



God Hears Her Podcast

Episode 32 - Mental Health and Faith

Elisa Morgan and Eryn Eddy with Dr. Christina Edmondson

INTRO: Repeated in segments by various speakers: "God Hears Her is brought to you by Our Daily Bread Ministries. Visit GodHearsHer.org or find us on social for more information."

[Music]

Christina: ...But the truth is our brains are just as fallen as everything else, so...

Eryn: Right. Yeah.

Christina: ...to the extent that we would have physical issues like, you know, high blood pressure and...and heart disease and a bad back. Well ...

Eryn: Yeah, right.

Christina: ...we als...we also have nagging, anxious thoughts. Right?

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Christina: ...We also are kind of wired in ways that make us more susceptible and prone to depression, for example...

Eryn: Yeah.

Christina: ...and not to mention the painful experiences that we have and the way that trauma sh...shapes us.

Eryn: Yes.

Christina: ...And so I just think that we just need to give ourselves and other people a lot more grace...
[laughing] ... a lot more grace...

Eryn: Yes.



Christina: ...and a lot more honesty to talk about our own mental health ...

Elisa: Yeah.

Christina: ...and that we are a work in progress.

[music]

Announcer: 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 Eddy.

Elisa: And I'm Elisa Morgan. Have you ever struggled with anxious thoughts or constant worrying? Or maybe you've been stuck in a sad season for a while, and you can't seem to snap out of it. Or perhaps there's a long line of depression that runs in your family. As Eryn and I have shared multiple times on this show, we are firm believers in therapy. And this isn't a commercial for it, but why is that? Because all of us – you, me, Eryn – we all struggle with emotional, psychological, and physical circumstances that impact the way we experience our lives, other people, and the world around us.

Eryn: That's right. And even though our society has come a long way, the conversation of mental health is oftentimes still stigmatized. But we believe that an important way to disprove that stigma is to just talk about it. Just like we need to take care of our physical health, it's so important that we learn to take care of what our guest today will call "brain health."

Elisa: Our guest today is Dr. Christina Edmondson. She holds a PhD in counseling psychology, an MS degree in family therapy, and a bachelor's degree in sociology. Yowzers! Along with a career in higher education, Dr. Christina is a public speaker, a mental health therapist, and a co-host of the Truth's Table podcast. We are so excited to pick her brain – her healthy brain – today. It's our hope that her personal story and experience can help us all learn to pay attention to our mental health. This is *God Hears Her*.

Eryn: Dr. Christina, I am so excited to have you on the show. There's so many reasons. One: I've gone to therapy for probably twelve, fifteen years, so ... [laughter] ...



Christina: Yeah.

Eryn: ...the fact that I get to just sit here and talk to you, I'm so excited about!

[Laughter]

Elisa: We are therapy fan girls! Yeah, we...

Eryn: Yes!

Christina: Yay!

Elisa: ...we...we...we are!

Christina: That's a good thing.

Elisa: We have decades of experience ...

Christina: Yes!

Elisa: ...at receiving it.

Christina: Amen! What a blessing – especially when it's helpful and thoughtful and gets you where you're trying to go.

Elisa: And painful...

Christina: And painful...

Eryn: And painful!

Christina: ...Well, you know, it is like a workout. Right? And if you haven't worked out in a long time, you're gonna feel it. So, yeah...

Eryn: That's right. It's a muscle. So...



Christina: Yeah.

Eryn: Yeah. So, I mean, so you're an expert in mental health. You have your PhD in counseling, in psychology, and you are a host for Truth Table.

Christina: Yep.

Eryn: Before we dig into that, though, I want to know who Dr. Christina was before she was Dr. Christina, when she was Christina, when she was a young girl. What memory comes to mind? And then what kind of brought you to where you are right now?

Elisa: Mm. Yeah.

Christina: Oh yeah. Great question! Well, I would say I still am very much Christina, and so I think the part of me from childhood is still very...very present. It da...didn't go away with more educational opportunity or more ...uh... more painful work and...and learning...

Eryn: Right.

Christina: ...So, you know, I...I think to get a snapshot of who I am from my early childhood, I think you'd have to know like the...the city that raised me, like the community, the culture that raised me. And so I was born in Baltimore, Maryland. And my parents are a hoot! I have learned to appreciate them more. Obviously, when you're a kid, you're like *Eh, I don't know...*

Elisa: Yeah.

Christina: ...*about these people, but...*

Elisa: Yeah. [Laughing]

Christina: ...um... As I've grown older, I have...I've realized why my parents had so many friends. And I grew up in a household where my parents had company every day!

Elisa: Oh my word!

Eryn: Wow!



Christina: ...And I'm not even overstating that, this idea of having an open door, where my father was trying to force feed someone. So that – like you don't say no to the food he's offering you. [Laughter] ... And all of that to say, you know, I was shaped by these people who were clearly deeply flawed humans but were really hospitable and compassionate and funny and kinda cultured in their own way...

Elisa: Yeah.

Christina: ...And I just ... really, really grateful. And they introduced me to ... to the local church...um...

Elisa: Oh wow!

Christina: ...and by extension that introduced me to Jesus. And so I think who I am at core is someone who...who loves to laugh. Someone with a... [laughing] ... with a full range of emotions.

Eryn: Yes, yes.

Elisa: I love that.

Christina: Yeah! Someone who deeply appreciates hospitality and someone who loves culture and is...and is also honest about the way sin has impacted our society, our world, our systems. And so...and that certainly, I think, was introduced to me by Mike and Brenda. Those are my parents.

Elisa: Mike and Brenda, who are a hoot!

Christina: Mike and Brenda...

Elisa: I love that...

Christina: ...who are a hoot!

Elisa: ...description. They're... "My parents ...

