

EPISODE 08

[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.

Today we have author, speaker, and blogger, Jeannie Fulbright, with us. Jeannie and I are going to be talking about learning disabilities, teaching your kids to study independently, and motivating teens in school.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:00:38.3] Aaress Lawless: Well, Jeannie, thank you so much for joining us today on the podcast. I've been looking forward to talking with you today.

[0:00:45.0] Jeannie Fulbright: I'm so excited to be here.

[0:00:47.1] Aaress Lawless: Well, to start things off, can you introduce us to the Fulbright family? Now, I did see on your Instagram that you and your husband celebrated 27 years of marriage just a couple of months ago, so congratulations on that.

[0:00:58.7] Jeannie Fulbright: Thank you. Yes, well, I first heard about homeschooling in college which was a long time ago but I babysat a couple that they homeschooled their children and so that's where I was first exposed to homeschooling and so I was interested in it but I didn't understand it until – we lived in Dallas at the time, and my next-door neighbor was an old couple, and they had a granddaughter that was homeschooled, and she was 10 years old, and I was 26 and had a two-year-old and she would come over and talk to me like an adult, and I was just blown away.

[0:01:34.5] Aaress Lawless: That's incredible.

[0:01:35.7] Jeannie Fulbright: A 10-year I and I thought, if this is the result of homeschooling, I'm homeschooling my kids. Pretty soon after that, I was in a Christian bookstore, and I saw a little kindergarten home school curriculum. I brought it home, and I started homeschooling my two-year-old.

I was a little anxious to get started. That was kind of the beginning of the big home school life that we led. When we first moved, we moved to California, and then we moved to Georgia. I lived in Georgia now, and when I first moved here, I was excited, trying to find some parents that were going to home school, and my daughter at that time was five, and right at that time, I got diagnosed with a very serious form of thyroid cancer.

For that year, I ended up putting my daughter in a little Christian school, and that was just the hardest thing I ever did but just going through this cancer treatment, but then after that, I just thought, you know what? I don't even know how long I'm going to live, I don't know how many more years I'm going to have with them, and I am never going to put them under somebody else's care for the whole day.

They're my children, and God has given them to me, and I'm going to teach them, I'm going to nurture them in the things God just showed me. I started homeschooling for real after all the treatments were done. For a while, it was just my daughter, who was being homeschooled. My boys were really young and just really rambunctious.

It was just me and my daughter, our little cozy homeschool. We're together, and she felt like she was an only child, she was getting all this attention every day to do the school. That was really great for her, and we really had fun homeschooling, but then, when I decided to start my oldest son to start homeschooling him and I actually waited a while because he just was not ready for formal learning right away. I waited until he was almost seven before I sat down to do formal learning with him, and it wasn't long into that teaching him that I realized, this is going to be a lot harder.

There's a problem here. At the time, I didn't realize; it didn't occur to me that he would have a learning disability. For some reason, I just couldn't accept that. That was not it. We needed to

get the right curriculum. For years, I was in that denial that a lot of parents experience when they first find out their child has learning challenges. But what was really interesting about what happened.

When I realized that he did have dyslexia and dysgraphia, I started really focusing on, I got a curriculum that was designed for kids who had these problems, and I was really hyper-focused on him for a lot of the day. My oldest daughter really fought against that, but because of necessity, I just told her you have to be independent with your learning now, and she was used to me sitting down next to her, whatever she did, and she had to learn how to teach herself.

I had to choose a curriculum that helped her to teach herself so that I could focus on my son. What was really interesting about that is she really fought against having to be independent with her learning but in the end, that ended up being the most important part of what happened in her home school journey because when she was about ten years old, decided she wanted to be a ballerina.

We're in Georgia, and we have some great ballet programs here. I put her in a program and pretty soon, when she was about 13 or 14, they had a home school program there where the girls would go in the morning and they would dance for two or three hours and then they would go to their home school room and there was this big room and they all had to do their work for the four-hour time slot and then they danced until about 9:00 at night. She was gone all day long.

