

Three Stages of Calling Prep *C2C Podcast Episode #16*



- Jody: You've heard of college prep, but how about "calling" prep? In today's episode, Jenni and I are having a conversation about the three stages of preparing your kids for their unique calling. They all have one. So let's talk about how to leverage our homeschooling years to prepare our kids to rock their calling.
- Jenni: Jody, I love that. I love that. Not college prep, "calling" prep.
- Jody: Right.
- Jenni: Well, first let me just jump in and say we have been out of the loop for a while here. Um, we've been working on curriculum through Corona, so...
- Jody: We've been hiding from the COVID.
- Jenni: We have been in our office. It's like the mad scientist in the basement, right?
- Jody: Yes.
- Jenni: By the way, if you're listening and you're interested, we do have some study skills courses and some writing courses over on the Mr. D Math website. So you can go check that out if you're interested, but that's what we've been up to. And, um, we did 15 episodes of this podcast. Um, and most of the time we interviewed people, but we had a couple where it was just you and I. And the overwhelming feedback that we got was that people listened most and downloaded most when they were just listening to you. And I talk- I guess they like to eavesdrop on our conversation.
- Jody: I think they like to hear me make fun of you.
- Jenni: Well, um, so from- for the next, uh, however long, I don't know, God will show us. Um, but at least in the foreseeable future, you can find us on your favorite podcast platform on Monday mornings. Um, so you can go anytime, but a new one will post every Monday morning and it'll be all different topics that, um, we've made a whole list...
- Jody: Yes, a very large list, yeah.
- Jenni: ...of things that people that want to,

Jody: These are questions people asked and inquiries we get. We are constantly being contacted right now, obviously in these crazy times of people are like, "What do we do? How do we do this?"

Jenni: Well, you know, and honestly, a lot of people are saying like, "Well, we have to homeschool just for this year,". And we call those emergency homeschoolers. And it's not like we can't be helpful in some ways, but on the whole, that's not the kind of homeschooling we're talking about. We're talking about the people who've decided to pick their own curriculum and forge their way on their own without connection to a school system. So if you want to hear more about how to do that and how to use your homeschool time to really prepare your kids for their calling, like Jody said, they all have one. Every one of our kids has a purpose. Every one of our kids has a calling from God and there is a way to help them find that path.

Jody: Well, not only a way, it's our job. That is our job as their parents to connect with God and connect with our child, to see what their God-given call is. And to help them walk that out with excellence and an absolute deep diving expertise.

Jenni: Yeah, we're a three-quart strand. It's us, our kids and the Holy Spirit working together to help our kids. Our job in this role that we're in right now is to help our kids become their future adult, right? And all that that entails. And so, of course, that entails character training. Of course, that entails working on their constitution. When we say character, Jody, we mean like the things that impact how they treat the world around them. And when we say constitution, we're talking about the things that empower themselves to become their own best, right? And so, um, that's a huge part of our job, but another huge part of our job is preparing them vocationally. We're preparing them for the next step that's going to set them. That's really what education does, I mean, in large parts.

Jody: Well, there's a reason for that, we just figured- found some statistics about how your vocation is literally one-third of your life.

Jenni: Of your life. And really, it's more than that. Because you think about it, like, that's of your whole life, not just your waking life. Cause you know, we got a factor sleeping in there. That's a chunk.

Jody: Right.

Jenni: Right? And then there's, like, the time that you get yourself ready in the morning and you make the food for the people and you do a laundry and yard work and all that stuff. I mean, that's all factored into the two-thirds.

Jody: I'm not doing the yard work, I'm just saying. That's a Tony Hagaman job. Not happening by Jody Hagaman. Sorry, babe.

Jenni: Yeah. Yeah. I'm not a big yard work person myself.

Jody: You can do all that yard work you want! But you're right. I mean, we spend a lot of time in the minutiae of getting ready and brushing your teeth and getting ready for bed and appointments and stuff like that. So when the statistic is one-third of your vocation. I mean, if you think about just dads alone who are off at work or run their own company or business, they're gone a lot.

Jenni: Yeah. And so what ends up happening is when kids are not prepared for their calling, they have this void.

Jody: Yeah.

Jenni: I mean, you know it, because you might be listening- you might actually have the void yourself, because you didn't ever figure out your calling. And so we walk around- we try to fill that void in all different ways. Cause it's uncomfortable. And we want our kids to live their best life, but fulfill their purpose, right? We want them to impact their generation. And we have a lot we can do in these preparatory years, as homeschoolers, that people who are in a school may not have the opportunity to do.

Jody: Absolutely. And if you look at it like this, too, I mean, we're- being a homeschool mom, we are stay-at-home moms in theory and well, I-

Jenni: Sort of.

Jody: But the truth is we have daughters and we know that we want our daughters to be at home with their children if that's their desire. And I think often we get confused like, "Oh, so they're not- that's their call," but it's not their call because soon enough, those kids are going to be grown and raised. And then what?

Jenni: Right. So their years of parenting...

Jody: Those are very important!

Jenni: Very important. And it's one of the missions...

Jody: Yes, absolutely.

Jenni: ...that they're going to go on in their life and they're going to have a lot of different missions in life. And it's a big one.

Jody: But they still have a call beyond that.

Jenni: And it could be tied into that. I mean, ours is. Our calling is definitely tied into our child-rearing and homeschooling. Um, but honestly our kids are going to have to take things like, do they want to have a family into account when they're figuring out how to work out their calling?

