



THE PASTOR'S VOICE

Insights from Church Leaders

The Pastor's Voice Podcast: Episode 10

Transcript: Home Schooling, Parental Responsibility, and the American Dream

Reuel Sample: We've talked a lot about your kids and your family being on board, which has necessitated homeschooling or as you also call it, world schooling. How has this worked for your kids?

Tanya Hackney: I have to be very honest with you, that is probably the hardest part of our lifestyle. Homeschooling is hard. A lot of people discovered in 2020 and 2021 how hard homeschooling is, especially if it was thrust upon them. I chose to do it. I chose to do it while traveling in a small space, which makes it doubly hard. But I chose it, so I can't really complain. I think on the one hand, it was really good for our kids. I think the travel alone made it worth the effort. And then, on the other hand, I don't think it was terribly consistent. I don't know that you could compare their education with an education that would have gotten in a school building. You know, maybe, maybe there's a parallel there. We rejected sort of organized church. We also rejected organized education. Our education they've gotten somewhat disorganized, probably equal parts, academic and real life. My 10 year old, still struggles with her math facts, we're still working on the multiplication tables. But that girl can make homemade tortillas from scratch using a tortilla press and a cast iron skillet. And I don't know many 10 year olds can do that. So whenever I'm despairing, like I hope that our kids got the education they needed, I think, well, I don't really know what they're going to need.

Tanya Hackney: I trust God with some of the those end results, and I think, well, they certainly got an education. It was very well-rounded. It might not have been as

academically strong as I had once dreamed. We've traded sort of those traditional land based goals for some sort of bigger life learning goals. They're pretty happy. I think the oldest one is independent now, and he is pursuing his dreams. What he feels is his calling, and he's learning to fly airplanes, and he's independent and finishing school, and he's doing all the things that we had hoped that he would do. And then we have, you know, all the kids have been able to pursue their individual goals and callings because they weren't boxed in by that system. And that does make us feel good and they were all able to reintegrate when we came back to the United States. They, the three oldest teenagers, were able to take dual enrollment classes at the local college. And up until they had sat in that first classroom and taken that first test, I wasn't sure how that was going to work, and I'm gratified to tell you that they're fine.

Reuel Sample: But from start to finish the marker of your home schooling and any home schooling is that you as a parent are involved in all aspects of their education so that you can say, OK, today we're supposed to study algebra, but we're here at this island with some major geographical features on it. We're going to study that instead, or we're going to we're going to do this or how does this bioluminescence in this in this piece of of water work? And so they're getting they're not just getting a grade. Your kids are getting an education.

Tanya Hackney: Correct. And we prioritized learning and mastery of skills over, I think, what the traditional school system prioritizes, which is passing a test. And I was actually I was a public school teacher. And, you know, in the same way that we say, you don't always want to know how the sausage is made like I didn't. I knew the ins and outs of public education, and I did not want my kids sitting in a classroom. And so I'm really happy with that sort of hands on and on location learning that they got for sure. We traded some consistency. Like you said, OK, today we were supposed to do the algebra lesson, but instead we're going to go climb a volcano. What are they going to remember looking back on it? I mean, they're going to they're going to remember that volcano hike for the rest of their lives. You know, the quadratic equations. Maybe they'll remember that. But you can always google that

Reuel Sample: Well, because you're a schoolteacher and because you've been doing this for a while, you do have some qualifications to answer this. Next question is that right now, there's no question that our public school systems are justifiably being

criticized for how they are teaching our kids what they're teaching our kids. Parents are in an uproar against it. And one of the answers is home schooling or group schooling. This is a podcast designed towards pastors and church leaders and those within the church. Is there a way? Do you think that the local church can make education for our kids a little bit easier?

