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**Intro:** Hey friends! Welcome to Girls Night. I'm Stephanie May Wilson and I am so happy that you're here. Each week I have a girlfriend over and we talk through one of the biggest questions we have about our lives as women.

We're talking about friendships and faith and relationships and self-confidence, about our calling in life, and how to live every bit of our lives to the full. Life is so much better and easier and absolutely more fun when we navigate it together as girlfriends. And I cannot wait to get started.

Friends, I'm so excited about today's episode. Today we're talking about how to create your own family culture, what that means, why it's so important, and then how to practically do it. To be honest, this is something I've thought about a lot since becoming a mom. But it's also something I thought about long before having kids.

If you're anything like me, you've had this idea that your family needs to do things a certain way. This could be in any category: the way you eat, spend money, spend time, what you value, what you prioritize, how you do holidays, and more.

These ideas might have come from the way that you were raised, from the way your parents did things, or from how your friends are doing things or from what you're seeing on social media.

But over the years, I've been learning something that's been incredibly freeing and empowering. My family should be a reflection of me. There's not one right way to do this. I get to decide what this looks like. And so do you. And that's what we're talking about today.

Our guest for today's episode is my new friend Jodi Mockabee. Jodi is a photographer, a writer, a blogger, a speaker, a social media influencer, and a mother of five. She has a new book out called *The Whole and Healthy Family*. And I cannot wait for you to hear more about it.

Here are just a few of the questions I asked Jodi in this episode. I asked her, where do we begin with creating a healthy family culture and what does that look like? I asked her, how do we sort through the things that we experienced as a child and determine what we want to be part of our family life and what we might want to do differently?

I asked her, is it okay if the way we do things is different from what others and our inner circles are doing? How do we form a family culture that aligns with our values? And seriously, so much more.

One of my favorite parts of the episode is when Jodi shares a story about a choice her family made while attending church and how that one decision impacted their entire congregation. Everyone else changed the way they were doing things because of how Jodi's family did things. It's a super cool story. I cannot wait for you to hear from her.

But before we dive in, there's a resource I wanted to share with you. And it's called *The Between Places*. It's a hundred days to trusting God when you don't know what's next. Now, here's the thing. We all find ourselves in-between places throughout our lives, especially these days, right?

If you're waiting for something, longing for something, or working for something, but it just hasn't happened yet, maybe you know where you want to go, but you have no clue how to get there, or maybe you know you're not where you want to be in life, but you don't know exactly what needs to change or how to change it and you don't know how to figure any of that out, maybe you're trying to make a big decision and you have no idea which option to choose, or maybe you're feeling like the whole world has turned upside down in the last few years, taking your life and your plans and any sense of security right along with it, and in at all you're trying to trust God with the future but you're just not really sure how to do that, how to quiet the fear and anxiety, all this uncertainty is brought up in your heart, well, that's what *The Between Places* is here for.

Through 100 guided prayer prompts, *The Between Places* will help you trust God with the trickiest, most uncertain, and most important parts of your life. It'll help you believe more fully than ever that God is good, that He loves you, and that He's taking care of you. It'll help you live today with more contentment, step into the future with more courage and faith and rest in God's peace knowing that He's with you every step of the way.

To pick up a copy, just head to my website. It's [stephaniemaywilson.com](http://stephaniemaywilson.com). Again, that's [stephaniemaywilson.com](http://stephaniemaywilson.com). That link will also be in our show notes.

Okay, now without any further ado, let's hop into the episode with Jodi.

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**Stephanie:** All right, friends, I am so excited for who you get to meet today. I'm sitting here with my new friend Jodi Mockabee. Jodi, thanks so much for coming on Girls Night.

**Jodi:** Thank you so much for having me.

**Stephanie:** So for women who haven't gotten to meet you yet, can you tell me who you are, what you do, and I would love to hear a fun fact about you.

**Jodi:** Yes, my name is Jodi Mockabee. I am a mother to five children ages, 17 down to 10. I'm also a wife and had been married for I believe 18 years now. So you've got a little bit of seasoned-

**Stephanie:** [inaudible 00:04:24]

**Jodi:** Yes, I know. It's always me that forgets the anniversary.

**Stephanie:** It's amazing.

**Jodi:** We have been parenting for a while and have just been on this really fun journey and challenging journey called parenthood. And a fun fact about me. I would have to say in college I went to school. I majored in international business and my hope was to kind of get into the surf and skate industry.

I attended a college down in Southern California so I was hoping to be somehow involved with merchandising or design for apparel. I didn't realize it was a really difficult industry to get into. So upon graduating, my only opportunity that I had was to take this job for a footwear company that was trying to kind of brand itself as the skate industry.

The footwear company is called Heelys. I don't know if you've seen the shoes, but there are these shoes with a wheel in the heel and these kind of like cruise around. They were really trying to build this like surf-skate genre with their shoes.

