



# God Hears Her Podcast

## Episode 105 – More Than Your Scars

### Elisa Morgan & Eryn Eddy with Kechi Okwuchi

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[Music]

**Intro:** You're listening to *God Hears Her*, a podcast for women where we explore the stunning truth that God hears you, He sees you, and He loves you because you are His. Find out how these realities free you today on *God Hears Her*.

**Elisa:** Welcome to *God Hears Her*. I'm Elisa Morgan.

**Eryn:** And I'm Eryn Eddy. When you think of your scars, do you think of a certain story or emotion tied to them? Do you have visible scars or internal, emotional ones?

**Elisa:** Today's guest is a strong woman who is more than her scars. Kechi Okwuchi was one of two survivors on a routine flight home from her school in Nigeria in December of 2005. She first publicly shared her story during her amazing audition on "America's Got Talent." She's the author of a memoir, *More Than My Scars*, and an advocate for burn victims and bullying prevention.

**Eryn:** Kechi has an incredible story, and we are so excited to hear it on this episode of *God Hears Her*.

**Elisa:** Eryn, I have to confess that I'm a little gobsmacked by who's joining us today. I remember seeing her come across my television screen one night when Evan and I were just kinda holed up watching stuff, and my jaw dropped, and my heart broke open, and my spirit rose. I'm excited for you to meet Kechi.

**Eryn:** Kechi, welcome to *God Hears Her*.

**Kechi:** Thank you.



**Eryn:** I am so excited to dig in and just learn more about you...

**Elisa:** But first, Kechi, let's start off with saying: Can you tell us about your childhood? You grew up in Nigeria. Right?

**Kechi:** Correct.

**Elisa:** Yeah.

**Kechi:** Yes.

**Elisa:** Talk to us.

**Kechi:** I had a really great childhood. I had a very fun one. My family, very close-knit, and personally I was born into a small family; so my mom, my dad, and myself, and my little sister who came when I was 11 years old. So I was an only child for quite a bit of time.

**Elisa:** Mm-hmm.

**Kechi:** And so I had my parents' full attention, and we didn't have a lot. We were very ... just regular, middle-class family; but I never felt like I was lacking anything, you know. I had a very fulfilling and wholesome childhood because of them and how they provided for me, and how they were very keen on making sure that I had this great relationship and closeness with my cousins. So my parents, siblings, their kids, you know, I grew up very close to them as well. Like a lot of holidays I would spend with my cousins, and so till this day we are extremely close. We have like, you know, group chats where we're there together and...

**Eryn:** Aww!

**Kechi:** ...talk every single day, cause we just...we grew up around each other, so we just became like...

**Eryn:** Wow!

**Kechi:** ...that. But I...I'm really grateful to my parents for especially that, because considering what was coming in my life later on, you know, having that closeness with family and having that family support was very, very important to my journey in life, essentially. So ... so that was kind of like my childhood. And



Nigeria wasn't...it's never really been very safe, but I believe I'm one of the more privileged lucky ones that was able to kind of live in a very kind of secure neighborhood. You know my parents were very ... they sheltered me a lot. You know that's really the best way you can keep your kids safe in Nigeria. And so they protected me a lot from a lot of like things that could've gone wrong. That's kind of how I grew up. And then when I was 10, I went to boarding school. Here it's, I believe, from grades 7 to 12. That's usually, I think, junior high and high school here, but in Nigeria those six years are grouped into one school, one...

**Elisa:** Okay.

**Kechi:** ...school experience. Yeah...

**Eryn:** Oh wow!

**Kechi:** ...So we call it secondary school. So typically, from ages 10 or 11 to 16-slash-17, we would all be in the same boarding school. And so you grew up with the same kids for the next six years, basically, of your life. Your ...

**Eryn:** Wow!

**Kechi:** ...formative years are with the same people. So, naturally, a lot of my closest friends are from secondary school.

