



# God Hears Her Podcast

## Episode 147 – Mentoring the Next Generation with Ericka Porter

### Elisa Morgan & Eryn Adkins with Ericka Porter

[Music]

**Ericka:** He actually authors my purpose, and my purpose is so much bigger than just the things that I see in my day to day. And I've seen that, especially, young people who come to know the Lord and get baptized, it's almost after that moment that they see that their life is so much bigger than what they had originally thought.

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**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 Adkins.

**Elisa:** And I'm Elisa Morgan. When you were growing up, did you have someone in your life mentoring you? Maybe you were really close with your parents, or another family member, someone in your church. Or maybe you wish someone had come into your life with the wisdom and advice you needed while growing up.

**Eryn:** Today, we are talking to someone who is passionate about reaching the next generation. Ericka Porter is the founder of Rise Up Training and Consulting, a company focused on supporting organizations that support kids and teens through effective collaboration, professional development, and program design.

**Elisa:** Ericka is an absolute joy. Her passion for the work she does is contagious, so let's start off this *God Hears Her* conversation by asking Ericka what is one word you'd use to describe yourself.

**Ericka:** I'm His...



**Elisa:** Good word.

**Ericka:** ... and when I say His, I mean Jesus's. And so, I feel like my life has unfolded that part of who I am, and so, Ericka, Ericka Michelle as my mom would call me...

**Elisa:** Ericka Michelle.

**Ericka:** I am an Aurorite, so for those of you who are not in Colorado, there is a city that is next to Denver, and it is called Aurora, and so I was born and raised here, grew up here well into my mid-teen years. I'm the oldest of four girls, so I...

**Eryn:** Oh!

**Ericka:** ... hold that hat.

**Eryn:** How far apart are y'all?

**Ericka:** Yeah, the sister right underneath me is thirty-three, and so there's a ten-year gap because I'm forty-three...

**Elisa:** Oh, gosh...

**Ericka:** ... so there is a good ten year...

**Elisa:** A gap.

**Ericka:** ... difference, and then underneath that there's thirty, and underneath that there's twenty-nine, so, they are closer together. So, I kind of was a second mom, but have so enjoyed being an older sister, and I am the quintessential annoying, asking you questions, all up in your business, trying to control you, big sister, but it's really cool to watch them grow into women. And so, the oldest of four girls, I was born to a single mom... she had me very young, and I'm just grateful I could go into very deeply the story behind all of that, but I'll say that my mom, of any circumstance, could have made another choice but she chose to trust God, and... give birth to a baby girl when she was eighteen...

**Elisa:** Wow.



**Ericka:** ... and raised me, and loved me. And so, that's been a part of... a very big part of my story.

**Elisa:** Beautiful mom, well done.

**Ericka:** Yes, beautiful mom. Laura Anne. I call her... If she calls me Ericka Michelle, I'm going to call her Laura Anne. But didn't grow up necessarily in a Christian household. I think God and Jesus was kind of in the background, you know. You know something's there, something, but you know, we just do things. We would celebrate Christmas and Easter, but it wasn't until seventeen when my mom says this is the first time she really heard God very clearly to move our family to Florida where my grandmother was. And my grandmother was an anchor to our family coming to know the Lord. And so, we moved cross country in 1997 to Florida, and we... relocated our life and it was really then that I decided for whatever reason *why don't we go to church?* Like, *I don't know anybody, we have to rebuild our life, so I'm going to go to youth group and see what that's about*, and I, within three months of going to youth group, I radically found the Lord, my faith in Christ, at seventeen years old. And I really believe with everything within me that had God not gotten me at that point in my life, I might not have followed Him after I left, you know, the house and started college. And so, I firmly believe and know to be true in my own life that young people are impressionable. Young people are seeking something that's real, and when I found the Lord it was then that I really knew, *huh, maybe I don't want to be a fly girl on In Living Color*, for those of us who might know that show from the 90s. *I don't want to be that, I actually feel like God is calling me to youth ministry*. That's initially what I really believed the Lord wanted me to do. I went to something called Acquire the Fire...

