

Episode 6: Preparing Your Teens for College with Valerie Felder

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:05.2] Aaress Lawless: Hi there. Welcome to Today's Homeschool Teen, a podcast for homeschooling parents who want to help their teens meet the challenges of high school and reach their incredible God-given potential. I'm your host, Aaress Lawless. On behalf of our team at Dual Credit at Home, thank you for joining me.

I'm excited to have Valerie Felder joining me for a chat. She's an author, military veteran, speaker, and a homeschool mom. Now in this conversation, we're going super-practical. We're talking about preparing teens for college, helping them make wise decisions, and, most importantly, how parents can pray for them.

[EPISODE]

[0:00:45.8] Aaress Lawless: Valerie, God has taken you on such an incredible journey from what I've heard, and I am grateful to have the chance to chat with you today. Thank you so much for being on the podcast.

[0:00:55.6] Valerie Felder: Thank you for having me. It's a pleasure.

[0:00:58.0] Aaress Lawless: Well, let's get started with the beginning. I would love to hear the story of your childhood in Chicago, through the Air Force and how God led you into this incredible homeschooling journey.

[0:01:10.7] Valerie Felder: Oh, yes. Well, I was raised by a pretty determined mother and father in one of the least likely places for success that was in Chicago, Illinois, in the south side ghetto. It was a time when there was a lot of unrest and a time however, for families to get a little more closer and congeal. That's basically what my parents did for me.

They supported me with my schooling. I would have to walk to school, a latchkey kid, while they both worked. I learned responsibility pretty early on. I learned that I needed to make the right choices at an early age. We went through that era. At one point around my sixth-grade year, we

did move from the city of Chicago into a suburb of a really small country town, township of Covert in Michigan, a little blueberry hamlet. That's where I spent the rest of my junior high and high school schooling years.

I loved school, loved academics, and again, that was something that my parents encouraged me. It was always just do your best, not necessarily about competing with others, but compete against yourself. Do the best that you can. One thing led to another. I did end up graduating with pretty good ranking within my high school and one in Air Force scholarship, a four-year technical scholarship.

[0:02:34.5] Aaress Lawless: That's incredible.

[0:02:36.5] Valerie Felder: It was a really wonderful beginning of a story that started off in a pretty challenging location. Again, it was the support of my parents. My father didn't go past the third grade. It was just his life. My mother did graduate high school, and they had visioned to try and help me to go a little further. That's where their love and support and diligence came to play.

I went to the University of Michigan. It's funny because I hear a lot of people saying that they apply for four or five and six different schools, and just knowing my background, I didn't know you had to apply to that many schools. I only applied to one.

[0:03:21.1] Aaress Lawless: That's great.

[0:03:23.4] Valerie Felder: The Lord blessed me and my ignorance. I did get accepted. I went through four years of ROTC, Air Force ROTC. At the end of that time, I had earned my math degree and Air Force commission.

[0:03:36.8] Aaress Lawless: Math degree. Wow.

[0:03:38.5] Valerie Felder: Love math. The eye-opener, the first eye-opener for me was that I was not as well-prepared as some of my college prep counterparts. I got through school and did well. I was actually at the top of my class, but there were a lot of things that I did not have under my belt. It caused me to have to take additional classes and to work extremely hard almost four

years taking math. I was pre-med, so I was a stubborn student. I said, “Well, I may go into the military. I want to be a physician.” I had the science; I had the ROTC and the math.”

It was a rugged four years and learned a lot. I remember the first time I realized that I was at a little bit of a disadvantage both economically and academically, all I could think of was that I had the same 24 hours that the other students ahead of me had. However, my parents gave me the best that they could, but I did not know even from my own high school counselors that there was such a thing as college-level entrance preparatory exams, and so would helped me – would have gotten me a little bit ahead.

I at that point, I remember my freshman year thinking if I ever had children that...It impacted me just waiting for money and sweating bullets really spiritedly because I had so much upon me. The Lord blessed me. I made it through. I got my degree and my commission and started my Air Force journey. Shortly after that, once I got into the military, they moved me to Biloxi, Mississippi, which is where I met my husband in the Air Force. He had a different, but yet similar struggle of a story, so together we decided whenever we had children that we would do whatever we need to do to help them. We knew nothing about homeschooling.