**Elisa:** Okay.

**Kechi:** That was where I was when my life changed. So I was a senior.

**Elisa:** Tell us about that. This is the...the year 2005, I believe.

**Kechi:** Correct.

**Elisa:** ...You said you're a senior in...

**Kechi:** Yes.

**Elisa:** ...this boarding school...



**Kechi:** Yes, I was.

**Elisa:** ...this very familial, you're very close...boarding school...

**Kechi:** Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

**Elisa:** And what happened? What event occurred?

**Kechi:** So I was 16 years old at this time, and final year of high school. I was getting ready for the SAT's, like everyone else. And I was going home for the Christmas holidays. This was December 10, 2005. And so it was going to be a holiday full of just studying and getting ready, like SAT prep, because that was the next big thing coming in my life at that point. It was December 10<sup>th</sup> and, you know, being at boarding school, the students live all over Nigeria. You fly in from all over Nigeria to come to this school. Right? So I lived in the east, whereas the school was in the north, so it was very routine that I would fly back and forth. The beginning of the semester I would fly from my home to the school and, you know, when the semester ends, I go home. And typically, those of us who live in the same area would go on the same plane. The school busses would take us to the airport at different times, and then we would board the same plane and go home. So those who lived in the same area that I did, there were 61 of us that took that plane. So this was a routine flight, you know, every year, every semester we do this. The flight is usually about a ... it's usually an hour and a half or so...

**Elisa:** Okay.

**Kechi:** ...you know, going or coming. I remember that day we, you know, left the campus, got to the airport, 61 of us. We boarded the plane, a regular commercial plane. There were 109 passengers on board, including the flight crew and us students. And the flight took off, and everything was normal. You know it was a regular flight, uneventful...

**Eryn:** Yeah.

**Kechi:** ... I slept a little bit, woke up, you know, talked to my friend. I was sitting in the aisle seat in front. One of my closest friends was in the aisle seat next to mine. And so I remember just sitting there, and everything was fine. And then, about maybe 15, 20 minutes left in the flight, when the pilot makes the announcement that he's going to start the descent into the airport, that was, you know, when the turbulence started. And, you know, at this point, it wasn't anything cause, you know, you fly, turbulence happens. It's part of flying. It's not a bit deal, typically. And then it just kept going, you know, and then just kept getting worse and worse. And it just got to a place where there was this tension in the air. And it's...



it's just...no one wanted to say anything; because no one wanted to be the one to say it, you know, that they think somethings' going wrong; because you don't board a plane thinking such a thing is going to happen. I mean, of course like...

**Eryn:** Right.

**Kechi:** ...its always the fear that people have, you know, but like it's so rare. It rarely happens...

**Eryn:** Yeah.

**Kechi:** ...so you just don't think the worst thing. So even then it's like...

**Eryn:** You don't think it could happen to you.

**Kechi:** You just don't...Exactly. Specifically, you're like *There's no way*. And so it wasn't even something anyone wanted to consider. But then eventually there was this woman at the back...eh... it was just a woman's voice. And it was just like she screamed, and that just started the panic. Right...

**Eryn:** Ohh!

**Kechi:** ...Everyone started screaming...

**Eryn:** Oh!

**Kechi:** ...There was just chaos in the cabin. No one was running around or anything, but we're all strapped in, obviously, but it was like people were screaming. You could hear people praying at the top of their lungs, calling God's name, calling Jesus...

**Eryn:** Oh wow!

**Kechi:** ...And I remember just sitting there in my seat, and I was just kind of stunned, speechless, and like I couldn't really ... I was numb, like it was like *Is this for real? Like am I actually on the plane that's... that's having issues? Like this doesn't happen. Is this a movie?* Like I just could not understand ...

**Elisa:** Mm-hmm.

**Kechi:** ...that this was real...



**Eryn:** Oh!

**Kechi:** ...And I was just sitting there, and I didn't scream. Nothing. I was just staring. And I remember my friend, I looked at her, and she was looking at me, and her eyes were huge. And the last thing I remember is we held hands, and then it was like this...this metal scraping sound that like I remember just like jarred my brain, like my senses. And then just darkness. There was just darkness. And my next vivid memory after that is opening my eyes, and I was lying down in a hospital bed.

