



God Hears Her Podcast

Episode 131 – Jesus Be My Peace

Elisa Morgan & Eryn Eddy-Adkins with Sharon Hodde Miller

[Music]

Sharon: I think for a lot of us, we think we can get away with control. We think *I know what's best for this situation. I know what's best for this person.* And so, if I can just get my way in this situation, if I can just force this person to make this choice that I think that they should make, or force my kids to behave, you know, the way that they should behave that it's all going to work out that in this instance, we're not really controlling, we're just doing what is right. And it's helped me to understand, no, this is a relationship that has been written into the blueprint of creation, is that whenever I reach for control to empower me or to fix a situation, I am not just reenacting Genesis 3, but also its consequences.

[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*.

Eryn: Welcome to *God Hears Her*. I'm Eryn Eddy-Adkins.

Elisa: And I'm Elisa Morgan. Do you consider yourself a controlling person? I don't think any of us want to give ourselves that label, but do you find yourself trying to control others or situations? Do you feel relieved when you're in control?

Eryn: Today's guest has personally seen the hurt that can happen when we try to take things into our own hands. Sharon Hodde Miller is one of the founders and lead pastors for Bright City Church. She also is an author that recently wrote *The Cost of Control* after seeing the harmful effects of people trying to control their situations during the pandemic.

Elisa: Join us as we learn about the cost of control from Sharon during this conversation on *God Hears Her*. What's the path that led you to where you are right now, in... into leading, into writing, in... in growing up... and into marriage, and into actually planting a church, Hodde girl. Yeah, Pastor Hodde... to talk... talk to us more about that.



Sharon: [Laughing] You are the first person who's ever said Pastor Hodde. Yeah, so, I'm in Durham, North Carolina. My husband and I planted Bright City Church about four and a half years ago. Prior to that, I had no aspirations of being a pastor. I had gone to seminary, I'd gotten a PhD from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, as well. But I came out of a context where I did not see women leading in that capacity very often, and so, it just was not really on my radar. I was writing for women, I was traveling and speaking to women, but when God gave my husband the call to plant the church, and it was literally, like, a vision in the middle of the night kind of a thing, like, it never happened before or since in our marriage. We are not people that God is constantly, like, speaking to us. This was like one big vision that God has given us in our marriage was to plant this church...

Elisa: Wow.

Sharon: ... And so, when we said yes, and we were trying to figure out what my role would be, I had just had our third child. She was eight months old when we launched, and then I was finishing my second book. And I was travelling and speaking, and so, I was pretty maxed out, and just didn't know how active of a leadership role I should take. But, my husband, to his credit, and this tells you a lot about him. The Raleigh-Durham area is one of the most highly educated areas in the country per capita, because we have Duke, UNC, NC State, and other colleges in the area, and so, per capita the, like, ratio of people with PhDs is one of the highest in the country. And so, women here are leading in every sector. They are professors. They are, you know, CEOs. They are doctors, we've got two major hospitals here. They're leading in every sector except for in the church. And so, my husband said *this is about stewardship. Like, you need to be modeling how does one use their leadership gifts as a woman, you know, for the kingdom of God.* And so, he was actually the one who really encouraged me to step into the position that I... I hold at our church. And so, that's kind of how it all came to be, but it was not, none of this... we did not want to plant a church, I did not plan to be a pastor, none of that if you'd asked me ten years ago.

Eryn: I would love to know what you thought your life was going to look like, or not look like.

Sharon: So, I went to Duke undergrad, I majored in religion, but as I was graduating was not really sure. I knew I was called to leadership and to ministry in some capacity, but again, I was part of a wonderful Southern Baptist church, but just didn't see... there was not, like, a very clear path forward. And so, I ended up, right after I graduated from college, moving back to Charlotte where I'm from, and I worked for Proverbs 31 Ministries. And back then, it was very, very small. There was, like, five of us on staff, and I was an intern. And for anyone listening who's not familiar, the president of Proverbs 31 is Lysa TerKeurst and so, I would travel with Lysa and kind of learn just the ropes of women's ministry. But one thing that I noticed was a big part of Lysa's ministry early on, and really still to this day, is her story. And this was



close to twenty years ago now. Back then, for a lot of women in ministry who were writing books, and were travelling and speaking, their story was their platform. And that was kind of where they derived their authority, which is wonderful, but my story is boring. [Laughter] And so, I was... looking at this, and I was going to all these different conferences and retreats and seeing Lysa share her story, and... and women respond and, just, be healed, and it was very emotional and powerful and wonderful. But, realized that was not gonna work for me then. I wasn't... that wasn't gonna be my path, and so, I was trying to figure out what my way forward was, and I... at some point just had the thought, well, for my brothers in Christ, when they feel called to ministry, they don't ask the question *but is my story good enough?* They just go to seminary. And so, that's what I did. Is I just decided *I want to go back and get more education.* I really love studying Scripture and theology, and so, I went to Duke Divinity School and then that is where I met my husband. And then, the funny story... of how we met is actually, it was not on campus, it was at a bar at a date auction.