We started on that path. We had children. We had our first son. I remember when he was maybe three-years-old, I started thinking about me at that point was a captain, thinking how much I was going to miss having him. He was in daycare, but at the time after daycare and work was so precious to me.

[0:05:57.8] Aaress Lawless: Yes, so short too.

[0:06:00.4] Valerie Felder: Yes. I started thinking, and I told my husband that I would sacrifice my military career at that point. I was a captain ready to transition into the management part of the military, about eight years in. All I could think of was my son. I need to give him as much as I can so that I can be in my head as much as I can to help them.

I did get out of the military when he was three and a half or so. My last week before I got off, I remember hearing, we were in San Antonio, hearing about a man coming to town named Gregg Harris. He was doing this homeschool conference and it was advertised on a Christian station here. I'm thinking, “Homeschool. Wait a minute. What in the world is this?”

[0:06:48.4] Aaress Lawless: Oh, do you remember what year that was vaguely?

[0:06:50.6] Valerie Felder: Yes, I do. I remember exactly, that was 1991 January.

[0:06:54.6] Aaress Lawless: That's incredible.

[0:06:55.5] Valerie Felder: Yes. My husband agreed. He looked at me like I had two heads, but I thought I said – These people are doing this. I have my degrees, although that it's not a requirement. I said, but to justify, maybe I can look into it. We did go. It started on a Friday night. By the end of that first night, we both were committed, convicted, and dedicated to the fact that we needed to do this for our baby for the sake of giving him as many wisdoms as we could from this scripture, from raising him according to our Christian, Judeo-Christian values.

As far as we knew, our academics could beat him. It was then that we learned about it. I bought up every book from Mary Pride, to Cathy Duffy, whomever. I studied. I really studied hard. Coming on the military, this is something that I need to do. By the time May rolled in around, I got him a preschool all-in-one curriculum, called Training Wheels. I started schooling him in May 1991. I was pregnant with our second child, and we have never looked back.

[0:08:14.0] Aaress Lawless: That's incredible.

[0:08:15.8] Valerie Felder: Yes. That was the beginning. Again, I wanted to be certain that I had all my duckies in line, moving across the country. I didn't know who might knock on my door, so I wanted to be certain that I knew. That is how we started. Here we are 28 years later, and I'm looking at my grandbaby thinking, "Well now, buy little phonics cards. It's time to start it."

[0:08:41.8] Aaress Lawless: That is incredible. What an amazing journey. Today, tell us where the Felder family is today. Who's still at home? Who's in high school? You mentioned your grandbaby. Where y'all at today?

[0:08:55.9] Valerie Felder: Yes. We had over the years after our first one. We ended up being blessed with nine children; five sons, four daughters.

[0:09:04.3] Aaress Lawless: What a blessing.

[0:09:06.5] Valerie Felder: It really has been the first five have graduated high school. We took them all the way through. The first five had definite aspirations to go to college. There weren't papers. The first one wanted to go to Texas A&M, so that was my proving ground. I had to have them, have them ready. He did. He went. Graduated from the Mace Business School and went through the corps. He got his degree, and then he went into the military. He and his wife married; they're both veterans now living about four minutes from my driveway at San Antonio. That's a precious story. The second is he – Domani, he graduated from A&M and very interesting, he decided he wanted to walk onto their football team.

[0:09:54.3] Aaress Lawless: Oh, wow.

[0:09:56.0] Valerie Felder: He did. He tried out, and he did it. It was just a redshirt situation, but still, it was another – it was his story. He wanted to try a few little things, but he did graduate with the degree and also business. He is a businessman in Dallas. Behind him is Miriam. She graduated, our daughter. She is now putting herself from school and working in the Houston area.

[0:10:23.0] Aaress Lawless: Oh, in my neck of the woods.

[0:10:24.9] Valerie Felder: Okay, well, then that's good. That's good. It's a good thing. Good people. Good people together. She's our third, and so she's continuing to do her working through. The next one is Valeria. Yeah, she went through Baylor and just graduated last December with a degree in math and Mandarin.

[0:10:45.3] Aaress Lawless: Math and Mandarin.

