



God Hears Her Podcast

Episode 155 – Connectivity and Relationship

Elisa Morgan & Eryn Adkins with Lauren Reitsema

Lauren: I remember in that season when my parents were nearly separated, I still recount and I have the journal, that I was pouring out my soul. *Why aren't You big enough to change this? I believe in miracles. I believe I have the faith of a mustard seed.* I mean it was the quintessential Bible study answer. I did everything I could to beg and plead and say, *God, where are You? Come on. All my friends who hate You have better families than this. What's going on?* And I sit here multiple years later [inaudible] multiple years later and thinking *He held me.* Because that moment put His sovereignty and His faithfulness on display.

[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. I had the privilege of talking with Lauren Reitsema live and in person while were at the MOMCON Conference in Chicago.

Elisa: Unfortunately, I couldn't make it because during that conference, I broke my arm. Oh geez. Lauren's mission is to teach relationship skills to help people feel heard and fight fair and set healthy boundaries. She's the president of The Center for Relationship Education. She and her husband, Josh, love adventuring with their three kids.

Eryn: Let's start off this *God Hears Her* conversation by asking, Lauren, Who were you as a little girl?

Lauren: I actually am a girl who grew up in a magical town in Evergreen, Colorado, which was in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains and had a childhood of close proximity with siblings in close age. I have two brothers and a sister. I'm the second born...

Eryn: Okay.



Lauren: ...of parents who were married for almost 20 years. And then, after a move away from the...the mountain town and some changes in jobs and...and stuff, we experienced separation and divorce when I was a teenager. And so I experienced this place where childhood almost existed in a season that stopped at a point. And it's been interesting as a mom myself now to mark those milestones in my own children's lives and kind of say, Oh, here we are. I made it a little bit beyond that storyline in my parents' lives. But being that I was college-bound when a lot of the transition really took shape and remarriage started to happen, I fell into a season of one, wanting to escape from Colorado, which I rarely do cause I love it there. I live there now with my family. But I went to TCU in Fort Worth, Texas. In a season of happenstance and serendipity, I was in an interpersonal communications class that I had to take as a freshman just to check a box. And my professor started talking about science behind what makes relationships work. You know what makes relationships fail and patterns in communications and up messages and down messages. And I was equal parts enamored and inspired and equal parts angry. Because I thought, if only I was not learning this at 18. And if only my parents had learned this, and if only somebody stopped to coach us in how to change our patterns, maybe my family could have been different. Maybe my legacy could have looked different. But ultimately, I know that that was a milestone in my life that shaped and created a space for encouraging others for looking at my own self-developing awareness and a passion for doing relationship and connection with intention, with purpose, with tools, with skills. And it's led me on a journey to build my own family. My husband and I have been married 16 years now. We just celebrated an anniversary. We have three kids ranging from toddler to teenager.

Eryn: You said you were 16 when you heard the news that your parents were divorcing.

Lauren: Yeah. So the separation...my...in my circumstance, there was a formal separation period with a lot of desire and intention to try and work it out. So I was in eighth grade when my dad moved out of the house. And I...we watched progressive counseling and...and had lots of ebbs and flows of hope and wonder and curiosity. But ultimately, I remember the day I felt like I could have told them just based on facial expressions and some of the dead ends that maybe they felt that it was too far gone and that they had chosen not to reconcile. So trying to navigate that was really challenging in my identity at the time, because a lot of my friends and people in my community were from a faith background.

Eryn: Yeah.

Lauren: And I happened to have been raised in...in the church. And so I felt a lot of hypocrisy and worry and wonder and almost jealousy that family friends and these people that are mentoring me that aren't necessarily in agreement with how...what I believed, why are they experiencing family in such a better way than I am?



Eryn: How did you answer that at such a young age? Cause I feel like that would really shape your faith.

Lauren: You're spot on. I can only attribute it to grace. Because I was in a place of wrestling and...and actually I'm very performance-driven. And I was mad at God cause I thought that the more I did to get good grades and not let people see me struggle or to say we're good, the better chance He might reconcile it. And it was such a twisted performance-driven theology. But ultimately, I realized I couldn't run sovereignty. I couldn't direct or control outcomes. And I remember distinctly feeling a pull in my gut to say okay, I can continue to walk and follow a God who, so far in my young life, has demonstrated everything about His character to be true and see where You take me. Or I can call this all out as a lie. And I can go and find my trench in my own way. And truly it is grace, because I chose the prior and the faithfulness is so evident in every part of my story. And I know for a fact that that part of my story is also a part of my redemption.