Jody: Well, I'll tell you what, my youngest is walking that out right now. She wants to go to law school and she wanted to be a criminal attorney or a civil attorney. She was trying to figure out between the two. And she's currently a, um, a paralegal in a law office and the lawyers took her out

for lunch and they sat her down and they said, "Syd, we know you, you want to be- you want a family life. And this is the kind of lawyer that you need to be to be able to have your family and this professional law career also," and so she switched gears.

Jenni:

Yeah.

Jody:

And so that's what we're talking about.

Jenni:

And they need to figure that out. That's really important. I mean, I think a lot of kids, um, don't think that all the way through.

Jody:

Right.

Jenni:

So what we want to talk about, today, is three distinct phases or stages that we've identified as the process of preparing our kids for our- for their calling. So, it's calling prep.

Jody:

Can I just- can we just clarify for one second? It's not the parental calling.

Jenni:

It is not- we don't decide what it is. We are not the ones issuing the calling.

Jody:

Right.

Jenni:

Right, God is.

Jody:

You may think your kid is so good at it something and they've got to go into that, but...

Jenni:

So I have an extended family member and um, it's a cousin of mine, and he, growing up, was, like, just eaten up with airplanes and military. And I mean, this kid, his heart's desire was to fly planes in the military. I mean, since he was a little, little kid and it never changed. He joined the civil air patrol and he, um, worked his way up the ranks. In fact, as an adult, he's still a member of the civil air patrol. I mean, he was like sold out, right? But his mom was like, "My son is not going into the military".

Jody:

I don't know any moms like that.

Jenni:

Yeah. We all feel it. I mean, I had a son who said he was going to go into the military for years. I hated that idea, but I didn't try to interfere. And this might be why, 'cause I watched what happened. So he didn't go into the military. She said, "No, you're going to become a lawyer," so he became a lawyer. Well, he became an aviation lawyer and he, um, practiced for a little while. Uh, and he was successful at it. But that void was there. That void was there. And so he didn't end up going into the military to fly airplanes. Um, but he did end up going into the FBI and he has- he does counter-terrorism and he's all over the world.

Jody:

That's some scary stuff.

Jenni: It is sc- I mean, way scarier. If he had gone into the military as a lawyer, he would have been a JAG lawyer...

Jody: Safe.

Jenni: Safe, you know, they would have protected his life, because he was important.

Jody: They need their lawyers.

Jenni: Not that not everybody's important, but those are- they're expensive. Um, but no. So he has a very dangerous job, now, and he's jumped out of airplanes into dangerous territory. And so the moral of that story, for me, was don't try to get in the way of what your kids want because it's going to backfire.

Jody: They are gonna figure out how to get there one way or another.

Jenni: They are. And we can't customize that. I was just, um, I was just listening to... I was watching, um, a documentary series and they were talking about a dad who, um, wanted his son- I think it may have been the Sigmund Freud episode of this one show I was watching. And his dad, um, wanted him to take this- he wanted him to live this noble path. He wanted to be a statesman and he ended up, um, going in- Oh no, no! It wasn't. It was- I'm sorry. It was Siddhartha Gautama, the father of Buddhism.

Jody: Ah.

Jenni: His father, he was a prince. And they went out of their way to make sure he never saw any suffering. 'Cause I guess it had been prophesied over him that he was going to be this great spiritual leader from the time he was a baby.

Jody: Wow.

Jenni: Well, his dad didn't want that. So his dad wanted him to be like royalty, like they were. You know, statesmen, I guess. Um, so he didn't ever want him to see, he wanted to entice him with the luxurious life. And I thought about parents today, we do this in our own way. He manipulated the situation. He wanted him to really feel so entrapped by the comforts of royal life. So whenever he would go out, you know, they would take him out, they made sure that they went before him and cleared the streets. So he never saw any suffering. He never saw old people. Yeah, no, this happened. And they- he- they, like, completely doted on him and wanted him to be so just in love with this cushy life.

Jody: That did not work out well for them.

Jenni: No, and you know what happened? He ended up, one time, seeing someone suffering, he saw an old person and he saw, um, like a priest of the time and he was drawn to it. And that's the key. They could not interfere with his calling. I loved the movie "Moana", because I felt like this was our message, right? Their parents were like- her parents were

like, you know, "Stay here on the island where it safe. Never leave, never leave!", and her heart was like, "No, I know I'm supposed to be out there on that water," and she fought it and she fought it. And finally, she just couldn't fight it. So, we want to just give you some practical tips that you can plug into any homeschool plan. It doesn't matter if you're a classical homeschooler or an eclectic homeschooler or an unschooler. You can follow this path, as long as you give your kids the latitude to explore these things in the course of their day. If you are filling their schedule from the minute they get up until the minute they go to bed with schoolwork or you're working them to the point of exhaustion, even if exhaustion happens at three o'clock...

- Jody: Stop looking at me like that.
- Jenni: I have this very, like...
- Jody: You are judging me.
- Jenni: Okay, so the truth is I am really, like, secretly outing Jody. I'm looking at her like "You did."
- Jody: Knock it off. Knock it off.
- Jenni: But you know, it comes from a good place. When parents do that, it comes from a good place. They want their kids to have the best education.
- Jody: No, it comes from your parental thought process of a good place. It's really not a good place to come from.
- Jenni: It's actually a fear-based place.
- Jody: Yeah.
- Jenni: Like, we want them to be perfect.
- Jody: Right.
- Jenni: I want to make sure that- Actually, it comes from the wrong mindset of what education is. I think it really comes from the mindset that our kids are containers and we're responsible for pouring that information in there and making sure it all gets in. All of it.
- Jody: But guess what? We're not.
- Jenni: No, that's- I like somebody said "It's not the filling of the pail, but the lighting of a fire".
- Jody: Yep.
- Jenni: So our job is to light the fire. Okay, so how do we do that? Well, stage one is we help them discover their interests. Now, this is a discovery process. It is not something- you can't Google an interest.