Tanya Hackney: Well, you're also asking someone who's a bit of a, you know, outside the system, so so that's a hard question, I think the first responsibility lies with the parents to actually raise the children that they had. And our society does not make that easy and our priorities do not make that easy to prioritize raising your children yourselves and instilling them with the values that you think are important and giving them the word of God and giving them the foundation of trust. The way to do that is to have, I think and I know I'm going to sound like a loony here and like a throwback like June Cleaver. I think it's to have at least one parent who's really dedicated to staying with those kids when they're, you know, very young so that you're there for them and that you can. You can be their main influence, I mean, a person becomes like the people they spend time with, and so if your kid is dropped off at daycare, you know, from the time that they're six months old and then they're in school and then an after school programs and then they're they're surrounded by these other people and they're essentially being raised by strangers. And so I think to kind of pull back from what's happening, we've done a societal experiment and I think it's, you know, it's failing, it's failing our kids. I think that we need to go back to some kind of model where and it doesn't have to necessarily be the mom. I have friends who've had, you know, the mom works and the dad stays at home. But we have to have some people really dedicated to raising good people because raising children in an institutional setting doesn't raise compassionate, caring, critical thinking human beings.

Reuel Sample: What you're saying goes against, though, what has become the American dream. I want it all. And in order to have it all, I've got to work all these hours and so my kids are going to pay the price because I'm going to drop them off at daycare from the time that they can be away from me until they graduate from high school 18 years later. And what you're saying is, is that we've got to get away from that.

Tanya Hackney: Well, yeah, and it's your loss too, because you have these wonderful children that you love more than life itself. And then you you work so hard to raise them,

but then you don't get to actually enjoy the fruits you know of those labors because they're away from you all the time and you're not getting to spend the time with them or they don't behave the way that you would want them to behave and then you don't even like them. And that, to me, is a real tragedy. We rejected the American dream. Actually, we would probably classify that as the American nightmare. We lived in a house in suburban Atlanta with a white picket fence. We had two cars and a weekend card. Jay drove a Porsche for a while. It was our date car. You know, only two seats, so it couldn't take any kids with us.

Reuel Sample: It wasn't just a Porsche, folks. It was a Porsche Boxter. Is that right?

Tanya Hackney: Boxster? Yes, it was a Boxster. It was a little convertible. It was so fun to drive. And you know, when we could get a babysitter, we would we would take off. And that was so much fun and we had this wonderful, idyllic life. And I am not complaining about that life at all. The the work that my husband did, he was able to establish a career that eventually we were able to take with us and unplug because he's in because he's a computer guy. He was able to become a digital nomad. So I don't I'm not disparaging of those years that we built that life. But once we were there, once we had this American dream that everybody aspires to, we found it unfulfilling. We did not want. To fill our life with stuff, and we saw what was happening was that you, you know, you buy the starter home and then, you know, when the neighborhood starts to go, you know, the values in the neighborhood start to go down or it's time to put your kids in school. You start looking at the other neighborhoods that are either further outside the city or in the nicer area. And then you buy a bigger house and then you buy a nicer car. And this is this is a dangerous trap. In our opinion. We actually did a U-turn. We looked at another house in a nicer neighborhood and we almost signed papers on it and we both had misgivings. And so we explored those misgivings and we began to think about what we had always wanted to do, which was sail away and do something different. This was a dream that we'd had since we were teenagers, and we started to examine that. As an alternative to bickering, we decided to do a U-turn and we bought a smaller house and got rid of half of our stuff, and then when we found our boat, we got rid of the house and the stuff and the cars, and we we decided to collect experiences instead of objects.

Reuel Sample: Your boat is slightly bigger than the boat that we stayed on for three and a half years. It's got it's for some reason you decided to get two hulls instead of the standard one hull, but you still have to downsize and it's amazing how much you really don't need.

Tanya Hackney: So true, so true, and the reason that we have two hulls, quite frankly, is because we have five children, and every now and then you need to find a quiet corner and we have four cabins and you can almost get out of earshot. You could you could spread out a little bit. The main living space that where we spend most of our time is a 15 by 15 foot room and we are sometimes on top of each other. One of the chapters in my book is called Close Quarters, and when you say close quarters, I really know what that means.

Reuel Sample: But you folks are still around and you're still family, and that's the most important thing.

Tanya Hackney: Yeah, sometimes we're close emotionally and other times we're just close in proximity.