**Eryn:** I remember that.

**Ericka:** ... I'm really aging myself here! But Acquire the Fire. Our youth group went to Acquire the Fire, and there was a part of it where they said *for those of you who you feel like the Lord is calling you into ministry, we want you to be really brave and we want you to stand up*. And Acquire the Fire is a stadium of thousands of young people who are there to either know the Lord or get introduced to the Lord, and so, we're, seventeen-year-old, nobody wants to be called out, but something in me was like *I gotta stand up. This is... this is me*. And so, I stood up, and they said *if this is you, now we're going to ask you to take another step forward, and we want to meet with you, and talk with you, and pray with you after the event so that we can give you the tools you need to do that*. And long story short, I end up going to Bible college, getting a degree in youth ministry, and moving to the east coast after... the northeast, rather, to start that trajectory in... in urban settings. I really believed it wasn't just young people in general in that time, but specifically urban youth ministry.



**Elisa:** So, Ericka...

**Ericka:** Yeah.

**Elisa:** ... if you can, take yourself back to when you were seventeen and... and you were at Acquire the Fire. How did you experience what I'm going to call God's call? You know, I love the way you started out saying... one word to describe yourself, you said "His..."

**Ericka:** Yeah.

**Elisa:** ... and, you know, we are all called to Jesus, that's our original call, but then we're called for Jesus in some kind of vocational investment. And so, here you are in this stadium full of all kinds of people, and I think a lot of us, you know, and people listening are going *how did you know it was God?* You know, what... what was that like? And how do we validate... that nudge that we're experiencing is the right one? You know, tell us about your experience there.

**Ericka:** Sure. I couldn't name it in probably, until about five years ago, but something called like listen to your life. I was kind of listening to my life. And when I say that, yes, I kind of was dialed into God, you know, having a personal relationship with Him I would feel nudges from Holy Spirit, but then I also had a youth pastor that just saw leadership in me, and saw passion in me, and really helped develop that, so had me serving early. He had me serving in youth group, had me serving in church, and was affirming the gifts...

**Elisa:** Okay.

**Ericka:** ... that he saw in me, and giving me a taste for what ministry was like, and I was like *this feels right*. This feels very aligned to what I didn't think would be until I came to know the Lord, and so, when I went to Acquire the Fire and they asked that, it was almost like I needed just somebody to say *that's what this is*.

**Elisa:** Okay.

**Ericka:** You feel like you're called to ministry, and like, that's what this is. That's exactly... I want to reach my generation. I want them to know the Lord like I'm coming to know the Lord and how He's healing me, and breaking me down to build me up, you know what I mean? And that really just evolved into not just my generation, but then the generation after that, and now it's Gen Z, and soon coming is Gen Alpha, and



I just feel as each generation comes up I'm still in that space to work and serve young people and their families.

**Eryn:** That's beautiful, Ericka. I have a multi-faceted question for you.

**Ericka:** Okay.

**Eryn:** So, I was talking with my mother-in-law this weekend. She was sharing with me that she really came to know the Lord and pursue a relationship, a faith of her own, when she was sixteen. She had grown up in a Christian household, but she hadn't fully understood the faith of your own. I asked her what was the difference between when you were fourteen, fifteen, and then sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, after you intersected with knowing that God is your Savior. And I want to ask you the same question for yourself, but then also, is there a pattern of types of behavior that you've witnessed that you can go *well, I've seen this and then that*. Is there something that you've seen that's, like, a trend amongst what happened in your life, and then, like, now, seeing kids intersect?