Jody: Nope.

Jenni: You can't...

Jody: You can't talk your way into one.

Jenni: You can't brainstorm one around the kitchen table. You guys can't sit with your kids and be like, "You know, I think you would be interested in dance, because you love to wear tutus".

Jody: Okay. So, let's be honest. How many of us have done that?

Jenni: Every one of us. Every single one of us.

Jody: So knock it off. It doesn't work.

Jenni: No, it doesn't work. Um, what we need to do is give them experiences so that we can give them the opportunity to experience that, "That was fun!" And that is ideally done in the elementary years. Now, the truth of the matter is it doesn't always work neatly like that. And you know, you might be listening and you've got high schoolers who don't know what they're interested in other than video games.

Jody: You might have a 20-year-old.

Jenni: Yeah. Or you, yourself.

Jody: There you go.

Jenni: "Wait a second, I'm 42 and I don't know". Um, so if that's the case, uh, you're still gonna go through the same process. It starts with an interest.

Jody: Okay. So let's talk about what does it look like to have an experience? And it looks the same, but different at different ages really?

Jenni: Right. So, I think reading broadly with our kids is experience. I love that Mark Twain quote that goes something like, "A person who reads lives a thousand lives, but someone who doesn't lives only one life". Um, so we can read broadly with our kids. Books on- audio books are amazing. I love audible. It's now one of my favorite things. But on my library- our library has, um, an audio book app and we use that a lot. And then when we want a really good book that we can't find at the library, then we use our audible credit.

Jody: So, we've come across a ton of statistics that I'm not going to be able to rattle off my head, but I can give you the gist of some of them about this reading and reading out loud with our kids, because not- it gives them an experience, but there's a reason why it gives them an experience. They learn empathy from it and they can dive deep and literally live the experience. So even though you're reading to them, it's like they have a hundred percent been there, done that.

Jenni: Yeah.

Jody: And so, it's super fun to watch, because you see their eyes light up on certain parts, right?

Jenni: And conversation is a big part of this whole process. Like, really talking to our kids and asking them- now, if they feel like they're being interrogated, if they feel like we're trying to like probe their, like, inner-most parts, they are not- they're going to clam up. So it's gotta be a natural conversation. One of our own curiosity of- "I want to know what you love. I care about you. And I want to know what you care about". And so I give them...

Jody: Stop with the book reports.

Jenni: Oh yeah. By the way, knock it off. Especially in the elementary years. We don't have to turn everything into school.

Jody: No. A conversation.

Jenni: Just enjoy those books. Like, just read together and talk about it and talk about what you liked and when it's boring and be like "This part's boring, isn't it? Why do we think it's boring? You know, we- I'll tell you why it's boring". Okay. Let me just tell you. I absolutely love the "Little House in the Prairie" stories. Love them. I mean, they are so inspiring. It makes me want to go live out on the frontier. I mean, I love those stories, but I'm just going to tell you, sometimes Mrs. Wilder can go on for pages describing what a table looks like. Like you're like, "Okay, come on, Laura".

Jody: "I get it. It's a table,".

Jenni: Like, you know, every once in a while, and sometimes she describes things in such detail, I can't even picture what she's saying. She's just gotten too detailed for me.

Jody: 'Cause she only described that one little corner. Can't even picture the rest of it.

Jenni: No. So we can talk about that with our kids. We can be transparent and say those things. Um, other things that spark interest are definitely field trips, go to museums, aquariums, zoos, go to, um, go to Publix or- Okay, that- you might be listening and not know what that is. That's our grocery store.

Jody: Publix, Kroger....

Jenni: Yeah. See, now I was from the Northeast and we didn't know what a Kroger was.

Jody: Midwest. Kroger.

Jenni: Kroger sounds like a doughnut style to me.

Jody: It's not a cruller, it's a Kroger.

Jenni: We had ShopRite and the A&P.

Jody: The A&P? Sounds like a gas station.

Jenni: And the ShopRite. Yeah.

Jody: ShopRite sounds like CVS.

Jenni: Yeah. Okay. So go to the post office, ask if they can give you a tour, like go and see...

Jody: We've done restaurants, anything and everything that has a behind-the-scenes, um, way about it, you go. And you take your kids and you let them participate. Pizza places are awesome.

Jenni: Yeah. Those are fun field trips.

Jody: And the kids are like, first of all, they're amazed at how things are stored, how they're prepped. They can't imagine that things come in bulk like that. Like it's super fun to watch your kids be like, "Oh my goodness!" and then they accomplish making their own pizza. Which is super fun.

Jenni: You know, what's really cool too? If- Check your local museums and see if they have weekend or summer kid classes.

Jody: Those camps.

Jenni: Camps and kid classes. My kids, when we lived in New Jersey, my kids took Saturday classes at the Newark Museum and they were so cool. Sky took an awesome jewelry-making class where they would go into the museum and look at some jewelry from a specific time period. And it was like an eight-week class. So we did this for eight Saturdays.

Jody: Wow.

