



God Hears Her Podcast

Episode 57 - Living With Depression

Eryn Eddy and Elisa Morgan with Sarah J. Robinson

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Voice: You're listening to *God Hears Her*, a podcast for women where we explore the stunning truth that God hears you, He sees you, and He loves you because you are His. Find out how these realities free you today on *God Hears Her*.

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

Eryn: And I'm Eryn Eddy. I want to know how many of us deal with depression, anxiety, or intrusive thoughts but don't ever talk about it? In places where we should feel safe, we often fear judgment or diagnosing where our thoughts may be coming from, not to mention the stigma that comes when we begin discussing mental health. Well today we will be talking with Sarah J. Robinson about mental health and her journey of understanding her own depression.

Elisa: Before we get into our conversation, we want to let you know that this topic may be hard to listen to. We'll be talking about depression, anxiety, intrusive thoughts, self-harm, and suicidal tendencies. So please feel free to take breaks from this episode or stop listening if you need to. We want everyone to remain mentally healthy by doing what you need to do for yourself, even if that includes skipping the episode. If you or someone you know is struggling, you can call the Suicide Prevention Hotline at 800-273-8255. You can also visit suicidepreventionlifeline.org for more information.

Eryn: For sure, Elisa. We want everyone to be safe. We're so thankful to bring the topic of depression into the open and hear how Sarah fully gives herself to God in this episode of *God Hears Her*. Elisa, I want to read something to you.

Elisa: Okay.

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Eryn: All right. What happens when loving Jesus doesn't cure you of depression, anxiety, or suicidal thoughts? You might be crushed by shame over your mental illness only to be told by well-meaning Christians to choose joy and pray more. So you beg God to take away the pain, but nothing eases the ache inside. As darkness lingers and color drains from your world, you're left wondering if God has abandoned you. You just want a way out. I...Elisa, I am so excited about our guest today, Sarah Robinson. She wrote this book. And I know that we're going to be talking about her book a little bit in this interview. But we're also going to be talking just about the human struggle in life and all of the weight that we experience. Sarah, Elisa and I, we are so honored to have you on this podcast today.

Sarah: Oh my gosh, thank you so much for having me. I'm honored to be here.

Elisa: And you know this is a tough subject.

Sarah: Yeah.

Elisa: You know and...and so what I want to say is, if that opening reading...it probably either made you go "dive, dive for cover" or it made you go "oh my gosh, somebody is speaking my language." Or maybe it's something in between. Anyway, I...I just want to...I just want you to draw your chair up closer and know this is a safe conversation that we're going to have together. So yeah, welcome, Sarah.

Sarah: Thank you.

Eryn: Yes, there's so much to unpack. I wish we had like part 4, 5, 6 to have with you. I guess before we...we do dive into this I'd love to know just a little bit of your upbringing. Like where do you live right now? And give everybody that's listening that has the chair close some context.

Sarah: Yeah, absolutely. I live in Nashville with my husband. And he's a relationship photographer. And I'm so excited about becoming a mom and...

Elisa: That's awesome.

Sarah: Thank you.

Eryn: Congratulations.

Sarah: Thank you.



Eryn: That's awesome.

Sarah: But I was born and raised in Oregon in a really beautiful community on the dry side of the state. We had a ton of sunshine, and it was just you know lots to do outdoors. And it was really a beautiful place to grow up. But I actually struggled from a very, very early age with depression and anxiety. I don't actually remember a time before that. So even though I was surrounded by all this beauty, and it was just kind of an idyllic community to grow up in, I really wrestled with, even as young as being in elementary school, I remember being on the school bus and having intrusive thoughts of suicide and even like picturing jumping out of the back of school bus and getting run over and just horrible things like that. But not knowing that wasn't normal, I didn't talk to anybody about it. I just thought this was what life was. And so it wasn't until many years later when I came to faith in high school that I really began to realize, oh this isn't everybody's experience. And it really started to be clear. This doesn't actually line up with what my community of faith is teaching me my life should be like. So there was a lot of I think confusion and definitely a lot of just despair in those early years. Because I felt alone and felt like something was wrong with me but also didn't really know enough to be able to put it into words. And so it was a really isolating experience.

Eryn: You know I love what you shared in regards to...like you didn't know that your thoughts were warning signs of anything.

Sarah: Yeah.

Eryn: That it was an im...just your...cause we have imaginations.

Sarah: Yeah.

Eryn: You know so it's like how do we know what's an imagination or what's a destructive thought when you're young?

