



God Hears Her Podcast

Episode 35 - Are You There God

Elisa Morgan and Eryn Eddy with Sally Lloyd-Jones

Sally: The tiniest child needs to know God loves them.

[music]

Eryn: Yeah.

[music]

Sally: God is with them. No storm is gonna separate them and that wherever they are, God is really near.

[music]

Eryn: Yeah.

[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*.

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Eryn: Welcome to *God Hears Her*. I'm Eryn Eddy.

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Elisa: And I'm Elisa Morgan. All of us know what it feels like to be alone. Even when surrounded by people, we can experience loneliness and isolation and disconnection. Sometimes this aloneness is because of an experience that we've had that no one we know can relate to. Sometimes it's because of something we've believed about ourselves. And sometimes it's because we are literally alone, by ourselves. In any and all of these situations, our aloneness can make us wonder if God is truly near.

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Eryn: Yah. And, well, we have a return guest today. On this episode of *God Hears Her* the author of *The Jesus Storybook Bible*, Sally Lloyd-Jones joins us to share how God is near, even when we don't feel His presence or recognize His nearness. And then the show takes a surprising turn, when she helps us see how God's nearness opens the doors to experience child-like wonder. Here's our conversation with Sally Lloyd-Jones on *God Hears Her*.

Elisa: It's not often we get to have guests return. So it's awesome to have you back.

Sally: It's my honor. Thank you for having me back.

Elisa: Absolutely.

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: Most people know you for the *The Jesus Storybook Bible*. And...and the story of how God really wrote that through you is stunning. And...and I love the way He wooed you over decades, really, to yield to His message that was not about compartmentalizing Who He is, but really about understanding that every story whispers the name of Jesus. And...and our God is a God Who bends into our every circumstance and can redeem it. He's that powerful.

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: You have another message that's being born in you. And I love the simplicity of it, and yet I'm completely befuddled by it too. And...and it's the message of near. Can you talk to us about what this message means and how it came to be in you?

Sally: Well, it's the third title in a series. The first two were *Loved*, which is a paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer; *Found*, which is a paraphrase of the Shepherd's Psalm; and *Near* is a paraphrase of Psalm 139, a portion of it. But it's such a rich psalm, you can't really fit it all into one little board book. And it's a board book, which is...I call the edible edition. In other words...

Eryn: I love that.

Sally: ...a baby can chew on it, and I love that, because we're...we're supposed to eat God's Word, aren't we and chew on it? So...

Elisa: I love that.



Sally: ...there we are.

Elisa: I love that.

Sally: But what I noticed that really moved me was when the first book came out, it was called *Found*. That's the Shepherd's Psalm. There's a spread in there that shows a little lamb in the middle of a storm. And every little child, really tiny child, like under 1 year old, always goes to that spread. They...they have to see that. Then they go forward to the next spread, which shows the Shepherd running and the sun breaking through the cloud. Then they go back to the storm. And the reason I bring that up is it made me realize the tiniest child is hungry for comfort. The tiniest child knows everything is not good. And if we're... You know, I often say no one is too young for the truth. We have to tell children the truth. We have to be age appropriate, but we can't pretend everything is a fairytale and nothing goes wrong. Cause a little child already knows that. And that's why they're drawn to that storm. And what safer place than to process that on a parent's lap or an aunt's lap or an uncle's lap or whoever's lap? Someone who loves them. And so I thought, I love this little format that has very minimal text and beautiful illustrations by Jago, that can become a comfort to children. So that was my heart, was that the tiniest child needs to know God loves them.

Eryn: Yeah.

Sally: God is with them. No storm is going to separate them and that wherever they are God is really near. And so this *Near* book is all about wherever you are, you can't ever go anywhere that God won't also be with you. And so we've got lovely illustrations of a child in a rocket, got a child scuba diving, we've got a child climbing a mountain. And Jago's done a beautiful job because they're all different nationalities and races and... I just think it's a message that actually we all need to know right now, don't we? In this time...

Eryn: Yeah.

Sally: ...where we're all isolated and socially distant. We have a God who is not socially distant. He's with us. And His whole goal is to move heaven and earth to be near with us...near to us. So that message is for grownups, but it's also for tiny children.