Eryn: Wow, fast-forward, so you have kids. Where does your career fall in line with all of that?

Lauren: I actually had a funny conversation with Josh I'll never forget. I had been through two maternity leaves. I remember thinking on a date night conversation or something, I thought, "It's so funny that I'm a working mom. Cause I never pictured myself being a working mom." And...and he just looked at me and laughed. He said, "Well, that's a good thing; cause I never pictured you staying home." I said, "What do you mean?" And I almost was offended. And I thought, *What is that supposed to mean?* And he said, "No, it's not a knock on the role. Both are great. Both are...I'm...I'm not demeaning anybody's choices." But he just said, "I know who I married. And you would just die in a hole with not being able to put that ambition..."

Eryn: Yeah.

Lauren: ...out to the world." And I didn't even see that myself until he kind of spoke it out in me. But I just watched and waited. I had three children, all with full-time vocational employment with busy travel and all the things I get to do. But I just got to see and continue to get to see. Cause it's...we're...we're in the throes of it with toddler and teenager. And I find that when you know you're hard-wired and passionate and equipped to do something that you enjoy and that is for the good of humanity, provision finds a way to allow you to be a mom, and a great mom, at it. And so I just feel like I've had miraculous sitters come out of the woodwork who are studying in their Master's at the University of Denver and just need a semester that happens to have classes on the days that I'm in my office. And I've had grandparents rally and...and help with childcare. I've had just different flexible policies where my...my own staff are n...are navigating growing their family, and how do I lead in that while still expecting high-capacity performance? And I feel like I've fought feeling guilty. In a way, I thought I would grieve leaving my kids a little bit more

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than I did. And for a while, I didn't feel guilt that I was leaving them. I felt guilt that I didn't mind being away.

Eryn: Yeah.

Lauren: And I remember when I had Leah, who's my oldest. And I feel like I...I got to coach some young moms a couple years later just some, you know, not...not in a formal way but just over coffee and stuff to say, you know what's so awesome is that you hear so often that when you become a mom, everything changes. And you just...you have this new-found identity and it's so awesome. And all of that is true. Everything does change. You have a new identity, and you don't lose yourself.

Eryn: Yeah.

Lauren: I do have autonomy, and I am still a mom and...

Eryn: Yeah.

Lauren: ...a wife and a community member and a neighbor and a friend. And I think it's really freeing, at least in my experience, to not feel the pressure.

Eryn: Yeah.

Lauren: To only wear one hat and to be able to say, hey, when I am "momming," I'm gonna mom with presence; and I'm going to mom with intention. And I'm going to be creative, and I'm gonna give all my energy. And then I'm gonna go to work. And ultimately, I'm along the way gonna write a lot of thank you notes. Cause people have helped in such grand ways so that my children feel a part of something big. But they don't...they've never communicated at least that they feel neglected.

Eryn: Yeah, I feel like a lot of women listening will find comfort in that. Because, in my experience, which is very limited and very short to this point, I was just sharing with my husband. I was like, I mentally forgot about my job, because I had the kids for two weeks. Now my cir...circumstance is so different. But I was mentally it's been hard for me to like shift from like almost like I'm compartmentalizing, and then I feel bad about it. Cause I'm like shifting or I'm wearing...taking off hats and putting on other ones.

Lauren: Yes.



Eryn: Can you speak into that? Cause I feel like more women than not probably identify with taking off the hat, putting on another, feeling guilty about it and...

Lauren: Yeah, and on the plane this morning I was watching something on *The Today Show* which I haven't watched in so many years.

Eryn: Yeah.

Lauren: And it was almost...it was about mental load that women carry, particularly them never getting their checklist accomplished. And I think the freeing part of that is none of us ever get everything checked off. There's not a day or a time or, and again, that linear thinking. I think I always tell people to change their linear patterns to circular patterns.