Elisa: Oh my gosh!

Eryn: I love that! Tell me more about that!

Elisa: How... What is that? What is a date auction? Yeah.

Sharon: So, the graduate student government said *Duke Divinity School's part of the larger grad school at Duke*, and the graduate student government was having a charity event to raise money for a local organization. And so, they had this date auction, where they were auctioning off a certain number of men grad students and... and female grad students, and you would bid on them, and then you would win, like, a particular date with them. And so, I had a guy friend who was being auctioned off, and so I went with him just sort of, as, like, moral support. And then my husband, Ike, was also being auctioned off. And so, we met that night, and I did not bid on him, like that's where this...

Eryn: I was going to say, did you bid?

Sharon: ... yeah, that's where the story is, unfortunately, very boring, is I did not. He thought I did, actually, like, he thought he'd made a really strong impression on me, and so when he got off the stage he kind of walked straight to me thinking, like, I had bid on him and I had not. And I was actually at the time, he seemed weirdly comfortable on stage, like, being auctioned off. And so, I was kind of, like, this is not husband material. I kind of, like, made that assessment, so I did not leave that night thinking...

Elisa: He... He's the one.



Sharon: ... I've just met... yeah, I did not leave that night thinking, *I met my husband*. So, he actually I think did think, *I think this might be her*, and so, he started pursuing me and then, just, very slowly took me out on dates, like, once a week after that and kind of showed me who he was. But that's... that's how we met, and then... we got married, and then moved up to Chicago where we both did our PhDs at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and mine was looking at why evangelical women go to seminary, and... and really the question behind the question was, kind of, how do we steward the gifts of women in the church? Like, when a woman discerns her call to ministry, how do we encourage her to get training? And so, that was a really fun doctoral project, which not many people can say. We did that, and then we moved back to North Carolina, and then a few years later received the call to plant.

Elisa: You know... I'm fascinated by your PhD topic, but most recently, you have been attracted to, and I'm going back to your story here as I'm thinking about this, I'm digging around in what you've shared so far... a... a topic of control. And so, can you tell us how that topic became interesting to you, and how you began to think about it, and what do you think our issue would be with... with... with control?

Sharon: So, I first came to this topic, not surprisingly, because of the pandemic.

Elisa: Ah, okay.

Eryn: Okay.

Sharon: So, in the spring of 2020, when everything was shutting down, I was watching how the people in our church were responding, I was watching how people online were responding, and the one thing that was clear and troubling to me is that by and large, it did not... appear that Christians were drawing on the millennia of spiritual resources that have been passed down to us by Christians past. You know, the writers of Scripture, you know, the last two thousand years of church history. We have so many brothers and sisters in Christ who have drawn on, you know, prayer, and spiritual disciplines, and... and the Holy Spirit to walk through plagues, you know?

Elisa: Good, yes.

Eryn: Yes.

Sharon: ... To... to walk... walk through oppression, and... and persecution, and... and exile, and we are the heirs to those riches. And we were not drawing on those resources, we were taking all of our fears, all of our anxieties, to the internet. And that, to me, signaled a huge gap in discipleship. And the more I... I



just dug into it, I realize that part of the reason why we were doing this is people have been doing this forever. Like, ever since Adam and Eve, we reach for control to rescue us, or to, you know, alleviate our anxiety, to give us a sense of security. But what I also realized is... is part of the reason we're doing that, is we are being trained to do this. We are in this age of technology where we are promised increasing mastery over our world. And... and we're constantly, because of our, you know, our smartphones, we're taught you can predict, and you can prepare, and you don't have to be surprised. And that we are more and more, you know, sovereign over this world, and the exchange for that is that we are less prepared to actually live in the actual world. And so, all of that to say, I was really processing what this revealed about the state of discipleship, and it made me realize I wanted to go deeper into it.