**Ericka:** I think for me, and what I've observed in young people as I've watched them go from considering God to really giving God a chance, and then actually developing that faith is that your worldview and your purpose become less about you and more about the world around you and what God has called you to do. Because I didn't really have a clear vision of what I wanted to do. Like, I said I had some ideas, but it didn't click for me until I came to know God, that He actually authors my purpose, and my purpose is so much bigger than just the things that I see in my day to day. And I've seen that, especially, young people who come to know the Lord and get baptized, it's almost after that moment that they see that their life is so much bigger than what they had originally thought. And their purpose is aligned to who God has called them to be, and now they want to do more. I've seen young people want to become missionaries. I've seen young people want to now not just be saved but save their basketball team. I've seen young people really insecure and not know who they are, and as they develop a relationship with the Lord have more confidence to fulfill what He would have them be. So, I feel like it's like, the world gets bigger and more meaningful, and more purposed, as you find the Lord, cause He opens your eyes to who He is, and who He's called you to be from that.

**Eryn:** That's so good.

**Elisa:** I think it's so beautiful that God planted in you this sense of passion and purpose, really from a very early age, but it's really formed in your very identity. Here you are, born to a teen mom, a single mom, ten years ahead of any siblings, so just you and your mom, as He grows you up into Him, right



there where you were growing where He planted you. It seems like He grew this passion for kids your age when you found Him. Tell us more about that.

**Ericka:** Yeah. I would say this a lot about, probably, my generation is that we now really want to show up and be what we needed, and I'll say that...

**Elisa:** Wow.

**Ericka:** ... specifically for myself, because I didn't have siblings until I was a little bit older, and didn't get saved and really get into a church community until I was almost an adult, that I can imagine that I probably would have avoided a lot of pitfalls, a lot of insecurities, a lot of comparison, a lot of confusion, a lot of shame, a lot of trying to find myself if I would have had an Ericka in my life in those spaces who saw me, and spoke life, and showed up consistently, and wasn't afraid to ask me hard questions, and to hold me accountable, but also love me, and support my mom. Like, my mom was, we grew up together, that's what she always says, *we grew up together, I was just a kid raising a kid*, and she did the best that she could, and... and quite honestly, it's by the grace of God that we are who we are now, we have a great relationship, but she also could've used support. She could've used a mentor, or a coach, or just somebody that really loved on me so she could have support in parenting me, and parenting my sisters. So, it's just bigger than just mentoring or what not. Like, my advocacy isn't just get involved in a young person's life, but do you know some single moms or a single mom that could really use some mentorship. Who are the young people in your life that you can show up for in all the various ways. There are lots of ways. And it doesn't have to be intimidating. Teenagers aren't scary. You just gotta talk to them. Just gotta talk to them, you know. To answer your question, that's what I would say, and even for those women who are listening that maybe did have mentorship and really have experienced that, I feel like that is all the more reason to support young people in your life, because you did have what you needed, and now you can sow that seed again.

**Eryn:** What have you learned about yourself in pursuing relationships and discipling teenagers?

**Ericka:** I really feel like God has gifted me to be able to connect with young people, so I will say that. And I know that's not everybody's story, and that's okay. And maybe that's why I don't find them scary. I am a naturally curious person, and so, I just lead with curiosity, and I've learned through working with young people that curiosity is welcomed. If you have a posture of curiosity, and not judgment or fixing or *let me guide you in the right direction*, you know, but you lean in with curiosity, and asking questions, and *what are you listening to right now*, and like, *what's going on at school*, and so, one, I'm naturally gifted in that way because I'm curious, and so I've learned that. I would encourage people, if... if they're wanting to



really get involved in young people's lives but they're just not sure how to do it, lean in with curiosity. There are young people in your lives naturally that you could probably connect with, but if you want support, like, if you're like *I really think I could do this, but I need some support*, there are youth groups you can get involved in, there are youth programs that will equip you and support you, give you talking points, coach you along the way. If you are curious, if you start with curiosity, you will learn from young people. I encourage adults that work with young people to have an asset-based mindset. Our young people, sure, are still growing and still lack some maturity. I mean, before you're twenty-five, your frontal cortex isn't even fully developed, and so there is that part of it, but man, there is so much value, and gold, and gems that are inside of a conversation with a...