Christina: They are a hoot!



Elisa: ...are a hoot!" I love that!

Christina: [laughing loudly]

Elisa: Well you've got a lot of degrees, you know, after your name and...and some expertise, for sure. And you've had a lot of education. And you've also formed that and focused that towards people and their problems and mental health. So how was this passion for education and for mental health – how was that born in you? How was that shaped in you?

Eryn: Yeah.

Christina: Well, first of all, I'm one of those people with a long list of problems. So I think... I think I can ...

Elisa: Yeah.

Christina: ...relate to...uh... although I think I have enough insight to know that people don't often perceive me that way. But I've got a long list of issues ... [laughing] ...

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: Issues, yeah.

Christina: ...And so...um...

Eryn: Yeah.

Christina: ...And so, in some ways, as...as we think about, you know, *Healer, heal thyself*...

Eryn: Yeah.

Christina: ...people who go into the helping fields are...are also kind of crying out for some degree of help, some need of help as well. Right?

Elisa: Yeah.



Christina: And so I'll just say that. I'll confess that, even with some delight and joy, that I'm ... I'm fully human. And, you know, I was raised by a school teacher. My mother was a...a school teacher ...um... and she was also an administrator. And my father, in particular, he normalized for me the struggle of learning. Whereas some people think about learning as like, you know, either you're a smart person or you're a non-smart person...

Elisa: Ah, yeah.

Christina: ...My dad presented ... You know I remember him saying to me one time... I was struggling in a class in seventh grade. And his response to me... Where my mother was like, you know, "Do your homework. Study. Ask your teacher." You know she was running the drill like, as an educator. And my dad was like, "I don't even know if I passed the seventh grade, and I did okay. Just go in there and just enjoy learning." [Laughter] ... And so they were like night and day in that. My mom was like, "What are you saying to her?"

Elisa: That's nice.

Eryn: Ah...I love it!

Elisa: Yeah.

Christina: But my father presented learning to me as opportunity. He presented it to me as like curiosity and discovery. And so there was always something cool to learn. So I'm grateful that I was able to continue as long as I was able to in education. Yeah, so the...the way I think about learning is not so much about performance or achievement or grades. It's about curiosity and exploration and connection and...and attaching what's new to what's already kind of hanging in our closet. Right? It's how...

Elisa: Oooh!

Eryn: Yeah.

Christina: ...learning kind of cements itself. So my...my parents...

Elisa: Oooh!



Christina: ...have been...My dad particularly – I'll give a shout-out to him – kind of instilled that curiosity without a lot of judgment or pressure. My mom definitely came with...with a bit more pressure. And I'm glad, cause I... [laughing] ... I probably would've quit. I needed some type of ... Somebody needed to be a bit of a drill sergeant. But, yeah, that's, I think, how that became cultivated in me, a love of learning.

Elisa: Mm-hmm. An...and why the direction you went? Wh...why mental health and people and their problems with your education?

Christina: Right. So when I first started college, I came in wanting to be a medical doctor, like I was...my parents, you know... What...whatever I had kind of an interest, they were like *Well, let's get you a medical book.* I remember my dad getting me like a medical book at like 9, which, clearly, I could not understand this stuff. But he was like this...he was like "we're invested." I was like "Okay!" [Laughter] Like I think he saw me...

Eryn: That's so good!

Christina: ...playing around with like a chicken that they were going to cook for dinner, and he was like "Let's..."

Elisa: Oh my gosh!

Christina: ...cultivate that," you know? And so...so... but I...I had been saying from probably the age of 10 up, like "I'm gonna be a medical doctor. I'm gonna be a medical doctor." And so I started college, and I spent maybe a week as a pre-med major. [Laughter]

Eryn: So you were in, right? You were so in...

Christina: I was in. That's how committed I was. Right? ...um... And so I...I had met the other pre-med major, and I was like *Oh, we're like different kinds of people!* Like...like, fundamentally, we were different. We were like made of something different, and like...I was like *Oh, I want you to be my doctor!*

Eryn: Yeah.

Christina: But I don't need my doctor. I should not be...

Eryn: I love that so much...



Christina: ...my medical doctor.

Elisa: That's awesome.

Christina: And so I ended up just roaming around higher education, so to speak, and eventually found my way taking some Sociology courses. And I just began to enjoy these conversations about society and culture and people and...and issues of justice and injustice and how people have tried to figure that out for generations, with different theories and philosophies. And then also putting my own growing faith convictions in conversation with that...

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Christina: So I ended up...uh... finishing undergrad with a degree in sociology, an emphasis in race, class, and gender. So studying society broadly. And then I went to graduate school and got a masters in family systems. So that's the smaller group. So I went from society to the family systems...

Elisa: Okay.

Christina: ...And then eventually got a PhD in counseling/psych to really kinda focus on the individual.

Eryn: Wow!

Christina: And, ultimately, it was because I wanted to understand people within their context, but also have some of the skills to actually be helpful in some way directly to people one on one.

Eryn: Mm-hmm. Gosh! You know what's so cool about your story, is that like there was a curiosity at a young age. And you did continue to be curious and walk through the doors of exploration, which is exactly what you do with other people, and how you...you create this like safe space to be curious. And you grew up in a space where you were allowed to be curious and explore. I feel like sometimes when it comes to mental health, there's this stigma of weakness or ...um... it's sloppy, or it's too much feelings, and we're just too sensitive and all of these things. What...

Christina: Yeah.



Eryn: ...what do you feel like is real...like so important about mental health?

Christina: Yeah...

Elisa: You mean like especially for women? Right?

Eryn: Espec...yeah...especially for women...

Elisa: Yeah.

Eryn: Yeah.