Elisa: So, what did you discover in terms of, you know, here's this epic challenge that made the universe incredibly anxious, and did you find a relationship between that anxiety and then our desire to control, and our lack of stewarding the lessons from the past.

Sharon: Well, one of the things that I learned, and we see this in Genesis 3, you know, Adam and Eve, they have everything essential to flourish. They have peace, they have unity, they have influence, they have power in the garden, they're just not totally in control. And when they buck against that one single boundary by reaching and... and eating from the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, we are reenacting that moment every single time we reach for more power than God has actually allowed us. But what we see immediately after that moment is that Adam and Eve are afraid because they are naked. And we assume that this is about shame. That... that this is the first moment of shame, and I think that that is true, but that's not what it says. It says that he is afraid because he is naked, not embarrassed, not humiliated, not ashamed, afraid. So, there's anxiety there for the first time. And, you know, we don't know all that was going on in the hearts of Adam and Eve in that moment, but I suspect that what was happening in that moment is that Adam realized he had gotten what he wanted. And the best analogy I can give to describe what I mean by that is my ten-year-old has this fantasy of me having twelve children...

Elisa: His fantasy.

Sharon: ... and whenever, yeah. And whenever I say, like, *why do you want twelve children?* He says, *well, because then the kids can take over.* And he said this to me multiple times, and so finally one day I thought, *you know what, I'm going to play along.* And so, I said, *okay, you know, if you want to be in charge, I can leave. Like, I need to go to Target, and so, I'm going to leave you in charge, and you can watch your brother and sister and then you'll be in charge.* And I'm straight-faced. You know, I'm not



letting on that I'm kidding, and he, at first, he laughs, but then he sees that I'm not laughing, and so his laughter shifts into terror....

Elisa: Yeah.

Sharon: ... and I'm like, *okay, well, I'm going now*, and he's, like, *no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no*, you know?

Eryn: And how old is he?

Sharon: He's ten.

Eryn: Okay, okay.

Sharon: So, it was one of those things where he wants to be in charge until he realizes, *oh, when you leave, so does my security*. Like, *the one that actually keeps me safe will be gone*. You know, *I don't keep me safe, Mommy keeps me safe*. And I think we see a similar fear in Adam in that moment where he realized he wanted to be in charge, and God said, *okay*. And there's nothing more terrifying than that realization. And so, what we see in that moment, though, is anxiety and fear are not the only consequences of control in that moment. There... there is shame, there's brokenness in... in his relationship with God, and... and with Eve. But every time we reenact that moment, every time we try to control something that God has not given us to control, by rebelling against that boundary on our wills, on our... our power, we're not just reenacting that moment in Genesis 3, we are also reenacting its consequences. And that was huge for me to understand that this has now been written into the blueprint of creation. Because I think for a lot of us, we think we can get away with control. We think *I know what's best for this situation*. *I know what's best for this person*. And so, if I can just get my way in this situation, if I can just force this person to make this choice that I think that they should make, or force my kids to behave, you know, the way that they should behave that it's all going to work out that in this instance, we're not really controlling, we're just doing what is right. And it's helped me to understand, no, this is a relationship that has been written into the blueprint of creation, is that whenever I reach for control to empower me or to fix a situation, I am not just reenacting Genesis 3, but also its consequences. And that is why, when we do turn to control, and you saw this in the pandemic, when people were going online to find out, you know, what's going on. They were looking for information to empower them, to give them a sense of certainty or predictability...

Eryn: Yeah.



Sharon: ... why it didn't work. Why it actually made us more anxious, not less. And finally, just accepting that reality has been really huge for me.

Eryn: What would you say are some of the consequences to the desire for control? What are some, like, specific results or symptoms to it?

Sharon: Yeah, I mean... anxiety is a huge one, and we miss it because we blame the situation. We say *I feel anxiety because this situation...* So, a really good, very close to home, very recent example from my own life, and... and also just grace for everyone to know, I wrote an entire book of... on control, and here I was, reenacting the things that I wrote against. So, about a month ago, I went in for a mammogram. My mom has had... breast cancer twice, and the first time she got it was in her late forties, and so, I... she's fine, but because of that I have to go get mammograms from a younger age, and so, I went in and I had an abnormal mammogram, and so, I went in for a follow up a couple weeks later, didn't think anything of it, that's kind of normal at my age, but they said *actually, we've identified something that we need to biopsy...*

Elisa: Oh, geez. Oh, gee.