**Elisa:** Yes. Yes.

**Ericka:** ... young person. The way they see the world, how they take in information, they are the smartest generation that has ever lived in that they are the most educated. They are the most socially aware and wanting to get socially involved. They also are the generation that has fully grown up in technology, and so, there's just a lot of different ways that we can engage them knowing these things about them...

**Elisa:** So good.

**Ericka:** ... and sometimes, you just have to have the conversation and be awkward.

**Eryn:** Yeah.

**Ericka:** Get through the awkwardness and continue to show up and be consistent, and that terror and that awkwardness eventually dissipates, and you start to really build a genuine relationship with a young person.

**Elisa:** And I think, too, like all of us, they just want to be known... and accepted...

**Ericka:** For sure, for sure.

**Elisa:** ... you know, for who they are. So, as we take an interest in what interests them, and ask the second and third and fifteenth question. You know, something I've done with my grandson, I'm not sure everybody wants to do it, because it's kind of weird, but... but whenever I'm with him, you know, I'll ask him nineteen thousand questions, and then I always turn it around and I say *now, ask me three questions...* He's nineteen, okay?



**Eryn:** That's so good, I love that.

**Elisa:** But I started doing it since he was about twelve. Because it isn't all just about him, and, you know, real relationship comes when it's mutual...

**Ericka:** For sure.

**Elisa:** ... and when there's... information exchanged, you know, not just imparted. So, you know, tell us about Rise Up...

**Eryn:** Yeah.

**Elisa:** ... what is it, and what do you do there? What's it about?

**Ericka:** Sure. So, I took a leap of faith about a year and some change ago and resigned from full-time work within Denver Public Schools. I mean, I did amazing work there, I was able to lead a mentoring program for the district around career... career development, and I've done youth development work my... all of my career in lots of different ways, and so, I've been in ministry, I've done other faith-based things, I've done career and college access work, worked in urban settings and suburban settings, and so essentially, my trajectory has given me a lot of experience, both professionally and personally working with young people. And I graduated from a leadership program last year, and a lot of different opportunities and people were sharing, again, listening to my life, that I had a gifting in certain things, that I maybe wasn't able to fully walk in when I was working inside of an organization. And I said *I think I'm going to resign and start my own thing.*

**Elisa:** Wow.

**Eryn:** Wow.

**Ericka:** So, I did it afraid. I was like, *okay, God!* At the top of last year, the thing that He told me at the very beginning of last year was to create space for what you're praying for. Create space for what you're praying for, and I had no idea what that really meant, but it ended up actualizing as *create space for the things that you're really good at that I'm going to make space for you to do.* And so, one of those things that I was able to do this year was to start Rise Up Training and Consulting. And it's essentially a company that works with youth-serving organizations to help them and their teams and their staff work effectively with youth and their families...





**Elisa:** Wow.

**Ericka:** ... So, it could be with consulting... long-term projects, it could be through workshops, and training and development, it could be through a talk where I just come in and kind of give you tips and tools to work with young people. It's been really, really cool. It's still brand new. So, it launched this year, so I'm about six months in, and I... it is wild. [giggling] It is fun, it is wild, it is scary, it is stretching me. But I'm learning, as my grandmother Pat had told me is that I was born to make a statement and part of the statements that I'm making is equipping other people to show up for young people like I believe is necessary. So, Rise Up is really a call to action. It is our collective responsibility to show up for the young people in our lives and to make sure that they have a chance. There's no such thing as other people's kids, and how can we collectively be that for young people. So, you can probably tell, I'm just excited, passionate, could talk about it all day, but that's what Rise Up is, and so, to kind of engage with me, I highly encourage visiting my website, checking it out, seeing if it aligns with your listeners and... and what they might be curious about. They can follow me and get my newsletter if they just want to know more about what... what it's like to work with Gen Z, tips and tools for parents, for youth leaders, for community members. But if you feel like there's an opportunity for us to work more deeply, you can schedule some time with me, we can talk about it and go from there. But yeah. Rise Up is a labor of love and I'm... I'm really excited about it.