[0:10:47.2] Valerie Felder: Math and Mandarin. The baby just under her is a junior now at UTSA. He just called home and told me, "Mama, I got an A in my stats course." As a math major, that makes me feel pretty good.

[0:11:01.8] Aaress Lawless: Congratulations.

[0:11:05.2] Valerie Felder: That's five of them who are graduated and out and being productive members of society, which is what we really had impressed upon them. The sixth one will graduate in a few months and will start her college career in January after doing some more dual credit. There are three babies left at home.

[0:11:29.9] Aaress Lawless: That is amazing. Wow. You've gotten to go the whole gamut with your kids, all the way from preschool, all the way to seeing them as you mentioned, just incredible members of society. What I would love to do now is let's just pretend for a second that we're sitting down with a mom who is homeschooling high school for the first time. What would you tell her?

[0:11:54.7] Valerie Felder: Okay. I will tell her first if she's been doing this for a while is the assumption, and she's gotten to this crossroad where, "Okay, either I'll school them myself, or send them someplace else." I would encourage her that first, she needs to take a deep breath and sit down, put on the seatbelt because it is a little different, but in many ways, it's very much the same.

I would tell her to plug in to whatever support network she has around her because there are people who have done this over and over again. Sit and have good discussion with the child to understand what their aspirations and desires might be. Some know, and some don't. Then I would chart a course. Now, if I could know her maybe two years before high school, I would sit down with her with her seventh-grader and tell her even then, to start charting a course. That would make it a little less pressured for those last four years. I would definitely encourage her to do it, because there are definitely more options and curriculum available in this day, where she doesn't have to know everything, but she can get a good job done.

[0:13:15.0] Aaress Lawless: Now when you say, chart the course, what would that look like? Or are we thinking a four-year plan, or what would your recommendations be about that?

[0:13:21.9] Valerie Felder: Okay, my recommendations would be to sit down and listen to the child's heart first. If they understand what it is that they would like to do, I would even recommend doing different personality tests or aptitude tests and interests to see for those who don't know. Then based on their interests and strengths, try to build them in that direction

academically. If you have a child who's interested in the sciences, then you start moving towards the school that they may be interested in.

I would take them on campus. I would talk – I talked to the professors, the college professors vary, the ones that I've seen they're very open to someone being interested in their field. You sit your child down with them. Then help them to chart a course as someone who knows and dip their toe in a little bit and then ask the questions that the colleges can normally lay out for you what type of a track and plan four years of English, so many sciences, so many math courses. They'll lay that out for you.

Then from there, you can determine what that child maybe can take with Community College. That again is where that dual credit can come into play. I definitely would try and figure where the child wants to go and then plan, set some type of a track down, something that is a little flexible for those who do not understand where they might want to be. I would then say if they want a college course, so want the college path, to take them to a community college, or an online college, until they really have a vision as to what they might want to do.

All in all, I would again put them through some type of college prep, or preparatory exam situation, because then for some children when they see themselves actually doing it, I think it opens their minds up to the possibilities. In some, they have to take a hurdle from high school, even high school homeschool to this magical world of college, “Can I do this?” I think that as much as you can to prime the pump, that's what I would do; lots of counseling and try to get him out there.

[0:15:48.1] Aaress Lawless: You mentioned that when you're telling about your story, how when you arrived in college, you felt that if you had kids, you would do things to help them be better prepared for college. For many families, they're doing college, some are doing college during high school, but others are looking at high school as the preparing ground for college. What are some of those things that in your college experience you wish that you had maybe majored on a little bit more in high school?

[0:16:14.9] Valerie Felder: Right. For one, because of the emphasis that is placed on the college entrance exams, the SAT, the ACT, I would start my child in those tests. I'd get one of the Petersons, or Princeton reviews. I would get this, but I wouldn't say, “Here's the heavy.”

We're going to start with this." Scare them out the backdoor. No. What I've always tried to do with our school is to get as much of the regular academics done and then Friday, Fridays for my elementary I would say, "Okay, come over and sit down and we're going just to see how much you know. Then once you're done, we're going to go to the playground." Those were all of their tests and their assessment. They didn't know that they were testing.

