

## 274 Homeschool Convention Report, part 1

Steve: Father, thank you for another opportunity to draw near to You. Here we have two. All we need is two or three. With our listeners, that makes three. Help us by Your spirit, guide our conversation, encourage our hearts. In Jesus' name. Amen.

I just got back from the first home education conference that I've attended in a year. I thought we could talk about that because it was really nice being together. Zoom is better than nothing, but I don't think anything approaches being together, face to face, person to person, talking at the booth, etc.

I was in South Carolina this weekend and next weekend, Lord willing, I'm going to be in St. Louis. I did four talks, and I thought maybe I'd give a little overview and share some of the highlights of the conference. How does that sound?

Scott: Sounds awesome. I don't know if I'm going to get to a home school conference anytime soon, so I need this.

These four talks encapsulized our home-schooling experience. The first talk I did, when I arrived on Thursday, and was called "Parents are uniquely qualified to teach their children at home."

Then Friday morning, "Fear not, you and your children can learn math together." Friday evening was "Tips for husbands and fathers" followed by Saturday morning, Family communication. "You know me well as anybody, Scott, because you've been listening to me for years now."

I walked into the conference, and believe it or not every conference, there's a little bit of concern, "Is anybody going to come to my workshop?"

Scott: You still get that?

Steve: Yeah, it's funny, some conferences, I have great content, and two people will show up, and then the next conference, you'll have a packed room. It's really difficult to tell. I wasn't sure what the attendance was going to be like, but it was well-attended. It was a good solid conference.

The first night, I expected to have people there that were rookies. I expected people to be there who had just completed their first year of COVID homeschooling, or were contemplating homeschooling for the fall. There were those people there, but there was also a lot of veterans and it was a nice mix.

I pretty much gave our testimony of how we learned to homeschool and what Sandy and I did 37 years ago when we attended our first homeschool conference in 1984. We came home ready to be homeschoolers. We bought little wooden desks and

refinished them and then put the alphabet around the room on the wall and added a flag in the corner.

My wife envisioned that she would be sitting at the front desk facing two little boys at their desks, and they would do worksheets, and she would make lesson plans. This is really what we did, but pretty soon the desk gave way to the kitchen table which gave way to the living room, etc.

My assumption is that God designed us to be parents and as parents, that's our job to raise our children. The biggest lesson that I learned, I don't know if Sandy would say this, but I would learn is that we learned how to learn together.

Home education. When I use that word, I mean a lifestyle of learning. It wasn't just parents giving facts to children. We learned while doing life together.

Our biggest asset going in, besides the fact that God had designed and created us to be parents, was that we were lifelong learners. We still like to learn, And I firmly believe e that nobody's more motivated than a concerned parent to make sure that their children gets a well-rounded education.

Nobody knows their child as well as a parent, nor is able to adapt to what they know, what they don't know, and their learning style. If you're willing to learn and do life together as a family. It's going to make you all better, as you grow together, and develop your family chemistry.

One of the biggest thing I try to communicate to the people teaching their children at home is that you're a tutor. You're not a classroom teacher, so you're able to do so much more in such a little amount of time. You're able to assess your child and begin there. You're able to move at their pace. You're able to focus on their character. You're able to tailor-make their education.

I don't know if you know this, but in public schools when I was a teacher, this is what you're supposed to do. You're supposed to develop an individual education program for each of your students, or IEP. I had 140 students in 5 classes every day. I didn't even try. I didn't know their background. I never met their parents. I wasn't aware of what challenges they had at home, but all of these things I did know about my own children.

When people pin me down on airplanes, when they discover I'm going to a home education conference, and ask "Why did you homeschool your children?" I say, "Ultimately, because I want to train them to live forever, and I have the freedom to do that at home."

We can study God's word. We can have family worship. We can teach from a biblical perspective, and this is the things that we did.

For a while, we had health challenges. We had to have a certain diet for people in our home, and we were able to not only adapt their learning needs, we were able to adapt their nutritional needs. Tough to do that when you're in a government school.

Another lesson I learned is that teaching is a two-edged sword. Not only does the student change, but the teacher changes. The teacher learns along with the student, and you develop a lifestyle of learning. I don't know how else to put it, but you learn together.