**Elisa:** Oh my goodness!

**Kechi:** And five weeks had past, and I was waking up from a coma.

**Elisa:** Oh!

**Kechi:** And that was pretty much...

**Eryn:** Oh wow!

**Kechi:** ...how my life just kind of restarted, you know, on this whole different path that was completely unexpected, unplanned for but, you know, here we were.

**Eryn:** What was the first emotion you experienced when your eyes woke up from your coma?

**Kechi:** I was numb. I had full awareness, I remember, of everything that had happened; because, when I was in the coma, I could hear my mom speaking to me. She would be either reading Scripture to me or singing to me, or she would be talking to me, telling me where I was, what had happened. And she did that because she knew I'm not good with surprises; and so she just wanted to make sure, if I was hearing her at all, that I would wake up and I would know what was going on. That's the thing with like trauma survivors, because sometimes you can wake up still kind of going through the motions of what had happened to you and put you in that position.

**Eryn:** Yeah.

**Kechi:** So it was kind of like also preventative to make sure that didn't happen to me. And thank God I could hear her, so when I opened my eyes, I knew where I was, I knew what had happened...



**Eryn:** Wow! All from her talking to you...

**Kechi:** All from her talking...

**Eryn:** ...while you...

**Kechi:** ...all from her...

**Eryn:** That's...

**Kechi:** Yep...

**Eryn:** ...wild!

**Kechi:** ...all from her talking, literally. I knew what had happened anywhere. I've been...I woke up knowing mus...like songs that I didn't know before the accident too like...

**Elisa:** Oh gosh!

**Kechi:** ...cause I could hear them playing by my bedside, cause she would leave and leave music playing...

**Eryn:** Ahh!

**Kechi:** ...And I woke up, and the song that she'd sing to me, I didn't know those songs before, but I woke up knowing the song that she used to sing to me when I was in a coma. It was very interesting. First thing I felt was just... It was really no feeling. It was like numbness. I felt like I was barely existing. It was very numb and like a floaty feeling, but I remember the relief that I felt when I saw my mom's face. So the first face I saw was the nurse, who was talking to me and asking me to blink. One blink, you know, yes; twice for no; and I remember when I saw my mom, her face. And it was just cool to see her face and not just hear her voice, you know? And I think that was really the beginning of this ... it was kind of like a...a need to always have that and latching onto her voice and her face as like my reason to wake up everyday and to like continue...

**Elisa:** Tether, mm-hmm...

**Kechi:** ...treat...exactly! She was my anchor, you know...



**Elisa:** Mm-hmm.

**Eryn:** Wow!

**Kechi:** ...to like reality essentially, so I think I would say relief that she was real, you know. It wasn't just like I was just hearing her voice. Now I could see her face.

**Elisa:** Can you help us enter the reality of what you were facing? How were you injured? What was the nature of your injuries? What would keep you in a coma for five months? And what did your recovery look like?

**Kechi:** I sustained third-degree burns over 65 percent of my body, so that just means that everything from the top of my head to the soles of my feet burned...

**Elisa:** Mm!

**Kechi:** ...except for my tummy and my back which, incidentally, were the areas that they used to cover up the rest of me that lost so much skin. I was flown the day after the accident to South Africa, Johannesburg. That's where they saved my life. That's where they brought me back from the dead — literally — and kept me alive. So the reason I was flown there was because Nigeria didn't have the medical capacity to care for the level of burns I sustained. And so, if I was going to have any chance of survival, I would have to be flown to a place that did have that, and the closest place was South Africa. So when I got there, they basically just focused on patching me back together, keeping me alive, keeping me disease-free, you know, keeping me just safe; because, you know, when your whole body's exposed the way that mine was, it's very easy to get infected fatally. The first step was to cover me up as fast as possible. So my tummy area and my back actually look like they were burned because of how much and how often they harvested skin from those areas...

