



God Hears Her Podcast

Episode 191 – Creativity Without Expectations

Elisa Morgan and Eryn Eddy Adkins with Jena Holliday

[Music]

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Elisa: Amen.

Jena: That helped me to really step into the fullness of the voice that the Lord had already given me. What I have kind of learned is that there is a hunger to see the different ways in which the image of God is reflected on the earth.

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Eryn: Elisa, the guest that we have on today is really special to me. I have followed her work for years. What she creates, like it comes alive, it fills a room, it fills a digital space online.

Elisa: Wow.

Eryn: It gives you an emotional feeling. And that's one of the reasons why I've loved watching her evolve as a entrepreneur and a business woman and an illustrator. Oh, there's a hint there. And a designer and an artist.

Elisa: Yeah.

Eryn: Her work is so bold and fierce and I know behind it there were probably like scary, intimidating moments. And you know, where's God gonna show up in this question mark moment?

Elisa: No doubt. Yeah.

Eryn: And so I'm really excited to be hanging out with Jena Holliday today. Jena...

Elisa: Oh gosh.

Jena: Yes.

Eryn: Welcome to God Hears Her!

Jena: Yes. What a great intro. Thank you. I'm so excited.



Eryn: Jena, would you share before we get into like what you currently do right now, I would love to pull back the curtain and learn about your faith as maybe a young girl or where you were in your mid-twenties. Wherever faith landed for you?

Jena: Sure. Yeah.

Eryn: Would you kind of give us a little bit of a backstory?

Jena: Yeah. So, I actually grew up in a Christian household. My dad was a minister, and his dad was a pastor, so he comes from a line of pastors. So, I grew up in a home where my parents really were devoted to the Lord or pretty much grew up in church, and I saw a lot of really cool things like growing up. I saw a lot of things before my eyes. I still was unsure and didn't understand a lot of things for myself, and I grew up with a lot of thoughts around trying to prove myself to the Lord and also with the church that we had kind of grown-up in. Um, there were a lot of things that I learned that were really legalistic around the way of Jesus. And so me being who I am, I'm a hard worker, go-getter. I wanted to do right by my parents. I wanted to do the right thing. I fell into a lot of different just traps really from the enemy of like trying to prove myself and be this good Christian girl. Things that I couldn't live up to and once I kind of reached the age of 18, you know that old age of adulthood.

Elisa: Where you know everything, and no one can tell you anything. Yes, I'm familiar with that age.

Eryn: The old age of adulthood.

Jena: Yes.

Eryn: Says every 18-year-old.

Jena: I wanted to go to college outta state. I wanted to leave, I wanted to get away from everything I grew up in and I wanted to find out everything for myself.

Eryn: True artist.

Jena: Right, right. Um, and so I went away to school for a year and kind of in that, being on my own, I was like, I don't know what I believe, because I had seen a lot of things that I knew were true, and so I was like, I always knew in the back of my mind, like, I know God is real. I do believe this, but I also saw when people would fall, you know, and people would not, you know, live up to the standards that I thought they were telling me to live up to.

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Jena: As young as, you know, I was at that time, I just didn't understand it. And I remember kind of having this conversation with God and saying, I don't think I'm ready for this. And like, if you're real, you've gotta show me that you're real and I want like a honest faith. I wanna be able to be me and I wanna be able to like walk with you and I don't wanna fake it.

Elisa: You know, Jena, honestly that's a very raw, transparent, authentic response that most people don't get to till they're like 40. Most people don't even understand there's such a thing. You know, especially when it comes to faith. And I think that's why we get so hung up.

Jena: Yes.



Elisa: In the impossibility of it all and you know, I can't do it and God must not love me and you know, all the things. And I love that you're sharing this real crossroads.

Jena: Yeah.

Elisa: Of really where, where you said I gotta be me. Okay. Oh, keep going. I wanna hear, I wanna hear.

