



You weren't meant to do this on your own. Whether it's day one or year ten of your homeschooling journey, you can draw from this well of wisdom and encouragement! McCarthy helps create a culture at home that fortifies hearts and sharpens young minds.

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Where Do I Begin?

Not all of us will feel “called” to homeschool. Your beginnings may not be marked by warm and fuzzy feelings, and you may not have a carefully laid out plan or a big support system. I have learned that although all beginnings are different, there is hope in homeschooling for us all. Whether you are just beginning or are at the start of another year of homeschooling, you have purposed to do it well. This is all that really matters. My story isn’t yours, but I hope my beginnings will inspire you to start strong and stay the course.

Our first day of homeschooling will always be my favorite memory in this journey. What is so amazing is that I don’t remember experiencing fear, nervousness, indecision, or worry. What we *did* have that day were two used wooden school desks set in the corner of an end room in the trailer we were renting at the time; a simple chalkboard hung on the wall; and an excited “showing up” on our first day of school.

I had started with a dream to homeschool my children. The early years of parenting afforded me the time and an awareness that what my children learned now would affect their future. With a vision

to teach my children in the way they each learned uniquely, I had a purpose to be their primary teacher in life and learning. My dream, my vision, and my purpose propelled me to the end of each year since and served as the pillars of my schedules, my curriculum, my expectations, and my focus from the moment I woke up.

My two kids didn't know homeschooling was all new to me. They never asked me if I had a degree or which curriculum we would be using each year. We just began, used what we had, and enjoyed our time together. Our family created a lifestyle of learning. I asked others for help and wisdom and asked Jesus to guide us every single moment. Literally.

Homeschooling may be the hardest job you will ever love.

I am sure you didn't make this decision lightly. Homeschooling is a big decision, and you are most likely feeling the weight, worry, doubt, and concern that *maybe* it wasn't the right decision for you or your family. This decision also comes with excitement, anticipation, and fun! Homeschooling decisions are different for everyone. Most likely you made this decision for your family and didn't really take yourself into consideration when you said yes to homeschooling. Now you are wondering where to begin, looking around at what everyone else is doing, and making the best plans for the best education for your children.

What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear this question about homeschooling: "Where do I begin?" Do you think of a homeschool space and how to set it up? How to choose curriculum or set schedules? Maybe you wonder who to talk to

and what the advantages and disadvantages of homeschooling are. Whether this is your first rodeo, or you've been in this for a while, the same questions apply. We don't always need to re-create the wheel, especially when something is working; but every summer, we all should and need to ask ourselves, "Where do I begin?"

Always begin with your *why*. Remembering *why* you chose this path will inform your *how*. My beginnings were marked with the purpose to redeem every minute I had with my children as they were growing up. I purposed to teach them those things I believed to be the most important. I knew I didn't want the world and its influences to have first dibs on their heart. I wanted to help my children thrive in their schoolwork and not feel like a number waiting for help. I chose to homeschool to show them God's faithfulness in the little and big things of life. I didn't choose to homeschool my children because I was prepared or had it all figured out. I chose to homeschool because I knew why I wanted to, and in some ways, felt deep down that I needed to.

Let's take a deep breath here. Even if you have a clearer idea of your why, you'll still have doubts. Consider the list below:

- You may be a confident person, but homeschooling scares you.
- You may not be a worrier, but homeschooling has you a little (or a lot) stressed.
- You may not consider yourself a teacher, but now you feel the pressure to "become something you are not."

When doubt creeps into the cracks of my calling and my convictions, I have learned to stop, step back, consider, remember,

and remind myself of the following: there is a bigger picture than what is before me right now.

Now read the sentence below aloud:

I am a significant small piece of God's larger plan.

There will be more fruit and reward than the hardest part of this right in front of us. We just can't see it yet. However, we can put our trust in the Creator of all things good and right and perfect, who has us on His mind and always held in His hands. He holds creation in His power and plan every day, so why does this one thing seem to be too big right now? We aren't invincible and how we do in this decision and how we get through this journey matters just as much as our children's education.

Our homeschooling *why* will grow as we go. It may feel weak and full of the unknown today, but someday, we will look back and see the reward. We trust the process because God knows the end before we begin, and we place our trust and confidence daily in His care and provision.

CREATE A WHY VISION AND STATEMENT

Casting your doubts aside and resting in the assurance that your abilities and confidence will grow with you as you go is your first step to creating a strong vision that will last. I have been homeschooling for three decades, and the vision I had from the beginning has not only sustained me but has come full circle with more blessings than I could have ever imagined.

There may be a lot of voices, or even feelings of fear, that have propelled you to choose homeschooling for you and your family. When you are in the middle of your longest days of homeschooling, those people, opinions, and emotions will not sustain you. Take time to consider the *who* you are homeschooling and the *how* this will look for your family.