You ask questions of each other. One of my favorite things is to learn history by going to reenactments and visiting historical sites, and national parks. There you often find people who are experts, who like their craft, and then sit there and ask them questions.

I remember being at a reenactment in our local town. Johnny and I passed it on the way home from church. We saw all these World War II tents set up, and I said, "Wow, Johnny, you want to come back?" "Yes."

We went home and had lunch, and then we called my oldest boy and said, "Hey, you want to meet us over here? There's a reenactment." We went there and we talked to these fellows, and one guy was from Austria. The only thing I knew about Austria, I learned in "The Sound of Music." I said to him, "I understand that the Austrians didn't want to join Hitler."

He says, "Oh no, it's the exact opposite." I said, "No, Georg Von Trap." "Oh no, Austrians and Germans were together in World War I. They all spoke the same language. They were in an economic depressed state since World War I. They wanted to join them." He enlightened me. Then he told me about edelweiss which only grows at elevations really high," like 6,000 feet or something.

He said, "A young man would climb up into the mountains and pick some edelweiss and give it to his intended or to the girl that he was trying to impress. Because it took so much rigor and climbing ability to get up to the top of that mountain he made quite an impression."

I just stood there listening to this man. That's the kind of stuff that I like to do is take my kids with me. Then we all stand around and ask an expert questions. Of course Johnny just wants to see their guns and their uniforms and get his picture taken with them, but it's fun. That was the first talk.

I hadn't been in a conference in a year, and was wondering how it's going to go. The first person I met at this very first session was a mom who came up to me in the workshop while I was passing out the handouts. She said, "I want to thank you for your podcast." I said, "Really?" She says, "Oh yes. I listen to them. They're so

encouraging." I don't track statistics or how many people listen. We just make these and hope that people are being blessed and encouraged.

I asked her how she heard about it. She said, "I was listening to you being interviewed on somebody else's podcast. I liked what you were teaching about the history of home education so I started listening to yours."

That was the first night. There were some other encouraging things that happened there to me. On Thursday night, I crashed in a hotel since I was up early that morning, went to bed early, got up the next morning and I get to talk about math.

When I'm talking to math parents I'm also aware, as I have been now for a generation, that there's a lot of people that have fear or trauma connected with their math experience.

I can almost go as far as to say some people even have something similar to PTSD. They just had horrific experiences with math. Even being in a room that's going to have a math workshop is pushing buttons.

I try to keep it light and encouraging. I do a lot of joking. I try to assuage their fears by telling them things like I'm not a certified teacher myself. I didn't have any education classes when I became a public school, math teacher. If they're willing to learn again with their children, we could probably pull this off. That's my big thought that I'm trying to pass along.

One of my favorite stories is about a mom from Maine, who back in the day when I was writing Math-U-See, called me. She said, "Where's Algebra II?" I said, "I'm currently working on it." She said, "Get going."

I said, "What do you mean?" She proceeded to tell me her story. She decided to homeschool her girls, and she did not even graduate from high school. She got a GED, but she had started with her girls when they were young. She learned along with them.

They had just finished Algebra I, and she was ready for Algebra II. She said, "I learned along with my kids." Then she said something I'll never forget. She said, "If I'd had this program, I could have been an engineer."

It wasn't really the program, in my mind. It was the fact that she was learning it from scratch again. She was working along with her girls. She was diligently learning every lesson that they learned. I never forgot that conversation.

The second thing I try to encourage them is, which is similar to what I already said about the first thing, is that I learned while I was a classroom teacher how efficient

tutoring was when I had a student who was sick for three days. He missed three 45-minute classes. When that student stayed after school I caught him up in 15 minutes.

I remember going home and thinking wow, what have I been doing in my classroom? I realized I had to take roll, I had to collect homework papers. I had to pass out assignments. I had to tell the students to be quiet when the announcements were on. There was just a lot of classroom dynamics that a classroom teacher has to do. They need special training for that.

However when I have one student sitting across the desk from me, I can teach them very efficiently. I watch their eyes. If they keep smiling and understanding, then I keep going, if they frown, I stop and redo that part of the lesson. I move at their pace.

I also learned while I was a classroom teacher that math is one of the few, sequential subjects. In other words it builds upon itself. You have to know how to add before you can do multiplication. You have to know how to multiply and subtract before you can do division.

good tutor needs to assess the student and make sure they don't have any holes in their foundation. Then once you've found out what they know, start there. That's when I give them the "you are never behind" speech, which by the way, I gave to my next door neighbor last night. She was complaining that her child was a year behind of having lost it because of COVID.

