



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Homeschooling Today- Part 1

Guest(s): Heidi and Jay St. John

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Dr. James Dobson: Well, welcome to Family Talk, everyone. I'm your host, Dr. James Dobson. And today we're going to take another look at homeschooling, which many parents who are either doing now or they're attracted to. They are motivated, frankly, by two cultural developments. The first is the COVID pandemic, which changed public education dramatically. When my generation grew up, our moms packed little lunches for us, and we were scurried off to get on a yellow bus, or as in my case, we walked to a neighborhood school where we spent the next seven hours. Parents trusted teachers in those days because they usually knew them and they felt comfortable with what was going on in the classroom. Then came the pandemic and education became virtual, so that more or less, forced parents into the teaching process. And they began to see the advantages of spending each day with their much loved kids. This is the first reason homeschooling has grown so rapidly, just exponentially in fact, in the last couple of years. It introduced a new experience for children and their parents.

Now the second force driving homeschooling is what I call the radicalization of curricula. Many Christian parents, and even some of those who don't share our faith, are deeply concerned about critical race theory among other things, which continues to spread across the nation and they oppose what passes for sex education and a leftist ideology such as LGBT curricula that often begins in kindergarten, which takes my breath away. It's a form of indoctrination that in worst cases, warps the young minds of boys and girls and contradicts what moms and dads are trying to teach at home, including biblical concepts of right and wrong.

I want to tell you that if our children, speaking of Shirley and me, were young today, we would either put them in Christian schools, which we did anyway, or we would do the job at home. It hadn't been considered when our children were young. One more time, I would like to tell those of you who haven't heard the story of how the modern homeschool's movement came to be. I had never heard of it either when our kids were young, until a man came along named Dr. Raymond Moore, who is legendary today. And he wrote a book along with his wife, Dorothy, in the late '70s, it was called *School Can Wait*. It completely revolutionized my thinking. Now Ray and Dorothy Moore have gone on to Heaven, but I wish that they could see the relevance today of what they started.

The thesis of Dr. Moore's book was that enrolling young children in formal education is not always the best choice.

One of the reasons is because young children are very vulnerable to social pressure. They get pushed around, bullied, they get laughed at, they get called names and they don't deal with that well, and it's better to delay that process and they tend to catch up once they have been put in their grade level. You don't have to start with kindergarten. You start where they are and good things happen to them. They're also given the freedom to learn the fundamentals of reading, writing, and arithmetic at their own pace. So if you've been thinking about homeschooling for your children or grandchildren, stay tuned because we're going to let you hear a recorded interview with Jay and Heidi St. John on this edition of Family Talk.

It was recorded, I believe, in 2010 here at the ministry. And I want to go back to that pre-pandemic era and let a homeschool family tell you why they're doing this and why it's important. Jay and Heidi are founders and executive directors of Firmly Planted Family Ministries. That's a parachurch organization that is dedicated to training and equipping parents to disciple their children. It has a strongly spiritual foundation and to teach children the way God intended. The St. John's travel and speak together throughout the year, encouraging couples in their marriages and parenting journeys, using God's word as their primary source for spiritual growth and discussion. I think you're going to enjoy this interview. With that let's hear part one of that interview and we'll hear the balance of it tomorrow.

We have two guests here today that have been in the thick of the homeschool's movement, their parents and their organizers have a homeschool's ministry, and I'm delighted to have them here. They are Heidi and Jay St. John, and they have six children and a seventh on the way.

Heidi St. John: That's right.

Dr. James Dobson: I say that with real trepidation. I made a mistake one time. I asked a lady if she was pregnant or when her baby was going to be born.

Heidi St. John: Oh no.

Dr. James Dobson: And she wasn't pregnant.

Heidi St. John: Oh, that's not a good thing.

Dr. James Dobson: And I said, never again as long as I live, will I do that. And she didn't let me off the hook. I'm telling you she was mad at me and I couldn't get the words back in my mouth after I'd said them. So, I'm taking a real chance...

Heidi St. John: I can confirm for you. No chances here. I'm six months along.

Dr. James Dobson: So that was a pretty good guess, but it was last time too. And I was wrong. Six children you've homeschooled. And the oldest Savannah, just graduated from high school and only one of your children has attended a public school.

Heidi St. John: That's right. Savannah, our oldest started in school and we pulled her out in second grade. So she went through traditional school through the second grade, but none of the other children have ever been to regular school.

