



# God Hears Her Podcast

## Episode 45 - Best of When We Feel Invisible

### Eryn Eddy and Elisa Morgan with Robert Gelinás

**Robert:** Two weeks after that, I'm in my second worship service ever. And I'm standing in water wearing a white robe, and I'm being baptized. And the pastor says "I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And when I went underneath the water, it's like time stopped because I didn't know who my dad was. And this man said "father." And there was something visceral that took place in the water that day. And I come out of the water, and I felt like I got a father.

[Musical introduction]

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

**Elisa:** And I'm Elisa Morgan. And we want to share with you another one of our favorite episodes. Feeling unseen, unheard, and invisible—something many of us struggle with. In this episode of *God Hears Her*, we revisit our conversation with my pastor, Robert Gelinás, as he describes overcoming feelings of being invisible. And he introduces us to Hagar and the God who sees and hears her and us.

**Eryn:** Now this episode may sound a little different. Normally, Elisa and I do our interviews together. However, this episode was recorded when Elisa was spending some time with Robert on a day that I wasn't around. And we didn't want to miss out on capturing Robert's wise perspective on what it means that God hears us and sees us and knows us. Before we get into the interview, let me introduce you to Robert. He's a pastor who deeply desires to see the body of Christ united and empowered to serve the poor and the poor in spirit, the miserable and the marginalized, the disabled, and those deemed unimportant. He and his wife, Barbara, live with their six children in the Denver area. So here's a conversation between Elisa Morgan and Robert Gelinás. This is *God Hears Her*.

**Elisa:** I'm excited about this conversation. I don't know exactly where it's gonna go. You and I serve together in several different capacities, *Discover the Word*, the radio program, the online and everyday Bible study that we do as a group at...out of *Our Daily Bread*. Sometimes we serve together in the church. But we're both (dun, dun, dun) introverts. So do we talk that much, Robert?

**Robert:** We don't talk that much when there's not a microphone. When there's not a microphone, we...

**Elisa:** That is awesome.



**Robert:** ...we're rather quiet, yeah.

**Elisa:** We're rather quiet.

**Robert:** Yeah.

**Elisa:** And I think for rather quiet people, talking about hard stuff is an extra challenge. So thank you.

**Robert:** Yeah, I remember when, I think it was the second date with my wife, and cause she's an introvert. I'm an introvert. But we didn't know that on our second date. And we were driving in the car for the longest time, and it was just silent. And I finally said to her, we haven't said anything. And she said, that's okay. And I'm...

**Elisa:** Oh.

**Robert:** ...as soon as she said "that's okay" I'm like I need to marry this woman.

**Elisa:** I'm marrying her. She's mine. We are called to one another. That is so good. Well I know part of your story, but I really want our friends here with us today know more of your story. You came to feel seen and heard by God I think in some unusual ways and maybe even early in your life. Can you tell us how that came about?

**Robert:** When you are the only black child in a white family, and no one in the family will recognize that, you don't feel seen and you don't feel heard. I felt loved by my grandmother, by my siblings, by my mom and the man I call my dad. I definitely felt loved growing up. But there was this thing, for reasons that I would only discover later and really not worth going into and in this podcast, but it took a long time for me to not feel invisible in my own family. And even to this day, I think I still feel somewhat invisible, kind of extended family.

**Elisa:** I don't think I can imagine that, and that's powerful what you're saying right there. Was it like you needed to play a game and...and ignore some of the realities of who you were and who they were?

**Robert:** Yeah, when somebody's not recognizing you, you wonder, is there something wrong with you? And as a child, the answer's obviously yes. That's what you always go to is something must be wrong with me versus just something wrong with the world. Everyone's playing into that.

**Elisa:** Who raised you? Describe your family that raised you.



**Robert:** Yeah, my grandmother raised me. She...she always would start a conversation by saying she was born in 1920, three minutes after twelve. She was a New Year's baby and...

**Elisa:** Wow.

**Robert:** ...she had five children. And then somewhere in her fifties when one of her daughters has a child and then at that moment, wasn't able to care for her child which namely being me, she takes me on.