Sharon: ... And so, I found that out right before I went to Disney with my family, which, I was honestly, like, so mad about [laughter]...

Elisa: Yeah.

Eryn: Of course, I would be too.

Sharon: ... it's like, *just let me have... let me have Disney!* And so, I had about two weeks to just sit, waiting on what's going to happen with this biopsy and then I went in and had the biopsy done, and I had to wait another five days or so. And during that time, there was nothing that I could do to change the outcome. You know, there... obviously, there's nothing I could do. But having just written a book on control, did I receive that reality? Did I, you know, rest in that knowledge and simply wait on God? No, I did not. [Laughter] What did I do instead? I went on the internet. [Laughter]

Eryn: Did you google a lot?

Sharon: Yes! I could upload all the pictures...



Elisa: Yeah, yeah you can become...

Sharon: ... of my ultrasounds.

Elisa: ... a MD, right. Uh-huh.

Sharon: And so, I'm googling, like, you know, mammogram ultrasounds and... and all this stuff, and, like, comparing them with mine, and I went to it looking for answers to help me feel more peace, but it achieved the opposite. Every time I would go on the internet, I could feel it. Like, that pit in my stomach where, cause you always go to the worst-case scenario. You just kind of...

Eryn: Yeah.

Sharon: ... assume it's, like, the worst. And I could see myself doing this. Like, I am walking this out in real time where I'm going to the internet thinking that knowledge, and that's the original sin, that tree of knowledge, I... I went to knowledge to empower me, and instead it stripped me of my peace even more. And... and so, we miss that... that relationship because we think *well, I feel anxiety because this situation*, yes, but whatever peace is still available to you, you are now forfeiting...

Eryn: Yeah.

Sharon: ... by trying to control a situation you can't control. So, that's a huge cost. And then another big one that I look at in the book and that I still struggle with in my own life is the brokenness that this creates in our relationships. That whenever we try to control people, it is going to break our relationships with them. And again, we just have to go back to Genesis to see that in spite of the fact that God is in control of the garden, God is in control, but He is not controlling.

Eryn: Yeah.

Sharon: And that's a very important distinction where He preserves Adam and Eve's agency. They have freedom, they have purpose, they have influence. He's not just micromanaging them. And whenever we violate that really important distinction by trying to control other people it is going to affect our relationship with them in some way, shape, or form. And as a mother of...

Elisa: There you go. Yup, yup.



Sharon: ... young children, that is so sobering, because it's nuanced, you know, as parents there's that line of I'm called to be a good steward of... of my children, to teach them, to guide them, to discipline them, but if I start to think that I can control them it is going to damage my relationship with them, and the thing that especially chastens me is that I might not see the brokenness of that for another ten to fifteen years.

Eryn: Yeah.

Sharon: And I think that's why we can get away with thinking we are successfully controlling someone that... without fallout, is the fallout just hasn't shown up yet. And by the time it does, it's too late...

Elisa: Yeah.

Sharon: ... and so, that's something that I'm constantly asking God for grace and wisdom about.

Elisa: You've teased apart two aspects of control, and I'm really glad that you did. You know, the one example you gave of the mammogram, and you going online to get knowledge, you know, is I'm going to control something in my life to make myself feel better. As if you can change the outcome. And you know, one of the principles of... of addiction recover is understanding the difference between what you can control and what you can't control and acknowledging, you know, the Serenity Prayer. But the other aspect that you brought up that maybe has more far-reaching consequences, you know, beyond us, is when we try to control our anxiety by controlling others, and you gave the example of our children. I totally relate to this. Yet, how do we notice when we're doing either one of those? You know, when we're trying to control our own lives, versus trying to control the lives of others. And you did bring up a really gnarly example, because as moms, as parents, we need to set boundaries around our children to keep them safe, and there's a difference, though, between that and controlling.

Sharon: God doesn't give us control, but He does give us agency. And I define that, that's... it's actually a psychological term, but I thought it was a really helpful way of describing what we see in the Garden of Eden. And I define it as the power to influence ourselves and others, and the operative word there being influence, not control. And we see a bunch of different forms of agency in Genesis 1, 2, and 3, but there's one form of agency that it doesn't feel like a really great alternative to control, but it's a really, really important one, and that is self-examination. And this is a form of agency, a form of influence over ourselves, that Adam ultimately fails to exercise in Genesis 3, after he, you know, eats the fruit and it says God asks him "Where are you?" And that question is rhetorical, because God knows where Adam is. He's not stumped by this great hiding spot that Adam found. [Laughter] He doesn't know where he is. You



know, He's asking Adam to stop in this just catastrophic unravelling, to stop and consider *how did you get here?*

Elisa: To self-examine. Yeah.