Sarah: Yeah.

Elisa: And we don't have a plumb line, you know. Our plumb line is ourselves, you know. Our...our normal is what we see in the mirror, what we hear in our heads; and we don't know. So I was struck by that too, Eryn. And Sarah, I was also struck by the second thing you shared is that maybe it didn't line up with your faith community. So you've got two things going on. You know I feel this push-pull between



didn't know my thoughts were not what everybody else is thinking and all of a sudden I began to hear that maybe my thoughts, my feelings don't line up with (quote) "my faith community" whatever that is.

Sarah: Right, right.

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: So Sarah, you know for lots of us, I think it would be help to actually define depression. And...and if you can too, I don't think all depression has suicidal tendencies in it. You know so maybe help us understand what depression is and how...how it's different or how it includes suicidal [inaudible] and...

Sarah: Yeah, absolutely.

Elisa: ...tendencies.

Sarah: Depression isn't just one disorder. There's actually a collection of depressive disorders. And they can look a little bit different depending on which one you're experiencing. The common kind of misconception is that depression is sadness. And I would say that now, after a lot of years of like work and therapy and medication, now when I feel depressed; I feel more sad than I ever have. Some other kind of emotional symptoms are numbness, irritation. Anger is a big one. You can feel, you know, anxiety can be a depression symptom which you know is kind of confusing. But many people don't realize how physical mental illnesses actually are. It's really a misnomer to say mental illness, because we think it's in our head and our thoughts and our feelings. But most people, many people, get their initial mental health diagnosis because they are having digestive issues, because they are having sleep problems. The vast majority of people with depression either sleep too much or not enough. Many people show up at the emergency room thinking they're having a heart attack because they're having heart palpitations from anxiety.

Elisa: Yeah.

Sarah: You might think you have ADHD because you can't focus all of a sudden. You can't read. You can't pay attention. You feel like you're in a fog. You can't remember things. You might think there's something wrong with your brain because you're experiencing all of these things. But you know there's also like the just life doesn't interest you as much anymore. I remember one time a friend asked me, what are you excited about right now? And I didn't really realize that I was going into a depressive episode. And literally the only thing I could think about was sleep. She said, like what are you excited about in your life? And I said sleep. And I was like, that's not a good sign. Like...like I don't enjoy...



Elisa: So you caught it.

Sarah: ...anything right now.

Elisa: You caught yourself, yeah.

Sarah: Yeah.

Elisa: And...and how...how about the whole role of suicidal tendency? I mean you said there was like a constellation of depressive expressions, you know.

Sarah: Yeah.

Elisa: What about suicide and suicidal thoughts?

Sarah: So suicidal thoughts and self-harm as well, I'll talk about this with it.

Elisa: Okay.

Sarah: They really occur on a spectrum. And they can be part of just about any mental health diagnosis. So there's a big difference between someone who has a random suicidal thought pop into their head. We call that an intrusive thought. So that's where I'm doing all right, but you know I'm driving down the road, and I just have a random image of getting into a car crash getting in my head. That doesn't mean I want to hurt myself. It's an intrusive suicidal thought. So as depression gets more serious, those start to come more frequently. That's a big sign for me. Like I'll be you know working on all of my self-care. But if I start to have thoughts coming into my head, it's like a horror movie in your head that you can't turn off. So if those things start popping up for me, I know I need more help. I need more support. I need an extra appointment. I need to change my meds, something like that. When you get past that point and you start to actually make a plan or when people do research on lethal means, so ways to end their life, that's when somebody's really in a...a very dangerous spot. And so it's...it's kind of tough sometimes to differentiate like someone may say like I wish I could go to sleep and never wake up. That would be like a passive kind of suicidal thought versus I'm saying goodbye to you or I'm making plans. Or you find on my computer that I searched for ways to end my life. Those are both very serious and concerning things. But obviously if someone's making a plan or...

Elisa: Yeah.



Sarah: ...is saying like I just can't do this anymore, if someone says I'm going to kill myself, if you or somebody you know are progressing through those stages...and sometimes you skip it and all of a sudden you know a crisis comes up in your life and you're like I can't survive this. I can't live through this, you know that's...that's your moment to call your support people. Call the suicide hotline. Text the crisis text line which you can text the word HOME to 741741 or go to the emergency room. There's no shame in that. You, again, you are worth whatever it takes to get better. So go to the stinking ER if that's going to be safer for you.

Elisa: Yes, yes.

