



God Hears Her Podcast

Episode 77 - Caregiving, Caretaking, and Careserving Elisa Morgan and Eryn Eddy

Elisa: One of my friends who's a survivor of cancer for 15 years, and her husband's a survivor of brain cancer, she actually wrote an article about the difference between caregiving and caretaking. She said, I'm not caretaking. I'm caregiving. And that's the way she really wants to define it for her identity. And...and I...I've thought about that a lot as I've been initiated into this role in a different season now. I don't feel like I'm taking care of somebody or taking care from somebody. I feel like I'm giving care. And...and to me, to use that word you just used, Eryn, of *noble*, it seems more noble to give care rather than to take care of somebody.

Eryn: Yeah, I mean I almost want to say, "care serving."

Elisa: Ooh, yeah.

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. Today, Elisa and I wanted to talk about a topic we both recently had experience with. We have a feeling that many of you will be able to relate to.

Elisa: Yes, and that's the topic of caregiving, caretaking, care serving, whatever you want to call it.

Eryn: We know it's sometimes a really hard season of life, or for some, a part of everyday life. So let's talk about why caregiving is important and how we can take care of ourselves as well, even when caring for someone else takes so much time and energy.

Elisa: Join us for this conversation on *God Hears Her*. Eryn, we've been in a season, both of us, where folks around us at different levels have had some physical or mental needs. You know it's a time, a season, in their lives when they can't do it on their own; and they need help.



Eryn: Yeah, I entered into that season about four years ago with my dad's health.

Elisa: Okay.

Eryn: And he went through throat cancer radiation treatments. I think I had mentioned that briefly on a podcast when we first started in 2019. And from there, you know, then complications from radiation, regulating his body again to then diverticulitis. And he's had...he had diverticulitis 10 years ago, and it came back with a vengeance. And unfortunately, with doctors overlooking some complications, made things worse. And it was actually the hospital here in Georgia, in Atlanta, said it was the worst case of diverticulitis they had ever seen.

Elisa: My heart breaks.

Eryn: Sixty pounds that were lost of him after overcoming throat cancer and 60 pounds lost of him in three months and...

Elisa: Ooh.

Eryn: ...26 hours of surgery, it's just been...ah it just seems like, you know, I watch how my mom has been so loving and serving to him. But it's put...I guess it's downloaded a different perspective in my mind with seeing how my mom cares and serves, not just on the good days—and they've had bad days, but to a whole other level where he needs somebody to help take care of him to a degree that is so humbling to him. And honestly, he would say he felt like he lost some of his dignity. So that's been something that's new that I feel like I'm processing and learning right now.

Elisa: Yeah, and you know, it's a sacred thing to be united, you know, in these conversations, Eryn, and you know how God brought us together just in life period; because we learn from each other's seasons, you and I. And so does everybody. And I've been initiated into a season of that kind of care as well with my parents, but they're both deceased and have been for several decades. But recently, my brother who is just one of my dearest friends in the world, has end-stage liver disease and actually is waiting for a transplant as we talk right now. And he lives in another state. I'm trying to help him from afar. It's new territory for both of us. And while I'm his older sister and have mothered him through some of his life, I've also had to stop mothering him through some of his life. You know so there's just a dynamic that we're needing to negotiate as his needs increase. But then my husband, my precious Evan, was diagnosed with



bladder cancer. And he's been through crazy surgeries and tests and having to develop, as you're describing with your dad, to very new normal ways of living where he hasn't been able to do everything on his own. And he's needed a kind of help from me that has never been required. All of this topic that we're talking about, and I'm familiar with it too just from being a mom and a grandmom and ushering kids through chicken pox and the flu and the etcetera. But...but as you and I've been talking, we realize that there is this role that we're all called to at some point in our lives that we're not really prepared for. And we...we've dubbed this role "caregiving." Caregiving, it can go up. It can go horizontally. It can go down. It can go to friends. It can go to family. It can go to extended family. It can go to strangers at times. Some of us have a profession of caregiving, you know, especially in the health profession. Let's unpack this. Let's talk about what's required. What is it? How do we approach it? How do we do it well? How do we not lose ourselves in the process? How do we honor someone else? Oh, all the things...all the things.