Jenni: And then they would go back into the classroom in the museum and they would try and make their own versions of those kinds of jewelry. They talked about the different materials they use. And um, my son took a, like, a- it was like a slime class where he learned about polymers at the New York Museum. They learned about polymers and um, gooey, oozy, slimy things. So, um, look for that kind of stuff. We took photography classes there. Um, also- so classes are a great way for kids to figure out what their- scouting programs are awesome. Because scouting programs, when you start doing those badges, you have to really dig deep into, um, into the topic. The Boy Scout curriculum. I have to say, think what you want. I know there's all different views on the Boy Scouts, but let me just tell you this - their curriculum is stellar. The stuff that those kids have to do to earn those badges is mind-blowing for the Boy Scouts. The Girl Scouts has changed and their badges are not as detailed as they use to be, but you know what? Here's what you can do. Even if you don't like the politics of the Girl Scouts, what you can do is you can go order their badge books and you can do them at home because they do still offer some pretty great ideas.

Jody: And that's a curriculum in itself.

Jenni: Go online, look for old Girl Scout books.

Jody: Yeah. Those are better.

Jenni: People are dying to get rid of those. And they've got some great stuff in there. So what we want to do is once our kid has an interest, so let's call it bugs. Go to the library, go to the kids section, show them how to use the card catalog, get every book you can on bugs. Um, watch documentaries on bugs, go to the store, every birthday, Christmas, get them bug stuff. Order that kid the butterfly thing and watch them hatch. And maybe they can draw pictures of it. Here's the deal. If you're the one driving the truck here, they're not interested.

Jody: No.

Jenni: They might've been interested in it for a second, but now they're not. And that's okay.

Jody: Well, you know, as an example, I had one kid who thought she wanted to be a baker. Like she really- the decorating part of it. And you can check places like Michael's. So we put her in a Michael's class and she learned how to decorate cakes and cupcakes. And for her birthday that year and Christmas, that is all that kid got. And she loved it, it's all she wanted and it lasted about a year and that's all she did. I had cupcakes in my house continually.

Jenni: Which is why we're now on a very strict diet.

Jody: Anyway... And she outgrew that. She decided "That's not what I want to do". And she shoved everything above my refrigerator in this giant cabinet and everything lived up there. And now this year she's getting married and she decided I want to make my own cupcakes. And she pulled all that stuff back down. And again, I had cupcakes going on in my house for weeks on end.

Jenni: Torture.

Jody: But then she looked at me and she goes, "I don't want to do this". She goes, "I only want to do this for my own fun in my own house when I want to have a party or I want to have an event". And I'm like, "Awesome!"

Jenni & Jody: "Hobby!"

Jenni: We need those, too.

Jody: But she never would have known that if she hadn't really dove deep in that.

Jenni: Yeah, and those are really important. We don't want to discount those, because they are part of their adult life. Jody and I, we just went last

night. Once a month, we go to an amazing art journaling class. And you know what?

Jody: Shout out to Nena. We love you.

Jenni: Nena, you rock. We spend hours. It starts at like a quarter to six. And so sometimes we don't leave until 11:00, 12:00 at night. I mean, it's- it is...

Jody: Bless her heart for bearing with us. She's like, "My husband's calling me," we're like, "We'll just be another hour".

Jenni: "My page isn't done". Um, but it is the high- one of the highlights of our month, without a doubt. It brings me so much joy. It probes such depths of my soul and it helps me to be the fullness of who I am, but it is not my calling. And that's okay. Because part of our homeschooling, remember we're brimming that future adult. So stage one is to help them discover their interests. And again, we need to let them bounce around and try different things. And it's okay if you bought them a whole bunch of cake making stuff, and then they're no longer interested, that's fine.

Jody: But you're willing to move on.

Jenni: You know what? Sell it. Let them sell it or they can keep the money or save it for the next kid, or...

Jody: Or even a family member that thinks they might be interested, hand it down and bless them.

Jenni: Yeah. So just be willing to change at any point. So then once you're seeing some interest, now let's talk about this in terms of homeschooling. So you do whatever your- let's talk about the elementary years, because honestly, ideally that is when this happens. But like we said, you could do this at any stage, but if you can do this in the elementary years, your kids are going to be set up for success. So let's talk about the elementary years. What do they need? I know parents feel all this pressure in those elementary years to make sure, like, "We have to get history and we have to do science and we have to do..."

Jody: Why are you looking at me again?!

Jenni: You just happen to be in my line of view. There's really no other place to look at the moment.

Jody: There is. There's a whole big room here.

Jenni: See? It would be kind of weird if I, like, have this whole conversation with Matt's head.

Jody: All right. So I'm feeling the stare.

Jenni: Given too much?

Jody: Yes, this was me. I was the box checker.

Speaker 2: But the truth is, but when they're little, you know, what they really need academically is to the tools to learn.

Jody: Right.

Jenni: They need to learn how to read. And not only do they need to learn how to read, they need to learn to love to read and they need to learn the-

Jody: And think.

Jenni: And they need to learn how to think. Conversation. You want your kids to learn how to think, read out loud to them. That could literally be like the bulk of your curriculum. Because- and have a conversation about it. And if you hate reading out loud, if it's really hard for you- first of all, let us try to persuade you to change that because you know, it actually helps you build new brain cells.

Jody: True.

Jenni: There's not a lot of things that do that. Learning an instrument, learning a foreign language, reading out loud.

Jody: Okay. And if I forget to say this later, read to them through high school, even.

Jenni: Yeah.

Jody: We're not talking about just your littles.