Even better, start with the answers to *why* questions like these:

Do you see amazing opportunities to spend more time with
your children,
... to grow closer as a family,
... to teach them uniquely and diligently in the way they
should go?

Can you see the possibilities to give them more one-on-one
time on focus areas,
... to come alongside them in their struggles,
... to grow their gifts and to walk with them in their relationship with the Lord?

Having a *why* vision and statement can help keep you rooted and grounded when days are hard.

Read the section below, adapted from Deuteronomy 6:5–9, and consider your vision and purpose in homeschooling based on the highlighted bullet points below. It is with His wisdom and guidance we can find excitement and hope for the mornings we rise and are weary or face obstacles along the way. These verses are a wonderful model for your homeschooling and can be a placeholder for the days when you may lose sight of your vision.

“Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.”

Deuteronomy 6:5–9 (NIV)

“Love the LORD your God with all your heart”

- Devotion is the best way to sum up the first part of this verse from Deuteronomy. There is no doubt I love my children. If I have been called to homeschool, then my devotion to God and my children are my priorities.
- God called me to homeschooling and will be with me through every step.
- When God calls me to something, He loves me enough to equip me for what is before me.
- God has my whole heart and not just the pieces or parts that are comfortable and easy; He will grow me and strengthen me as we do this together.
- Am I making time for God on a personal level? Does my relationship with Him reflect His love in my life and home?
- Homeschooling will give me more time to model godliness and teach my children about God and His character, attributes, and truths.
- How will I live this out in my homeschooling?
- How can I learn more about God’s love and learn about Him in my homeschooling?

“And with all your soul”

- How do I homeschool my children when I am weary and tired?
- He has provided me with prayer, worship, communion, and time to refresh my soul.
- Loving God with all my soul will restore and refresh me in lonely moments.
- Homeschooling doesn't have to be a dry and barren land where we are forgotten, and our souls are desperate and weary.
- He sustains us in all we do for Him.
- I can direct my homeschooling prayers and petitions to the Lord of my life, just as in any other area.
- A satisfied soul can overflow into my homeschool.

“And with all your strength”

- Rather than considering time with God and building a relationship as extra things to “fit in,” I can remember this is the closest and most dear relationship I will have.
- My time and devotion in knowing God's love will transfer into my homeschooling as I model and teach my children His example.
- When we serve too many masters, our devotion is spread thin. Homeschooling to grow and strengthen our family's love for God is a “why” I cannot ignore. We all will reap fruit in abundance.

“These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts”

- As my heart receives His commands, I will walk in His ways daily.
- When I recognize something of value, I invest in it. There is no greater reward than to train my children to love the Lord with all their heart, soul, and strength (and mind).

“Impress them on your children”

This part of the verse requires action as you take opportunities throughout your homeschool day.

There were so many nights I would lie awake while my household slept, and I wondered if I really taught my children anything worth remembering that day. I would recall the moments of bringing God’s truth to the breakfast table. I would choose verses and a focus for the day, that we would keep before us. When the kids had conflicts over who was going to practice the piano first, or complaining about how long their schoolwork was taking, I would take the time to stop the bookwork and the busywork and “impress on their hearts” God’s command and example for us to love one another. We’d talk about diligence and good stewardship of what God had given us. I’d remind them of our daily verse, our focus, and gently usher our day back into a good momentum.

As I looked back on my days, I could see where virtue was impressed upon our lives in the most mundane moments. Amid whining, arguing, laziness, or sharing, God’s Word was at the center of our discussions and, most importantly, our solutions. Consistently talking and teaching throughout daily activities left an impression on my children’s hearts that I will never regret taking time for.

When you imagine the action of impressing God's commandments onto your children's hearts, the choice to homeschool is an open book, and your daily investment, time, and teaching are like the folded pages and consistency in learning. You are living out His commandments and His precepts and showing your children how to walk in His way daily.

What an opportunity God has given us with our choice to homeschool. Redeem the time and the season, and remember His love endures forever.

"Talk about them when you sit at home"

You will have many opportunities to talk to your children about the Lord's faithfulness as you homeschool. We don't homeschool because we are Christians; but because we are Christians, we use our homeschooling time at home to have conversations, read the Word, and ask the hard questions that encourage deeper discussion than the dinner table conversations about sports. Part of my "why" was to impact the hearts of my children before the world could. With the time we have had at home, we navigated their choices, their friendships, their identity and sexuality, and their future pursuits, all through the lens of God's Word and His wisdom. The hours are opportunities, and we often forget the value our communication has as an impact on our child's faith. We can weave Christ's teachings into our all our daily interactions. It isn't enough to be a Christian family and assume our kids will love God.

“And when you walk along the road”

One of my children struggled with learning, and my choice to homeschool her meant that I was able to show up to help her work through her schoolwork with patience and perseverance, but to also be present for the tears and frustration daily as well. It is easier to show up with solutions to a math or reading problem than it is to be committed to matters of the heart. Because we were homeschooling, I was able to see what was going on in her heart, beneath the surface.

