



God Hears Her Podcast

Episode 95 – God’s Good Plans

Eryn Eddy & Elisa Morgan with Teresa Swanstrom Anderson

[Music]

Teresa: We forget that there’s that time and preparation, because how scary would it be to walk into a calling unprepared. And, yes, God can give you all the strength and all the power. Yes, I’m not saying anything against that. However, we still have to do the hard work. He’s not going to drop every single thing into our laps if we are not preparing ourselves to do that work, showing that we’re serious in following Him.

[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. Have you ever been so caught up in your own plans that you don’t realize you’re leaving God completely out? When has He shown up in the midst of your own dreams and plans to remind you that He has a good plan for you.

Elisa: Our guest today knows the pain that can come from leaving God out of our plans, and her life reflects a constant challenge to be bold in the things that God has called her to do.

Eryn: Teresa Swanstrom Anderson is an unlikely mom of six, as well as a community builder, author, speaker, and a huge Bible nerd. She loves to help women learn to slow down with Scripture and say “yes” to wherever God is leading them. She has written four books, including three best-selling Bible studies.

Elisa: Teresa Swanstrom Anderson, welcome!

Teresa: Hello!

Eryn: Teresa!!!

godhearsher.org



Teresa: Thanks for having me, ladies. I'm so excited!

Elisa: Tell us your story, you know. How did you come to be a Jesus lover?

Teresa: So we're in Denver, Colorado.

Eryn: Okay.

Teresa: ...I'm initially . . . well, born in California, mostly grew up in Seattle. And my dad and I went to Guatemala on a mission trip. It was a medical mission trip, and he is an entrepreneur. I don't know why we were invited on this trip at all, other than it was a couple of his buddies. Anyway, it opened my eyes to a completely new world, and I was never the same after that. And we came home — somehow convinced my mom that we needed to move to Guatemala! So...

Elisa: What?!

Teresa: Yeah!

[Laughter]

Elisa: And how old were you?

Teresa: So the mission trip was in fourth grade, and middle of my sixth grade year we moved. So I never...

Elisa: Wow!

Teresa: ...actually graduated sixth grade. So...

[laughter]

Elisa: Good job! Keep going.

Eryn: Wow! That's amazing!



Teresa: So we moved, and my dad was part owner in an airplane company. We lived, literally, at the international airport in a hangar.

Eryn: Oh.

Elisa: Wow!

Teresa: The runway was our backyard...

Elisa: Wow!

Teresa: ...And our front yard was a couple parking spaces and then this teeny-tiny street that would really be more of an alleyway. And on the other side of the alleyway was the Guatemalan army base. And it was the mid-1990s. There was a lot of guerilla warfare and political unrest. There were several coups while we were there. It was a time of extreme violence. It really shaped how I viewed the world, and I went to a private Christian school prior to that, that I equate to *Clueless*. And so this was...

Eryn: I love that!

Teresa: ...a huge culture shock, and there was eventually a hit out on my dad. So we fled...

Elisa: Oh my gosh!

Teresa: And... we were there for two-and-a-half years, and obviously fled when there was a hit out on my dad, when we discovered that. Ended up in public school, which was much more my speed at that point. Ended up graduating there and went to Seattle Pacific University. Graduated there in Art History. And I really felt like God was calling me to live a life in the art world and to be a light in the art world. And I just realized one day, as I was watching the hubbub of all the city down below by the Space Needle. And then if you look off to the right, you can see the ferry boats just really dreamily, slowly drifting from the pier to the San Juan Islands. And I felt like God was saying, *Which lifestyle are you after? Are you after the one of toiling and hustling and working hard and just busy-busy-busy? Or could you possibly be okay with something that's slower, but definitely from Point A to Point B?*

Elisa: Hm.

Teresa: ...And it was that day that I realized, *oh my gosh! I have been planning and planning and planning all these things.* My intent was to get my master's and then my doctorate in art history and move



to Europe to be a curator at some fantastic museum. And Italy is my first choice. I'm sure it's a very easy ... [laughter] ... job to get...

Elisa: Sure. Sure, sure, sure!

Eryn: Yeah! I wish!

Teresa: And I realized, as God was having this conversation with me, that I never consulted Him in any of this. I thought I was doing something *for* Him, but really it's only for Him if He is the One asking us to do it.

Elisa: Mm, mm!

Teresa: He hadn't, and I hadn't even had that real conversation with Him. So...

Eryn: I'm going to stop you there for a sec, cause that's so profound and so true...

Elisa: Yes.

Eryn: ...How did you discover that at the time? Cause it is so easy to... especially when you're a dreamer, and you're a go-getter, and you get excited, and you're just like *Ah! I'm gonna do it!*

Teresa: Yeah.

