



God Hears Her Podcast

Episode 154 – From Self Care to Holy Care with Laura Smith

Elisa Morgan & Eryn Adkins with Laura Smith

[Music]

Laura: Jesus loves us so much better than we can love each other. I imagine His perfect love just coming and holding us, and hugging us, and settling us down, and reminding us to take deep breaths which calm our entire nervous system. I just think it would just be so much love and compassion, those moments. That's who He is and what He wants for us.

[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 Adkins.

Elisa: And I'm Elisa Morgan. How do you think about self-care? Do you prioritize it? Feel strongly against it? Or wish you had more time for it? Well, today we're talking with author and speaker Laura L. Smith about self-care as holy care.

Eryn: We've had a conversation with Laura before, so make sure to check out episode twenty-four, linked in the show notes. Laura recently wrote *Holy Care for the Whole Self*, a book about mental health and the practices we can embrace straight from Scripture to help our hearts and minds.

Elisa: Let's start this conversation by getting a little recap from Laura about her life and what led to this book during this episode of *God Hears Her*.

Laura: I grew up in Columbus, Ohio, I now live in Oxford, Ohio, which is a college town. It's about an hour outside of Cincinnati. My husband's a professor at Miami University, so we get to live in this beautiful, like, brick and ivy town, and...



Eryn: Oh, so romantic.

Laura: ... it's just... it is, it's like a Hallmark movie. We joke all the time, like, our town is like a Hallmark movie. They should film it with all of the seasonal festivals and things. We've got it...

Elisa: Wow.

Laura: ... it's adorable, so cute, and we have four kids who are big now, our baby is seventeen and our oldest is twenty-five, so... we have been through the whole raising of kids, and still doing that as they're older, but that has been a big part of our lives.

Eryn: Boys or girls?

Laura: Two of each. That's just how God sent them. Like, can't plan that... It's just...

Elisa: No, you can't. That's great.

Laura: ... just how it came... girl, boy, girl, boy, and they're all awesome, and it's so cool to watch their journeys, and I am blessed that I get to use words to tell more people about Jesus through books, and speaking, and things like this, like your podcast.

Elisa: Beautiful. And I know... when we talked last time you were sharing your story, and your story, I... I'm recalling it just off the top of my head because it was a... so impactful. You had a... a messy kind of a family situation between your mom and dad specifically, and it scarred you in some ways that were very painful for a little girl in terms of your identity...

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: ... your self-worth, how you stood up for yourself as a woman...

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: ... you know, how you understood who you were, so, if we're going to go into this topic of holy care, which is really what you write about in... in your latest works, and you're talking about mental health, how did your childhood and the scars, you know, that resulted, how did that begin to shape your voice on this topic?



Laura: Yeah, so, I did grow up in a house where my dad left our family several times, and as a little girl, I didn't have language for that or understanding of that, it's just, it was the only lens that I knew to look through. But to me, it just felt like I wasn't good enough. Right? Like, not good enough to make my dad stay. Obviously, there were other grown-up issues going on, but that is how I internalized it, and I became a people pleaser, trying to do anything I could to make my dad stay, and then that developed into... just a personality of not believing I was enough, not believing I was a lova- lovable, not believing anyone would ever stay... and believing that I had to literally, like, work my head off to try and get attention, or praise, or love of any kind. All of those are lies, but that was the reality that I knew, and I didn't know anything different. And, gosh, it took me a really long time to even realize that I was living life through that lens...

Eryn: Yeah.

Laura: ... you know, there were defense mechanisms that I built up for survival, and it's just how I was going about life...

Eryn: Yeah.

Laura: ... and it took a lot for me to even realize I was approaching things that way.

Eryn: Was there a moment or was it just several moments that brought you to that awareness?

Laura: Honestly, this isn't going to be true for everybody of course, but I was really blessed. My husband came into my life, and he loved me, for real loved me. Like, loved me for who I am. We were friends before we ever started dating, so he knew all of the really dumb stuff I did in college. He knew all of my, like, personality quirks that I thought made me very unlovable, and he just cared for me so perfectly, and so deeply, and so honestly for who I was instead of for the show I was trying to put on, that that was the first time I realized, *oh, my gosh*, like, *someone actually does love me for me*. Like, they know I have no sense of direction, and they still love me. Right?