Elisa: So Psalm 139, Sally, I love that psalm. I've gotta be honest. Sometimes, though, people have approached that psalm kind of in their head. You know, it's that you see these attributes of God, like His omniscience – He knows everything, or His omnipresence – He is everywhere, or His omnipotence – He



is all power. Those are heavy concepts, and they're beautiful. But I have a feeling you go at this a little bit differently. I have a feeling you go at this a little bit more cookies on the bottom shelf, if you will.

Sally: Yeah.

Elisa: What is your approach? And what do you hope that kids and their parents glean as they read *Near*?

Sally: Well, I think, you know, it takes a while to do these books because of the illustration, which, of course, are glorious, and we can't show those on a radio program, but it's really... You know, this is a picture book, and a picture book is a story told in two languages, so the images are just stunning by Jago, who's the illustrator of *The Jesus Storybook Bible*. And he's done an incredible job. And I think with this children's book you have to keep it so simple. And it has to be concrete. When you're telling anything to children, it has to be something you can see. If it's abstract, you lose them. So I just went with the simplest approach, which was thinking a child needs to know that, you know, God is with them whether they're at church or whether they're climbing a mountain. Like, where could they go? They could go to space. That could be the furthest away, and even there God would be with them.

Eryn: Yeah.

Sally: And they could go really deep, down to the bottom of the ocean, and God would be with them. I think I was thinking on a level that, you know, down to the depths, even when you're depressed, up to the heights, even when you're at the mountaintop to God that's no different. He's always with you, whether you're happy, whether you're sad, whether there are clouds, whether there's storms in your life. God is just as close as He would be on a sunny day in a meadow. So I think that was the underlying thing, but none of that is said. It's all very concrete. But I...my prayer is that this becomes a blessing that a child and a parent, or whoever is with them, can read and let the truth of this... Especially now because we're all so distant from each other. It might be easy to think if you're by yourself in your house, socially distanced, that God's socially distanced. But that's the beautiful message of the Gospel, that God wouldn't...He wouldn't let that stay that way. He did everything He could and moved heaven and earth so that He would always be near to us. And why? Because we are His children, and He loves us.

Eryn: Was there a time in your life, Sally, that you wondered, as a little girl, like, if God was near?

Sally: Yeah. Well, I went to boarding school when I was 8, because I was a very dreamy child, and I wasn't excelling any way at school, cause I was always looking out of the window and not very good at math, so that seemed...or spelling. And those two things seem to tell you whether you were clever or not. So I didn't think I was clever. And my parents were faced with a choice of leaving me in this school in



Africa, where I suppose other children were thriving, but I wasn't thriving. They were worried that if I stayed there I would come back to England and really be so behind that it would do me in. They were in this position of a very hard decision, so they chose to send me to boarding school. So 8-year-old, being sent to boarding school is a very young age. And I now look back and I say to my parents, "Thank you for sending me." And it's been a real blessing to thank them, because, you know, when you're a teenager, you blame everything on your parents, don't you? So...

Elisa: Of course.

Sally: ...any problem I had I blamed on the fact that I was sent to boarding school. "Oh, it must be because of that." So now to turn around and say to my parents, "Thank you, because I can see how that was huge in my life." I loved my boarding school, from when I was 8 to 12. I just adored it. But the first night I was at that boarding school I was in my bed. It was, like, army cot...lines of army cots, with horse hair mattresses. And I was in my bed, 8 years old, the lights were out. And I thought, "I know Jesus is with me, so I better make room," so I squished myself over to the edge of the bed, so He could have room in the bed. So that tells you in my little 8-year-old soul how real my faith was. And I know God honors that. You know, that... It breaks my heart to think of that little 8-year-old doing that. But that little 8-year-old knew what she knew, that God was with her. And that's always been true. I knew Jesus was with me, rather. That was when I was still, you know, thinking, "Jesus is my best friend, and He's with me."

Eryn: Oh.

Elisa: Are there moments as an adult that you've harkened back to that moment in the bed and scooting over for Jesus and thought, "Was that real?" Or, "Will it work now?" Or, "Where did He go?"

