



RAR 57 - How Books Shaped an Out of the Box Kid

Stories are powerful. That's how God chose to reveal His word to us, Jesus changed the entire world by walking around his town telling stories, and I think my mom and dad captured that idea of how important stories are in young lives. So, for me as a young boy, being exposed to these stories, having my parents read to me these stories, and show me these stories helps me see my life in a context of a story.

Sarah: You're listening to the Read Aloud Revival podcast. This is the podcast that helps you make meaningful and lasting connections with your kids through books.

Well, I'm so happy to have you here. Sally and Nathan, welcome to the Read Aloud Revival.

Sally: We're so honored to be here, and you are the favorite person of so many of my friends, so it'll be so much fun to be together today.

Nathan: It's really fun to be here, thanks.

Sarah: Oh, it's a treat for me. I have been wanting to talk to you guys for a long time. I got to read, of course, your new book early and I thought, 'Oh my goodness, I must, must, must have them on the podcast,' so I'm so glad we made that happen.

Nathan: I'm so glad.

Sally: Yeah.

3:30 Sally and Nathan's new book

Sarah: So, why don't you tell us a little bit what your new book is about. Some of our readers have probably already devoured it, but I think it's

probably best to open up this podcast by giving a little overview for anyone who hasn't seen the new book yet.

Nathan: The book came out of an idea I brought to mom; a couple of years ago she wrote a book *Desperate with Sarah May*. It was from two different perspectives about motherhood. And I had such a unique upbringing with who I am, the personality and all the disorders and things like this, that I thought it would be interesting to come to mom and write a book about what it is like to be a different kid and what it is like to raise a different kid. So, I came to her with this idea, hoping that perhaps we could tell this story from two different perspectives and hopefully encourage and connect with some different kids and hopefully moms of different kids out there.

Sally: And from my point of view, as we had 20 years of mom's conferences (we're having another one this year) but through all these years I would tell what I call "Nathan stories" and I'm very careful to protect stories that my kids don't want me to tell and to give them the opportunity to have privacy, but whenever I would say a "Nathan story" I would have all these women who would line up and say, "Oh, I'm so glad you struggled" or "I have a Nathan" or whatever, whether they really had issues like Nathan did or whether it was just a personality thing, I think that many of us struggle with figuring out what to do with our outside-the-box kids and so when Nathan came to me, I said, "You know, this will help a lot of people, but are you OK if I tell a lot of your stories very realistically and bluntly?" and Nathan has always had a great heart for ministry and reaching out to people, and he said, "That's the whole reason I want to write it, so we can tell our story and give people hope." So I hope that our messages will mutually encourage, inspire



and help lots of different people to know that who they are can be validated by the Lord and also we can, as parents, create a lifestyle that will cause our children to be sustainable and to really be able to accomplish what they were created to within their personalities.

Sarah: I love this book so much. I'm telling you – my copy is marked up like crazy. One of the things I wrote here on one of the pages I'm just look at, one of my notes, says 'This book is for the mama whose heart's desire is to see her child as a blessing even when they don't feel like it.'

Sally: That's true.

Sarah: But maybe for our listeners could (either of you) give a little overview of what you mean by out-of-the-box kid, or what you mean by Nathan being an out-of-the-box kid.

6:00 What it means to be an out-of-the-box kid

Nathan: I will go first and say that kind of the whole idea of being different is there isn't one way of being different. I think there isn't a child out there that isn't different. My differences were louder and so they're a little more easy to see and understand, so that's why I'm hoping my story will connect with a lot of people, but the differences I struggled with growing up where I had a lot of learning disabilities; I didn't test well, I couldn't sit still in class, I had ADHD, and I also dealt with a lot of mental illness with anxiety and OCD, and all these things added up to me being a quote unquote different kid, a kid that didn't hit the norm, a kid that didn't fit in the lines of what the world would say kids were surprised to be. When everyone else would be walking the side walk I'd be climbing on the rails, when everyone

else could be quiet I'd have one more question, so that's, in my mind, what a different kid is.

Sally: I think, too, for me, I had two children before Nathan and one after, and even from the get-go, he, I think, really just wanted a little bit more attention. He's probably me in my family. But he wouldn't calm when he was a baby and if he had an attitude about something we all knew it. And sometimes he was the most delightful of all the kids in how generous he was or loving or out of the box in terms of being a hero, or being very enthusiastic and other times you would think, 'oh my goodness, could we just have a very normal day' because I would learn to dread what might happen at the dinner table. So it was interesting writing this book, too, because I realized that I had a lot of the same issues growing up and probably caused my parents great havoc but over the years I felt like I needed to learn to conform and I would kind of stuff myself inside of my own personal box because I didn't want to always be too much for people, and I've really grown in that area as we've written the book together.

