



God Hears Her Podcast

Episode 73 - Women Who are Often Overlooked

Elisa Morgan and Eryn Eddy with Amanda Benckhuysen

Amanda: Yeah, women did not by and large have access to education, and they didn't have access to sort of the ecclesiastical structures, so by and large when we think of interpreters of Scripture, we don't think of women, right?

[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*.

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

Eryn: And I'm Eryn Eddy. Sometimes women are treated as second-class citizens within the church, as if we're not meant to study Scripture, teach about it, or go to seminary. We can feel overlooked in comparison to the men around us doing great things.

Elisa: Today I'm talking to Dr. Amanda Benckhuysen about her journey from feeling like an overlooked woman to becoming a woman who learned she was seen and valued by a God who loves us all. Unfortunately, we missed Eryn for this conversation...boo!

Eryn: I am so bummed I missed it, but this turned out to be a great conversation. Dr. Amanda is the author of *The Gospel According to Eve*, and *Immigrants, the Bible, and You*. She's also a scholar, speaker, teacher, wife, mother, and follower of Jesus. She currently serves as the director of Safe Church Ministry for the Christian Reformed Church after having taught the Old Testament while mentoring seminary students for over 15 years!

Elisa: We're so excited to learn from Dr. Amanda Benckhuysen and hear her story on this episode of *God Hears Her*. Amanda, I am so glad that we get to sit down today.

Amanda: Yeah, it's just lovely to be here with you and to have this conversation.



Elisa: Yeah. We're two women, a little bit different ages, but some similar journeys, and that, I think we came at them in different ways maybe, and so I really want to hear how you ended up where you are, but you are a woman who's ended up in ministry, but ended up through the doors of a seminary...

Amanda: Yeah.

Elisa: ...going into ministry. And I did too. I graduated from seminary in 1980, so everyone now knows how old I am [Laughing], but it...it was an era when a not a lot of women went to a seminary as a graduate school, and for those who may not be familiar, seminaries are theological educational institutions...

Amanda: Yeah. Yeah.

Elisa: ...where you go for a master's level or something, but I'd love to know your story. Where'd you grow up? What was your family like?

Amanda: Yeah.

Elisa: How did God woo you forward... [Laughing] ...to um studying for your career?

Amanda: Well, I grew up in a Christian home. I have three brothers, and I am the only girl in our family, and I would say that there weren't a lot of expectations placed on me in terms of what my future would be like, so...

Elisa: Does that mean they didn't expect you to do anything, or they didn't tell you what you needed to do?

Amanda: Ah I think they just didn't really expect me to do anything, so, I mean, I wasn't held back,...

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Amanda:...but I also...there wasn't a lot of encouragement or...

Elisa: Interesting.



Amanda: ...excitement about what I might be. What God might be calling me to be. But when I went to University, and I'm Canadian, my family grew up in and around Toronto, and I went to a public university, and I thought, *I want to be a lawyer*. So I was on track to becoming a lawyer, but I got involved in some Christian campus groups...

Elisa: Hmm.

Amanda: ...and really began to grow in my faith and feel a deep and profound love for Jesus.

Elisa: Mmm.

Amanda: I can remember just at one point saying to one of my mentors *I really love Jesus*. [Laughing]

Elisa: Wow, yeah.

Amanda: And that's...it's such an interesting way to think of it now, but at the time...and I think it still does express exactly how I felt. I just felt this overwhelming sense of love for Jesus and for...for what God through Christ had done for me, and that sort of overtook a desire, I think, to go into law, and I thought, *I just need to share this with other people, this...*

Elisa: This love.

Amanda: ...*this love, this that I feel as a child of God and this love that I feel for God*.

Elisa: Ah. Can you back that up just a little bit. I mean, that's a remarkable statement, and I'm also hearing a great contrast between the law, which is typically rather cerebral, rather mental, and a love for Jesus, which feels very emotional and holistic for you. How did God woo you from one to the other?

Amanda: Yeah, I think I began to experience that all of who I was and all of what I brought to the table, all of what made me me was pleasing and acceptable to God, and I don't know if I had fully experienced that prior to this, that in my homelife I was...I was one of four kids. I was the girl. There weren't a lot of expectations, but all of a sudden, I'm at university and I am feeling like God has placed on my heart a sense that I have gifts to offer the world, and that I am loved for who I am. And that just evoked in me just this profound sense of love for God.



Elisa: Yeah. I hear a...a specialness...

Amanda: Hmm.

Elisa: ...almost in the way you felt like God loved you. A...a uniqueness, an offering that you might...might have been gifted,...

Amanda: Yeah.

