



God Hears Her Podcast

Episode 146 – Reading Truth with Amanda Williams

Elisa Morgan & Eryn Adkins with Amanda Williams

Amanda: Our heart is for women to know the Lord and to be in relationship with the Lord and to understand Him in that relational way, you know, and to see His faithfulness and how much more we're able to see Him in our world and in our lives when we have seen Him in His Word.

[Theme music]

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

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

Eryn: And I'm Eryn Adkins. When did you start reading Scripture?

Elisa: Some of us may be able to remember the moment that God's Word took our hearts captive. Or maybe you always loved reading your Bible. Well, today we're chatting with Amanda Williams about equipping women to read Scripture. As cofounder of "She Reads Truth," Amanda wanted to create resources to help women grow a passion for reading the Word.

Eryn: We are so excited to learn from Amanda today. Let's start out this *God Hears Her* conversation by asking Amanda: What does her day to day look like?

Amanda: My everyday kind of looks like a lot of mom stuff for all the kiddos. And then also I get to call work and my job — this thing that I really love. It's really dear to me, so ...um... I'm really grateful to get to... to do something that I love so much and care about so much as work. I realize that that is, you know, a privilege and a rarity in a lot of cases. And so I... I'm...I love that.

Eryn: I mean you're an entrepreneur. You started something and learned how to lead and create something beautiful. And before we go into that and the hard work of that in itself, did you know in high school that you were gonna pursue something of your own? Or were you like *I want to be an architect*? Like what... what was it that you wanted to be when you were in high school?



Amanda: I, never in a million years, would have pegged myself as an entrepreneur. I still — if I'm really honest with you — don't feel like one because...

Eryn: Yeah.

Amanda: ...of the way that I'm built. I mean it's just so cool, and also sometimes confusing, the way that God like builds and equips us for things that we just didn't know. You know? Like sometimes I think we ... we can tell, and there are parts that make a lot of sense of who I am and who He made me to be and... and the work that I get to do. But the part that makes sense for me is the part that has to do with words, and, you know, eventually *the* Word. So when I was in high school, I would have said ... well, there was a moment where I would've said I wanted to be a marine scientist. Listen, you guys, no. There is not a scientific like bent in my entire self...

Elisa: You just like...

Amanda: ...but I like...

Elisa: ...dolphins...yeah...

Amanda: ... One hundred percent! [Laughter]... Elisa, ...eh... that is exactly it! And you were forced to like, you know, you gotta have an answer if people ask you stuff like this. So that's what I would say. But I... a more realistic, and more true-to-myself goal was I ... I just loved words, and in reading and writing and in story and learning about myself and the world and other people through stories. And so I would've said that I wanted to probably teach English in like ... maybe like a community college, or like a university or something. Like I wanted to be a professional student. [Laughter]

Eryn: Yeah, that's awesome.

Amanda: And... and that's kind of what I do. I mean that is...

Elisa: Oh yeah.

Eryn: Yeah, it is what you do.

Amanda: ...a little bit of what I do. Yeah. But I'm not by nature business minded. That is something that I've had to learn.



Elisa: Can you tell me when you first began to read the Bible...

Amanda: Yeah.

Elisa: ...and what its impact was on you? And maybe describe that part of your story for us.

Amanda: Yeah. You know it's been a while since I've really thought about that question. And it seems so basic, especially given like, you know, kind of the sphere that we are all in. But it really is... it's sweet to think back and remember. I mean my mom was a believer, you know, from the time I was really young. And we spent a lot of time at church, and I mean I even grew up, at the time, when I was in elementary school, there was a woman that we nicknamed "The Bible Lady," who would come and tell Bible stories at our public elementary school...

Eryn: Aww!

Amanda: ...on a felt board. I mean that is ... that is how old I am. And also that is... um... you know that's a sweet memory of like...

Eryn: It is sweet.

Amanda: ... This is just something that has kind of been in my world for as long as I can remember. God's Word has been in my world for as long as I can remember, which is such a gift. But I think my actual like kind of love story with Scripture probably started... It probably did start in like high school. I spent a lot of time with my youth group at my local church and with my youth leader. And she was just really influential at the time. And... and my mother, like I... I witnessed my mom opening her Bible every day, which is again... is such a gift. And ... and so that started for me in high school, and it really has kind of ... there've sort of been chapters. You know like the... the high school chapter is sort of that like when your heart is being captured by the Lord for the first time. The dots start to connect a little bit in Scripture and like the knots between like Scripture and the life that you're living, and like what you're experiencing. All of that. But it was still a pretty kind of... It was sort of a puppy-love phase, you know, if I think about it that way.

Eryn: Mm. That's a good way to say it. Yeah.



Amanda: And in college, the pendulum sort of swung totally to kind of like the academics. Like... like I would not... I didn't study. I mean I did... took a couple Bible classes, but I wasn't in seminary or anything. I just, you know, I was learning to think critically in college. And I kind of applied that to...