8:00 A storyformed childhood

Sarah: That's so interesting! OK, so one of the things that I've talked to your daughter, Sarah, about last year is about her storyformed childhood, because, of course, you and Clay are known as homeschooling parents who really filled your home with stories and rich literature, just really steeped your kids in stories, and on the podcast here, we're often talking about sharing stories as the best way to make meaningful and lasting connections with our kids, so tell me a little bit about what that looked like for you for any of our listeners who aren't familiar with your mode of parenting through books.



Sally: OK, great. Well, we did write this HUGE book about it eventually because we kept adding more books and adding more ideas, but when Clay and I were both living in Europe; we both had our degrees, he had his mDiv, I could speak part of four languages just because I had been a missionary and we were sitting at the dinner table at our house one day when we had people from all over the world, and they were talking about ideas and leaders in the world, and about art and music and issues I realized we'd never heard of. We'd both go like we left the dinner table saying, "We're quite uneducated," so we don't know how to think we just know how to fill in the blank and do multiple choice. So I just remember thinking, 'Wow, if we ever kids I want to have the kind of home that gives them the opportunity to learn how to think, and to learn how to engage with great minds, the best artists, the best musicians, so we began the concept of educating our children at home before we had ever heard of homeschooling, and I would read articles, and I remember reading an article from some institute in Washington D.C. about what really creates genius and it basically said that we are people of words and that when children are raised in a home where they're allowed to be bored, they have to be bored in order to be creative, or they're raised around a lot of adults and conversation in where books surround them that they will actually access their mental prowess and become great thinkers, they'll become genius, and so I was a bit neurotic. This was in a pioneer time for home education and we literally have thousands of books in our house and every child has their own library. We have books in my little library and Clay's library and so we really focused on giving them stories and giving them a foundation of virtue, and morality, and heroes, and exposing them to the best writers and it was

all of the kids, whether they had issues or not, including Nathan, and I really believe that although a lot of people come to us for the whole area of discipleship and life-giving home and traditions and stuff like that, I long to talk to people about education. So does Sarah (my Sarah), we were talking about that last week, how excited she is to be with you because I feel that we have this amazing mental muscle potential in our lives and in our children's lives and it has so much capacity but it needs to be exercised and it needs to be stretched in order to grow into the strength that it can be allowed. I've been astounded at all of my children because all of them are writers, they're communicators, they just love our values and the Lord, and so it's been really fun to see that foundation established, education that inspired them.

11:30 Is sharing stories time well spent?

Sarah: So, just to follow up on that, one of the things you just said is that your kids, as they've become adults is that they're all writers and communicators. In the thick of it, did you ever doubt that the time you spent sharing stories with your kids was time well spent? Did you ever have doubts about that?

Sally: Oh my goodness, yes! I can remember that I would have the most exciting or profound or even fun book and one of them would say, "He touched my toe" or "He's moving on my side of the couch" and I would say, "I don't care what side of the couch you're on just listen" but of course, I never raised my voice with my kids.

Sarah: Of course not, no.

Sally: You always wonder and people are quick to show you your children's faults and so I



wondered all the way through, ‘Are they really paying attention?’ and, of course, everyone in the whole world would say to us, “You’re just not doing enough. You need to do more because in the public school they’re doing this , or in the private school they’re doing that,” and then if my children wrote thank you notes to grandparents and they misspelled words or someone was quick to point out that they added a math problem up incorrectly, then of course, I would spend time thinking, ‘oh my goodness, I hope this matters. I hope these ideals are right because I’ve been spending so much time doing this there’s no hope for them to go backwards now.

Sarah: Right, yeah, especially those of us who really spend a lot of time filling our homes with stories because it’s so counter-cultural.

Sally: So counter-cultural. And it is the best thing I ever did. People have asked me now, “How did your kids get into these great schools and they’ve all written books – every single one of them – and they’ve done this and that,” and first of all, I have to say I never knew what the results would be, and those were never my goals. I feel like there is somewhere along the way where I started realizing that my kids were engaging in these great thoughts and they were fun to be with and they were fun to talk to and we had this great culture of being close to each other because of the stories that we shared, and there was a moment in which I, by faith, left the whole model of curriculum demands and just continued to go forward in these whole areas of reading, discussing , and engaging the kids. I don’t know when it happened but I thought, ‘You know, if I’m going to do this, this is it, and we’re going to go all forward and I see that it’s bringing about life in their minds and hearts that I hoped for but never

knew for sure it would happen.’ But I just thought I’m not going to live by guilt the rest of my life and worry, this is our decision and it will have to be enough, and that just gave me great freedom to enjoy life and to not be neurotic everyday if something interrupted us.