Elisa: ...so being in a...in a home environment that didn't have "expectations" on you, it's just...maybe you're just in an average pool of people.

Amanda: Right.

Elisa: But there's like a spotlight comes on you, and you, Amanda, are unique...

Amanda: Right.

Elisa: ...wanted, desired, a contributor.

Amanda: Yes, all of the above. I felt validated in ways that I don't know if I had before. I was someone who was valued and had dignity and worth and had been gifted by God in unique ways—knit in my mother's womb. I think I felt that in profound ways.

Elisa: Did being a woman have anything to do with it? You being a girl growing up in a family of boys. Was that another element?

Amanda: Absolutely, yeah. I think ah there were big expectations placed on my brothers.

Elisa: So yours was in contrast.

Amanda: Yes, it certainly was. I...I don't think my parents meant anything negative by it, but I think they still sort of had this idea that if my brothers were going to be successful in life, they needed to get an education, they needed a career, they needed ah to be encouraged in that way, and that I didn't. Whatever happened would be fine. [Laughing]



Elisa: Wow! Was there the...the unspoken expectation *Well, you'll get married and that will take care of you?*

Amanda: Yeah, I don't know if we ever spoke about what was going to happen. I think it was just when I decided to go to university, there wasn't much by way of saying *Oh, yes, this is good!* It was more like *Okay.* [Laughing]

Elisa: Okay.

Amanda: Yeah, more like that.

Elisa: But you weren't criticized either?

Amanda: Yeah, I don't remember being criticized. I just don't remember being supported, right, like it wasn't a high priority. You know, I think that many of the women that I went on to university with understood that they had something to offer, that they had gifts, that needed to be nurtured, but it was always within the context of *I'm going to get married and have kids*, which is a lovely thing.

Elisa: Sure.

Amanda: *And that my career will support the family insofar as it needs to support the family, but my main role will be raising my family.* But I did come across some people who...and...and in fact they were instrumental in my life who said *You know what? God has given you unique passions and gifts.* And actually that was what changed the trajectory of my life. They kind of spoke into my life and said, *We think you'd be better suited for ministry.* And I was like *What?* [Laughing]

Elisa: What...what kind of people were these?

Amanda: So one was a campus pastor...

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Amanda: ...who said *Wow you have real gifts for ministry* and who kind of came alongside and encouraged me, who gave me opportunities. I preached my first sermon when I was at this public



university for this campus group. I mean, it would have occurred to me to preach a sermon before that. And then another woman who was several years ahead of me, who was in the...in the law school, who said, *You know, I've been watching you, and I just...I just...I think you have gifts for ministry, and I think law school will kill you.* [Laughing] *It will kill your spirit.*

Elisa: Oh wow. Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Amanda: And I was just so helpful to be seen actually, to have people who were observing me and able to speak into my life in ways that were knowledgeable, right, and wise, because they were actually aware of who I was and what gifts I had. I don't take that for granted. You kind of receive that and go *Okay, thank you.* [Laughing]

Elisa: It's a huge gift.

Amanda: Yeah.

Elisa: And so many women don't get it. I love that you referenced the Scripture of being "knit together in your mother's womb"...

Amanda: Yeah.

Elisa: ...from Psalm 139, but even that is a hidden recognition.

Amanda: Right.

Elisa: You know, only your mother and you would know me, and God would know about that.

Amanda: Right.

Elisa: And then God peels back the layers for you and exposes you to people who see...

Amanda: Right.

Elisa: ...and they peel back more layers in you.



Amanda: Right. Yes.

Elisa: And poke around and...[Laughing]

Amanda: Exactly. Yes.

Elisa: ...and release more of you. What happened after you made the decision *Oh, law school hear is not for me*, you...your falling in love with Jesus, and you're (sighs)...I just love this...you're responding...

Amanda: Right.

Elisa: ...to the glow of His love and His recognition on your life.

Amanda: Yeah.

Elisa: What happened to you next?

Amanda: Well, so I did meet a guy. Ah we fell in love, and he was going to seminary, but somewhat independently. And even actually before knowing that he was going to seminary, I had also been thinking about seminary. So as I was approaching the end of my undergraduate degree, I realized I need to figure out what's next, and I began to apply to seminary. I was part of the Christian Reformed Church, so it seemed right that I should go to Calvin Seminary.

Elisa: Hmm. Mm-hmm.

Amanda: And one of the things that sort of encouraged me in that direction was realizing that I wanted to be in some form of ministry, but I didn't feel like I had the training. I didn't feel like I had the knowledge of the faith. I didn't feel I had good Bible knowledge, and I thought *Going to seminary will help me represent the gospel well. It will help me represent Jesus well.* And somewhat serendipitously it turned out that this guy I was dating was also going to seminary, and he was also Christian Reformed, and he had also applied to Calvin. And so we ended up coming to Calvin together and were engaged our first year and then got married at the beginning of the second year of our seminary education, so.