Whenever they started into the entrance exams or even the national exams that they were excited, it was like, "Oh, I can do this." What I would do and what I've done is to go to Barnes & Noble and pick up those thick books and sit down with them and say, "Okay, we're just going to do this many pages today and tomorrow," and walk them through even from seventh and eighth grade.

By the time they get to testing for the PSAT, which is at their junior year and the SAT, they know the test is most – they know what they're familiar with it and they don't have trepidation. The reason that I do have my children to test is because of the scholarship. The possibilities are astronomical. Most all of my children have been able to test into getting as much scholarship as they ever did need. The first two, especially when they enter college, they had everything paid for.

[0:18:03.3] Aaress Lawless: That's amazing.

[0:18:05.7] Valerie Felder: It's a preparatory step that you don't try and chew on. You don't fire-hose them. You don't make them take big goals, but little at a time. Now, if you don't know anything until high school, the ninth grade, then take it. Take that whole – you have 365 days in the year. Take a little at a time, but don't stress them. A little at a time, they can do it. We need to give them the confidence that they can.

[0:18:29.4] Aaress Lawless: Exactly. I love that. One other question I have for you that I've noticed, sometimes it's hard for teens they make that transition from mom standing over them each day and laying out the subjects and the schedule, and they go to college and all of a sudden, they're responsible for setting their own good study habits, setting their own schedule, that kind of thing. How can parents prepare their teens for mature scheduling, mature organization in high school, to start moving them towards that point where they can set their own study habits and set their own schedules?

[0:19:04.4] Valerie Felder: Right. I would say this is how Valerie Felder did it. Others might say, “That’s different.” In my household it worked, because we moved. My husband was in the military and retired. We moved every one to two years for over 20 and some. I knew that I needed my little ducklings to know how to read pretty quickly. I focused heavily early on on phonics and got to the place where they could read by very early. Then I would have these rudimentary charts, and it would say, spelling page 1, page 2.

I would lay these out for them. Vertically, it would be the subject at the top, going across would be the days of the week. Then very simple instructions for my younger kids. Now the older ones, they grew up with that so that I could be a little more mature with it. From that, they could understand God is a God of order. You need to understand what is required and how much time you have to get it done in.

As a high school, hopefully they've had some type of time management training. If not, then just start them with a little day planner or some of the planners you can pick up at the curriculum fairs. First and foremost, teach them to look at what they have to do and you can do it for them and layout their weeks and maybe a few weeks out of time, maybe a nine-week period and let them understand, “Okay, this is what you need to do, and we'll check in however.” Now, this is where high school can get a little muddy because they have extracurricular activities and tasks. Then there's church on Wednesday nights. And, and, and...

[0:20:52.8] Aaress Lawless: Exactly. No end to the and.

[0:20:55.1] Valerie Felder: That’s exactly true. However, I would always explain to my kids; life is about not necessarily – I don’t think the word multitasking is all that, because but part-tasking. I have to understand that I need – I have this one thing I must do, and I have this that I want to do. I may have to stay up later, get up earlier; teaching them that. In some cases, there are no options. You have to get this work done, and that there are consequences.

I do have a few have gone into sports, and then they turn around, and I look at their scores. I just tell them, “Absorb the applause today. Tomorrow you will be in your room, door closed, and chin stuck to the chest.” They understand that. I do try and help them to commit to the schedule that they learned to – I help them first when they learned to do it. Sometimes, I see other

parents taking their students to co-ops. They are able to sit under other voices, other instructors, which is good. That's healthy. Even Sunday school is a good place for people to take their children in places where they are held accountable to another, versus instruction, martial arts. Different places where they're not just hearing your voice and they're held accountable.

Community college courses. Every now and then, they might be able to take a little course here and there. Even DVD courses in your home, they have been trained by many times largely the mom. They may be responsive to mom, and they understand what her triggers are, but they need to then step into that arena where others are trying to parlay the data or not. Because I have had some who've taken courses and the instructor could care less, but they still have to figure laying out that schedule, figuring what they need to do.

Again, there's so many options for parents, but they do need to be able to respond to other's voices because that is where they're going to go, but they still need to be able to hear the voices of their parents, the mother and father. They've got their vested interest in their child. Mom and dad standing in the background sometimes while they go out there and learn those – learn to make good choices. If they do that during high school and they do a little misstep, they can still fall back into your arms, and you can help them to correct it and move forward before they get college.