14:15 Nathan’s perspective

Sarah: So, Nathan, now that you’re an adult, what would you say that love your parents showed for literature, that commitment to reading with you and your siblings, as an adult do you have a perspective on what that did for you as a child?

Nathan: Stories are powerful. That’s how God chose to reveal His Word to us, Jesus changed the entire world by walking around his town telling stories. And I think my mom and dad captured that idea of how important stories are in young lives. So, for me as a young boy, having these stories, being exposed to these stories, having my parents read to me these stories, and show me these stories, helped me see my life in a context of a story. So, it inspired me as a young man to start, even at a young age, living a life that would be a good story. It showed me the weight of my choices and that my choices actually mattered, and that my choices would add up to the kind of story I was telling. So being exposed to great stories at a young age helped me see my life in the context of a story.

Sarah: That’s so beautiful. And now, what you’re doing with your life, which we’ll talk about a little bit later, is very much immersed in stories, yes?

Nathan: Absolutely.

Sarah: Do you have favorite, some stories that really stuck with you from your childhood?



Nathan: Oh yeah, I mean, I hate to be unoriginal but I am going to say things like Narnia and Lord of the Rings those were just so epic in scale and widened my mind, even an allegory helped me understand things were never good as a kid so even those now I will go back and read them and still be inspired by them but oh! there is one – I was talking to mom about this the other day – that really inspired me as a kid, it's called God's Smuggler and it was about a man named Brother Andrew who had this amazing conversion and ended up being one of the most amazing missionaries in eastern Europe or in communist Europe and smuggling Bibles, but I just remember being captured as a kid to hearing this story of this man who lived this amazing life before God. So Lord of the Rings, Narnia, are classics but the one I recently remembered was God's Smuggler about Brother Andrew.

Sally: Do you remember when we read the biography about Andrew Carnage?

Nathan: Yeah, that was a great one. I was going to say Andrew Carnage and the one that Dale Carnage sticks out, it's not really a story, but How to Win Friends and Influence People – it was a collection of stories and that one still comes into my mind every time I meet someone today.

Sally: I wanted my boys to be civilized and so I said, "Here, read this out loud together!" So that wasn't literature as much as somebody else telling them they had to really learn how to control their lives in order to be friendly and influence people. As young boys they read it together, as teenagers, didn't you? Did you read it by yourself?

Nathan: Yeah.

Sarah: That's fantastic. I have that book on my shelf but I have not read it, and I've heard of

God's Smuggler but I've never read it so I'm going to have to get my hands on it.

Sally: It's a great story.

Nathan: Both are fantastic, pick them up.

Sarah: OK, OK. Were there times, Nathan, when you didn't want your parents to read aloud or suggest books to you, and what was that like if that ever happened?

Nathan: I would say, especially as a young boy, as I mentioned earlier, grew up with ADHD and a lot of focus problems and a lot of learning problems, so the thought of sitting still and being read to for more than five minutes, much less reading myself for more than five minutes, seemed like an almost impossible task, so there were a lot of -- it wasn't just a perfect morning where 'here's this book, go read it' there was a lot of pushback on my part as a young man with a lot of mental issues and learning issues, it was really hard and frustrating even for me, but my parents, and especially my mom was very ingenuitive in the way that she figured out how to get me engaged in these stories while still understanding my personality and how I worked. I'm impressed with what you did, mom.

Sally: Thank you, I'll pay you later.

17:40 What Sally did when there was pushback

Sarah: I see how this works. Sally, tell me about that from your perspective. What did you do when Nathan didn't want to read or when he'd push back against read aloud? We hear from a lot of people who say, "Most of my kids love it during read aloud time but I have this one kid



who just groans and mopes and do I make him sit and listen?” So what would you tell her?

Sally: I would say yes.

Sarah: I thought so.