Christina: Yeah. You know what's interesting is... When I think about the world of psychology, there was a time when psychology was heavily male-dominated, actually. That's when the... when the field first started. And it has...it has shifted...uh... significantly over generations. And I do think there is some legitimate sexism when we think about emotions and expression that cause people – men and women – to talk themselves out of the blessing of...of being able to analyze the full range of our emotions...

Eryn: Wow.

Christina: ...um... In a very negative and derogatory way people will look at that like *Oh that's a... a woman's thing*, in a negative way. And I'm saying that that's actually a great blessing, whether it's a woman's thing or not...

Elisa: Yeah.

Eryn: You bet.

Christina: ...God has given us emotions and feelings and thoughts and experiences and invited us to process those things...

Eryn: Yeah.



Christina: ...And so I do think there ...uh... is a lot of stigma and shame attached to, obviously, issues of ...of...of mental...mental illness in our culture and our society. And...uh...but the truth is our brains are just as fallen as everything else...

Elisa: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Eryn: Right. Yeah.

Christina: So to the extent that we would have physical issues, like you know, high blood pressure and...and heart disease and a bad back,

Eryn: Yeah, right.

Christina: ...we als...we also have nagging, anxious thoughts. Right?

Elisa: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Christina: ...We also are kind of wired in ways that make us more susceptible and prone to depression, for example...

Eryn: Yeah.

Christina: ...and not to mention the painful experiences that we have and the way that trauma sh...shapes us.

Eryn: Yes.

Christina: ...And so I just think that we just need to give ourselves and other people a lot more grace... [laughing] ... a lot more grace...

Eryn: Yes.

Christina: ...and a lot more honesty to talk about our own mental health ...

Elisa: Yeah.



Christina: ...and that we are a work in progress...

Elisa: ...cause don't we...

Eryn: [whispers something like "okay."]

Elisa: ...as followers of Christ, I think we have an extra dimension of shame and judgment on it...

Eryn: Mm-hmm.

Elisa: ...I mean you were talking about sexism and just women having it, but we...

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: ...you know we have this Jesus-ism – heh – if you want to. We're...because...

Eryn: Yeah.

Christina: Right.

Elisa: ...we're a follower of Christ, we're supposed to be done. You know we're supposed to be all tied up with a bow and not struggle in our brains anymore. But...but you're saying *Hey, you know, your brain's like your kidney. If...if something goes whack-a-doodle, you're gonna experience it and whether or not...*

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: ...*you know Jesus*. Right?

Christina: Yeah. Oh...

Eryn: Yeah.

Christina: ...absolutely! And I...I do think that, you know, on this side of Glory, we got real problems and real issues...

Eryn: Yeah.



Elisa: Amen! Amen!

Christina: And, you know, Jesus is not insecure. We don't have to pretend to have it all together, and if we are somehow disparaging the name of Christ because we have struggled...

Eryn: Oh, say that again.

Christina: Yeah. [Laughing]

Eryn: Could you say that again?

Christina: Well, we're not disparaging the name, the work, the beauty, and the power of Christ because we have problems. And, if anything, it is in our weakness that Christ shows His strength. And so even our traumas, our fears, our...our issues, even those things must bow down to Christ's agenda for us, which is ultimately for our good and for His glory. And I think that causes us to have the freedom to start handing some things over, like *Lord, I'm Your project. So this depression, this is ... You're in charge of it...*

Eryn: Yeah.

Christina: ...*What would You have me to do?* And so we can...

Eryn: Yes.

Christina: ...start to hand those things over to Christ. And we don't have to...to over-spiritualize. And by that, I mean we don't have to use some kind of pseudo-Christian language when we have legitimate biological and physiological issues or problems.

Eryn: Yeah.

Christina: So that doesn't... You know we're not any less Christian because we seek out medical services to help with

Eryn: Yeah.

Christina: ...our medical problems. [Laughs] That's actually ...



Eryn: Yeah.

Christina: ...a gift from the Lord God Almighty. And I'm so grateful. I'm grateful that God has given us brains, and that one of God's attributes is creativity. And that means that people create things too. We share that attribute with God... [a background noise here] ...um... which means we have a... tons of people – believers and nonbelievers – who have created things that can really help us in...in our own mental health.

Elisa: Mm. Hm. Hm.

Eryn: Yeah. I love what you said “spectrum of emotions are...are a blessing,” cause I think sometimes I feel like I'm just not a blessing. I feel like I'm a crazy person...

Elisa: Aw. Aw, Eryn...

Eryn: ...when I have a spectrum of emotions that I... I'm sure there's somebody listening that can absolutely relate.

Christina: Mm-hmm.

Eryn: What would you say to somebody that...that feels that way? That they feel like *Ugh, this is actually a blessing and an opportunity to bring God in.*

Christina: Yeah. So the Lord has given us the...the real privilege and honor to be humans. [Laughs]

Eryn: Yeah.

Christina: And I... It doesn't always feel that way, cause you know we...we've got sin. That...that ... that definitely complicates all things...

Eryn: Yeah. Yeah.

Christina: But it is a privilege to be fully human, and as a part of our humanity, we do have a range of...of emotions. And we can see Jesus in the text express a variety of emotions, from grief and lament to anger ...uh... to joy and delight and friendships and connections. We can see Him ...uh... present a sense of



loneliness and disconnection. We can see Him weighted down by frustration when His friends didn't have His back and didn't support Him.

Eryn: Yeah.

Christina: ...They fell asleep in the garden. We see Jesus display a variety of emotions without sin...

Elisa: Hm.

Christina: ...And that is so important for us to ...

Eryn: Wow.

Christina: ...to think about. Now, obviously, because of sin, everything that we do is, you know, impacted by the Fall. We need...we need the Lord. We need the blood of Christ to cover us. But we don't have to be afraid of...of the sadness or the frustration or even the anger that we have. It is what, then, we do next with it. Right?