Sharon: You know, there's so, yeah, there's so many different moments, *why were you listening to a talking snake? Why, when he gave you a different version of reality than I have, didn't you come and ask Me about it? You know, why, after you ate the fruit, did you think okay, now we need to hide?* Like, there were so many different moments where Adam needed to stop and consider what is going on inside of me that I think me fixing it is going to be the answer. And unfortunately, Adam is not able to do that work. When He says, "Where are you?" You know, *how did this happen*, and all that Adam does is point to Eve and blame her. And then the same thing happens with Eve, she passes the buck onto the serpent. Neither one of them is able to self-reflect at all. And for me, personally, that has been really important to pause whenever I am feeling any sort of anxiety at all, to stop in that moment and ask how did you get here? You know, like, what... like, what is going on inside of you that makes you think if you just push your husband a little harder, that this is going to go well for your marriage, you know, or the church, or if I, you know, push my kids, or... or whatever it is, like, I can... and... and that was the really important pause when I was looking at google ultrasounds, is I could feel it, like in... in my body. And to be able to stop and say okay, why am I feeling this way right now? I can't change the fact that I don't know... what I have, but is this helping?

Eryn: Right. Or is this contributing to the...

Sharon: Or is this making it worse?

Eryn: Yes.

Sharon: And that was really helpful for those moments when I realized I need to just get off the internet right now.

Eryn: Yeah. Creating a boundary around what you may be prone to. Maybe you could give us a prayer that we could pray, that maybe that's one that you've journaled about, maybe, one you've written, that has helped you to pray through those moments when you have a righteous anger, like, you're rightfully, maybe, angry, and you want to have... you want to be able to speak into something cause you do see it could go in a direction and you want to control it but you can't. Maybe you feel like you have pure intentions toward your children to live a certain way, or believe something about them, but you cross the



line of trying to control. What is a prayer that we could pray in those moments that we are catching ourselves in being dependent on our own strength and... and not Gods?

Sharon: Well, I love that you brought that up, Eryn, because that is a really important point. For most of my Christian life, I thought of control as just idolatry. Like, this is just the sin of pride. You know, I... I think my life would be better off if I was in the driver's seat instead of God. I trust myself more than God. And I think that that is certainly a component, but part of the reason we also struggle with control is that we live in this post-Genesis 3 world, but we were created for Genesis 1. We were created for peace, and security, and... and wholeness. And for a lot of people that desire to control is because we are bumping up against the jagged edges of our very broken world. And our desire if... if you have a child who is struggling with addiction, or, you know, a loved one who's making really self-destructive choices, your desire to want to snatch them from the jaws of destruction is not sin. And that is really important to say, that... that there is grace here. That what we're ultimately desiring, God does too. You know, what we're ultimately desiring, wholeness for ourselves and others, peace, security, God desires it, too. Where we go off the rails is how we pursue it. By, you know, either taking it into our own hands or remembering that yes, God desires to make it whole, that is why He sent His Son. And so, a prayer, a very simple prayer, this is one that I [Music] pray a lot, and I prayed a lot when I was waiting to get the results from my biopsy is "Jesus, be my peace. Jesus, be my peace." And that I would not go seeking peace in other things, that I would not go seeking peace in information, you know, research on the internet, that I would not seek peace in trying to impose my will on situations or engineering outcomes, but that I would simply let Jesus be my peace. And it's such a simple prayer. It has seen me through...

Elisa: Yeah.

Sharon: ... a lot of times.

[Music]

Eryn: Jesus, be my peace. That's so easy to remember for our moments of anxiety. Also, we just want to say that at the end of this conversation, Sharon let us know her biopsy results were negative.

Elisa: We're so glad she shared that example with us, because we can all fall into panic modes like that. Well, be sure to check out our website to find a link for Sharon's book, *The Cost of Control*. You can find that and a link to join our email list on our website at godhearsheer.org. That's godhearsheer.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 and Mary Jo Clark. We also want to thank Dave and Joyce for all their help and support. Thanks everyone.

[Music]

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