Sally: I looked at my children differently than maybe most of the parenting books told me to, but I tried to look inside of their personalities and I tried to watch when their eyes lit up and so I would gather boy books, like the series on Little Britches or Freckles or different ones like that and I would try to gather a whole basket of books that Nathan would like or interesting art books or whatever and I felt like I tried to engage in stories that would captivate their hearts. Eventually I learned that I didn’t have to go through the list that everybody else used, I could just make up my own list and figure out how to engage each of my kids. I gave them baskets of books in their room that I had picked out for them from the library and I would reward them greatly. I would take them to the Dollar Store. They would have this little basket that they could pick little rewards from, just because I had an hour every afternoon where I would give them some kind of cool or hot drink, from the time they were very little, and a basket of books and I would set the timer and I would say, “Let’s see if you can strong inside. Today you have 30 minutes. See if you can do something creative.” Nathan would often listen to books on tape, but I feel like with him, I realized very early that if he wasn’t occupying his hands and there’s a lot of research on that now, I just guessed that intuitively, and I would make him run around the house before we would start. I’d have the other kids doing the dishes for breakfast and I had read a book to Joy but I’d say, “Hey, Nate, why don’t you run around the house one more time” (we lived in different places where there’s acreage) and I’d say, “Maybe you could

beat your time from yesterday” and, of course, I wasn’t timing it I just made up the time, but he would come in, and I’d go, “Way to go, Buddy, I think you cut off a half a second” and I would give him fun things to do and I would give him things to play with, puzzles to do, legos to play with, cheerios to eat one at a time, but the rule was always, if you can’t tell me back what I’ve read to you then you lose the privilege and I won’t read it all over again. Do you remember any of that?

Nathan: Yeah, I was going to say one tip that I can remember always was a game-changer for me and we actually talk about this in the book, one of the chapters was as a young man it was so hard to sit still and like mom said, there’s a lot of studies that is really hard for a kid with ADHD if their eyes and their hands aren’t engaged in something then it’s going to be very hard to capture their attention, so I remember that mom, one day brought a pad and paper and dropped it down on the couch and said, “Today, we’re going to get you involved in the story. I’m going to read this story to you but while I’m reading I want you to draw the story out. Draw your favorite scenes. And every 10 minutes I’m going to turn around, I’m going to see the drawing you made of what scene you decided to draw.” So I remember that being a turning point in my ability to start engaging in the story she was bringing. I actually started looking forward to reading time. Those are some of my favorite memories looking back on. Those were the times I’d be sprawled out on the floor, drawing the stories that she was reading out loud, and it really helped to have my hands, mind, and eyes fully engaged which really allowed me to enter into the story that she was wanting me to hear.



Sally: There's something you may not even know, Sarah, is that in the book that you'll eventually receive in a couple of weeks, is Nathan has put art pieces and sketches all through the book.

Sarah: I did not know that, so I'm excited to see that.

Sally: He does sketch – he's very artistic – but I think that he loved telling stories through art and we would get him interesting art books to help him draw more. But I do think that I want everyone to know that my children never just sat still and didn't complain. It was always dependent upon who was moody or who was irritated or whatever. It was a process of just doing it and investing in it and many days we didn't want to do anything else. It was so much fun to enter into the worlds of these books. And other days, if I read for five minutes and everyone was fussing, I would just close the book, go outside, play, do something else, because sometimes you know that if everybody's off it's not going to work. And I trusted that we had such a verbal environment and we listened to books on tape in the car, we had them all over the house that I didn't have to fill in every single check list that said, 'oh today, you haven't done your schooling' I just trusted that, 'OK, I'm kind of tired of you all today, too, so I think we should go out and do something fun.'

Sarah: This is not possible. Sally Clarkson never got tired of her children.

Sally: I think because maybe I was ADD too, growing up, and I needed to have variety in my schedule and they did too. So it wasn't a legalistic thing but I did literally read hundreds, if not thousands, of books to them. And I would take them to the library and let them get tons of

books. They always got books for Christmas. Yeah, we're pretty book-y people.

23:00 Courage to follow the still, small voice

Sarah: OK, I found the quote that I wanted to find from earlier, which is actually from Desperate, it's on page 34, so this is it, you said, "Early on, I realized that all of the times I had found joy and freedom and pleasure in my life were when I listened to God's voice in Scripture and pursued the dreams God had put in my heart. What other people thought of our path was irrelevant." I think that's one of the things that I find so inspiring about you and your work, and when you're talking about motherhood, because you listened to the way God is speaking to you for your family and you watch your children and the unique beautiful way He made each of your kids and respond to that, and so often, I feel as mothers we don't feel confident enough to follow that still small voice that God speaks to us, instead we feel pressured by whatever culture says, by what the public schools are doing down the street, by what Grandma thinks they should be doing by which age, and it's just so inspiring to me to hear you say, "You know what? Sometimes we started to read and it didn't work so we went outside because that is what we needed to do that day."

