



God Hears Her Podcast

Episode 138 –

Elisa Morgan & Eryn Eddy-Adkins with Dr. Lynn Cohick

Lynn: I am excited to see, and I dream of seeing it more and more, of women confidently stepping into what God has called them to do, not needing to explain. And it's not like they all need to teach, or they all need to evangelize. I don't have a template. Whatever good work God has for you, that's what I want you to be able to do.

[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 Adkins. Have you ever felt discouraged while reading the Bible? Maybe because you felt like women weren't as prominent in its stories as the men.

Elisa: Well, today we're talking with my friend, Dr. Lynn Cohick, a distinguished professor of the New Testament. Dr. Lynn once felt discouraged while reading her Bible as a grad student. And since then, she has been passionately teaching the importance of women in the New Testament as well as how God has a purpose for each of us.

Eryn: Let's learn more about Dr. Lynn by first asking how she became a professor of Bible teaching during this conversation on *God Hears Her*.

Lynn: I was raised by parents who probably would now identify as nominal Methodists. You know, we went to church. They kind of thought they were Christians. But it wasn't until I was in junior high, and my parents were part of a United Methodist Church where the pastor really preached the gospel. And the youth pastor also really, really presented the richness that I began to understand who this Jesus is. And both my mom and I were saved. That would have been the language then. And my family had seen and had been taught in the United Methodist Church that women could serve in leadership. So that was sort of assumed. And then my mom and I, we came to Christ. So unfortunately, that particular United



Methodist Church was not excited about the pastor's energy towards evangelism, and so he was invited to leave as was the youth pastor. And when that happened, yeah, my mom wanted to get in a space where there still was that good Bible teaching. And so we started in another church, a church plant of the Evangelical Free denomination. And we had a wonderful pastor there who really taught the Word, which was fantastic. Cause both my mom and I were so hungry for it. But it was in a structure that didn't allow women to do leadership. So there was kind of a, I don't know that I would call it a conflict, but in my home; it was like well you can be anything, Lynn.

Eryn: Yeah.

Lynn: But in church, it was like well, no not so much.

Elisa: So confusing.

Lynn: You know, and so that was the tension, yeah.

Elisa: Yeah.

Eryn: It was like inconsistent.

Lynn: Yeah, we had a very dynamic youth group that was both college and high school age. It was a very small church plant. And so the youth, in a sense, met in the...some of the college kids were the leaders of...of the youth. That's where I met my husband.

Eryn: Oh, you did?

Lynn: Youth group, yes.

Elisa: Of course, I love it.

Eryn: Oh.

Lynn: Oh, I know. I know.

Eryn: Tell me, okay I want to know. Let's just get a little bit behind the scenes of that.



Lynn: Yeah.

Eryn: When you saw him, did you know? Or were you like, eh?

Lynn: Eh.

Eryn: Eh, tell us more.

Lynn: He knows that story, so I...it won't be a surprise, Yeah, I kind of thought eh, well, that's interesting. Yeah, I was not super impressed. But that quickly changed, yeah, yeah.

Eryn: Oh, was he pursuant of you?

Lynn: Yeah, he was. Although he's in college, right? He...he started school young as a four-year-old, right?

Eryn: Oh wow.

Lynn: This was...he has a December birthday.

Elisa: Wow.

Lynn: And so he started kindergarten at four, right? Which, so he was young.

Eryn: Okay, wow, that's very young.

Lynn: Yeah, yeah, so we're three years apart in age and also in class.

Eryn: Okay.

Elisa: Okay.

Eryn: So fast track, so when did you get married? Did you have kids?

Lynn: Yeah, when he graduated from college, we got married.



Eryn: Okay.

Lynn: So that meant I had just finished my freshman year in college.

Elisa: Wow, you were young.

Lynn: I was just shy of my 19th birthday.

Elisa: Oh my goodness.

Eryn: Oh my goodness.

Lynn: I know. When our children later reached that age, they just looked at us like...

Elisa: You're crazy.

Lynn: ...oh my word, you're crazy.

Elisa: You know just to pause right here; you were in this family where women could do anything. And then the church gave you a different message that women can only do certain things. Okay now you're married so young, and you're in college. So how did getting married that young shape what you thought you were gonna be when you (quote) grew up? You know, how did that shape you?