Eryn: Yeah.

Christina: That's what you're talking about...

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: Yeah.

Christina: ... "Be angry but not sinning." Right? So that means there's an expression of anger that we can have about injustice or pain or trauma or...that we've experienced. And then there's also a way that we can render that to God, and we can ...uh... move through that in a way that honors the Lord and is not inherently sinful.

Elisa: You know, Dr. Christina, I'm...I'm thinking, too, when we talk about women and mental health, when we talk about our faith and mental health, it's easy to compartmentalize this and think we're all the same because we're...

Christina: Yeah.



Elisa: ...all women. And ...eh... you know I know ... [a loud sigh here?] ... so many different kinds of women, and I know you do too. But even Eryn...

Christina: Yeah!

Elisa: ...and I talked a lot about how we're alike, except when we're not ... [laughing] ...

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: ...and, you know, so we have a lot of things in common...

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: ...But one of the things we...we don't share exactly the same is that Eryn ha...is a ... a different personality. She's even more exuberant and ha...experiences feelings in a different way. And I tend to, if I ...

Eryn: [Laughing loudly]

Elisa: ...feel a feeling, it goes straight up into my head where I analyze it. And...and then...

Christina: Yeah.

Elisa: ...I'm like *No, that feeling's not allowed.* [Makes a cutting noise] *Gone!* You know, and ...eh... So can you talk about how we as women ... what we're alike with our feelings and maybe what we're different? And...and how our personalities...

Christina: Yeah!

Elisa: ...fit into that?

Christina: Well, you know, and...and I will...I'll throw in out another one to complicate it. There are...

Eryn: Yeah.



Christina: ...some people who...who...uh... who...who experience their emotions somatically. So “soma” means body. Right? So they experience it in their body. Whereas, you know, you talked about it kinda going straight to your head to kind of...

Elisa: Yeah.

Christina: ...intellectualize what’s happening...

Elisa: Uh huh! Yes.

Christina: ...um... For me, I know that I’m anxious or...or frustrated by what my body feels like. It’s when...

Eryn: Mm-hmm.

Christina: ...there’s an...when there’s an elephant that has his...has his foot right on my chest, [laughs] I’m like *Oh, maybe I’m worried about something.* [Laughter]...

Elisa: Ah...

Christina: ...That’s...that’s when I realize it. Right?

Elisa: Huh.

Christina: ...And then I have to send it, you know... And then I have to kind of send it to the brain, so to speak – right – in order to analyze ...uh... *What is that all about?* And kind of work myself backwards. And so...um... we’re all, you know, we’re kind of all hardwired different ways. And then we’re also socialized in different ways, based on the messages that we received as we were developing. Right? So some of us grew up in households where we were invited to express a variety of emotions. But that’s actually not super common. I mean...

Elisa: True. True.

Christina: ...it’s...it’s...it’s not, you know. And...and, you know, it’s interesting. I’ll give you a full disclosure. I was talking to one of my oldest daughters recently. And, you know, I...I’m in like the emotions business, so to speak...



Elisa: [Laughing loudly]

Eryn: Yeah. Yeah.

Christina: ...And so ...um... and grew up in a house where people gave me liberty. And I'm...and my daughter said to me one day, she said, "You know I don't know if it's okay for me to be sad or to cry about ..." uh... this situation that was, you know, a situation of grief for the loss of a family member. And she said, "I don't remember seeing you all cry."

Elisa: Ohh!

Eryn: Hm.

Christina: And...uh... for me I...it was...it was humbling. You know your children tell you the truth. I mean they really do hold up quite a mirror ... [laughing] ... till you're like *Oh! Okay!*... [Laughing]

Elisa: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Christina: And...and ... and here I am talking about "Express all your emotions! It's okay!" And then...and here I have my really wise ...uh... humbling daughter ...

Elisa: Mm. Mm-hmm.

Christina: ...say to me, "I did not see you tell me what it is I have permission..."

Eryn: Wow!

Christina: ...to do."

Eryn: See...yeah.

Elisa: Mm.

Christina: And...and then I realized that, you know, it's one thing to say it. It's another thing to do it before our children...



Elisa: That's good. That's good.

Christina: ...um... And so to the extent we were able to see people do that, then we can... we can begin to pick that up. And that becomes a part of our own story, for example. So it's hard to become what you don't see...

Eryn: Yeah.

Christina: ...Right? And so...

Elisa: Yeah.

Christina: ...we're all kind of shaped in different ways through our own stories.

Eryn: And giving each other – kinda what you said – giving each other grace that we all do process things differently. Explain more to me about “the see and the say.” Cause I just think that's so powerful. How can women show other women to learn that we all are different?

Christina: Yeah. Well, there's a grace in...and ...um... and freedom in not having to force people to be some stereotype for us...for them to be more easily...

Eryn: Yeah.

Christina: ...digestible. And I...I think about that when that...as that comes to...to race, but as well as it comes to gender...

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Christina: ...that stereotypes are these really easy cheat sheets. It's what I teach my students. And...

Elisa: Hm!

Christina: ...it's kind of an intellectually lazy way for us to size up people. Women do this with other women. Right? And we...



Elisa: Oh wow!

Christina: ...do this with people who are...

Elisa: Yeah.

Christina: ...uh... outside of our own cultural group...

Eryn: Yeah.

Christina: ...for example. It's a lazy cheat sheet. And those stereotypes end up making caricatures out of people and even caricatures out of...

Eryn: Yeah!

Christina: ...ourselves...

Elisa: Yeah.

Christina: ...And so...eh... as women, we can demonstrate love for each other by not like binding people to these caricatures of what other women are supposed to be, giving them the grace to teach us something about the fullness and beauty of womanhood. ...um... that it doesn't have to look exactly only the way that we want it to look so that it's digestible to us. Or doesn't ...