Eryn: Yeah.

Lauren: And remember that there's gonna be overlap. There's gonna be reentries and starts and beginnings and ebbs and flows. And as long as your confidence, your contentment, your roots come from a place of humanity. And being moms, we've all, whether it's mom through birth or adoption or kinship or foster care, we've all seen that children don't have to do anything to just merit that unconditional love that we give them. But yet we hold a different standard for ourselves. We think we're not...

Eryn: True.

Lauren: ...loveable. We're not a good mom. We're not a good employee. We're not a good spouse if we don't do everything perfectly. And I think, wait a minute. I loved my kids and still love them recklessly. And the...when they were born, they took a lot. They didn't give anything. But I gave it all. And...and that was a privilege. And so we should be able to give ourselves that same space.

Eryn: Yeah.

Lauren: No, you're not gonna have the Pinterest box Bento box lunch. You're gonna get an Uncrustable and some Cheetos. And you know what? I'm probably gonna eat out today. And I'm gonna spend \$10 dollars. And you're not gonna get to budget that, because I'm working. And I can't tell you how many times I do lose my cool. My mental load is just too much. And I feel like I'm not doing anything 100 percent well. And I just...I've learned to communicate that.

Eryn: Yeah.



Lauren: I...I walk in and say, mom's got her grumpy face on. I am overwhelmed. I can't be touched.

Eryn: Yeah.

Lauren: I need you all to just give me a minute. And...and then, you know, walk the dog, or grab some food, and ultimately, forgive yourself. Because we're not meant to do everything well all the time.

Eryn: Yeah, that's right. Being a child of divorce, how has that shaped you as a mom now?

Lauren: Thinking about it just in the spontaneity of my answer, I do think it's the depth of my heart in that the only mothering gift I really want to give my kids is a legacy where they watch their parents love each other well. And so putting Josh first is actually not a detriment to my parenting. It's what makes my parenting better. I've seen the mental struggle of, but I'm leaving my baby to go out to dinner, and we could eat dinner here. What if the baby needs me? And ultimately, even that baby is gonna be fine in the care of a sitter for a couple hours in the long-term when your relationship is needing that adult energy so that you can then model a legacy of unity and partnership. And the hospital setting that, you know, made me a mom and stuff, I remember Josh and I...all of the genders of our children were a surprise. So we had different names picked out. We had...we changed them all at the day of. And...and so it was a privilege for Josh. He was the one who always got to announce whether it was a boy or girl. And I remember when Leah was born, the first thing he said was, "It's a girl!" and I just freaked out, I was so excited. And then he said, "Don't worry, we can have another one that looks like you." Because my daughter is a spitting image of her father. And you could tell right away, ah, she's the most beautiful version of her father I've ever seen. Ah, but her...and then I remember him looking at me. Our eyes met in this mysterious way and just say, hey, our attention still needs to be on each other first. And he...he said to me, "You're still my favorite." And he goes, "But she's a close second." And that mantra set our parenting trajectory. And that's how we always do it is, you know, we're sometimes our kids' attention does suffer because we both have work priorities. But then we use those passions and gifts to energize ourselves and to provide for opportunities and experiences that we can go travel or so something.

Eryn: Yeah.

Lauren: And so I think our kids see the full circle in it. And we just have, out of necessity but not out of perfection, but out of necessity they know that the world doesn't re...revolve around them.



Eryn: Yeah, I love that. I love that you spoke specifically to that, because that's something that we've been wrestling with. In not...not my showing that we love each other in front of the kids. That's not something that we [inaudible]. But there is this temptation, especially within a blended family...

Lauren: Yeah.

Eryn: ...to show priority to the kids to the point of which, at the expense of your relationship, which feels like it's a healthy sacrifice. But I actually think it could be a detriment to your relationship more than it is a healthy sacrifice. Can you speak into that?

Lauren: The familial bonds are a little different in that linkage. And so there is some precedence and some tenderness in which you have to approach...

Eryn: Yeah.