**Elisa:** Wow!

**Eryn:** Mmm.

**Kechi:** ...to cover the rest of me up, but like those were the areas that saved my life, you know?

**Eryn:** Wow!





**Kechi:** These were all things that were happening while I was in the coma and also in the first few months of waking up from the coma. So those first few months were very numb. I was more unconscious than I was conscious those...those first few months. And the surgeries were like pretty much every day. So I can't say that I really know much about what's happening in reality at that time, but I did have a lot of weird dreams, a lot of dreams and visions and just things that were just so weird when they were happening. That was really what my reality was at that time, but as I got better, I got more feeling back. And it was a double-edged sword because I feel like feeling, you know, sensation, that's a huge indicator of life. You know in the beginning, when I couldn't feel much, that's literally because I was on the brink. There was no guarantee I would make it or not...

**Elisa:** Yeah.

**Kechi:** ...but once I started getting my feeling restored, I could feel more pain. I could feel all these different sensations, then the further I was away from the doorstep of death essentially. So it was kind of like *I'm glad that I'm alive, but at the same time, this really sucks. This...it feels terrible to be inside this body...*

**Elisa:** That's a powerful metaphor...

**Kechi:** Yeah...

**Elisa:** ...that is...

**Kechi:** ...that's the truth.

**Elisa:** ...When we come alive, it hurts. Yeah. That's powerful.

**Eryn:** Mm.

**Kechi:** It does. It's the truth. I think, yeah, pain ... definitely a very strong indicator of life I would say. It was hard for my parents to be upset about that, you know, so...heh... They were happy I was, you know, alive and I could feel like my legs and, you know, so... You know it was a miracle, really, that I didn't lose any limbs...

**Eryn:** Yeah.



**Kechi:** ...I didn't lose like sensation permanently in certain areas. These are things that could have happened...

**Eryn:** Mmm.

**Kechi:** ...that didn't. But, honestly, the pain was really nothing compared to the itching that comes with healing burn scars. For me...

**Eryn:** Oh, I bet. Oh..

**Kechi:** ...that was the worst thing. And I know, till today, if I could've converted all that itching to pain, I would have done that. That's literally how bad the itching was.

**Eryn:** All your nerves are coming back in, and ... ooof!

**Kechi:** That's exactly what it was. It was the worst feeling. Everything was on edge. I could feel ... like even just the wind blowing on my face was irritating.

**Eryn:** And tender, and soft, I mean, I would love to just learn even more ... You know you were talking about coming out of this space of numbness to feeling, and then feeling everything, and then how it just affected you, like you felt deeply everything, from the baby skin on your face to probably emotionally, you felt deeply.

**Elisa:** Mmm.

**Eryn:** I'm curious. Even though you woke up and you knew where you were, had you been able to grieve in the coma, when your mom was sharing the news...

**Elisa:** Mmm.

**Eryn:** ...and did that come later? And when...

**Kechi:** Yeah.

**Eryn:** ...did that come to actually grieve the knowledge of what had just happened?



**Kechi:** Yeah, that's a good question because I guess it's important to know the extent of what she was telling me when I was in a coma. And she didn't give me details about what happened...

**Eryn:** Oh wow.

**Kechi:** ...to everyone else, or what happened with the crash. She only focused on me. She told me what happened. She said, "There was a plane crash, and you were really badly hurt, but you're going to be okay. You're in South Africa, in Johannesburg, and they're taking care of you." So she was very careful to kind of...

**Elisa:** Wow. Smart.

**Kechi:** ...keep it to just me and my injuries and where I was, so I don't wake up confused about where I am and why I looked the way I did, cause I was bandaged head to foot. So that was what she focused on. And, obviously, from a psychological point of view, that was important too, because understanding the gravity of what had happened at that stage could have affected my healing. So they couldn't risk that at all, so they actually told me the truth about everything four months into my treatment, when they were sure that I was psychologically and mentally strong enough to handle the actual truth. So that came much later. When it comes to grieving, that only happened after that time.

**Elisa:** Kechi, what was the actual truth?

**Kechi:** The truth was that, out of 109 people that were on the plane, only two survived.

**Eryn:** [whispers] No!

**Kechi:** ...It was myself and another lady who I didn't know prior to the accident. So all of the kids, all my friends, classmates, that were on the plane were also gone. The other lady, she didn't sustain any burns, but she did break like her arm. She also didn't pass out, so she remembers everything that happened, including the crash...