Elisa: Yeah.

Christina: ... _____ with our own insecurities. And I really think that...that...that may be at the heart of it for some people. *I need...I need other women to do X-Y-Z, because when they don't, it...*

Elisa: Oof!

Christina: ...*it taps on the shoulders of my own personal insecurity.*

[Music]



Eryn: And when we come back, Dr. Christina addresses both the destructive effects and positive effects of something that really all of us use regularly. Find out what that is after this break.

Elisa: Thanks for listening to this *God Hears Her* podcast. Eryn and I love sharing this space with you. And you know what? We want to invite you to become an even bigger part of our *God Hears Her* community to sign up for our weekly email newsletter. We'll keep you updated on new podcasts, encouraging blog posts, exciting new products, so much. Just go to godhearsheer.org and sign up today. That's godhearsheer.org. Now back to the show.

[music]

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

Eryn: And I'm Eryn Eddy. And in just a minute we will hear from Dr. Christina Edmondson on the importance of true social connection and the danger of being lulled into lazy disconnection. But before we do, just a quick reminder that the show notes are available in the podcast description. The show notes not only contain the talking points for today's episode, but they also include a link to a free resource. It's a digital download titled *Why? Seeing God in our Pain*. This free download shows us the root causes of our pain and suffering, and it points us toward the Bible to show how God can draw us closer to Him, even while in the midst of the pain. And this digital download is yours for free. Just click on the link in the podcast description, or visit our website at godhearsheer.org. That's godhearsheer.org.

Elisa: Now back to our conversation with Dr. Christina. So far, Dr. Christina has talked about the importance of looking at mental health as if it were a muscle, and how it needs exercise and stretching in order to stay healthy.

Eryn: We also discussed the laziness of stereotypes and how they can harm our ability to find true community. And that's where we will continue the conversation. Dr. Christina will address the social connection that is or isn't found through social media and the destructive potential that social media can have if we're not careful. This is *God Hears Her*.

Elisa: Well, so now you're hitting on, I think, a really big issue for us all as women is social media...

Eryn: Yeah.



Elisa: ...and how we see each other through social media. The stereotypes, the expectations, the perfectionism, the judgment, the...the shaming, the ...

Eryn: Comparison...

Elisa: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, thanks, yeah. How has that shaped us and our mental health? And got any suggestions?

Christina: Well, there...there actually is a whole body of ... of research ...uh... specifically as it relates to adolescent and teenage girls about the way in which they are being shaped, misshaped and burdened by social media images. And...and some people would make the case that we see a parallel between exposure to social media and increase in depression and anxiety related disorders. In...in boys and girls, but especially in girls because of the socialization of community and relationships are hardwired to... You think about a fight-flight-or-freeze when anxiety comes up, well, some people are hardwired to connect and bond. And...

Elisa: Oh.

Christina: ...social media offers kind of this ... [loud sigh]... somewhat pseudo ... [laughing] ... some...sometimes it's...

Elisa: Right.

Christina: ...real connection, but...

Eryn: Yes.

Elisa: Yeah.

Christina: ...sometimes it's kind of a pseudo...a pseudo connection. So it can be particularly...

Elisa: Like a fake one...

Christina: ...attractive. Yes.

Elisa: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.



Christina: ...particularly attractive for adolescent and teenage girls and...and, by extension, to... to women as well. And so we can find ourselves looking at those images, thinking that's what we're supposed to be and putting extra burden on ourselves to match something that's not real.

Eryn: Yeah.

Christina: ...I mean everything that we see on social media is like...is...is...

Eryn: Yes.

Christina: ...a still frame, you know, before...

Elisa: Yeah.

Christina: ...Before people took that picture, their kids were like...

Eryn: Exactly!

Christina: ...yellin' and fightin' and ...

Elisa: Yes.

Eryn: And they did a quick...

Elisa: Yes. There you go.

Christina: Chaos was happening before that picture was taken, and that was the only good one out of a hundred shots...

Eryn: That's right.

Christina: ...Right? So... But...but we don't see the backstory. And...um...and we know that about our lives, but sometimes we tend to unfairly hold ourselves at an...

Eryn: Yeah.



Christina: ...expectation that we don't even hold others to. And so in the same way that it took us 25 takes to get the right picture, it probably took those other folks 25 takes too.

Eryn: Goodness. Yes. One thing that I just feel like is so common is that we think we are connecting with our friends, because we are observing what's going on online. But we really don't know what's beyond that picture. And it creates this narrative in our heads to thinking that we know that person. We are connected to that person. I remember I was going through a really hard time, and I sat down with a friend for dinner. And I was just sharing, and sh...she was at the time a really close friend of mine. And I was sharing what was going on and sharing my heart. And she was just like... *"I had no idea. I thought that everything was fine. I mean I would check on social media and didn't think I needed to ask any questions that ... to see if you were struggling."* And it said two things to me. One, it said: What am I portraying online? And then the other was: Why hasn't she called me to check in, not check in online?

Elisa: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Eryn: Do you see that often?

Christina: Yeah. Oh absolutely, absolutely. I think it's interesting. Intimacy takes vulnerability, and vulnerability is almost like a muscle that we have to continually to...to train and work out. And social media and even like texting on the phone, I think, make that muscle weaker and weaker. So I know people who never call people on the phone...

Eryn: Yes.

Christina: [laughing] They're like, you know, it feels...it feels like so outdated to actually pick up the phone and say...

Elisa: Yeah.

Eryn: Yeah.

Christina: ... "How's it going?" Right? To actually talk to the person, not just like text...

Eryn: It's so true.