Lauren: ...the reprioritization of partner over children, especially if there's been a gap there. However, segmenting your time in a way, maybe not publicly in a blended family at first, but that always seeks energy, time, and...and your best for your person. I remember a time when I was just being mean to Josh, because I gave all my gratitude, all my hospitality, all my generosity to everyone else. And then I just...he got my leftovers. And I realized that was completely unfair. And we needed to come up with a solution so that I was actually refreshed and pouring out of abundance and not just feeling depleted all the time. But that required some tactics and some strategies.

Eryn: Yeah.

Lauren: It didn't...it wasn't just a mindset. I think the ways that we approach dreams or the ways that we approach desires are often neglecting a strategy and tools.

Eryn: Yeah.

Lauren: What does it look like to, people always say we need to connect. Well what does that mean?

Eryn: Right.

Lauren: What does connection look like for you? So you ask that of your partner. You ask that of your kids. You ask that of your neighbors. Hey, we need to connect. Yeah, we do. And then you just never do anything.



Eryn: Yeah.

Lauren: What would make you feel connected to me right now in this moment? Do you want to do a puzzle? Do you want to go on a run? Do you want to go grocery shopping? Do you want to sit and stare at each other? What is it that actually fuels that connection? And then make a plan to do it.

Eryn: Yeah.

Lauren: And behave that way. And then eventually you start to pattern your life, and patterns predict outcomes.

Eryn: Which goes to boundary.

Lauren: Yeah.

Eryn: And I know you talk on that.

Lauren: I love boundaries.

Eryn: Yes. Because you love boundaries, I would imagine there was a time when you didn't have them maybe.

Lauren: I would say they were too strict perhaps. I grew up in, you know, both my parents were military and loved them for it. But I sh...I feel like I almost didn't understand what it looked like to let my guard down and live with a little bit of a flexible boundary. So I found more of a middle ground. But I think what I...I appreciate about strict and clear boundaries is that it actually gives you more of the freedom you're looking for. I think the mindset of most of the teenagers that I work with, both vocationally and just as a volunteer and as a parent and I'd even say some of the younger ones, will expect that freedom comes from removing the boundary.

Eryn: Yeah.

Lauren: And science actually shows just the opposite that if you don't draw the line, then kids are afraid cause they don't know where the line is. And so rather than trusting their instincts, there was a study done about a playground observation years ago where kids were instructed to play, free range. And the first round of observation was without a fence being built. And the psychologists found that the kids just



stayed really close to the brick walls of the school. They never actually used the...the equipment, and they were pretty timid around their creativity. And then the next round of observation was after they put the fence up. And once the fence was up, the kids went and played freely. They laughed. They actually went to the edges, and they engaged in more of the equipment. And I think that it makes more sense to assume that without the fence, you would have more freedom. And what's interesting is that it's the fence the provides the freedom. And so if you want more time, set strict boundaries. Because if you end your...your meeting on time, then you'll have an extra half hour for a coffee with a friend. Or if you actually get up to the alarm, you'll have more time to do your makeup, whatever it is. And I find that that's why I believe boundaries are kind. Because they actually create more of the freedoms we long for. And as we remove more and more boundaries in today's social society, we actually are not in relational freedom. We're alone, and we're worried. And we're anxious all the time. And so I actually like when somebody says, this is the line.

Eryn: Yeah.

Lauren: Don't cross it.

Eryn: How do you walk in confidence laying down a boundary when your child responds completely opposite. Like they don't think it's kind. They don't think it's loving. They get super angry.

Lauren: Sure, well I think in...in your case, you shared so graciously that you're a step-mom or bonus mom. And I feel like that's a harder balance with especially adolescents or older kids, because they've already set precedents that you are walking into as a stranger, the outsider. In a non-blended environment, the answers have just to be...have to start when they're little. I mean take the pacifier away just for a little bit longer...

Eryn: Yeah.

Lauren: ...or don't give them the extra sugar before...it's not taking away all the goodness in every day type of experience. But it's I find a lot of parents, especially when teenage years come, there's so much anxiety because they're I have to rein in this kid and have emotional safety and trust. And sometimes I'll just say, well what did you do when they were five? What did you do when they were ten? What did you do when they were seven? Because you can't change behaviors that were never modeled as kids. And so you can, but it's a...it's a harder coping mechanism, because the expectation gap is much wider. And so I think recognizing where maybe boundaries are being broken or where you have had less experience in setting them, starting small and then practicing communicating over and over again that this isn't just some surprise change in my demeanor, but I actually believe that what we need more of is



freedom. In order to do that, it sounds like we need to tighten the reins a little bit more. It's...it's kind of like benefits at work, right?

