



# God Hears Her Podcast

## Episode 128 – Discover Your Passion

### Elisa Morgan & Eryn Eddy-Adkins with Chanel Dokun

[Music]

**Chanel:** All I needed to do to kind of save myself was to actually stand up. And I kind of use that as a bit of a metaphor for the work that I do now of part of how we get unstuck, part of how we kind of come back to life is by standing up in the truth of who we are. Like reclaiming our identity, owning what our purpose is, and getting back into our own skin.

[Music]

**Voice:** 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-Adkins. Today we are speaking with a friend of mine, Chanel Dokun, about what it looks like to pursue our purpose even when we feel like we may have lost it in the busyness of folding laundry, washing dishes, or working at a job that was never our dream.

**Elisa:** Chanel is a certified life planner and relationship expert. She specializes in helping women step into their life's true calling, and she now splits her time between New York City and Atlanta with her family.

**Eryn:** Let's learn how to pursue our passion with Chanel Dokun in this conversation on *God Hears Her*.

**Chanel:** I am physically located in Atlanta...

**Eryn:** Yeah, you are! My city! Yeah!

**Chanel:** Yeah. Hot-lanta. It's not quite hot today, but... I love being here, and then I... I go between Atlanta and New York City.



**Elisa:** Gosh, that's quite a combination. And why do you do that?

**Chanel:** Yeah. So... Well, we own, the "we" that I'm referring to is my husband and I. My husband's a psychiatrist, and so we own a therapy practice in New York City called Healthy Minds NYC, and we want to hold on to that, but we also have this weird passion and fascination with Atlanta. For a long time, my prayer in New York has been the prayer of what our church was, which is, you know, to join God in the renewal of all things, join God in the renewal of the city, and to pay attention to where He's moving, and what's happening, and what's the redemptive edge of His work right now. And New York is certainly a place where that's happening in every industry and every neighborhood, and Atlanta feels like there's something going on, and so, we wanted to be here and wanted to be a part of it.

**Elisa:** So, tell us a little bit about how you grew up. What was your early life like. What is place to you, and what is footing like for you?

**Chanel:** Yeah, place, that's a good... that's a good way to say that. Place is everything, right? I grew up in California, and I would say that my place was always on the outside, it felt at least. I felt like I was someone who was always on the margins looking into the life that I wanted... I grew up in a fairly affluent area, lacked a lot of diversity. We were in southern California in Orange County, and the listeners can't see, but I am a... still fairly young African American woman. And being in that space, I felt like I didn't fit, and I felt that unsteadiness, and I felt like I was often, kind of, trying to hop from rock to rock. Now I'm in a different place.

**Eryn:** Tell us about your upbringing. Are you... Did you have any siblings? Tell us about your parents. I love... how you share your mother's story, and that's really part of why you do what you do. And so, maybe take us back to, like, little-girl Chanel, and then maybe go into sharing about your mom and her imprint that she made on your heart.

**Chanel:** Yeah. So, I grew up as the baby girl in a family of three kids. My brothers were all ten years apart. My mom used to joke that she forgot how she got us [laughter], so she's like *and ten years later there was another one, and I thought oh, I did that thing again.* [Laughter.] So...

**Eryn:** That thing again...

**Chanel:** So, I was the baby girl, which meant I was the princess, and loved and adored by my family... But it was also really a difficult time. I felt really alone a lot of my childhood... because my parents were much older. My dad was fifty, my mom was thirty-nine when they had me, and so, they were kind of done



raising kids. And my mother, in particular. So, my mom is the oldest of eleven children, and... my dad, by the way, is the oldest of eighteen, so...