Sally: I think that maybe part of it is my personality too but I feel like I was so bored in school. I was the one who would get in trouble for talking or I wasn't terribly bad sort of child or anything but I was wiggly and I was bored and so I just decided, I would read the life of Jesus and he would say, "Peter, you're the rock," and Peter was this loud extrovert who ...

Sarah: I love Peter so much.



Sally: I do, too.

Nathan: I do, too!

Sarah: Yeah.

Sally: But then you'd see Thomas and he was the lawyer and in the man there was no guile and he cared about getting things right, and then you'd see John and he was the lover. He said, "I'm the one that Jesus loved," so I thought I don't want to compare my children to other people nor could I because they all had different issues but I thought I felt so suppressed in my life by feeling that I was too much for people, I still feel that way sometimes ...

Sarah: Yeah, so I do.

Sally: ... but I just thought, 'I want to cultivate the person that God made them to be, the unique person,' and what that meant was being sensitive to a balance between building their character and requiring discipline and commitment and then on the other side saying, "I would probably be exhausted today, we were out all weekend, maybe we all just need to sleep or eat or whatever, watch a movie." It's a balance. I don't want anyone to hear that I didn't read and read and read and train my kids, but on the other hand, neither do I want them to try to live by somebody else's rules. We are quite free as women to decide by faith and to just live into it by confidence that we can be whoever we want to be in our home. We have different personalities, we have values, different priorities, and I think children thrive when a mom feels like she is flourishing within the limitations of her own personality. And that means you'll never finish everything you ever wanted to, but you don't have to compare yourself to everyone else because, as a matter of fact, that just produces guilt and fear that you're not doing enough.

26:15 Stories helping in dark times

Sarah: Oh, I just love you so much when you start talking like that. OK, so Nathan, have stories ever helped you out of a dark situation or time in your life?

Nathan: Absolutely. They actually still continue to do, continue to help me in dark times in my life now when I'm having a low season or a valley season. I will still go to that book that I read when I was 13, 14, 15, I will still go to that movie because again, within stories it helps you see your life in the context of a story and when you watch these heroes overcome adversity, when you watch these main characters go through their own struggles it encourages you; first of all, it lets you know that you're not alone. It also inspires you to push through and overcome whatever adversity you meet in your life. So even to this day stories are still probably one of the main things I turn to; to encourage me, to inspire me, to empower me.

Sally: I love when Nathan talks about why Superman captivated his attention. I think that's a neat thing to share with them.

Nathan: Yeah, it's a little different, but Superman is a main theme in my life. I found him in my early teens, around 12 – 13, and I really connected to him; first through the comics and then through the show that chronicled the young life of Superman as he was learning about his powers and learning to fly, learning his super strength, and while it's silly to a lot of people to a 13 year old with a lot of mental illness and learning



disabilities and a lot of angst because of that, watching this young Superman learn how to deal with his powers and not want them and want to be normal and wish he didn't have them made a parallel for me that oh, these things that are really hard for me really can turn into blessings and into gifts if I continue to hone and learn from them, so Superman's kind of a main theme in my family and with me. So stories are always things I look back to that continue to push me forward.

Sarah: OK, so that opening story from Sarah's (your sister's) book *Caught Up in a Story* that's you that she's talking about ...

Nathan: Absolutely.

Sarah: OK, I thought so. I was just looking at if I could read this on air but it might be a little bit long. But if you, listeners, haven't grabbed Sarah Clarkson's *Caught Up in a Story: Fostering a story formed life of great books and imagination with your children* this is one of my tippy-top favorite books to recommend to parents. I love it, it's so inspiring. And in the opening of the book, in the introduction, she tells a story of Nathan and her and what stories looked like as they were lived out in their home. And actually, one of the things I have underlined here is she says, "A story formed child views life as an epic tale in which he or she must live as hero or villain." I think that's exactly what I'm hearing you say.

Nathan: Absolutely.

28:45 Stories that can help build self-esteem

Sarah: Sally, you've talked about stories serving to help build the foundations of a child's self esteem. Can we talk about that a little bit?