Dr. James Dobson: And Jay, you have been a pastor and you left that responsibility to help found the homeschool's organization, explain the title of it.

Jay St. John: First Class Homeschool Ministries. And we started our first co-op in 2000 and Mount Vernon, Washington. And then as we moved to Vancouver, Washington started a co-op there. And then another one and was growing and blossoming actually around the country. People were asking, calling and emailing, "How do we do what you are doing in Vancouver?" And so we realized God's wanting something of us. And so we packaged it up and started helping other people do it, helping churches have a ministry to the homeschooling community. And so that was in '05 or '06.

Dr. James Dobson: And you all have actually taken your tribe and another family and gone what, in the bus?

Heidi St. John: In a motorhome. It felt like a bus, though.

Dr. James Dobson: And you went all over the country speaking.

Heidi St. John: Yeah, we traveled last summer. We went a little over 11,700 miles. And we drove all around the United States with all of our kids, speaking in different churches about the opportunity and the blessing of homeschooling. It was amazing.

Dr. James Dobson: You're really serious about this.

Heidi St. John: We're very serious about it. And we're a little not serious sometimes because we have to laugh a lot when you're homeschooling. Definitely serious about homeschooling. Yeah.

Dr. James Dobson: You have written a book called *Romance: Nurturing Your Marriage Through the Homeschool Years*. You're really honest about the challenges of homeschooling. It's not an unmixed blessing, is it?

Heidi St. John: No, it isn't. And in fact, Jay and I were talking about this morning, I loved *Parenting Isn't for Cowards*. And I said to Jay, "Homeschooling isn't for cowards either." You better know why you're doing it. And so the book is really aimed at helping moms remember why they're homeschooling so that when it gets hard, because like anything else that's worth doing, it has its difficult moments. I

always tell people, "There have been many times when I've watched the school bus go down around the corner, and I'll think to myself, 'I wonder if I just ran out there and just ask the guy, I'll give you five bucks if you'll just put all my kids on your bus and take them on your route so I can get a shower.'" Little things like that I want to encourage moms, it's so worth it if you can hang on for the ride. Now that we've graduated our oldest from homeschooling, I can speak with much more authority and confidence seeing her become this beautiful young woman. It's been absolutely the hardest, best thing we've ever done.

Dr. James Dobson: And you're about ready to start with a new baby.

Heidi St. John: It's diapers to diploma. That's what we're doing.

Jay St. John: We say that about our program, is diapers to diploma. And so we've taken that on as our family. That's our family's a slogan as well.

Heidi St. John: I always tell people, I kind of call myself an accidental homeschooler because we were really not fans of the homeschool movement. We didn't really understand it. A lot of people when we were younger and first married, a lot of people that we knew that were homeschooling, it seemed like an unattainable goal for us. Just really either really, really conservative or academically, I just felt like, how could I spend the time with my kids all day long. I was used to traditional school. My grandparents put us through, me and my siblings, through a private Christian school, kindergarten through 12th grade. And that's the experience you take into your adult life is what you know. That's what I knew. And it was really the Lord who did a work in my heart. And He started because our second daughter Sierra missed the cutoff to go to school with her sister by just a few days, because her birthday fell outside of the parameters that they needed.

And so, in order to kind of keep her happy, I said, "Well, I'll teach you. I'll work with you at home." And I realized, I sort of took it on that way, and I realized I could teach her to read and Jay would come home from work. And I would say, "Honey, look what I can do. I mean, look what Sierra can do," and she would read a basic word to him, cat or whatever. And I, at that moment, I realized how much joy I was getting from spending this time with her and teaching her to read and watching her blossom. I mean, she was passing her sister who was two grades ahead of her in the public school. So we started off kind of cautiously. But once we realized this is amazing and committed to it, that's when our real journey began.

Jay St. John: And we know our children, we love our children. We're raising our children. We want the best for our children so we can help craft the educational process for them that will be more effective.

Dr. James Dobson: Speaking of differences, there are different approaches to homeschooling too. Describe some of the options that are there.

Heidi St. John: Well, this is a little bit like trying to take a drink from a fire hydrant, because there are so many different approaches, but there are some main ones that are sort of mainstream. And I think one of the biggest one is traditional. People call it school at home. So, and a lot of people when they first start homeschooling, this is what you do, because remember I was saying earlier, you kind of take what you know with you into homeschooling. And so it's a good way to start. That'd be more like a traditional approach, like workbooks and traditional textbooks that you can get from a company like Abeka or Alpha Omega.

