

Catholic Homeschool Podcast

Trust God with Your Homeschool – Tami Kiser

Welcome to the Catholic Homeschool podcast. I'm your host Paola Ciskanik. And today I am thrilled to welcome Tami Kiser.

Hi, Tami, how are you today?

Hi Paola, how are you?

Good. And Tami is joining us from South Carolina. I'm here up in Delaware. And as we're recording this, this is just after Easter and we both have been freezing. So, what we're going to talk about, really that number one challenge that we, you know, homeschooling parents have and really, any parents I'd have to say, which is that challenge that we've got so much to do. We've got this laundry list of things. How do we set those priorities and how do we be present for our children? So, before we begin, I'm going to read your bio. Okay, Tami, and let's yeah, let's get that in there because people need to know your interesting story.

So, Tami Kiser lives in the mountains of Sunset, South Carolina at a Retreat Center. She's a mom to 10 children with two children still at home. She's a grandmother to 10. She is the author of two books published by Our Sunday Visitor. She has produced numerous video programs for parents and women, which can be found on Formed a Catholic video platform. Many of you know about Formed. You get it through your parish. She currently holds a part time job teaching with a very long commute at St. Joseph's Catholic school in Greenville, South Carolina, the rest of her time. (Is there any, Tami?) and energy is spent running Heart Ridge Retreat Center with her husband, Keith. This involves planning retreats, camps, and conferences, as well as helping with cooking, cleaning, and taking out the trash. She has a passion for nature and wildlife and loves all forms of art and music. Her vision for the Retreat Center is for the people who visit to find beauty there that will draw them closer to God.

Well, thank you, Tami. And welcome. Welcome.

Yeah. Thank you. I'm glad to be here. The bio overwhelms me, but yeah, that's it. That's true.

Isn't it amazing? Yes. I mean, I alluded when we first began to this whole idea now, again, being a mom to 10, you know, busy and homeschooling, you've had that experience and now, you know, even just having a calling to God in this ministry, you know we moms have this--or parents have this long list, how in the world do we set priorities? I know you wrote a book; something must have compelled you to write that one Smart Martha's Catholic Guide for Busy Moms. Yeah. Tell us a little bit about that.

Well, I mean, I've, I've heard a quote that we teach things that we need to learn ourselves. And I mean, that's so true for me, so, and it's not necessarily that I'm the pro at it. It's just something that I know I need to learn. You know, I've just found that conviction, you know, I, I love the Mary Martha story. I'm just, I'm just such a Martha, I'm such a doer, but I've just had that conviction that God wants us to just be and just be that Mary in His presence.

And I think that's so important for moms, especially homeschooling moms. We're just, you know, we have our lists and things we have to get done and, you know, it's, you know, housework, but then we have that, the list of, you know, our kids have to be able to read and they have to do their math facts. I mean, we just have so many things that we're constantly doing so many things that we're doing. And then, and then we're all volunteers in the church too. So, we're all working at our parish. We're teaching CCD. And it's just, I think we just fall into that Martha mode, and we need to be more like Mary. I mean, that's, that's what, that's what Jesus wants from us. He's given us tasks to do in this life. And I think we have added to those tasks.

God doesn't really want us to have these super long checklists. You know, we do have things that we have to do. We're busy moms. Like you say, we do have lists that we have to do, but I think there's so much added to that list. And we second guess God, like we think that, you know, when He tells us we need rest or He tells us that we need to spend time with Him, or we need to spend time with our children, you know, when you look at Jesus and His ministry, you know, as far as being a top executive, you don't see Him scrambling from one person to the next and writing people off.

And just here, you got your job done. You know, He's sitting with like the woman at the, well, and just having a conversation with her, you know, He's just sitting with people, talking with people, maybe insignificant people, you would think, you know, He's not planning these business meetings. He's not like, okay, disciples, we're going to organize you. And you've got this, this, this to do. And, you know, no, it's just, He has this, really, this ministry of presence. And I think as, as you know, being convicted as a Martha myself, we need to have more of that ministry of presence with our family and try to emphasize that more being with our kids and just trusting that this is how God wants us to be. And those other things are going to get taken care of.