Eryn: Yeah, I feel like I have more questions than answers. I feel like I'm kind of naïve to this space, because I've never had to do it to the extent that I am doing it now. And even then, I...I look at around me at friends that I know do it too and a degree that is just so noble.

Elisa: Good word.

Eryn: And so I feel like this is giving me just a tiny look into what has been a reality for years and decades for some people that I know. I'm curious, as we were brainstorming talking about this cause we've talked about caregiving. There's caretaking. Is that the same thing?

Elisa: Yeah, I've struggled with that word too...both words...caregiving, caretaking. One of my friends who's a survivor of cancer for 15 years, and her husband's a survivor of brain cancer, she actually wrote an article about the difference between caregiving and caretaking. She said, I'm not caretaking. I'm caregiving. And that's the way she really wants to define it for her identity. And...and I...I've thought about that a lot as I've been initiated into this role in a different season now. I don't feel like I'm taking care of somebody or taking care from somebody. I feel like I'm giving care. And...and to me, to use that word you just used, Eryn, of noble; it seems more noble to give care rather than to take care of somebody. It's...it's like maybe a small differentiation we do between when we talk about parenting versus babysitting. I remember how, you know, just adamant I would get when somebody would say, "Well get your husband to babysit." And I'm like, he doesn't babysit. He's parenting, you know. You don't say I'm babysitting when I'm taking care of my kids. And kind of in that same way, I think about, can I...can I ennoble this love, this service by calling it caregiving instead of caretaking? What do you think?



Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: What do you think?

Eryn: Yeah, I mean that...I almost want to say care-serving.

Elisa: Ooh yeah.

Eryn: And I watch my mom just selflessly serve my dad in ways that, I mean it was just so grace-giving, full of so much compassion and so much love. And like it was a way that it wasn't like she saw herself above and he was weak. It was just this like I want to serve you. I respect you. You know for my dad, like I'll share like he had to have a bag on the outside for his colon and his bladder. And my mom had to remove it, clean it, empty it, put it back together. She had to give him IVs. She had to just when you handle someone's feces, right, it's like...

Elisa: Right.

Eryn: ...I don't want to get into the weeds. But it's like when you handle someone's feces, there are things you do not know that you did not know and then you learn how to handle it, right?

Elisa: Well and it's like changing a diaper for a baby but we know they don't have any other option. And what's wacky to us...

Eryn: Yes.

Elisa: ...to understand that an adult grows backwards in some ways that way. And they don't have any other option. Eryn, I love the word you used right there. You said you watched her care give with such compassion. And you know I...I'm going to just cut to the chase right there. We may be done with our conversation. But...but...but I...I think that's the hinge point. I mean I've been around...I've been in hospitals forever, cause I was going to be a hospital chaplain. And I just...I've just done a lot of hospital work. And I've done a lot of work with the elderly. And I...like I said, I've been with my parents. And there have been seasons when I've just gone eew...just eew. You know this bodily function is eew. I can't imagine holding this or helping that or changing this. But when you have this loved one, and you watch them become incapacitated or diminished or just even struggle and be infirmed for a little bit, and if you've ever done this, in that moment; if you've locked eyes with that human and you know who they used to be,



and you know who they may still become again. But in that moment, they're vulnerable. What wells up is compassion. And what I've been holding onto is...is that letting that compassion, and it's not a feel sorry for. It's a...

Eryn: Right.

Elisa: ...it's a I can't believe you're going through this either (ness) okay. It becomes like this drawbridge that extends down over this enormous distance between what you think you can do and what you think you can't do and what you can do in that moment.

Eryn: Yeah. Yes, oh that is so well-said. It is seeing that person and knowing what they used to be. When I was watching just my dad's health you know slowly decline in this season, reflecting back on the strength that he showed in our family and his resiliency, and his joy and his laughter has been tempered down. And watching...watching that, I've had to grieve that over time...over the last few years. And then with my mom, I didn't know that this was going to happen in experiencing all of this. I didn't know that I would grieve also for my mom.