Elisa: And you've been married a good while now.



Amanda: Yeah, so.

Elisa: And have two children?

Amanda: We do. We have two children—one who is in her sophomore year of college and one who who's in her sophomore year of high school, so.

Elisa: So a year of study, and you're moving forward into the gifting that God had been wooing you and reflecting you to possess. Took you to seminary to go "into ministry", but you began to focus in on certain topics, certain area of study.

Amanda: Yeah.

Elisa: And you ended up with a focus on what?

[Music]

Eryn: When we come back, Dr. Amanda will share more of her journey with us and introduce us to other women scholars who have influence her own education and passion and who many of us may never have heard before. That's coming up next on this episode of *God Hears Her*.

[Music]

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

Amanda: Well, let me back up and just say all through seminary I felt this profound sense of calling to be in kind of missional activity. I wanted to share with those who didn't know the love of Jesus that Jesus loved them. [Laughing]

Elisa: Mmm. Mm-hmm.



Amanda: But it's really challenging to have two people in full-time ministry, and one of the things my husband and I discovered is that there weren't, at the time, good opportunities for husbands and wives to be in ministry together, at least...

Elisa: Like a tandem?

Amanda: Yeah.

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Amanda: Not in our denomination, and so I began to be pushed more and more towards academic studies.

Elisa: Okay.

Amanda: And I loved Hebrew, the Hebrew language, and I loved the Old Testament, and I actually I loved and hated the Old Testament.

Elisa: Hmm. That's honest.

Amanda: Yes.

Elisa: Yep. Yep. Yep.

Amanda: I wrestled with Jacob.

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Amanda: Ah like Jacob with the stranger at the River Jabbok. With the Old Testament, I kept trying to figure out *What is this thing? All these books of the Bible that seem so hard...*

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Amanda: ...so many of them so hard for us to interpret and why are they part of our canon? And we say they're part of our canon and yet we reference them so little. [Laughing]



Elisa: Right.

Amanda: So where...

Elisa: We get uncomfortable with the, don't we? Mm-hmm.

Amanda: Yeah, so it led me to do graduate work in Old Testament and that's where I met my advisor, Marion Taylor, who was doing work on the history of interpretation.

Elisa: Now is that—the history of interpretation?

Amanda: Yeah, so she was ah looking at how texts in Scripture have been interpreted over the course of centuries, and so, you know, what did the early church fathers say about specific texts. What did the Reformers say? How has the interpretation expanded or grown or been augmented or changed? And what happened in later years. How has interpretation and even our approach to texts changed over the course of time.

Elisa: So maybe to...to make it very every day for us, it's like you open up the book of Genesis...

Amanda: Yep.

Elisa: ...and paying attention to what me, Elisa, and you, Amanda, bring to it in the twenty-first century, you know, I...

Amanda: Right.

Elisa: ...assume certain words mean certain things. I assume that relationships look like the ones I know, so you go back *Oh wait a minute*, punch pause, we need to go back to when this was written...

Amanda: Right.

Elisa: ...you know thousands of years before Christ and passed down in...by words rather than writing, etcetera.



Amanda: Yeah.

Elisa: All of this and then moving it forward to those theologians right after Jesus died and rose and the Christian church was born, they start...interpret it. So anyway, that whole lineage is what you're talking about.

Amanda: Absolutely, and I think I...I kind of got excited about recognizing that I read the Scripture and I hear certain things, but when I read other interpreters in history on that same text, they heard other things. And so what it did was it expanded my understanding of texts to read what others thought of these texts.

Elisa: Oh.

Amanda: So think of a Bible study, right? You're sitting around with people who are alive...

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Amanda: ...and who are all contributing based on what God is placing in their heart about the text that is in front of them, right? Well this was like having a Bible study except you're reading with people who have lived in a different time and a different context, who are no longer alive, but whose contributions we still have accessible to us, and so it was like having a Bible study with Augustine or John Calvin or Martin Luther. I mean, there...there's something really...

Elisa: I love that.

Amanda: ...beautiful about that, right?

Elisa: That's very imaginative, and you said you were very attracted to the Hebrew language, you're attracted to the characters in the stories of the Old Testament, but I love your imagination to actually place interpreters right...

Amanda: Yeah.

Elisa: ...around the table with you...



Amanda: Right.

Elisa: ...and we can do that, can't we...