**Elisa:** Oh!

**Kechi:** ...whereas I sustained more of the physical part of the injury, and I don't remember the actual impact with the ground, you know?

**Elisa:** Wow!



**Kechi:** So it was interesting because it was almost like the trauma of the situation was kind of split between two people...

**Elisa:** Huh.

**Kechi:** ...And, also, it's kind of affected how we both have dealt with what happened. I can do things like this, where I talk about my experience, and I talk about what it's been like surviving and going through the healing journey, you know, flying again, things like that. But like she has no interest in doing such things or revisiting that day. So I think it's really interesting because it just shows like the kind of trauma that she has to deal with is completely different from mine, I think...

**Eryn:** Yeah.

**Kechi:** ...and makes it hard for her to talk about that stuff. Of course, I got to know her after the accident, and we became friends...

**Eryn:** That had to be healing to experience a friendship in her.

**Kechi:** I would say it was cathartic and necessary. It was necessary for the both of us, in terms of moving on with life, in terms of just having that bond, that connection, as two people who went through something that several other people went through but didn't live to tell about it.

**Eryn:** Yeah.

**Kechi:** ...So I think being with her and talking with her is very different from anybody else, because we both have very similar experiences, from the same experience but still somehow different because she remembers things I don't remember, and vice versa. And we don't talk about certain things because we already know that we know. We don't have to explain things to each other in certain ways. It's definitely a connection that is for life, and one that we're both grateful for; because, you know, there's a unique perspective of this accident that only the two of us share, that we both take a lot of comfort in, really...

**Elisa:** Yeah, it's a club you don't want to belong to, but it's meaningful to have each other.

**Kechi:** Yeah.

**Elisa:** As you're describing this, you know, and she has her own story, but...



**Kechi:** Mm-hmm.

**Elisa:** ...for you, what role did your relationship with God play before, during, after, you know. It... Has that been a source of the anchoring as well for you? Or did it get shaken up and thrown out? You know, what happened?

**Kechi:** When it comes to God, faith, you know, this was something that, in my life prior to the accident, was more obligatory. It was kind of like *I believe cause my family believes. I'm a Christian by virtue of the fact that my home is Christian. My mom and my dad are Christian, my family.* So went to church, did everything, believed in God, but did I ever try to have something personal with Him? No. You know I was just doing what my parents said was the right thing to do...

**Elisa:** Mm-hmm.

**Kechi:** You know? That was the extent of my understanding of Him. And I also understood that, you know, He just preferred when you were a good person, as opposed to just doing bad things. So it informed my teenage years, for sure, and made me not want to do certain things because I believed He would, you know, be mad and punish me if I did certain things. So it definitely kept me in line, I would say, as a teenager...

**Elisa:** Like a stern father kinda thing...

**Kechi:** Exactly...

**Elisa:** Yeah, yeah...

**Kechi:** Exactly, exactly. So that was my image of Him, and so, yes, I did believe in Him, obviously, because I lived my life, you know, trying to make sure I didn't make Him mad. And my parents, you know, when it came to church, I just went because they went too. And I loved singing. Aside from that, I was just a pretty normal teenager. It wasn't really anything special that I had with Him. After the accident happened, though, I was in a place where I was being prayed for by so many people all over the world. And my mom, especially, was there as this representation of faith and steadfastness, you know. And I knew that she was always in there interceding for me. My family was, strangers were, even after the accident. I, for a long time, didn't feel the need to develop anything special or personal; because I felt like I was covered. People were doing it for me...