**Elisa:** How old were you?

**Robert:** I must have been around two, yeah.

**Elisa:** Okay, okay.

**Robert:** And my grandmother just raised me. She always said, I think God put me on the planet for this.

**Elisa:** Oh wow.

**Robert:** Talk about being seen.

**Elisa:** Yeah.

**Robert:** But at the same time not being seen, not talking about some obvious things about me.

**Elisa:** It's back to what you were saying about knowing you were loved...

**Robert:** Yeah.

**Elisa:** ...but not necessarily seen. Were you the only kid raised in that family?

**Robert:** With my grandmother. My other siblings were somewhere else.

**Elisa:** Okay.

**Robert:** Different household.



**Elisa:** So you were raised with your grandmother. How did you begin to discover there was a God who sees and hears you?

**Robert:** My grandmother always used to take me to church, but she wouldn't go to church herself. She would just make sure I went into Sunday school, and she would wait for me on the way out.

**Elisa:** Can I just pause there? I totally relate.

**Robert:** Yeah.

**Elisa:** I was raised by a single mom. And she would drop my sister and I off at church, and she'd come back and pick us up like two and a half hours later—free childcare. I mean brilliant woman, right?

**Robert:** Yeah, yeah.

**Elisa:** Go ahead.

**Robert:** Yeah, they'd go get some shopping done. Or my grandmother though, sometimes I'd come...come out; and there was a dry spot under the car. It'd be snowing, but there was a dry spot under the car, cause she didn't leave.

**Elisa:** Wow.

**Robert:** She just stayed right there. It was almost like she was guarding the door to make sure I stayed. But...but there was a Sunday school teacher who realized I didn't understand what it meant to have a relationship with Jesus. And this Sunday school teacher kept me after class and just paused and walked me slowly through the gospel and asked me if I wanted to give my life to Him. And I said yes, and then the next week I'm in my first worship service ever. Everybody's happy that I've given my life to Christ, and I still don't know what this means. And then two weeks after that, I'm in my second worship service ever. And I'm standing in water wearing a white robe, and I'm being baptized. And the pastor says, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." And when I went underneath the water, it's like time stopped, because I didn't know who my dad was. And this man said "father." And there was something visceral that took place in the water that day. And I come out of the water, and I felt like I got a father. So...

**Elisa:** So just to tease that a little bit, was your grandmother single?



**Robert:** Yes, she was. Yeah.

**Elisa:** Okay, so you didn't know literally who your father was in that season. And as you're raised back up, hearing this in the name of the Father, that's new. That's a new label.

**Robert:** Yeah, yeah.

**Elisa:** Wow. Okay, did you feel seen and heard by God then?

**Robert:** Yeah, I mean that was a profound way for me. The one greatest need I had and didn't even know to ask for is the exact place where He met me.

**Elisa:** Is there something there in your story, you didn't even know you had this need to ask for it. Is there some kind of a key in a lock there for this concept of being seen and heard by God?

**Robert:** I think of Hagar. She's being mistreated by Abram and Sarai and she just takes off running to get away. And then God comes and meets her right where she is. She thinks she needs to get away. She doesn't know that she actually needs to go back. And yet so God sends her back. And she gave a name to God right then. She said, You are the God who sees.

**Elisa:** You are the God who sees.

**Robert:** She felt seen because no one else was seeing her.

**Elisa:** So...so I guess what I'm getting at as I'm hearing you say is that sometimes we don't really know the great gap in our heart that longs to be noticed, that longs to be known until suddenly we are.

**Robert:** Yeah.

**Elisa:** You know here...here all of a sudden, Father, you have a father word over you. Someone is your Father. That's amazing. Did it change anything about the invisibility you experienced? Or did that come later?

**Robert:** Not in my family. You know that stopped when I met Barbara who would eventually become my wife. I mean she was one of the first people I felt saw me in my entirety. And so...

**Elisa:** Neat.



**Robert:** Yeah.

**Elisa:** That's neat. You know let's...let's segue into her. She's your wife. You've been married how many years?

**Robert:** We're at 25.

**Elisa:** Good job.

**Robert:** Yeah.

**Elisa:** I didn't want you to trip over that. What have you learned about this concept of being seen and heard by being married? I don't think our spouses are God to us, and nor am I trying to imply they should be. I mean our heart's desire is really only gonna be met by God. But the people that we interact with on this planet can mirror how He views us. So how has being married to her uniquely informed you about being seen and heard?

**Robert:** You know I'm even struggling with the question as you ask it, because I'm on a podcast for women. And you're asking a man about seeing and hearing women. And it's...there's almost like there's an elephant in the room there that it's not supposed to be this way.

