

"MORNING TIME HAS BEEN ESSENTIAL FOR ME AS I LEARN TO TEACH FROM REST.  
EVERY HOMESCHOOLING MOM NEEDS THIS BOOK!"

—SARAH MACKENZIE



better  
*Together*

strengthen your family,  
simplify your homeschool,  
and savor the subjects  
that matter most

**PAM BARNHILL**

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Better Together:  
Strengthen Your Family, Simplify Your Homeschool,  
and Savor the Subjects that Matter Most

[PamBarnhill.com](http://PamBarnhill.com)

ISBN 978-0-9997421-0-5 (print), 978-0-9997421-1-2 (epub)

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Editor  
Ann Karako

Publishing and Design Services:  
[MartinPublishingServices.com](http://MartinPublishingServices.com)



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# Foreword

While reading Pam's book on Morning Time, it occurred to me that I do not have nine children; I have ten. And I don't mean my husband, even though he is quite nervous that with no more children to homeschool I will commence teaching him. No, I feel that my tenth child, the darling I anxiously watch from afar to see how it flourishes, is Morning Time.

To see the idea of Morning Time slowly take root over many long years and finally to reproduce itself in a new generation is astounding to me.

To say that I created Morning Time because we participated in it for so many years is like saying I created breakfast because we had oatmeal every day. Still it is a much-loved adopted child, and to see it thrive in old and new ways is gratifying. I think this is happening now, after so many years, just because it is so organic, so natural. If you are in the business of ordering affections (*ordo amoris*) then Morning Time is the most obvious, if not the easiest, way to go.

Twenty-seven years ago Timothy (my oldest) and I repeated his Awana verse, sang a Bible song, read nursery rhymes, and read aloud all morning long just because it was so much fun. Then we got up the next day and did it again. We never did stop.

This past school year was our last official year of Morning Time. Andrew and Alex and I got up many mornings, prayed together, read poems, diagrammed sentences, then read *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* together. It was a fitting way to end a quarter century of family tradition.

Only it is not the end. If Pam is right and we are not merely teachers but fellow travelers, then it makes sense that Morning Time will continue for me. I will still get up and seek the Lord in His Word, sing His praises, and commence praying for my husband, my nine children, their four spouses, and my ten grandchildren. Many days I will read a poem, and most days I will read a few chapters from a few books. Turns out Morning Time might have just been an excuse for me to learn after all. Nothing has changed except that no toddler interrupts me these days, except when the grandchildren are visiting. This week two little girls have kept me from my devotions but not from participating in a liturgy of love. As I sat reading aloud to them from the book my grandmother read aloud to me, I couldn't help but get choked up. Love is a liturgy. It means something. I must tell someone.

People used to ask me to write a book about Morning Time. For awhile I thought maybe I would, but then I didn't, and life got complicated. Then one day I looked up and I was not the only one. The burden was lifted. Other women—writers, mothers, teachers—were writing and living out their own Morning Times. Sarah MacKenzie breathed new life into my posts, and now Pam has written this helpful book. And helpful it is. It even made me a little sad that I couldn't do it all over again. However, Pam's reminder that I am still a learner encouraged me.

Pam has said so much that I would say and then some. I love reading about Morning Time from her fresh perspective. So much of her experience is common to my family. Once upon a time I had three little children and we had Morning Time just like Pam! Then there were nine, and then eight, and then seven, and so on just like an Agatha Christie mystery. And now suddenly, so suddenly, just two are left at home but going on to other schools of life. Yet Morning Time lives on in my life, in Pam's family, and maybe in your family too. That brings me great joy. "I have no greater joy than to hear my children walk in the truth" (1 John 1:4).

Thanks, Pam, for reminding me of the fun I had with my children once upon a time. May the fruit last long after you and I are gone.

Cindy Rollins,  
 Summer 2015  
 Preface to the first edition



part  
*one*

*one*

## A Homeschool Wish List

When I first became interested in the concept of homeschooling my kids, I rarely doubted that I could actually *do* it. I mean, I had taught for years in inner-city high schools and middle schools. I won awards, gave workshops for other teachers, and had former students who later told me that my classes were the ones that had most prepared them for the real world. While I wasn't the flashiest teacher—in fact, looking back, I can think of over a million ways I could have been a much better one—I was competent and confident in my ability to do my job. Homeschooling would be no different, I thought.

Then I actually started homeschooling. While teaching a class of high school freshmen how to write compelling news stories is no easy feat, I found that homeschooling is an entirely different emotional experience. As a public school teacher, I had been committed to my students. Being solely responsible for the education of your own child, though, is the kind of thing that keeps you up at night—many nights.

That is not to say that doing the job of homeschooling—and it *is* a job—is not worth the sleeplessness. The rewards of getting to spend your days as a family, experiencing the moments when wonder and learning collide, and allowing your kids time to play and be kids, far outweigh the hours spent working and worrying.