Eryn: Yeah.

Lauren: If you are running a company, you don't give benefits to anybody until they're at least six weeks into the job and have proven their loyalty.

Eryn: Yeah.

Lauren: But eventually, as their capacity grows and they have shown that you're...they're helping getting to your outcomes, you kind of loosen the reins a little bit. And I think what happens in parenting is we actually tighten the reins as they get older instead of starting with tight...tight reins when they're young and giving them more freedom as they've proven that they have the capacity to get there. We end up thinking, okay well now they're gonna go crazy. They're gonna crash the car. They're gonna, you know, do something stupid with their...their loved ones and...and they're...

Eryn: Yeah.

Lauren: ...and so [inaudible] you're thinking wait, if I couldn't trust you to walk to the mailbox on your bike when you were three, how do I expect you to drive to the mountains in the snow? And...and so I just think that incrementalism and, especially if you're a young parent listening, it's a great opportunity to say, okay where are we gonna start with the fence tight and then have the freedom to kind of chisel away some of those beams so that we can still see what the kids are doing. But they've already demonstrated that they have the capacity to do it, right?

Eryn: That's so good. What would you say to the woman that's listening that really wrestles with like does God [hear] her in her circumstance or in season of life of motherhood?

Lauren: So I'm gonna go back to that. Full circle moment when you said bring me to your life as a little girl. Because the way that I always answer it, I remember sitting on the end of my bed. I was 12 years old, and I had a journal and a book that said, *If God Loves Me, Then Why Can't I Get My Locker Open?* It was...I don't even know who wrote it. But if you're that Christian author from the early 90s, then I had your book. And I remember in that season when my parents were newly-separated, I still recount, and I have the journal, that I was pouring out my soul. *Why aren't You big enough to...to change this? God, if you say You...I believe. I believe in miracles. I believe I have the faith of a mustard seed.* I mean it was the quintessential Bible study answer. I did everything I could to beg and plead and say, *God, where are*
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You? Come on. All my friends who hate You have better families than this. What's going on? And I sit here multiple years later [inaudible]. Multiple years later and thinking, He [held] me, because that moment put His sovereignty and His faithfulness on display for my benefit, not for His glory, but for my benefit to trust somebody who I was ready to deny because I wanted control and authority. And I was alone, and I was desperate. And He didn't show up. And I think sometimes it's the denial of what you want that actually gives you the trajectory. So I think the idea of longevity and the idea of sovereignty and kindness that, if you're truly a believer that understands that God is a God of connectivity and relationship, He does connect with every one of your pain points. And He weaves it into a beautiful story that, what I always try to remember is, it's not the cross, right? Every alone moment that you feel could never compare. And I'm not minimizing it at all. But it helps me to remember, You do see me. Because You died. I'm not there yet, right? And so if You can take it that far for me, then You've got... You've got this. And so I, for a couple years of some of my hardest seasons so far; I just had a mantra that I would say. You know, in this generation it would be a hashtag. It's not the cross. It's not the cross. It's like this is really hard. I lost a baby. This is really hard. It's not the cross, right? I... a friend passes away early, doesn't deserve that, right? It's not the cross. This is a, I don't know, it's... let's say you default on a mortgage payment. It's not the cross. And that shouldn't make us feel invisible. It should make us feel seen. Because He is the only one who understands us when you don't think He's listening. Cause He said that same thing to His own Dad. He said, "Why have You forsaken Me?" What are You doing? And you know if He can say it, then so can we.

Elisa: Wonderful conversation. Jesus is the only one who fully understands our pain and suffering. We are not alone.

Eryn: I really enjoyed this conversation. Well before we go, be sure to check out our website to find a link for Lauren's book *Relationship Essentials*. You can find that and more 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.

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Eryn: Today's episode was engineered by Anne Stevens and produced by Jade Gustman and Mary Jo Clark. We also want to thank Kat and Anna for all their help and support. Thanks, everyone.

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