So part of my job was an event manager, so I had to do a lot of marketing events and different things like that, which included having to wear the shoes. And what I discovered is I was a fantastic heeler. So I never knew that that could be a gift. But somehow I just was able to wheel around and do all these tricks and jumps. It was hilarious, because, you know, that's not really something to be super proud of. But that's my claim to fame is I am an amazing heeler. So send your kids to me, I'll give them lessons.

**Stephanie:** I mean, I've seen kids like, you know, heeling. I didn't know that's what it was called. But heeling around them all or something, you know, or Target or whatever. One, is that still a thing? And then do your kids think you're super cool because of it? Because they should.

**Jodi:** Honestly, I thought that that would give me street credit with them but they actually think they're kind of dorky. So they're like, "There's so many better things you could be good at, mom." So, unfortunately, no, it did not give me any extra points or anything like that. So that's why it's kind of a funny fact because I haven't gotten any street credit for it anywhere.

In the surf and skate industry, we would be at these different conventions and things like that, trying to promote the shoe and they just thought it was a joke, too, because it's certainly not as hardcore as skateboarding. So all around it's just a big joke.

**Stephanie:** I am so mad on your behalf.

**Jodi:** Thank you.

**Stephanie:** I think you were so cool for that and I think that it is just plain wrong that your kids don't give you any extra credit for that. You deserve all the extra credit. I think that's very cool.

**Jodi:** Thank you, Stephanie. I will send them over to you the next time they make fun of me.

**Stephanie:** Yeah, yeah. That's way cool. Most people's moms can't do that. I don't know, you should challenge them to like a heel off and... I don't know.

**Jodi:** Oh, we're doing it. We're gonna have a heel off.

**Stephanie:** So amazing. So you have a new book coming out. Tell me about the book. Tell me about the heart behind the book. Tell us what it's about because I know all of that led into the book.

**Jodi:** Yes. So the book is called *The Whole and Healthy Family*. And alongside of this little, you know, Instagram hobby, I should say, I also blogged. And when I blogged that was always kind of working through my parenting journey. I was a young mom, I was home a lot with these little ones. They required a lot. They were noisy. They were active. They were tired. They were grumpy. They were happy.

So as I walked through the early phases of parenting, which I like to call the trenches because it feels like sometimes you're just coming up for air, that's kind of how I would describe those early days of parenting, I would research a lot on some of their developmental needs.

There was a lot of problem-solving involved with little ones. You have twin toddlers, you know there's something always new where you're questioning, what is the story behind this? Is this a developmental thing? Is this a disciplinary thing? Is this a personality thing?

**Stephanie:** Oh, my gosh.

**Jodi:** So you're always kind of questioning your own mothering and parenting journey because you want more information to try to figure out how to make a decision. I turned to a lot of research. I spent a lot of time in prayer.

So it was just this combination of finding information, whether it's scientific or whether I'm meeting with a mentor ahead of me, or whether I'm spending time in prayer and just seeking the Lord's counsel. There were so many elements to parenting that I was reaching out and looking for more to see the bigger picture of what was going on. And I would kind of blog through the process of that.

And what I found was that I wasn't the only parent that was seeking out information, you know? It's a hard job, and there's no manual to it. And even when there are books written such as mine, it's not going to be a one size fits all for anyone. So I started kind of pulling from here and there to try to kind of develop this like family culture within our home. Like, who are we? What are our goals? Who do we want to be? What do we want to instill in our children?

So the book is a result of all of the years of those early years of really trying to develop that foundational family culture and kind of just walking families alongside our journey and inviting them in. It doesn't come from a place of authority. I'm not telling them what's right or what's wrong. It's just kind of, "Hey, here's how we developed our family culture. Here are some stories to help you understand how that happened, how we failed, how we succeeded in some ways."

So that's really the book is just encouraging parents to look at the whole child through their mental being, their physical being, and their spiritual being, and kind of how to encourage them to thrive and develop who they are to become.

**Stephanie:** I love that. I'm so excited to talk with you about this because, I think, I would say the majority of the women in my community either aren't parents, or aren't parents yet, or are very early in the journey like I am. So you're well ahead of us in this.

But one of the things that we have been talking a lot about in my community, and we're going to be talking more and more about, is just this idea of authority in our lives, and the fact that there isn't one right way to build a life. We get to be creative with how we put it together, we get to make the decisions that are right for us and for our families. And those decisions look different for everybody. And so it really is so in line with what you're talking about like building an intentional family culture.

Because you're so far ahead of us in this, I mean, you literally wrote the book on it, I'm so excited to have you help us get our wheels turning to help us start thinking about this so that we can be casting a vision for what we want our families to look like, whether that's current or whether that's kind of more of a long view.

So, tell me what this looks like for you. What are some of the things that you guys have put together for your family culture? What is your family culture? What are some of the decisions that you guys have made?

**Jodi:** I'm going to kind of bring myself back to kind of the stage that you're in, and maybe some of your listeners and just kind of walk you through the process of establishing a family culture. That will probably naturally fall into some of the decisions that we've made as a family and how we've developed our own.