Sally: Well, I think that part of my own view of my spiritual life, or whatever, is that from Genesis to Revelation, from beginning to end we can stand back and look and see that God almost has a mega story. It's history through every generation, through normal people who were willing to trust in great ways. And I really believed that I would speak forward into their future of the lives of my children and I would say, when Joel would play the piano, or when Nathan would play the piano or guitar, I would say, "I wonder if your music is going to inspire people some day. I love that." Or "Wow, you guys are so wonderful to each other – there's going to be a need for a lot of counselors in your lifetime." And I really believed that afterward we would read hero tales or stories or biographies, I would say, "I wonder how God's going to use you." I remember a time, I don't think we put this in the book but when I took Nathan on top of the (we have Glen Eyrie here, a castle, and it's head of the Navigators, and the man, Dawson Trotman, who actually started it was a hero in that he reached out to people in the military all over the world and loved them and showed them the foundations of God, but also, he was on a boat, a time when a little girl fell off the boat and he actually saved a little girl that was drowning and died in the process) so Nathan and I were on the mountain and I said, "You know, Nate, there was a normal man and yet this normal man ended up influencing thousands of people but he was such a servant-heart that he even died saving the life of someone else. I bet God's going to use you in your lifetime to save people, to bring them hope, to bring them goodness. And I think that stories in our family, whatever was a story, stories in the Bible, stories in fiction, stories in real life, where the foundations upon which I attempted to build their vision; "you're such a great writer, Sarah, you



have devoured books since you were little I bet your writing is going to be something that will transform people's ideas" and so I feel that that's what Jesus did when he was verbalizing to Peter, to Mary, this story will be told about you forever and this centurion "Greater faith have I never seen" so I just tried to emulate speaking forward into their lives from the stories and the histories of the people that we were around and helping them to believe that they had a very special part in God's story to tell.

31:15 Questions from listeners

Sarah: Well, I have a couple of questions from readers that they submitted when they found out that I was going to be chatting with you today. Are you up to tackling a couple of those?

Sally: I think Nathan is.

Sarah: Well, actually, some of these might be good for both of you, in fact, the first one's definitely for you, Sally, because three women wrote this in, Sarah, Vanessa, and Jennifer, all wanted to know how did you keep your cool when your child was not keeping his cool?

Sally: Oh, that's a great question. You know, I was actually thinking about that in the past couple of weeks because I feel like what we are often fighting against is our own immaturity and our own lack of training and we have very few support systems. Sometimes we don't realize we were created to have bigger communities, people who helped us raise our children and I think that maturity is a process. I'm 63, when I'm 70 I'm not going to sin anymore. But I think make goals, small goals for yourself. Identify what behavior drives you crazy and then put your finger in your heart "Why is this bothering me and why do I react?" because nobody wants to be a constantly

impatient person and I think I was praying about this today and thinking about it, that even still, Nathan has issues, all my kids have issues, and when I believe in their heart motives that they're not just trying to thwart me, especially as little children, they're not just trying to make you irritated, they are being who God made them to be and we're supposed to lead them gently forward. The more you can understand the situation and the more you can work on one piece at a time, the more you can give yourself grace and stretch in your ability to be patient. And I think always for me I made a lot of mistakes and yet I would always apologize and it still crushes me to this day when I get angry at my kids for doing things that I think, 'Really Sally? That wasn't that big of a deal. What is wrong with you?' but it's a process of stretching and growing. And I think the most important thing is to try to look in their heart, maybe they're a little boy with a lot of testosterone or a teenage boy or a moody girl in high school, kind of standing back and looking at them objectively instead of reacting to them and just stretching yourself and seeing what does this child need? Do they need sympathy? Are they exhausted? Do they feel insecure? I remember one time Nathan was just having a really rough time, he was questioning everything, talking back, doing all these different things, and one of my other children has furrowed eyebrows when they're upset and I need to talk to them. I mean, I can just tell, OK, something's going on. And I took him to my room and I said, "You know what, Honey? Tonight mommy's going to spend time with you." And he said, "I bet you're not going to. I bet somebody's going to interrupt you and we won't get to talk." And I said, "Nope." And I sent Sarah to wash the dishes, and Joel to do an asthma treatment for Joy, and I said, "No, tonight is your night." And



we talked and found out somebody had been bullying him, but at the end of the evening he said, “You know, mommy, when you give time to me to be patient and to talk with me it makes me want to obey you, and when you don’t have time for me by myself, then it makes me do whatever I need to do to get your attention.” And so some of these times helped me to realize as an extrovert (Nathan and Joy are my extroverts) they really need to talk and tell me everything they’ve thought and what’s going on and what they’re interested in. And then Sarah and Joel, as my introverts, meant that I needed to stop everything and try to seek them out. And the more I learned relationally how to be mature the more they responded to me. So it’s a process of understanding and trying to be objective about what are they saying when they act out and just little by little us growing in maturity and loving who they are on the inside while becoming objective about why they’re doing it on the outside.