Dr. James Dobson: You're sitting again.

Heidi St. John: Yeah. And you're sitting again and it takes time to kind of figure out what works for you. So, people would call that school at home because you're basically bringing a classroom home. A lot of people when they start homeschooling do what I did. I got desks at a garage sale. I set up my little classroom, but before long, where do you think we ended up? The kitchen table. And so we converted it back into a family room again. But my point is that that's how we started also was schooling at home. And then eventually we transitioned into something that's called unit studies. And a unit study is basically taking a subject, like let's say, instead of studying whales in the fourth grade and in the sixth grade you're studying...

Dr. James Dobson: Western Movement.

Absolutely. Maybe you're going to study oceans. And while you're studying the ocean, you're going to talk about Jacques Cousteau and you're going to learn about different types of vocabulary words that he would have introduced as he was studying the ocean. You're going to learn about whales. You're going to learn about the environment and you take all kinds of different academic angles and you study the ocean. So when you're done with that particular unit, you've taken math and science and history and language and incorporated them into one topic. So that is a wonderful-

Dr. James Dobson: And that's what you do.

Heidi St. John: That is generally what we do in our home because we have so many children. It makes sense for me to take one topic. I tend to write my own unit studies. I like to base them off of missionary stories. So we have studied Corrie Ten Boom. We have studied so many amazing people who've done amazing things for the Lord. And so when we studied Hudson Taylor, for example, we studied China and we studied what was happening during that time period that Hudson Taylor was serving the Lord, and we learned about indigenous people and God's heart for the people of China.

And that just sprouts all kinds of conversations with the kids. When we studied Corrie Ten Boom, we learned about the Holocaust. We studied the Netherlands

and Holland and Hitler, and we were so, the kids were so fascinated by this because they could relate to a story. If you tell a child a story-

Dr. James Dobson: They get it.

Heidi St. John: ... they get it. And all of a sudden, they're emotionally attached to this particular time period that we're studying. And we actually quit the rest of the thing that I was planning on doing with them. And we just did Corrie Ten Boom for about three months. And we studied. It was amazing. We made a huge timeline, put it up on our wall. They never forget. It's amazing.

Dr. James Dobson: Dr. Ray Moore put great emphasis on working with your child. I'm not talking about reading books together. I'm talking about taking the child to a grocery store with you to do the shopping. And you learn from that about measurements and you learn-

Heidi St. John: Budgeting.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, budgeting. Yeah.

Jay St. John: There's so many things that we do every day that have so many other applications that we can teach our children. They can see, helping them to understand how we need to follow through with things that we do. Character building things, as well as academic things, all that stuff starts fitting together. And it's just so much more powerful.

Dr. James Dobson: Jay, what is your role in homeschooling?

Jay St. John: Well, Heidi is the main educator with the children being now that I am, I don't have a full-time job at the church anymore, so I am more flexible. I help more with homeschooling, but I like to encourage dads, which so many dads ask, "What can I do? I have a full-time job. I'm not there. I don't even understand all this academic stuff. How could I contribute to it?" I always encourage dads. "Look, you can be a support to your wife. You don't have to know all the answers of what to do or how it's done, but you can sit down with your wife and say, 'Look, we want to follow God's leading in raising our kids.'"

Jay St. John: So I tell the dads, "Ask your wife what she thinks should be done, and then pray about those things together. Discuss them. If you can, go with your wife to a curriculum store and look at all that's out there. Talk about your kids' strengths and weaknesses, what fits with them. And that is huge. And then telling your wife every day, 'You're doing amazing. I can see the progress.'"

Heidi St. John: Don't quit.

Jay St. John: Because just like your kids growing, you don't see your child growing every day. You don't physically see it, but they are. And when you're going to work every

day and coming home, you see that better than your wife does when they're educating your child.

Dr. James Dobson: How do you account for the fact that these kids come out so academically gifted frequently? There are kids that have problems with homeschool too, but it is amazing how well they do in college, how well they do on standardized tests. And if you don't take the classical approach to education, how do they come out with those skills?