**Elisa:** Yeah.

**Kechi:** ...They were handling it for me. My mom was there praying for me all the time, you know, reading the Bible to me. I mean I felt protected, you know, despite me not looking for anything myself. It didn't seem like I had to make any effort to access, you know, the peace and protection that, you know, He had for everyone that He created. So that's how I lived for quite a while, months after the accident really. And then I got to a point where I became curious, because the more I watched my mom and her relationship with God and her faith and the way she talks to me about Him. She was so sure, and it was like an unshakeable thing inside her, an unshakeable belief. And it just got me curious because it was like when... There were moments where I doubted, you know, and she would just very gently reassure me. And I'd be like, you know, *how does it feel to like just be so sure of yourself in this particular kind of way?* In a way that wasn't arrogant. It was never like she knew everything. It was just this gentle strength inside her. And so that's how the curiosity started, like *What would it feel to feel that way personally, as opposed to like derived from my mom?* You know? And then eventually, you know, after she covered me, prayed, everything, I got to a place where insomnia became a very bad thing for me. You know I couldn't sleep, you know, it was very, very bad. And I found that a lot of times in her presence... I just thought it was, you know, *Mom's here, you know, I feel good.* I'm... That's definitely a part of it too. I slept better when she was around. I just...

**Eryn:** Aw.

**Kechi:** ...I felt more protected, but then I also started craving that feeling after she left. And when I was awake more at night, I would just be lying there, can't sleep, can't do anything. And, you know, I would just kind of like wish that she was there to read to me, or pray to me, you know, things like that. So it was like *How am I going to access this peace, you know, by myself?* And so that was another thing that added to my need to kind of search for Him myself. I guess the main thing was sleep. I needed a sustainable way to do this that doesn't involve my mom, and so I think that was really the beginning of my personal interest in finding out about Him. Everyone told me that was the way to go, so I just kind of started trying to figure things out. So when she read the Bible, it was less about just a relaxation and all that, but I'm actually listening to the words, asking questions, really just actually wanting to know about this God, and learning how to pray, and understanding that prayer is something that I didn't have to wait to do it like every Sunday or wait to do it like when my mom was around. I could just talk to God like I was talking to my actual dad, you know, talk to Him, cry out to Him, all that stuff. So I was learning all those things, and I felt like I was making good headway. I was understanding certain things about Him, and then they hit me with the fact that everyone died in the accident, so you know, when the truth came. I back peddled so much after that. I just didn't understand.



[Music]

**Elisa:** Kechi, we are so sorry for your loss. How devastating! But let's take a quick break from our conversation to hear some news from Eryn.

[Music]

**Eryn:** Hey yall, *God Hears Her* recently celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> episode! If you haven't checked out the episode, you can find it on our website or anywhere you listen to your podcasts. As part of the celebration, we also want to offer you a special limited-edition *God Hears Her* tote, filled with things that you'll love, including the three devotional books: *God Hears Her*, *God Sees Her*, and *God Loves Her*, with pens and stickers and notebook and other great goodies too. You'll want to get your hands on this ASAP. Check it out on our *God Hears Her* website. That's [godhearsher.org/shop](http://godhearsher.org/shop). Again, that's [godhearsher.org/shop](http://godhearsher.org/shop). Now let's get back into our conversation with Kechi, sharing how her confusion and frustration about God stemmed from the questioning of her experience.

**Kechi:** I never, ever once felt that way, like *Why wasn't it me?*

**Elisa:** Mm-hmm.

**Kechi:** ...But I did have confusion and anger, because I had learned so much about God. He was supposed to be this Being that could do everything, save anyone He wanted, do whatever He wanted. And He would just let sixty children die? It made no sense to me...

**Elisa:** I see.

**Kechi:** ...Like I couldn't understand. It was so different from what I had been learning about Him so far...

**Elisa:** Like contrary to His character.

**Kechi:** Very...exactly. It just seemed like it was two contrasting things that I could not fit into the same Person. Like ...eh... I couldn't fit these two things to identify ... They didn't sound like they came from the same Person, like...

**Eryn:** Yeah.



**Kechi:** ...how can He do this good stuff and then allow this bad stuff to happen? So it definitely confused me. I just had all these in... contrasting information, and I just didn't know how to overcome that.

**Eryn:** And how did you? I feel like there are so many women that can relate in some form or fashion into the layers and the emotions that you're expressing right now.