**Elisa:** What do you mean?

**Robert:** I don't think the first woman wondered if she was seen and heard. I don't think Eve ever woke up before the fall and said, does God see me? And does my husband see me? She was the crown jewel of creation. And she even gets this title "helpmate" which we seem to have taken to be lesser than. But there's only one other person in the Bible who's called the helpmate, it's God. God is the helpmate of Israel. That can't mean that God is lesser than Israel. And Eve gets the same title as God. That somehow Israel needed a helpmate, somebody who would bring Israel up. And therefore, God looks at Eve and says Adam needs a helpmate. You're gonna...he needs some help, you know.

**Elisa:** Isn't the Hebrew word *azer* A Z E R?

**Robert:** Yeah, yeah.

**Elisa:** And I think...I've heard it translated "strong warrior."



**Robert:** Yes.

**Elisa:** Protector.

**Robert:** Yes.

**Elisa:** And that's what God is for Israel.

**Robert:** Yeah.

**Elisa:** And that's what Eve is for Adam?

**Robert:** Yeah, and so I don't think she wondered if she was seen and heard and mattered. And then the fall happens. And somehow, all this gets turned upside down. And now women wonder often how they're gonna be seen and how they're gonna make their voice be known. Something went wrong.

**Elisa:** I almost kind of want to cry right here, because it's a sacred wound; isn't it?

**Robert:** Yeah, yeah.

**Elisa:** For both genders.

**Robert:** After the fall, I gained a power. And it's a power over, and it's a power that I was born with. It's a power to see and not see. It's a power to choose, to recognize people's existence.

**Elisa:** It is heartbreaking that you would have been given that kind of power. And I don't want to like give you unfair power here. But maybe what you can do is speak into the redeemed power of a man in Christ towards God's redemptive purpose in the life of a woman. Saying it that way. And I guess I want to ask you, in several of your roles as a husband, as a pastor, as a brother in Christ, as a father, what have you learned that is appropriate for you to reflect to the women around you in those various relationships about God seeing and hearing them?

**Robert:** I think because I had the experience of feeling invisible, that does help me to realize that I have power; and it's power that I just...I didn't do anything to get. I just have it. But if there are people, especially my wife and my daughters, cause we have six children. Three are boys and three are girls. I don't see the boys wondering if they are seen or heard, but I do see the girls.



**Elisa:** Do ya?

**Robert:** I do. It's a very unique need which means they could go through life feeling invisible. And so why not use the power to make sure they know they're not?

[Background music]

**Eryn:** Wow, Robert Gelinas reminds me so much of my dad. My dad took a lot of effort to make sure I felt seen by him and heard. And you know we all have those opportunities every day to make people feel seen and heard. When we come back, Elisa and Robert will shift the conversation to his role as a pastor and what it means for him to see and hear the women on his staff and in his congregation. You are listening to *God Hears Her*.

[Background music]

**Elisa:** If you are a fan of this podcast, sign up for our *God Hears Her* email newsletter and find even more inspiration and encouragement from women like you. These weekly emails are filled with stories you can relate to and other fun goodies that will brighten your walk with Jesus. Go to [godhearsher.org](http://godhearsher.org), and sign up today. That's [godhearsher.org](http://godhearsher.org).

**Eryn:** Now back to the conversation with Elisa and Robert.

**Elisa:** As you interact like in your family or...or maybe moving into the church, maybe moving into the women who come every week and sit in pews and listen to Pastor Robert and are struggling on a daily basis with feeling invisible, I mean really invisible in their jobs, in their families, and in the church. What do you hope that they will notice? What is your goal in preaching to them that they would discover about who God is using you as His conduit?

**Robert:** You know the church where I get to spend my time is a very diverse congregation. We have almost 30 different nations. We have red, yellow, black, brown, white. We've spent a lot of time thinking about diversity in terms of race. And I hope that the congregation comes and sees some intentionality when it comes to the staff is diverse. The stage, when people walk in, whoever's up there leading in worship and...and the preaching, there's a diversity up there when it comes to race. I hope the women of our congregation also notice that same kind of intentionality's happening, that we have made here again though, the very fact that I can say I've made room. What does that mean that I had the power to even



do that. But yes, there is room that has been made for women that women are expected and have plenty of room to serve.