She wanted to be a professional ballerina, and she was determined to do it. If she had not learned how to teach herself independently, that would have been a real problem because the other girls in the program that didn't know how to do school work without it being spoon-fed to them. They didn't know how to act when they didn't have a teacher.

Looking and watching and checking up on them every day and my daughter knew, I put her in some enrollment classes when she was 15. I gave her a college-prep education even though I was not the one that was teaching her. She was teaching herself.

[0:06:02.1] Aaress Lawless: That's great.

[0:06:03.3] Jeannie Fulbright: Yeah, in the end, she was asked to dance professionally with the Orlando ballet when she was 17, right away, be professional ballerina and I have been praying for her with my prayer partner for years just God, if this is really what you wanted to do, I pray, but if it's not, just moving her heart and so she decided before she accepted that contract, she just said to me, "Mom, I think I want to go to college." And she already had two surgeries on her feet and all kinds of things. She didn't want to dance anymore.

I thought, if she had behaved the way these other girls in the program had behaved and not done her work, she would not have been college-ready.

[0:06:43.8] Aaress Lawless: That's right.

[0:06:44.3] Jeannie Fulbright: So she was college-ready whereas a lot of those other girls, they had these issues where they couldn't dance anymore. But they hadn't even completed high school. What was really great is she had learned to learn independently, and that is what I tell high school parents. Teach your children to be independent learners because that is going to make the difference. When she went to college, she had been teaching herself for years, and so it was just an easy transition for her, even though she had never sat in a classroom in her entire life.

Especially not one of those theaters. She just transitioned really smoothly right on. It was great. My boys, the older one, had learning challenges and struggled, and the younger one didn't, he just had ADHD. I made sure they got outside a lot, they played a lot, I just gave them a lot of free time just to work off that energy but my younger son, he was not ready for college until the day he stepped on campus. When he graduated from his first year of college, he went to Pepperdine, which is in California, Malibu, and that was a really hard school, but he was ready for the challenge of doing it.

I didn't give him the kind of high school education where he was just exhausted from school. I tried to make their high school education where they were learning great stuff, but they were not being overburdened with too much work. I think that was really helpful for him, but it was funny because when they were in high school, I couldn't imagine them ever being excited about

school, but they love college, they are so excited about it. I had my son call me last year one time, and he said, "Mom, you're not going to believe what I learned in calculus."

He started trying to explain to me and still thinking, this is way over my head. Just the cutest things. They get there. Boys are a little bit difficult, especially in high school. But they eventually get there, and it's amazing to see them just become their own men and women.

[0:08:50.1] Aaress Lawless: That is incredible. Well, thank you for introducing us to your family. I love the story of your son excited over calculus. I bet you never dreamed 15 years earlier, that he would call home excited about math. But you touched on this a little bit when you're talking about your daughter. What are some of the unique challenges and blessings that you've seen come from adapting your home school to meet the needs of teens that have special needs? Like learning disabilities or ADHD?

[0:09:21.7] Jeannie Fulbright: Well, I think that for my son, we had him tested, and he did have a lot of other things besides ADHD and dyslexia and dysgraphia, he had some other learning challenges and one thing that we realized. It's not that he can't read fiction; it's just that it's really hard for him to read fiction and so we always got him audiobooks. We used a lot of audiobooks in the family. I think that was really helpful just to change the way we did things a little bit, but then, when they got to college, the schools give him audiobooks as well. They'll put the whole textbook on audio for them.

[0:09:54.9] Aaress Lawless: That's great.

[0:09:55.3] Jeannie Fulbright: Yeah. It's really great just to make accommodations for them, the way they need to be made, and also to encourage them. You know what? This is the way God made you, and he made you this way for a reason, he has a great reason for making you this way, we don't know what it is, but there's something special about the way your brain thinks that is exactly what God wants it to be.

Don't feel like you're not as good as other kids. You are, you just have to work harder. One thing that we've noticed is my son does have to work harder. He knows that he has to work harder than everybody else in his college classrooms. When he learned something, he knows it. He

knows it very well because he had to work so hard at learning, and it transfers the knowledge from the short term memory to the long term memory.