I said, "Mind if I give you a little sermon?" She said, "Sure." I said, "Your child is never behind. Your child is where they are. It's your job as the parent/tutor to find out what they know. When you begin teaching them, start there and move at their pace.

Only a parent/tutor can tell when a child is getting it and when they've mastered it. One of the things that we used to encourage people when they would ask us, "How do I know if my child really has it, they've really learned the material?"

We used to say, "If you're working with them day-to-day, you'll probably know pretty well anyway. The litmus test is see if they can teach it back to you. You and I know that if you teach something, you have to know it better than if you're just passing the tests. That's something that's just a really good technique.

Back when I was going to math conferences, and I was representing Saxon...This is way back in the '80s, and I remember hearing a word used that I'd never heard before. It was called math innumeracy. People that can't do numbers, but I think it's more to it. I think most of it is emotional.

They had some bad experiences. I don't know if you're old enough to remember this, but did you ever have to go up to the chalkboard while your teacher would give you problems to do on the chalkboard?

Scott: Yeah. [laughs]

Steve: I'm getting stressed mentioning that.

Scott: [laughs]

Steve: I was pretty good in math. I didn't mind doing the problems at my desk, but who wants to do it when your pants are too short, and you have zits.

Steve: For whatever reason, a lot of people have some bad experiences with math, and I try to assuage their fears and say, "It's OK." When I start the workshop, I'll start off by saying, "How many of you really liked word problems when you were in school?" Usually, I get one-and-a-half hands.

No, really. It's funny in America. You'll have one person that put their hand up, maybe two, and then you'll have a couple people that'll put them up like halfway, like you're almost afraid to admit it that you liked word problems. I say, "OK, now, let's bow our heads, and close our eyes, and let's pray for everybody that didn't raise their hands."

Steve: I am dead serious about that. I pray and I asked God to help take the sting out of math, helped me to teach it in a way that's understandable, and try to get their courage up, because I do think math is not that tough, but once you acknowledge the emotional attachments to it and keep moving, you can do a lot better, and the blocks make it so it's kind of a unique approach.

I had a mom come up to me and say, I've got three boys. There was one who was on the autism spectrum, and two other ones. They both want to meet their math teacher and told me how much math they liked it, now it's one of their favorite subjects. The mom is sitting there almost with tears, because when you have happy kids, you got a happy mom, and everybody knows that when you have a happy mom, you have a happy household.

Yeah, that's one of the things that can keep me going for a long time just knowing that there's some kids that are enjoying math now.

Scott: That's how we first met. You were like the rock star at the homeschool convention. My son was dying to meet his math teacher and you put him up on your shoulders. We had a picture of little Will on your shoulders back at least 10 years ago.

Steve: Wow. I don't remember that. That's how we met?

Scott: Yeah.

Steve: Yeah. Pretty cool. That's the thing that I try to do. God's given me this little area of influence, and I try to bless these kids. I'm going to close with this next story because this blesses my socks off.

Steve: At my booth I met a little guy named Bryce. He came up to me with a ball cap. You could tell he's a little bit shy, and he says to me, "I really like math and a lot of it has to do with your program. You've helped me to like math." Then he gave me a hug. I melted.

Then I went over to my booth, and said, "Would you like a book?" I have this book called "My Story, His Story," which is my testimony and a gospel of John. I like to give it to students who are wanting an autograph.

I signed the book and gave it to him. He looked at me and he gave me another hug. Well, Bryce, I hope you're listening. Thank you, you blessed an old guy very much. That was my report of the homeschool conference, the first half. We'll do part two next week.

Let's close in prayer:

Father, thank You for this opportunity that You provided for parents and people that are serving the homeschool community and speakers, and vendors, and the whole package. Thank You for bringing these events about and restoring them.

Thank You for my experiences. Thank You for getting me through the airports, helping me to sleep in strange hotels, and here I am in one piece. Thank You for all the encouragement that was mutual on both sides. Parents were encouraged, speakers were encouraged. Hopefully, vendors were encouraged. We know that all good things come from You. Thank You for these gifts. In Jesus name. Amen.