Sarah: And help you get to a safe place.

Eryn: That's right. So take us through maybe the process of starting to learn more about okay, these thoughts that...these thoughts are starting to get scary.

Sarah: Yeah.

Eryn: They're starting to scare me.

Sarah: Yeah.

Eryn: What...what was that like for you?

Sarah: So when I came to faith, and I...I'd grown up in what I would call...I would say I had been like a nominal Christian before that. You know it was kind of a cultural thing, wasn't really involved in church very much. But when my faith became really personal on my own, I joined a church community in our city that was a little bit more charismatic. It was really focused on like the promises of God and God's a healer and God is powerful and God is good, all of which I absolutely believe. But it was sort of framed to an extreme almost with some subtle prosperity gospel influences. Like if you can just pray and do all the right things, like your life will be blessed. You should be joyful all the time. You should be healthy. You should be financially prosperous. And we sort of overlooked passages in Scripture where God walked through suffering with people. And so I, you know, there is like that honeymoon phase of faith where it's like everything's new. Everything's awesome. But I quickly learned that I couldn't just choose joy, which isn't in the Bible. But everyone told me to like it was, and...

Elisa: Those words?



Sarah: Yeah, yeah, like oh just choose joy. Oh if you're not...if you can't think about Jesus dying for you and be happy, there's something wrong. I heard from the pulpit that you know depression and anxiety were signs of a lack of faith or sin or an issue in your prayer life. And so I became really desperate to try and fix myself, to try and you know do all the right things, declare the right Scriptures. I was helping lead a prayer group at school. I went on mission trips. I joined the worship team. I did everything I could think of. We were distributing food in our community after church on Sundays. I was there every time the doors were open. Like if I could have shown up to the men's group, I probably would have. Like...

Eryn: You're just checking off all the boxes.

Sarah: Yeah, just trying to do all the things.

Eryn: You're like dot, dot, dot, dot potluck,

Sarah: Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. But nothing helped, because I had an illness that needed to be treated not a lack of prayer or a lack of faith. And so it was about six months after I initially really committed my life to Christ that I decided like this isn't working. God must not like me. I know He has to love everybody, but that doesn't mean He likes me.

Eryn: That's a great point. Yeah, let's pause there, cause I think that's true. Sometimes we think I can have a tendency in my past especially where I went through a really hard season, and depression was so prominent in my life. Getting out of bed and brushing my teeth seemed like a feat for me...

Sarah: Yeah.

Eryn: ...to do. And I just remember thinking *He loves me. He's just off somewhere else, and maybe He just doesn't like me and want to be around me right now.*

Sarah: Yeah, doesn't like me...

Eryn: Cause I can't get out of bed, yeah.

Sarah: ...doesn't care, yeah.

Eryn: Yes, yeah, so...so continue. I...I interrupted that statement.



Sarah: Yeah.

Eryn: But I just thought that was so powerful, cause I can't...I mean I can only imagine anybody listening has probably felt one way or another that, you know, maybe God's just...He loves you. But maybe He's just off somewhere else.

Sarah: Yeah, I really resonated when you said like maybe He doesn't want to be around me right now. Because I remember thinking and journaling like *You deserve better than this, God. Like You're perfect, and You're good. And like You deserve better than all of this mess.* So I think many of us struggle. And I mean it's also just if you have like a clinical depression, that's a symptom. Like that's actually like the illness makes your brain think things that aren't true. And so you know it can come from many different places and wounds and things we've experienced. But I also just think it's just part of the human condition, and it can be part of the illness. So I think sometimes it's tough to identify where those things came from. But the important thing is being able to recognize *man, sometimes my thoughts aren't telling the truth to me.* Like sometimes they're saying things that are really dangerous and destructive. And that led me down the path of like well, either God doesn't like me; or I'm just not good enough for Him. He deserves better. This is never going to change. And that's when I began to really seriously contemplate suicide and when I really decided that the only way out was to end my life. And I had thought about that before coming to faith, but it had never been like a very serious thing where I was making plans and like making attempts until there was just that added layer of shame and despair of like I'm never going to be able to live up. I'm never going to be able to be the joyful Christian that I should be, and I'm never gonna be good enough for God. So you know feeling like I had to take matters into my own hands in a way.

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: I hear the...the tug of war between I don't know if my thinking is normal and all I know is I'm not measuring up to what the teaching I'm receiving is prescribing. And so when you're caught between those two things, that could be really a big trap. And I can hear you as...as you're sharing your story, beginning to kind of pop through. It's like you start poking holes in some of the teaching that you've been listening to. Wait a minute, that...something's off here. And then you began to redefine what's going on in your head as an illness.