Eryn: That's a good question, yeah.

Lynn: You know, I just did things by the seat of my pants.

Elisa: Okay.

Lynn: When I look back, I think it is amazing that I got a PhD. I...it really is. Cause nobody encouraged me in this, except again my parents and my husband. I come from a medical family. And so, would you want to go into medicine? I thought about that, but I also loved the Bible. I love teaching. My mom talks about, you know, I've taught...I'm the oldest of...of three. And they had to listen to my teaching whether they wanted to or not growing up, you know.

Elisa: Little guinea pigs.



Eryn: [inaudible]

Lynn: No.

Elisa: That's awesome.

Eryn: I love it.

Lynn: Yeah, so you know so I...I think I was en...encouraged that way to...to go forward. But there were...there were real hurdles. For example, when I graduated from college, I thought well, you know I'd like to study the Bible. And I know my pastor went to a seminary that has a very good reputation. Well, I'll go there, get my MDiv or MA in Bible and then go on for my PhD. But the church would not sign, would not write a letter of recommendation for me to go study the Bible. They would sign for me to go if I did Christian education, but not for the Bible.

Elisa: So erratic, yeah.

Lynn: So yeah, I mean so you get these messages, right, from my family. Go for it.

Eryn: Yeah.

Lynn: We have no idea how.

Eryn: Yeah.

Lynn: But just go for it.

Elisa: Or what it means, yeah.

Lynn: Yeah. And then from the church, no, that's not legitimate for you to study the Bible.

Eryn: Wow.

Elisa: You know, what...what role did your father play in you becoming you? I've heard you talk about your mom. You know, did he go to church with you? Did he give you the mirror back that you can do anything you want, Lynn? Or, you know, was he conflicted?



Lynn: Yeah, he did come to a born-again experience a couple of years after me and my mom. So by the time I had graduated from high school, he was also on board that way. And he didn't actively try to stop it before then. My dad, I think allowed for all of his kids to take risks. He is a risk taker. And so or he likes entrepreneur. I'll say it that way. I mean it's not like he jumps off mountains with no parachute. But I mean it's...but more just you know as an entrepreneur...

Elisa: Sure.

Lynn: ...starting things. He encouraged that. I didn't have to worry about failure in the way that some people worry about that. And I think being the first-born, I just had the expectations that often come on a first-born, whether it's a son or a daughter.

Eryn: You grew up with such a wide-eyed like possibility environment. So I would imagine when you're told you can't study, like you can't go to school for learning the Bible was so confusing. So take us to that moment when you learned that, what happened?

Lynn: Well, I just found another way.

Eryn: I love it.

Elisa: Did you know?

Lynn: So that might be inherited also from my father.

Elisa: Okay.

Lynn: Oh, this door's shut, I'm opening over here.

Eryn: I like it.

Elisa: So there was a determinedness in you.

Lynn: Yeah, yeah.

Elisa: So it's like, I can't do that, then I'm gonna do this.



Lynn: Yeah, sometimes it was even with that kind of tone in my mind.

Elisa: Snarkiness.

Lynn: And other, yeah, saucy, did you say?

Elisa: Snarky.

Lynn: Snarky.

Eryn: But I love saucy.

Lynn: Snarky, saucy.

Elisa: Spicy.

Lynn: Let's go with saucy, yeah. I think in this particular case, because I still did want to get a degree, right? I wanted to teach. I...I didn't...I have never felt called to be a pastor in a church. I wanted to be a teacher, a teacher of the Word. If I can't do seminary, that doesn't mean I couldn't go straight into my PhD. And so that's...that's what I did, straight from undergrad to my PhD.

Elisa: How'd you do that? Did you get a Master's?

Lynn: No, I started...

Elisa: How do you do that?

Lynn: Well, with a lot of errors and sleepless nights, yeah. I had no idea what I was doing. And it was a huge leap. I finished my undergrad in three and a half years. So that last semester, I did go to a seminary. But I was studying church history there, so I could get in. And a couple of weeks into the semester, my advisor said, you know, you could stay and get an MA here. But it's not really gonna count that much towards your PhD credit hours. You might just want to dive right into your PhD.

