



God Hears Her Podcast

Episode 162 – Promise Keeper with Shannon Popkin Vivian Mabuni and Elisa Morgan with Shannon Popkin

Shannon: *How long am I going to cry out? Am I going to wait on You?* And I think that is the tension of the Christian life. You know so many of the things that we're waiting on God for we don't know the timeline. God asks us to trust Him without seeing how it's going to all turn out, without knowing how He's going to answer our prayers. But looking and contemplating God's faithfulness is what grows our faith in that time of waiting.

[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, and one of my cohosts, Vivian Mabuni, is kicking off our conversation by introducing our guest.

Vivian: Well, hello, hello, hello! This is a really great *God Hears Her* episode. It's just the best when we can actually have a conversation with someone we know in real life. And so I am thrilled today to introduce to you my friend, Shannon Popkin. I've actually had a meal in her home and sat on her couch, so it's always a thrill. If you don't know Shannon, and Elisa's here too, we're just going to have a great time; but Shannon is an author. She's a speaker, and she has books titled *Control Girl*, *Comparison Girl*, ...

Elisa: Uh-oh!

Vivian: ... *Comparison Girls for Teens*. I mean she speaks my language because this is where I live. But what we're really going to focus on is her latest book, *Shaped By God's Promises*. Shannon has her own podcast called "Live Like It's True Bible Podcast," and she's been on all sorts of different places like Family Life Today — Yay! — Gospel Coalition, Proverbs 31. She's wonderful, and I can't wait for all of you to be able to get to know her better. So, Shannon, welcome to *God Hears Her*.

Shannon: Well, thank you. I mean could there be a nicer introduction than that? You are a sweet friend, Viv. It's so good to be with you both today.



Vivian: Well, for our listeners, Shannon, I would love for you to kind of walk us down your story a little bit. Like tell us your spiritual journey, a little bit about who you are, and a little bit about your life for our listeners.

Elisa: Yeah...

Shannon: Sure, yeah.

Elisa: ... Give us the background. Yeah.

Shannon: So I have been married for 27 years. My husband's name is Ken. He is a data scientist, and he's funny, which I think is a fun combination. And we have three adult children, so we have the joy of seeing our kids launch. And that has just been a joy — a daughter and two sons. And we love, you know, serving the Lord together here in Grand Rapids. We're going to be marriage mentors at our new church. We just like went through the training for that, and real invested in our church and our house church. And I just love God's Word! I, as a young girl, fell in love with my Bible, and I think one of the things that I most love in my Bible are the stories. The literary part of the Bible, I think, is so interesting. I love stories because they package up truth, you know? They help us to retain it, to hold onto it. I hear some people say, "Well, they're not just stories," you know, and that's true. They're not just stories. They're true stories. Right? They're true accounts, and yet they're told as stories. Right? You know like . . . um . . . "Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the other beasts in the field." Like that's such a storytelling . . . So they're . . . they're told as stories. The story we're going to look at today — Abraham and Sarah — it's this story where Moses isn't just chronicling events in their life. He's packaging up this story because he has a purpose. He has an intention for his readers. So I'm just so taken with these stories, and I love unpacking them. I feel like they just package up such good, rich theology and truth. And I think they help us to rehearse what's true, you know, in a way that's tangible and concrete.

Elisa: I'm intrigued by how you just began talking about your faith journey as it being rooted in your love of the Bible. And I think that's kind of a maybe unusual reflection. How did God specifically use the Bible to bring you to Himself? And you were young. About how old were you when you first started thinking, *Wow! This Book is a story. It's a fascinating story!*

Shannon: Mm-hmm. You know my first memory of faith was . . . I was four years old, and I was outside playing in our front yard. We have this big birch tree with limbs you could play on. And I was thinking about this story. I think it was probably in Sunday School, a story of Nicodemus. And he was saying to Jesus that he wanted eternal life. You know he didn't want to die. And I didn't want to die either! And I

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was thinking like *if this guy could get eternal life from Jesus, well then maybe I could too*. You know like I was kind of . . .