Reuel Sample: I want to keep I want to keep talking about how how parents can influence their children. Right now, according to a Wall Street Journal report that just came out, TikTok is the number one influencer in the lives of our children, and the influence from TikTok does not come from a human being someplace. It's an algorithm. And what that algorithm does is that they look at what the kids are watching and then they feed more of it and then they feed more of it. And these are kids end up going down these rabbit holes of extremism. How do you, as a parent overcome that? And how are you dealing that with that in your own family? Because you've got kids and they're they're connected.

Tanya Hackney: Yeah, I think it really starts at the beginning. I'm going to say three things. Three things were triggered by your question. First, when we were a young couple and we had, you know, just our first couple of kids, this would have been. Early, two thousands. My husband and I would get an occasional date. Grandma would watch the kids and we would go out and we'd go out to a restaurant and there would be children running around the table and we'd be so annoyed because we had just

escaped our own toddlers, only to find in the nice restaurant that there were toddlers running around. A few years later, we would go on a date and there would be no toddlers running around, and we started to notice this trend. The toddlers were still in the restaurant, but they were now staring at, you know, some sort of device and a screen. They were very quiet, but it was in a way more disturbing. We would prefer if they were running around acting crazy because at least they would be doing something that is normal for toddlers. So the dependence on a screen for entertainment and education starts really early. And so we actually never owned a television, never bought a screen, we had laptops.

Tanya Hackney: So we would do family movie nights, sometimes on the laptop. But we had wooden toys. We were very, very old fashioned in our parenting early on and I think people have abandoned. This old fashioned way of parenting. They've traded it for something that's easier but dangerous. So I would say like kids shouldn't be on a screen before age three at all, and that's maybe an extreme view. We obviously have teenagers now and they are connected and they do play Minecraft and they do spend time on screens, probably more than I like. But there was a year while we were traveling, we did an entire year screen free. So I'm sure some of your listeners will sort of gasp like how would you even make that happen when you're traveling and when you're on the ocean and when you're cocooning with your family? It wasn't that hard. And we had so many alternatives to staring at a screen. They were. They had the great outdoors. They had free diving and hiking, and they played musical instruments and they drew pictures and they sang songs. And they did all the things that people used to do back before we had convenient computerized education and entertainment.

Reuel Sample: And their heads did not blow up. They did not die. They were able to form coherent sentences.

Tanya Hackney: Yes, but they were angry and bored at the beginning, if you take away something, it's almost like, I would say it's almost like a drug addiction when you take that thing away that they're sort of dependent on, and they haven't learned how to entertain themselves or use their imagination. They do get angry and they are bored. But I think boredom is really good for children because they will. The human brain will eventually figure out what to do. It doesn't exist in boredom for very long. And you know, we're we're creative. We were created in the image of a creator and we'll figure out how

to create things again. But we do have to turn off the screen because that is the only way to learn that. And then I think there was this other thought that I was having while you were speaking where you asked the question, which was family dinner, family dinner. When you have, you know, the I can't believe that the number one influence is TikTok. That's appalling.

Reuel Sample: That Wall Street Journal report was amazing. They they spent a lot of time. They actually created bots, thousands of bots that responded to these things in different ways. And what would happen is is that they would start in what they call the general area. But each of these bots were programmed to respond to different kinds of videos. Some of the bots they were, they were talk. They would watch videos about depression and suicide and so forth and so forth. And what they found off was that these these what TikTok would show was more and more extreme in those areas of depression or what have you. And it's all algorithm based so that in the end, all these these bots were being seen were being shown were more and more extreme of the same topics. It was a fascinating,

Tanya Hackney: Fascinating look down the down the rabbit hole,

Reuel Sample: Right down the rabbit hole.