Elisa: Oh wow.



Lynn: I know, I don't know that the school loved that he just told a student to go somewhere else. But anyway. So that's what I did. But my undergrad, I mean it prepared me in so many ways. Didn't necessarily prepare me to go in...straight into a PhD from undergrad. So it was like truly like drinking water from a firehouse. And it was well, I have a determination, I think. I have a kind of persistent spirit.

Elisa: Clearly.

Lynn: There was also...there was also a lot of self-doubt, like can I actually do this? Over and over and over again, I wondered that quite a bit. So it was a time where I just felt like I was always the stupidest in the room. And that could have been actual fact too. You know I'm just always felt so behind but loved to be part of the conversation. And just that was...I just loved it. That's what kept me going just exploring the world of the New Testament.

Elisa: How did you become so interested specifically in the New Testament?

Lynn: I was captivated by that world. I don't find the Old Testament world, the ancient Near East quite as exciting, you know, as...as I did that first-century Roman world.

Eryn: Was there a story that captured you in the New Testament that opened your eyes to feeling that way?

Lynn: There was a story that I used when I was baptized. In the adult baptism that was what our church did, the Evangelical Free Church, it was right before I was going off to college. And we had our baptisms in a local creek. And we gave our testimony and the biblical text that we wanted to share. And I shared the story of Mary of Bethany anointing Jesus with the alabaster jar of ointment. And that...that story for me has just resonated down through the decades really of someone who was in the same moment as Jesus. She's the one that recognizes His passion to come. And she, in the face of ridicule by her friends, does what needs to be done through love. And so that was my hope.

Elisa: And then you continued to express your own pouring out of your alabaster as you really immersed yourself in the New Testament and then in women and children and the culture of the New Testament. And Lynn...you...you've really opened my eyes, because you teach from a contextual, a cultural contextual approach where when we go into passages, it's more than just the words on the page. You help us understand the context of the times and what it was like for women, what it was like for children, what the structure of society was like. How did that become so important to you? And are there a couple



of big principles that you want to offer out to all the women listening here about, you know, when we read Scripture, remember this stuff.

Lynn: Sure, sure, yeah. I would say my first semester in graduate school, there were two moments that I think really shaped. I might not have known it at the time, but they really did shape. The first was I took a class in Feminism and Christianity. This would be in the mid-80s. And...

Eryn: I'm so surprised that that's even a class.

Lynn: Yeah, yeah. But it was very much second-wave feminism.

Eryn: Okay.

Lynn: And the women in the class, there were about twenty students, all women. There was one other woman who identified as a Christian. I think she was Episcopalian, and then me. And then everybody else was post-Christian. And I felt that's how they identified. And my heart...

Elisa: And for anybody listening who doesn't know what that means, what does that mean, post-Christian?

Lynn: Well, I think for them, I think they were done with Christianity.

Elisa: Okay.

Lynn: They were done with the church.

Eryn: Wow.

Lynn: I'll put it that way.

Elisa: Why were they taking this class?

Lynn: Feminism and Christianity...

Eryn: [inaudible]



Lynn: ...I think to the feminism point to kind of see the critique perhaps of Christianity. And the authors that we read, some of them strongly critiqued the church, not all. With these women, it just broke my heart that they wanted nothing to do with Jesus because they wanted nothing to do with the church. And I...I just thought, oh, that's not right. I wish they would know Jesus as I know Jesus. And I just lamented that reality. And...and I think that...that has been a burden then of mine to...to be able to call the church to account. Maybe, well that sounds too bold. But just to at least acknowledge, okay, the church has gotten some things wrong that has pushed women away, but to also then invite women look at who Jesus...look who God is who loves, right? You're seen. You're heard. You're loved by God, right? Like that is the truth of the Bible. And so I really wanted to...I mean at that age, I didn't think oh, I want to make an impact. You know, I didn't think [inaudible].

Eryn: It just broke your heart.