I have always had an affinity for hearing other people's homeschooling stories. I love the “day-in-the-lifestyle” vignettes on blogs that give a glimpse into what others' homeschool days look like. A few years ago I turned this interest into a podcast called *The Homeschool Snapshots Podcast*. Each 30-minute episode consists of about 20 minutes when I ask the homeschooler who is being the guest that day the very same questions on each show. Who is your favorite homeschool guru? What would you tell your younger self? How do you go about salvaging a bad homeschool day? I don't do this because I can't think of anything else to ask, but instead I do it for reassurance.

The message I want parents to get from listening to the show is that there is no single right way to homeschool. Different families will thrive under different circumstances or will follow different educational philosophies. Yet we are so much more alike than we are different. We have similar hopes and dreams for our kids and are striving for similar goals—educating healthy, happy, productive adults who are well-adjusted to live in this fallen world. We also have similar struggles—like those annoying, all-too-frequent, bad homeschool days.

### Today is Not the Definition of Your Homeschool

Kortney Garrison spent two-and-a-half years serving indigenous people in Suriname. Now armed with a library card and her own intense curiosity, she homeschools her three young kids in the Pacific Northwest. She reminded me in a recent *Snapshots* interview that one day is not the sum total of your homeschool experience, even though it can very much seem like it when you are in the muddle. “Whether (today) is a really amazing day or a less amazing day, one day doesn't make or break you. We are here for the long haul, and this is a big journey that we are on,” Kortney said.<sup>1</sup>

As hard as that is to remember on the good days, it is much harder to remember on the bad ones. On the bad ones we are certain we are ruining our children's lives (and possibly that they are ruining ours as well). Homeschool Frustration Syndrome is a very real thing, despite the fact that I just made up that name. You wake in the morning unready to even begin your day. You face whining kids who drag their feet and don't want to start. You worry that your

homeschooling is ineffective. The kids are not retaining any of the information that is in their textbooks. You despair that your homeschool is boring and joyless. They aren't interested in the material you are presenting at all. You don't blame them—you don't much like it yourself.

When you first began researching homeschooling, you encountered the blogs of moms who incorporated nature journaling, learning about great art, and listening to beautiful music in their homeschools. Within their families they sang hymns, memorized scripture, and read beautiful poetry together. You wanted all of those things for your homeschool; but reading lessons, math worksheets, history texts, dirty diapers, and toddler messes soon turned into “How does anyone ever have time for all those extras?”

You feel as if your day is an exercise in checking boxes, with one day as monotonous as the next. You want education to be more than selecting the best pieces to pad a portfolio. Your interactions with your kids have been reduced to fights over finishing the math worksheet; and speaking of fights, your kids' interactions with each other consist largely of those. Where is the relationship? Where is time to build character, to teach articles of your faith? You wonder how to get it all done each day. School is time-consuming! Everyone is going about their own tasks. There has got to be a way to teach multiple ages at once, but it eludes you. The school day drags on into the late afternoon, or tasks don't get finished at all.

Whoa, mama. Take a deep breath.

## What's Your Homeschool Makeover Wish List?

My entire family loves to watch the TV show *Fixer Upper*. From Dad down to the seven-year-old boy, there is something about the show that appeals to each of us. On the show the husband-and-wife team of Chip and Joanna Gaines show a family three rundown houses. The family selects one of the three, and then the Gaines spend the rest of the show turning that house into something stunning. My kids mostly love the antics of crazy Chip Gaines. I think my husband is drawn in by the craftsmanship and carpentry (he has a desk job, and secretly, I think, he would rather work with his hands). As for me, the appeal of the show is the promise of the “after.” The Gaines take something that is tired, dated, and clearly not working, and turn it into something that the homeowners find beautiful, functional, and perfect for their needs.

That's the beauty of a makeover. What was once disorganized becomes functional. What was once tired becomes energized. What was once drab becomes beautiful. There is a point in each show when the guest family declares what is on their wish list for their new home. They itemize their needs. It is up to the show's makeover team to be sure that the new home has those features. What about you? If you could make a homeschool wish list, what might it include? How would you go about fighting Homeschool Frustration Syndrome in your home?

For our family, the cure has been about establishing a time in our day when we can all learn together. A time where the oldest (me!) down to the youngest can study largely from the same curriculum, be read to from the same books, and contemplate the same ideas—each to their own ability. It has been about creating a space for shared discussion and presenting truths that are education for the old just as much as for the young. It has been about using simple but powerful methods as old as education itself—methods like listening to stories, questioning and discussing, telling back, and recitation. It has been about adding beauty and delight to our day to feed our souls and keep us going. All of the above are on my homeschool wish list, and fortunately I have found a practice that allows me to easily add them to our day.

It is called Morning Time.