But I would say, starting, you know, with dating, if you have some single gals out there that are listening, knowing kind of what you envision for your life, what you see in the future. I know for me, personally, I wanted to be a mom of many children. I wanted a husband who was playful, who was fun, who could go through life laughing. So I was paying attention in my dating life to men that could potentially fulfill that.

And I remember with my husband, we were just dating at the time and he invited me to a family birthday party of a young child. He was like seven years old and he was a friend of a family or something like that. And we go to this birthday party and he's on the trampoline with all these children. And I just remember thinking, "Okay, he can do that part. He can fulfill that part of my vision of what is to come for me and for my future family." So it even started then.

And then when we got married, we just had so many discussions on what we envisioned our family doing, what it would look like, and not necessarily even the number of kids, even though my husband has an Excel spreadsheet on that. It is quite unique, but it basically shows Jodi pregnant and nursing for like seven years.

**Stephanie:** Oh-

**Jodi:** That was a little bit extra planning. I'm not a huge fan of that but he is. So whatever works, right? But at the very beginning of our marriage, I remember just looking at families together and saying, "I love that they do that."

We have an uncle on his side, and they're well ahead in their parenting journey than we were. I think I was maybe pregnant at the time with my first and the uncle and his family hiked together. That was so unique to both of us. We hadn't really known any families that hiked avidly together. We loved that.

We loved that their kids were teenagers and they enjoyed hiking with their parents. We thought that was so unique and wonderful that teens wanted to be with their parents. Let alone doing something physical and active with them.

So we kind of asked them a lot of questions. "How did you get them to start hiking?" We know that they probably didn't start hiking as high schoolers. "So when did that start? How old were they? What did you do? Do you have any tips?" We were totally unapologetic about the multitude of questions we had for them. But just that's one story of how many families we looked at and observed and decided, "I think we want to make that a part of our family culture."

And even I remember, you know, being around the stage that you're at having... my boys at the time were maybe three and one, and a lot of my friends were sending their kids to preschool. At the time, I had full plans to send them to school. I just had never considered preschool. And I remember just having this kind of, I don't know, instinctual hope to keep them at home and play and be outside more.

I kind of just started questioning the purpose of preschool. And I remember just praying about it and asking for the Lord's discernment on it, and then talking to a few moms who didn't send their kids to preschool. And I know that sounds like a silly, little decision, but at that stage, it's not. It's a big decision.

I decided, ultimately, and it was very against the grain... Every single one of my friends had sent their child to preschool. And in the area that we were in at the time, preschool was kind of this big deal. Like you were on waiting lists, you know, which school are you gonna go to? Is it still?

**Stephanie:** Totally.

**Jodi:** Okay. So yeah. There's Montessori and there's Waldorf and then there's a more academic path. It just seemed like so much for my kid who literally was still picking his boogers. I don't understand why we're on a waiting list when this kid is still in diapers. This is so crazy to me.

Part of our family culture is we decided we always wanted to talk through every decision thoroughly and look at it from multiple perspectives, not just, Well, so and so's sending their kid to preschool, and this person is sending their kid to preschool, therefore, we must send our kid to preschool.

It was like, "Let's talk about the mental well-being of our kids. Is this beneficial for them? Will it actually improve what they have going?" Well, studies say that, no, mom and dad are the number one influence in their life and that is the most important influence that they should have in their life at that time. So it can't necessarily be for their mental well-being if studies are showing that if mom and dad are healthy and at home and modeling how to live and work through habits, then the child probably is better off just doing that with mom and dad.

So we started just researching, like beneficially, does preschool benefit our children? And found that not necessarily. Now, every family has different reasons for that. So I do not want to bash pre-schooling. But for us, it was just this long process of looking at: how does it affect the family financially? How does it affect the family emotionally? How does it affect us spiritually, even physically?

Because guess what, your kid is going to come home with all kinds of germs. They're going to be sick all of the time. They are exposed to so much. And while that's good to kind of build the immune system, it is hard having sick babies. And to have them constantly sick and not sleeping well it does affect the family.

It seems like such a simple choice to just sign them up. But we would walk through this whole process for every decision that we made, just making sure that we were intentional and not filling up our schedule or following the same route that everyone did just because everyone's doing it.

So I think that's really where you start to build your family culture is you're questioning, "Is this right for our family?" Not "Is this the right thing to do?" because everybody else is doing it. It's "is this right for our family?" What are our children's needs?"

So that's kind of where we started just asking these questions from everything, from preschool to T ball, to do we purchase a certain type of car? I mean, every decision had a ton of intentional discussion behind it.

And it's exhausting sometimes. I like to make quick decisions. So to walk through that process is exhausting and challenging and trying, but it doesn't go to waste. It benefits your family in such big ways. And it's really important that you learn to look through that lens.



**Stephanie:** I love this. I love this. What do you do when the things that you're deciding do go against the grain of what other people are doing? Like, sometimes people may have a real... like a strong reaction to it. You know, there are things where people are like, "This is right. This is wrong." But then there's some times where it's just like preference, but people tend to do things this way. How do we get over that fear of like standing out, if that makes sense?