Elisa: Her availability and her...her own spirit being diminished?

Eryn: Yes.

Elisa: Is that what you mean?

Eryn: Yeah, and just feeling...feeling for her not in a...like she's weak, but just feeling like the loss that she is experiencing seeing what my dad used to be to what right now he is. And I know she's grieving. But right now, she needs to have the energy to help do the things that are demanding of her in the middle of the night. You know like she's just on call coming downstairs, helping him in this room, three o'clock in the morning because some...a bag broke, you know. And...and...and she doesn't...she doesn't have time in that moment to grieve. So I...I almost grieve the...the lack. I think that's what it was. I think I...I was grieving and grieved the lack of space that my mom has had to grieve the used to, to what is now. But I know that she does have her own lamenting to do in this season right now. And I think anybody that has gone through that, it's...sometimes you don't feel like you have the space or the capacity to deal with what the...the depths of your heartbreak is when you're in this space.



Elisa: Back to some of my friends who are just like what you're describing, and they may be more your mom's age. I...I think there's a...a catch. And I think I probably can recognize it in my own heart too in the relationships I'm caregiving into right now. And it's like you don't want to go there. You don't want to go all the way to this could be it or I'll never get them back again. Because so much of caregiving is about helping restore.

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: And a lot of the way we keep giving it is through the reality that we hold hope. And...and when hope is removed, then you're doing something different. Then you're doing a...a kind of a vigil to usher someone towards heaven. Then you're doing a...a companionship as they walk to a place you can't go with them. And that's a sacred calling too. That's not really caregiving, you know. Caregiving is about sustaining life as much as you can. You know and...and I love the way you brought in letting grief be your partner in it. Because there are real things to grieve. The person who is infirmed is grieving. You better believe it. You know like you said your dad's feeling this struggle of what happened to his dignity, this diminishment. And...and everybody does, you know, when you're faced with your helplessness and your vulnerability it's just so raw and embarrassing you know. We get embarrassed. And so there's grief in that.

Eryn: When we come back, we will continue talking about why it's important to care for ourselves too. That's coming up next on *God Hears Her*.

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. Just 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.

Elisa: If I can just turn this a little bit, just nudge our conversation just an elbow into some of the ways we give care to ourselves while we're giving care to others. You know that in itself sounds so selfish. You know but, how does...how does your mom care for herself? How do you care for yourself? How do I care for myself? I'm grieving the fact that right this minute, my brother can't be my best friend right now; because he needs to be focused on his health you know. And he's not capable in some ways of being my buddy, you know, the way he was. How do we care for ourselves as we care for others?



Eryn: It's hard to do, because you do feel selfish; and you feel privileged that you g...you have the option, the ability to do it. You know it...it's interesting watching my mom. I mean I have just experienced a wave of all sorts of emotions. Cause there's like I'm grieving whether she has capacity to grieve yet or now she's grieving. And then I'm also changed. I am forever changed watching how my mom has exuded joy when she has changed my dad's IVs. And I just...that act of service and the way that she was joyful and brought it in and winked at him and just did these like sweet little gestures. I just...that changed me. And I think she kept some of that joy because...or she's had joy because she has taken care of herself. And she does little things like little self-care things like slow mornings when she can or you know one of my favorite things that she did was she called me. And she was at Belk's. And she was buying a...

Elisa: What's Belk's? Sorry.

Eryn: ...oh Belk's is like a department store in Georgia.

Elisa: Okay, thank you. Okay.

Eryn: Yeah, yeah, yeah, sorry. And she called me on her way. And she's like it has been a day. I'm running errands. And she just...I could just tell she was just emotionally exhausted and drained. And she was running errands. And she just goes "I'm going to go get a new tube of lipstick, cause sometimes a new tube of lipstick is what you need."

Elisa: That's awesome.

Eryn: Of course, community, right? Like me being able to like share with you what I'm walking through, and you're able to reciprocate because you understand that helps also. I...that's a form of self-care as much as buying a tube of lipstick...

Elisa: Yeah.

Eryn: ...which may sound so superficial. But it's...there's those little...you've got to find the joy...the joyful moments.