Lynn: It broke my heart, yeah. And then I traveled from Harrisburg to Philadelphia twice a week, that's two hours one way on the train. And I had my morning devotions on the train. And I'm reading from my translation. And everything is in the masculine pronoun, the generic, masculine pronoun. And it hit me one morning. I was in 1 Corinthians, he this, he that, he this; and literally tears came to my eyes. And I just cried out, *Lord, am I here? Am I in this story at all?* And I think that helped crystallize for me this personal interest in exploring the biblical text and how God sees women, right?

Eryn: Yeah.

Lynn: And how women are integral to the people of God, the ancient Israelites and the church of the apostles. And so yeah, it became in part a personal journey. But it was also at this time in the 80s, the rise of studying historical women, especially in Christianity. And so there was a lot of work being done on trying to raise up these stories that have been there, but we just didn't pay attention to them.

Elisa: Are there things that you would want to say that we should keep in mind specifically as women when we're reading...

Lynn: Yeah.

Elisa: ...in the New Testament?

Lynn: I think so. I think one thing to keep in mind is that women populated the landscape. And even though sometimes in the biblical text only men are mentioned, that's just a convention of the day. But they



assume, and we should assume cause it's correct, that there...there are women doing all kinds of things there. Secondly, I think it's important to note that women worked, and women were shopkeepers. And...and they could loan money. Or they had financial resources. It's not like when a woman married and any of her finances went totally to her husband. It's not Victorian England, you know, back then. Women had resources. So again, maybe it...a way to talk about this is that women had agency. Like they could choose to align with Pharisees (Jewish women), or they could align themselves with a prophet. They could make decisions. So I think of Martha, for example, who knows about the resurrection of the dead, which is a belief that the Pharisees held but not the Sadducees. Well, where did she learn that? Why does she have that commitment? Did her brother, Lazarus, also have that? Was it a family commitment or...or not? It's like the women could learn and...and could have opinions and could exercise agency and could make financial decisions. And so we have Mary Magdalene who had finances and contributed those to Jesus' ministry. Yeah, so you just have women being very active. And I don't think we often see that.

Elisa: We see it, especially in the book of Acts and in Paul's letters as he'll write to a Lydia or a Dorcas or describe these different ministries, Phoebe, etcetera. But Jesus' ministry was revolutionary to women in that He did include them. I mean we don't see them in the twelve disciples, but we do see them as you're referencing in Luke chapter 8 where Mary Magdalene and others supported Him and His ministry out of their own means and also Mary sitting at His feet and learning from Him. I mean there are some different things, Martha as you...as you're referencing. But I love the backdrop that you're expressing that women were active, and they were everywhere. But it was convention for everything to be put in the male. How did Jesus shape the opportunities and the value of women?

Lynn: Yeah, I think His ministry happening a lot in Galilee where you're just a day journey or less between towns allowed for both men and women to travel with Jesus. Now the women are not gonna sleep in the fields with the men disciples and Jesus, right? Like propriety would just not allow that. But this is a mainly Jewish area up in Galilee. Everybody knows everybody. And so for a woman to come into a town or a group of women, they would be shown hospitality. That was a very high value back then. And they're following this Teacher, this healer. So they could have easily been cared for. So we need to imagine these women and men are traveling with Jesus. And there are culturally appropriate ways that protect modesty and safety for the women—not a problem in Galilee. In their journey up to Jerusalem from Galilee through Samaria, there I think they'd be traveling, both men and women...Jewish men and women would have a dynamic in dealing with Samaritans. But once you're in Judea, not...not a problem. You know, you mentioned about the twelve apostles that among them are not women. And that is true. But I think the point of those twelve is the new Israel. So you have the twelve tribes and the promise of God to bring back the twelve tribes in, I would say, more of a symbolic way.



Elisa: That's interesting.

Lynn: You know. So that twelve was very important—the number twelve. They were all Jewish men as well, which again, it's very much a part of Jesus the Messiah fulfilling the promises of bringing all Israel back from exile. And so, I don't think the argument that somehow there weren't women in that twelve is at all pertinent to a question of leadership. Because the twelve apostles are really representative of this new people of God that's established by the Messiah. That's why they pick a new person at the beginning of Acts. That's why even earlier in the first chapter of Acts, the disciples ask Jesus, is it now that You will restore the kingdom to Israel? Right? And so it's all about Israel, the end times. Is that happening now? Yeah.