Jena: Yes. No, that's, that's great. When I was 25, so this is like a total of seven years later from this moment, I was in a place where I was kind of struggling with happiness and joy. Like I had everything that, like on the on paper that I would've wanted. I had just transitioned over into a digital marketing role. So it's kind of like, okay, I finally get into this role that I would want to be doing. It was easy to me, like it came natural to me. I was good at it. I had been dating my now husband. We had been dating for a while. I just was not happy. I found myself on the weekends, drinking or marijuana, like just using things as a way to kind of like pacify and like make me feel. Fill the empty void of, you know, the Lord really.

Eryn: Yeah.

Jena: And inside I was asking all these questions on the outside, I was smiling, you know, and I remember distinctly one night where I distinctly heard like in my heart, why are you asking everyone else where to go, who to be, and what to do except the One who created you? And it was like, as soon as I heard that, I could feel like blinds open. Like, weights lift off of me. I remember sitting there and thinking He's real. The next thing I'd called my parents, and I was like, okay, I think I'm gonna come to your church. You know, it'd been a while.

Eryn: Oh, which takes so much humility too.

Jena: Yes.

Eryn: So, you surrender, you go to the church that next Sunday and then you're still working your corporate job, what happens?

Jena: Yes.

Eryn: Fast track a little bit. Yes. Where you get married maybe?

Jena: Yes.

Eryn: To this man.

Jena: I do.

Eryn: That you said now is your husband. Okay.

Jena: I decided to keep him. I decided to keep him.

Elisa: Yeah.



Eryn: I love it. I love it.

Jena: Yes.

Eryn: Okay, so tell, tell us more.

Jena: Yes, so um, I immediately just saw my life differently. Now I'm like, oh man, there's a lot that I really need to clean up here. I went to church and my parents were just like elated that I did this on my own and they just encouraged me. I remember my dad saying, you know, like kind of helping me to start kind of getting in the word and I remember him telling me like what books to start reading and things like that. But I was still working in my corporate job, and I also had a blog, so I was like doing like some writing on the side and kind of sharing of my life and I just remember really every time I would like sit down to like spend time with the Lord, I just like would sit there and be like, okay, like, what are you gonna show me today? Like, give me something, you know, like I would sit there and just kinda wait to feel like, um, God was showing me or, or guiding me in some way. And as I continued to do that, I started to like strengthen that muscle of like really hearing from the Lord. And I remember kind of having this moment where I just felt there's so much within you that you're not using, and I want you to start using it. And so, I decided to start this new blog called Spoonful of Faith. In those next couple years after I had kind of like, alright, I'm gonna go back to church. I got married and then I got pregnant with my first daughter. And I remember kind of starting this blog and sharing these. Now I've started sharing like what I was learning in my faith and it was very different from what I had been writing before. So, I was like, I gotta get a new blog going. And uh, so then, you know, the name Spoonful of Faith had just like, really just come to me. My dad used to have these like Disney singalong videos that he'd bring home for me and my siblings when we were kids, and we'd sing all the songs on 'em. One of the favorite ones that we loved was Mary Poppins and her song, Spoonful of Sugar, um, helps medicine go down.

Jena: And I was just sitting there one day thinking of a name. And I'm like...

Eryn: That's so great.

Jena: I'm like a Spoonful of Faith, a little bit of faith. It will help you.

Elisa: Sure.

Jena: You know, and so I remember sharing that with my mom and sister and they were just like, oh my gosh, yes, you have to do this. Like just start it. And I just started. I started sharing the things that God was showing me and things I was just learning as like a new believer. I'd always been creative. So, my family, I come up from a very creative family. We always were encouraged to use our gifts. And I think also with being in a big family, we kind of at some point didn't have a choice. Uh, there's some things that we wouldn't, our parents would be like, we're not paying for that. And we would be like, okay, well how do we make this happen? You know?

Eryn: Yeah.

Jena: So, we were always looking for ways around things. We were always DIYing, we were always building things. And so, I actually always loved to draw, but I just doodled. I would doodle in my notebooks. I doodled in school. I would doodle on my tests. I mean, I would get notes from my teachers like, this is a cute drawing, but I need you to focus on your math here. I literally thought absolutely nothing of it.

Eryn: That's so great. I love it. You're like, why wouldn't you draw on a math test?



Jena: Right? I'm like, I mean, isn't that what everybody does?

Eryn: There's margin.