Sarah: Yeah.

Elisa: And there's a great respect in that, Sarah. There's great respect. You know when you receive a cancer diagnosis or you find out you have a brain tumor or you know you have eczema; there is a reason. And...and it's...it's something that we attribute as not our fault.



Sarah: Right.

Elisa: And so we can separate ourselves and begin to process through. And it...what role did defining your thoughts as an illness play in helping you to begin to identify where you needed to poke holes in some of the stuff you were holding onto where you could find some hope?

Sarah: I think for me, that process was actually reversed.

Elisa: Okay.

Sarah: I had to begin to poke those holes in those beliefs. I had to start seeing a fuller picture of how suffering is woven throughout Scripture and had to see that God is still present in our pain and not angry at us for it and not disappointed and like tapping His foot and looking at His watch. And like can you just get over this already?

Eryn: Yeah, yeah.

Sarah: And part of that was having some people speak into my life and say things that gave me hope. I showed up on the doorstep of a couple in my church one night after I had been self-harming and told them what was going on. And they said, "I'm not disappointed in you. I love you. We're gonna walk through this with you." And that was the first time I was like, maybe if they're not disappointed, maybe God isn't disappointed. But I didn't actually...that happened when I was about 20-21 years old. I didn't actually see a doctor or get a diagnosis or find a good therapist until I was 28 or 29.

Elisa: Wow, and you lived, wow.

Sarah: Thank God. Like literally by His grace. And there were a lot of little milestones along the way. A few years after that, I had a mentor look at me and say, "Honey, you have depression. And you need to learn to take care of yourself." And so I was probably 26 or 27 by then, but it still took me a couple years before I would actually go talk to a doctor about it. And I would still, you know, try to manage it myself. I tried to go to therapy and had some bad experiences because I didn't know what to look for. And yeah, so there were a lot of little signposts along the way. And people you know, people definitely say horrible things and hurtful things because they don't know how to help sometimes. But then there were also people who really, really wanted to love me well. And even if they didn't always know the right things to say, they were just that little like breadcrumb of hope that I needed to keep going until I could get the help I needed and the tools I needed to learn how to be healthy.



Eryn: Yeah. Oh that's so powerful. All of that is so powerful, Sarah. And something that is like a just what I continue to hear in our conversation, something that I mistook in my just time of...it was like my darkest, my darkest hour I guess you could say. But...but it was like a few years...but in my darkest hour for a few years. I...I had a lot of statements said to me in the faith community that caked on shame, the shame that I was already experiencing internally, this internal battle I was having. I thought that the way my friends treated me and what they said to me being part of the faith community, must mean that's what God thinks...

Sarah: Yes.

Eryn: ...and that's what God says. And it sounds like that's what your experience was. And you have a chapter in this...in your book, *I Love Jesus, But I Want to Die*. You have this chapter that says, "People Say Terrible Things, But We Still Need Them." And...

Sarah: Which is like the worst. Like why can't it be one or the other?

Elisa: Yeah, can't live with them or without them, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Eryn: Right.

Elisa: Yeah. Yeah.

Eryn: And it...it was so hard for me to develop trust in the faith community again, because I was so hurt by a group of individuals who didn't know what to say, how to say. So I have a few questions and that I want to talk about. How can we be a better friend? How can we be a good friend? But before we get to that question, I do want to ask you, how did you differentiate between people's actions and who God was? Like who...what was that journey like? Cause that is...

Sarah: Yeah.

Eryn: ...a hard...hard journey to differentiate between.

Sarah: Yeah, yeah, so initially I did experience almost unilaterally you know some of those shaming comments. And I think what we don't realize when we receive those is that people usually mean well. They're just ill-informed and ill-equipped. And it doesn't make it okay. It doesn't invalidate how painful those things are. But you know people would just tell me, you know, some of the things I alluded to earlier.



“Choose joy.” You, you know, pull yourself up by your bootstraps, you know. Don’t be so selfish, things like that and...

Elisa: Pray about it.

Sarah: Yeah, just pray about it. Pray and read your Bible more.

Eryn: Put your big girl britches on. That’s what I got. But your big girl britches on.

Sarah: Yes.

Eryn: Like I don’t have britches, okay? I can’t.

Sarah: Yeah. I don’t even know what britches are.