Elisa: I love it.

Laura: They... they know that I'm not any good at sports, and they still love me...

Eryn: Yeah.



Laura: ... like, just all the things that I used to think if someone found out, or if someone knew, right, that they wouldn't love me. So, that was just a, like, lightning bolt to me, and I think God really used that, because I think from where I was and how I'd grown up, I wasn't going to believe it if someone just said *oh, yeah, you're lovable, Laura, someone would stay for you*. Like, I wouldn't believe it unless I felt it...

Eryn: Yeah.

Laura: ... and I feel like God actually redeemed my story by having all those negative emotions from the man I cared about most in my life be redeemed by positive emotions from the man I loved most in my life.

Elisa: You know, I love the way you just put that, Laura, it's like a thread that runs through what you're saying. You know, your husband saw you for who you were, and you were stunned that someone could actually see you, and then love you. And it... it takes me back to a comment you made just prior to that, when you said, you know, *I had defense mechanisms, you know, I... I was protecting myself*, and I think for so many of us, those very defense mechanisms that we put in place to survive, we have to reexamine, and usually, you know, undo, you know...

Laura: Right.

Elisa: ... reform, because we're unable to receive the love that God wants us...

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: ... to get because we've defended ourselves so mightily and properly, you know, from being hurt with bad love before...

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: ... and I'm hearing that discovery threading through your days, and now, you know, twenty-five - seven, whatever years later... you sit in a very different place. Take us forward now into how you have tapped into a different view of mental health. You know, now that you can look back on it all, and I know you've studied some things, and you've been through different kinds of therapy, and you and your husband have worked on stuff, etcetera, you know. What's your view of mental health and Christians, and... and how we as followers of Jesus can steward our mental health?



Laura: Listen, we're created in the image of God. He calls us His prized possessions. He calls us His masterpieces, I mean those are the words that He has for us, so we should be taking care of ourselves...

Eryn: Yeah.

Laura: ... like, and I think it's back to that self-care. Is it selfish, or is it important, or is it sacred? It's sacred, and we can't be all things to all people, and it's not selfish to care for ourselves, because God created us, and He wants goodness for us, He wants fullness for us, and in order to experience that fullness we need to take care of ourselves.

Eryn: Would you define what taking care of ourselves looks like...

Laura: Yeah.

Eryn: ... cause I think, from what I've struggled with, especially in my past, is feeling better doesn't mean I'm becoming better and taking care of myself...

Laura: That's good.

Eryn: ... and so, what feels good to me, I could trick my brain into thinking that's taking care of myself...

Laura: Yeah.

Eryn: ... but it... it could be actually more detrimental to myself.

Elisa: Like eating the whole box of chocolates, or...

Eryn: Yes!

Elisa: ... yeah, yeah, that...

Laura: It looks good in the moment.

Elisa: ... feels so good, yeah...

Eryn: It does! It feels so good...



Elisa: I feel loved right now.

Eryn: ... or, like, or never working out. It's like, I know my brain needs to release things chemically, that's better for me, but what feels better to sit on the sofa, like...

Elisa: And watch another episode, yeah.

Laura: I mean, it totally depends. Everybody's different for starters... what might totally fuel you might not work for me, and vice versa, but there are some things that are just **incremental** to human wellbeing, and this is something that I've discovered on my mental health journey is that so many of them come straight from Scripture, and I love that so much. One thing we all need is rest. We can't function unless we're resting, and...

Elisa: So true, yes.

Laura: ... all of our mental health issues escalate when we're exhausted, right. We're... we're more anxious, we're more depressed, like, it... old triggers are sharper, like everything when we're... but that's from Genesis, right from the beginning, God created six days of work and a day of rest. Then He made it one of the Ten Commandments, like *this is a commandment*, like *I command you to rest*. And that is so **incremental** to all of us, every human being needs rest to care for their physical and mental wellbeing.

Eryn: Yeah.