Amanda: Right, yes.

Elisa: ...even now by reading their writings.

Amanda: Yeah. So one of my advisor's courses was this class on the history of interpretation, and one of the students in our class, and it wasn't actually me, asked her the question---cause the main assignment for the class was do a paper, a major paper on one of the interpreters in history that we have studied, right?

Elisa: Sure.

Amanda: And one of the women in the class asked *Well, can I do a paper on a woman interpreter?*

Elisa: Hmm.

Amanda: And ah my advisor was like *Well, we haven't looked at any women interpreters.* [Laughing] *Are there any women interpreters?*

Elisa: Yeah.

Amanda: Like are there any women interpreters of Scripture in history? And it kind of set her on a trajectory of recovering women's voices in history as...in terms of how they interpreted Scripture. I was privileged to have her as a mentor, and she introduced me to a lot of her work, and I kind of got really excited about this idea that *Wait there's more voices...there are more people that need to be around the table that we need to hear from when it comes to interpreting Scripture.* Because each voice we add sort of expands again our understanding of the Word, and so yeah, it was an opportunity to look into a subject matter, into an area that there hadn't been a lot of work done. Um and so, yeah, I spent a lot of time trying to recover women's voices on Scripture, so.

Elisa: I'm struck by the...what's to me now in this brief conversation, obvious connection between the explosion of joy and love that happened in you when you were realized you were seen by God, and the



explosion of love and joy that happens when you see other women who are seen by God. And I guess I'm wondering; do you see anything in the women interpreters that's different than their male counterparts or then their brothers who...

Amanda: Yeah.

Elisa: ...were more familiar with Augustine, etcetera _____, and these, you know, famous church historians, church fathers?

Amanda: Yeah.

Elisa: What do you see in the voices of women, and were women allowed...

Amanda: Yeah.

Elisa: ...to study like this? Were they taken seriously if they asked questions or wrote about this?

Amanda: Yeah, so such...

Elisa: Touch back.

Amanda: ...such great questions. Yeah, women did not by and large have access to education, and they didn't have access to sort of the ecclesial structures, so by and large when we think of interpreters of Scripture, we don't think of women, right? I think that was sort of...

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Amanda: ...this aha moment for both my advisor and for this female student and for myself, realizing *Oh, were there women interpreters?* And what would that even look like? So women interpreters didn't tend to write and offer their insights at a level where it was saved and passed on...

Elisa: Oh.

Amanda: ...from generation to generation, which is why we don't hear...



Elisa: That's a shame, isn't it?

Amanda: ...about them.

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Amanda: But many of them in their own day, did write works. They came in different forms. They were sometimes devotionals, or they would write poetry. They would write stories. They would write dialogues, so it came in a variety of different formats, and then they would publish it and circulate it or they would circulate it, and their works would be widely circulated and sometimes to through second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh printings. Like...so they would be widely circulated for a period of time, and then they would get lost, right?

Elisa: Hmm.

Amanda: Their voices would just disappear from history.

Elisa: Hmm.

Amanda: But a lot of these women they were women who were educated either by brothers or fathers or uncles who decided that yes, they had gifts and had an intellectual thirst, so they would invest in them, and so some of these women would be fairly well educated. They knew multiple languages. They had read the church fathers. They had read the Bible front to back. I mean, so their contributions are actually quite insightful, and I would say hermeneutically sophisticated. I mean, I think they're really good readers of Scripture.

Elisa: Can you tell a story of maybe of one who impacted you with her work?

Amanda: Well let me talk about two. I'm going to talk about Anna Maria van Schurman first, because I...I want us to realize that these women, they had the kind of insightfulness and academic prowess that should cause us to take them serious. So, Anna Maria van Schurman is a seventeenth century Dutch woman, and she is one of the first women to go to university in Europe, and she is invited to participate in this one professor's classes because she has shown so much intellectual capacity, and he sees it in her. So he invites her to participate in his classes, but she has to stand behind a screen.



Elisa: Hmm.

Amanda: So as not to distract the men in the class. [Laughing]

Elisa: Oh my gosh. Okay. Okay. Not just draped and hooded, but no.

Amanda: No, right, right.

Elisa: Okay.

Amanda: But she knows fourteen different languages...

Elisa: Gosh.

Amanda: ...like proficiently, right? Like she knows all the biblical languages, so Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic. She knows Arabic, Ethiopic, Syriac. I mean, and then she knows all the European languages, right? Dutch, English, ah French, German, Italian, and on and on. She writes an Ethiopic grammar for fun, because she likes...

Elisa: Golly.

Amanda: ...[Laughing]

Elisa: Smarty, yeah.