**Elisa:** I'm proud of you.

**Eryn:** That's awesome, Ericka. You did it afraid...

**Ericka:** Yeah.

**Eryn:** ... You pushed through the terror barrier.

**Ericka:** I'm still doing it afraid.

**Eryn:** Yeah.

**Elisa:** Yeah.

**Eryn:** Ericka, what is one piece of advice that you would give somebody listening that wants to remind this next generation, the Gen Z's, the what is it, Alpha? I think Alpha...



**Ericka:** Alpha is like eleven and under...

**Eryn:** Yeah.

**Ericka:** ... and Gen Z is like eleven to, like, twenty-six. Yeah.

**Eryn:** Yes, okay, good. So, what's, like, one piece of advice, one encouragement, one tip for somebody to remind that generation, Gen Z, Alpha, that God sees them, that He loves them, that He hears them.

**Ericka:** I would... encourage them to look around their everyday life and see who are the young people that are around them, whether they're in their household, whether it's their neighbors, if it's the kids that go to the high school in their local community, and start talking to them. Just start engaging them, and I know that feels weird, cause it's like stranger danger...

**Elisa:** Yes, right. Mom's going to get mad, yeah.

**Ericka:** Right. Just show up in your everyday life. And honestly... like again, if you're looking for a way to engage young people and maybe just going up and randomly talking to them is not comfortable or appropriate, there are so many ways to engage young people. Volunteer at the high school. Become a mentor. If you've got a really interesting career, and you want to help young people figure out their purpose, then there are career centers in every high school that would welcome an opportunity for you to share your story. There are teachers that would welcome you to do mock interviews with young people. So, I think my advice would be, like, get with a youth-serving organization, a school, a non-profit, a mentoring organization, ask how you can help, and help according to your comfort level and your margin...

**Eryn:** Yeah.

**Ericka:** ... And then stick with it. Commit to it. Show up, be consistent.

**Eryn:** That's good. Commit to it.

**Elisa:** You know, I think we have these assumptions, Ericka, that we're not needed. You know, that... that when we get, you know, maybe beyond the career, or, you know, just beyond teenage... life, you know...



**Ericka:** Yeah.

**Elisa:** ... that we're not really needed. That... that they're doing their new thing, and we're going to be old fuddy-duddies. We think of the... the commercials with, you know, becoming your parents. You know, we... we think of that, we think we're... we're irrelevant...

**Ericka:** Yeah.

**Elisa:** ... and it's easy to just give in to that. And, because it's...

**Ericka:** Yeah.

**Elisa:** ... kind of surprising for you to say go connect with your high school, I think *oh, my gosh, you know, they've got security guards, I can't even get in there anymore*. I mean, I've gone to try to pick up...

**Ericka:** Sure, sure.

**Elisa:** ... my grandson at high school, and it's like, you know, fifteen forms of ID, and so we get intimidated by that, and we think...

**Ericka:** Sure, sure.

**Elisa:** ... *I've got nothing to offer there*. And yet, you're making it sound so normal...

**Ericka:** It is.

**Elisa:** ... so, maybe in our neighborhood high school, maybe in our churches, talking...

**Ericka:** Yes, yes.

**Elisa:** ... to our youth pastors... maybe, you know, even in... in a group like the Mom Co we look at how do we be a mentor to moms, so it... I like the way you're popping our thinking beyond what is right under our nose...

**Ericka:** Yeah.



**Elisa:** ... but the other thing that I think about is just do we have neighbors?

**Ericka:** Yeah.

**Elisa:** Do we have neighbors whose kids go outside and play some or whatever, I can remember, there's nothing more moving than an adult taking a healthy interest in my child...