They are okay. So those other things are going to take... so it sounds to me like there's a priority and there is a way a practical way. Would you say, you know, and especially with your experience to kind of... where do you start? You know, what comes off?

Oh, you know, I think the first place is that surrender prayer. Have you heard that? I mean, that's, that's really, my go-to is that, you know, Jesus, you know, the whole Jesus, I trust in you or Jesus, I give everything to you, take care of everything for me.

And, and just sort of trust that he is going to take care of everything to you, and then let the day unfold as it unfolds, you know, make your lists start things. And, and I always say, here's the, here's the priority. I always say that is helpful to me is that people always take precedent over task. So, no matter what things I have to do, whether that's even something like making dinner, emptying the dishwasher, people always take priority over every single one of those things.

So, if my child comes up to me and has a question, or is concerned about something, I mean, I'm not saying you have to play Candyland, you know, when you have to make dinner, but sometimes you do. Sometimes there's a need, it's the neighbor who knocks on the door and needs something. Or the, the phone call that you don't want right now, because you're busy. You have something to do, but if it's a person, if it's somebody with a face that's who you have to pay attention to, that's always where Jesus shows up.

I know Jesus shows up in your dishes and in cooking, you know, and in teaching, I know Jesus can show up in any task, but Jesus always shows up in the face of somebody, whether it's your, your children or your neighbors, or a friend or whatever, right. There's your top priority right there. And of course, your top priority is, is Jesus. You're not going to find Jesus if you don't spend time with Him every day, you know what I mean?

Yeah. You're not going to remember. Right. You have to remember to do the people priority. You're not going to remember to even find them in your dishes if you're not spending time with Him every day. And I'm not saying you need to spend an hour every morning praying. I mean, for some people they may need that. I don't know.

You know, we each have our own path and, and, you know, five minutes of really concentrated meditation with God is better than if you're just, I mean, you know, just rattling off prayers and not really praying, you know? So, I, you know, you can't say the time, it's just some good quality prayer, you know, it could be a good quality Rosary, sure. That could be what you need every day, or it could be, you know, like I like to read the Magnificat or even just for me, I, I say that surrender prayer, you know, and I say, I'm my morning offering. And I really, really mean it, you know? And I asked God to show up every day, you know, and then Mass and you know, those prayers throughout the day. So, you keep that constant presence of Jesus with you. And then you're going to know your priorities at that point.

Yeah, he does, he does talk to us, even in those moments, even in the busy moments. He's teaching us, as you said, giving Him the opportunity to teach us, which brings me to that next point. So, it sounds to me too, you're kind of modeling some behavior for your children. I know you've done this video called trusting God when we talk about the world is full of anxiety. So, what about modeling for our children?

Oh, for sure. I mean, we can't help it. We model for our children. I mean, you can't help it. You can't help it and good and bad for sure. But you know, I mean, I think it just is going to happen naturally. I mean, we've got, you know, we remind that like, you know, I just was on the phone before talking to you and I was worried about, this is my daughter. She's, she's 30 and she lives in Chicago and she's, she's an actress. And I just, I just hung up the phone from her, but she's in this big play this weekend, which is exciting. But she, her, her husband just got COVID. So, this is like the biggest disaster in her life right now. Do you know what I mean? Because he's been, they've been dying to perform and perform, and now it's just like, oh, what do they do? Without getting the details about COVID and all that kind of thing. But it's just like, you know, you have to just sort of trust that God has this and it's going to be okay, either you perform, or you won't perform it doesn't really matter. It doesn't matter.

So, you have those conversations with your kids all the time. You know, this isn't going to work out for you, but that's okay, God's got this, God's got this.