What happens for most of us who learn really easily is we learn the material, we memorize it, and then we take the test or write the paper, and then we forget it because never transfer to that long term memory. There's a lot of really positive things about the way he learns. It's also been a blessing for him to be so successful in college, to be on the dean's list.

[0:11:04.5] Aaress Lawless: That's wonderful.

[0:11:06.0] Jeannie Fulbright: It is. It's just amazing.

[0:11:08.4] Aaress Lawless: That is exciting. Now, one of the many reasons why we ask you to be part of the podcast was because of your background as a speaker and a writer on helping motivate teens. Now, motivation is a tricky thing. What are some of the biggest mistakes that you see parents sometimes making as they try to motivate their teens?

[0:11:27.5] Jeannie Fulbright: Well, I would say there are two things that I see often, and I mentioned this a little bit earlier. Giving them too much work, expecting them to do more than the 120 hours per course that's required for a credit. They don't realize that in high schools, they're not spending that much time on each subject.

That's not what's happening, in fact, they've done studies, and they have found that in a typical classroom, public school classroom, in that one-hour class, there's usually only about four minutes of actual learning time going on.

[0:12:01.0] Aaress Lawless: Wow.

[0:12:03:0] Jeannie Fulbright: Not that I'm encouraging moms not to do the work or not make them do the work, but I would not make it burdensome for them and if they're not strong in a subject. Don't buy a course that is really intensive and hard. For example, I write science books, and my daughter loves science I elementary school, but she just really isn't into science. Right now, she's a photo editor at CNN, and she's a professional photographer.

That was just really not her thing. Everybody that I would see, they would all buy the same very difficult science textbook for their children, even if that child really isn't strong in science. I would redo courses to make it easier for a child who is really not interested in that subject, really not going to pursue a science career.

I just felt like you know what? We have to tailor the high school to the child, and that is the beauty of homeschooling that we can do that, that we are masters over the curriculum. We decide what they're going to learn, how they're going to learn it and that's a great advantage that we have, we don't need to follow everybody, what everybody else is doing.

I just recommend, just look at your child's, look at their bent? What are they really interested in? That's where you're going to buy the more intensive curriculum. That's where you're going to help focus on their strengths, not on their weaknesses, and I find that another thing that I really recommend parents do is not hover over them.

[0:13:28.8] Aaress Lawless: Yes, the helicopter parent.

[0:13:30.3] Jeannie Fulbright: Yes. It's so hard to do, and it's especially hard that the mom only has two kids or one child. But even, I've seen moms just completely hover over their children and nitpick everything about their work, and what they're doing, and they're looking at everything and checking everything.

You need to motivate your children to do the work for themselves. The way that we did that with our children, we talk a lot about their future and about who they were and why they were learning, why it was important because God has a plan for their lives and their future. This is their education; it's not my education.

You're not doing this for me. You're doing this for you. Transferring the ownership of their education over to the child was, I would say, probably the most important thing we did with our children is we didn't hover, I didn't check their tests, they need to see how they did it because it's their education and they're doing it for themselves, and I would see these mothers whose high schoolers were sneaking and looking at the teacher's manual and writing in the answers.

I thought, why are they doing that? They're only hurting themselves.

[0:14:43.5] Aaress Lawless: Right.

[0:14:45.3] Jeannie Fulbright: It is the art of masterly inactivity. We know we can help them, but we should let them do it themselves. Let them make mistakes. Teach them how to keep their own schedule, teach them how to do the things they need to do, but then take your hand off and encourage them to do it for themselves, to do it on their own.

I think about the Bible verse – without a vision, my people perish. I think about the fact that our children, if they have a vision for their future and they're thinking with that Biblical worldview that God has something great for them, then they will restrain themselves to do the hard things in high school.

I think that's probably the most important thing is really giving them a vision for tomorrow, for their lives.