Jena: The Lord was showing me like, there's things that you are just overlooking. And so, I began to like share my heart in this blog and also my doodles. I was drawing women and just things that would come to mind words, and as I did that people started responding and asking me like, oh wow, like I didn't know you could do this. Like, why aren't you doing this more? I started getting requests from moms. Now this is the time, when this came out, I started this in what, 2015. So, around this time was like huge for mommy fashion bloggers that had like dress their kids up and stuff like that.

Elisa: Yes, yes, yes.

Jena: Yeah, so I was getting like requests from these like mommy fashion bloggers to draw their kids in their clothing and all this stuff. So, I was like, okay.

Elisa: That's interesting.

Jena: And like nobody else was doing this. And so, when I would do it, I would all of a sudden gain tons of followers 'cause people were like, who is this girl? And like, what is she doing? And like, this is so different. And so, it just really started to kind of like become this thing that I didn't really expect it to ever become. As it grew, I really just asked the Lord, like, okay, what do, what do you want me to say here? What do you want me to do? And I just continue to share my life, share the things that I felt like Holy Spirit was sharing with me

Elisa: A quick look at your website reveals exactly what you're saying, Jena. I mean, I haven't seen a whole lot of these kinds of images.

Jena: Mm-hmm.

Elisa: And there's such diversity in your work. That's just gorgeous.

Jena: Yes.

Elisa: And you know, the Bibles that have this stuff in it and things, you know, talk about, if you don't mind, what have you discovered about diversity in art and what especially the Christian community is hungry for.

Jena: Yes.

Elisa: And, and how God's opened up space for you in that.

Jena: Yes.

Elisa: In that place.

Jena: Yeah, so I think, you know, for me, what I've always tried to do is just stay true to who I am and my story. My parents were really good about affirming me as a black girl who grew up in a predominantly white neighborhood, honestly.



Eryn: Yeah.

Jena: Who were the only black family on the block for years.

Elisa: Really.

Jena: And so, they had to really affirm us as kids before we stepped out of the door every day.

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Jena: God didn't make a mistake when He made us who we, who we were. It wasn't by chance. It wasn't a coincidence. It was on purpose, and I think...

Elisa: Amen.

Jena: That helped me to really step into the fullness of the voice that the Lord had already given me. What I have kind of learned is that there is a hunger to see the different ways in which the image of God is reflected on the earth. And I think it's cool to be in a position as an artist, an illustrator, because I have the unique role of visually representing something. You know, creating something in a visual way that doesn't take words and it just shows you and makes you have a feeling and it makes you encouraged in, in that aspect. It was always really important to me that I showcase different women, different images, and illustrations of people because I wanted people to be seen. I wanted people to know that they were loved, that they were heard, that their stories mattered. And I also grew up in Minnesota and it's really like it is a predominantly white state, but there is, it's a melting pot also in our cities.

Elisa: Hmm.

Jena: And we have a lot of cultures here. Some of my best friends growing up were Liberian, Laotian, and Cuban. I grew up with all of these different women and I didn't think that their culture and like where they came from was by chance. I, you know, and like I didn't think that it didn't matter. I thought it was really important to the story of who they were, and I think that is why that was easily weaved through my work. But then also as a black woman growing up in a house of five girls and my mom.

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Jena: I got to also see all of these different representations of black women.

Eryn: Hmm.

Jena: And that was really important to me as well. And so to be able to showcase that through my work was, at first it was hard because there was nothing like that out there.

Eryn: Yeah.

Jena: I remember having this conversation really with the Holy Spirit and really being empowered that...

Elisa: Hmm.



Jena: I made you this way on purpose. Stop shying away from sharing and showcasing that part of yourself because it's really going to help you and it's going to encourage others.

Eryn: I'll say, Jena, you won't say this, but I can say it, that I really do believe as you listen to the Holy Spirit, to the call to create you really have paved a path for other women of different races and nationalities and the way that they look and physically like shaped.

Jena: Mm-hmm.

Eryn: And you've paved the path of other artists to feel safe, to be able to create and put it online. That is what the Lord so badly wants his kids to know is that we're so unique in the way that He's created us, and I just think it's beautiful that He's used your hands to be able to shape His message.