And that's like, sort of our motto. And don't worry about things, especially with, we don't really know yet, like, you know, we and our kids, they get so tensed up about things that haven't even happened yet. You really just try to take them through that conversation. It doesn't do any good to worry about things. And of course, you can talk this till you're blue in the face. It it's, it's how you model that with your kids. Do they just say, they'll learn that from you, they'll learn that anxiety and that stress from you. You don't even have to like talk to them about it. Just, just, if you just take care of learning that yourself, telling yourself that, and living in that real presence of Christ and that real trust, that real surrender to His Will that'll rub off on your kids.

That reminds me because you have an amazing story about trusting God. Like your life has taken quite a turn. We mentioned about this Retreat Center. So, tell us that little story about, you know, how do you even find a Retreat Center and talk about trust in God?

So, well, we did have that, we had this call. So, if you have a call, you have to trust God, you just do that. Then you start to question, well, do I really have this call? I got a thing, right? Like, is that really what God's calling me to do?

Well like homeschooling. Right?

Yeah. Well, so like I said, we've had this conviction about wanting to rest and getting away from these busy lists and how people really need to pull away from their regular busy lives and spend that time just being with God, being with other people, being with their families, you know, this is a Retreat Center, right? That's what a Retreat Center is. And sometimes we all need that, like that, you know, that reset in our life where we can really like, take a step back, take a breath and, and we need to pull away from our lives and do that.

And sometimes it's just something simple with your family, like going on a picnic the afternoon, or just pulling out of your regular busy-ness, you know, we're big on vacations where they have that component to them. So, so anyway, so my husband and I like, yeah, we really feel that we need to help people find this. And so, we started looking for a Retreat Center and actually it started because we were just feeling this anxious, stressful life, these lists, these things to do with kids, you know, high school kids, college age kids, there's just so much drama. All right.

And then we're like at the peak of our careers too. So, we're doing a lot with our careers too. And we have little kids it's just so hectic. Y'all know that this is why we're having this conversation. So, we had, we ended up buying this little piece of property in a little cabin in the mountains, and we would drive, you know, an hour and a half through these mountains up and down and around, up and down and around. I mean, just, you know, like kind of, you're getting sick, even just getting there. But as soon as we'd get over that last mountain, my husband's blood pressure would just drop, you know, there was no cell phone service there, you know, you couldn't even do the internet, you can't check work, you can't talk to people. And we would go there for weekends as a couple with our kids, our kids and their families. Cause some of them are married. And what a difference that made in, in the mountains are beautiful. You know?

So, we're like, we want to share this with other people. It's, you know, we, you don't really have to have that to get that experience of being closer to God, but sometimes in this busy world, whatever you can do to get that, you know?

So, we're like, yeah, if we can help other people just sort of experience this Retreat, this getting into nature, breathing, fresh air, going on hikes and walks with each other with your family, just by yourself with God, no internet, you know, no cell phones, that kind of thing. (Although we do have cell phone service at a Retreat Center, it's not very good, but there is a service here because you know, you can't completely disconnect.) It would be nice.

But so, we started looking for, for property and we went all over the place. We spent like a year looking at different properties. The one place where we live has like the highest concentration of like camps and like the world or whatever, because it's just such a beautiful part of the country. So, we were looking through all these old camps and different farms and so on.

And then we were in contract for this one and we realized we had to put a lot of money into it in order to have more housing, to make it affordable because you've gotta be able to make money to pay for the property. And then on the computer, this other property came up and it was just sort of that, oh no, that's the one that God wants us at.

And so, we went there and it's this old Baptist like reform school. We're in, we're in the Bible belt here in South Carolina. So, we're surrounded by lots and lots of good God-fearing Baptist people. We love them, you know, they're our neighbors.

Salt in the earth, our Christian brothers and sisters.

So, you know, it's just funny having a Catholic presence in that, but it's, it's, it's been fun.