Sally: I know. I... You can be so, sort of, cynical in your own head, can't you? And yet... Like, I'm somewhere right now, surrounded by trees and woodpeckers. And the glory of what I'm watching is so beautiful. If I look at that, it kinda breaks through the cynicism, because if God can do... I'm...I'm learning about forests and the incredible trees and how they help each other and, oh, the mysterious thing and how they work together as a community and how dead logs feed creatures that mean... I mean all these incredible things. And it fills you with wonder. And when I'm filled with wonder, then I don't have any cynicism because the God Who is so majestic that He would care about a little 8-year-old in her boarding school and make her think, "I'm with you," and her to believe it so she would scoot over, it takes away all the doubt, because I think, you know, love is at the center of creation. God is a loving Creator. And if He cares for His forests and teaches them how to help each other and live and create oxygen and...if He can do stuff like that, then there's nothing He can't do. And there's nothing...no magic thinking about me in that bed. It's actually a child often sees with eyes that... G.K. Chesterton said we've sinned and grown old. And we're older than our Heavenly Father. And I think that's really true. There's a playfulness and



wonder in God's heart that we get so clever and complicated and looked down on. But it's really poisonous to our soul.

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Elisa: And when we come back, Sally helps us rediscover creativity and wonder, as she speaks to the importance of intentionally seeking beauty. And she also offers some practical tips for fighting back against the cynicism that can so often overwhelm us in this world. That's coming up on *God Hears Her*.

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

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

[music]

Eryn: And I'm Eryn Eddy. And in just a moment Sally will help us rediscover the creativity and wonder that many of us experience as children and how that rediscovery opens the door to experience God's nearness. But before we do, just a quick reminder that the show notes they also It's a series from the *Discover the Word* radio show that Elisa is a part of, titled *The Jesus Storybook Bible*. Sally joins the *Discover the Word* team to discuss what it means that every story in the Bible whispers Jesus' name. The fun part of this series is that Sally reads part of the story for us, and it brings the story of God to life in a whole new way. J

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Elisa: Before the break Sally shared how easy it can be for us to look down on the wonder and playfulness in God's heart and how that view is poisonous to our souls. That's where we want to pick up the conversation. Sally will share ways in which, instead of looking down on those qualities, we can learn to value them in our Father's Spirit and learn to cultivate them within our own hearts. This is *God Hears Her*.

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Elisa: Sally, you have an amazing awe and wonder as you talk about discovering the forest and the interdependency of trees and logs and this... Your...your eyes light up as I'm looking at you. And...and you almost... I can just see them widening as you're taking it in. I'm hearing in you something that is awakening me and reminding me... I...I...I tend to flesh the little girl in me. I tend to push her aside, behind my legs, because she's inappropriate or...or embarrassing in a given moment or maybe is gonna ask the wrong question or be silly when she should be serious. I'm sensing that you have, over your lifetime, bent to hold the child, the child in you and the child in others and the children that you write for. How did you come to discover that? What do you do to...to keep her present with you? What do you to...to keep this awe and wonder...

Elisa: Yeah.

Elisa: ...growing and awake inside of you?

Sally: Yeah, I...I'm not always... You know, like we...we can get very serious and down and complicated in your thinking. And I can get... Yeah, I think it's often a sign, when I'm not filled with wonder, that something's gone wrong. But I think... I don't really know the answer, because all I know is, I'm still a child inside. And I think that's part of the equipping to write for children, because an editor of mine said there are two types of children's book writers. There's the one who has to be around children. That's how they get their ideas. And there's the one who never grew up inside, who's still a child. And when she said that, it really freed me, because I realized, yes, I love being around children. But I don't have to be around children to write for them because I'm already a child inside. And that's, I think, just part of the package. So it may come easier for me, maybe, because God's given me that call. And that equips me to write for them. But I think wonder is the root to childlikeness, because children have a right-sized view of themselves. They are small in a big world. So if we are too big in our own estimation and we look down on stuff, then we're not...we're not in the right posture. We're not... And that's, I think, why we're told to adoration and gratitude and praise. That puts God in the right place, doesn't it? And... They did this free class at Yale called The Science of Wellbeing, which is available online. And it's been amazing because it's everything we know from the Bible, but all the science showing it's true. So they get you, over 8 weeks, to do practical, what they call, rewirements. And one of them is savoring. Do something where you're just doing it. Like, for me it was building a fire, getting the logs, building the fire, lighting the fire, tending the fire. And it's amazing how something that simple is a root to wonder. I think a lot of our problem is we're too much with our narratives in our head... Back to that, what are we saying to ourselves in our heads?

Eryn: Yeah.



Sally: We're too cluttered.

Eryn: Yeah.

Sally: Cause, you know, I was on a bike ride this morning. And, you know, there's a whole sway that the bike ride that I don't remember cause I was off in my head somewhere. And I'm missing beautiful trees that are only going to be looking like that for the next day. And I just missed them. So when I think of it like that, I don't want to miss anything.