Eryn: To a woman that's listening right now, what...what is something that she can find comfort in, in hearing what all...well all of what you're sharing right now about women in the New Testament? How can they apply that currently? And what does that say about who Jesus is in their life right now?

Lynn: And so much of it is, where are they?

Eryn: Yeah.

Lynn: You know, and course the Holy Spirit knows that, right? So I think for some women, maybe they've been selling themselves short, right? Maybe they've made some excuses. Well, you know, God would never really ask me to do that. And I think oh, hold on, you know. You've got a Lydia who, in Acts 16, opens her home, and her very guests are then beaten and jailed. She won't expect justice from the city rulers necessarily. Though that's I think that's why Paul visits her before he leaves to kind of say, hey look, people. She took care of me. She's my friend. You all know I'm a Roman citizen. Don't harass her. But she took a risk in that, right? So there might be some women God is prompting them, I need you to take this risk. I'm here for you. But then there are probably other women who have just gone through such a...a hard time, a difficult time. And Jesus wants to...wants to say to you I'm here. Just...just be with Me. I see you.

Eryn: Yeah.

Lynn: In the story of the Samaritan woman John 4, it's often taught that she was a sinful woman; which is not the case. But Jesus, in His response to her, treats her seriously as a theologian. She asks theological questions. You know, are...are You greater than Jacob whose well we...you know I mean that...that's a theological question. And she's asking a Jew. She already shows her curiosity, her willingness to go



outside of a comfort zone. And Jesus doesn't treat her as like oh, you silly woman asking these questions. It's like He embraces her interest and her question.

Elisa: She really becomes one of the first evangelists.

Lynn: She is.

Elisa: She goes back to her town and tells everybody this a man who knows everything about me.

Lynn: That's right. And the stuff that He knows, like that she had five husbands, I'm unaware of any other figure at this time that would have had that. And the one that you're with now is not your husband. When we do have a figure who was a close friend of Augustus, Caesar Augustus. His name is Agrippa. When he died, he was married to his fifth wife. Two had died, and two he had divorced. But otherwise, we don't know any. That's clearly Jesus displayed His prophetic understanding of her. It's not a judgment statement. It's a prophetic statement.

Elisa: He reveals Himself through it.

Lynn: He wasn't guessing, yeah, yeah. He wasn't guessing, and He landed on five, right? He was, you know, He knew. And that's what she describes. And her...the town people believe her. That's my dream is that women would be believed, that they would be taken seriously that they think theologically. And that then when they have an insight or they meet Jesus, their friends, the townspeople, would believe them. She must have been s...a person of such trustworthiness that when they heard, they believed. Cause they did.

Eryn: Yeah.

Lynn: It's...cause they later say, you know, now we believe in a sense even more. We first believed cause of your testimony. But now we believe even more. And do you know, the whole time, this is happening, His other disciples are buying food in the town. And they aren't talking about Jesus to anybody.

Elisa: So fascinating. What a comparison.

Lynn: You know, so yeah.



Elisa: So you're talking about how you long for women to take the risk that God's inviting them to. And then you're longing for women who've been wounded or misunderstood or not known to know how deeply Jesus does know them. And then I heard you, Lynn, say, that's my dream. That's my dream. And you got super impassioned there. Tell us about your dream. And you know because you still have a lot of years left, God willing. And you're shifting positions as God calls you to different roles. And what is your dream for women? What do you want to see God really accomplish as you pray to Him in the morning and cry out to Him? Please do this. What does that look like for you?

Lynn: I am excited to see, and I dream of seeing it more and more of women confidently stepping into what God has called them to do, not needing to explain. And it's not like they all need to teach, or they all need to evangelize. I don't have a template. Whatever good work God has for you, that's what I want you to be able to do. And it may look very traditional. Fine, you know, if that's where God has you and has gifted you. Because that's where you'll have the impact for the kingdom that God hopes for you to have. And it makes all the things that you do have eternal value, because they're in sync with, in line with what God has called you to do. So I want that kind of freedom that women just feel a sense like all of this is for me. Where do you want me, God? And I would pray that there would be more and more men who would come alongside and encourage like my father, my husband, celebrate with me when things go well, and cry with me when things don't. Or say okay, pick yourself up, new day, let's go. So part of how I feel I fit into all of that is continuing to understand the biblical text better myself and then be able to communicate that truth. So many times people say to me, I never knew that. Why didn't I know that?