Sarah: I can see that in my own home with my own children, some who are extroverts, some introverts, and I’m an extrovert so I tend to understand my extrovert children’s way of responding to either stress or joy better or easier than I can my introverts, so it’s been interesting as a mother, I’ve realized just in that growing as a mother it’s slowly watching to see what they need and watching how to respond to each of them individually based on the way God made them. One of the things you wrote in this new book in Different is you were talking about Nathan’s outbursts and you said, “Gradually I learned to leave my need for control behind. What did it hurt me to simply absorb his agitation instead of trying to change it all the time? I could choose to be the mature one in the daily confrontations and

overlook a moment of his immaturity. I realized that correcting everything he did wrong and getting upset about it was not productive for me, for Nathan, or for our whole family. So instead of worrying about what other’s thought or about what I thought children should be like I tried my best to focus on Nathan’s true needs, his actual capabilities, and what he needed most to learn.”

Sally: That’s really good!

Sarah: It is really good. I have it underlined and starred.

Sally: That’s just the process. I think that’s the process of maturity for all of us, whether it’s an irritating husband or an irritating family member. It’s such a waste of energy to get angry over things that might repeat themselves again and again and again. We have to accept the limitations of each of the people who are in our lives.

Sarah: So another question I saw a lot on Facebook, on the post, was how did you juggle the demand of upper level academics and keeping up with younger students? Which I think is something a lot of us who are homeschooling with a large age span of children struggle with. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Sally: Well, I think for one, no child is going to have an equal education. I used to feel really sorry for Joy. I had three children, three miscarriages, and then I had Joy when I was 42 and the other kids were a lot older, and I used to think, oh, I tried diligently to read some picture books to her and so did my other kids, but because I was dragging around her to all the older kids’ activities and so on I did sometimes wonder if I was giving her the short-end of the stick. But actually, I think that because she grew up hearing discussions and books and ideas and



thoughts that were profoundly older than her age group I think that she actually is probably the most balanced of all our kids, in the sense that she had to learn to conform. She had to come with us. She had to sit still. I mean by that, that we have an illusion that, I don't know, people get neurotic in high school and when they're in junior high and high school, and I really think that most educational foundation is established between 0 to 10/11 years old, and I think that if you have the opportunity to read and discuss and engage them and give them creative things to do, ways to act it out, Nathan was great at doing costumes and mapping things out, pretty much their educational preferences and appetites are established. I realized with Joy when she was 13, 'Wow, I'm pretty much almost finished with her.' She loves education, she loves to read, she's engaging her life in places, and I began to realize that this whole owning their education happened at a much earlier age than a lot of times we think in our culture. And I think that you just work with the puzzle you've been given and you do your best, but I feel like, as I look back, they were all making forward steps all the time because we had established these routines and rhythms- this is what we do; we talk, we do chores, we read, we engage at the dinner table, we serve people in our lives and that was just over and over and over again, and it formed and shaped them even by the peer pressure they gave to each other by conforming to this rhythm.

39:00 Nathan's advice for young listeners

Sarah: OK, so we're just about to wrap up, but Nathan, I wanted to ask you: we have a lot of whole families that listen to the podcast and I'm wondering if you could say anything to, if there

are any kids listening who have a hard time sitting still and they have a hard time paying attention and focusing for a long period of time, do you have anything you'd like to say to a child who may struggle in ways that you struggled growing up?

Nathan: Yeah, I guess I'd just encourage them to keep on going and when they do feel different, being different can feel so alone; you can feel separated from other people and you can look at the classroom or your family around you, and say, "Why are they able to sit still? Why are they able to not ask the question? Or keep their mouth shut? Or not get into trouble?" And I would say, keep on working on becoming the best person you can be with the limitations you have, but know that God made you individually and made you unique and made you different and these aren't things to hide or to get rid of or to fix but these differences inside of you that can feel lonely sometimes are going to be the things that God uses to tell your specific story, these differences and uniquenesses are things that God wants to use in your life to tell a great story.

Sally: I have to say that when he was 15 and he painted a mural on his wall, he put up posters all over and I began to realize, 'Oh my goodness, he's an artist' and I think that if kids can believe in themselves and believe in what they love, and exercise their own appetites in different areas then I just think that kids need to be freed to be who they are and to grow stronger inside and to really access the person that God made them to be. I just watched that in Nathan. He's such a powerful, strong person in his arena right now and I think maybe I neglected to see that when he was younger. So believe forward into the person God created you to be.



Sarah: That's so good, and actually, I want to ask you about that Nathan, can you tell our listeners what does life look like for you now?