Laura: You know, same with eating correctly and exercise. Like, everyone's exercise is different, I love, like, talking to different people even if you have some physical ailment, sometimes you can use, like, exercise bands from a seated position, or someone who's just even going up and down your stairs at home might be your exercise for the day, right? But moving our bodies is important. Eating the kinds of food and hydrating that are best for our body type, like, talking to a doctor if you know already, like, what's good for you. That's so important. So, there are some things that are just basic human needs, and then there are other things that will bring joy or light to different people, but some of them still have, like, a common thread. Like, creating things is really good for our mental health, and actually helps reduce trauma, it helps us deal with stress, and again, this is biblical because we're made in God's image and He's the master Creator, right? So, this makes so much sense. But the things that I want to create might not be the things that either of you want to create... or any of our listeners. Like, they could create codes for computers, whereas I create books. Right? I mean, someone might create beautiful things in their



kitchen, or in their yard, or some people are engineers and create entire buildings or plans for their company, but creating things is tapping into who God created us to be...

Eryn: Yeah.

Laura: ... and it helps us process our mental health. So, I think there are some things like creating we should all be doing. But what does that mean for you and me, it's... it's different, right?

Eryn: Yeah, that's good. So, rest, movement, nutrition, creating...

Laura: Community.

Elisa: I love those.

Eryn: Community, oh yeah, tell us that one.

Laura: So, again, in Genesis God said *this is good, and this is great, and*, "It is not good for man to be alone..."

Elisa: Yeah.

Laura: ... it's the first thing that wasn't good in all of creation. So, God knew this from the beginning, and mental health professionals, like, it's their number one thing they say people need is a community, because we need people to help carry our burdens with us so it's not all on us, and we need people who will listen, to help us process, I think we see a much bigger picture of who God is and what He's doing when we're in community, and I can see, like, Eryn, how He's blessed you, and how He's answered a prayer for Elisa, and instead of just what He's doing in my life, like, we just get such a bigger view. So, community is one that we all need, and again, that'll look different for us. You know, that could be...

Eryn: Yeah.

Laura: ... a group of girlfriends that you play pickleball with, it could be your family, it could be, you know, a woman you do Bible study with, it can be so many different things, so again, that looks different for everybody but community is key.



Elisa: It makes a lot of sense, and if you were to draw a blank and say *how do we experience this kind of self-care*, you would write the word “church” in that blank. And yet, not all of our churches really look like that. Say we’re single, say we’re not connected in a deep community, say we are trying to work out, and eat correctly, and stuff, that nut of community is a really tough one to crack. You know, we... we’ve heard it a million times, these days in the dating world, how do you meet somebody except for swiping left or right or whatever direction it is. You know, how do we not be alone on Saturday nights? How do we change it? I mean, lots of us live in apartments where community’s kind of sparse, you know. Some of us live in families, but, you know... can you speak to... to that? How do we crack that nut of community?

Laura: Yeah, so I think it’s the same as cracking the nut of all of these things, that one, we need to be creative, and two, we need to be intentional, and three, we have to turn it over to Jesus. So... one, like, *God, help me find community*. Like, that could be a daily prayer, cause He listens to our prayers, He hears our prayers, so take it to Him for starters...

Eryn: Okay.

Elisa: I love that. Yup.

Laura: ... And then being intentional, like, okay, so do you belong to a church? Do they have small groups you could sign up for? Do they have a craft night if you like crafts? Do they have a worship night if you love worship? Do they have a bonfire if you love bonfires? Like, what is going on at a church, sign up for the thing that you like. If you hate crafts, don’t sign up for the craft night, you’ll have a terrible time and you won’t meet people that are like you, cause they’re all crafters. Right? Like, but seriously...

Elisa: Good point.

Laura: ... Check out your city, like your local library. Like, ours has book clubs and free classical music days, and there are arts and crafts for kiddos, and story times for kiddos, there’s, like, the local library has... usually has a lot of free activities, or you can meet people with common interests.

Eryn: That’s cool. I don’t think I realized that.

Laura: If you’re a runner, join a running club. My daughter’s twenty-five living in Nashville, and it is hard to meet people, but she’s a runner, so she joined a runner’s club and once a week they run, and at the end they have a social...



Elisa: Nice. Nice.

Laura: ... and... and if you can make it, great. And if you can't, not great, but now she's, like, made some friends with other runners. Right? People have something in common with her who are training for marathons like she is. You know? So, find the things that you love, and you have to be intentional and actually do them, you can't just say *oh, I don't have any friends*. Yeah, it's hard...

Elisa: Yeah.

Laura: ... and you might have to try several things. You might try a small group that actually doesn't work for you...

Elisa: Yeah.

Laura: ... You might show up at the runner's club and be like *they're all marathon runners, I like to run a three-mile course...*

Eryn: Yeah.

Laura: ... right? Like, so, you might have to try multiple things, but I think being creative, and being intentional, and... and seeking the Lord's help in that are all key.

Eryn: So, I hear you saying being vulnerable to experiences and willing to adjust.

Laura: Yeah, yeah.

Eryn: What has it been like in this journey of taking care of yourself, and recognizing when you haven't? What's your relationship been like with shame?

Laura: Shame's the worst, isn't it?

Eryn: Hate it.

Elisa: Yup, yup.

Eryn: And sometimes I mistake it...



Laura: Shame's the worst.

Eryn: ... for it being rational.

Laura: Yeah.

Elisa: It's... it's kind of like a Whack-a-Mole, you know... you... you slay it in one area, and it pops up in another area, and you slay it there, and it pops up over here. I mean, it's just my go to, right under the surface emotion. You know, yeah.

Laura: Yeah, yeah. No, and I think it's... yeah, it is, it's a constant battle, like you said, Elisa. It doesn't just go away cause we snapped our fingers. We have to remember that there's condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. Like, Jesus didn't come to judge the world. He came to love us. So, I think that holding onto that truth is helpful, but still, that doesn't always penetrate, but if we can have that verse kind of in our head, like when we're... when we're condemning ourselves, be like *there is no condemnation in Christ Jesus*. So, Jesus isn't condemning us. Okay. All right, let's... cling onto that truth. But also, we need to tell people. I know Brené Brown has done a ton of work on shame, and she says silence and secrecy is how shame grows. If we tell somebody, we know this, this shines light on it, and darkness can't survive when we put light on it. But I know so many things I feel ashamed for as part of my story of suffering with PTSD, and I just figure if something has gone wrong, then it is my fault. But, for example, we currently have this crazy thing going on in our house, a pipe burst, we had a flood, all kinds of damage to our home...

Elisa: Yes.

Laura: ... fighting with the insurance company, all the things, and... the other night, I was, I literally didn't sleep, I was up all night just, like, wrestling with the arguing with insurance and I can't stand confrontation, and the dollars that are going out the door to fix things, and all of it, and I was just so... I'm like *oh, my gosh, I shouldn't have picked out that cabinet*, even though technically insurance should cover it, but I'm like, *if I hadn't, then it wouldn't be this cost*, and like, da da da, and I was up all night, and I just... but the next morning I said to my husband, I'm like *I was up all night. These things were bothering me*. And he's like *okay, take it down a notch*. Like, *it's going to be okay. It's going to be okay. We have enough money that if we don't get them reimbursed, we can pay that one thing. It's okay*. And just because I didn't let it fester, because that could have bugged me all day, and the next night, and the next night, but we need to tell somebody... Or else that shame is just going to continue to grow.

Eryn: Yeah, it's going to compile on.



Laura: Yeah.

Eryn: It is.

Elisa: You were talking about that Jesus didn't come to condemn us, you know... let's take that illustration into our relationship with God. You know, tell somebody, yeah. And so, you did, and you felt a relief in telling your husband...

Laura: [Whispered] Yeah.

Elisa: ... How do you think Jesus views us when we spin out the way you just described, and... and how can we connect with Him in those moments?

Laura: So, I know that He is so loving, and He cares so much about us. I think about, consider the person you love most in the world, and if you saw them fretting, and worrying, and... and...

Elisa: Oh, that's good.