Heidi St. John: That's a great question. I honestly think it's because they're in it. They're being tutored basically. You're going from a child who maybe be one of 23 to 30 students to being tutored one-on-one by their mom or their dad. And I think that's the environment in which they're flourishing. And also you're teaching them to become an independent learner. If we don't know the answer to something, we find it. And while we're looking for that answer, as a parent, we're teaching our children how to look for it also. So our kids are very proficient on the internet. If they don't know something like our son was trying to figure out the history of model airplanes. And he just said, "Mom, do you mind if I get on Google and find out who made the first model airplane?" No, I think and it's a wonderful opportunity. He's self-directed then. And I think we're teaching these kids, by the time they get out of high school, they are self-motivated, self-directed, they understand the importance of education. They get it.

Dr. James Dobson: You're not a credentialed teacher.

Heidi St. John: No.

Dr. James Dobson: Did that scare you in the beginning?

Heidi St. John: Absolutely. Oh yeah. It scared me. And I realized I don't, I didn't need to be scared after Savannah took her very first standardized test. In Washington state, you are required by law to have your kids tested every year. And when the first year that our kids had to take that test, I knew we were going to be okay. They tested on average three grade levels above where they were supposed to be. I very rarely hear about a child who's not flourishing in a homeschool environment because if the mom doesn't feel comfortable or she's not sure how to do it, she can find help. There are so many resources out there now. The ministry that Jay and I run is just one of them. So it's an incredible opportunity-

Dr. James Dobson.: Give us the name of it again.

Heidi St. John: It's First Class Homeschool Ministries, www.firstclasshomeschool.org. And we have about 50 locations now around the United States. Homeschool co-ops that function as ministries of their local church, just like a MOPS program would function as a parachurch ministry.

Dr. James Dobson: Can they ask you questions?

Heidi St. John: Absolutely.

Jay St. John: Absolutely.

Heidi St. John: Oh, absolutely. We would love...

Dr. James Dobson: Do they call you?

Jay St. John: We give each church for these co-ops a website and a database system so they can manage all their classes and the people, the parents and the kids.

Dr. James Dobson: So, you work largely through the local church.

Jay St. John: Absolutely.

Heidi St. John: That's right.

Dr. James Dobson: Heidi, what do you do when you get a call from a mother who says, "I can't do this. I'm exhausted. I never have a minute to myself and I've got these kids around my knees all day, every day."

Heidi St. John: I might cry with her.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah.

Heidi St. John: I might. I love those calls because I've been there so many times myself and I always tell them, "If you need to be talked down out of your tree. Here's my phone number you can call me." And I think it's a wonderful opportunity for me to be real with that mom and say, "Hey, what you're going through totally normal. It's totally normal. There's nothing in this life that's worth doing that isn't difficult. And the Lord's going to give you the grace that you need." And then it's just a matter of listening to her because most of the time, their fears just are very easily calmed. And it's just a matter of her needing some time for herself, or maybe she needs a little bit of extra encouragement and how to organize her day.

A lot of it is just found in being, that encouragement is found in being real and just saying, "You know what? It's totally okay to feel like you don't want to do this anymore. I get it. I've been there." And when I was a younger homeschool mom, Diana Waring who is a friend of mine and has written an amazing history curriculum that's now published by Answers in Genesis, she came to speak at an event that I coordinated and at the end of it, she said, "Does anyone have any questions?" And here I am, a relatively new homeschool mom, but I'm leading this huge group. And I raised my hand and before I could even get the rest of my sentence out, I just started crying. "I can't do it anymore. We don't ever finish

our whole math assignment" I mean, I was blubbing. And she walked right up to me and I'll never forget this as long as I live, she put her hand on my shoulder and she said, "Woman, be loosed."

And I thought, "Well, that's embarrassing." But she went on to tell me, "You're expecting too much. You're missing the blessing of homeschooling by expecting all of this of your children. This isn't a classroom. This is your home and integrate your children into it." And that was the beginning. Savannah was in fourth grade at that point, that was the beginning of me realizing this is a lifestyle. I need to change the way that I'm looking at this. And I went home and I told "Jay, I think I've got a little bit more of the piece to the puzzle now." I started out very simply with my kids. And I always tell parents, "When you start out homeschooling, stick to the core subjects, you want to do reading, read with your kids and teach them some. Anybody can do second grade math, right? Pick up a math workbook at Walmart. And you'll see what I'm talking about. It's not that difficult."