**Elisa:** Good grief.

**Eryn:** Wow.

**Chanel:** ... let me tell you, sick of kids. Sick of children.

**Elisa:** They rose kids... raised kids their whole lives, yeah.

**Eryn:** Lots of uncles and aunts, it's amazing.

**Chanel:** Yes. And so, my mom, by the time she had me I think she was a little done and a little worn out. But I remember just having a very close relationship with her, and I think because we were the only girls, we spent a ton of time together. She doted on me. We loved spending time reading, that was our passion, and so, a lot of what I do, as Eryn mentioned, is rooted in the time that I spent with my mom. I have this really distinct memory of being in a bookstore with her, where she used to take me as, like, a little treat for doing well in school or whatever it was, and I remember walking through the stacks with her and she said, at some point, you know, *Chanel, what do you want to be when you grow up, or who do you want to be?* And I was so excited by all the books, and I thought *oh, I want to be an author. Like, absolutely, I want to be a writer.* Right? And she... kind of smiled at me as the way that, you know, parents do, and then her eyes started to glaze over. And she disappeared, and I kind of was like *what?* And I remember tugging on the hem of her dress, and kind of going *mom, you know, where'd you go? What happened?* And she... got really quiet and said *that's so great that you know who you want to be. I never knew who I wanted to be.*

**Elisa:** Oh my.

**Chanel:** And she said *no one ever asked me.* And she's like *I just kept raising kids,* cause she was the oldest of all these eleven children. She raised her brother and sisters with a single mom, single grandmother, and she said *I thought that if I just kept doing what I was supposed to do, eventually it would be my turn.* And her turn never came. My mom passed away about ten years ago, and so, I think her life was wonderful, and beautiful, and meaningful, but she never got to experience that.



**Elisa:** Oh, Chanel, that's heartbreaking for her. And yet I'm also really pausing at your self-awareness and your inter-personal awareness to hear that and pick that up. How old were you again?

**Chanel:** Yeah. I was probably like seven...

**Elisa:** Good grief.

**Eryn:** Wow. Yeah.

**Chanel:** ... or eight years old at that time

**Elisa:** That's beautiful, what you noticed. I bet in that moment, she felt really seen. Maybe she couldn't express it... maybe she was so shocked, but I bet she felt really seen.

**Chanel:** You know, it's actually funny that you say that, because I think I work with women so often in helping them figure out their purpose, right? What's your vocation, and career, and... all the other parts of your life. Just, how do you live out your purpose in the whole of your life, and often women feel like they've never stumbled upon it. And I think I was doing it at seven or eight years old, right? I was already there, I was already asking those questions, I was already sensing the moment. And so, it's funny if you actually think back to who you were when you were little, I think there's little flickers of your purpose that have been there all along.

**Elisa:** So true.

**Eryn:** What did you say to yourself as a little girl when your mom shared that?

**Chanel:** Yeah. I remember thinking *I don't want that to be my story*. I mean, I didn't fully understand at that point how she got there, I just... could sense her heartbreak, and that that was a bad thing. And I knew that I never wanted to be in that space. I never wanted to get to a point in my life where I felt like I was waiting for my turn. And I wanted to take my turn. And... and not only for me, but it felt like for my mom. It felt like I almost owed it to her to pursue what I was passionate about because it felt like she'd kind of given up her life for me to be able to enjoy and flourish in mine. And so, I felt a real drive... from that moment to kind of step into whatever I was meant to do.

**Eryn:** Yeah, of course.



**Elisa:** How did your life unravel after that? You know, what would happen next for you? Or maybe ravel is a better way to put it.

**Chanel:** Well, I mean, I had a really traumatic, as many of us do, childhood in so many different ways. So, my parents separated, my life was really chaotic for a while, my mom ended up getting sick... My father passed away when I was fifteen; my mom got sick shortly after that. She lost my dad and my grandmother that same year, and it... I think it really broke her spirit in some way that manifest in a physical way. And so, she ended up kind of in a way checking out. I ended up having to take care of her, I was about sixteen years old at that point. And so, I spent, like, the rest of my teenage years really focused on being a caregiver for my mom, and my older brothers had their own struggles that they were managing so it kind of fell to me to do that. And I was so loved... this wonderful woman who was a part of my church who... ended up being a translator for a missions trip that I was on, and she kind of came alongside me, and just loved me, and supported me, and ended up ultimately taking me into her home so that I could finish high school and go off to college. And I just... I... I ended up kind of with that, you know, tunnel vision of *I need to find my purpose*, like *I need to find whatever success means for me*, *I... I need to make it happen*. And so, I ended up, you know, going off to school. Went to Bible college in LA, got a degree in English, and in psychology, and biblical studies. And that kind of took me on, you know, to fast forward, I guess that took me on my journey to New York City to work in publishing. So, it was a lot of... a lot of stress, I would say, for my childhood. A lot of wondering, like, how will things pan out, and feeling alone, but also feeling really solid in a way. Knowing that there was, like, this end point of I was eventually gonna kind of step into this purpose that I thought awaited me in some way.

**Eryn:** Did you grow up in a Christian household, or was that something you learned from the translator in your church? How did your faith play a part in your upbringing?

**Chanel:** So, my mom was definitely a woman of faith. She introduced me to God at a very young age. My father as well, but he was just a quieter man. He kind of did it through his actions, right? So, he had one little sign that he put up in our house that just said, "the family that prays together stays together." And he would make sure that I looked at often... My mom was the one who took us to church, she was the one who had Bible studies for us, and she invited me to sit at the table, which is a really strong memory I have is her meeting with pastors and having Bible studies at our home. And even though I was so young, she wanted me to be a part of it, and to read and study with them, and ask questions...

**Eryn:** Wow.



**Chanel:** ... and so, my mom kind of inspired in me, I think that's how I ended up in Bible college, is that she said, you know, *God's not afraid of your questions, and it's okay to explore*. And so, she would read a lot, she would read about other religions a lot, she encouraged me to have a high level of tolerance for people with different beliefs because she said God's not threatened by that. And...

**Eryn:** Wow.

**Chanel:** ... and so, I just got this curiosity about faith from her.

**Eryn:** I would imagine that skill that you didn't know was developing within you, you use that now all the time with all of the women that you sit across from, to learn about...

**Chanel:** Yeah.

**Eryn:** ... their story, and their purpose, and...

**Elisa:** A curiosity, yeah.

**Eryn:** Yeah.

**Chanel:** Absolutely, yeah. And to not feel that anyone needs to be a particular way, right? It's like, I can hold onto myself and be okay in the face of someone being different than me. And to also have that, and it's very... very much a therapist thing, but to have a non-judgmental stance toward people... They can't move toward a place of health or healing if you are sitting there judging them, and berating them as they're, you know, being vulnerable with you.

**Elisa:** Amen.

**Chanel:** And so, I think my mom just kind of led me into the space of saying, like, it's okay. Let's just hear people. Let's get curious, let's learn about things, and that is the way I approach most of my work.

**Elisa:** I'm hearing... a thread, you know, as you're talking about helping women discover their calling, their purpose, their point on the planet, and yet you're... you're using the backdrop of your mom and this phrase *I saw her eyes glaze over*. That is... wow. That is really haunting me, that phrase *I saw her eyes glaze over*. I think so many women, and me at times, live in a perpetual state of glazed eyes. You know... stuck. Just, well, you know, that meaningful life is for everybody else. You know, I... I'm the one who's got



to go make the donuts, you know, kind of thing. And... and I'm struck, too, Chanel, by, in your own life, you lived through a season of your own eyes nearly glazing over where you were a caregiver in a season when you should have been flourishing, and... and yet you came out of it... Can... Can you talk about that... that stuck-ness, that glazed over-ness that happens in so many of our lives, and... and how you were able to navigate it?

**Chanel:** Yeah. I call that feeling, this feeling of drowning in shallow water. Right? It's this space where it seems like everything's okay from the outside looking in, but you're experiencing this extreme disconnection from who you are, and you feel lost, and you feel like you can't get your head above water. And certainly, your eyes being glazed over is part of that. And, I don't know, I mean, I think that I have certainly learned, I kind of tell this anecdote of the feeling like I was... I was at a water park and how I was actually drowning in shallow water...

**Elisa:** Uh oh.

**Chanel:** ... but then realizing that all I needed to do to kind of save myself was to actually stand up. And I kind of use that as a bit of a metaphor for the work that I do now of part of how we get unstuck, part of how we kind of come back to life is by standing up in the truth of who we are. Like reclaiming our identity, owning what our purpose is, and getting back into our own skin. For me, you know, I have this strong memory of when I was a teenager, and I remember it was, like, at the height of my mom being sick. I had just dealt with... some, you know, friendship drama, as you do when you're sixteen, and I remember feeling so incredibly alone, and kind of that eyes glazed over feeling for me of *things will never be different. I am stuck in this life, and this is all I can expect.* And I remember walking up a hill, and I really felt, it was one of the... the only times that I have felt God speak almost audibly to me. And I remember He just said, like, *you are not alone. I am right here. You are okay.* And this idea of, like, *don't forget who you are.* Like, *you are My daughter. I am right here.* And that truth has kind of sat with me, of... my identity, despite the circumstances that I am dealing with... my identity doesn't change, that doesn't go away. And I can still hold on to that, and that kind of keeps me afloat.

**Eryn:** That's so beautiful. What would you say in the years of working with women? Is there a common thread or denominator that attributes to our struggle with wrestling with believing that we have worth, and that we can land on a firm foundation, just trusting God's in the circumstance?

**Chanel:** I would say it's noise. Right? There's just so much noise. And whether that be, like, the actual audible, literal noise that's around us, all the time of all our devices are dinging and pinging at us all the time, or if it's just more of this figurative noise that we're dealing with. And more so now, as we have



things like, you know... social media and all of that. Well, we're constantly connected, and we're constantly being presented with an idea of flourishing that is not unique to us. And so, we lose sight of ourselves because we're being presented with somebody else's great life. Right? And, you know, your great life is not my great life. As amazing as it is, all the things that God has in store for you are not the things that He has for me...

**Eryn:** Yeah.

**Chanel:** ... And so, I think that's what gets us off track, is that we start to believe that our lives need to conform to something else, and we start to twist, and shape shift, and conform ourselves to be something we were never meant to be.

**Eryn:** That's a good word.

**Elisa:** Kind of like the whole comparison thing?

**Chanel:** Yeah. I think comparison, for sure, and I think an internalization of a standard that isn't real. Right? It's... it's not even the pure comparison, it's... it's... this idea of I believe that my worth is associated with these particular things, by what my job is, or, you know, the people that are in my life, or the stuff that I have. We start to lean into these lies and we start to believe that that's what our life is about. And then we forget, like, oh, I was made for something else.

**Eryn:** Yeah. I mean, I identify with that... things are constantly changing, and I'm recognizing more and more how I can't control certain stuff. It is so important for me to identify or become aware of my inner talk towards myself and how I'm bringing God along the journey. Cause I can start operating out of my own strength, and then that makes me extremely exhausted and drained. And then also very confused on how I view myself, or my purpose, or... and I will spiral. Can you... Can you talk about spiraling? Because I don't think I'm alone in that spiral...

**Elisa:** No, you're not alone.

**Eryn:** ... roller coaster that I can get on.

**Chanel:** Yes. Well, you are absolutely not alone. And it's funny, that phrase of, like, *I'm spiraling*. I was like, *I think I said that in a text message yesterday with my friend*, so I don't know if I'm the best... expert at this, but yeah. You're not alone. I think that it is, it's like we so quickly start to move off... get off track,





right, and to lose sight of ourselves, because we're stuck in this whirlwind of a life that's not our own. And we're kind of going, like, what is all this stuff that's occupying my time, and my energy, and everything is unfamiliar, and it's exhausting. And so, yeah, you're not alone in that. But I think it's... it's the call for us is, like, to get back to a place of quiet. And how do I start to remove these things that no longer fit with who I am, and actually just kind of edit my life to the purest form of who I am.

**Elisa:** So, for a woman who's, let's say, in the thick of life... You know, she's... she's parenting, she's working, she may or may not be married, she's juggling, she's running, she's got so much going on, maybe she's in her dream job maybe she's not, most likely she's not. And she's listening and she feels something's off inside. She's always known it. But there's another load of wash to be done, and there's nothing in the fridge to make for dinner, and, you know, the dog hasn't been walked, and etcetera. What can she do to access more vitality, more meaning, right where she is, you know, living in that... that place of caregiving which you went through so early, while still living, while not caving, and settling in the stuckness?