Laura: ... stressing out about something, think of that person you love, and if you knew they were just so worked up about that conversation they had, or... or so stressed out about that thing they forgot to do, or that thing that they did mess up even, cause sometimes we do. I mean, we're human, so we do things wrong, like...

Elisa: Hello. Yeah.

Laura: ... say they're, like, stressed out about something they did wrong, they know it, they're blaming themselves, they're beating themselves up, like, how would you treat them?

Eryn: Yeah.

Laura: Like, with... you'd give them a hug. You'd listen to them. You might buy them ice cream or a coffee, like, you would just want to love on them, and reassure them, Jesus loves us so much better than we can love each other. I imagine His perfect love just coming and holding us, and hugging us, and settling us down, and reminding us to take deep breaths, which calm our entire nervous system. I just think it would just be so much love and compassion, those moments. That's who He is and what He wants for us.



Elisa: Beautiful. What are some practices you just... you just mentioned breathing, you know, so what are some of the practices that you use for yourself with holy care, with this kind of attention to your being?

Laura: Yeah, breathing is really important. I'm surprised how often I forget to. Like, that I literally catch myself holding my breath...

Elisa: Yeah.

Laura: ... especially when I'm stressed...

Eryn: Same.

Laura: ... like, my shoulders rise up and I'm not breathing at all, and I'm like [gasping sounds], it's like I can't.

Eryn: And you're like *why do I have so much anxiety?*

Laura: Right! Right! It's... I'm not even breathing... breathing is so important. Just taking, like, five deep inhales and five big exhales can literally change your whole spinning. I think being outside, again, like, God created outdoors, so being outside is biblical and it makes sense that we would find beauty there and rest there for our souls. I think just, whether it's the leaves changing in the fall, or snowflakes in the winter, or just even... having that change in temperature from, like, climate control is just so helpful. Hearing a bird sing, or we have a ton of woodpeckers in our back yard, and every time I hear one it's like that is insane, that God created woodpeckers. Like, da da da da da da, how they do that, and it just makes me marvel at creation and who God is. Right? It just snaps me out of whatever's in my, like, crazy-town brain and, like, focusing on the goodness of God. So, being outside is great for me. Exercise is really important, too. That to me is, I know it's good for my body, but I tell you what, it is way better for my soul even than for my body. Like, to just process all those thoughts and let them come out and talk to the Lord about them, or sometimes it's just me talking to myself, I'm sorting, and then He... like, when I finally get to a space where I'm allowing Him in, He's like *hello, I've been here the whole time...* but... that's really good for me. So, those are some of my favorites.

Eryn: That's good. In writing this, what was your hardest and favorite part? Do you have one? Cause I feel like whenever you write on something that maybe you've struggled with in the past, you either rub up against something, or you're like *oh, yes, I can't wait to write about this part.*



Laura: I think the hardest part was writing about setbacks. I wanted to talk about them, cause they're real. I want everyone to know they can give themselves grace, cause Jesus gives us so much grace...

Eryn: Yeah.

Laura: ... and that, like, you don't snap your fingers, or pray it all away, or even go through a few rounds of counseling and just, like, feel better. It's a process, and it's a journey, and so, I actually had a chapter about setbacks, and it... it was very meh, and then I had a big setback, and then I'm like, oh...

Elisa: Thank you, God, yeah.

Laura: ... Uh-huh, thanks so much... and I had to write about that setback, and actually experiencing it and then writing it really raw was hard, and actually a little bit triggering, but also, I felt, like, so important to say, like, look, this is real life. Like, we're going to have setbacks and they're hard, and no matter how far we get in our mental health journey, there could still be a trigger or something that happens that will set us back. So, I felt like that was a really hard thing to write, and also, I pray that it'll really help a lot of people who read it go *oh, gosh, it's not just me*, like, this is okay.

Eryn: How would you define a setback?