Elisa: Yeah.

Eryn: And that was one for my mom.



Elisa: Yeah, it's bottom line filling your own tank up. And...and it's...I remember when I was going down to Houston where my husband was in cancer treatment. And I have a dear friend in Denver who lost her husband two years ago after a three-year battle with cancer. And he was not even yet 50. And she took me on a walk before Evan and I were going to do down there. And she just kind of like mama'd me even though she's quite a bit younger than me. But she was like, now don't spend the night every night at the hospital. Now get yourself a nice meal when you get to your room. Now make sure that you take a warm shower. Now, you know, do you have warm clothes? Because it's cold in the hospital waiting rooms. You know she just equipped me with practical things that I...I wasn't thinking about, you know. I was thinking about Evan and what he would need. So that's super-helpful. Something else that has helped me take care of myself, and this is going to sound ridiculous to some people and right spot on for others. But I have begun to view the tasks that I need to do for my brother or my husband as accomplishments. And because accomplishment is important to me, that has really helped me realize I have had to...I have needed to say "no" to speaking engagements, to new writing projects. I've missed some of my normal assignments with Our Daily Bread. I've had to pull back for these seasons. That makes me feel guilty and bad and wrong, Elisa. And yet I know it's a necessary obedience. And one way that God has just nudged me forward is He's shown me where I can find accomplishment in other areas in my life. You know I learned how to organize all of my brother's medications into one sheet. I've worked with another assistant in his town to make sure his Mediplan or box is filled with those medications. I...I...I come to lists, and I check things off. And I go, okay, I may not have been able to do my career things; but I've been able to do my care-giving things. And it's made...

Eryn: That's so good.

Elisa: ...me feel right and good and fulfilled.

Eryn: You hit the nail on the head with having somebody, whether like the woman that is...was younger...significantly younger than you like take care of you in...in some ways and speak what to do and what not to do. I think that's where community is so important. I remember when my dad was, I think he might have been...I don't know where he was in his cancer stage when I started recording with *God Hears Her*. But there was somebody on staff that I connected with that just told me some things that maybe my dad's thinking about that gave me a just a deeper understanding of what my dad's processing, how he feels, how he's healing, what I can do as a daughter. And I think that relationships, as much as you are pouring out telling people that you are pouring out so that they can pour in so you can continue to pour out is so crucial. And that's something that, you know, you've done for me. And I mean it's so...it's so



beautiful the day that my dad had surgery, one of his...I don't know hundredth felt like surgeries in the hospital was the exact same almost time and day...

Elisa: Yes.

Eryn: ...as Evan was having surgery.

Elisa: It's crazy. We were both sitting in waiting rooms thousands of miles apart with very significant men in our lives. And we knew it. Because we talked about it, and we prayed for each other.

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: It was sacred. You know, and you're bringing up this element of community. And I...I think we need to talk about this too is there is an intentionality to developing the help that you need. My brother, when you're on a transplant list, and people get transplants mixed up. There's a kidney transplant where you know somebody can donate their kidney, and it's often a long wait and etcetera. Well he's not waiting for a kidney. He's waiting for a liver. And so somebody came up to me, and he said, well you know you need to get on lists and really recruit people to give you their...their organs. And I said, no, with the liver the person has to die...

Eryn: Right.

Elisa: ...in order to give you their organ. And so that's a very different process. We're totally not in charge. It could come at any time. And the reality is that the only way to live until you get a transplant is to get sicker and sicker and sicker and sicker. And so that means differently than what I'm dealing with, with my husband which is helping him find a new way to live. I'm trying to help my brother survive. And I can't do it all. And so with his help, we actually developed a team. He identified four emergency people in his neighborhood. He...he's single, so he doesn't have a family right there. And I have them in my emergency people in my phone as my emergency go to's. Then we have a circle out from that that are helpers who will run an errand or take him to get a Covid test or take him to get his bloodwork done. And then we have an area out from that that might be providing a...a meal coupon or might be sending money for a flight if I need to go. And I...it sounds so exhausting, and I know and it is. I'll just be honest. It is. And then there's the prayer team that you maybe set up through you know Caring Bridge or something else or your church. But without these layers, I would fall over dead in a heap you know like a little cockroach turned up with its legs in the air just [sound effect] because I can't do it all. And then I have my friends. My



sister came alongside knowing that Evan was then sick after my brother had become sick and said, I will be your point person for when Evan needs you and our brother, you know, you can't help him. And sometimes that means we have to ask. You know, we have to call somebody and say, I can't be there, could you? It's humbling even for the caregiver, isn't it?