[0:23:29.2] Aaress Lawless: So true. You mentioned this about how the importance of them still hearing mom and dad's voice and also hearing mom and dad's heart in all this. As I was getting ready for the interview, I read a quote that somebody had written on one of your bios that your husband had said. He's quoted as saying, "We want to raise exceptional children in a less than ideal world." I love that. Now how do you prepare your kids in high school to face that less than ideal world? One of the top criticisms we hear against homeschoolers is that they're so sheltered, they're raised in a bubble, they won't be able to know right from wrong. How did you and your husband approach that in your homeschool?

[0:24:11.5] Valerie Felder: Yes. I think the schooling, even calculus 3; there's such a thing as probably – that's the easier aspect of homeschooling. The other part is yes, we have taken these saplings. We have taken this job very seriously and help these children near our hearts. We have given them everything that we could.

I think it's very important for us as parents, when they're even younger to have them in and out of the home with us, of course when they're younger. Take them out. We would do a public speaking group. I have never seen one in the many moves we've made, where they did not want to have or didn't welcome their children, so long as they could sit and be quiet.

That was the other thing we would tell our kids is if you want to go places with mom and dad and have real fun, we have to enjoy you first. Let's be certain if we can do that. The hardest aspect of homeschooling, especially as a mama who's held her children so close even physically, is watching them walk out that door into what can be a rope step. In society, that is not as friendly towards us today as it had been.

I have always tried to establish great connects with them. We have our group text. We do the social media. I try to go where they are. If they are on Facebook, I get on Facebook. I know some of their friends, and then there's a bit of a group and accountability there. I am there for my child. Even one who was a few hours away, she hadn't left her – one of her major books and need it the next day, I got in that car and took off and presented it to her. We as parents, have to continue to be there and be present, and not think that just because they made it across crossing that specific group into college that they are mature enough to handle.

We need to keep the lines of communications open, because we, as much as we prepare them and train them, Satan knows where to show, unfortunately, and so we need to continue to pray over them and be there as much as we possibly can. The scripture in Proverbs tells us, train the child up in the way he should go. When he's older, he won't depart from it. I wish the Lord would give us the number that equates when he's older. Because sometimes you have to sit back and allow your child to live in their own will, God-given will to prayerfully make the right decisions.

I'm the first to stand on platforms to tell people I am so not perfect. Oh, my family, pray for us, because we are definitely – we are not there either, but God's grace. We pray and pray that God will guide them. The communications has to be open, and they come back to us. I've had some of my kids to come back and tell me, "Well, mom. I did this, or I saw that, or I heard this." Then we're able to take the conversation places. Even to points of forgiveness, even to points where they can rip your hearts out. These are your babies.

We want to raise our children. We want them to be prepared, but we also have to be as gracious as God when they make mistakes and allow them and understand that if we can release them into God's hand, he's safer in their hand than he is living at home.

[0:28:12.0] Aaress Lawless: So true. If we could eavesdrop behind by your bedside during those years of homeschooling, what would we hear you pray?

[0:28:19.4] Valerie Felder: First and foremost, Lord, please give us wisdom as parents beyond our years. We are talking to our peers, and we're all doing the best that we can, but help us to know and see what we don't yet and cannot yet know. We pray one; give us supernatural eyes and hearts to prepare the way for the children. We would pray, Lord, cover them, because we can't know where the Lord is going to cover their hearts, cover their minds, and give them the desire to pant after you.

Therefore, there have been situations where we've had a child who may have decided to make a choice that we would not embrace. We knew that we had prayed over that child and that God's word would not come back void. It would accomplish what it was to accomplish. We have seen some occasions where it looked as if our child was going in the wrong direction, and because of the prayers that we prayed from early on, that child would end up coming back around and bringing what I would have to consider to be masses, back in the direction of winning souls for them to learn.

Praying over, just praying a general spiritual, and that we could then connect always, we always pray that wherever our children are, that we have a spiritual and a heart connection. This is all about relationships.

[0:29:58.1] Aaress Lawless: Yes, so true. Wow, well, Valerie, this has been such an incredible conversation. I would love to keep talking, but I do want our listeners to have a chance to learn more about you and to take advantage of some of the awesome resources that you have available. Can you tell us a little bit about your books and where our listeners can find those?