Elisa: Oh, nice.

Amanda: ...not just the Bible, but to my faith. And I didn't really have like a crisis of faith, but I definitely got a little in my head ... [laughs]... with it, you know?

Eryn: Mm-hmm.

Amanda: ...And really feeling like I was getting some stuff that ...um... most people didn't get. You know and just... not ... kind of arrogance in like some ways of just like really feeling like I was figuring some things out, which is hilarious to me now, which...

[Laughter]

Amanda: ...But again it's just the story that God's write... You know, like the Lord is so kind and patient. And I remind myself of this when I think of my children, and I feel like a pressure to steward their faith journey as their mom. And I have to remind myself that my faith journey is ongoing...

Eryn: Yeah.

Amanda: ... And I'm at 45, you know, and so for them, at 9 and 13 and 16, like I can be patient because the Lord is patient with us. And He is drawing them in His own time. And so even those parts where I look back, and I kind of cringe, thinking in my own story of like the way that I postured myself. And like, but that too the Lord used and was...

Elisa: Absolutely.

Amanda: ...That was part of my love story. Right?

Elisa: Totally.

Amanda: And what's interesting though, Elisa, is that my answer to your question would have been similar to Eryn's. If you said, "When did you first really fall in love with God's Word?" I don't remember if



that's exactly how you phrased it. I would have said, "When I was around 30, my early 30s." And it was because there was an air of ... my need felt so acute. It was...

Eryn: Yeah.

Amanda: ...You know, it didn't feel. It was. Like my need was so acute. The intensity of my encounters with the Lord in His Word, and my need for refreshment through His Word, and you know, my 30 years of life now coming to this Book. It was like *Oh!* You know it just started to really...

Elisa: Like the lights come on. Mm-hmm.

Amanda: It did — not primarily in ways of necessarily knowledge, like academic knowledge of the Word. But just that, plus experiential knowledge and seeing like... it wasn't like just dots connecting. It was like someone turned the lights on in the whole room. You know? And suddenly I'm like *Oh, like I could just keep digging!* And there was no end to the depth, and that's still... I think that's still kind of the phase that I'm in is just like I need this so desperately. And I am astounded, day after day, year after year, and His Word is always living and active. And it doesn't fail me, like it's always there, and it's always that powerful.

Elisa: So you founded this ministry called "She Reads Truth," with one of your dear friends, and please tell us about that came to be formed. But what I'm hearing, too, Amanda, is what I've experienced when I've participated in your ministry. And that is: You're not going in and proof texting. *Here's a specific verse, and wow, it changed my life!* You are really immersing yourself in the context of the story of God in the Bible. And when you do that, I think that analogy of the lights coming on is so rich. It's like you can see everything — not just what's right in front of you, but you can see the character. But help us understand what this ministry is and how God led you and your partner to form it.

Amanda: Yeah, well, one of my favorite parts of this story is that "She Reads Truth" started from personal needs that we were feeling as women, who we wanted to be. You know our mission statement is "Women in the Word of God every day." So Rachel and I both grew up in the church. And there were other women around at the founding of "She Reads Truth," because we weren't starting a thing. We were having a conversation. Right? And so the conversation was: We know that the Bible is God's Word. We believe that. We believe that we are meant to read it. It feels like there are obstacles to it, and it's not just: it's hard to find the time. That is definitely one. But it felt like there were obstacles for us as women, feeling like: Is it okay if I read my Bible ...

Elisa: Wow!



Amanda: ...outside of the context of like a formal Bible study, or outside... like not sitting in the pew on Sunday morning. Like am I qualified? Am I invited? Is it scandalous?

Eryn: Or am I smart enough to?

Amanda: Yeah, and also just wanting some accountability and direction and community around this need that we all felt. We felt a need to be in God's Word. Now there were a lot of ... there's a lot of layers to that. Right? Like there were plenty of layers of like desire, but there were also layers of "we should." We knew we all should. Right? And that conversation also gets complicated, of like: Was this a box that I'm checking off? What is this that we're doing? And so we just all started like... let's just start reading, and let's do it together. And let's see what happens. And it just was one of those conversations that you have where you don't anticipate the echoes that you hear behind you of like *Me too. Me too. Can I come? Can I come?* It just almost... the Lord just amassed a movement of women from around the world, really, but like at the time, like you know, the country, who didn't really know each other. I mean Rachel and I lived in the same city, which was very kind and providential of the Lord because...

Eryn: Yeah.