Eryn: Yeah, oh so communication is part of self-care, communicating your needs and the needs of the one that you're taking care of. I think that also kind of hits on something which is, how do you develop boundaries?

Elisa: Ooh. Now that sounds selfish again. You know, right?

Eryn: Right. I know and it's like what I think about is if you have like sounds like, you know, you've created these circles, these spaces of people that can help and take turns. And in some ways, that is actually establishing boundaries. But boundaries feel selfish in a time like that.

Elisa: It's really good, though, Eryn. And I'm...I'm glad you brought that up specifically. Because when my brother was diagnosed with this situation and we realized all of a sudden, oh my gosh. And you have to actually have a lead caregiver in order to go on the transplant list. If you don't have a plan for your own caregiving, they won't even consider you.

Eryn: Wow.

Elisa: And so I...this is what I realized. I can't do everything, but I can build a team. And...and as I began to do that, one of the things...and I felt like the Lord really listened to me as I howled out. *How am I going to do this?* You know, I'm a grandmother. I'm a wife. I'm a mom. I'm a worker, etcetera. And...and I ended up...I ended up kind of journaling what do I not want to miss in life? And I...I thought, *I don't want to miss my husband. I don't want to miss my kids in some ways, although they're grown. I don't want to miss my older grandson's senior year of high school. I don't want to miss my younger grandson's first year of first grade.* You know and I put these things down. And those things helped me create some boundaries. So as I just shared, my...my sister then stepped in and said, I know you don't want to miss Evan. And he needs you. you're the only person who can help him right now, so I will step in. And because I had asked God to help me identify what I don't want to miss, sometimes we have...have to miss things. Sometimes we do. But because I had identified that, that helped me say "yes" to her offer better. What about you?

Eryn: That's good.



Elisa: What do you do to create some boundaries? You don't live 10 minutes from your parents. You know, how do you...how do you help them from afar? And how do you also keep your life all the wheels running and spinning?

Eryn: I communicate...well yeah. Cause so my...one of my sisters lives in Colorado, and my other sister lives...there's some distance between her and my...and my parents. And so I live about an hour and a half away from them. I carve out time through phone calls and through visiting. And I just communicate that. And I've...I've "amazoned" things, surprised them with things, done little things like that when I can from afar.

Elisa: That's good.

Eryn: But when my dad was going through cancer, I was off and on visiting them at weeks at a time. Fortunately, my job allowed me at the time to be able to do that and just work from wherever. And so I was able to like help my mom with things whether it was cooking dinner or helping around the property, cause they have a lot of property that they manage. And my dad and my mom are typically the team that does it. And so without him, my mom is overwhelmed with maintaining everything. But honestly, at the end of the day, like I learned that with the support that my mom needed was like me coming up there and taking her out to dinner.

Elisa: Okay.

Eryn: Being able to set some things in place to be able to...to do that. That's what she...that's what filled her cup up. And then for my dad, it was sitting and watching the game with him or reminiscing on a sermon or a talk that he really loved. And asking him for advice on things brought his head space out of his circumstance, cause he's thinking about his circumstance all day long. And his identity almost started to become what he currently is experiencing. And that was advice that one of my friends gave me when they walked through cancer was that you start to think that you are it, and you forget all of the things that you've done and experienced. And you start to think that you're a burden on everybody and you're purposeless. And you feel lifeless. And so there have been ways that I've just showed up emotional support, asking questions that kind of bring my dad out of it and not in a way that's ignoring my dad's circumstance. But I'm just not allowing him to be his circumstance, you know. It's like he's more than what's happening right now. He's more than cancer. He's more than diverticulitis. So that's kind of some ways that I have just shown up for my family.