Laura: Yeah, I think if you feel like you're going along, and, like, things are, like, you're doing pretty good with your mental health. Like, you're doing the things that care for you, like, you're seeing your counselor, or if you have a prescription you're taking your prescription, or you're doing your deep breathing, or, you know, you're in community, whatever the things that are just really feeding your soul, and then you literally have some sort of downward spiral. Right? Like a... if it's depression, a day you can't get out of bed, and you're just like *boy, that hit me hard*, or if it's anxiety, you feel the anxious thought spinning. With my PTSD, I'll have a lot of, like, flashbacks to things that happened as a girl and lies that I had believed, and all the sudden I'm living in those lies again, even though I know they're lies. I know better...

Eryn: Gosh, yeah, so real.

Laura: ... and I actually have, like, we talked about those defense mechanisms, all the sudden I'm living full in those defense mechanisms again. I think setbacks can be lots of things. I think if you have an addiction, it can be, like, oh, you've been clean for so long, and now, all the sudden you fall back into a bender, right? I think there's so many things that a setback could look like depending on what you're



dealing with, but it's kind of like when you were at a certain level of mental health, and you feel yourself, not just like gradual, well, sometimes it's gradual, but all the sudden you find yourself at a lower place.

Elisa: I hope people are hearing the freedom in this conversation. You know, we have judgment about mental health that we impose on ourselves and on each other, and I love what Dr. Christina, I think, Edmondson said when she was on one time with us, Eryn, she talked about how our brain is a... an organ in our body, and, you know, if we had a broken leg or, you know, a... a kidney infection, or something wrong with our eyes, we would go to the doctor and we would get a prescription or whatever and get treatment and get better...

Laura: Yeah.

Elisa: ... But with our mental health, we tend to judge it as, well, *you're a loser, and something's lacking in your faith or in your relationship with God*. And the reality is that, like she said, the brain is another organ that we need to steward...

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: ... its health for. So, there's great freedom in that, and when we get stuck, and especially in setbacks, I think, because that's when we do that heap of shame and judgment on ourselves, *well see, you screwed up again*, you know, and... and if we can go no, it's two steps forward, three steps back, five steps forward, two steps back, you know, that's the way the life is. That's what sanctification is about. It's not about poof, you're done, it's about continuation, you know, as Eugene Peterson said, a long obedience...

Laura: Yeah.

Elisa: ... in the same direction. Just, this continuation of abiding, and that's as true for our mental health, our... our self-care as for any other part of our being.

Eryn: Laura, would you pray over the hearts and the minds that are listening right now that may be wrestling with a setback, or maybe they're wrestling with the shame... that voice that's like *oh, you're not worthy of taking care of yourself*, or wherever the Lord leads you in this prayer, but would you pray over the hearts and the...

Elisa: Yeah.



Eryn: ... minds that are listening right now.

Laura: Absolutely, what an honor. Dear Jesus, thank you for creating each and every one of us in Your image. For coming to this earth so that we could have an abundant life. So grateful, Lord. You want us to have an abundant life, but we live in a broken world, and so, broken things happen to us, and we're all dealing with those, but Lord, I pray that You help us remember that we can go to You, that You love us so much, and You do want abundance for us, and You do want healing for us, and You do want fullness for us, and that there is no shame in saying *I live in a broken world, and bad things have happened to me, and I've done bad things*. That we can come to You freely, and You love us fully no matter what we've done or where we've been. And Jesus, I just pray that You remind us all that, like, You are a healer. That is Your desire is for us all to be healed, and [music] when the crowds came to You, You healed everyone, no matter what their affliction was, and that this is what You want for us, and on this earth that might be something miraculous and quick, but often it's a long journey, but that You promise to be with us always, to the end of the earth, so You'll be with us on this journey. I hold... just pray that we hold onto that truth, Lord, that You are with us, You are for us, that You love us in our mental health journeys and in everything we face in our lives. In Your holy name, Jesus, I pray. Amen.

[Music]

Eryn: Amen! It's really exciting to embrace self-care in a new way.

Elisa: Yeah, it really is, Eryn. Before we go, be sure to check out our website to find a link for our first episode with Laura, and to check out her new book, *Holy Care for the Whole Self*. You can find that and more at godhearsher.org. That's 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 our fans Melissa and Jill for all of their help and support. Thanks everyone.

[Music]

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