Jenni: Yeah. No, totally, keep reading to your kids. Keep- Let them- When they get older, let them read to you, too. Take turns. Um, so what my kids and I will do is they'll read one page to me once they're really proficient of a chapter book and I'll read a page to them. They love that. They love that time. My kids love when it's their turn to read, but either way, like they do need time where you read to them for a long period of time, like a half hour. When I say long period, that's what I mean. Um, so that- at least a half hour, I'm saying. If you want to go longer, go for it. But, um, but at least a half hour, if they're antsy or fidgety, give them blank, paper and markers. They like markers better than crayons. Um, and just tell them to draw while they're listening and then pause and don't grill them. Don't get mad at them if they don't know what's happening in the story, um, it takes time for that to develop.

Jody: It'll cause them to hate reading.

Jenni: Yeah. I had a friend who- I have a friend who teaches, um, seventh and eighth grade English and she- years and years ago, she told me something fascinating. She told me that, um, kids, even in her seventh and eighth grade level, most of her kids come to her without the ability to see a movie playing in their mind when they read a story. That is a critical skill to the enjoyment of reading. When I talk to adults who say, "I can't read it, it's so boring," I will ask them. "When you read a fiction

book do you, like, see a movie playing?", most times those parents will- or adults will say to me, "No". Reading out loud to your kids helps develop that movie. It takes time. But if you talk about it the way you talk about it, you go, "Okay, so let's talk about what's happening. Tell me what you think is happening". And if they're like blank stare, deer in headlights, say, "Okay, no problem. Here's what's going on". And then you recap it for them, they'll get it.

Jody: Right.

Jenni: Keep doing that. Eventually over time, they're going to clue in, and then they're going to be like on the edge of their seat. Or then you can start to ask them questions. Like, you can stop right before Laura opens the cabinet and you can say, "What do you think she's going to find in it?" And then they'll guess.

Jody: Then you're going to get some crazy answers.

Jenni: And that's where the fun of it starts. Now, we've triggered their brain to listen in a new way. Like, now they want to see if they were right. You know? So in the elementary years, they need to learn how to learn, how to learn. Yeah. You can totally do some science concepts. You know, if you need structure and you need a curriculum, by all means, use that, if that's what you need. Um, there are lots of parents who can't wing it. It scares them to death. They feel like their kids are gonna, you know, I don't know. What do they think? I don't even know. Cause I can't put myself in that mindset. What do you think's gonna happen?

Jody: Well, it feels like they're not really. They feel like they're going to fail their kids, right?

Jenni: But then what does the failed kid look like?

Jody: Like, going to go into high school and not have a clue. And they're gonna have to start over from kindergarten.

Jenni: Like they can't tie their shoes in high school?

Jody: No, I think the fear is like, "Oh, I was supposed to teach them the basics back in second grade. And they don't know that".

Jenni: Well, like the periodic table?

Jody: Yeah.

Jenni: It's so good that you're listening and you- we have Jody and me, because we have- we come from the two different mindsets. She came from the box checking world and that's foreign to me. So we were like the, you know, let's just, you know, I got my kids this book called, I think it's called "Totally Irresponsible Science". And then there's another one that's "Completely Catastrophic Science." They're neither irresponsible nor catastrophic. But-

Jody: They are to me.

Jenni: That was- And I just, like, would stock the house with the supplies they needed. And once they could read, they would just do those experiments. It was like their favorite thing.

Jody: So, one of the things that happens is if you're the box checker and you don't allow for that is they hate to learn, because it feels like work.

Jenni: Right.

Jody: And so that's what you want. You want their learning to be fun so that they're doing all this fun and creative digging and searching stuff. And if you're like, "Oh, they're learning and they don't even know it".

Jenni: Yeah.

Jody: So that's really your goal. So if we can change our mindset, those box checkers that-

Jenni: I do. I am a box checker too, in some ways. I just have different boxes.

Jody: Well, you have- Okay. Yeah, you're right.

Jenni: My eight-year-old actually has a checklist everyday.

Jody: You're right. But it looks differently than my checked boxes did.

Jenni: It looks different than yours.

Jody: My checked boxes were "Give me the curriculum. I'm going to sit down, I'm going to teach them. And then I got to make sure they complete the work completely with an A, or they didn't learn it". And that's not it. It's totally different than that. It's a much deeper conversation than this, but...

Jenni: So around the time that they're around their academic schedule, we need to leave a lot of latitude and we need to leave them energy left over to explore these interests.

Jody: So the 6:00 AM to midnight thing is not gonna work.

Jenni: Not a good idea.

Jody: No.

Jenni: No. Even, like, from after breakfast until 3:00, if it's a lot of rigorous work, if you're seeing that by the time they're done with school, they're spent and all they have left in them is to veg out.

Jody: It's too much.

Jenni: Then it's too much. Then we need to back off. Because they need freedom to explore these interests and really dive deeply into them.

Jody: Well, here's the thing, here's a little rule to kind of think of yourself, you know, Jen, you and I, we went to make jewelry for your birthday, right?

Jenni: (giddily) Yes.

Jody: Okay.

Jenni: Can you see a trend here? Make jewelry, art class.

Jody: Well, but here's the thing, we learned a lot in that little class and it was fun.

Jenni: It was so fun.

Jody: We didn't feel like we were sitting in a lecture.

Jenni: No, I can't wait to do it again.

Jody: Right. But we learned some cool stuff and I- even about metal and stuff like that. So I think that if we approach it in that way, like what fun thing can we do that my kids are- Because you're going to learn something if it's new. You're going to learn. You're going to learn new tactics of how to learn. You're going to learn new things that you didn't know before about something. And that's learning. You want them to be life learners.