[0:15:33.5] Aaress Lawless: That vision is so important. Now, I love the term you mentioned, starting the process of transferring ownership. What does that look like? What did that look like in your family when you started transferring ownership of things. Was it schedules, to-do list, how does that work?

[0:15:50.7] Jeannie Fulbright: Well, when the children were little, I went by the philosophy once they have learned to read, and they need to read to learn. I would simply put their schedule up on a whiteboard, and then when they finished a subject, they would just go and wipe it off or wipe it off or whatever it was. Now, this with the boys, this got a little bit difficult because then they were really competitive with each other. So they were putting out really bad work just quickly getting through. It was just really, really not well done because they wanted to wipe those off before the other boy does.

But yeah, I would say that I had been in charge of that. I got to the point where I did not want them to ever come up to me and say, "Okay, I am done with spelling. What am I supposed to do

now?” No, here is your list, you check and see what you needed to do now. Just letting them know that this is your education, this is all yours. This doesn’t benefit me in any way. This is yours, so doing that and then as they got older, I would have them check their own tests against the teacher’s manual.

And really just slowly but surely allowing them to do it on their own. Here is your science book; just do as much reading as you can in a day. Typically, I’d have a timer. I believe in doing short lessons because I believe there is a lot more retention with short lessons. So I wouldn’t have them sit there for a long time, but yeah, it was slowly handing over the reins of their education to them. I think that is probably the difference between a homeschool kid and a non-homeschool kid in the college classroom is the homeschool kid really does know how to do it on their own.

[0:17:30.3] Aaress Lawless: So true, now let us talk again about how this works with teens that have special needs or special learning disabilities. Now, what are some of the signs that parents can notice the differences between? So, in other words, if you might have a teen that’s unmotivated or a teen that might be a slower learner, what do parents see to be on the lookout for? How did you notice that and pick up on it in your own boys?

[0:17:55.5] Jeannie Fulbright: Well, I would say that first of all, if a child doesn’t enjoy reading, there is probably something – there is a struggle there. There is a struggle to read because by the time they can read well, they should be enjoying books and a child who doesn’t enjoy books may have a struggle reading and also that their test scores, their standardized test scores, we have to do standardize tests here in Georgia, if they don’t reflect the child’s intelligence then there’s probably a difficulty.

Whether it’s ADHD and just the distractions they have, just the inability to stay focused for that long period of time or it could be a number of other things, but I think those are the two factors that you are looking at and as far as motivating a teenage boy, just believe in their future. You believe in the men they are going to become. I heard one speaker say once when your children turn about 12 years old, you lose them until they’re about 19.

They’re just a different personality like a crazy person who moved into their body, and then at 19, they turn back into their regular selves again. I have seen it with my own eyes. Just truly

believe in them. Don't let yourself get caught up in the cycle of negativity because it's about relationships, and you don't want to make yourself the person that they're trying to avoid that they want to get away from. So again for motivating, I would say if you could get them excited about who they are.

And their possible career goals and the college manual that I wrote, I have a personality test in there that the teens will take and then they can turn to the page with their personality that has their personality reflected in there and then there are all the possible careers for them. There is not every career that ever is possible, but a lot of them are listed in all the different fields, and then I also have a list of careers they want to stay away from.

And so for a kid, this might be something to help motivate them. Look at all the things I'd be really good at, I could be. I actually could be a surgeon, or I could be a psychologist or whatever it is that gets them excited about their future. I think that is part of what motivates boys and girls too. So that's why I put that in there. I think it is going to be helpful for giving kids just an idea of foreign places. I've got stuff to do to get there.

[0:20:14.9] Aaress Lawless: Right. So I am glad you mentioned that about the college prep and the new book you are working on. We're going to talk about that too, but let us talk about college for a bit. Looking beyond high school, how can parents help their teens make wise choices when they are starting to make these education and career decisions?

[0:20:34.1] Jeannie Fulbright: Well I think there is a lot of information out there that we need to gain as a parent to be able to convey to our children, not just about the college application process, about what it takes to get into colleges and all the different things they need to do, and I think that it is really important that we understand that if your child is going to take a gap year, I know a lot of parents whose children took gap years. They just didn't want to go to college right away, which is fine.