But the one sign that was sort of that miraculous sign, couple things too. And of course, St. Joseph is the real estate guy. I mean, he does this, he's also the career now. So, like, if your husband is asking about careers, you do these St. Joseph novenas. So, St. Joseph came through on both of those things, as far as it being like a, a job that we can actually sustain and then finding us the property is that when we got to this Baptist camp and I won't get into it, you have to read it on the website. I mean, it had been abandoned from very long time, awful to say.

Yeah, like scary? Like a scary place to even walk into.

Very scary, the power had been out. And we're talking about freezers with food that was in them without power. I mean, it's just been awful, but you know, the one we went to this one building, you never know what you're going to get into, and you're opening these rooms up. And this was in the winter. We were looking and we see this one statue of, of a man and it's a statue of Saint Joseph!

In a Baptist camp?

Isn't that such a miraculous thing. So, we open up the door and we're, we're all, we are not prepared while using our little cell phones as flashlights. And we see this silhouette, of course, it's a little bit scary to think it was a real man. And I know that's just a statue. And then it's statue of St. Joseph, which, you know, unheard of in a Baptist place.

That's just so bizarre. It ended up that it was part of a nativity scene. You know, they just had this leftover Saint Joseph who was part of this bigger nativity scene, but he was sitting there on this chair. And so that was our statue of Saint Joseph. And then we were scheduled to close on this place on March 19th.

Oh wow! His feast day.

I know and you don't plan those closing dates. You have no power over closing days, you know, when you purchase property. So, we thought that was kind of neat. So yeah. So now we have this Retreat Center, we've been opening it up. We have our own Retreats here, but we also have, you know, other, you know, the parishes, we've had some Baptist groups who've come and it's, it's just really, it's in the nature, it's in the mountains. So, it's just very beautiful.

So, homeschoolers tend to, you know, and again, we think about education education. Well, you know, let's talk Tami about, you know, the whole person, because you know, you, I mentioned in your bio, you love nature and then your husband's blood pressure went down the minute you're in nature. Don't we tend to ignore nature? What does that do for us in terms of, you know, restoring us?

There's just, there's tons of studies about this. It's, you know, you can look it up on the internet and you'll see, there are physical things that happen to you when you get in nature. And I like looking at what the saints have said about nature. I mean, there's so many saints, you know, we of course think of Saint Francis, but you know, Saint Therese loved being in nature. She loved, she loved flowers and fields. And I mean, and there's so many saints you can pull up about how nature is the book that shows them about God.

So, it's, it's, you know, and it's, its science is showing us now, you know, social sciences coming out with all these studies. And so, this, we have this whole, you know, we have these nature schools, right? So, we Catholic Homeschool. We probably do put our kids in nature. A lot of these, I always say when I was raising my kids, but they actually have like public schools now that are outdoor schools where they teach a lot of the classes outside.

So even as you know, I'm suggesting this to you, homeschoolers out there that, you know, get those kids outside. It's not slacking. If you do that, like you always think, oh, I'm such a slacker. We're not having to sit inside, filling out their math sheets or whatever. No, get them outside, get them playing with sticks, get them, building their own forts and creating their own little stories and play that they do outside. This is so important for their education. Talk about, you know, we're here, we're talking about natures and education planning over talking to homeschoolers, but also the nature for us as a family and as our own general health, it calms our nerves. It's, I mean, just all kinds of things like that. And I have my list in front of me. I'm sorry. And we've all experienced that just, just going outside and going on a hike, you feel good about it.

And you talk about self-care, you know, and that's one of the things I think that even just like, it's good for the children, but it's also good for the parents.

It's so good for us too. It's so good for us. Read your book to your kids outside, you know, just sit outside. There's all kinds of stuff you can do in that way. Yeah.

Yeah. Yeah. So, tell me a little bit about, you know, one of the things I know right now, you're, you're getting your plan because as we're recording this, as I said, we're right the week after Easter, right. What about vacations, summer vacations? You mentioned that, you know, this is a little different than going to Disney world, you know? So, what's it like at your Retreat Center. And are you booking summer camps now?