Jenni: Right. So you're saying like, let them have the freedom to, um, try a new project, you know, explore new interests.

Jody: Pick their own thing.

Jenni: Pick their own thing.

Jody: Right.

Jenni: You know what, a unit study is a great way to do that.

Jody: Oh, yeah it is.

Jenni: Let them pick a topic and go deep into it. And then let them go as deep as they want. I literally did an entire school year. The whole year we did horses. Because that's what my kid at the time wanted.

Jody: Okay. So one of the things you can do, 'cause I know they feel like they're going to the ocean with a teaspoon with that. And if your kid looks at you, like, "I don't know", say, "Okay, so there's food, animals, weather. Like, is there something in there that is fun to you?"

Jenni: Yeah, or even, like, if they ask you a question or if they, you know, "Hey, do you want to do a study on that?" Like, okay, so let's say your kid loves Minecraft. Like, um, I'm not-

Jody: Go with it.

Jenni: I'm just gonna, I'm gonna out myself here. So, like, do you want to do a unit study on what it really means to mine? Like, let's learn about oar, let's learn about what mining really looks like.

Jody: And then play "Catan".

Jenni: Yes! "Settlers of Catan". Oh gosh. We love that game. Okay. So let's say now the end of the elementary years, we've seen some interests really emerge, okay? Now come the middle school years. And this is stage two. And stage two is to develop passion. Passion is not something you discover. Interests are something that you discover, you discover interests, but you develop passion. Passion takes work. You have to work at it. Now, if they're not interested in the thing, they're not going to develop passion. If you- okay. So I use this example a lot. I think it's a really good one. So I had two kids who both asked me to learn to play an instrument. One of them, my son asked if he could learn to play the trombone. My daughter oddly asked for the tenor sax. I thought that was weird. It's just very random and she's petite and tiny. And that thing's huge. And so anyway, Samuel, the trombone player, like I heard that thing going all the time. He would lock himself in his room and he would get on the computer and he would watch trombone players on YouTube. And he would learn about different well-known trombone players. And he would teach himself beyond what they were learning in their class. And he talked about it all the time. I mean, this was- I saw a real interest there. Right? Um, it took me months to realize, "Hey, you know, I've never actually heard the saxophone coming out of her bedroom". So I talked to her about it. And at first she was like, "No, I really like it". And I was like, "Well, that's weird because I don't ever hear you play". And she's like, "I do", "Oh, well you must play it very quietly because I don't ever hear it". And then I would say, "Okay, you know what, can you just please fill out your practice card this week and just show me how much?" And then she would let out tears. And I finally got her to figure out for herself that it really was - she didn't like the saxophone at all. She actually hated it. She liked the friends she made at the program. And she didn't want me to pull her out of the program, because she wanted to be with those friends, right? So, but that's a clue too. And there's no condemnation in that. It's- I mean, I could have said- I did say to her we have to complete the year because we do finish what we start, but you don't have to stay in it after that.

Jody: So I just want to interject. And this is not the time to shame your child for not doing the practice.

Jenni: Yeah. We don't shame our kids for anything, ever.

Jody: But what I'm getting at, is it's a clue and it's a very important clue.

Jenni: Yeah.

Jody: And so we don't want to make them feel badly for not doing that. They just figured something out about themselves. So that's important to...

Jenni: Right, right. We don't want to make our kids feel bad about those things.

Jody: No, no.

Jenni: Okay. So when you develop passion, when you see that interest really there- So now I realized for Eden that type of music, wasn't a passion for- music is a passion for her, for sure. It is her passion. But it's singing and it's not, um, instrumentation. So Samuel, on the other hand, is a musician's musician and he began taking multiple instruments. Now I don't even know how many he plays but a lot. He plays viola and piano and flute. He just started flute and about a whole bunch of things and trombone and, um, and he sings. And- but he's now composing music and music is his whole world, but all those things take development. And in the middle school years is the ideal time to really dig in deep, deep, deep and figure out is this something that we can develop into a potential vocation into a potential calling? Is this your calling? Is it the direction of your calling? So, um, so internships are great things to do. Job shadowing, um, interviewing people in the field and finding out, you know, what...

Jody: What's the day-to-day like? Yeah. And what does it take to get there?

Jenni: What does it take to get there? What are the supporting skills that you need? And what is the day-to-day like, you know, like if you want to- if you think you want to be a lawyer because you've watched lawyers on TV and you're excited about arguing in court...

Jody: You're gonna have a rude awakening.

Jenni: Because it's a lot of paperwork and a lot of research and a lot of, um, it's a lot of desk work and book-work. That court time has only the icing on the cake. There's a big, giant 12-layer cake under that.

Jody: Well sometimes you never even see court.

Jenni: Right. So you need to know, um, they need to really understand what that- and, okay, so let's go with that for a minute. So that's where we are with the kid. Well, we realize, okay, there's a clue in that though. What is it in that? And they need a job where they're going to be talking a lot. They need a job where they're going to be, um, speaking and even maybe performing in some way, what does that look like? Because it may not be this one, but we're - but it's a clue.

Jody: Right.

Jenni: And the middle school years will be the time that they take lessons, they go deep. They do, um, they take summer camp programs, not necessarily pre-college programs. Those are more for, uh, the college- I mean the high school years. But, um, but there are camps that are specific to subject matter. There's science camp, there's robotics camp. There's uh dance camp, soccer camp. Look for those kinds of opportunities so that they can dive really deeply into their subject to- and begin to develop an expertise.