Jena: Thank you.

Elisa: I love that, Eryn, that's rich and what a great, thank you, you know to Jena. I'm also hearing Jena, and you said it a couple times and I bet women who are listening heard it and went, oh, it was risky for you.

Jena: Mm-hmm.

Eryn: Mm-hmm.

Elisa: It wasn't easy.

Jena: Yeah.

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: And you know, there is a risk in creativity and, and I think a lot of us think, well then that's something we're not supposed to do, you know, it doesn't feel safe. And even though you are providing a, a, a bridge, you know, for those who, who want to be creative, there's a risk in it. So, so what do you say to that? And is it a risk that we should all take? Why?

Jena: Hmm.

Elisa: How do we begin if we have this creative little wire inside of us that we've just, you know, snip, snip, snip. As long as we could because it feels so crazily disobedient or just, you know,

Eryn: Or scary.

Jena: Mm-hmm.

Eryn: It just, it feels scary to, to quit your corporate job. Right.

Jena: Oh man.

Eryn: For instance.



Elisa: And not everybody needs to do that.

Jena: No, not at all. I know that I was taking the steps that I very confidently felt like the Lord was telling me to do. And it ain't for everybody. And I also had a husband that worked a full-time job. So, like there was a lot of aspect there that there was some privilege in that I didn't just leave and have nothing. I do think that we should take a risk to use the gifts that God's given us. Now, I don't think that we should all quit our jobs. I don't think that we should all become illustrators and artists or writers or whatever. But I think that if there is a gift that God has given you, and even if it's a creative gift that feels like, ooh, I'm good at this, or I love doing this, or I come alive when I'm doing this, or I feel like I worshipful in this thing.

Eryn: Mm-hmm.

Jena: I think when I started out, I thought, yes, you should use it and God's gonna like grow it and it's gonna be this huge, crazy thing, and now I think you should just use it and be faithful with it. You should use it as a way to honor the gift giver, the One that's given it to you. And I think that we all have a corner of this earth, we get to use our gifts there. And so whatever God does to multiply it, that's Him. That's not on us. That's not our responsibility; that's not our task. We get to do it. And I think, you know, you see this in the way that people will do small things in their community. I've seen it in the way of like making your own little library right on your corner, right?

Eryn: Mm-hmm.

Jena: Like you want to get people to read and that there are so many ways in which we can really use the things that God has put within us. Sometimes if we think that it might not be productive or like get to some level of success or be monetized or you know, any of those things, we count it out. And I think it's worth it to use our gifts because gifts are meant to be used and they shouldn't sit on shelves. And if you have something that God's given you and then it's still like neatly wrapped in a box, I think that's an invitation to open it up and spend a little time with it and see what He does with it.

Elisa: That's a pull quote, Jena. Everyone should take the risk to use the gifts that God has given them. That's a pull quote right there.

Jena: Yeah.

Elisa: I love it. Make it a meme.

Jena: I will, I'm literally writing it down.

Elisa: Send it to me, and I'll color it.

Jena: Yes.

Eryn: So good.

Elisa: And, and I also love how you talked about that not everybody's gonna draw or paint.

Jena: Yes.



Elisa: You know, but you know, whatever the gift is. And, and I loved your illustration of the little library on the corner. And I bet if we sat here for five seconds, you know, we would think of a zillion ways that people can use their gifts and they're not necessarily artistic, but they are creative.

Jena: Yes.

Elisa: Maybe there are a couple more examples like that because I, I think I'm just betting there's a lot of stuff stirring.

Jena: Yeah.

Elisa: In women and men who are listening and going, oh, I'm almost there. Keep going, keep going. Gimme a couple more ideas here.

Jena: Yeah, and we think of creativity. You know, it really, it is taking something that doesn't exist and bringing it into fruition. So, I mean, it could be in the, in the way of problem solving, like a lot of people are super creative in the way that they problem solve. And a lot of people are creative in the way that they run their households, in the way that they organize, manage. Like there's so many ways that we use the gift of creativity.

Elisa: That's good.