**Jodi:** I think, you know, you're a forerunner, you're gonna stand out, you're a pioneer. You have to kind of look at it from that perspective. One of my mentors and friends spoke about homeschooling and the term that she used I had never heard before and it truly helped paint this very positive light for it. But she called homeschooling entrepreneurial.

I'm a business major. I love business. I breathe business. I'm always thinking of business ideas. To think of something as entrepreneurial and actually paints it to me in this super positive light of risk-taker, someone with big ideas. And so to me, parenting can be entrepreneurial.

It's like you are paving your own path for your own family culture. That can also look like businesses are into business cultures, and they're into these vision casting sessions. They're all about having a mission statement. Why shouldn't a family be like that? That's the most important before a business would be your family.

So we are entrepreneurial, we're going to be taking risks, we might look very different from other families out there. But if you can look at those risks as exciting entrepreneurial risks, that it's this experiment that will bear great fruit, then it's a lot easier to kind of break out.

When you ask that, I actually think about one tiny little story that might kind of help you understand going against the grain a little bit. When our children were little, we were attending a church and they had a whole kids program. Kids never actually entered the church. You would walk in and you would bring them down to their kids' classes. And everything was appropriate for their age, it was secure and all that stuff. That's what everybody did.

Well, Jason and I wanted our kids to worship alongside of us. We just thought that like, "Why are they going down there and eating graham crackers and coloring pages when they can be listening to the Word of God and worshipping just like we are?" It just seemed to us very simple that we wanted our family together worshipping God together.

So we were the first family to bring our children into the service. We didn't talk to the leadership or anything like that. We just brought them in. And over the course of probably I would say five or six weeks, we would see other families start to bring their children into church. And it was the most beautiful thing to see families together, worshiping God together, sitting together. It was a risk. We felt uncomfortable, you know, with our whole row because we take up a whole row. So our whole roll row of kids and being the only family there.

At one point, I'm sure a pastor would even say, "There are children's programs available." But we kind of took that risk. It felt right for us and so we did it. And as a result, other families started to see there's something beautiful about this. And then the church ended up entirely changing their whole children's program as a result of that one step stepping out. They no longer had children's programs during worship. They wanted all the kids to attend worship. And then if you wanted to send your child downstairs during the sermon, you are welcome to do that.

But they ended up changing the whole culture of the church as a result of just us kind of going against the grain and stepping outside saying, "You know what? That might be okay for other families, no problem. But for us we're going to worship together."

And little decisions like that they kind of empower you. You see the fruit of it. And they empower you to continue to critically think through other decisions. And one of those I think that most families are faced with today, which can just rob your family have so much goodness as extracurricular activities and sports.

Families tend to sign up without putting much thought into what that's going to do to the family. And we're one of them. We love sports as a family. So that is a constant conversation. We're constantly having to turn down opportunities that our friends think we're crazy for just to preserve and protect our family.

**[00:26:08] <music>**

**Sponsor:** Hey friends! I wanted to pop in for one quick second because our show would not be possible without our sponsors. And so I wanted to take a quick second to thank the company sponsoring us today. Our sponsor today is a company that I love. It's [HelloFresh](#).

Now, I know that lots of y'all have heard of them. But just in case you haven't, HelloFresh is America's number one meal kit that shops, plans, and delivers your favorite step-by-step recipes in pre-measured ingredients so you can just cook, eat, and enjoy.

There is nothing better than cozying up and having a home-cooked meal during the winter months. But as you guys know already, I'm not the best cook. Now I have gotten better over the years. But I still don't love meal planning or cooking. It's just not my thing. Plus these days, cutting down on shopping time is absolutely necessary. And that's why I love HelloFresh.

First of all, with HelloFresh there's something for everyone with over 35 recipes available to choose from each week. This includes family-friendly, fit and wholesome, and veggie. They even have holiday-inspired dinner recipes and seasonal add-ons available. I made these incredible HelloFresh Taquitos recently, and you guys, they were so good, I'm going to be thinking about them for ages.

And not only is the food delicious but the process of making it is so easy. All the ingredients come pre-measured in handy labeled meal kits so you know which ingredients go with which recipe. And that means there's less waste.

Guys, I'm telling you, I'm a beginner in the kitchen and even I can cook these recipes. They are simple. They come outlined in pictured step-by-step instruction cards. They walk you all the way through the whole thing. And it actually feels like a fun cooking lesson.

I'm also a huge fan of HelloFresh because it's actually cheaper than grocery shopping and 25% less expensive than ordering takeout. This is great news for those of us on a budget during the holidays, right? Plus HelloFresh owns Green Chef, another one of our amazing sponsors, so there are even more meal plans to choose from. I love switching between the brands and now my listeners can enjoy both brands at a discount with me.

Speaking of discounts, I love HelloFresh even more because they want to give you a promo code to get 18 free meals. All you have to do is go to [hellofresh.com/girlsnight18](https://hellofresh.com/girlsnight18) and use the code Girlsnight18 for 18 free meals plus free shipping. Again, go to [hellofresh.com/girlsnight18](https://hellofresh.com/girlsnight18) and use code GirlsNight18 for 18 free meals plus free shipping. HelloFresh, thank you so much for sponsoring our Girls Night. We just love having you.