Jody: So those camps all sounds so fun. And one of the things, though, that we have done with our own kids is, well, we develop grit and stamina in

them during those years? And that is hard. That is hard, but if they don't have that, they're never going to move. They're never going to complete their race.

Jenni: Yes.

Jenni: And this also the time to be thinking about, um, does it look like the track that my kids are heading on is going to be college bound to prepare for where they're going? Because if it is the middle school years are an important time to begin laying some academic skillsets, like how to take notes, how to keep, um...

Jody: Absolutely.

Jenni: ...how to keep themselves organized, how to manage their time. Uh, middle school is the time to learn that - by high school, they need to really master that.

Jody: Oh yeah. Or they're going to be lost.

Jenni: If they're first starting in high school, they're going to struggle. They're going to flounder. The high school years should be the mastery of those skills. The middle school years should be the foundation and the introduction of those skills. Um, if they're going to work in a trade, what are some of the supporting skill sets they're going to need that they can start building in those middle school years? Uh, we have a friend whose son is on an agricultural track. And so he's actually now in high school, but all through middle school, he through 4-H, he raised animals. They don't- they live in the, you know, in, like, a suburb. So they don't have the animals in their yard. They found a farm that allowed- partnered through the 4-H program, that allowed them to, um, buy the animal, had the animal at the farm. They have to go every day. They have to take care of the animal every day. They're responsible for the care and wellbeing of those animals. And that was a great hands-on preparatory track through his middle school years to find out if this is indeed what he wants. And he also knows that he's going to have a collegiate aspect to it, he's going to college for this. So at the same time, she put him in study skills every summer. We did a summer study skills program locally, where we live. And she kept him in that every year, because she knew that he needed to prepare, um, academically. So the middle school years lays that foundation. The one, um, we want to be intentional in these years. Uh, we really want to help our kids begin to dive deeply into what they're doing and become experts, but also throughout this time, some other things are happening developmentally. The middle school years is the time when their social awareness goes up. And now all of a sudden friendships take center stage, and they begin to become aware of the opposite sex. And these things start stirring. And they're important. We don't want to discount those things are very important, but if they become their focus, you will assassinate that passion development.

Jody: Right.

Jenni: We call those passion assassins, which I always have a hard time saying. And then also, you know, a lot of time on social media- social media is also important. We don't- we're not of the school of thought that we should ban our kids from it's part of the world that they live in and they're growing-

Jody: And they need to be relevant. And, you know, here's the thing we don't know in the moment is are they going to need to know that platform for whatever it is they're going into?

Jenni: Right. But they need to use it responsibly and they need to use it minimally.

Jody: Right.

Jenni: And the same thing with video games, we're not against video games at all. Um, but they need to be used responsibly and they need to be used minimally. And so all of those things, if they're overindulged will really hinder their ability to grow and develop that passion. By the end of eighth grade, um, or let's say you're out of - you're not in that elementary, middle school, high school time-frame. ideally at the end of eighth grade...

Jody: Yeah.

Jenni: You've developed a passion and you have some prospect of a future. You've got your sights set on something. Um, but if you did this at a later time period, this comes when you've developed the passion. The final stage is to create a strategy. And the strategy is to help our kids become the best candidate for the next step in their process, the step that's out of our hands. So that step might look like college. It might look like, um, a trade apprenticeship. It might look like the military. It might look like, um, a business working with an entrepreneur, um, an internship or an apprenticeship with an entrepreneur. Um, there's a lot of, I mean, there's multitude of paths that they can take, but at some point we are going to release them from our homeschool into something. What are they being released into? Hopefully it's not just the community college to find themselves or the retail store job to find themselves. What were you going to say, Jo?

Jody: Well, I just think, I think it's important to say here, this is the good time to say it, is for those of us who are box checkers. We have to keep in mind that we aren't trying to exit our kids. This isn't, the let's let's fit the form and make sure we did everything we were supposed to do...

Jenni: To graduate them.

Jody: ...to graduate. Let's make sure we have fully prepared them so that they can launch into wherever their next step is. So, you know, that is one of the biggest questions - that's one of them that we get from people who are like, "I need to make sure we're ready for the diploma". And we're like, "Well, what does that look like? What are you checking off? Where's this going?"

Jenni: What are you graduating them from?

Jody: Exactly.

Jenni: Yeah, I mean, we say high school, but high school means at many different things. Um, really what's most important, and this is what we should be gearing their high school toward, is what are the requirements for where they're going to?

Jody: Yeah.

Jenni: So years ago we sat with, uh, Marines recruiter and we asked him like, "What do you need for the next step? How do you, you know, what are you looking for?", and he said, "Just a diploma". And we said, "Well, we're homeschoolers in the state of Florida. Homeschoolers don't get a diploma, per se. I mean, we can produce transcript". He goes, and of course he was kidding, but he's like "From a homeschooler? Just write us a note and crayon saying he graduated".

Jody: But that is- there's some truth in that, like, it doesn't mean a whole lot.

Jenni: And they weren't, they didn't want to see his transcript. They literally just wanted a letter from parent saying "We're done".

Jody: Yep.

Jenni: And you, the parent, decide what that looks like. Now, if you have state requirements and your state requires specific things, then you have to meet those needs to stay legal. That's very important.

Jody: And there's many ways to do that.

Jenni: And there are wide range of ways to do that. But if your child wants to go to, um, a competitive college, they probably need a lot more than your state requires. A lot more. So you need to know what it is that they're looking for.

Jody: So that's why it's important to have a strategy and a map to know where you're going.