It was a rare gift to show up every day with a truth from God’s Word to bring light to the situation and to help her focus on His precepts daily. I reminded her of His love for her. I was present when she got discouraged and wanted to give up. I shared about her value and worth and the gift of His love to us when we least feel like loving the hard parts of us. We had so many moving parts to our days, and I discovered the opportunities were endless when it came to impressing His commands and love on the hearts of my children.

Whether while reading, teaching, driving, or correcting papers, every homeschooling moment is an opportunity to share the love of Jesus with your children. He affords us so many hours, days, and years with them, and every one matters.

“When you lie down and when you get up”

Every morning, before diving headlong into a stack of books and routine, I discovered a formative and sustaining rhythm I practiced over the years that has stayed with my children even when other things did not. My former structured approach to

most things in life would have dictated a strict schedule to begin with our bookwork after morning chores and breakfast. I found a smooth transition from breakfast to our schoolwork with a time of worship.

We began each morning with a slow roll into the living room, gathering on couches with babies on my lap, Bibles, a basket of books, verse cards, character-based learning materials, and hands-on and interactive supplements at my disposal. Often, my Sunday evening prep times would begin with a reflection of our previous week and the areas we seemed to be struggling in the most. I would choose a topic or a focus for the new week that would bring everything we do back God's Word. For example, if there had been a lot of whining and complaining, I would pick out verses and stories that focused on gratefulness; then I'd incorporate solutions into our days to combat and cure the whining. When we struggled with laziness and defeat, I would lay out a plan with a focus on the character quality of perseverance and diligence.

These Sunday evening preparation times allowed our homeschooling to be filled with intentional moments of character growth and solutions for us to work on together. We read and learned together. We sang and talked and prayed for one another. As we moved from this to our schoolwork, we had a focus to keep before us, and it allowed me to pause to refocus as needed.

You have been called to so much more than educating your children. In fact, that is the most exciting part of the purpose you have before you. Don't let the weight of the task thwart your efforts. It will come to you. You will find the moments to impress

the most important things on their hearts—as you seek Him and seize the opportunities.

CONSIDER YOUR CALLING

Your calling will only last as long as your purpose holds its place in your life. Your goals will determine how you move forward, so now is the time to consider your calling and determine your next steps. If you want to start strong, remember God knows the details and has promised to provide for us as we draw near to Him.

You know your family better than anyone and what they need in this time. Don't wait for the perfect scenario and a completed checklist before taking the steps to begin. Be careful to watch the heart of your home as you start. It may be easy to get caught up in the roles, the defined purpose, and the checklists and forget to hold on to the joy in the process.

Your homeschool will only be as strong as the anchor to which you tie your vision and purpose. Keep Him central to all that you choose to do and commit your ways to Him. When you rise in the morning, let your lips speak words of need and praise. When you show up for your family, show them the passion and purpose God has called you to by leading in love and the fruit of His Spirit. As you end your day, pour out your needs, tears, praise, and prayer to a God who has called you to a greater purpose than even you can see in this moment. The best is yet to come.

..... *personal reflection*

What are my greatest concerns or stumbling blocks to beginning with confidence and peace?

How can I start strong?

..... *personal challenge*

Today, I will replace my doubts and worries with confidence in knowing that all good things begin with small steps of saying yes to the Lord and allowing Him to lead me with wisdom and peace.

Today, I will choose to see the areas that are hard in homeschooling as something I can control, rather than allow them to control me. I will reap the fruit of perseverance. Not every list is a “must do” or checklist, but rather a guide to give me steps to grow in hope as I homeschool.

Here is my mini pep talk to help you stay focused on the here and now. Don't get too ahead of yourself. Take a few moments to consider the following thoughts that will help you start strong.

1. Choose your homeschool style. What fits your family the best?
2. Plan to be consistent, dedicated to great learning and a balanced home and schedule.
3. Discover your own strengths and your weaker areas and plan accordingly.
4. Set your end of year goals and work backward.
5. Find a community. Find your people.
6. Give yourself (and your children) grace to begin.
7. Show up daily and stay committed.
8. Take a deep breath and know your purpose every day.
9. Pick your start day and make it special!

..... *drawing from the well*

Jesus doesn't expect us to come to the well prepared or polished. He is waiting for us expectantly because we all need to be reminded that we are not homeschooling alone, and His words can refresh and restore our souls.

"And the LORD will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail."

Isaiah 58:11

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

Matthew 11:28–29 NIV

.... *a prayer for my homeschool*

Father God, help me to choose to not allow hard things to control me, my decisions, and my reactions. I give You my homeschool and ask for clarity and purpose that aligns with Your will for our lives. I trust You to replace my doubts and worries with confidence as I surrender today to You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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