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: What would you say to the mom or dad or aunt or uncle or grandma or grandpa who gets unplugged from this wonder? You know, how can we rekindle it? How can we not lose this gift that God has given us in the child that we all used to be?

Sally: Well, of course, it's very hard, isn't it right now? Because parents are being teachers; they're doing their job.

Eryn: Yeah.

Sally: I mean I can't imagine the stresses everyone's under. So it's obviously very hard to find the time. But I don't think it has to be a big, long time. It might just be you take a minute. You walk outside, and you... You know, I tell children, "Why don't we go on a beauty hunt?" like a treasure hunt, but we're looking for something beautiful. And it could be you might be miserable and there's nothing beautiful. But if you can find one tiny thing, like it might be a leaf that's changing color, and you just look at it. Or you decide you're going to think of three things you can be grateful for. And even if they're the most ridiculous things, cause you can't think of anything. I think something happens when you start to choose your thoughts, as opposed to listen to your thoughts. And that's what Martin Lloyd-Jones said in *Spiritual Depression*. We have to decide whether we're going to listen to ourselves or talk to ourselves.

Elisa: Oh.

Sally: When we wake up in the morning, there's all these thoughts coming at us. And we can just listen, and then that's the story we always tell ourselves, "Oh, I'm..." whatever, fill in the blank. Or we do what the psalmist said and we say, "Why are you downcast? I will yet put my hope in God." So it's sort of taking ourselves in hand, not not feeling our feelings. We're supposed to feel whatever we feel. And right now a lot of people are in terrible situations. But I think it's just noticing, what's the story I'm saying in my head? And can I pop out for a moment and say, "I'm going to look at this leaf. And I'm going to thank You." And I



think also just bringing God into everything, like, “You know my heart. You know how I feel right now. You show me. I’m just giving You everything. I want that wonder. You bring it, cause I can’t do it.” You know? It’s not...it’s not up to us.

Eryn: Yeah. I love what you’re saying, Sally, because I feel like sometimes we can start to go down the path of wonder and this childlike faith and then immediately disrupt it with saying that we’re ignorant or reckless or we start to, like, make it go smaller and dimmer and dimmer and dimmer, to where it goes out almost.

Elisa: Yeah.

Sally: Yeah.

Elisa: It’s just... And I just... I love what you’re sharing because it gives us that permission to, instead of dimming it, embracing it and seeing as an opportunity to make it bigger and gr... I mean I...I’m terrible at math. I know you...you... I’m horrible at it.

Sally: Yeah.

Eryn: I repeated fifth grade. I also went to a boarding school.

Sally: Oh, you did?

Eryn: I did. And all-girl boarding school. And I remember when I repeated fifth grade. My parents told me, “Hey, you’re going to be repeating fifth grade.” I think they were expecting me to be just heartbroken and devastated. And instead I saw it with, like, this opportunity to be the smartest kid class, because I’ve already taken the tests. And that was in the fifth grade.

Elisa: Oh, wow.

Eryn: But I was so grateful to have that wonder, cause I think in some form it was protection. Instead of going down this long list of, “All right. Let’s go through all of the tactical things of how this is going to negatively impact your life,” or, you know. And I know that’s such a smaller circumstance in comparison to what we see. But I think that if we don’t lean into that wonder, we can immediately be overwhelmed by all of the...

Sally: Oh, yeah.



Eryn: ...criticism. That isn't constructive.

Sally: Yeah.

Eryn: That could lead us down a more destructive path.

Sally: I think what you're saying is really true, because... I think what you're saying is it's like we need to stop judging. I don't know about you, but I...I feel like I need to get out of the court room, get out of the court room.

Eryn: Yes.

Sally: Because God isn't about punishing and... If...if that was the case, Jesus never would have needed to... You know, it's like we're making nonsense of the fact that we needed a rescuer, Who took all of that. So God isn't pleased when we beat ourselves up. That doesn't do Him honor. And I...I keep thinking... And I need to learn this every day, is to stop judging. Is it good? Is it bad? Am I good? Am I bad? Am I doing it right? Am I doing it...? Cause that's such a waste of time. And we're all focused on ourselves. So, you know, when you...when little children are very little, when their parent is there, they can play. They're full of joy. They can play. But the minute the parent leaves, they get stressed out and anxious. And I've been thinking, we can play because our Father is near, which goes back to that theme of God being near. If we know God is near and He's the one in charge of our lives and all we have to do is the next thing, then we can be more playful. And I think playful and then wonder go together. But as long as we're clenched and we're trying it all, it's all on our shoulders, there's no room for any of that. So I try and remind myself that.