Christina: ...those emoticons or emojis, but to like really say that. And it's because when we don't activate that muscle, when we're not using that...that social connection muscle, we can find ourselves with, I think, actually increased anxiety to engage in that way. So social media – to use the word “cheat sheet” again – becomes a little bit of a cheat sheet to make us feel like *Okay, she looks great in that picture...*

Eryn: Yeah.

Christina: ... *All looks well...*

Elisa: Yeah. Yeah.

Christina: ...*What a ... what a funny thing she reposted. ...um...*And it's all good. And we don't have to express any of the vulnerability. We don't have to kind of give up any of ourselves, any of our time, any of our energy, to actually ask the questions like: “*You look great online, but ...*”

Eryn: Right.

Christina: ...*do you feel great too? Cause I can't see how you feel ...uh... from the images ...*

Elisa: Yeah.

Christina: ...*that you post.*”

Eryn: That's a great question.

Elisa: We get lulled into disconnection, and...and we get lazy. And ...eh...there is another element that...that I'm thinking of. And this is maybe another angle, but the...the cross-generational communication. You know I'm of an older generation, shall we just say? So, you know, my...my kids and my grandkids have pretty much taught me: “Don't call me. I'm not gonna answer.”

Eryn: Mmm.

Christina: Mm-hmm.



Elisa: ...It's gonna go straight to voice mail which, by the way, they won't listen to if I leave one. You know it's just "Delete." You know? So conversation is... be...because I guess of their ... their generations is not as important to them. ...eh... So how do we get vulnerable when we're held at bay by generational...

Christina: Yeah.

Elisa: ...preferences on how we communicate?

Christina: Yeah! And I ...I one hundred percent agree with what you're saying. I think that dynamic is very real across _____ [sounds like "federationally" but probably saying "generationally"?] in many households and families right now. But yet wh...what we see is that that's one of the very things that young people are missing within discipleship. They're still longing for that connection, even the connection that they reject by saying "Just text me." What we're seeing is that they are longing for real deep connection. It's just that they don't realize that it's gonna be awkward at first. And I think that's the thing that people are avoiding, because, again, that takes vulnerability. That connecting with other people...

Eryn: Yes!

Christina: ...is awkward...

Elisa: Yeah!

Christina: ...It can be really awkward! [Laughing]

Elisa: Yeah. Yeah.

Christina: And there...there're a lot of things that we call social anxiety. Social anxiety is... is ... is a real thing. But there are some things that go under the umbrella of social anxiety as if it's ...um... a kind of like a pathology or a real big issue, when it's just ... it's just the growing pain of getting to know people.

Elisa: Of starting, yeah...

Christina: Absolutely. And I remember working with first-year undergraduate students and having them all stand up and practice small talk.

Eryn: Oh wow!



Elisa: Oh that's...

Christina: ...in the classroom...

Elisa: ...so good! That is so smart!

Christina: ...To just practice the art and skill of small talk...

Elisa: Oh that's brilliant.

Christina: ...helping them to develop their elevator speech, so to speak, and then watching their bodies... uh... watching their...the...the anxiety, the heartbeat, the breathing. *What's happening for you when you have to do that task?* And then normalizing the fact that you might feel goofy...

Eryn: Yeah. Uh huh.

Christina: ...that you might feel awkward in that. And...um...and so that doesn't mean you don't call. It just means that you have to do it more and more....

Eryn: Yes...duh...

Christina: ...and more, so that you can get used to it. And, honestly, we have to reclaim that...

Elisa: Yeah.

Christina: ...because there are many benefits and blessings, I think, through social media communication. But we still desperately need each other...

Elisa: Well...

Eryn: Yes.

Christina: ...We need connection.

Elisa: ...just to be clear I haven't given up. I text like crazy...



Christina: Yes.

Elisa: ...And then I make them get together with me, and then I make them talk...

Christina: Absolutely!

Elisa: ...And, in fact, I do this: I'll say...I'll ask them five thousand questions in the... In the car is the best time because they're in the passenger seat...

Christina: Yes...

Elisa: ...and they can't get out, and you're driving...

Christina: Yeah.

Elisa: ...But the...the...the other thing I do is I'll ask them a thousand questions, and then I go: "Okay, you ask me one question." And they all [makes loud sighing noise] ... You know? [laughter]... But they do! But they do! They ask me a question: "All right. What'd you have for lunch?"

Christina: These are great skills! I'm...I'm...I'm with you on this. I...I...eh...We need to all do this. I agree.

Eryn: Yes. I love what you're saying, Dr. Christina, cause there's so much relief to that, that it is awkward. It is awkward, and if we know that it's awkward...

Christina: Yeah.

Elisa: So embrace the awkward?

Eryn: ...we can embrace it...

Elisa: Yeah.

Eryn: ...and get to the other side.



Christina: We're also gonna feel a bit of the shame and self-criticism of – *This would be so much easier...*

Eryn: Yes.

Elisa: Mm-hmm!

Christina: ...*if he did it the way that I'm better...*

Eryn: Yes.

Christina: ...*at doing it.* Right? ...um... But releasing ourselves to actually not be great at something...

Eryn: Yes.

Christina: ... [laughing] ... Just saying like *I'm not...I'm...This is not my thing*, and not having to have everything be our thing. Like I always tell people, you know, I ... I feel like I have a short list of things that I'm good at and... [Laughter]... So ...

Elisa: That's it.

Christina: ...And that's...and that's what it is. Everything else I'm like ...um... just kinda learning or maybe dabbling around, you know. And I think about that the way I cook, you know, that I...I feel like when I cook, people are gonna eat. And they're...

Eryn: Yeah.

Christina: ...not gonna get _____ [junk?] ...