[0:30:17.5] Valerie Felder: Yes, yes. I have about three books. One is only available from my website, currently. It's called TUFF Mama Organizer. It's an organizer for your home, but chapter – I think it's chapter 8 or 9 is where I talk about shelves and pantries. The first part of

the book is about organizing mom and dad's heart, organizing the children to obedience, and poor family values that I took from the military and mush them together in my mama's heart.

[0:30:47.6] Aaress Lawless: That's incredible. What does TUFF stand for? I was curious about that when I saw that.

[0:30:55.0] Valerie Felder: Yes, I was hoping I'm populating video on my YouTube, but I think I can go ahead and give this to you because I go into greater detail once I'm done with my speaking gigs. T stands for tenacious. As a mama, you have to do what you need to do, sometimes staying up late, or just going down the muddy slide with your child, whatever it is. Be tenacious to give your child what they need. The U stands for a mama who is uncommon, looking at the mothers such as Hannah and the children who've been developed through the biblical days, like Esther and even Joseph. Those mothers and fathers planted something in those kids that, when they were challenged as youngsters, they were able to stand. We need to be uncommon in the way we parent our children. The first F is that we need to be fireproof.

[0:31:45.3] Aaress Lawless: This is great.

[0:31:48.5] Valerie Felder: Satan's end starts our way. It could come in the form of your child breaking your heart, or it could come in the form of being isolated because most of the community doesn't understand your church, doesn't understand that you have to be fireproof and do God's will. Then the last F is fit. You need to be fit mentally, spiritually, physically. When I say fit spiritually, or physically, I'm saying you don't have to have this one of these chiseled bodies, but you need to take your body, honor what God has given you and do the very best that you can in it, so you can be the witness. I say, there's no witness without fitness, and homeschooling is definitely a witness. That's just one book on the website.

Then the other two which are available on Amazon, one has five-star reader ratings I'm excited for. The one is about teaching communications, even from a high-chair. So that when your child and growing, your child so that when they get to those hard places in high school, in college, they go back to you, as opposed to elsewhere. That's called *Table Talk Guidebook for Christian Living*. That was my first book on Amazon. My second one, which is my baby right now is – it was released last year, *Life in Sturdy Stitches*.

[0:33:10.6] Aaress Lawless: Life in Sturdy Stitches. That's great.

[0:33:12.2] Valerie Felder: I talk about the closeness of family. *Life in Sturdy Stitches*. What that happens to be is the story of all nine of the children. They actually co-authored each chapter that I dedicated to that one quality that I felt the Lord saying, this is what this child needs or this is where you need to be as a parent as you raise this particular child, whether – we had two that we adopted. They told their story at the end of every chapter. It's a parenting manual of sorts, but it's one from my heart to tell the story of what we've done.

I have those three. I am on social media. I am on [facebook.com/TheClose-KnitFamily](https://www.facebook.com/TheClose-KnitFamily). That's a good place to go for encouragement, and I'm building up my Instagram and YouTube channels as well, by the same name, The Close-Knit Family.

[0:34:06.8] Aaress Lawless: Awesome. Your website is what?

[0:34:08.6] Valerie Felder: Valeriefelder.com.

[0:34:10.8] Aaress Lawless: Awesome. Well, I hope everybody takes advantage of learning more from you. I know I have learned so much during this conversation. Thank you so much, Valerie, for joining us.

[0:34:21.1] Valerie Felder: You're welcome. You're so welcome. Thank you for having me.

[END OF EPISODE]

[0:34:25.7] Aaress Lawless: Now, for those of you listening in, I want to encourage you to check out some of the resources that Valerie mentioned in today's episode. You can find those in the podcast show notes at our website dualcreditathome.com/podcast. In the show notes, you'll be able to find the links to where you can follow Valerie on her social media accounts, plus you can learn more about the TUFF Mama Organizer and her book, *Life in Sturdy Stitches*. Also, don't forget to hit subscribe, so you don't miss the next episode of Today's Homeschool Teen.

Thanks again for joining us, and we're praying that God blesses you and your family as you homeschool high school.

[END]