Vivian: Wow!

Shannon: . . . wondering about that. And I went inside my house. Now my parents were newer believers, and so . . . I mean they had . . . they had come to faith early on, but they didn't really know their Bible. And so they were just now coming back to church, just now starting to study their Bibles. And so as they were telling me the Bible stories, these were the first times they were experiencing them too.

Elisa: Sure.

Shannon: ...And so we were just kind of having this wonder together. So anyway, I remember coming into the house and telling my mom like, "You know that story about that man who wanted eternal life, like, I want eternal life." And she said I was too little.

[Laughter]

Elisa: Oh, I love it.

Shannon: She's like, "Honey, no, you know, you're too young."

Elisa: Conscientious there.

Shannon: I started crying. I . . . I said, "I want eternal life. I don't want to die!" And so she *let* me, you know, pray to the Lord Jesus and receive salvation. And I do look back at that as a time of genuine faith. And I was ready to start telling other people about these stories of faith. My mom remembers me knocking on doors, and they were maybe just a little bit embarrassed by my boldness. And she remembers me standing on the front porch and gathering the neighbor kids and telling them the story, like "You are going to hell." And my sister was 2, and she was crying. And Mom was like, "No, you cannot do that. You're scaring these poor kids." So anyway, yeah, no ...eh... I think just from a young age, before I could read, you know, before I could even read my Bible, I was so gripped by these stories and by the overarching story of our great God.

Vivian: Wow!



Elisa: You know, it's so sobering to understand how young children can be to really benefit from reading the Bible. Thank you, Shannon.

Shannon: Yeah.

Elisa: That sets a great foundation for this conversation.

Vivian: I agree, and I think just a shout-out to Sunday School teachers that kids really do . . . They're listening. They're paying attention, and their responses to the Lord . . . I mean I think about in the Scriptures where Jesus said, "Let the little children come to Me," that He welcomed kids. And I think of, you know, young Shannon, just being so earnest and so naturally wanting people around her to know this wonderful God. Well, tell us a little bit about how you were inspired to write this book and, specifically, this idea of God's promises. Like what was going on in your life to kind of move you to put pen to paper to create this new resource?

Shannon: Yeah. Well, I have been intrigued with Sarah's story for a long time. I just saw in her story just packaged up so many good truths about jealousy and insecurity, inferiority, and taking control, and surrendering control to God — like so much there. And I think one of the greatest ways that I relate to Sarah's story is this battle with control. Sarah was given this promise, and yet there was this long stretch of waiting. And I like to think of God's promises as a set of parentheses. You know you never have one parenthesis without the other. So the first one is God makes the promise. The second is God keeps the promise. And we love, as the people of God, we love God's promises. Right? We love to cling to them. And that's not the problem. The problem is not clinging to the promises. The problem is when that stretch between the parentheses widens, and that's really what we see in Sarah's story.

Elisa: That's a really powerful visual, Shannon, to think about a parentheses — the right and the left, or the left and the right. And lots of times — I'm just going to say it — there's nothing in the middle. You know? [laughing] . . . We just have this blank space. And, you know, listening to your story of how God first began to reach you as a four-year-old child with the promise of eternal life, well of course, you don't . . . you're not currently experiencing that. Right?

Shannon: Yes. No.

Elisa: I mean, well you are currently experiencing it this side of heaven, but the fulfillment of it will be after you die. And so we all, in a way, are living in a parenthetical reality between the promise of being in a relationship with Jesus now and the hereafter. But that's a really powerful way to look at it because most



of our lives is living in the parentheses and waiting in the parentheses for the promises to come about. Did I say that clear enough? Is that what you're saying?

Shannon: Yes, it is, and Abraham and Sarah died without seeing that second parenthesis closed.

Elisa: What was the promise that God gave to Abraham and Sarah? Yeah.