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**Stephanie:** Talk me through that a little bit more. Because I think that part of like reimagining these different pieces of your life I think a really important. First step is realizing that we can. You know, that these things aren't set in stone. This isn't an automatic. It doesn't have to look like this. And that's so freeing, but then it's also a little bit paralyzing, because it's like, Wait, okay, where can I... Like we just need... Like

more examples the better. So talk me through that. Like what kind of conversations are you guys having around extracurriculars?

**Jodi:** That one is a constant conversation and has been probably since our oldest was five years old. Now he's 17. So this has been a 12-year process of constant conversation, making those decisions against the grain. And again, we love sports, our kids love sports.

So trying to figure out the balance of how do we fulfill these needs in our kids to compete, to release their testosterone? I have four boys out of the five. So lots of testosterone. They need to be running, they need to be active. How do we fulfill that without just being gone every single night of the week?

In certain years, in the early years, Jason and I both have had to rise up as coaches so that we could control the practice nights. So rather than just signing them up and having them in all different teams, we would coach our kids, and then we would control the practice night so they were both on Tuesdays and Thursdays so that it wasn't taking up every single evening.

So it was sacrifice on our end here. I've never played sports and I'm coaching soccer or basketball. But it was for the sake of the family. It was if we can control these two evenings and have it on both at the same time, then we're home Monday, Wednesday, Friday together.

So it started then making those kinds of decisions that are very sacrificial. It takes up your time. And it's also kind of nerve-wracking to coach if you don't even know the sport. So then you have to learn the sport. And you're spending time on YouTube watching drills. But it's all for the sake of the family. So none of that time is wasted.

Now, 10 years later, we're almost doing the same thing. We're combing through soccer clubs that are family-friendly, that allow all of our kids to practice at the same time, that scheduled games on the same day so that we're doing it all together.

And what has come from that is we have developed, within our family culture, this love of soccer as a family. So we play together. After practices, we'll play soccer together. Everyone leaves and the goals are still up and our whole family is playing together. It has become just such a special gift that came as a result of being incredibly intentional and not just signing them up and saying, "Well, everybody else is doing it. This is just a crazy time in our life right now. So we're gonna do it."

We've even had to be intentional in our extracurricular activities to make sure that, you know, we have time together as a family to recover, to rest, to hike, to do other

things. The world does not revolve around sports. So yeah. And turning down just other sport opportunities that kids have wanted to do hockey and baseball and different sports like that.

And we have to just assess every season, have we had enough family time together? Is this healthy to just jump into another activity? So we've really worked hard to always assess and make sure that our family is connecting together enough before you just say yes to another activity.

**Stephanie:** That makes sense. I can see why you're saying about, like, it's exhausting to think through so many things with so much intentionality and to look at all angles. But if you don't, then you all of a sudden find yourself with, like, every single night of the week is taken up with something different and each kid has a different thing on a different night and so no one is ever together.

And it just sort of happens if you don't like... your schedule happens to you if you don't happen to your schedule. And so what you guys are saying is you're sitting down and like, "Okay, if we can be a little bit more strategic about this and group it all together, it's just a more efficient way of doing it. And we're able to prioritize a couple different things. We're able to fit a couple of different things in instead of saying yes to one thing and ending up sacrificing any downtime we'd have as a family as a result."

**Jodi:** Exactly. I mean, this is where information... I'm kind of an information geek. I research a lot. And it always helps me with my decisions. Even with sports and activities, you analyze, what's the long-term effects of these versus the longevity of family time hiking together or something like that?

My favorite kind of thing to do is research. So say it's soccer. Even though we're incredibly involved in soccer and that's kind of the family sport that we have chosen to focus on since we don't want to be scattered everywhere else, the fact that this is probably going to last much longer than the next 10 years, I would say that's not the case. Soccer will die out.

Maybe one out of five of our kids will play in college, maybe not. I mean, that's not our goal at all. We're not focused on the scholarships or anything like that. And then after college, what happens? Nothing. They get jobs and they work and they have families. It's not like they're playing soccer five nights a week into their adulthood.

That's another lens that we look through is what's the longevity of this? Well, what I can tell you is hiking... I see people in their 80s hiking. That goes with you all through life. Walking, it goes with you all through life. You see people walking their dogs everywhere.

So we even want to be intentional with the activities that we do, knowing that whatever they're doing now, what does that look like in the future for them? I mean, what's the long-term goal of this? I know that developmentally, group sports are good on a certain level, and that is good. And it may only be just for a few years developmentally that they need to learn teamwork and how to follow coach's orders. That will translate to a corporate atmosphere or something. Those are good skills.

But what's the long-term goal of this? I don't know if there's going to be this huge long-term goal of organized sports. But if you instill daily habits, like jogging together or hiking together, or playing tennis at a public court together, those are things they can do into their 90s. That's another thing that we try to look at is the big picture, not just what's happening right now. What does this look like in 20 years for them?