Eryn: Yeah.

Lynn: You know, and it's right there in the...the Bible that we've had for 2,000 years. Why didn't I know that? So I hope to hear that less and less. I hope that more and more people learn those stories in the global church. I think it's going to be increasingly important that Christians work together for the sake of the world as the world continues to fracture. And I don't want us to get sidelined on, well is she allowed to do this, or what...what should we call her? Cause you know we can't call her that in case it sounds like this and blah blah. And you know, and we just...we fuss a lot in my mind. We fuss a lot on that when, you know, sort of we're fiddling while Rome burns, you know. And I think, no, no, no. Let's focus on a world that needs Jesus.

Eryn: I love how you...you want women to know that sometimes they have to take a risk, that they're qualified, that they have a voice. Would you define, in your words, what *purpose* is and how God sees purpose?



Lynn: I would say *purpose* is faithfulness. I come to that. I think of, in 1 Corinthians chapter 4, where Paul asks the Corinthians, don't judge me. He said, I don't even judge myself. It doesn't make me innocent, but I just try to be faithful. And God will take care of the growth. And so that's why I say with purpose. Purpose might imply, for some people, an end goal. But I think for believers, we don't always know what that end goal is in a concrete sense.

Eryn: Yeah.

Lynn: Paul tells the Romans and us that we are predestined to be conformed to the image of the Son in chapter 8. We are predestined to be conformed to the image of the Son. That's our ultimate goal, right? And we are being transformed from glory to glory, right, 2 Corinthians. And so I think the...when...when I see how Paul as an individual says, I'm trying to be obedient. I'm not even going to judge is this effective or not? Because I don't know the big picture. All I know is God asked me to do this. And sometimes, you know, you don't even know. You're not even sure, is God asking me to do this?

Elisa: Totally, right.

Lynn: You know.

Eryn: You feel like you're walking in the dark.

Lynn: Exactly.

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: Yeah, yeah.

Lynn: If it's about being in relation, right, and being...having a relationship with Jesus, then purpose is knowing more deeply, loving more strongly, receiving the love more acceptingly and then sharing that. If that's what our focus is, then I think purpose happens. It may be hard though to go after purpose directly.

Eryn: Yeah.

Lynn: I think of the story of Amy Carmichael, a missionary in India, 1800s, right, was when she lived. And she was an evangelist going from town to town preaching the gospel. And she really wanted to continue doing that. But there were a number of girls, that had been dedicated to temple shrines in one way or



another, came to her seeking to leave that world of what we would call slavery in...in a real sense. At one point, they had, I think it was a typhoid, but it may have been something else, an illness, where they had to stay in one spot for a while till the illness went away. And more and more girls came. And what she finally realized was that God was calling her, not to move around and evangelize, which was what she wanted; but rather to stay in one place and to care for these girls. And she said there was a Tamil proverb that children bind a mother's feet. And she said, and I thought of that and thought, but who am I to complain about bound feet when my Savior's hands were scarred for me. I mean she said it much better than that. But that was the...her sentiment. And so she embraced, with difficulty, but she embraced the ministry that God had for her which wasn't necessarily her dream per se but became her dream. And she also worked for years to get a law changed that would help, would benefit these girls. And it, eventually at the end of her life, it was made into law. And I just think back to, like that to me models a faithfulness, right? That there...she has tremendous courage, I'll go anywhere. And God says, no, I want you to stay right here, you know. And there was so much fruit that came from that.

[music]

Elisa: I love the example of Amy Carmichael. We are all women with a purpose.

Eryn: Well, before we go, make sure to check out the *Discover the Word* series where Elisa shares more about women in the work of Jesus. You can find the link for that, and our blog, on our website at godhearsher.org. That's godhearsher.org.

Elisa: Thanks 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 also want to thank Tyler and Emmy for all their help and support. Thanks, everyone.

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