Elisa: And as long as we misspeak to ourselves that our God is like the judge, you know, we're gonna be afraid to play even in His presence.

Sally: Yes, that's very true.

Elisa: You know? But...but if we allow Him to be the loving God that He is and, you know, and then bring this...this wonder and awe of ourselves, let it shine, let it bubble up, let it grow, don't judge it, don't push it down, just for 5 seconds let it be free.

Sally: Yes.

Elisa: You know, just...just for 5 seconds. I wonder if we might be able to feel His pleasure. And I wonder if we might be able to really sense what it is we hope is in our Father and truly is there.



Sally: Yeah. I...I wonder if... I'm sure that must delight Him. Just like a...if earthly parents are delighted when their child is happy and playful, why wouldn't He be delighted? You know? I think that helps me sometimes, to really think about a good parent and then just think, "So why would I doubt that my Heavenly Father is...why would I think He's not even as good as a human parent?" You know?

Eryn: That's so beautiful, Sally. What would you share to the listener that is struggling with feeling God near? Maybe they're in the...the bottom of the ocean or out in space.

Sally: Yes.

Eryn: What would you share with somebody that doesn't feel His nearness? What are some, like, tangible things that you've done or that you've journaled or that...or conversations that you've had with Him that have helped you feel His nearness?

Sally: Obviously, everyone's different and I wouldn't want to suggest to the person who's really in a tragedy that I know anything about what they're going through, but...

Eryn: Yeah.

Sally: ...I've been through my own tragedies. And I think what I would say is I love what Amy Carmichael said, that...I think it was Amy Carmichael...that our feelings aren't God's facts. That doesn't make our feelings wrong. And I think we have to be careful as believers that we're not judging our feelings. God gave us our feelings, and they're good. But they're not facts. They don't always tell us the truth of what's going on. They might tell us how we feel, but they're not telling us that God's mo... Just cause we feel like He's far away, doesn't tell us that He's far away.

Eryn: Yeah.

Sally: And she said they're like clouds. Our feelings are like clouds. It's like weather. So clouds can hide the mountains and the sun. Does that mean the sun and the mountains have moved, that the sun stopped shining? No. It just means right now you don't see the sun; you don't see the mountain. And God knows that, and He understands, and He's kind and tenderhearted. But He wants you to remember, just because you can't see them, doesn't mean they've gone away. The mountain's still there, and the sun is still shining. And I think that means that you can, again, separate yourself from your feelings. So you have the feelings. They're like weather. And maybe you can just let them be. You don't have to judge them. You don't have to fight them. I think I've learned that, that if I try and fight my feelings, I make them much more powerful. Cause I'm kinda trying to deny I have them. Like, "Oh, no. I shouldn't feel angry. I don't feel



angry.” But then, of course, that’s no help. Whereas maybe it’s about saying, “God, You know my heart. And you know all the weather in my soul right now. And You can see everything. So I’m just... I give it to You.” You know? “You bring me wonder. You bring me hope. I’m giving it all to You.” Just keep... I think keep giving it to Him. Let Him shoulder the burden of trying to work it all out.

Eryn: Relating our feelings to clouds allows us to visualize them in our heads. And creating an image to acknowledge our emotions is just another great way to embrace our inner child. This is *God Hears Her*.

Elisa: 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. And it’s a series from the *Discover the Word* radio show, titled *The Jesus Storybook Bible*. Sally joins the team at *Discover the Word* to discuss what it means that every story in the Bible whispers Jesus’ name. The fun part of this series is that Sally reads part of the story for us. And it brings the story of God to life in a whole new way. Just click on the link in the podcast description or visit our website at godhearsher.org. That’s godhearsher.org.

Eryn: Not only will you find this free series, but you’ll also find a link to purchase the children’s board book, *Near*, by Sally Lloyd-Jones. And finally you will find links to connect with Sally, Elisa, and me on social. We love to hear from you and answer any questions that you might have or even just pray for you. So check out the show notes on our website, godhearsher.org.

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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 Ann Stevens and produced by Daniel Ryan Day and Mary Jo Clark. And today we also want to recognize Christie and Luanne for their help in creating and promoting the *God Hears Her* podcast. Thanks, y’all.