**Kechi:** Mm-hmm.

**Eryn:** How did you find resolution to that?

**Kechi:** So this was ...eh... my mom... I want to say it was mainly her, but like also... cause I know at that time I just sunk into this dark place, just very depressed and confused, missing my friends, couldn't believe they were gone, and just so confused about God. And that's the place I was in, and I stayed there for a while. And my family would talk to me. They would pray for me. They would try to comfort me. And then my mom, we had a conversation, and she just kind of was very frank with me about certain things, cause my understanding so far had been: You believe in God, you're a Christian and, you know, you're shielded, you know, you're protected. You know that...that's what it's supposed to be. That's the whole... that's... When you get saved, you have this blanket of protection available to you that people that aren't, you know, don't have. My mom was just like, "Kechi, bad things happen to everyone, good and bad people, no matter what kind of life you're living. That is just what happens when you live in this world. And being a Christian, believing in God, believing in Jesus, does not exempt you from bad things happening. That's not how that works, you know. You are still human; you still live in this world. It's a flawed world. Bad things happen all the time. And so being a Christian does not stop bad things from happening to you. But what it does is that it gives you a place to go to when those bad things happen." So a lot of times, when bad things happen to people, they just veer off the path. They're confused, they're angry, and it leads us to like seek comfort in many different things, many different ways, many different people — oftentimes not the most sustainable sources of comfort, you know?

**Eryn:** Yes.

**Kechi:** ...Because that end...especially if it's another human being. For me, a lot of it was my mom, but at the end of the day, you know, she also draws strength from Somebody else. She's not an infinite source of comfort and strength. She's not. And no human being is built to be that way. So she just told me that I'm going to have to allow myself to see God in that light.

**Elisa:** You have a very sifted-through ...





**Eryn:** That's right.

**Elisa:** ...perspective. And it's been many years, you know, as you look back at it. We started this conversation with some curiosity prickers that we need to probably get to because people are going *Huh?* [Laughter] ... But, you know, you ended up in America. And I'm not sure when that happened, but maybe you could just fill us in to how you came to America...

**Eryn:** Yes.

**Elisa:** ...And then you've got to share with us what surprising thing happened.

**Kechi:** Yes. Okay, so I came to America in 2007. So at this point two years had passed. I was definitely not going to die. I was alive. I was fine, but now it was about the quality of life that I was going to have. And America was the best place to improve the quality of my life, such as it was. I always say South Africa is where they saved my life, and America is where they gave me back my independence because...

**Eryn:** Aw, I love that!

**Kechi:** ...the...the surgeries...

**Eryn:** Yeah.

**Kechi:** ...that I did here were not like lifesaving. I didn't need those anymore, but they improved the kind of life I could live. They gave me back my mobility, allowed me to be able to walk properly, to hold things for myself — things that you take for granted as just living life became milestones for me. You know being able to brush my own teeth, give myself a shower, stand up and like walk around to go to places cause I came here in a wheelchair. This is where Shriners Children's Texas — that's the hospital that I went to...

**Elisa:** Okay, yeah.

**Kechi:** ...They essentially gave me back my mobility and my independence, and I got to a place where I could finally go back to school, finish high school, got scholarships to go to college in Houston, which is here we moved to. And then, after I graduated with my bachelor's, I worked for a year doing nonprofit stuff, and then I came back for my master's, my MBA. In 2016 I was given my MBA, and that's when another like lifechanging thing happened. So how did it happen? Well, I mentioned music being like a



huge source of comfort for me. And, actually, like in South Africa, some things changed in my voice after the accident happened...

**Elisa:** Huh.

**Kechi:** ...No one really knows what or how or why. I didn't question it. I wasn't curious...

**Eryn:** I love that!

**Kechi:** ...about why. I was just like *This is cool and, you know, this is a horrible situation, but at least, you know, we have this one thing that... unexplainable thing that we can enjoy.* So music became this like huge source of comfort and distraction for me in this... in South Africa. I moved here, and it became even more part of my healing, because Shriners, they put me in music therapy and that like was just such a beautiful thing for me. And at a time when I started MBA, I had started singing in my church worship team. So, for me, that was like a step outside my comfort zone because before that I was just singing in my room at home for family and friends. I would never have done anything more with my voice, but my mom was like, "You need to do something." And I was like, *Okay, worship team, that's cool, singing for God. I mean that should be good. That's enough.* You know? So I'm in school, and I have this friend, one of my best friends who, way before this, years before and since, she had been telling me so many times that I need to join one of these music shows. I need to participate in whether it's "American Idol," or "The Voice," or "America's Got Talent." She'd be telling me every time I'd send her something of me singing, she'd be like "Why are you sending this to me? You need to send it to a music show!" And it's so funny, cause my dad also did the same thing. He would always be like, "Why haven't you joined one of these music shows?" And I was...

