



One More Thing

BY SONYA SHAFER, 2018 HOMESCHOOL IOWA CONFERENCE KEYNOTE SPEAKER

It's probably happened to you too. You're running low on eggs, apples, and napkins; so you make a mental shopping list and announce, "I'm heading to the store. Does anybody need anything?"

"Could you get some avocados so we can make guacamole? Oh, and some cotton balls?" your daughter asks as you walk by.

Eggs, apples, napkins, avocados, cotton balls. Got it.

"Can you get me some tea bags, please," another daughter adds.

Eggs, apples, napkins, avocados, cotton balls, tea bags. No problem.

"We need more popcorn," calls your husband from the other room. "And I'm out of decaffeinated coffee."

You feel your list quickly approaching the line that delineates Too Much.

Your son wanders into the room: "How can I brush my teeth if there isn't any toothpaste?"

That's it. You reach for the nearest pencil.

What was a relatively simple and manageable task has become overwhelming.

Crossing the Line

Looking back, you can easily see how it happened. The process of adding one more thing, then one more thing, then another one resulted in crossing the line into Too Much.

It's pretty easy to recognize that shift with a shopping list. But somehow it's not as obvious with homeschooling.

You start out with a mental list of priorities: read and discuss good books, practice spelling and writing, accurately calculate numbers, cultivate good habits of character, appreciate good art and music, love God and His Word. That doesn't seem so overwhelming.

But then others start to offer one more thing.

"Does your child participate on any teams? I think he would really like this one."

"Take a look at this class. It meets once a week."

"Have you seen this new curriculum supplement? It takes just 15 minutes a day."

"This teacher is offering a discount on lessons this year. It's a great opportunity!"

"I think you would really enjoy that co-op, and there's a discussion group too."

"You really need to make your child study ____."

So you add one more thing, then one more thing, then another one. And what used to be a relatively simple and manageable task becomes increasingly overwhelming. Soon you wonder why homeschooling seems so stressful and why you're not enjoying it any more.

You have crossed the line into Too Much.

Keeping It Manageable

How do you stay away from Too Much? How can you keep things simple and manageable? The same way you do with a shopping list. Ask yourself the same three questions that you do when you're going to the store.

1. Do we really need it?

When your daughter tells you that you need to put cotton balls on the shopping list, you first check to see if you already have some on hand. It might be that she just didn't look in the right place.

Do the same with activities and curriculum. Ask yourself, What is the purpose of this item? Is that purpose already being accomplished in my home school? Look past the trappings and the outer show and think about what you hope to accomplish by adding the item. Do you already have something in place that can accomplish the same thing? It might accomplish it in a little different way, but if it is accomplishing the purpose and it is already in place, you don't need another one.

2. Is this the best one?

Once you have determined that you do, indeed, need avocados, you take some time in the produce section to find the good ones—the ones that best meet your criteria. If you can't find any good ones, you don't buy them.

Do the same for homeschooling. Make sure the proposed activity or curriculum resource meets your standards. You are under no obligation to download or use every resource or opportunity that comes along. Look for good quality that will fit well with your goals during this season of life. Be a picky shopper. If you can't find what you're looking for, don't add it to your cart.

3. Can we afford it?

As you find the store items on your list and place them in your shopping cart, you are probably careful to keep track of how much money you are spending. If you go over your budget, you're not afraid to remove