Elisa: How do you keep from losing yourself in that process?

Eryn: Oh, I honestly do think it's talking with people...

Elisa: Okay.

Eryn: ...that can point you back to all the other responsibilities that you have to steward. You know I think sometimes I can get so hyper-focused on the thing that is breaking my heart that I almost ignore, and I don't even steward. I just ignore all other responsibilities because I want to so badly just show up for the thing that's hurting everybody. And I...I'm not saying like oh I'm just...aren't I such a wonderful hero? Like I'm not saying that. It's just...your heart...when your heart is breaking for something, you put that thing as priority. And...and so it is so easy to lose yourself. And I've watched my friends that have gone through significant crisis and...and then going into caretaking or caregiving mode struggle with losing themselves and being completely swallowed up by the circumstance. But I think for me, it's reminding myself and seeing my friends kind of go through that journey reminding themselves of what's in front of them that they need to steward and creating priority lists and making sure that your responsibilities are also it's okay to take care of, you know.

Elisa: I want to just offer a couple of thoughts as we draw this up here. Most of the time, our caregiving seasons are not forever. Most of the time they are a season. Sometimes, they seem like forever. And sometimes, they're inordinately long, like when you're the mom or a grand mom or the father or grandfather of a special needs child that continues to need you throughout their life until you die. And when it does end, sometimes we have to redefine our own identities, because we've become so identified as the caregiver. I mean it's a 24/7 responsibility and sometimes and we're almost at a loss now, who are we? But when we find ourselves in the caregiving role, I think it's also important to draw from the reality that we don't do it alone, and we don't do it in and of ourselves. And I guess I want to just lay this out for us to hold us as a kind of a net from falling through into the black hole of what caregiving can seem to have sometimes. And it comes from 2 Corinthians chapter 1, verse 3 and 4. "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort who comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves received from God." We're really to be kind of a conduit in our caregiving between God and those we love. But the only way we can do it is when we ourselves receive His care, when we let God be our caregiver and dispense into our hearts the care we need and then through us flow that care to others around us. It's not really all up to us, is it?



Eryn: Something that I want to share, you know, but before kind of walking through this and walking with some friends; I kind of...I've never really...I'm 34, so I've never had to experience some of it to ways that, like my friend Toni. She's...she was a caregiver when she was like 14 years old to her mom. And so there...that's developed something in her and how she shows up for people and how she serves and loves that I don't understand cause I haven't had to experience that at 14 years old. But one thing that I just want to encourage anybody that may have been in that space like me, put yourself in that space to be around your friends that are caregivers. Cause it's easy to almost ignore or just let them...let that season be with them and not be with them in it.

Elisa: Wow.

Eryn: And...and there...you change. Like I said like my mom, like seeing her changed me. And I'm so grateful that I put myself in it closer to it. You know it was my dad. So it was easier to put myself in it. But it could have also been really easy for me to have stepped out. And so I want to just encourage anybody that's listening that's kind of been in that same space that I have been where I haven't really had to see it or experience it. Put yourself in it, because it does change you. It...it makes you look at life differently. You hold life differently. You view service differently with your...with your friends and with your neighbors. And...and ultimately, not only will it change you when you put yourself in it; but also give something to your friend that's a caregiver. Cause they start to see they have something to offer to you also.

Elisa: To those caregiving right now, we just want you to know that your work and care is always appreciated. And even when you're feeling unseen, tired, or burned out; it matters.

Eryn: And to those being cared for, we want you to know that God sees you, He hears you, and He loves you because you are His.

Elisa: 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 are also links to connect with Eryn and me on social as well as a link to a free resource. It's an article about how to care for those who are in the midst of caregiving. You can find these links when you visit our website at godhearsheer.org. That's godhearsheer.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.



Elisa: Today's episode was engineered by Anne Stevens and produced by Mary Jo Clark, Daniel Ryan Day, and Jade Gustafson. We also want to thank Jody and Kathi for all of their hard work. We appreciate you all. Thank you.

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