely beneficial for the brain of the child. It teaches them self-control and gives them the ability to be creative. Before I have the children sit, I give them a project. I lay a blanket on the floor for them to practice. They must stay on the blanket at all times during sit times. I'll set the timer for them for a short time. For the duration of the timer, they can do the project I have given them quietly as long as they do not leave the blanket. For very young children, this

needs to be practiced to work up to the desired time. I talk in detail about projects and how I structure my children's sit time in Chapter 2: Structure.

Movie in the Afternoon

After naptime, let them watch a movie or educational show. I never allow my children to watch TV or be on a device before naptime (other than schoolwork). Otherwise, we find that children struggle to be kind during the day. In Chapter 2: Structure, there are more ideas on educational videos.

Naptime or Reading Time

This is an absolute must. If your child doesn't nap, they still need rest time. They need a good two-hour reset time. Let them have books on their bed, but make them rest. This would also be a great time to play an audiobook for them while they are in their bed resting.

Creative Time

This is a great time to get out the washable markers and a stack of coloring books.

Not Alone

The final thing that I'd like to share with you in this chapter is this: don't do it alone. If you are choosing to homeschool your children, find a parent in your area who homeschools successfully. As uncomfortable as it might be to "force yourself" into someone's life, decide to become friends with someone you can learn from. In Chapter 3: Adult Relationships, I discuss friendships and healthy relationships that help you to learn.

If someone begins a diet, they are most successful if they do it with another person. This is why there are diet support groups. It's the same with an

exercise program. People hire personal trainers not for continued exercise tutorials, but for being held accountable and consistent support.

The Apostle Paul, the greatest evangelist in the New Testament, brought friends with him on his missionary journeys. In fact, his dependence on his friendships significantly helped him to be more successful to reach more people.

In Acts 18, we learn that Paul left his friend Silas behind in Athens and went ahead to Corinth to preach. While he was in Corinth, he met a man who was a tent maker, and allowed Paul to work with him (Paul was a tent maker by trade). Paul was able to do ministry in all of his spare time, but he was limited because he still had to make a living with tent making. Silas and Timothy eventually met up with Paul in Corinth, and the Bible says that Paul was able to “spend all his time preaching the Word.” I assume this means that Silas and Timothy worked on tents for Paul so that he could put everything into the ministry. By Paul’s friends coming to support him, Paul was able to take the gospel further than imagined. If we imagine the scene, I bet that Paul was greatly encouraged by the presence of his friends. Imagine the deep conversations, thankfulness, and prayer they would have had together. Paul needed this support of friendships to continue his work successfully.

Still considering Paul, there are multiple times in the New Testament in which he asks for prayer. He is constantly thankful for the support and friendship received from the churches. He never leads someone to think that he can do things on his own. Rather, he is an excellent example of how important it is to depend on others in important matters.

People are always most successful when they are supported by friends. Don’t try to homeschool without support. You’ve got this, mama!

Points to Ponder:

Where can you improve or begin right away in your homeschool?

What are the things you've learned that you'd like to implement soon?

What is the most important part of the day in your family?

How can you use the most important part of the day to structure your household?

Write a daily schedule that includes school time and work time

Dear Reader,

If you have learned and benefitted from this chapter, please consider reading the book in entirety. Homeschooling will become a large portion of your life if you choose to partake in educating your children. However, there are many other parts to your life than schooling. To manage balance between a business, motherhood, and a spouse can be challenging. Let me walk you through the process of balancing your life so that you can be the best Proverbs 31 woman that you can be.

Visit ElizabethSingler.com to get your copy today.

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Elizabeth