

The Clark Crew: Homeschooling Imperfectly

By Shanna Clark

I sit here reflecting on our school week, trying to think of something encouraging to say or to share with you. However, all I can think about is how we have completely thrown our lesson plans out of the window this week. You see, our home has been invaded with a nasty little stomach bug, and our kids have been passing it back and forth for a full seven days with seemingly no end in sight. Because of the illness, there has not been one day when each child has completed all of his or her lessons. I'm thankful that this is my eighth year of homeschool and not my first. During my first year of homeschool, I would have been devastated about all of the missed lessons, scrambling to try and make them up, but in my eighth year I have finally achieved a sense of calm confidence. My idea of the "perfect homeschool day" has changed drastically from when I first began. My husband and I have been blessed with eight children. This year we have children in sixth, fifth, fourth, and second grades. We also have a kindergartener, preschooler, and two toddlers. Our days are always hectic, sometimes chaotic, often imperfect, but mostly fun! Generally when people hear of both our family size and the fact that we homeschool, they gasp and ask the same question: "How do you do it?!" I always smile and reply that we take things one day at a time, sometimes one moment at a time, and we pray a lot! But every once in a while I have a fellow homeschool mom ask me that question and I know that she is looking for a very practical answer. So, I will try to provide you with that here.

The first thing I do is to spend a significant amount of time researching our curricula picks each year. I consider what we used the prior year and if it worked well or not. I seek out the opinions of friends when considering a new curriculum and read reviews from other homeschool moms online (such as reviews from the Schoolhouse Review Crew). Then I choose carefully, taking into consideration each child's learning styles, my preferred teaching style, and any upcoming events (like if we will have a new baby, a nursing baby, an active toddler, etc.) that school year. I don't get hung up on using the same curricula each year just because we've used it in the past. Perhaps perfect homeschoolers use the same curricula to avoid any "gaps" in their child's education, but we're imperfect, remember? We go with what works for us and promptly get rid of anything that makes me want to pull my hair out! Each of our children is on a different level of math and reading/language arts, but I like to teach many subjects to all of our children as a family. We do Bible, science, history, read-alouds, and many elective courses all together. Not only does this make teaching more manageable for me, but we also actually prefer learning this way. This year we are really enjoying using Teaching Textbooks for math and Sonlight for language arts. *Mystery of History* has worked perfectly to use with the whole family, and we have also been using *God's Design for Science* by AIG. My favorite part of the day is reading through Apologia's What We Believe series with the kids and then following that up with a great read-aloud. This year we are learning about missionaries and reading through the Christian Heroes: Then and Now series (YWAM Publishing).

Have you ever gotten through your school day only to realize you spent the entire day working with your oldest child, completely ignoring your little one's studies? You rationalize that you still have plenty of time to teach him simple addition . . . (I have done this!) Also, have you ever noticed how excited the little ones are to learn, asking over and over, "Is it *my* turn to do school yet?!" For that reason, I always begin my day by working with my youngest students. This ensures that I will get school done with the little ones, and they are more likely to play happily while I am working with the big ones since they have already had their turn. I usually work one-on-two with each of the children for about an hour, starting with my youngest and ending with my oldest. Our older kids have independent

work that they do as well. We can usually accomplish those goals before lunch. After lunch we gather in the living room for a read-aloud and other family studies. When I schedule our week's lessons, I try to think in terms of "What do I want each child to complete *this week?*" instead of *each day*. I know that a stomach bug isn't the only thing that can turn our day upside down. A potty-training 2-year-old, a dinner disaster, an unexpected errand, or a doctor's appointment are a few of the things that can interrupt our school on any given day. Sometimes that means that a child may complete five lessons of math in three days, but once again, that's okay! I purposely schedule Friday as a light homeschool day so that we can make up any lessons that we missed earlier that week. Finally, I told you that in our eighth year of homeschooling I have achieved a sense of calm confidence. That confidence is not in the fact that we have it all figured out perfectly. Instead that confidence comes from the One Who is perfect. Psalm 18:30 says, "As for God, his way is perfect," and Psalm 18:32 says, "It is God who girdeth me with strength, and maketh my way perfect." Does God care if we finish every last lesson of the science text? Probably not. I must let go of my idea of perfection and by His strength, walk forward in His.

"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33).

Shanna Clark is a wife and homeschool mom of eight children. She is the author of [Pink and Blue and Homeschool, Too: Ideas for the Homeschool Family Adjusting to Life With a New Baby](#) and the creator of [Integritas Academy File Folder Games](#). In addition to homeschooling, she enjoys reading, crocheting, and blogging at her blog, [Learning At His Feet](#)

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