

Podcast 242 Reading Books Aloud as a Family

Let's pray: Father, thank you for another opportunity to consider your Word, and I pray that you will help us today, help us all, help our country, help our families. You are king, and You know all things that are going on, and You are bringing good and You're bringing redemption, and there's a lot of stuff behind the scenes that we have no idea what's going on, because I'm 99% sure that mainstream media is not tuned in to You, but help us to tune into You, and help us to hear Your thoughts. In Jesus' name, amen.

Family activity. Let me maybe just preface this by saying, it's not like we went into having family with a plan. We did have a couple principles that were important to us. The first principle was, and still is, that we need to be intentional about family. When we make decisions, we evaluate based on this principle. For example we chose not to have a TV. We didn't want the influence of the media in our home. Plus we wanted to encourage our children to read.

At some point, you have to make choices about what you're going to have in your home and what you're not going to have. When you decide to not have something in or take something away, plan for an alternative to replace it. Nature abhors a vacuum.

I don't recall all the reasons we chose to read books aloud, but this activity replaces sitting in front of a computer, smartphone, or monitor being entertained. I don't believe I ever had a book read to me aloud. I don't know if I could have sat still when I was a kid that long anyway. Somehow, we got the idea to do it.

Over the years we read a bunch of books as a family. Sandi did most of the reading to the boys. Sometimes, they would do it in the afternoon when they had small projects to do. When I read the books aloud, it was usually when I had time, so it was either in the evening, maybe at the end of dinner or before the kids went to bed. I remember we had a vacation with my parents one year, and I read a book aloud in the evening.

I remember reading the Narnia series to my sons. I would put my folding chair in the hallway so they could all hear me, and I would read a chapter. Of course, when you read the Narnia books, they are so well written and they're so captivating that it's very difficult to read one chapter. And they would beg for another, and I was happy to comply because I wanted to read it, too! I also read at least one biography, it was about Amy Carmichael.

My favorite all-time read aloud book is the Summer of the Monkeys, not to be confused with Steve Martin and the Disney movie. It's written by Wilson Rawls, the author of Where the Red Fern Grows. It is set in Oklahoma in the Ozark Mountains.

These are two excellent books, by the way. Where the Red Fern Grows is one of the few books where I like the movie as much as the book.

I remember reading this book and at one point, Isaac fell off the couch, he was on one knee, and he was begging me to stop because he couldn't breathe. He was laughing so hard that he couldn't get his breath. By the end of the book, the tears were streaming down my face so much that I couldn't see the words to reads. We experienced the whole range of emotions in that book. I highly recommend Summer of the Monkeys as a great story and wonderful great read-aloud book.

Where the Red Fern Grows is another great book. One of the benefits of reading books together as a family is when you all read the same book, you can use the language and the lessons that the characters illustrate in their book to apply to real life situations in your own family's life. Since everyone is on the same wavelength, or on the same page (pun intended). We found that you get each other's humor differently when you've read the book together.

Where the Red Fern Grows is about a boy about twelve years old, who was desperate to have coonhounds. He was praying, praying, praying, with no tangible results and no puppies. He had a wise grandfather who owned the general store, and he asked him, "Grandpa, why doesn't God answer my prayers?" And his grandpa said, "Well, son, you know, sometimes we have to meet God halfway." The idea being that we have to pray, but we also have to do our part and work. He went on to say, "God is more interested in developing character than in giving us puppies." And the boy uttered a typical response, "I don't want character! I want puppies."

That was the turning point of the movie when began applying himself by doing chores and any work that was available. This story happened during the Depression era, and there wasn't a lot of cash. He would go to people's homes and make bundles of sticks or weed or any kind of chore they had for a nickel, a quarter, or a dime. He saved up his money, and then bought two red tick hounds.

When he picked them up, some local boys provoked him. A local sheriff broke up the fight. When the sheriff discovered this boy had done, he said, "Man, you've got more character than all the boys in my town."

In the Demme home, the expression, "meet God halfway," was used with my own sons more than once. One time we were talking about praying, and I said, "You remember that movie? Well, maybe we need to meet God halfway and not just put it all on God, but see what we can do on our part to make this prayer come to pass." Because they'd read the book and we'd watched the movie we all knew what it meant.

This idea applies to all the books that we've read. Once you have that commonality and chemistry of your family all tied to a specific book, you get each other's jokes, you understand each other's illustrations, you appreciate each other's humor.

Another special book in our home is *Little Britches*, written by Ralph Moody. *Little Britches* is about a young man whose father has tuberculosis, which prompted them to move to Littleton, Colorado. I've been there and have seen little metal statues scattered throughout the town of this little boy. There are nine books in the series, and the second one, *Man of the House*, is also quite good.

Perhaps many of you have read the Laura Ingalls Wilder books. I've read all of them myself. **Sandi** read them to the boys. The one that I appreciated the most and I've read multiple times was **Farmer Boy**. It is not about Laura and her family, but Almonzo, her husband-to-be. It is set in upper state New York when he was a boy growing up. He had a special dad. I remember one scene where the two of them were at a county fair. Almonzo, who worked hard side-by-side with his dad, approached his dad with a request. "Father, could I have 25 cents to buy a glass of lemonade?" His father took the opportunity to make this situation a teaching moment. He replied, "Son, I can either give you the quarter and you can drink the lemonade and it will taste good but it will be gone. Or with that quarter, you can go over there and buy that piglet. You feed it until it is old enough to be bred. Then you can have 9 more pigs which you can bring to the fair and sell. What a great lesson about investing and agriculture. Almonzo opted for the pig, and he learned a life lesson in the process. *Farmer Boy* is a rich book full of glimpses into life on a farm.

Louisa May Alcott wrote timeless classics. Even though the title seem to indicate they are more suitable for girls, they are for everyone. **Little Women, Little Men, Jo's Boys, all excellent.** We have a house full of boys, but these are beautiful books and I highly recommend them, because they're so well-written and are full of such character lessons and edifying stories.

Besides building your family chemistry and understanding each other's references, I think of Philippians 4:8, which says: "Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."

I've often wondered how to apply that passage for many years because it is so difficult to do. But if you read a really good book when you go to bed at night, it makes it so much easier to meditate on the character qualities of people that you're reading about that are worth thinking about.

George MacDonald wrote children's books like the **Princess of Curdie**. If there wasn't a George MacDonald, there probably wouldn't have been the Narnia books, because C.S. Lewis says, "I regard George MacDonald as my master."

Some others that we have enjoyed are Heidi, *Heidi Grows Up*, *Heidi Has Children*. We found out that Heidi was written by Joanna Spyri, and then her translator wrote the two sequels. There are so many really excellent books out there, and when you read them, it will help you to fill your mind with good thoughts which will provide

an alternative for the things that you're telling your kids not to watch and not to listen to. Reading good literature also builds family chemistry, which contributes to building your family.

Let's pray in closing: "Father, bless our families that are listening, bless our moms and dads that are navigating through a difficult season right now in our country, and I pray that you'll help us to draw near to You as You draw near to us. Fill our minds with good thoughts, fill us, our minds with hope, fill us with stories of courage, and lead us in how we can find our own flavor, our own books, our own life lessons in the books that you lead us to. In Jesus' name, amen."