What I discovered when I talk about Roman studies is, instead of teaching each one of our kids history separately, science separately, math separately, I realized I can take a history book and sit down and read to them like it's a story. And we'll sit around for probably three hours and we're reading and they're absorbing this information. And when that's done, they're taking off into kind of different places in the house. And they're writing about what they've learned and we're learning together. I've grown into homeschooling. I didn't start out that, I didn't start out doing it that way. I was terrified of homeschooling when I started and I had to go in a little bit at a time. And when it was difficult, I was honest enough with the moms around me who were seasoned to say, "I don't think I can do this anymore. I feel like I'm in over my head," and the Lord in his mercy, every single time, has brought someone along who said, "No, no, you can do it."

Dr. James Dobson: You're good at it though. I'll tell you what. Do your kids love it?

Heidi St. John: They do. They do. Although I have had, I love to teach moms who have reluctant writers because I have reluctant writers in my house, especially the boys. It's not a piece of cake to teach a boy to write or teach them grammar. And my son, this is how I learned he was a kinesthetic learner. I was trying to get him to write a paper on something that we've been reading. And the older girls, I was like, "Hey, just give me a few sentences on Thomas Jefferson. Amazing. We've been studying, we've read about Monticello. Let's do it. Let's write." And they're like, "Fine." You know? So they went to write, but they weren't super excited, but my son immediately started crying. His wrist went limp. "I can't write. It hurts my hand." And I started crying because he was crying. I'm crying.

I'm thinking, "I'm never going to get through this." And finally I, in absolute desperation, I put my hands up and I said, "Fine. You don't like Thomas Jefferson, what do you like?" And he kind of perked up. He said, "I like Legos." Of course, like every nine year old boy. I like Legos. And, still I'm feeling

desperate. And I said, "That's fine. How about this? Instead of writing about Thomas Jefferson," because the goal wasn't get him to wasn't to get him to understand Thomas Jefferson, remember. The goal was to get him to write. So I said, let's write about Legos. And that kid lit up like a Christmas tree. He wrote for me two pages, he was downloading pictures of Legos. Do you know the history of this Lego? We found out that the guy who started Legos actually started out building miniature houses and Skylar was fascinated.

And because he was interested, it brought out the learner in him and the writer in him. And that was, I mean, these are light bulb moments for me because I'm realizing I don't have to stick to a set curriculum. I can find out what's interesting to my children and then bounce off of that into the next thing. And that's what makes it doable. When you're trying to force a curriculum down a child, or let's say you bought a curriculum that's just not working for you. You don't like it. I always tell moms, "I don't care if you spent money on it, shelve it. Don't continue using it." One of the benefits of homeschooling is that you can work with something until you find something that works for you. You want it to work for you. What works for me may not work for you and vice versa.

So, we have tremendous freedom to figure out what it is that our kids are really fascinated by and what it is that we like to teach. So you find out what you're ... I've learned that I am an auditory learner because I'm homeschooling. I love to listen to things. Well, my daughter, Savannah is a visual learner. She likes to read. And so if she reads and Sierra listens, they're happy. It took me a while to figure that out. And that's the benefit. I think if you can not get scared and overwhelmed by looking ahead, just look where you are.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, Heidi and Jay, this has been so enlightening and so inspirational. Heidi, particularly, but both of you are not just talking theoretically, you've been there, you've done it. And you have answers to the questions that people ask, because you've heard them a thousand times and I've got about a thousand more. And so will you come back?

Heidi St. John: Absolutely.

Jay St. John: Absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow. Okay. The name of the book that you've written, which we didn't talk about today is *The Busy Homeschool Mom's Guide to Romance: Nurturing Your Marriage Through the Homeschool Years*. A lot of practical stuff here, and we will sooner or later talk about that here on Family Talk. Thanks for being with us.

Jay St. John: Thank you.

Heidi St. John: Thank you.

Roger Marsh: I'm Roger Marsh and you've been listening to Family Talk. Now, if you want to learn more about Jay and Heidi, their homeschooling ministry and Heidi's ministry to moms called Mom Strong International, you can find links to all that and more by visiting our broadcast page at drjamesdobson.org/broadcast. Again, that's drjamesdobson.org/broadcast. Well, that's all the time we have for today, but make sure to join us again tomorrow for another edition of Family Talk. Dr. Dobson will be talking once again with the St. Johns about some of the triumphs and struggles they've had homeschooling their seven children. I'm Roger Marsh, God's blessings to you and yours.

Announcer: This has been a presentation of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute.