



God Hears Her Podcast

Episode 114 – God’s Heart For Justice with Jenn Petersen

Elisa Morgan, Eryn Eddy, and Jenn Petersen

[Music]

Jenn: God is doing the work. He is sovereign. Right? His heart is for shalom, which, I think, it was Topinka that said, you know, “that is the way things ... God intended them to be.” That’s His heart, and He invites us into the work when it’s broken. You know He...He invites us to come alongside Him to partner with Him in the making of making things right.

[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*.

Eryn: Welcome to *God Hears Her*. I’m Eryn Eddy.

Elisa: And I’m Elisa Morgan. In Deuteronomy chapter 32, verse 4, God is labeled as “just and upright.” With all the terrible things that happen in the world, we can tend to feel hopeless at the lack of justice and peace.

Eryn: Today’s guest provides hope in the work she does to bring justice to people who may experience hopelessness and pain in their day-to-day situations. Jenn Petersen is the Director of Mobilization for the International Justice Mission. You may have heard it as the acronym IJM. She works with people, churches, and organizations to share God’s heart for justice as she and IJM work to bring an end to slavery and fix broken systems that prevent women, men, and children from living in the freedom and dignity that God intends for us all.

Elisa: Jenn and IJM are incredible! We can’t wait to learn more about her and about her work with the organization on this episode of *God Hears Her*.



Jenn: I first really felt God break my heart for the world back in 2006. I was already in full-time ministry and had been for a long time, but I had taken a group of young leaders to a conference in Atlanta, actually, and was sitting in this stadium packed with people and heard a gentleman named Gary Haugen speak. And Gary is the founder of International Justice Mission, with whom I work now. And he was just talking about the horrors of human trafficking. And at that point, I was just kind of, I guess, unaware of the problem around the world; but it was kind of in that moment when God just stopped me in the midst of where I was and kind of did that little shoulder tap of, you know, *I want you to pay attention right now.*

Eryn: Yeah.

Jenn: And I just know God kind of broke my heart in that moment, and it was almost as if He was saying, *Jenn, I want you to lean in right now because I have something for you to do in this.*

Elisa: Wow!

Jenn: And at that time, I was like, *What?* ... [laughter] ... cause IJM is made up of lawyers and social workers and, you know, advocates. And I was like *I don't feel like I'm any of those things.* At the time, I was a worship pastor. I was a songwriter, and I was like *Well, what can I do?* But it just was a reminder of "What is in your hand?" You know we go back to the story of Moses when he first encountered God in the burning bush. He was like *What...Who am I?*

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Jenn: ...like *Who am I to do this work?* And God said, "What's in your hand?" And he had a staff, and God was like *I can use that.*

Elisa: Wow!

Jenn: And I think...

Elisa: Yeah.

Jenn: ...that was a moment for me of going *What can you do, Jenn?* And I was like, *Well, I could write a song.* "I can use that." And that really opened a door for me to get involved in the work of justice around the world and traveled, then, to Cambodia a few years later, saw the work that IJM was doing there, and then several years later now I am in this role full time with IJM and getting to work to bring protection to



people in poverty who are experiencing violence around the world. And He just continues to break my heart for that, but also gives me hope in knowing I don't do this work alone. He is the One who's doing the work, and He invites us in to partner with Him in that. And He carries the weight of it all.

Eryn: That's beautiful. Did something happen in your heart as a younger girl to prepare you for what you are currently doing?

Jenn: So I grew up in an area so much like New York called "rural Iowa." [Laughter]

Elisa: Exactly! Exactly the same...

Jenn: Not the same at all!

Elisa: Yeah...

Jenn: Yeah.

Elisa: Yeah.

Jenn: No I... I grew up on a farm in Iowa and had really a beautiful, beautiful childhood where I was so clearly loved, so clearly safe. I grew up in a Christian home, in a Christian family. And, you know, God really did a beautiful work in my heart when I was in high school, and I kind of knew... Looking back, like I knew *Okay, God, You're calling me into ministry*. Didn't really know what that was at the time; but, looking back, I see how He was opening those doors for me to just obediently say yes. And I think, especially now in this work, as I hear the stories, I often just can contrast and go *Wow!* Like I was so secure in my upbringing and, again, I... a little bit unaware, I guess, but God has since just opened my eyes. And so I think what that did is it gave me this — I go back to that anchor — it gave me an anchor place to just know so firmly, *God, You're not going anywhere, and You've given me the tools, I think, and the... the skills. I mean I still feel inadequate all the time, but in order to use whatever voice You've given me in order to help others find their voice*. So I think that's part of what He's used my upbringing for.

Elisa: So you went into ministry...eh... feeling God's nudge. And what was that like? And what did you focus on? What did you do?

Jenn: Yeah, so I started in...in music ministry and worship ministry...



Eryn: Yeah. How did you discover your voice in that way?

Jenn: So I actually was always a singer, always played the piano too, play a little bit of guitar; but I was a voice major in college and...

Eryn: Wow, cool!

Jenn: ...at one point...

Elisa: Serious. Yeah.

Jenn: ... Serious. Was going to be an opera singer actually...

Elisa: [makes opera singing sounds]

Jenn: ...at one point...

Eryn: Yeah. Wow!

Jenn: Yeah, yeah, yeah. There you go...

Elisa: Love it, love it!

Jenn: ...There you go. But when I... I married my...my high school sweetheart in college, and he also felt a really strong call to ministry. So, really, while we were both in college, we knew, *Okay, God, we just want to say yes to You, whatever that looks like.* And so we actually, after college, ended up going on staff, both of us, at a church in the Dallas, Texas area. So we were there for about 17 years...um...

Elisa: Oh wow! Yeah.

Jenn: Yeah, yeah, a long time. Had both of our kids there. They were there till middle school, And then God really put on our hearts New York City. And, you know, we'd always loved the city. Again, being musicians and artists, you know, it was kind of this...this dream of *Oh, wouldn't it be great to one day live in the city.* And we were here one time, and God just really started nudging us toward church planting in the city, so we really started exploring that. Again, felt very inadequate, very like *Who are we, God?* But He's, you know, just that persistent *It's actually not about you. It's about Me* reminder. And so we said yes,



and so in 2015 we sold most of our stuff, packed up our bags and our two middle-school kids, at the time, and moved...

Eryn: Wow!

Jenn: ...into the city. And so we planted a church...

Eryn: That sounds so romantic...

Jenn: Yeah.

Eryn: ...too, in some ways...

Jenn: Doesn't it? Mm-hmm. Yeah. It sounds romantic until...

Eryn: Until...

Jenn: ...until you actually do it. And then that's when you go, *Wow God! I thought, you know, I knew what it was to live by faith in You.* And wow! You know it's just a whole new level, but His faithfulness is proven time and time and time again.

Elisa: I'm hearing echoes of Him carrying...

Eryn: [whispers] Yeah.

Elisa: ...things, you know, of Him...

Jenn: Yeah.

Elisa: ...It's His to carry, and so He gradually then... You've planted this church in New York City. And then how do you end up working with International Justice Mission, IJM, which is really about justice, you know? So how did God bring you into that? As you said, you're not a social worker or a lawyer?

Jenn: I first heard of IJM and really started getting involved as a supporter, as a donor, as an advocate, you know, back in 2006. And then when we moved to New York, one of the things we said right away was, "We want, you know, our church to be outward facing. We want to partner with organizations who



are doing incredible work, including justice around the world. And so, from day one we said, you know, “We want to partner with IJM.” This was when we had zero money as a church and really zero people. We said, “This...we want this to be part of our DNA.” And so right after I had moved to the city, I met someone who was on staff with IJM, and so we became friends and just knew we had a passion for the work of IJM. And so, when the role that I’m in came available, he actually reached out to me and said, “Hey, you know, I think you should consider...”

Elisa: Mmm.

Jenn: ... I don’t want to mess up your life, but I think you should consider this role.” And I just looked at it, and I said, “Wow!” You know, again, it’s kind of like God just opening those doors and discerning *I... I think You’re in this*. But really brought my passion for just serving the church and serving the city where I live and serving others in the...in the work of justice around the world. So it was a beautiful marriage of sorts, I guess.

Elisa: It’s a powerful thing to envision and then be a part of creating a church that has its arrows pointed outward. You know we...we tend to point all of our arrows inward. And...and it’s important. I mean we all need to belong, we need to have a safe place, we need to grow and be disciplined, but to also be a church with arrows pointed outward. Tell us about IJM. You know how does it help people? An...and then what’s your role specifically?

Jenn: Yeah. Yeah. So IJM is a global organization that works to bring protection to people in poverty from violence.

Elisa: So they’re in poverty as a result of violence?

Jenn: Yeah, that’s right, because people in poverty are disproportionately affected by violence. It’s kind of the root of so many issues. And we’re really, again, made up ...eh... We have a lot of lawyers, social workers who are on the ground, on the field, who are serving people all around the world. We have 24 program offices in 14 countries...

Elisa: Wow!

Jenn: ...around the world. And we really work in three major buckets. So we work in the area of slavery, and that includes sex trafficking. That includes the online sexual exploitation of children. It includes forced labor slavery. That’s the first buck is slavery. The second would be violence against women and children.



So, you know, wherever that's happening, we're coming alongside not only the victims in those situations but coming alongside the local justice systems to make that right.

Elisa: And is this mainly domestic violence against women and children? Or is it...

Jenn: Yeah, yeah.

Elisa: ...slavery, I guess, too.

Jenn: Yeah, yeah...

Elisa: ...It leaks into that? Okay.

Jenn: Yeah, both...

Elisa: Okay.

Jenn: ...And then the third bucket is police abuse of power. So we see this primarily in...in Kenya is where we do this work, where there's just such...such prevalence of abuse of power. And so we come alongside those who are suffering from that.

Elisa: And your role, Jenn...

Jenn: In my role...

Elisa: ...what...what do you do? Yeah.

Jenn: So I am the Director of Mobilization for New York City. So my job really is to help paint the picture of how New York City can get involved in bringing an end to slavery, bringing an end to violence against people in poverty all over the world. And so, in whatever domains that would be, so that could be the church. That could be the business sector. That could be in the fashion industry. That could be in the arts. You know so many domains of society, and I think people want to make a difference. People want to care, and people have a heart that God has put in all of us — right — as we are created in His image, to make a difference in the world. And so I get the huge privilege of coming in front of...of the city and just saying, "This is how you can partner with us and get involved in those...this work of justice."



Eryn: Wow! You know what's just so amazing about your story, Jenn, is you... When you were in Texas, you had this tug that you and your husband needed to move to New York. And you thought it was going to be one thing, and then God makes it one thing and then another thing...

Jenn: Yeah.

Eryn: ...And isn't that how God works in our story...

Jenn: Yeah.

Eryn: ...is that sometimes He uses a seed to be a catalyst to something else that He's doing in our life? And I just think that's so beautiful how you felt the tug in Texas to move to New York, and now what you're doing specifically for New York in raising awareness...

Jenn: Yeah.

Eryn: ...and telling the story of what IJM is doing. That's just really beautiful.

Jenn: Yeah, you know, following Jesus is such a wild adventure, isn't it? Like...like you...you just never know...

Elisa: Yeah.

Jenn: ...where He's going to lead you. And yet His will is always the best, and it's never necessarily easy, but it's always the best. And so I'm just overjoyed at the fact that, you know, we just get to say yes to Him continually.

Elisa: Why do you think justice — this particular cause — is so near to God's heart?

Jenn: Mm. You know we see it all through Scripture, don't we? It's kind of one of those things that once He opens your eyes to Scripture, you can't unsee it. You can't unsee how much He cares about justice. I heard it said one time that if you were to take all of...all of the sin mentioned in the Bible, and you were to put them in piles. So probably the largest pile would be that of idolatry. The second largest, right up there, would be injustice...

Elisa: Hm.



Eryn: Wow.

Jenn: ...Like injustice breaks God's heart. And so...

Elisa: Hm.

Jenn: ...one thing. I had a seminary professor one time, you know, say, "When you're...when you're studying Scripture, make sure you look at the verbs, cause the verbs are very poignant." And so, when we look at so many passages that talk about God's heart for justice, like Isaiah 1:17 says, "Learn to do right, seek justice, defend the oppressed, take up the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow." You know, or Micah 6:8, "Do justice, love mercy, walk humbly." Like there is this action involved that, again, God is doing the work. He is sovereign. Right? His heart is for shalom, which, I think, it was Topinka that said, you know, "that is the way things ... God intended them to be." That's His heart, and He invites us into the work when it's broken. You know He...He invites us to come alongside Him to partner with Him in the making of making things right. So, yeah, I think about that a lot. And I had a mentor, one time, say this, and it really stuck with me. But he was looking at the passage in Mark about when someone... the teacher of the law comes to Him in Mark 12 and says, you know, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" And so, first, Jesus gives him the *Shema*, right? "Hear, O Israel, The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your god with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." And I had a mentor friend say one time, you know, "Some of us are wired to love the Lord with all of our heart." Like we're like *Give me all the worship songs, like let me sing at the top of my lungs! Let me raise my hands, like, that's gonna get me going!* Others, you know, "love the LORD with all your soul," like contemplative, probably reading a lot of Henri Nouwen, you know. *Just let me meditate on this small verse of Scripture...*

Elisa: Yep, yeah.

Jenn: "With all your mind," right? Some are wired to just study the Word...

Eryn: Yeah.

Jenn: ...and like that is...that is where this connection with the Lord comes in. And then some "love the LORD with all your strength." What does that look like? Maybe for some that's like showing up when it's a church workday, and they're like *I will fix anything. Give me a hammer, whatever...*



Eryn: Yeah.

Jenn...But I think sometimes, too, like, you know, when you are wired in a way that I just go... [music starts here] ... *God, I need to...I need to serve those who are less fortunate. I need to serve those who are oppressed. I need to do the work of justice.* Like that might be part of how we're wired, but also in this passage, it says, "Love the LORD with all your heart *and* with all your soul *and* your mind *and* your strength." So there's a calling on all of us that we are to do these things – right – as a follower of Christ, to be a holistic follower of Christ. Like there's a piece of us that is...that is designed, that is created to come alongside those who are experiencing injustice...

Eryn: Yeah.

Jenn: ...and to say, *God, I'm with You in...in bringing this to right.*

[Theme Music]

Eryn: When we come back, Jenn will answer how we can make a difference and fight injustice right where we are.

Elisa: But first we want to give a quick shoutout to the International Justice Mission. Be sure to check out the link in our show notes to learn more about their organization, the work they do, and the stories of the people that they have helped. Their mission is really incredible.

Eryn: Thanks, Elisa. Now let's rejoin Jenn on this episode of *God Hears Her*.

Elisa: Can you bring it down to all of us who are so busy? We're moms, some of us are wives, some of us are working, some of us are grandmas, some of us are, you know, caregiving. Oh, all of this, you know...

Jenn: Yeah.

Elisa: ... How can we be involved in the cause of justice in our world and make a difference? Because every week has its own tragedy it seems, you know, every single one.