Yes, we are booking summer camps and two of our camps are full, but we still have lots of room in our other ones. So of course, like any of you parents, you're out listening to this now, you know, if you were to plan the perfect summer vacation, all right. And we've just been very, always very purposeful with our vacation time. And I think homeschools, our homeschoolers are really good about this. You know, we'll go to museums, right? We've always stopped at so many different shrines. Anytime we go on vacation somewhere, we're always stopping at a shrine or something like that. We've been through so many battlefields. It's like crazy.

But other things that we love as that we think should be incorporated to vacation is all the time together. Just good time together. We don't like a lot of TV. Like, you know, we go to beach houses or something like that. You don't want the TV on. You know, you want all of that done. You went time just to relax and hang out together. And ideally you would love to have a little more deeper conversations about, you know, how they are in their faith life. And you know, how can we pray more together as a family conversation about what would make our family closer together? Just the meaningful conversations. We would love that to develop out a vacation.

We want vacation to be very fun. And for moms, we want vacation to be relaxing. Like I've told you about these vacations that we've gone on as battlefields and all this stuff. That's been a ton of work for me as a mom, you know, and planning the food when you're taking 10 kids on vacation, lot of times we're camping, it was just, it was just so much work that I would come home from vacation. I would be like done.

So, so we are planning this vacation for families that moms can just really relax that the planning is done for mom and the cooking's done, we do all the cooking ourselves at the camp. So, we have this day where we're in this beautiful camp only, they're not like tents. we're talking. These are rooms with soft beds and, and bathrooms with running water and air conditioning. So, we've got the comforts. We're not camping here at our, at our camp. We call it a camp, but it's not really camping.

And then we have activities kind of like a, a Bible school or vacation Bible school, maybe a little bit where you're with some, you do some things with kids your own age, but you do some things with your family will be given like some family activities. Maybe it'd be a scavenger hunt across the, the Retreat Center.

And then we'd give, we give some free time, but we also lead people on excursions because we aren't one of the best places in that. We have like the highest concentration of waterfalls in the world where we live here. So, there's always the waterfall and swimming hole hike that we'll go to. And we could take families on that. And then of course in the evenings, we have like your, your square dancing, your talent shows, all that kind of thing.

So, you can, you can see how that would be just a really fun vacation for families. And, and like I said, it's not just the fun, although that's an important part of it have fun with your kids, but there's, there's meaningful. We're trying to incorporate these conversations in. And then the other thing that's great about is this you're with other Catholic families who want these similar things. And so, you, you learn so much just being with these other Catholic families, such a great time of fellowship, and the kids just all get along so well by the end of the week, we're just like one big family.

And we only do, like, we only take about 12 families at a time, so it's not like you're overwhelmed and there's so much going on. You've got this little bit, but 12 families, especially, we've had some large families here. There's plenty of kids. So, kids can find their own little play groups. And so, it's just, it's been so much fun. It's just been great. This is only our second year, but you know, we've really put a lot of time and thought into it and just so happy with how last year went. We did, we had families say their kids have more fun than when they went to Disney World.

Yes. Kids love that. Getting back to basics!

Kid's just love being with other kids and playing and yeah.

Yeah, and you can't underestimate how much your kids really do want to spend time with you because they're so busy to like, not have other things distract you. You really can truly be present. If as you say, you got, you got the cooking and the planning, and everything taken care of.

That's right. And so, it's just being with your family and having fun with your family. And then out of that, of course, you know, that time that's where you develop some more of those, you know, good conversations.

Yeah. And it goes fast. I mean, one of the things, and I know both of us are grandparents, you know, it's the old cliché, but you cannot, you know, it goes fast. It goes fast. And you have just, so the need is urgent to really be, one on one.

They take that time. I mean, whether, you know, whether you come to our camp, which would be great, we'd love to have you, but anytime you're your vacations that time your kid wants, I always use the Candyland illustration because I hate playing Candyland. I just hate that game. It's just an obnoxious game. I hate it. But so, for me, that's, that's my big sacrifice. If I have to take time with the child and play Candyland, you know, but just whatever that your Candyland is, you take that time to be with your children and, and just take that time, get away from that busy list.