**Eryn:** I love it!

**Kechi:** ...always just like, "Oh, whatever! I'm never going to do that, like come on. Why would I?" So this friend of mine decided to sign me up for "America's Got Talent" without telling me.

**Elisa:** Oh-ho! There's a friend!

**Kechi:** So she did that, and she was like, "Listen, we're doing this, and I know you...you don't want to do it. Whatever. It's fine. I put my email, so if they reject you, whatever, you won't even know about it. I will be the one to see it like..."

**Eryn:** I love it! "If they reject you, you won't even know."



**Kechi:** ...let's just see." It was very surprising for everyone when they actually reached out and called and were like, "Hey, we saw your application." This was in November 2016. "And we're trying out, you know, casts for Season 12 of AGT, and we like your application, and we wanted to see if we could move forward with you." And it was very surreal to me cause I was like, *Okay, what are the chances? This is not for... Is this for real? Like are they actually go... How far are they gonna go with this? So...*

**Elisa:** Yeah.

**Kechi:** ...I didn't put any kind of hope or anything into it, because I was like *you just don't know if it's going to lead anywhere, so don't even think too much about it. Don't invest too much in this, Kechi, you know, just let it be what it wants to be.* And it just kept going; 2017 started, and they kept emailing me, asking me questions, asking me for different songs. They wanted to hear how I sounded singing different genres. And before I knew it, May 2017 I was in LA auditioning for "America's Got Talent" on TV.

**Eryn:** Oh my gosh!

**Elisa:** And you didn't just audition. You got a standing ovation.

**Kechi:** Yes, that was the coolest thing! It was crazy! I still can't believe that actually happened, but like, wow, it was really something that changed the course of my life. After the audition, time passed. I ended up back for the judge cuts, and then I ended up on the live shows, and then the semis, and then the finale. And it was like *This is crazy! I cannot believe that America actually believes that I belong here.* You know?

**Eryn:** Hm.

**Kechi:** So it was really just a gift to kind of show me that my life doesn't have to be this one linear thing, you know? There're other options for me. What that show did was to give me a platform to build something more solid to put out there to the world — my message of hope and telling people through my life that there is life after trauma, literally living that life that I'm preaching about. I had a platform now where I could share that message with even more people than I could ever have imagined. And this was all because of the show, and I can say very confidently that this is something that God wanted me to experience. I don't know how long I'm going to be able to do it, how long I'm going to be able to continue sharing the message like this and for, you know, who all God wants to reach with this message. But I'm definitely enjoying the ride as it's going on, just more like enjoying what He's put into my life right now.



[Music]

**Elisa:** We hope that God continues to use Kechi to share her story and inspire all of those around her.

**Eryn:** I'm thankful we could have her with us to share her unrelenting faith and perseverance through an unbelievable experience.

**Elisa:** Before we close out today's episode of *God Hears Her*, we want to remind you that the show notes are available in the podcast description. You can also find a link for Kechi's book *More than My Scars*, plus you can connect with Eryn and me on social. You can find these links when you visit our website at [godhearsher.org](http://godhearsher.org). That's [godhearsher.o.r.g](http://godhearsher.org).

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

[Music]

**Elisa:** Today's episode was engineered by Anne Stevens and produced by Jade Gustman, Mary Jo Clark, and Daniel Ryan Day. We also want to recognize Melissa and Luanne for all of their help and support. Thanks everyone.

[ODB theme music]

**Eryn:** *God Hears Her* is a production of Our Daily Bread Ministries.