Jena: So, I think that's important for us to kind of take it out of our boxes. There's people, they have the gift of like hospitality, like they all day.

Eryn: Yeah.

Jena: You would like, you're like, they make you feel like home anytime you see them. And it, and it doesn't even necessarily mean that you have to be in their home and feeling that, but it's the way that that gift comes alive when they you know, speak to you or come to you. And so, I think that there's things like that, but I think also in like managing, like some people, like they can just get in a room with people and just take control. Take chaos into control. There are so many ways that our gifts are just shining at us, right?

Eryn: Yes.

Jena: But we just think, you know, this is just something I do, or you know, it's just, I just doodle on pages.

Elisa: So good.

Jena: You know, for 25 years.

Elisa: Yeah, we diminish them. Yeah.

Eryn: Totally.

Elisa: Yeah.



Jena: And if we started looking at the breadcrumbs that are sitting right in front of us, and actually just started taking the risk of using them without expectation. This idea of using our gifts as an act of worship really to honor God, like let's, let's just honor God with it and see what He does with it. I think we'll find some of the most beautiful ways that He'll show up in the process of that.

Eryn: Yeah. Jena, how have you, or have you overcome any sort of rejection or negative comments in your creativity?

Jena: Yeah. I feel like the past few years I have felt that. I had kind of walked through, ya know I've done Spoonful of Faith for 10 years. So, in the first like five years, it was really a lot of building. And then from there, there were a lot of seeds that were there that just started to take off, right? And so, you can kind of at some point kind of get behind the work, if that makes sense. And now this is the thing that's important and it becomes like an idol in many ways. And you're like, okay, how do I just keep this thing going and how do I keep making this thing?

Elisa: Yeah.

Jena: And oh, people like that. So that means more of that, right?

Jena: And also the way that social media is basically set up is for us to continue to make the things that people like and respond to.

Eryn: Yeah.

Jena: And so I think that can kind of cloud our mind and our kind of our, our, our judgment when it comes to creativity. And for me, anytime, and it's might be for most of us, you know anytime I start to take my eyes off of the One,

Eryn: Yeah.

Jena: And start to put it there on my work or what I'm creating, I feel distant to Him and I'm like, okay, who? And then I feel like, who am I listening to and where am I going? And what, you know, what is important and does any of this matter anymore?

Eryn: Mm-hmm.

Jena: And so the past couple years writing books has been very different than just sharing my artwork. And so I was, it felt like I was in a completely different space of creating.

Eryn: Hmm.

Jena: And also, that my time was really limited to like making art because I was writing so much.

Eryn: Yeah.

Jena: And so I started to feel like, am I relevant? Like, is, does anybody care? Do I need to make something so people still see that I'm here? Let me make anything. And then that starts to be reflected in your work, the authenticity, the joy, the, you know, the peace that you were using to create this thing is no longer there and it's, you're just doing it for, to feed the machine. To feed, you know?



Elisa: Yep.

Jena: I had struggled with that. And then also you were talking about rejection.

Eryn: Mm-hmm.

Jena: I have had people just not gravitate towards my work.

Eryn: Yeah.

Jena: Because of what it looks like or what it represents.

Eryn: Yeah.

Jena: I've also had people that like feel like my work is too whimsical and like playful.

Eryn: Mm-hmm.

Jena: And that, you know, wouldn't consider it to be art. Like I've had, you know, those kinds of conversations. And then I would say I've also had the opposite where people have commended the work that I didn't do from a place of, of like goodness that I just was like making, and I didn't really think, like, not that I didn't think it was good or whatever, but I didn't feel like my heart was in it. And people were just consuming me. So, I've had that, that aspect of it as well.

Elisa: That's a great description.

Jena: Yeah. Like it felt like, well, you just want this stuff. Like, it's just stuff, you know?

Elisa: Yeah. And then it's an inauthentic expression.

Jena: Exactly. Exactly.

Elisa: So that feels creepy.

Jena: Exactly. And that feeling of being like, this isn't even, this doesn't even feel good, even though it could pay the bills.

Eryn: Right.

Jena: This doesn't even feel good.

Elisa: Right, right.