Jenn: Yeah, that's a great question. And I love how, you know, the mission of this podcast is to meet people in the beautiful and the messy, because that is life. That is where we live in this now-but-not-yet



world. And I would say, you know, for me, what I have found is when I know, when I feel that tug on my heart, and I know God is breaking my heart just to ask that question, like *God, what...what can I do about this today?* Whatever that issue is that's breaking your heart — *God, what is in my hand?* If you're a grandma, maybe that's just: Can you sit down eye-to-eye with your grandchild and tell them, "I love you. I love you no matter what. Like you might've had a really hard day, but I want you to walk out of this space and know that you are so loved, and nothing changes that." So what's in *my* hand? And then, going from there, just saying, you know, *Who can I partner with?* I think that's a big part of it, too, is going *I don't have to do this alone*. There are other people. There are other organizations. There are other groups that actually can expand my influence, and I can be a part of something that's even bigger than myself. And that is one thing with IJM. We do have ... If people are...are interested in going *Well, how, you know ... my heart is broken for human trafficking, or for those who are experiencing violence...* If you have means to donate, you can donate. We have monthly freedom partners where every month it's that consistent giving, and it's going toward the urgent-need items that we have. You can pray... uh... you know, obviously, like prayer is such a huge part of the work that we do. In fact, we say that we are a community of spiritual formation that does the work of justice. That is first and foremost, that we go *God, we need to come before You regularly and frequently*, because, again, it's too much for us. It's too much for us on our own to carry the...the really hard stories, to witness the evil that we see in the world. We need to be reminded so frequently to bring it so people can pray. I mean that is real work that is being done. And then wherever you're listening to this, there's probably a group of IJM volunteers somewhere nearby that you can get involved with that are advocating. We actually train people in how to talk with your senators and your representatives in advocating on behalf of those who are experiencing human trafficking around the world. There are ways that you can get involved in your community, whether it's through... We do a 5K every year called "Race to Rescue," or even just hosting things in your home and sharing about it, you know, in Bible studies. There are so many ways that people can come together to really do the work of justice around the world.

Eryn: I love that. I spoke at a women's entrepreneurial conference in California called "The Yellow Conference" years ago, and IJM was involved in some factor. I don't know how. That's how I first learned about the organization. But I love that you said pray, because I think we discredit the power sometimes of that. When the thing that our heart is breaking for feels overwhelming, and our prayer can feel so small. I would love for you to just share: What are the types of prayers that somebody could specifically pray?

Elisa: That's good, Eryn. Mm-hmm.

Eryn: ...Because when you do get to that moment with the Lord, and you want to pray, cause your...



Elisa: It feels too big...

Eryn: ...heart is broken...

Elisa: ...yeah...

Eryn: ...It feels too big...

Elisa: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

Eryn: ...So you're like: *What do I specifically pray for?* What would you share?

Jenn: Ooh, that's a great question. And, you know, there's no right way or wrong way to pray, especially when those issues are so big. In fact, I was just reading this morning something that reminded me that there is an intercession of tears...

Elisa: Really. Wow...

Jenn: ...Sometimes our tears...

Elisa: Yeah. Yeah.

Jenn: ...are actually intercession when God does break our hearts. So that counts as well, you know? The Spirit understands. The Spirit intercedes on our behalf even through those tears and through our groanings. But I would say, you know, it... There's so many ways to pray. Pray for the victims, those who are still enslaved, for those who every day wake up and experience the horrors of violence that we just can't even... I mean I... you know some of us can comprehend that, right, cause some of us have walked through that. But praying for those that don't see the end in sight, but just that they would experience rescue, that they would know that God is near, and He sees them, and He cares so deeply for them. And He is weeping with them right where they are. So I would say, you know, pray for the victims. I would say pray for those who have ... the survivors, those who have been rescued, for those who now are walking that road – that long road of restoration and healing from trauma; because, you know, they need it. Pray for those who are giving the restoration work, for the social workers, for the counselors. They have a heavy weight on their shoulders. You know they're caring day in and day out as they're hearing these stories. And even to back up, I would say pray for, you know, those investigators and those who are on the ground doing the work...



Elisa: And that discerning...