I know we all have stuff we have to do, but, but really look for where God is asking you to be in that moment. And just trust that the other stuff's going to get done, that God wants to get done. Yeah. The important stuff, the really important stuff always gets done.

It does, Tami, and resting in that God's trust the surrender prayer, reading that right back to, you know, doing that. And I know I'm one of those busy people who loves to make lists and I'll put on the list, something I've already done, just so I can check it off and slow down. Yeah. So, this is such a beautiful, beautiful insights, such beautiful sharing, and especially you living it and you trust and modeling it for your children. I am so thankful for you sharing that with us today, where can people find out about you and it's Heart Ridge Ministries is your new site?

Yeah heartridgeministries.com. You could search Heart Ridge Retreat Center and that'll come up on Google. So, Heart Ridge, and it's, it's, you know, it's, it's given to the sacred heart of Jesus. So, every, every building has His pictures enthroned here, you know, all the promises of the sacred heart that we're just really hoping, you know, that He just envelops this whole Center. And He has, you know, we see that.

Yeah, Cor Unum. You know, one heart, it's this whole idea that our families have one heart to the Lord. And I really sense that that's exactly what you're, you know, opening yourself to that, Tami. That's exactly what you did.

Yeah, it is. And we also have an outreach because we do have, we're in the Center of, like I said, so many great outdoor rock climbing, mountain biking. There's just so much that sits here. We open our doors to people who are not religious, and they come here, and they'll stay in our buildings and they've got that sacred heart of Jesus there. And it's just a, you know, it's just an outreach for us in that way. Just that, just this Catholic hospitality, but, you know, we care about you. We're going to be interested in you and you know, the way of telling them that God loves them too.

Yeah. Just like God, you know, again, call the disciples. You're, you know, let's invite others into this beautiful world. And so, I love your heart for this. I knew I wanted to; I knew that there was also just really quickly. Are you still looking for interns? I know you use...

We do. We have plenty of female interns. So, if there is some male interns, you know, it'd be nice to have some guys there as well. We have, it looks like we have a great team of like senior girls and some college girls, you know, the interns make the summer camp. They just, they just do. We're a happy joyful team and the young kids and they look up so much to those interns. We need some boys in that.

So, if anyone has any high school boys, seniors, you know, maybe even juniors or like, you know, in college who are looking for something to do over the summer, it's a great way to spend the summer. We do pay them. They just get so much experience because we do, we load on a lot of responsibility for them. And they always, you know, live up to that. They rise to that occasion, and they end up falling in love with our families in terms just, you know, it's just great.

It's just a, it's a fun thing for a kid to do over the summer. So yeah, we, we are looking for males now, so...

Okay. Okay. Definitely. We'll put those links below this video that anybody who's got, some sons that are looking for an amazing time...

Sons looking for something productive to do over the summer. I mean, really, I mean, we do pay, we do pay, and you know, all room and board. So, you know, they get to leave home to go back home with some cash, but really just a really super experience. For some really good growth.

It is. My kids have always done internships and it's a way of testing out your calling. You know, we are leading them through discernment and what a lovely way. I really do believe when we instill wonder by being in nature, we do have that opportunity to hear God's call. We do. We do. We do.

Well. Thank you so much, Tami. This has been such a pleasure. I thank you again. I think everybody who's watching and again, Tami Kiser is Heart Ridge Ministries. We'll put the links below also to her book, the smart Martha's. And I think you, again, may have a beautiful, beautiful time this summer with all those families. I really hope that some of the families listening do go this summer and drop us a line and send us pictures.

And so, you can also meet me in the community, the CatholicHomeschoolCommunity.com. That's where I hang out. We're off all the social media, it's our private safe place. So please do join me in the Catholic Homeschool Community.

And thank you again for listening to the Catholic Homeschool podcast. God bless. Bye Tami.