Amanda: Yeah, smart woman, right? Well she wrote this beautiful paraphrase of Genesis 1 through 3 and published it, and only recently do we have small pieces of that translated into English. Most of it is still in Dutch, and most people don't actually know about this work that she has done.

Elisa: And how might it differ? I mean how...how might she have a unique contribution as a woman for...

Amanda: Yeah.

Elisa: ...her point of view?



Amanda: Yeah, I think women, they write, and they think in terms of theology on the ground, right? They're thinking about how God is present and how their faith has an impact on their daily life, right? So it's not the big broad stroke so much as the *What does my faith mean in terms of what it means to be a woman?* for instance in this...in this culture in this society. *What does my faith mean for what it means to be a wife, what it means to be a mother, what it means to be a person who is gifted and maybe called to preach?*

Elisa: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Amanda: And these are women in the seventeenth century who are asking this question. *How do I process this?*

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Amanda: *I feel like I've been called to preach. How do I read these texts?* Right, and so I think they're reading the texts differently, because they're reading them through their lived experience and trying to make sense of what the Bible says, how God has revealed Himself to them, and what their life is like. So another good example, and she's one of my favorite, a fourteenth century, Christine de Pizan.

Elisa: What's her last name?

Amanda: De Pizan. It's a French name. She's a Viennese woman actually, and her husband passes away, so she takes up writing as a way to support her family. She has no choice. She's got to put food on the table, right?

Elisa: Hmm. Mm-hmm.

Amanda: But fourteenth century women don't typically have professions, right? So her...

Elisa: Didn't get paid for writing usually, right. Yeah.

Amanda: ...options...right, her options are pretty limited. But she starts writing court ballads to make some money here and there, and finally, she starts realizing that in her day and age, there's been an influx of some fairly misogynistic Greek literature that has now been revitalized in the culture. And so



people are reading things that portray women in really negative ways. They're portrayed as tempters or seductresses or they're reduced to play things for men. You know like they're just...

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Amanda: ...there's a reductionism about what a woman is.

Elisa: Devaluation.

Amanda: A complete devaluation of their personhood. She's very concerned about this because she notices that women around her are starting to embody that. They're starting to pick up on those...those cues and...

Elisa: We absorb the messages, don't we?

Amanda: Absolutely.

Elisa: We still do.

Amanda: Yeah, we still do. Exactly, and she's witnessing this, and she's like *This is really bad*. Right? *Like my sisters are thinking less than themselves than the ought*. And it's making them vulnerable to abuse actually.

Elisa: Hmm.

Amanda: So she writes this poem, "A Letter of the God of Love," and then she writes a second work. So "The Letter of the God of Love" is in 1399, so fourteenth century she's writing this. And then she writes *The Book of the City of Ladies* in 1401, and both of these works reinterpret Genesis 1 through 3, where she highlights that God has created the woman with dignity and value and worth, and if that is the case, then to devalue the woman, to malign the woman is to scorn or malign the God who created the woman whose image she bears. I'm like *Wow!* [Laughing]

Elisa: Yeah.

Amanda: That is just so *I needed to hear that*.



Elisa: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Amanda: I needed to hear that, that it's not that the Bible is right and that yes, women have been endowed with value and dignity and worth, and that those who would speak otherwise are the voices that we need to...to say *No, that's wrong. You are not of God.*

[Music]

Elisa: You are an example of someone who was raised up and brought into newness of life simply by the fact that Jesus...noticed He loves you and lifted you, and it is in great contrast to the wounding of womankind. You know, so many have been degraded for so long and devalued, but I mean, you are an example of what happens when we look up for our value, not from the world around us, but from our Maker. Thank you for these examples, and may we tell their stories, and may we look up and see His face looking at us and reflecting back the value that He sees...

Amanda: Amen.

Elisa: ...as beautiful.

Amanda: Amen. Yeah.

[Music]

Eryn: What a lovely reminder from Dr. Amanda that we are all loved and valued by the one who made us.

Elisa: It's important to be reminded that we are all daughters of the King and we're deeply loved by Him.

Eryn: Well, before we close out today's episode of *God Hears Her*, we want to remind you that the show notes are available in the podcast description. There's also a link for more information about Dr. Amanda Benckhuysen, as well as links to order her books. You can visit our website at godhearsher.org. That's godhearsher.org.

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



[Music]

Eryn: Today's episode was engineered by Anne Stevens and produced by Mary Jo Clark, Daniel Ryan Day, and Jade Gustafson. Today we also want to recognize Jody and Kathi. Thanks you all.

[Music]

Elisa: God hears her is a production of Our Daily Bread Ministries.