Eryn: Yeah, exactly.

Elisa: That’s good.

Sarah: So yeah, like people who really wanted to love me well are some of the people who said some of the most hurtful things. And that’s a very painful tension. And I’m very grateful for that couple in my church who told me I’m not disappointed in you, because that kind of broke through the shame. And then around the same time, my church went through a transition in leadership and just began to get healthier. And so just overall the culture kind of shifted, which was a huge gift to me. Because suddenly we were talking about things like burnout. And my pastors were advocates of counseling. And they went through some really heartbreaking things and really modeled how to grieve and how to walk through pain in a way that I hadn’t seen before. And so until I saw people do it differently, I really thought like this is the standard. And I’m not living up to it. And then eventually, those same friends that told me they weren’t disappointed in me, they really called me on my self-hatred and my shame. And they were like, this is not from God. And we need to pray for you to have an experience with God’s love in a way you can understand and in a way you can’t deny. And I was like okay, whatever. Like we’ll pray that, you know not having...

Eryn: Love that honesty, I love that.

Sarah: ...a lot of hope for that. But like...



Elisa: Whatever you want to pray, go ahead, you know.

Sarah: All right. Yeah, okay.

Eryn: [inaudible] Yeah, yeah right.

Sarah: But you know over time I was like okay, I'll...I'll try. And...and through that time, I did have a lot of experiences with them and my pastors that were very supportive and very kind. And through those, I did have a lot of experiences with the love of God. But it was through a really random set of circumstances I wound up studying abroad halfway around the world in Paris. And I had nobody to talk to. I didn't speak French. My host mom knew the word *three* in English. Like they said she would speak English, but she didn't. She knew *three*. So I'm...

Eryn: That's like such a random English word to know too.

Sarah: ...yeah. Such a random word. So I was alone in a city where I didn't speak the language. And I had absolutely nobody to talk to. And this was before like FaceTime and cell phones and things like that. I mean there were cell phones, but it was like so expensive. So I never called home. I never talked to anybody. So for you know months, literally the only person I could talk to was God. And I learned to pray in a different way, and I learned to just see God's goodness in every little tiny thing. And that was my...it's so hard to put into words. But that was my experience with His love in a way I couldn't understand. And for the first time in my life, I was like oh. You do care about me. And it didn't take away the depression, but I didn't hate myself anymore. And I began to see God as kind for the first time in my life. And there's you know, I learned years later and I talk about in the book like the neuroscience behind like I learned to pray in a more meditative, contemplative way. And that actually rewires our brains to experience God's kindness and compassion in a way that many people don't know how to access. So it's cool to see that there is like actual science behind it too. But that was...that was how I began to learn to differentiate between these are the things that people have said, but this is the actual character and kindness of God.

Elisa: You know you are expressing such I think a rare and incredibly helpful picture of struggling with depression. You know when...when we have these conversations, it's like could you give me the to-dos? You know here's the five practical things I can do today to deal with my depression, you know.

Sarah: Yeah.

Elisa: And those I think we are all at times in desperate moments where that's all we want, just hand me my five. Just give me the list. You know I just can't live like this anymore. But your book and, honestly



Sarah, your story is a story. And I love how you've...you're expressing it here. And...and we can have some of those practical things. I would love to ask them in just a few minutes.

Sarah: Sure.

Elisa: But I really want to pause here and...and for me and for Eryn and for everyone listening, point out that what Sarah is expressing are several...several realities of depression. It's an illness. We think we're the only ones who think crazily. We expose ourselves to teaching that can make it worse. And Sarah, I am hearing you make some choices. Okay I'm going to...I'm gonna expose myself to something that models differently than what I saw that built the depression in me, that increased the depression in me. I...and you were exposed to different modelings of God's character. But you know what else I'm really hearing? This was a process of you living...

Sarah: Yeah.

Elisa: ...and that's an important word...of you living even when you didn't want to, of you living through to a new place of love with God. And it was one thing at 20 and another thing 26 and another thing at 28. And...and choices all along the way and understandings all along the way of it being shaped in you. And I just want to say doggone, that's so much how it is, isn't it?

Sarah: It is.

Elisa: Is that we have to live to a new place.

Sarah: Yeah, yeah. And I think that was one thing I really wanted to show in the book is like people would tell me, do these things and it will get better. Like eat right and exercise. Okay, I can't get out of bed. Like...

Elisa: Yeah, right.