Tanya Hackney: Yeah, wow. Well, so I guess I guess the things that that we did, we we had actual. Intellectual, emotional, physical connection with our children in large part not because of quality time, but just because of quantity time, I mean, we just prioritize spending time with our kids and educating them and doing church with them and doing life with them and going on adventures with them. They probably, you know, are happy when they get a few minutes away from us because we were together all the time. But even as they've become teenagers and they have jobs and cars now and they've got, you know, beginning their lives, their own adventures, we still prioritize family dinner and we sit down every single night. And that's the only time, probably during the day that we are all in the same place. At the same time, we usually say a prayer before we eat. We are often praying for people who are struggling or sick. That would be the time that you would bring up something that you'd like to pray for. We say thank you for the meal and then we have dinner and you can't get away from the the digital age. So one of the things we did in the last couple of years, our kids would find a YouTube video that they

thought was interesting that they wanted to share with the family. So I think rather than sheltering our kids, we've moved into sort of a filtering stage. And so they would bring us a video and they would put it on after everybody had finished eating and we would watch it, you know, like a show and tell and then talk about it.

Tanya Hackney: So I think at the beginning, we were very big into sheltering. You know, no screens before the age of three and then after that, you know, very cautiously previewing everything that they watched, watching very carefully what went into their minds and their thoughts. And then later moving into sort of this filtering stage where we want to expose them to the world and give and let them have a chance to think about how they want to respond to it. And obviously, we can exert some influence there, I wouldn't go so far as to call it brainwashing because they don't always agree with us and with what we think. But we at least wanted to have that conversation open so that they could talk so that we could talk about hard things. And you know, obviously what's been in the news is gender identity crisis and critical race theory. And, you know, government overreach. And so all these things find their way into our dinner conversations. And I think that's something that's accessible to every family, not just a family on a boat. You can turn off devices, you can make them off limits at the dinner table, you can establish boundaries and you can sit down and eat as a family. You do have to prioritize it. You're going to have to make a sacrifice to make that happen. But it is possible

Reuel Sample: You hit the nail right on the head and you and you took the words out of my mouth is that you don't have to be on a boat to do this. Making your kids making your family a priority is key and not being afraid to say, OK, let's look at this YouTube or let's watch this or let's talk about this. Our kids are actually pretty resilient, and they've got some pretty insightful ideas about the things that are going on around us. And they really actually do hunger for their parents, for their parents to have input if the parents would just take some time to do it.

Tanya Hackney: Yeah, teenagers are tough. I at one point I had four, all at the same time, and I thought that it was hard when they were all toddlers. But I tell you what, I think having teenagers is harder and they are in an age where they're beginning to question what you think. And they're. And they keep you on your toes because they make you. You have to to give logical, reasonable responses for why you think what

you think and you know they're hardwired to separate from you. And so they're in a sense pushing back against all of those things that you taught them. And sometimes you feel despair and you wonder, like, did they grow up in our home? Who is this person? And then you get these little glimpses, especially when they're away from you. I'll hear back from someone who's met one of my kids and they'll kindly come back to me and tell me what a wonderful kind person and what good manners they had. And I and I say, you know, he was. I heave a sigh of relief. I'm like, OK, good, I can stop despairing. I think it's going to be OK.

Reuel Sample: That's after you double check if they're talking about the same last name of the kids that,

Tanya Hackney: Oh yeah, I'm like, Are you sure you're talking about my kid? Like, actually like, had good manners and OK, they were respectful. Are you sure?

Reuel Sample: And I think it changes how we look at the activities of of God in the in the especially in the Old Testament is if you've lived through as a parent of teenagers, when they go through the rebellion, you can kind of pick pick up on what God is feeling. I took care of you all those years and now this is what you're doing. And you know, we start thinking and understanding of God as father.

Tanya Hackney: Oh yeah. And like, nothing is more instructive. I'll, you know, yell at one of my kids for doing something, and then I hear almost an audible voice inside my head saying, Really, you're yelling at them about that. I'm pretty sure you do the exact same thing. And I am quite frankly, a toddler at times, and I've been very convicted of that, of that rebellious attitude. And it does. I have grace for my children. I give my children grace because I need grace myself.

Reuel Sample: The book is called Leaving the Safe Harbor: The Risks and Rewards of Raising a Family on a Boat. Tonya also blogs at Take to Sailing dot com. Tonya Hackney, thank you very much for being here.

Tanya Hackney: Thank you so much for letting me just share a little bit about our lives and about God's grace to us.