Shannon: Sure. Yeah, absolutely. So if you look at Genesis 12, Abraham and Sarah, they're not following God. They don't know God. They're not seeking after Him. We see at the end of Joshua, it says that they're idol worshipers. Right? And so they don't know God, and God steps onto the scene, and He is a God who makes promises. That's what we see in Genesis 12. That's His introduction to them. And Moses here is telling a story. Genesis is a story of origins, so Moses starts the book with the creation story, how all of the world came to be. But now he's moving to: How did the people of God come to be? And we see this pattern. How do we become God's people? Well, God makes a promise, and they respond in faith. And so God promises Abraham and Sarah, *Go to this place. Go to this land I'm going to show you, and I'm going to fill it with people. And they're going to be your children.* And that is quite a stretch for this couple because first of all they don't know where they're going. And second, they have no children. In the chapter before, Sarah is introduced to us as a barren woman. And this is a terrible way to be introduced, like so much pain and agony. She's like the brittle branch in her family tree. And then God steps on the scene and says, *"I'm going to make these promises to you and Abraham."* So He sets that first parenthesis, and they move to the Promised Land. And I mean if I'm Sarah, I'm thinking, *I'm going to get pregnant on the way.* You know, we're going to get there. We're going to build our house, and I'm... She's probably picturing this big, open land. They don't know where they're going. And they've got two surprises when they get there. First of all, there's somebody else living in this land.

Elisa: Yeah.

Shannon: The Canaanites, you know, they're living there acting like they own the place. Right? And then the second is she does not become pregnant. And so the parentheses just start getting wider and wider and wider. And this is where doubts creep in. This is where we're going to see Sarah go ahead and struggle with waiting. She doesn't like the waiting, and so she wants to take control. Fears come in, all sorts of things happen in this wide stretch between the parentheses. And, oh, I can identify with all of them.

Vivian: Mmm.

Elisa: Absolutely!



Vivian: Definitely, definitely, wow! Well, I think about this concept of waiting, and I think all of us are familiar with it to greater and lesser degrees. I mean I think about my faith journey, coming to Christ later as a high school student. There was, for me, like a honeymoon stage that I can remember. Like there were prayers that were prayed, and it felt like there was immediate answer, which really helped build my faith. And faith is like a muscle. It was like I was learning to exercise it. And then there have been times where it's like this parentheses has been stretched. And I'm curious, Shannon, as you have been delving into Abraham's life, and specifically Sarah's life, what are your current thoughts then about what God does in this waiting time?

Shannon: Yeah, you know, I think we like to skip to the good parts. Don't we? We don't like this waiting section. I even think about the way that, as Christians, the way we tell the big story of the Bible. Have you ever noticed how we skip from Genesis 3, which is where we first learn about sin — you know that's the big problem of the Bible — to Matthew 27, Jesus dying for that sin. Like God keeping His promises in those ways. I have it marked in my Bible. I've got like here's Genesis, and here's Matthew. And there is this huge chunk in the middle . . .

[Laughter]

Elisa: Yeah, it's like two inches.

Shannon: . . . like this is . . .

Elisa: Yeah.

[Laughter]

Shannon: . . . Yeah, like it's a lot. And the way that we tell the story is we just like collapse that down. Right? And we wouldn't rip this part out of our Bibles, but we just kind of ignore. There are thousands of years that happened in that stretch between the promise. And so I think the question is: Does anything good happen in that stretch between the parentheses? And . . . and I think, as we look at Sarah's story, this is one of the good parts. We don't have to skip to the end to see the good. And so, you know, what happens in that stretch between the parentheses that couldn't happen if they were collapsed down tight, what we see is God's faithfulness. You know we don't learn God's faithfulness in a minute. And, Viv, you were talking about how early on it was like, you know, you were alive. You were enjoying walking by faith. But sometimes it gets long. Sometimes the stretch feels really long. And faithfulness, though, like if you think about that word. If I were to show you a picture of my husband the first day that I met him, and say,
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“This is a faithful man.” You would be like *Well, that’s weird. You know you just went on one date. You don’t know that he’s faithful yet.* Right? But if I were to say to you now, after 27 years, “Here is a faithful man.” Well, that makes a lot more sense. And so God’s story, that long stretch, that thick chunk of our Bibles, this is God not only making the promises, but keeping the promises after this long stretch. And we see His faithfulness over time, and it’s that faithfulness . . . And like, Elisa, you were talking about how these promises, they outlasted Abraham and Sarah’s life. Like they couldn’t become a nation in their lifetime.