Jenni: So how do we get that? Well, it starts by knowing what the finish line looks like. Now, this doesn't mean that your child can't change their mind.

Jody: Right.

Jenni: It doesn't mean that they can't take a different course, but here's the thing. If you've been doing this process all the way through, by the time you hit this point, they really know themselves and they're not going to make a radical departure, in most cases. Especially now, this is really important, especially if you spent that time developing their passion. If all you did was discover interests, you're going to be the person who has a million interests and no development.

Jody: Jack of all trades, master of none.

Jenni: Exactly.

Jody: That's what we don't want.

Jenni: We don't want that. We want them to become specialists. We say this all the time, colleges do not want well-rounded students. That is a myth. Colleges, want a well-rounded student body made up of individual specialists. We like to say, colleges want to see T-shaped students. Think of the capital letter T, it has a lot of depth in one area and a short breadth in other areas. So we want to spend that time really developing that passion. And sometimes we have to, in middle school, steer their hand a little bit in this sense. We have to say, "Listen, you have four really powerful interests. Either we need to figure out how to combine some of these, or you need to decide two or three of these are going to be great, lifelong hobbies that you love, but one is going to be your vocation". And that's what we're going to work on developing, because you can't develop all of them simultaneously. So we get a glimpse at the finish line, and then we reverse engineer it. What does it look like to be, um, a neurologist? What does that look like? Well, it definitely looks like undergraduate and then it definitely looks like medical school and then it absolutely looks like a residency. And then it probably looks like a fellowship after that. So you've got to do a little research and Mr. Google knows all the answers to these questions. So just Google it. Um, what are the best neurology hospitals in the country? Call those hospitals? What fellowship, you know, how do you recruit your people? Um, look for fellowships in that area. How do you find your people? Where do you, what residencies do you recruit?

Jody: Do not assume anything.

Jenni: Don't assume anything. Nothing. Call and ask them. Don't email them, because you're going to get a stock response, get on the phone and call them.

Jody: And don't listen to what grandma said 20 years ago.

Jenni: Nope. Don't listen to what your neighbor said her son did. Cause her son is her son.

Jody: Yeah.

Jenni: You need to ask for your child and reverse engineer it all the way back. Believe it or not, decisions, all the way up to the fellowship and the residency, can be impacted by the decisions we make in high school. Great ones. We can make great ones. This isn't to scare you a put pressure on you. It's to give you tremendous insight and actually to give you freedom to really help your child become the best candidate for their next step.

Jody: Well, knowledge is power. So if you know to make certain phone calls and you know to create a strategy and you know to develop passion and interest, then you're on the right path.

Jenni: And then you know which, um, which opportunities to pursue and which to let go of, even the really good opportunities.

Jody: Right. They're not the best.

Jenni: No. As a matter of fact, this year, my son had to make a couple of very hard decisions. Um, he wants to go to school for- he wants to do a double major in theater arts and music composition. He wants to actually be a music producer, musical producer, musical theater producer. Um, and, but he also really wants to compose for musical theater at the same time. So, um, he has a ton of music experience, um, and he sings at our local opera house and has for - I think this is his eighth or ninth year, his eighth or ninth year. Um, but he has no musical theater experience at all. And so he has done All State, which is a very big honor. He's an all-state to- first, he got in at ninth grade, he got in at in 10th grade is going into 11th grade. And he wanted to have all four years of All State, but you have to belong to a choir and a school choir. And so we have a homeschool choir that's affiliated with them, but the problem is it competes with the dual enrollment musical theater program. And he has no musical theater experience. And he really felt like he needed two years, at least of like, I don't want to say professional, because it's not professional, it's academic, but college level musical theater.

Jody: Right.

Jenni: So that he has that on his resume since he's pursuing theater arts. And, um, and that was a really hard decision to make. But when you know, the end result and you know, where you're headed, we've spoken to the school, he wants to go to, we know what they're looking for. We also know that earning Eagle Scout is going to make a huge difference - number one, in his ability to get accepted and number two, in his, um, ability to earn a scholarship, which he needs. So that was another consideration that we had. You know, we have to really think about...

Jody: But you wouldn't have known that had you not made that phone call to that university to find out.

Jenni: Yeah.

Jody: So it's really important. And I don't know that you've said this, but one of the things we say is don't email them. It's gotta be the phone call.

Jenni: Yeah.

Jody: And with all this stuff, don't assume anything. And don't get, uh, um, a canned response from a university or even a place of business where you're looking for information. Get on the phone and ask very specific questions.

Jenni: And dig.

Jody: And dig.

Jenni: And dig. Um, so once you have all that information, you have a stellar program for your, I mean-

Jody: For your unique child's call.

Jenni: That college or apprenticeship or company is going to give you the best roadmap for how to navigate the high school years. And your student will be the ideal candidate when they graduate. Well, we are about to wrap up here, but I just want to say this. If you want to come hang out with us, if you want to ask us questions, if you want to get to know us, we do have a Facebook group that we interact in quite a bit. Just go onto Facebook and search for "Homeschooling from Cradle to Calling" and ask to join the group. We're just starting this week. We're just starting weekly Facebook live videos. So we're actually going to, um, kick that off, um, soon here...

Jody: Come talk to us. We'd love to talk to you there.

Jenni: Yeah. Come talk to us. And so we will, um- Go into the Facebook group. You'll see the announcement on what day in time the next Facebook live video will be. And we hope that we can- and tell us what you want us to talk about.

Jody: Yeah. We'd love to hear.

Jenni: Thanks so much.