Amanda: ...then we were able to link arms and do some things together. But He created this movement of women who wanted to read their Bibles. And for a myriad of reasons, our lives were not reflecting our desire. You know like we wanted to be women in the Word of God every day, but the reality looked very different than that. And so we were kind of striving together toward that reality. And so the community of "She Reads Truth," we still do Bible-reading plans. Another thing that fed that is that a lot of us grew up in the Church where we did feel like most of the times that we encountered Scripture, it was accompanied by someone else's language. And there is a place for that, and that is... that is not bad. But, also, as women who have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, if I am filled with the Holy Spirit, as a follower of Jesus, and I am holding God's inspired Word in my hand to read it, then we were like *Don't we have what we need to read this?*

Elisa: Mm-hmm

Eryn: Right.

Amanda: And so we just sort of tested that theory, and it's been eleven years now that it has just proven to be, *Yeah, that is ultimately what you need.* The community and the resources that we create, the reading plans that we create, are sort of based on that premise of like: God's Word first. And also "only" if



that's what... And we do have other conversations and devotionals and podcasts, things like that. But our goal is to inspire and equip women to be in the Word for themselves.

Eryn: I just love that so much, Amanda. It brings me to a memory. I was 30, and I moved back home with my parents. And I had gone through a divorce, and my Bible, at that time, had my married name on it. And I told my mom, you know, I had so much shame with moving back home and then, you know, having my married name on my Bible. I remember telling my mom, "I just ... I think I want ... I think I want a Bible for Christmas." She got me a She-Reads-Truth Bible. I have it right here.

Elisa: Oh!

Eryn: And ...

Amanda: Oh, that makes me cry...

Eryn: Oh now I'm gonna cry... [Laughter] ... I cry with people. But it has been, like I mean that's when I fell in love. I mean it's like a journal. I have written just like journal entries and prayers in it, on the sides of it. When I fell in love with the Word was when my mom gave me that Bible for Christmas. And it was a way for me to enter back in into learning how like...

Amanda: Yeah.

Eryn: ... not only will God strip my shame away and tell me that I am loved, but He'll teach me, you know, what we hear "living Word" actually means in my life.

Elisa: I'm very, very struck by when we allow ourselves to fall in love with God and His Word, He changes us. We'll have these pivotal moments that nobody can take away from us, you know...

Amanda: That's right.

Elisa: ...Nobody can.

Amanda: Well, it's our relationship with Him. Right? I mean our mission is "women reading the Bible," but our, you know, our heart is for women to know the Lord and to be in relationship with the Lord and to understand Him in that relational way, you know, and to see His faithfulness and how much more we're able to see Him in our world and in our lives when we have seen Him in His Word. And then we can recognize Him. Right? Like we can recognize... We see what He's doing, what He's in done in His Word.



What He has done, is doing, will do; and then we can see that around us too. And so, you're right, like the track record is precious, but it's not the goal, you know. The... the pursuit of Jesus is the means to Jesus... [Laughs]... you know to knowing Jesus and have... and... and being known by Him. Like to have that... that relationship. And so we've always said that like the mission "She Reads Truth" is not... It's not women in "She Reads Truth" every day. Like we are a way for people to read the Bible. They need someone to come alongside, and they need to remove the mystery from like *Well, where do I start? And what do I read next? And who do I read ...* You know to kind of make it as simple as possible. It's not easy — right — cause it requires discipline...

Eryn: Right.

Elisa: But accessible.

Amanda: ...but to make it as simple as possible.

Elisa: Yeah, yeah.

Amanda: Right. The goal is to be in the Word and... and with the One who wrote it.

Elisa: You teed up a great point right there, is the mystery of it. It can be very intimidating, you know. We're like *Aargh! I don't know enough to read this*. So, for all of us, you know, what do you guys say in terms of where do you start? Where is a place, an entry point, to get into reading God's Word and begin to become accustomed to it?

Amanda: Yeah. I mean I think there can be so many answers to that question. And there are, you know, answers in terms of like *Well, what would be a good book of the Bible to start with?* But the thing that we have found resonates... It's one of the reasons that we are always reading something together, is that the real... And it can be a frustrating answer because the real answer is: Just start. Right? Like it is. And so I don't think that there's a magic formula of like *Well, you should or shouldn't start with Genesis. Or You should or shouldn't start with a Gospel*. I think those are great places to start. I mean we do know, because most of us who have been believers and who have aspired to be Bible readers, have at some point, probably attempted and failed a Bible-in-a-year plan.

Eryn: Yes.

Amanda: Right. Like we know what...



Elisa: Raise your hand. Yeah.

Amanda: ...that's like. It's like you get started, and Genesis is awesome...

[Laughter]

Eryn: You're hyped up...

Amanda: ...That's right, and...

Eryn: ...And then Leviticus throws you off...

Amanda: ...and then Levit... Man! If your heart.... if... Leviticus is... is this whole situation...

[Laughter]

Amanda: ... And so what we have kind of pivoted toward is being “women in the Word of God every day” this year — ha ha — or just every day, as a... And so like Bible-in-a-year plans are awesome. I do think for most personalities out there, that is not a beginning point. There are some people who could just nail it. And I admire that so much...