Eryn: Right. Right. [Laughter]

Christina: ...You know it's...it's gonna taste like what it's supposed to taste like, but I'm not an expert in cooking. I don't even have that... I don't even give myself that whole obligation to be that...

Eryn: Yeah.



Christina: ...And so I think there...there's a need to give ourselves a little bit more freedom that we are not gonna be experts in everything...

Eryn: Yes.

Elisa: Mm-hmm. Amen.

Christina: And that we're...we're gonna be awkward ...uh... when we do certain things.

Elisa: Yeah, that's awesome.

Eryn: That's so good.

Elisa: Okay, so Dr. Christina, you know there are some of us – maybe it's a good day, ... [laughing] ... maybe it's our personality, but we actually don't really struggle at the moment with some mental health issue. Ther...there's some people who are like *Hm, you know, I think I'm doing okay*. But we may not be aware that we are, or we may not be aware that we're being exposed to certain elements in our world that could eventually really wear us down and make us unhealthy. Wh...what would you say to us in that...

Christina: Yeah...

Elisa: ...sense?

Christina: ...sh...Sure. I mean if I was ...um... you know just really reflecting on kind of our own kinda best practices ...uh..., so to speak, to be good stewards of our mental health. You know we're called to be good stewards of our...of our physical bodies. And...and our brains are a part of our physical bodies, so...so our mental health...

Elisa: Yeah.

Christina: ...you know I would say that ...um... you know we...we should still participate in kind of a checkup. You know you take your car in to get looked over. We should take our... our brains and bodies in to get looked over. And I would say to...to examine if there's any... any trauma or anything that we've kind of tucked away or buried away that we can surrender over to God. And...um... and at different places in our life, we...we may have the stamina or energy ...uh... to be able to work through those things. And it...it really does require us to work ... work through them...



Eryn: Yeah.

Christina: ...a commitment to them to see them through. And I would also say that, you know, to continue to employ what we know are some of the best practices for mental health maintenance. And so that's...that's nature, that's exercise, that's ...uh... gratitude – counting our blessings, ...um... that's connection to people...

Eryn: Yeah.

Christina: ...And also to just kind of do a emotional kind of body or mental health scan...um... And to...to be able to seek out who are service providers who can help us if we do hit a...a... a rough...a rough patch...

Eryn: Yeah.

Christina: mentally speaking, ...uh... to be aware of those things. Ultimately, you know, we have...we have a...a lot of resources in the Word of God, in the...in the body of Christ... um... that...that help us to persist. And we also have the wonderful resources that God is still sovereign over in the medical and mental health field as well.

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Christina: ...And so...uh... you know I would invite people to think about how, if *they're* doing great, how they can be a listening ear...

Elisa: Mm. Mm-hmm.

Christina: ...um... a supportive friend, how they can...uh... You know the ministry of the person who delivers the cards...

Eryn: Yes.

Christina: ...of encouragement. So I ha...I have a whole drawer full of cards that – this lets you into my personality – that I fail to send to people. I have stamps in one part of my house, and I have a whole drawer frul...full of cards that...



Eryn: Yeah.

Christina: ...haven't made it out, but... But I would say: Don't be like me, and actually put a stamp...

Eryn: Yeah.

Christina: ...on the envelope. And...and send...

Eryn: Yes.

Christina: ...those notes of encouragement. I think in the particular moment that we're in right now, those things can really go a long way.

Eryn: That's so good. I am sure you...you experience and you witness women and men all the time wrestling with not feeling seen and heard by God. You...

Christina: Yeah.

Eryn: You...you observe it, and you speak...

Christina: Mm-hmm.

Eryn: ...into it... you speak truth into it. What does that look like for you in your _____ [person?]?
When have you felt...

Christina: Yeah.

Eryn: ...unseen and heard? And when have you heard from Him?

Christina: I...you know I think the way that I would probably describe that sense of feeling ...um...
unseen or unheard is usually when I feel really stuck...

Eryn: Hm.



Christina: ...um...And...or...or I feel kind of trapped in a...in a circumstance where things are not getting better. Or I feel like there's just ...um... so much confusion. You know I had ...um... a couple of months of just...of ha...kind of plaguing health issues. I had ... had developed ...um... an infection that I just could not...

Eryn: Ugh!

Christina: ...could not get rid of. It was antibiotics after antibiotics. It was a...it was a steroid after steroids. And at...at that point, like, the medicines were making me sick...

Eryn: Yes!

Elisa: Yeah!

Christina: ...I felt sicker with the meds than I was with the infection. And I remember realizing – and just...just the up and downs. The steroid would change my personality...

Eryn: Oh wow!

Christina: ...and I'm...

Elisa: You can't sleep.

Christina: ...shaky and...

Elisa: Yeah.

Christina: ...grumpy and, yeah, all of these things. And I really need...

Eryn: Yeah.

Christina: ...sleep. And I remember just being so frustrated because I felt the wear and tear of that sickness and – which I'm still working through right now. I felt the wear and tear of it, the foginess in my thinking. And I couldn't get relief. I couldn't get on the other side of it. And I wanted God to deliver me from it...



Elisa: Yeah.

Christina: ...I was just...

Eryn: Yeah.

Christina: ...I'm tired of being sick...

Elisa: Yeah. Yeah.

Christina: ...And...and, too, I wanted to be Christian enough not to be grumpy and angry in my sickness...

Eryn: Yes.

Elisa: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Christina: ...because that's really what was happening. I found myself multiple times a day giving a disclaimer of like *I don't feel well!* Like *I don't feel well!* And...and...and I had created a sense of piety in my own mind that looked like I wouldn't need to announce that because I... I could live in a way that people wouldn't even know I was...wasn't feeling well. They would just be like *Look at the Lord at work...*

Eryn: Yeah.

Christina: ... [laughing] ... *at work in her life*. I had created this...