**Chanel:** Whooo, okay, well, so, let me give you two suggestions. One is, I'll give as a really practical one, I'll come back to that. But one is something that's a little bit more abstract, but I think is actually the more critical one, okay?

**Elisa:** Okay.

**Chanel:** So, I am in this very space. You describe this, as I was a caregiver when I was younger, but I am now the mother of two. I just had a little baby girl, so I have an infant...

**Elisa:** Ohhh.

**Chanel:** ... I am that woman who is running all over the place, doing her dream job, but has a thousand and one things on my plate, and so I'll tell you, actually, the action that I'm taking...

**Elisa:** Good, good. This is awesome.

**Eryn:** Yes, we love practicality.

**Chanel:** ... this week... So, what I'm doing is actually doing what I write about in the book, which is to have the courage to be nobody. Which is, for a moment, you have to let go of everything. For a moment, you have to kind of suspend all of the effort and the activity to pause and say *I've gotta get back to who I*



*am*, because you cannot continue to try to just, like, juggle or, you know, keep all the plates spinning and get perspective. Those things can't happen simultaneously. So, at some point you have to find some way to get quiet. You have to find some way to silence everything. And to accept that I am not gonna live up to whatever the standard is that I've either created in my mind or that other people are expecting of me. I can be a, you know, quote unquote nobody for a little while. I don't have to chase after significance, I can actually pursue a more meaningful life of consequence, and I'm gonna do that... kind of courageously by retreating. So, that's the first thing. And then, a very practical way, which is, like, okay how do I do that? And I'm like, how do I retreat? What can I do? Is what I call my reclaim-the-morning practice. And so, I think it's great if you can do this on a grander scale of get away, go on a sabbatical, do whatever you need to do, but one way that you can do it every single morning is just to wake up and to spend the first part of your day in your own voice, where you're getting really honest, you're silencing everything and everyone else, and allowing yourself to have that little bit of quiet, just you and God, to say, like, *who am I? What matters to me? What am I about? What are the things that are on my heart? What are the things I haven't gotten to that I would long to do?* And to actually allow yourself space, just to write that out every single day, to kind of marinate in that space. And eventually, you get better at hearing your own voice. You get better at being able to discern *oh, this is what I want* versus what the world is telling me. I'm actually not satisfied with that thing that keeps getting presented to me. Or this is the area of my life that is most draining for me, and I haven't been able to see it, now it's really clear that I need to do something about it, because I complained about it in my journal for maybe three or four months, let's finally make some action, right? So, that's a real practical step.

**Elisa:** I love those. I would imagine, I'm trying to do this first person, as we start writing those things down, we can get stuck, though. We can go *oh, but I should be grateful that I actually get to have a job, or I should be grateful that I get to spend time with my kids, cause a lot of moms aren't able to, or I should be...* and so we diss our introspection, we diss our discoveries. We push them aside and say *grow up, big girl, put your, you know, big girl panties on, let's get going back at it.* So... so, what do we... tell ourselves then? How do we access moving past that then?

**Chanel:** When you sense that should... Actually, I like to go back to getting curious, right?

**Elisa:** Yeah, I love that.

**Chanel:** ... If I think that I should feel a particular way, but I don't, huh. I'm curious about that. Why don't I feel more grateful? Why don't I feel more satisfied? What's going on? And so, rather than using that moment, I think the should language is a judgment that you place on yourself that leads to nowhere...



**Elisa:** Crams you down, yeah.

**Chanel:** ... it just leads to condemnation, right?

**Eryn:** Yeah.

**Chanel:** There's no action to take from that. A curious posture, then, actually opens up to possibilities, so I can start to go oh, okay, there's maybe something going on here. Maybe I should quote unquote be grateful for, you know, the job that I have, because it provides for my family, but I'm not. And I feel like it's sucking out, you know, the life in me every single day. Why? What's happening? Why isn't this job more meaningful to me? And so, then that leads me into a more helpful conversation where I might actually be able to do something about it.

**Elisa:** So helpful.

**Eryn:** That's good.

**Elisa:** I love the idea of being curious. It's so respectful.

**Eryn:** It goes back to, you know, honoring your feelings, but valuing... valuing ourselves, valuing our feelings. You know, there's a quote that I love that you shared a while back, Chanel, and it was, "When we devalue women's talents, we miss the full extent of God's movement throughout the world..."