Nathan: Yeah, absolutely. I, kind of, have taken this idea of stories being powerful and taken on for a life for myself. Those were things that affected me and inspired me so I decided I wanted to be involved in this story as it's being made in this culture and especially the ones that are inspiring and engaging and educating this culture. So now, I went into, first of all, acting. A few years I've been acting and have been able to pay the bills doing that and it's been so much fun to be a part of the story's being told. And then God put on my heart to actually tell stories, so recently a couple of years ago I wrote a script and produced a movie starring Kevin Sorbo and myself called Confessions of a Prodigal Son, you can see it on Netflix and it was inspired by me wanting to tell a story that would reach out to prodigals and that N-generation and inspire them to live a great story then most recently with this book, Different it is my own personal story and how my upbringing and how I lived and the way I see the world affects me and affects others and how that can be used for the story that God wants me to tell. So, every turn and corner of my life is filled with stories because I think they're powerful and I just absolutely love it.

Sarah: So good. So, if you're listening and you haven't yet picked up a copy of Different, The Story of an Out-of-a-Box kid and the mom who loved him written by Sally and Nathan Clarkson, I know you will love this book. Probably if you're listening to this podcast you've read at least one of Sally's books, if not all of them, this one is my favorite yet, so I cannot wait for the world to get this book into their hands. Sally and Nathan,

thank you so very much for being with me today. This has been a pleasure.

Sally: Oh Sarah, it has been a real privilege for us to be here.

Nathan: Thanks so much, Sarah.

43:00 Let the kids speak

Now it's time for Let the Kids Speak. This is my favorite part of the podcast where kids tell us about their favorite stories that have been read aloud to them.

Child1: My name is Zoe and I'm 6 years old. I live in Tokyo, Japan. My favorite book is Ramona the Pest. [Mom: why do you like Ramona, the Pest?] Because she lost a tooth and I've lost some teeth too. [Mom: It's a good book, isn't it?] Yes.

Child2: My name is Caroline and I'm 5 and I live Missouri, and my favorite book is Pinkalicious because I like pink.

Child3: My name is Ben, I'm 8 years old. I live in Colorado. My favorite book is Charlie and the Chocolate Factory. My favorite part is when Augustus Gloop goes up the gas pipe and gets stuck.

Child4: My name is Ivy. [Mom: And how old are you, Ivy?] 2. [Mom: And where do you live?] In a house. [Mom: In a house. Where in a house?] In this house, in Malaysia. [Mom: And what is your favorite book right now, Ivy?] There's a Wocket in my Pocket. [Mom: Oh, There's a Wocket in my Pocket. And what do you like about A Wocket in my Pocket?] There's a bofa on the sofa. [Mom: That's fun.]

Child5: My name is Gerdie and I'm 4 years old and I live in Malaysia and my favorite book is **[**inaudible**]** I love the page



Child6: My name is Ariana, and I live in Minnesota, and I'm almost 8 years old, and my favorite book that's been read aloud to me is The Laura Ingall's Wilder series. I like them because they are about a girl and she looks lot like me and it's really fun to listen to them. They're good books and we have all of the books.

Child7: My name is Julia and I'm 3 ½ and I live in Minnesota. My favorite book is Little Rabbit he hops away and the little girl goes to find him and then she gets some babies.

Child8: My name is Isabella and I'm 6 years old and I live in Minnesota and my favorite read aloud book is Ember Falls. I like it because it's so fun, it feels so happy. I think it's really happy for the long treaders, and, well, I love it.

Child9: My name's Joy. I'm 2. I live in Oklahoma. [Mom: My favorite book is..] One Morning in Maine. [Mom: Why do you like One Morning in Maine?] **[**inaudible**]** [Mom: Where do they go?] Out to Bar Harbor [Mom: What do they get to eat?] Clam chowder for lunch!

Thank you so much, kids. I love those messages. Hey, if your kids would like to leave a message to be featured on the Read Aloud Revival podcast, we air each and every single message in the order it's received. Head to ReadAloudRevival.com and scroll to the bottom of the page to find out how easy it is to leave us a message. Are you following the Read Aloud Revival on Instagram yet? You should. We post our favorite audio book deals, kindle deals when we can find them, but our favorite are the audio book deals, of course, as well as book recommendations and just lots of fun tips. Go ahead and find us at [Instagram.com/ReadAloudRevival](https://www.instagram.com/ReadAloudRevival). We also do occasional giveaways with the really awesome things from

our shop, like our hand-thrown pottery mugs, our awesome book bags that we can't seem to keep stocked on the shelf long enough, they just get sold out every time we post them, and other goodies, so make sure you head to [Instagram.com/ReadAloudRevival](https://www.instagram.com/ReadAloudRevival) and follow us there. Love having you listen. Love that you're committed to connecting with your kids through books. And hey, until next time, go build your family culture around books.