Elisa: Whoa!

Christina: ...this Christian ...

Elisa: Yeah.

Christina: ...superwoman that I wanted to be. And...uh... the Lord didn't allow that to be a option...

[Laughter]



Christina: ...like that was ... I was like you know...

Elisa: Couldn't just back up, yeah.

Christina: ...like *I am bitter!*

Elisa: Yeah. Yeah. Wasn't working. Yeah.

Christina: ...Bitter and tired, and I can't...I can't muster up...I can't muster up the fruit of the Spirit...

Elisa: That's so good.

Christina: I need the Holy Spirit...

Elisa: Yeah.

Christina: ...to bring about the fruit of the Spirit in me. And am learning – like this is literally still in process right now, so I'm telling you something that is ... is a part of my life...

Eryn: That's so _____. Yeah.

Christina: ...at the moment. So I'm learning that I can't fake Christianity...

Eryn: Mmmm!

Christina: ...you know? The Lord is being gracious to me in saying that I just...I can't fake it. I don't have enough strength to fake it...

Eryn: Yeah.

Christina: ...I have to acknowledge my fatigue, my weakness...um... my...my moodiness...

Eryn: Yes.

Christina: ...my mood change. It's made me have to apologize and repent of a lot...



[Laughter]

Eryn: That's real!

Christina: ...you know a lot! Like *I am mean today! I am tired, and that's not an excuse because you are beloved of God...*

Elisa: Oh!

Christina: ... *I'm so sorry!* Right?

Elisa: But look at how your modeling exactly what we all need to see. Sorry. But look how you are...

Eryn: Yes.

Elisa: ...because you're...you're doing the full range, and you're showing it.

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: ...And that's what it means to be more emotionally healthy is to say *I don't feel good today, and I am mean!*

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: ...*And God help...*

Christina: Yeah.

Elisa: ...*me grow something better in this mess.*

Christina: Absolutely...

Eryn: Yeah.

Christina: Absolutely. Absolutely. So God...so God is meeting me, I think, in this moment through...through deep humility.



Eryn: Yeah.

Christina: [laughing] and through exhaustion...

Elisa: Yeah.

Eryn: Yeah. And you know what? You... you said something that was just so ... [slight pause] ... I just kinda connected the dots as you were saying it out loud. But, you know, in the moments of where we feel unseen and unheard, like when we...when we feel unseen and when we feel like we don't hear the Lord, we also won't allow ourselves sometimes to feel seen or heard within our friends and our community. And we feel like we have to put on this like mask and this face. But we so desperately desire to be seen and heard...

Christina: Absolutely...

Eryn: ...and ...uh...

Christina: Absolutely...

Eryn: ...I just think that's so interesting that we...we do that. We feel that with the Lord, and then we do that with other people. And we end up feeling so much more alone and isolated...

Elisa: So much worse!

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Christina: Well, it's one...it's one of the amazing things about ...um... the character of Jesus. And...and, you know, one time I...I just kinda did a study of thinking... of looking at the passages where Jesus notices someone...um... where He sees her right where He ...eh... where He...where He notices someone. And no one else is, you know... no one is paying any attention to, and just how loving that is. How loving it is to see the person being ignored or on the margins...

Elisa: Mm-hmm.



Christina: ...that it is...it is a godly thing to be able to have that kind of vision, to see what we don't want to see. Or see *who* we don't want to see. And Jesus does that repeatedly in the New Testament ...um... where Jesus sees people. He fa...He *feels* people. In a...in a crowded space. He feels the woman who touches the hem of His garment.

Eryn: Yeah.

Christina: He, you know, He's...He sees that woman at the well. ...um... He...He sees that woman who's being completely ignored by ...uh... the male disciples who've been ... who were kind of just pish-pushing her away...

Eryn: Yeah.

Christina: ...And He's pointing to her as an example of faith in that particular instance. And so ...um... yeah, you know, God sees us. And we are meant to be seen. And that...that's not like in an arrogant, showboat-y way. We're meant to be ...um... we're meant to be acknowledged because we have value. And I think there's a way for us ...uh... to name that and not to be overwhelmed by a shame that makes it seem like we're being ... being arrogant or histrionic or too much. And I think...I think, particularly for women, there is a...and particularly in our... in our culture there's this kind of idea that if you want to be seen, that that's inherently sinful. And I think there's a difference between ...um... wanting to be praised, like an idolatrous way, and wanting to simply be recognized in the way that Christ recognizes and sees people. And I'm just ... I'm so grateful that Jesus did that in the Scriptures. And Jesus does that now. Jesus sees us even now.

[Music]

Elisa: Jesus saw the unseen in the New Testament, and He continues to do that today. What a beautiful truth about our God and a great call to action to us as His followers. A way that we can walk together in our mental health journeys is to reach out to those that feel unseen and let them know that we, and God, see them.

Eryn: That is so true, Elisa, and just beautiful. And before we close out today's episode, just a quick reminder that the show notes are available in the podcast description. The show notes not only contain the talking points for today's episode, but they also include a link to a free resource. It's a digital download titled *Why? Seeing God in our Pain*. This free download points us toward the root causes of our pain and



suffering, and leads us to the Bible to show us how God can draw us closer to Him, even while in the midst of the pain. And this download is yours for free. Just click on the link in the podcast description, or visit our website at godhearsher.org. That's godhearsher.org.

Elisa: Not only will you find this free eBooklet, but you'll also find a link to connect with Eryn and me on social. We would love to hear from you and answer any questions you might have, or even just to pray for you. So check out the show notes on our website 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 Daniel Ryan Day and Mary Jo Clark. And today we also want to recognize John and Nicole for their help in creating and promoting the *God Hears Her* podcast. Thanks, friends!

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