Sarah: ...I can't eat. Like that...that's nice, but it's...I needed to do a lot of work to get stable enough before I could do those things. And now those are huge parts of my self-care, and they do make a big difference. But sometimes we're just not ready for those things. And...and that's not an excuse. But there is a process we have to go through of being able to integrate hope and learning how to cultivate it and learning how to discover joy when everything seems just completely bleak. And we want the fast road. I want the fast road. Like I talk all the time about how I would get so mad at God. And I would be like *I know You have a magic wand up there. Like wave it. Wave it and fix me.* But it is such a process. And I think



also one thing I wouldn't trade for anything is the fact that God choosing to take the long road with me has revealed His kindness and His presence and His character to me in a way I cannot trade for anything. Like I would take the healing in a second, but like I know God is with me. You cannot convince me otherwise. That is unshakable, deep in my bones that even if I deal with this to the end of my life, God will always be with me in it. And that means that I can navigate it with Him. And I wouldn't know that if I'd just gotten like healed or could do three things on a checklist and then I was better. Like I don't think God gave me depression so that I could learn that, but I think He's kind enough to have used it.

Eryn: You said "discovering joy." And I love that. Prior to that we were talking about how statements like "just choose joy" and you will be better. You'll be able to get out of bed. But it's discovering joy is ever...ever-evolving. It's not arriving to joy. It's discovering more of Elisa what you said. It's like live to a new place. It's when you live to a new place, you are slowly discovering joy.

Sarah: Yeah.

Eryn: Oh this is so powerful. I was reading this morning just on the discipline of waiting. And sometimes it's just waiting can be so painful. And...and we think that the misconception of waiting is thinking that like once the wait's over, then we can live. Like once we, you know, we can finally live once we're done waiting.

Sarah: Yeah.

Eryn: And the truth is, is that it's what you're sharing. It's living with God, discovering joy. It's living to a new place.

Sarah: Yeah, yeah, that was really beautiful. Like life is always happening in the in-between and in the mess and in the pain and the suffering. And we can never predict what's going to come our ways. And if we can't learn in the midst of it and in the midst of the pain, then we'll never learn to live at all.

Eryn: Yeah.

[music]

Elisa: And when we come back, Sarah will talk about her process of healing and how she coped with relapses in her depression. She'll also explain how to be there for someone we suspect may not be doing mentally well. Remember, if you or someone you love is hurting from suicidal thoughts or tendencies, you can dial the suicide hotline at 800-273-8255. Or chat with someone on [suicidepreventionlifeline.org](https://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org). You



can also visit suicidepreventionlifeline.org just for more information. Our helpful and vulnerable conversation with Sarah is coming up next on *God Hears Her*.

Eryn: Want a free resource that tells you about God's amazing love for us even when we feel unlovable? For a limited time, sign up for our *God Hears Her* weekly newsletter. And we'll send you a free, digital e-booklet called *Longing to Love Us*. It's one woman's story about how God loved her through all the messiness of her life including broken relationships, teenage rebellion, and attempted suicide. Go to godhearsheer.org, and sign up today. That's godhearsheer.org. Now back to the show.

Elisa: There are women close to us, practically sitting in our laps right now as they walk or you know drive or whatever else they're doing, right? But our hearts, that's where we position ourselves. And...and so Sarah, I'd love for you to speak to them, and we want to invite you to do that. You know, we say all the time that God sees you, He hears you, He loves you because you are His. And yet when we're struggling in the depths of depression and having suicidal thoughts, those words can feel as far away as Mt. Everest, you know, from our heart, you know. C...can you speak to maybe the you...the you that you know so well and to others. You've got such practical chapters. I'm thinking about the chapter on "Bad Therapy" or the chapter on "Relapse." And...and you really do unpack helpful handles. But again, you do it through story. And you do it through your own process. So could you take a minute or two to...to bring that up to meet the need of someone right now who's listening?