Colleges actually like kids to take a gap year, but if you do that, you have to apply to college first and get it set and then take a gap year. Ask them if you can take a gap year, and they'll usually defer your enrollment, but the reason why you want to do that is that most scholarships that your

children will earn when they apply are for freshman only. So that's an important thing for you as a parent, you want to pay as little as possible when your children go to college.

And so it is important to know these things, to understand some of the little ins and outs of getting into college but if your child has an excitement about some career interest they want to do, then I think it is really important that you expose them to those people that are in that field, help them to understand what the daily life of someone in that field what it really looks like. For example, a lot of people want to be lawyers. For most of your life, you know your daily life as a lawyer is writing briefs on a computer.

It is not as exciting as it sounds or it looks like on TV, and so I think it is really important that our children understand fully all that it would take and all that is involved in that field and I think that when they're in college, their career goals or their interest will probably change. My son was all through high school. He was obsessed with health and fitness and exercise and just really overly obsessed about it. He was watching YouTube videos and exercising all the time.

He would give his friends exercise plans. He would take them to the gym and show them how to work out. He was just really into it, and when he went to college, he became an exercise science major and this is the one that struggled with learning and let me just also say, colleges are very accommodating to children with learning disabilities but what you have to have is you have to have a test done on your child by a licensed psychologist.

So that when you have that the results of that test, you just hand it over to the college, the disability department and your child immediately gets whatever accommodations they need but if you don't have your child tested, your child will not get the accommodations they need in college, but the college will test them if you ask them to, but really it is very helpful to test them early so they can get extra time on the SAT or bigger print on the SAT.

So there is a lot of good stuff that comes out of having a professional test done on your child. So my son was an exercise science major, and he was at Pepperdine. He ended up transferring back to Georgia. He missed his home, and in his junior year of his exercise science program, he had to learn to write code. He was doing research in one of the labs with the other researchers. They were doing this testing on football players and concussions.

And so they needed a computer program to input all of these data that they were getting and so they started writing code, and he realized, "I love this," and so he changed his major to computer science in the middle of college. So that happens that in his point of life.

[0:24:02.2] Aaress Lawless: That's right, but God will use all those skills in some other way and look at all the teens he helped get healthy in the process. All of his friends.

[0:24:10.4] Jeannie Fulbright: Exactly.

[0:24:12.2] Aaress Lawless: So question on the accommodations that is something I am so glad you mentioned. Now, where do parents begin with that? Is there a resource that they can find online, finding a Christian psychologist or secular psychologist? What do you recommend for that?

[0:24:25.3] Jeannie Fulbright: Yes, we were really blessed because the psychologist that most of the people I knew were using even people in my neighborhood was actually a Christian psychologist who was a homeschool dad. So that was really neat. He just went in for several days of testing there, and they were really intensive tests, and he had to do a lot of stuff, but it was very, very thorough, and they were able to uncover a lot of issues he has.

I mean we could reflect on how do we help him with this, how do we alter his life and his learning so that it is not a problem.

[0:25:00.1] Aaress Lawless: That's great. Now, I know that as a mom, you probably had concerns and fears when your kids went off to college. What are some words of encouragement advice that you would give to moms and dads that are in that similar position of letting their kids with special needs go to college? How did you make that transition? How would you encourage them as they begin that transition?

[0:25:22.0] Jeannie Fulbright: Well with the special needs concern, really it's important that the child get that squared away before the first day of class and so every college will have a department for special needs and as soon as your child has made a decision on a university or

college, contact that department immediately and send them everything you have and then they'll set up a meeting, and they will help your child succeed. One of the things they do is they provide the child with class notes.

So my daughter actually was a note-taker, so they paid her \$25 per class where she would go into these classes where it was a class that she was already taking and she would send her notes to the department head and they would distribute it to all its students who needed class notes but when he transferred to the University of Georgia, he was not really feeling doing all of this stuff for the accommodations and at this point, he is totally independent with it.