Elisa: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Shannon: These promises were going to extend beyond them. They couldn’t take this Promised Land. These promises couldn’t be fulfilled even in their lifetime. And that’s the same for us too. Like so. . . so what we do is we reflect on the God that we meet in the pages, in those, in that huge chunk of our Bibles. The God that we meet who is faithful, and that faithfulness transcends to us. It transforms us. And so, like for me, personally, as I am waiting on God for things, I have this prayer journal. It’s one of those five-year prayer journals on the same day. So today I can look at today’s date, and I can look back at the prior three years of what I prayed for, you know . . .

Vivian: Wow!

Shannon: . . . And I think the idea is to see God’s faithfulness over time.

Elisa: That’s good. Yeah.

Shannon: But there was a particular thing that I was praying for God to do in a . . . in a relationship. And I remember a couple years ago coming across a page in my prayer journal. I’m filling in . . . I wrote a prayer crying out to God for this thing that I’m waiting on Him for. And I looked back two years before, and it was almost identical, the same prayer. And I was just like *How long, O Lord? Like how long am going to cry out? Am I going to wait on You?* And I think that is the tension of the Christian life. You know so many of the things that we’re waiting on God for we don’t know the timeline. God asks us to trust Him without seeing how it’s going to all turn out, without knowing how He’s going to answer our prayers. But looking and contemplating God’s faithfulness is what grows our faith in that time of waiting.

Elisa: Some things are bubbling up inside me as I’m listening, Shannon. And I’m really struck by that last thing you just shared about waiting. You know it can be year after year after year, but that two-inch gap in the Bible you were talking about, using your fingers like little inches, you know, between Genesis 3 and Matthew 27. God reveals Himself in amazing ways, even reveals Jesus in foreshadowing in amazing
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ways in these stories. You know, we look at Joseph's story of God's faithfulness. "You meant it for evil; God meant it for good." Or you look at Ruth and the encapsulation of Jesus that Boaz really is as her kinsman redeemer. Or, you know, you look at these, and in that seemingly blank, empty space between the parentheses of the Fall and the resurrection of Jesus, God does demonstrate His faithfulness. And I think in our lives, we can see Him too. So you may not have seen an answer to *that* prayer in your five-year diary, but I know that we can experience other answers, which I think fuel our understanding.

Shannon: Yeah.

Elisa: And another thing I'm thinking about, and I love that you brought this up. You know in some ways, while Abraham and Sarah did have a son eventually, they did die without seeing all that God was going to do. And that's what Hebrews chapter 11 talks about, you know, is they died without seeing the promise. And I think, without sounding grandiose — I mean I'm not Abraham. I'm not Sarah. I'm not Isaac. I'm not the nation. You know, whatever, but our lives play a role in God's larger redemptive purpose. How many stories have we heard of like Henrietta Mears as the Sunday School teacher of Bill Bright and Billy Graham — just her faithfulness and what God raised up through her, and then how *they* led zillions of people to come to understand Jesus. And so as my pastor, Robert, is preaching right now, you know, an ordinary life is *powerful* life because God is faithful, even beyond our life. So I thank you for this conversation. It's just churning away in me, and, you know, it's like God's going [makes an odd noise] . . . *Give me a smooch! You know I want to... I want to underline some things in your life.* This is awesome, Shannon. Can you think of a time in your life where the parentheses seemed exceptionally wide from beginning to end, and nothing in between, and you're waiting and waiting? And how did God's promises shape your waiting? Shape your faithfulness and move you from self-reliance?

