

## **Homeschooling When It's Harder Than You Bargained For**

**By Kendra Fletcher**

When we begin homeschooling, we can't always foresee that inevitably there will be months, perhaps even years, that threaten to sink us. We start with a plan, whether it's a preorganized and carefully controlled curriculum, or an eclectic mix we've pieced together ourselves with our children's strengths and weaknesses in mind.

We design our days to give us the most bang for our buck, stacking schoolwork together in the morning to get it all done and to leave us room for the non-negotiables such as laundry and meal prep or the fun stuff like dance lessons and sports teams. Once we get in a groove, our school days can run like a well-oiled machine.

And then life unfolds.

I had been officially homeschooling for one year when I became pregnant with our fourth child and the sixteen weeks of unrelenting morning sickness kicked in. I would fill big Tupperware bowls with Cheerios and leave them on the floor of my bedroom so my kids could feed themselves breakfast while watching Sesame Street. I couldn't muster the strength to get out of bed, day after day, week after week. Still, school had to happen. Life was progressing with or without me, no matter how many times per day I found myself crouched over the toilet.

A child who screamed for the first fifteen months of her life. A coyote attack on our chicken coop. A baby in a coma. An accident involving our twelve-passenger van and a 5-year-old. A ruptured appendix and three weeks in the hospital. I'm not waxing poetic or pulling examples out of my imagination; these are the events that have marked the fourteen years of our homeschooling. These are the real experiences that occurred when we least expected them and always by the grand sovereign design of the One Who loves us most.

I didn't plan for my school years to go in such a direction, but God did, and I am thankful for the refining He has done in our family as a result. You won't always be able to plan for hardship either, but be on the lookout for it; this homeschooling endeavor can be way harder than we bargained for.

My friends, sisters Catherine and Caroline, have spent this last year at the mercy of their father's cancer. He was an attentive, Godly dad whom they adored and who enjoyed a meaningful marriage with their mother. His diagnosis was devastating to them all, even with the knowledge that his eternity was secure in the arms of Jesus. Months of driving three hours one-way to the VA hospital each week, strokes that took away his ability to speak, cancer that racked his body with pain and weight loss and horror.

Catherine is a self-professed control freak who had a difficult time laying her homeschool agenda aside during the time that she so dearly wanted to be caring for her dad. She wrote to me:

As my dad's illness progressed quickly, the importance of spending quality time with him became more important than keeping up with schooling. God brought a desire to my heart to show my daughters a different kind of lesson and that was one of serving others. Dad lived in our house until the day he died. My kids learned in all those months how to care for

someone who was very ill. They kissed my dad's bald head and hugged him and told him they loved him. They read books with him, and we also did a number of lessons in The Mystery of History together. Even after my dad lost the ability to speak, he still fumbled through the pages of his Bible in search of the perfect verse to share with my kids about what we had just studied. It was awesome!

When Dad couldn't feed himself or when he had food dribbling down his face, the girls learned to help feed him or gently wipe his face. When his final days on earth were here, my kids and their cousins boldly stood at the foot of his bed and sang to him. They held his boney hands and they kissed his sunken cheeks. They told their grandpa how much they loved him and they spoke of the lessons he had taught them. Lessons of God's grace, mercy and love.

While life was hard, we still schooled. We just did it very differently. Math and reading happened some days, but our main focus became our family and the place the Lord had us at that moment—smack dab in the middle of my dad's illness. Dad needed his family, so we studied life lessons that taught strength and character. My kids learned how to be compassionate and caring in the most difficult of circumstances. They watched as our family did their best to glorify the Lord. But most importantly they learned that God has a purpose in everything and that He is always good.

Catherine didn't plan for her school year to go in such a direction, but God did, and she is thankful for the refining He has done in their family as a result. The lessons learned this year by their entire family are life-changing and lifelong.

And then there's Dana, who has been homeschooling her four children for the past ten years. Last year her sister's children suddenly came to be in her home, and she instantly had three new students. Dana had to rethink everything, including the curriculum she had chosen for her own children. She's had to relinquish control and learn to listen to God:

Yes, I have had to learn to depend on Him. Homeschooling alone will do that to a person. But it takes the trials and harder times to really cement what you know is true. That the one true God is dependable, in control, and will write on your page what is His best for you. I feel inadequate to do what He has called us to do because I know my hang-ups. I feel tighter with Him because He asked this of us and made it clear we must totally depend on Him. I had big plans for this school year. God had bigger ones. I had to look at what He gave me and willingly set mine aside. His were better, for our best.

And that's always the key, isn't it? In the toughest, most trying times, when we feel we cannot possibly do what God is calling us to do, He refashions, remakes, rewrites, and redeems. We have to remind ourselves that in and above it all stands the God Who loves us more than we will ever love ourselves or each other, and that He has written our stories for His glory. Our plans are good if they are a means to an end, but if they become the means that undo us because we cannot rejoice in the afflictions that change the course of those plans, we are in bondage to a dream of homeschooling that was never God's intention.

He loves you unimaginably, and maybe most especially, because when you are weak, He is strong.

*Deuteronomy 7:9: "Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments . . . ."*

*Kendra Fletcher is the homeschooling mother of eight, aged 19 down to 4. She has never known what it means to homeschool without the presence of preschoolers and loves to encourage other moms who are beginning their homeschool journeys with little ones underfoot. Kendra reviews for the TOS Homeschool Crew and is the author of a popular E-Book about creating a Circle Time for your homeschool. Her website and blog can be found at [www.preschoolersandpeace.com](http://www.preschoolersandpeace.com).*

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