**Ericka:** Yeah. Yes, yes.

**Elisa:** ... I'm like, oh my word. That is such a gift, you know...

**Ericka:** Yes.

**Eryn:** Yeah.

**Elisa:** ... so, that helps me take courage, too.

**Ericka:** For sure. Well, and what I will encourage is I also... serve in my... my church's youth group, and when I look at the youth leaders, they are old, they are young, they are black, they are white, they are new to the faith, they are old in the faith, and we all just jump in there and interact...

**Elisa:** That's good.

**Ericka:** ... and the young people benefit from the varied experiences, and if I can encourage my... my boomers, my parents and older, if I can encourage you all, there is a place for you...

**Elisa:** Right.

**Ericka:** ... there is value in what you bring to a young person's life. They need grandparent-like people, they need that voice as well, so I... I've heard so many people in that age group like *no, they're good... you know, we'll leave that for the younger adults*. No, you are needed as well, so you're not exempt. There is room for you, there is value...

**Elisa:** Okay.

**Ericka:** ... in what you would share with our young people.



**Elisa:** I love that. As we go a little bit to a close, can you vision cast for us why it's important to care about the younger generation? What difference does it really, really make? No matter what age we are listening.

**Ericka:** The vision that I have is really the principle of reaping and sowing. If you can sow into what you hope will be a... a better world, a... a... a world that is closer to the Lord, like, you really gotta sow those seeds now. And the reason why I know it works is cause I'm alive and breathing and living, and I am a product of somebody who sowed, people, many people, who have sowed into my life, and so it's just proof of that. The vision is, if we can sow, and invest, and make time now, that we won't have to do it later. There's something that I heard, and I apologize, I don't remember where I heard it, but it's so much easier to, like, raise good children than repair broken adults...

**Elisa:** Oh, wise.

**Ericka:** ... We do the work now, we sow the work now, because the principle is if you sow, you will reap. And not only will you reap, but, like, the communities will reap, and they'll find their purpose, and there's a lot of lack of purpose, and a lot of confusion in identity, and I think a lot of what we can do now can help solidify that for young people. I could keep going, as you can tell, but yeah.

**Elisa:** If a... a young person is listening right now and just going *oh, I would give anything for somebody...*

**Ericka:** Yeah, yeah.

**Elisa:** ...you know, *to pay attention to me and build into me, and I feel so lonely, and I'm confused most of the time, and I think God loves me, but some days I get up wondering and I'm not sure who to turn to, and my parents don't really know God,* or keep going, you know, what do you want to say to that person?

**Ericka:** One, you're not alone in that feeling, and something that the enemy will try to tell you is that you're alone in that feeling, and that there isn't a safe place for you, and that you're not seen, and you're not heard, and you're not valued, and those are just lies. Straight up lies. And I would encourage you, depending on where the... a young person might be in their faith is, it's really as simple as there are local churches that would love to welcome you, to love on you [music], to provide support. There are safe adults that want to hear you, that want to welcome you, that want to see you. I know talking to your parents isn't cool, I know talking to your parents might not always feel like you're heard, but I also would start there, because no matter how they might show up in your life, they do love you, and I imagine that they want a good relationship with you, and that's also another place that you can start. But you are seen,



you are loved, you are valued, you're here for a reason, and God loves you and sees you, and seek Him, and He has got you.

[Music]

**Eryn:** It is so important for people to mentor the next generation.

**Elisa:** The work Ericka does is incredible. Well, before we go, be sure to check out our website to find a link for the newest *God Hears Her* blog post. You can also find a link to check out Ericka's website. You can find that and more at [godhearsher.org](http://godhearsher.org). That's [godhearsher.org](http://godhearsher.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 Sarah and Toria for all of their help and support. Thanks everyone.

[Music]

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