Shannon: Well, you know, I was a really controlling mom. I was an angry mom. I think anger is one of those things that rises to the surface when we're trying to get control, because we're mad when it slips from our control. Or we feel like, ugh, this pressure to get control. And so I was trying to produce this perfect family, and I was a super angry mom. Now all behind closed doors...

Elisa: Sure.

Shannon: ... I remember a time that somebody came to pick up one of my kids, and I was screaming at my kids and didn't realize that they were there on the other side of the door...

Elisa: I've been there. Yeah.



Shannon: And I turned to my kids before opening the door, and I'm like, [whispers], "Mommy's sorry." You know? We all, you know, took our places like we knew the drill. Right? I opened the door, "Hi! How are you?" Like this was the worst possible thing for me and for my kids to like live this façade. Right? To try to be producing perfection; so, I was trying to control, trying to create the perfect family. And, really, it had the opposite effect . . .

Elisa: Do you know what was behind that for you? Cause I think so many of us feel that pressure to control and create this perfect family because we know Jesus and blah blah. But what was your story there?

Shannon: Maybe at the moment I didn't understand it. I think looking back I understand it better. And, really, what helps is to look at the story of Eve, taking that fruit in the garden. You know here . . . I think it's interesting that God put this tree in the middle of the garden, you know, because when I don't want my kids to have something, I don't put it in the middle of the room or the middle of the table. Why would God put this tree in the middle? I think He was asking them, you know, "*As you enjoy dominion over all the earth, will you live in surrender to Me? Let's keep things straight. I am God, and you are not.*" And so here's a test of control, and they failed the test. They took control for themselves, and this is where everything went badly. Same as in Sarah's story. When we take control, instead of surrendering control to God, it goes badly. And so I . . . when I recognized like *Oh my goodness! What is going on here?* It really helped me to see what was going on in my own life. I am a daughter of Eve. I don't want to surrender control to God. I want to be God, you know, that's what the serpent said. "*If you eat this fruit, you're going to be like God. You don't have to depend on Him anymore.*" And that's really what my heart is crying out for, as a young mom, or even now as a writer and a speaker. Like I don't want to depend on God. I want to depend on me! [Laughing] I want to be the one. And I really want the glory that comes from being the one. You know there's that, too. There's just this pride and this feeling of self-reliance, like I *can* make it all turn out. I *should* make it all turn out.

Elisa: So you think it's maybe a core wound that you carry for womankind?

Shannon: Yes!

Elisa: I imagine there might be something in your life that reinforced this expectation to be in control. It sure has been in mine, you know, coming from a broken family where control was a great defense mechanism for a long, long time. It kept me safe, until it didn't, you know, so...

Vivian: Mm-hmm.



Shannon: Yeah, I think it can work both ways, Elisa. I think when you have a broken family, you think *Well, I gotta fix it.* And I think when you come from a family like I did, a really strong, godly family, you think, *well, I have these expectations for how that . . . what that's supposed to produce in the next generation.*

Elisa: Okay.

Shannon: And I think, you know, our enemy can use it against us either way. It doesn't really matter. I think all of us are prone to want to take control of our lives and to want to make it all turn out right. And so how that played out as my kids got older, one of my kids really wrestled with just all of the anxiety and the pressure in our home, and me being an angry mom. There was a lot of brokenness there. So here I was, I'm trying to insert myself and make it all perfect, and I'm the one breaking it. Right? And that has been the long stretch in the parentheses for me. Praise God, he is doing so well now, but there were many years of anxiety, depression, things that God took me to a place where I couldn't control it. And I had no option but to rely on Him. But I am telling you, He met me there in that middle, in that space between the parentheses, like nothing I've experienced since.

Elisa: Thank you for sharing that, Shannon. Oh!

Shannon: Yeah. God was faithful. If our listeners are going through some stretch where maybe it's a problem they've caused. Maybe they haven't. God will be faithful. He is a faithful God. He is a God who makes promises and keeps promises, and He invites us to live like it's true that He will keep these promises to us.