Sarah: Yeah, I think the first thing that you need to know if you're listening and you're in this really dark place, or if you have a loved one who is—a kid, a spouse, if you're a leader and you have someone in your congregation or you know a teacher and you have someone in your classroom. Whoever you are, the most important thing to know is that you are not alone. This is really, really common and really hard. But you are not alone in it. And not only are you not alone because there's lots of other people who know what it's like, you're not alone because God is with you. And it may be a lifelong battle to learn to believe that, but that's one of the best battles that you can fight. And there is really good help available. I know for me, I had to go through five therapists before I found one good one. And a lot of that was because I didn't know what to look for and you know if someone was equipped and all of that. But there is good help. And you know finances don't have to be a barrier. There's ways to get help with that and all of that. But the...the biggest thing that I would tell you is that you are worth everything it takes to get better. And when you commit to that, everything changes. When you decide I am worth whatever it takes to get better, I am worth the fight I'm learning. I'm worth learning to believe better things. I'm worth learning to speak kindly to myself. I'm worth figuring out how to go to therapy or go to an in-patient program if I need to or finding a new church if the one that I'm in is unhealthy or whatever it takes. Whatever it takes, you are worth it. And you don't have to just suffer in silence. There are people who want to come alongside you and help you. And I know you know that may not be the most practical set of tips, you know. And we can talk about like



how to find a therapist and all of that, or I can point you to resources. But I think until we have the hope that something can change and that we can learn the skills that it takes to live with the struggle, with the diagnosis, with the darkness, whatever it is, we're not able to do any of those things. Like I can give you tips, but you won't be able to do them if you don't have any hope that they're going to help you.

Elisa: Yeah.

Eryn: That's so good. What...what is...what is one thing you would...you would share with somebody listening that's like, you know, I've...I've not struggled...I can't connect with some of these things; but I have a friend and I'm trying to learn how to love her or him well.

Sarah: Yeah.

Eryn: And I...and I don't...I don't know where to start. I don't know what to say.

Sarah: Yeah.

Eryn: What's one thing you would share?

Sarah: I actually have like a...a guide on my website. It's beautifulbetween.com/whattosay that you can download for free. And it gives you a little guide and then also like 16 phrases you can use. But the first thing I would tell you is you don't have to fix it. It's not your job to make them better. And I want to take some pressure off of you. Like even if it's your kid, even if it's your spouse, like you cannot make them better. Your job is to love them and walk alongside them. And what we really, really need to know in the dark is that people aren't going to bail on us. We need to know that people love us and that they're willing to walk with us. So some of those things that you can say and do are, you know, saying I'm so sorry you're struggling. I don't have answers, but I'm going to walk with you, saying what I heard, "I'm not disappointed in you," noticing when they're fighting and saying "you're doing a really good job" even if you don't feel like it, and doing like practical things like you would if somebody you know like Elisa mentioned earlier like had a cancer diagnosis. Bring your friend a meal. Offer to drive them to their appointments. Like just really practical things like you don't know who a good therapist is. I'll help you find some options. I'll help you make the phone calls. And just being able to balance that, like I'm with you in this no matter how long it takes with providing some really practical things that demonstrate, no I actually mean this. They go so much farther than you can ever tell.

Eryn: So good. Sarah, I was 21 years old, and I started having my hands like tremor. I had tremors in my hands. And I didn't know what was going on. And I...I...I wasn't very familiar with panic attacks or anxiety



at that time. And I you know am a very bubbly personality. So a lot of people think I'm just always happy. And so I remember telling a friend I'm like I just...I'm getting like...like worried that I'm...my hands are trembling. And they would say you're fine. Oh you're fine. It's probably something you ate, you know. It's probably something. Maybe it's your blood sugar, you know. And it continued to get worse. But then as it...as my tremors got worse, so did my anxiety. But I didn't have a word for it.

Sarah: Yeah.

Eryn: So in this internal battle in my...in my mind was just like, what is happening to me? What's wrong with me? And then it's like a spiral. It took a friend observing just my behaviors to share with me. "Hey, like I've experienced this". They actually shared their story with me of what they've experienced with tremors and anxiety and...and brought it to my attention that this isn't something that is...I need to drink orange juice. This is something that is internally going on inside of me.

Sarah: Yeah.

Eryn: And my body was telling me physically what I was feeling internally that I wasn't connecting. And I was just wondering, like do you have any advice for somebody that's listening that might be observing what is going on their friend's life? You had shared it's...it's not our responsibility to save somebody.

Sarah: Yeah.

Eryn: But also being a friend and an observer, like how do you find that balance between not saving but then kindly showing and sharing what you're observing?