**Elisa:** How do you reflect that without being patronizing? You're acknowledging that you've been given a certain power as a male. And you willingly yield that power to invite and model the inclusivity of women in different areas in church. How do you carefully communicate that without being patronizing? Like I've got power and you don't.

**Robert:** I mean my gut says if I'm constantly drawing attention to it, then there's something else going on like I'm needing affirmation for it, that look what I've done. I mean we pray, "On earth as it is in heaven." And I'm thinking that when we're praying for the kingdom to come, in large part we're praying for some of that pre-fall garden to return. At some level, there is a selfishness to it that if we're willing to remember what that must have been like when no one felt invisible, that must have felt good for Adam too. That somehow our destinies are caught up within one another, and it's worth going after. For my health too, the men need that. Going back to the patronizing question, am I okay with women who disagree with my view of women in ministry for example? Do I feel the need to change her mind? Do I...

**Elisa:** That's a great example.

**Robert:** Or do I actually believe she has a mind, and she has fully studied the Scriptures; and she has come to a different understanding of them than I have. And to say, then I get that and to not have to feel like, well she just doesn't understand yet.

**Elisa:** She's not mature in the Lord.

**Robert:** Of course...of course she does. She gets it and...

**Elisa:** Yes.

**Robert:** ...she disagrees with me. And...and so part of me seeing her is seeing that she's studied the Scriptures and disagrees.

**Elisa:** So you know I think we're all in this process of trying to understand what we believe Scripture to say. If you were gonna continue to build your church of both genders and all ages and so many races, what is your desire for each of the people that are involved in your church that are a part of the body of Christ that God has called you to shepherd and pastor? What is your desire in this regard?



**Robert:** Here when we greet one another, we say how are you? And somebody says, I'm fine. And there are parts of South Africa where you don't say, how are you? But you say, I see you. And then the response is, I am here. And the idea is, are you really there if somebody doesn't see you? And it's one thing for me to make sure that my wife is seen. I try and make sure I understand what her fears are and even what her needs are before she knows them or that my daughters see that I spend as much time at their games as I do at their brothers' games. And...and the congregation I received some good advice one day. When you're in the hallway, walk slow; cause...cause if you walk fast like you're going somewhere, then nobody really feels like they can stop. So there's all these ways that you can make people feel seen. But my hope is that if there's a context where everybody feels seen and heard, then that spills over. And that becomes what then the community begins to feel outside the walls of the church. My hope is that as we remove people's invisibility, then they gain a desire to see that happen in their own families, in their workplaces and beyond.

**Elisa:** Do you think vulnerability is necessary to truly be seen and heard? Or can we stay guarded and then be seen and heard and then be vulnerable? Does one come before the other?

**Robert:** I don't know. What do you think?

**Elisa:** Another way to ask the question is, do we resist being seen and heard, and why? And when we're resisting, can we ever really experience it...the lack of invisibility? Is there a role that we play as the ones who want to be seen and heard?

**Robert:** I think we, by the way you dodged the question when I tried to go back at you, cause I think everybody wants to hear what you think about this too.

**Elisa:** Okay.

**Robert:** So I'm gonna come back and ask you. But I...

**Elisa:** You can just say that out loud. It's okay.

**Robert:** ...I...I just did say that.

**Elisa:** We won't cut it.

**Robert:** I think we fear being exposed. So we'd rather be invisible than be exposed, unless the context is safe. Cause if we're safe and even the ugly and the shame is okay. I mean all that stuff can come out.



**Elisa:** Okay, you just said something so profound. We'd rather be invisible than be exposed. But for the last 15 minutes, we've been talking about the pain of being invisible. But we'd rather be invisible...

**Robert:** Yeah.

**Elisa:** ...than be exposed. So I'm not sure we can be really seen and heard unless we're vulnerable. So to answer your question, I'm not sure we really can. I'm afraid that our defenses to keep us from being exposed, to keep us from being seen and, therefore, rejected for what is seen, I think that defense gets in the way of us ever absorbing it, of us ever receiving the gift of being seen. And it's really...it's a gnarly kind of you know catch 22. Who's gonna go first? Did you ever have this kind of a situation in your marriage, just kind of a discussion one night? You know the TV's on in the background and maybe Barbara's feet are in your lap. And you're talking, and there's this barrier between you? And you start what's this about? And you realize she goes, I just want to be cherished. And you sit there, and you go I'm such a louse. I don't cherish my wife. Wait, I want to be cherished. And she goes, I'm not cherishing you until you cherish me. I've had this exact conversation...