**Stephanie:** This question may not make any sense. So let me know if it doesn't. But when you're thinking through all these things, what are you guarding against? If you guys weren't to think through these things intentionally, what would the result be? Like what's the opposite of this?

**Jodi:** I think chaos. And I think kind of the heart of my book is the hope that families can see that family life, raising little ones can actually be peace-filled. That culturally to have a peace-filled home I think people would laugh at you, to be honest. If you were to describe your home with little ones as peace-filled, that would be, you know, totally against the grain and kind of incomprehensible.

So for us, we're going against chaos. We think that peace allows room to think, meditate, pray, be self-aware. If you have such a chaotic schedule, you are unaware of so many things that are going on. If you have a chaotic home, you know, if you have thousands of toys and you're not keeping your home organized or simplified, that is chaotic. It takes away from the ability to be aware of what is around you, to be aware of who you are as a person because there is so much visual traffic, there is so much traffic outside of your home that you're just trying to breathe.

So the hope is to eliminate as much traffic as possible so that you can be present and aware of what's going on internally in you and what's going on internally in your children so that you can meet those needs and equip them. I have a chapter on simplicity in that book. Because I meet with a lot of young moms and I want to help them. You know, if they say they feel frazzled, before I asked them anything about their marriage or their kids' personalities or anything, I ask them, "What does your home look like?"

And they'll start describing their home and there's piles of laundry, and there's dishes in the sink, and there's toys everywhere and the TV is always on. And I always just say, "Well, let's start there. Let's minimize this traffic that you are walking through every single day from task to task, picking up your child, cooking.

You are walking past all of that visual traffic, it's noisy, there's noisy toys, the TV is on in the background. That is just a ton of extra traffic that does not allow you to thrive as a person. And it doesn't allow your children to thrive. It doesn't give anyone a moment of respite.

There needs to be time of quiet and peace so that you can kind of think through, why did I handle that poorly? Why did I yell at my kid like that? If you don't have the piece and the time to be able to process through that, then you're never going to be able to figure it out. And so you continue on with this kind of unhealthy cycle.

**Stephanie:** That makes a lot of sense. I'm such a fan of simplicity and intentionality in our home. It's something I think about a lot. Can you give me an example of one or two things that you guys do in your house because you've thought through it intentionally? Like, "In order to help us step closer to the kind of lifestyle we want to live with, the family we want to be, we do this in our home."

**Jodi:** Yeah. Again, I'll probably give you examples of our earlier days in parenting just because I know that's where a lot of you guys are at. But one of them is just controlling what comes in as far as toys and materials. My oldest son is on the autism spectrum and we didn't know it until he was 13. I mean, we knew it. I knew deep down, but he wasn't really tested until he was 13.

One of the things early on, I believe he was maybe four or five, when I was kind of researching, like, how do we create a home environment for him where he can thrive, where things aren't triggered as easily, I learned that natural materials absorb sound and synthetic materials actually they create a ricochet effect with sound and energy, so the sound never leaves. It just kind of continues to move and it takes form and energy, and things that we can't see or hear, but our body can feel. But natural materials absorb all of that. They diffuse it.

So we started bringing sheepskin into our home, and I started dressing him in cotton and wool and natural materials. And even when we did home renovations, I would make sure that the materials were always real wood, not veneer. So we got really intentional. We weren't crazy purists about it. We were on a very tight budget. So you can't, you know, go out and buy organic cotton everything and fill your home with all these linens. But we did what we could. And we eliminated all of the battery-operated toys, got rid of all of those.

What I didn't realize is while trying to create an environment for him to thrive in where he had less sensory input, it actually made me a much better mom because there was less visual stimulus for me. I didn't hear a leapfrog in the background over and over again. You don't realize how much that's affecting you as a parent until you experience silence.

So then you're like, "Wow, I was so frazzled and stressed in that moment," but it's because there were like eight things going on at once, you know. But if you eliminate those, and you just... kids are creative, they are amazing. They do not need any of that stuff.

I remember watching an Angelina Jolie movie when I was a young mom. I maybe had one baby. She was over in an African country, I don't remember which country, and she was living in a home, and the lady that was helping her with all of her chores and tasks in the home, maid, or whatever you would call it over there, and had a baby.

And her baby would just crawl around and follow mom whatever tasks mom was doing, you know, washing clothes or dishes. And the baby through the entire movie had one wooden spoon. There were no toys. You know, there was no walker or bouncer or anything like that. This baby just kind of followed mom around and had a wooden spoon and figured out how to play with that wooden spoon in all different situations.

I remember it being so impactful to me because I knew culturally, that probably was true. And then I started thinking historically, you know, prior to all of these toys that have been developed in the past -what? 100 years, children literally did not have toys. They had wooden spoons, they were carried around or their siblings set them in a corner with a wooden spoon and a book or something. They are capable of creating toys out of anything, of entertaining themselves with very few items.