Jenn: Yeah...

Elisa: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

Jenn: ...I mean, again, just the heaviness that they carry, you know, the joy that they experience when things go well, and the deep pain when it doesn't. That's a real thing, you know, when rescue operations go awry, like that's tough to bear. And then I would say, too, pray for the justice systems. Pray for those lawyers, for the police officers, for those who are working to make the systems right and make the systems that are broken fixed so that they are working the way that they're intended to, that they would actually bring protection to the people that they are supposed to be protecting. I would say one more prayer for the survivors, because we're seeing this beautiful movement right now of survivor leaders who are stepping into this space as advocates. And there is nothing more powerful than a survivor voice who is stepping up and say: "This is where I stand now..."

Elisa: Yeah.

Jenn: ...And I'm going to use my voice. I'm going to use the rest of my life to ensure that no one else has to experience what I experienced...

Elisa: Jenn, on...on that note, could you share with us a story of maybe someone you've worked with or you know of through IJM who is that kind of a survivor?

Jenn: Yeah, yeah. There's a girl. Her pseudonym is Cassie, and she is from the Philippines. And when Cassie was 12 years old, she grew up in a remote village in the Philippines where they...they didn't have electricity. No currency, and so, you know, her family was a...in extreme poverty. And so a family friend came, promised to bring her to Manila, to the capital city, to give her an education. Of course, the family said, "That sounds great!" Right? Like this is...this is a way out for our daughter and a way that she can provide for our family, so she went with the man to Manila. Ended up that he was running an online sex trafficking ring. And so for several years, Cassie, along with several others, were trapped in a home — just unthinkable, unthinkable evil! Finally, there was rescue, and so our IJM teams were able to go in alongside the local police, and they were able to bring rescue to Cassie and the rest of these children. And Cassie now lives in a...an aftercare home. She's a dancer, like incredibly beautiful dancer. Has dreams of working in the hospitality industry in the future, serving people; but she uses her voice on



behalf of others. And she said, “You know what? I will use my voice from here on out to advocate, to make sure that no one else has to live that life, that nightmare that I lived through.” And there is now actually a group of survivors, called the Global Survivor Network, that works together, that advocates, that speaks to governments that ...um... really are the frontline voices in this work of justice and advocacy and are bringing change to the world. And I think that’s the future...

Elisa: Yeah.

Jenn: ...I really do. Isn’t it amazing how God takes the...the messiest parts, and He can make them the most beautiful, unexpected, redeemed ministry aspects of our lives?

Elisa: One thing you said, Jenn, is that when you look at Scriptures about justice, you’re so attracted to the verbs. And I just wonder if we could each pull out a verb that God’s gonna lay on our hearts right now, in terms of what we can carry forward from this conversation?

Jenn: Mm.

Elisa: ...Because we do feel helpless, and yet we serve a God who — when we look back, as Eryn says — shows us where He’s been present, even in the ugly. I’ll go first. The one that I’m pulling out is “have mercy. Lord, have mercy.”

Jenn: For me, I think about in Luke 4 when Jesus was quoting Isaiah, and He said, you know, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me to proclaim...” I think that’s part of it is we proclaim, using my voice on behalf of others.

Eryn: I think about permission to grieve, not move past to solution, cause I think that there’s something holy in mourning, in grieving with the Lord. When something heavy that you observed that’s broken your heart, you don’t know what to do, I think lamenting.

[Theme music]

Elisa: I love that, Eryn. God’s heart is truly for justice. We can pray, wherever we are, for the things that break our hearts. And we can trust that the Lord grieves with us.

Eryn: Yes, Elisa! I’m so thankful for the insight that Jenn could share with us and for the work that she does. Well, before we go, we want to remind you that the show notes are available in the podcast



description. There you can also find a link for IJM's website. Find all of this and more when you visit our website at godhearsher.org. That's godhearsher.o.r.g.

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

[Music]

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

[ODB theme]

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