Jena: There have been like all of those, you know, different places. And then in that, when you feel like you're in that place where it is like, okay, everybody's liking this, this stuff and it doesn't feel authentic and you're making this stuff.



Eryn: Mm-hmm.

Jena: That's kind of where I had been. And I, and then the Lord started really showing me like, I need you to use your voice again. Like there's some point you were using it and it was getting out there, and then you kind of stopped because people were saying, oh, we like this part of your voice. Right?

Eryn: Yeah. You got this one, but do this one.

Jena: Yes. And I need you to stay true to who I made you to be. And you are not going to be who you were 10 years ago. You're growing and so I need you to, to grow with that. And that has been scary. Because I'm working on creating this community and starting to write again, and that feels scary to have an authentic voice and to actually say the things that need to be said.

Eryn: Yeah.

Jena: And create work that makes people think and makes people stay connected and feel joy in a time where there's a lot of despair.

Eryn: Yeah.

Jena: I was kind of like encouraged because I'm a big dreamer where I'm like a big thinker, but also a lot of times God speaks to me through my dreams and so I'll get dreams about different things that'll just kind of encourage me or guide me in one way or the other. And sometimes these things like are just a way to like to remind me that He's with me. But I had a dream. In the dream, there was a woman named Deborah that was guiding me and so then I go into this Bible, and I start reading the story of Deborah, and I just was so encouraged by reading that, you know, she had to protect her people. She had come in a time of a lot of despair. She had to speak up, you know, she had to judge. She was also a prophetess, like all of these different things. And I go, oh my gosh. Right? We can think sometimes that the gifts and the things that God has given us and the places that He has put us in aren't big enough for the job that needs to be done, but it was an encouragement that like, I need you in this time when, whatever place I place you in, this is the time of it. That just kind of came to me this week as I was struggling and like, okay, I gotta use my voice again and get out there again. And I don't know, like if it will be received well and God's like, that's not the important part. That's not what it's about.

Elisa: It's use it.

Eryn: Yeah. Yep.

Jena: Just use it. That's kind of been my story with rejection and with kind of going through difficult times in, in creating and, and how to keep showing up. I think I am often okay. I'm focused. I'm focused, I'm focused, and then I'm over here somewhere. And I just love that the way that Jesus loves us is so deep that like He's just like, He'll come and run after you. Right? Like He'll come find you again. Hey, hey, hey, come back this way.

Eryn: Mm-hmm.

Jena: Guide me back to where He has me. And, or where He would like me to be. And we get to do it together and we get to keep walking forward together in it. And so, I'm just now getting to that point at 37 where I'm stopping, where there is some responsibility of myself, but like I don't put the responsibility on me to be the savior anymore, to be the one that has to prove and do all of these



things to make things right. I just really focus on my relationship with the Lord and walking with Him in every step of the way, and I'm like, you gotta do the rest. I'll use the gift.

Elisa: Yeah.

Jena: I'll stay faithful in watching you.

Elisa: I'll take the risk.

Jena: Yes, I'll take the risk and you've gotta do the rest.

[Theme Music]

Elisa: Let God do the rest, yes, Jena. Being creative can seem daunting, but God has blessed each of us with many gifts. We can spend some time thinking about how to best use them.

Eryn: I agree, Elisa! If you enjoyed this episode, please be sure to leave us a comment or review wherever you listen to your podcasts and maybe share it with a friend!

Elisa: Before we go, we are so excited to let you know that we now have a God Hears Her YouTube Channel! Be sure to subscribe to watch the video version of the podcast. You can find the link in our show notes where there will also be a link for Jena's book *Sacred Creativity*. You can find that and more at God Hears Her dot org. That's God Hears Her dot O.R.G

Eryn: Thank you for joining us and don't forget, God hears you, He sees you, and He loves you because you are His.

Elisa: Today's episode was engineered by Anne Stevens and produced by Jade Gustman and Mary Jo Clark. We also want to thank Diana and Mary for all of their help and support. Thanks everyone!

Eryn: Our Daily Bread Ministries is a donor-supported, non-profit ministry dedicated to making the life-changing wisdom and stories of the Bible come alive for all people around the world.

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