But somehow we have created this need for constant stimulus. And it sets the precedent for what's to come. A child who's raised in an environment where they need more and more and more, they're going to want more and more and more all through life. More activities, more stimulus, more TV, more video games.

But if you can teach them to be content by sitting with a wooden spoon, they're going to be much more composed as they get older and need less and not need activities constantly. That's what I can say, as a case study in our own home. Why I can say our home is peace-filled is because we learned very early on they did not need more. They actually needed less.



So I would say start there. Start with the toys. If you're afraid to get rid of them, put them in a box and put them in the garage and experiment just what they'll do if they have some wooden spoons, what they'll do if they have a little wooden bowl, and some rocks or something like that. I mean that's what... we had wooden block X and Schleich animals. I don't know if you know what those are, but you find them usually at bookstores. They're just little animals. But they're beautifully painted.

We had wooden blocks, those animals and my daughter had a little wooden kitchen. And that's all we had in the household for at least 10 years. And they found all kinds of opportunities to turn those blocks into fencing, trains. I mean, they made those blocks into all different types of things. And we never had to bring more stuff in. They just played constantly with those. So they don't need more. They actually, I think, need less. It kind of stretches them to be creative.

**Stephanie:** I love that. I mean, I've seen that to be so true with my girls, too. We have all kinds of different toys for them, mostly things that, you know, people have bought them for their birthday and Christmas and stuff. But they really do. They want to play with whatever is real, they want to play with whatever we're working with. We'll get them like a toy version of something and they're like, "I don't want that. I want..." Like they just want to do what we're doing.

And then yeah, the things that they just get, like... We went to... there's a little fair here in Nashville a couple weekends ago and we got those fair lemonades or something. My husband and I got one. So we have two fair cups.

And I'm telling you that the girls have walked around sipping from these big, ugly plastic fair cups filled with a little bit of ice, and a little bit of water. I mean, they have played with those things more in the last two weeks than any of the nice pretty toys that they have. It's just absolutely wild. Or every time they get a good toy, they always play with the box. I'm like, "No one buys them toys. No one buys them anything else."

**Jodi:** It's so true. It's so true. I remember experimenting with my son after watching that movie. I got rid of all of his toys and I just had one toy for him. And I realized, first of all, he didn't get bored right away. When he had 12 toys in front of him, he'd moved from one to the other very quickly. When he only had one, that's all he had.

So he started inspecting the screws, he started trying to figure out how it worked. It was just fascinating to watch, like, less is more. And so I don't know how we get so caught up. It's gifts, it's... we had to kind of share our birthday philosophy with both grandparents. If we had birthday parties, we had to tell friends, "Please, no presents."

I mean, we really had to work hard on the families on the gift thing. And that was really hard for them. Now we've become much more loose because our kids are older and the grandparents love that now. Now we have [inaudible 00:47:49], which I tried to avoid for so many years.

But once they are 10 and 12, you have to kind of give in to some of their desires. But when they're young, when they're toddlers, and I would say 10 and below, you have the authority to control what comes into your home. They should not be in charge. You know what's best for your kids and your family and you need to exercise that authority. There is a responsibility behind it. And I think we forget that a lot.

We're a very child-led society. And that doesn't go over very well. It ends badly when kids are in charge of everything. So parents do know what's best for their family, and they need to remember to kind of exercise that.

**Stephanie:** I love that. I keep coming back to this idea of examples. Just that the more that we can see different ways that people are doing things, the more we can go, "Oh, I didn't even know that was possible."

As you've been doing this work and as you've been... I know you said you've watched so many different families live in different ways. Are there some unique things that you've seen families do that maybe isn't right for you guys or maybe is? But like, "Oh, I saw this one family who always (blank) or who never (blank) and I just think it's so cool." I'd love to hear just a couple of those if you have them.

**Jodi:** Technology was another one. As iPhones and kids get older and parents need a way to contact their friends... We were watching a family... or kids need a way to contact their friends. We are watching the family ahead of us. Our children were still too young for any kind of technology. But we watched this family ahead of us navigate that, and it was so powerful the way that they handled it.

They had their teens watch different documentaries on what social media does to kids, also on just the addictiveness behind having a smartphone. And they really just kind of educated their kids as to why it's probably not healthy for them to have one yet, you know, at 13, 14.

And I watched them just educate and empower their kids. And ultimately, they let their children decide whether or not they wanted a smartphone. And both boys in this family decided not to get a smartphone. They were the only kids and their entire class all through high school that did not have one. And we're so grateful for it.

When children don't have something at first, you know, they want it because they see all of their friends. But then they start to see, that's all my friend can do. He can't even have a conversation with me. He's on his phone the whole time. They see some friends don't even want to leave their house on Friday nights because they have access to all of their friends on their phone. So why would they leave the comfort of their own room? Because they can see what's happening on their phone.

So they're smart. They're capable. They're able to kind of see this. But you have to give them the room to see it. You can't just give into their every whim because then there'll be like every other kid. You have to let them kind of observe and see for themselves.