**Chanel:** Yeah.

**Eryn:** ... and when I read that, I thought *I... devalue my own talents*.

**Chanel:** I love that you actually turn that inward. Because I think sometimes when I say that, part of that is a rallying cry for women to say, like, don't let the world keep us from...

**Elisa:** Right.

**Chanel:** ... you know, living out, and demonstrating, and displaying our talents, right? But the reality is that we are often the people that most hide them. It's not that the rest of the world is not willing to see them or honor them...



**Eryn:** Yes.

**Chanel:** ... but we're already the people that have counted ourselves out before it even got started. So, I love that you just are, like, *oh, I devalue my own talents. I'm the one who's putting the lid on that...*

**Elisa:** Yeah, let's turn it inward. And you know, Chanel, when I do that, I also go *ohhh, I think I sometimes devalue other women's contributions because it gives me a leg up*, you know kind of a thing...

**Chanel:** Yes.

**Elisa:** ... and we get into this competition, you know, *well, look at her she's all* [blowing a raspberry sound] *you know, that* and that's [blowing a raspberry sound]... you know, judge, judge, judge. And the reality, and this is so important for all of us, you know, how am I holding myself back? And then how might I be holding my sister back? Because neither needs to happen for us all to thrive, right?

**Chanel:** It's so true. And women are, you know, our greatest allies in terms of when women are working together, when we lose that, like, sense of competition or comparison, I'm... we are so amazing together. I think we have, like, some of the greatest skill sets available to us in terms of how to best grow and move things forward. So, yeah, the world loses out on so much when we do that.

**Eryn:** Would you share with us something that is breaking your heart currently in the lives of women right now? Maybe it could have been something that you witnessed, or maybe it's a common thread that we've talked about earlier, and then maybe speak a truth over that heartbreak,

**Chanel:** I think the thing that makes me most discouraged, and it's probably the thing that undergirds most of my work, is the idea that women will look at themselves, and they see whatever is quirky, or unique, or different, as something to be controlled, managed, and... like, subdued. And they want to bring themselves into formation with the rest of the world, or with other women. And so, they spend so much energy feeling ashamed of their difference, when in fact, it's, like, the very thing that is most unique, most quirky, most different about you, is the most beautiful part of who you are, and is actually probably the thing that's gonna most set you apart and set you up for success in your life. And so, they kind of put themselves in this hamster wheel of never quite getting ahead in life, because just as they start to experience their difference, they, like, put the lid back on it. They're like *oh, no, no, no, don't do that. Go back to what everybody else is doing*. And so, that is the part that breaks my heart... I see so many women in, you know, our one-on-one sessions and things like that, where they leave, like, their best ideas on the table, the things that would totally help you that are listening right now, that would, like, radically



change your life, there are things that women have in mind for you that they won't do because they feel ashamed of something unique about themselves. And that really hurts me.

**Eryn:** So, what would be a... something that is, maybe, a charge or a truth to speak over?

**Chanel:** There is no one like you for a reason. Right? [Music] You are different for a reason. Thank God, literally, that you exist. Thank you for that part of you that is absolutely different, and quirky, and that doesn't fit, and that feels awkward. And thank you for the areas of your life where there is no clear path of how to move forward, because nobody's ever walked that path before. We haven't seen it before, because we've been waiting for you. So, please be who you are.

[Music]

**Elisa:** This is such a sweet message to encourage us just to be ourselves. God created each of us for a unique purpose.

**Eryn:** Well, before you go, we wanted to tell you to check out Chanel's book *Life Starts Now* for more on exploring your purpose. You can find a link for that and more on our website at [godhearsher.org](http://godhearsher.org). That's [godhearsher.org](http://godhearsher.org).

**Elisa:** And be sure to check out *Our Daily Bread's* new media hub. You can find video series and podcasts, including this one. Check it all out at [odbmedia.org](http://odbmedia.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 Sevens and produced by Jade Gustman and Mary Jo Clark. We also want to thank Kim and Linda for all their help and support. Thanks everyone.

[Music]

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