**Robert:** Yeah, yeah.

**Elisa:** ...with Evan. And we realized we both wanted to be cherished. And it was a matter of who's gonna go first? And this thing had to happen between us of me going, you know, begrudgingly I'll go first and cherish you, which really isn't very good cherishing by the way. You know but as I do that, something slides down in him. Or as he does that towards me, something slides down. And it's not perfect, but that dance of who's gonna let the guard down first in order for true intimacy to break through.

**Robert:** That's beautiful.

**Elisa:** And I think we do that with God. And I think we do that with each other.

**Robert:** It's one thing to be treated as invisible. But then also when you have the option of not being, do you make that choice? And I'm thinking of Jesus with the woman at the well. And He begins to talk to her, and everything in culture said He shouldn't be. And then there's that one moment when He reveals that, not only does He see her physically right there in front of Him, but He also knows her, that He understands her. And He reveals something to her about her life that she didn't even tell Him. And she had a moment where she tried to deflect it, and yet she didn't stay with that. She ultimately runs back to everybody and says, guess what? I just saw somebody who told me everything about me. And there was



something about Him who made her feel so safe that then she would run back to the whole community and say, this guy can come read your life too. Let Him see you too.

**Elisa:** Which you would think would be something she would want to hide...

**Robert:** Yeah.

**Elisa:** ...because look at her life. It wasn't that great. Isn't that amazing when she was really seen and heard, she let the guard down. And then she let everybody else see and hear her. And maybe that's what you as a pastor, me as in whatever positions I'm in, in our relationships with our spouses, in our parenting, in our friendships, maybe that's kind of what it's about is realizing God sees and hears us. And living into that redemptive, new role in such a way that we're unafraid to let other people see, and then they want that too a little bit.

**Robert:** Yeah.

**Elisa:** Talk to the woman who's sitting here going, I don't have a pastor like you. I don't have a church like yours. I don't have a spouse like yours. How do I deal with this need to be seen and heard? Is it a right I demand? Is it a privilege I surrender? Is it a need I cry out to God with?

**Robert:** Is it a right? It's more than a right. It's what you were created for. And so first of all, there's nothing...nothing wrong with desiring that, cause it's absolutely what you were created for. We're given the book of Lamentations for a reason. When things are not the way we're supposed to be, we should lament that. So one, there should be some lamenting that takes place. There's godly sorrow that we have over it. I think when God sent Hagar back, I don't know if Abram and Sarai saw her; but she went back knowing she was seen. She names Him "the God who sees." But then He gave her a child named Ishmael. And Ishmael means "God who hears." And so there is that that we have to hold onto that, regardless of the culture in which we find ourselves in this side of the fall, there is a God who absolutely does see and hear.

**Elisa:** It's a beautiful example, Robert. She saw and heard God see her, okay. So.

**Robert:** Yeah.

**Elisa:** And she memorialized that.



**Robert:** When you feel invisible, you think it's possibly your fault. But when you have that moment where God reveals to you that He sees you, then at least you know I'm not invisible. I am real. I exist. Therefore, it's no longer about if I put on enough makeup, if I exercise enough, if I become funnier, then people will recognize me. Because once you know that God sees and hears you, then it's not you where the problem lies. Now it's outside of you. And it becomes more of a prayer. Can we pray that God would open people's eyes? Can we pray that God would allow them to recognize what's right in front of them, not just you but other people around them?

[Background Music]

**Eryn:** Let that be our prayer today that God would make us so aware of His love for us that we then can be the ones to see and hear others in His name.

**Elisa:** 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 you'll also find a link to connect with Eryn and me on social. So check out the show notes on our website [godhearsher.org](http://godhearsher.org).

**Eryn:** The show notes also contain a link to sign up for the *God Hears Her* newsletter featuring helpful articles and stories from women just like you who are discovering what it means to be seen and heard by God.

**Elisa:** Thanks for joining us. And don't forget, God hears you. He sees you, and He loves you because you are His.

**Eryn:** Today's episode was engineered by Anne Stevens and produced by Daniel Ryan Day and Mary Jo Clark. And we also want to give a quick shout out to Marjie, Rick, and Ryan for their help in creating and promoting the *God Hears Her* podcast. Thanks, y'all.

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