So we watched that family do that, make that phone decision by kind of educating their kids and empowering them and so we kind of followed in their footsteps and did the same thing. Our kids didn't have phones or tech or iPads or any access to any of that until the last year. So when I wrote the book, at that point, we had no phones or anything.

But in the past year, my oldest son is attending a college that requires an app. So he decided to buy a phone so that he could communicate with his professors. And then my second son is playing high school soccer at a local public soccer, public high school and they require an app for communication for practices and information. And so he decided to buy a phone.

But what is so fun to see them navigate through the whole phone thing, neither of them want social media. They're paying for their phones and their phone plans and they're both very cheap. So they have like the cheapest prepaid minimal data... like they can't even scroll. They can't even look anything up on it. And that's by choice. That's on their end.

So we've seen the fruit of that, of just encouraging them to learn about the pros and the negatives of cellphone usage and social media, and then make that decision on their own. And, honestly, if they were to choose to download apps, we would be right there alongside of them, helping them navigate through that on what to do and to watch the way that they react to it and all of that.

The fun thing is you're in control of so many things when they're little. And as they get older, you have to relinquish that control. And it becomes more about equipping and encouraging and accountability. So we've had just so much fun watching our kids make good and bad decisions. But then being able to react as a parent through both of those, the good and the bad through accountability or encouragement it's just been really great.

That's another example of just seeing every single friend have a smartphone and just waiting as long as possible and letting my kids see, you know, how much it takes away from these kids' lives. They don't even want to go fishing because they can play video games. It's sad for my boys to have witnessed that in their friendships but it's also...

Even with soccer games, we'll go and my kids will bring cards, and every other kid is on their phone playing games and my kids will start playing cards with each other. And all of a sudden the other kids sat down their phones and come join the card game. And I just think it's so wonderful.

I think kids naturally want to play. They want to be involved with their hands and their eyes and their feet and their voices. They just don't have the knowledge of like, "This is better for me than this video game." And there is just something so addictive in the science of even creating the game. These developers want you to continue to play. So there is an addictive nature there. It's not healthy. Playing cards and yelling and screaming and having that competition that's healthy. Sitting in front of a screen is not.

So just kind of going against the grain and all of those it's been nothing but beneficial for my kids. And even when it's time for them to join in on that, they come in with a different perspective because they've lived life without it for so long. They could see where its purpose comes in and where it's gone too far.

**Stephanie:** I love that. I love that so much. The word that comes to mind is just thoughtful. That everyone is... your kids are making the decision, especially now that they're old enough to, that's best for them. That's what they're doing. They're making the decision that's best for them. And that you guys are modeling that for them and that you're doing that for your family, I just think that that's really cool. I think that there's so much freedom in that.

We each get to decide the things that are most important to us. We get to do this phrase like family math. Like we get to figure out our own family math. Who needs what and what is that cost in terms of time and money and, I don't know, energy for each of us? And how do we do the math in a way that benefits the most people in the family the most? And I just love that you guys are doing that. It's so inspiring and encouraging.

Do you have just any last bit of encouragement specifically for women who are looking ahead? Actually, let me ask it this way. If you could go back and talk to yourself before you had kids or when your kids were really, really little, what's something that you would want to tell yourself in terms of casting a vision for your future family? Anything that you wish you could go back and say to yourself?

**Jodi:** That's a good question. I think I was always so forward-thinking that I was always casting visions even before I ever had a spouse. But from my own personal parenting journey, one of the tools that helped me the most with my special needs son, with my child that's on the spectrum, was truly understanding where my weaknesses were and why I was easily triggered by certain behaviors.

Having a neurodivergent child is so much different from having a typical child. And so it really messes with... It really can target your weaknesses in a big way. So I wish I would have been more prepared as a mom to be able to see that. And I talk about that a lot in my book.

I talk about being self-aware because I think knowing yourself is a huge part in how you relate to your spouse and how you relate to your children. And if you can understand where your sinful tendencies are, where your weaknesses are, if you can see what your husband needs, what your children need, what their love language is, what their needs are per child, because every child is so different, then you can parent in that way.

That was probably if I could look back, I wish I would have done that sooner. I wish I would have known myself a little bit better sooner, just to be able to react differently in those earlier years. And I do share about that in my book. It's probably my biggest regret in parenting is not quite understanding how to parent him specifically.

I think in the interim, getting to know yourself and just working through some of those things that need to be healed, that will all benefit your family in such a huge way.

**Stephanie:** I love that so much. Jodi, thank you so, so much for coming on the show, for being such a pioneer and an entrepreneur in this way, and for taking us along with you. I'm just really grateful.

**Jodi:** Thank you, Stephanie. It's just been a pleasure talking with you.

[00:58:53] <music>

**Outro:** Friends, thank you so much for listening to today's episode. I cannot tell you how much it means to me to have you here at Girls Night.

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And thank you to all of you who have left those beautiful five-star reviews already. I can't tell you how much it means to me. All right, friends, that's all we have for today. But we'll be back next week with another episode of Girls Night. I'll see you then.