So he was in the middle of a course and realized I can never finish these tests. Everybody else is finishing way before me, and he realized I need these accommodations, and so it would have been great for him to get the accommodations before he started that course. So I recommend doing it before. They say most kids don't, and most parents don't. They just wait, and we'll see if you need them. Well, by the time you realize you need them, you're almost failing in class.

So a bit early but also, as far as encouragement about your child going off into this world out there, it's just really trusting your parenting. Trust that everything that you have poured into them will actually take. They really do go off to college, if you already they kind of rubbed up against us and try to ignore us and they looked like they weren't listening, they were listening, and when they get to college, the person that they are is the person that you know they're going to be.

That sweet little child before they become a teenager. So it's amazing, it's wonderful just to take your hands off. Don't get too involved, let them figure it out but also where help is needed, I have edited a lot of papers in the last few years. So you know it is helpful.

[0:27:33.7] Aaress Lawless: That is awesome. Well, Jeannie, it has been a pleasure chatting with you today, and I am so grateful you took the time to share with us, but before I let you go, you do have a new book coming out. So can you tell us a little bit about it and where parents can find it?

[0:27:48.7] Jeannie Fulbright: So the book is called *My Roadmap to College and Career*, and my husband and I authored it together. My husband is an attorney here in Georgia, and it is

essentially a book that takes a child through the high school years to prepare them for college. As I said, it has a personality test, so they are thinking about what they want to do with their lives. They're thinking about their future careers, but they also have a place where they have quizzes in there.

To figure out whether they would be better at a big university or small university or where or what part of the nation they want to study in and then there is also a lot of places for them to record things they've done because they have to create their own course for example if they want to create their own history, American history course. It gives them some guidelines on how to do that. It also teaches them about the college admission process and why the SAT and ACT are so important.

Because that's essentially where your scholarships are coming from as your scores on those test and then also, gives them a step by step process on visiting colleges and the admission process and there is just a lot of checklists so that they know what to do because I think a lot of parents, it's an overwhelming amount of knowledge this whole college admissions and most admission manuals are written for parents, really boring, but mine is very colorful and bright, and it's for the kids.

And I think as I have been saying, we want our children to be independent and so that is why I wrote it for the students so they can take ownership of their choice to go to college or not and they can take that and use that as their guidebook to help them make decisions about what courses to take, about what books to read, about how to contact colleges and what's important to do, what do they need to do in high school to make themselves an attractive college applicant.

And we do talk about doing dual enrollment a lot, and all my children have gone through dual enrollment, which has been wonderful except for my son, who has a learning disability. He was not ready for dual enrollment. I did not want to put that on him until he was there. So his little brother has as many hours as he does, but it is great. So it is just a comprehensive everything you need to know but written in a way that's simplified. It is not long paragraphs. It's just here's the information in a little sound bite that you are used to in your textbooks.

[0:30:12.3] Aaress Lawless: That is awesome. Now, where can they purchase that? Is that available on your website or Amazon?

[0:30:17.1] Jeannie Fulbright: Well, it will be on Amazon, Apology is publishing it, and it is within – I mean it is soon. It's going to be out very soon. I think it is going to be this month, but it may be next month, and if you go to my website, jeanniefulbright.com and sign up for my newsletter, I will send out a newsletter as soon as the manual is ready and tell everybody where they can get it so.

[0:30:38.9] Aaress Lawless: Excellent. Well, Jeannie, thank you so much. We look forward to talking to you more in the future.

[0:30:44.8] Jeannie Fulbright: Thank you so much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:30:48.1] Aaress Lawless: Now, before we leave, I want to make sure that each one of you can get a chance to take a look at some of the awesome resources that Jeannie mentioned during today's episode. You can find those in the show notes on our website, which is dualcreditathome.com/podcast. You will find the links to some of Jeannie's books as well as some additional resources like her website. Be sure to check those out, and if there's encouragement, be sure to pass it along to a friend as well.

Thank you so much for taking the time and joining us for today's podcast. Be sure to 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.

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