Vivian: Yeah. I love that, and I keep thinking of this phrase that we don't see the end of the story. And I think of situations in my life and situations in my friends' lives. We're still waiting to see how God is going to come through. And I think that gives hope that's not a flaky hope. There's really a need to rely on the Lord in those times because my eyes cannot see around the bend. And if I were to just conclude that this is it, I could see how we would just resort to either trying to do things in our own, on our own efforts, to try to fix the situation. What you're describing is we are still actively seeking to trust the Lord and have hope in Him and release control of the circumstances and know that, in all of it, God is faithful. And His purposes will not be thwarted because He's faithful. And I think about . . . it just reminds me of Hebrews 11:6, "without faith it's impossible to please Him for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He's a rewarder of those who seek Him." And that active "seeking Him" when we're in the middle of the parentheses is really where our real lived life is coming out. This is what we live out of that place, that we're seeking Him.



Elisa: It's like John chapter 15, you know, "abiding in Me." You know which is this picture of living with Me inside those parentheses, you know. Just, really, that's where you pitch your tent. That's where you build your home. That's where you "make your home in Me." He invites us to live in those, in between those parentheses. Is there a specific promise, maybe a Scripture one, that God is using in your life now? Maybe it comes out of Abraham and Sarah. Maybe it's a different phase, or a different reference, but is there something God's working on you right now regarding His promises?

Shannon: You know we have to be careful with promises, because there are promises in the Bible that don't apply to everyone. Right?

Elisa: That's so well said. Yeah.

Shannon: And as we approach these things that we long for God to do, like Sarah had a promise for a baby. We don't all have a promise for a baby.

Vivian: Yeah.

Shannon: But I think, for me, I'm practicing these promises that are for the there-and-then, not the here-and-now. I want to hold onto both of them. I think I've done a better job practicing the promises that are for here-and-now, promises like, "I am forgiven." You know I *know* that I am forgiven. Or promises that He will be with me. He will never leave me.

Vivian: That's right.

Shannon: Or promises that He is making all things work together for good. Like these are the great and precious promises . . .

Elisa: Bedrock, yeah.

Shannon: . . . Yes, but so many of our hopes are not pinned on the here-and-now. Right? They're penned on the there-and-then. They're penned on the day that all things will be made new. And so I think trying to loosen my grip on a perfect life, and accomplishing all the things that I have hoped for, and making everything turn out the way that I want it to, I think like loosening my grip on that, like that's surrendering control to God. Like I don't know how this story's going to turn out. I could get cancer tomorrow, you know, I could lose my parents. I could lose one of my children. I don't know how it's going to turn out, but I know that "death will be swallowed up in victory." Right? That I will live eternally "with pleasures evermore" in that time, in that place, that same place that Abraham and Sarah were looking
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forward to. Not the city built here on earth, but the city that had streets of gold. That's what they were looking forward to, and I want to do a better job of focusing on that. I don't think we look forward to heaven quite as much as we should. And so that's really what I've been embracing and trying to pin my hopes on, are all those promises for the there-and-then. And it really kind of goes back to the earliest part of my story. Like I wanted eternal life, and I have it! God has given it to me, and that is not a life, you know, the new earth is not going to be a place where we float around on clouds. We will have purpose. We will have bodies. We will have, you know, we'll be in perfect relationship with one another. There is so much to anticipate and to hope for. So I want to be, as I live in this stretch between the promises, I want to be shaped by God's promises that will all come to fruition in that place and time to come.

[Theme music]

Elisa: That was a really beautiful example of a promise that we can all hold onto.

Vivian: I am so thankful to have Shannon as a friend in real life. Before we go, be sure to check out our website to find the link for Shannon's book, *Shaped By God's Promises*. You can find that and more at godhearsheer.org. That's godhearsheer.o.r.g.

Elisa: And we are now on a season break. Be sure to mark your calendars for the Season 12 teaser releasing on August 5th. And with it we'll have an exciting announcement.

Vivian: 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 John and Will for all their help and support. Thanks everyone.

[ODB theme]

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