Eryn: Yeah.

Amanda: ... That's... I'm not one of them. But for most people, they need other entryways. And so we just try to have on-ramps happening all the time. You know we're here, *We're reading Psalms for Prayer, and then here comes Give Thanks, and here comes Advent, and here comes the New Year reading plan, and here comes Lent.* Just like to make the focus just to start, rather than it being like *Hey, there's a specific way you should start in order to be successful.* But I mean if... if someone asked me, “what book of the Bible do I read first,” I would probably just say, “Just pick a Gospel.” I think we cannot underestimate the effect of like our seasons of life. I desire to always be in the Word, and I have made that a priority in my life. But it doesn't always look the same from season to season. And so, you know, there are seasons where I rely more on like an audio Bible than other seasons. There are seasons where you're spending more time in the Psalms, and sometimes I'm spending, you know, like man, I'm just digging... I am digging into Genesis. You know? Just digging into different areas. I have friends who have stories of times in their lives where they were ... felt so broken and so like... in such a dark a place that they couldn't bring themselves to read Scripture, so they would have Scripture read over them. We do this with a lot of



things, you know, where we can take an invitation and try to put a system and formula around it. And systems and formulas are really helpful. I am a person who needs those things...

Eryn: Yeah.

Amanda: ... And, at the same time, it can be really easy to forget that the point is not to fulfill the equation and the formula, but that the point is to encounter the Lord in His Word and to meditate on His Word and in prayer and all of those things. And so there's definitely a discipline part of the spiritual disciplines, and also it is, again, not the end.

Eryn: There is a woman that's listening right now that just feels like *I open the Bible. I feel so distant. I feel like I don't hear from God, and when I open up the Bible, I'm just like... I feel lost. Not only do I not know where to begin, but I also, when I read, I just feel disconnected emotionally.* What are some things that you would want to speak over her? Maybe it's rebuking lies, and it's causing her to not want to dive in. Or maybe it's tactical solutions of how to go about it. Whatever it may be that you feel in responding to that question, but how would you speak to her?

Amanda: I mean I wish I could just have like a conversation with her. But first of all, that resonates really deeply with me — not only in my own life. Certainly in my own life, in different seasons of life, but also it's not just that you're not alone. You have no idea how many women feel the exact same way, because we hear this every day in the work that we do. You're just not alone is what... is the first thing that I would say. And the second thing I would say is: I want to relieve the pressure of her feeling like there's something she's doing wrong. Like *Why am I not getting it? Why am I not feeling it?*

Eryn: Yeah.

Amanda: ...And because... I think sometimes when it comes to something like reading the Bible, we have different expectations than we might have in other areas of life. And what I mean by that is we may feel like if we open our Bibles and read Scripture, and we don't feel the thing, you know? Or we don't... we don't feel the presence of God maybe. We don't feel adequate. We don't get the answer we're looking for. Whatever it is that we're coming in kind of expecting, we don't necessarily get. And so what I would say is to be patient, both with yourself and also with the process, because in every other... I feel like this is true in so many other areas of life, we don't expect things to start and immediately click. If I am...

Elisa: That's true.



Amanda: ...deciding like I want to start moving my body every day. I know that's good for me. I believe that it's important, not just for my day-to-day life but for the length of my life. Right? And so I know, logically, that like I'm going to need to start small for a lot of reasons — time reasons, physical reasons, whatever. And so my point being that like, in other areas we sort of intuitively know that A) we're not going to be an expert coming in; B) we're going to have to be patient with ourselves. We're going to fail. When I say fail, I just mean like we don't make time for it that day. But don't let that... don't write yourself off. Like if I didn't make time, you don't just say, *Well, I'm never going to do that again because...*

Eryn: Right. Don't write it off completely.

Amanda: ...you know in those areas. Right.

Eryn: Yeah. Yeah.

Amanda: And so... And then just trust. My instinct is that this friend believes that there is a God, and that His Word is His Word, and she wants to read it. I would trust that. Don't just rely on how it feels. And trust that the deposits that you are making and the investment that you are making, no matter how small or how large; the investments that you are making in Bible reading, no matter how it feels from day to day, trust that the Lord is working and that He is active. And His Word is living and active, and it is acting in you, and He is acting in you and around you. So that's a long answer to say: I hear you. I understand. And just be patient with yourself.

[Music]

Elisa: It's so important that we take time to be in the Word of God.

Eryn: I am so thankful for all the work that Amanda and her team do. Well, before we go, be sure to check out our website to find a link for the newest *God Hears Her* blogpost. You can also find a link to check out the "She Reads Truth" website. You can find that and more 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 Heidi and Jerri for all of their help and support. Thanks everyone.

[ODB theme]

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