Sarah: Yeah, there is a big gap between trying to save someone and fix them and you know doing what Scripture tells us to which is to bear one another's burdens and just be a good support to one another. I think you should always err on the side of checking in with someone always. Because they may be aware that something's wrong. You don't know how desperate of a place they're in. Or you don't know if maybe they've got no clue that there's help available. And so some easy ways to do it are just to say hey, I've noticed XYZ lately. I've heard it called the "used tos." I've noticed you used to love to go hiking, but it seems like you never get out anymore. I've noticed that you seem down. I've noticed that you seem on edge. And I'm concerned about you. Is there something going on you'd like to talk about? And you know that gives them an opportunity to open up. They may start saying things like well I'm...I'm really worried, or I'm stressed. Or I don't know, I just am not myself lately. You can always say like there's a suicide training called QPR (question, persuade, refer) that's really, really good. And one of the questions they ask is, have you been really unhappy lately? And you know checking in this is to prevent suicide. So



they...if someone says yes, they'll say, have you been so unhappy lately that you feel like you wish you wouldn't wake up or so unhappy lately that you'd want to take your life? And so if you think it's that serious, you can go down that road. But I think just asking someone like, how are you doing? Are you overwhelmed? Are you unhappy? Are you stressed? What's going on? And then especially if you have experience with it or you, you know, have those resources handy that we mentioned, the suicide hotline, the crisis text line, you can pass those on or say like hey I'd be happy to help you find some support.

Eryn: That's good.

Elisa: I just need to personally thank you for sharing so vulnerably. In your book *I Love Jesus, But I want to Die*, I mean just the title is enough right there. But that's powerful. But...but in your conversations, and I think Sarah, in your ongoing life, you have made some probably difficult choices to continue that vulnerability.

Sarah: Yes.

Elisa: And to live vulnerably. And...and in doing so, I think you're shaping your community. Can you talk about that? You know what you're discovering as you live openly with your own struggles even though you're experiencing some healing in them too?

Sarah: Absolutely. So several years ago, I was in ministry at a really large church and worked with a lot of young women who were you know six, seven years younger than me and, you know, in their early twenties. And so I was kind of looked up to as a leader and a mentor and the big sister. And I had it in my head that good leaders aren't too vulnerable, you know. People won't trust you. People won't respect you if you show all of the things that you struggle with. And this was interestingly enough shortly after I had a leader tell me, you know, you're dealing with depression. The other part of that is she said, I know because I deal with it too.

Elisa: Wow.

Sarah: And so I still had that in my head, but there were some...some young women I was pretty close to. And I was actually in the middle of a relapse with self-harm, and one of them walked into my apartment shortly afterwards. And she could just tell from my face that something was wrong. And she was like, what's going on? And I told her. And I was so afraid that she was not going to respect me, and she was going to be upset with me. And she just grabbed me and hugged me and rubbed my back and said, it's okay. It's okay. We'll figure it out. We'll figure it out. And shortly after that, we were in a meeting with several other of the young women that we worked with. And we were just kind of checking in and talking



about what was going on. And I just felt like I was supposed to tell them that like I was dealing with this. I was struggling. I was in a relapse with self-harm. And you know I dealt with depression. And I was so afraid. And I...I did. I opened up to them thinking I just have to do this. And they were so supportive and so kind and so...they just did such a good job of caring for me. But what I didn't expect was that three or four other girls opened up and said, well me too. Like I'm...I've been actively planning a suicide attempt, or I've been struggling with depression.

Elisa: Wow.

Sarah: And it was just this huge turning point for me to realize man, sometimes people are just waiting for permission. Sometimes someone just needs somebody else to go first and also to realize like my preconceived notions about who I can receive support from or who's going to be equipped are not always right, you know. Like sometimes people who've walked with God for 40 years don't know what to say, and sometimes someone who's 19 years old will wrap you in a hug and rub your back and say, like we're gonna figure it out. It's fine.

Eryn: That's so powerful. That is the power of community right there.

Sarah: That's beautiful, yeah.

Eryn: That's true community when you can sit across from somebody and just be present and not flinch at what they're sharing.

[music]

Elisa: God is so good at leading us to people who can relate to us and make us feel loved in any and every struggle. We're so thankful to have had this chat with Sarah.

Eryn: Yes, Elisa. And remember if you or someone you know needs help, you can call 800-273-8255, or visit suicidepreventionlifeline.org to chat with someone or learn more. That's suicidepreventionlifeline.org. There's nothing to be ashamed of here, friends. We all have broken places in our hearts and lives. So seriously, reach out to someone if you need help.

Elisa: Thank you for that, Eryn. Before we close today's show, 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 with me on social. We would love to hear from



you and answer any questions that you might have or just even 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.

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Elisa: Today's episode was engineered by Anne Stevens and produced by Daniel Ryan Day, Mary Jo Clark, and Jade Gustafson. Today we also want to recognize Will and Dave 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.