Eryn: ...And the Lord's like *I'm not a part of this conversation that you're having with yourself.* Would you just share a little bit more on that?

Teresa: Yeah. I think it's a real important thing to realize that just because you're passionate about something, or just because you're good at something, it doesn't mean that that's your calling.

Elisa: Mm!

Eryn: Mm!

Teresa: And that, I have just learned within the past several years, because I really... I didn't resent God at all, but I was kind of bummed. *Why did You allow me to spend those years (quote-unquote) "wasted?"* Because it was very obvious, I really felt one hundred percent, like He had called me to my bachelor's in art history, so why wouldn't He continue me forward? What would be the point?



Eryn: Right.

Teresa: And I've realized, as now I'm a Bible study author, that I study the Bible the exact same way that I come and study art, because I love... well, in art history I loved the behind-the-scenes. I wanted to know what was going politically, socioeconomically, what was going on in the artist's life, in his surrounding, in his city that would inspire this piece of art, whether a painting or anything...

Eryn: Yeah.

Teresa: ...a sculpture, whatever it was. And that's exactly the same way that I come to Scripture, because, you know, as much as we forget sometimes, we are not who the Bible was written to. We are not Israelites living thousands of years ago. Yes, it's *for* us, but it's not written *to* us specifically. And so there are a lot of nuances in the Bible that we won't understand because we're coming to it as people from the Western United States that don't even understand Middle Eastern tradition and thought. And so that is really, I think, what stands me apart from some others is that I love to dive into all that behind-the-scenes stuff. And there's a lot of humor in the Bible that we don't get, cause we...[Laughter] ... we're not understanding that tongue-in-cheek, you know, sarcasm, because we don't understand what they're really speaking about. So anyway, it's really interesting how just because you love something, or just because you're good at something, again, does not mean that that is your calling. But God will still use that probably within your calling.

Elisa: What a beautiful illustration, Teresa! You know ...eh... we...we tend to view life as this linear, you know, from Point A to Point B, as you were kind of saying. But it can meander off into ditches that we think are detours or mistakes, and the reality is they're kind of course corrections, if...if we can use that...that metaphor. And God uses all of it, but we may not be able to see that in a given moment. And I loved how you said, and I think you said you wanted to do something for God, but if He wasn't inviting you into it, maybe it wasn't for Him. Maybe it was for you.

Teresa: Right.

Elisa: And so God redirected you, and you've put that same passion and gifting...

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: ...into being an archeologist, if you will, of Scripture...



Teresa: Yeah!

Elisa: ...an art history buff of Scripture...

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Elisa: Yeah. Wh...where did your children and your marriage come into this...

Teresa: Yeah.

Elisa: ...calling, this long path?

Teresa: Yes. So when I opened my hands that day and gave everything back to God, I kind of assumed that the next day I would wake up, and I would know what I was supposed to do... [laughter]... and...

[speaking simultaneously]

Elisa: As we do _____

Teresa: ...what my calling actually was. And...

Eryn: Don't you wish it'd be that easy?

Teresa: [laughing] It would be great. And I discovered that that is not the way God always works. But even though I didn't know what I was supposed to do, I did know — almost immediately — what I was *not* supposed to do. And what I was not supposed to do was continue on in my master's and my doctorate in art history. So I was managing a restaurant on the waterfront in Seattle, and that is where I felt like I was stuck.

Elisa: Hm.

Teresa: And all these other people that I worked with, you know, they were going off to the Peace Corps. Or they were doing a internship in New York. And they were just doing all these really exciting sounding things. And here I was with a college degree at a gourmet burger place on the waterfront, and I just felt like *Okay, God, like what about me? Did You forget about me?* And, again, I have since recognized that there needs to be a time of preparation in all of our lives. There *has* to be. You know? Abraham waited 25 years for Isaac to come, and he had that misdirection, obviously...



Elisa: Right, right.

Teresa: ...He doubted, and God brought him on back, but we forget that there's that time of preparation. Because how scary would it be to walk into a calling unprepared? And, yes, God can give you all the strength and all the power. Yes, I'm not saying anything against that. However, we still have to do the hard work. He's not going to drop every single thing into our laps if we are not preparing ourselves to do that work, showing that we're serious in following Him.

Eryn: Yeah.

Teresa: So I was...

Elisa: Mm, that's good.

Teresa: ...there for a number of years, and finally I started working just a nine-to-five corporate job in a cubicle. And it was not super exciting, but my mentor's boyfriend helped me get the job. And he and I became best friends, and he is now my husband.

Elisa: Ahh!

Eryn: Oh!

Teresa: So I had nothing to do with their break-up at all, at all, at all, at all. [Laughter] They...they had broken up just years before...

Elisa: Disclaimer. There you go. Yeah.

Teresa: Yes. They broke up long before I ever thought that it would ever be anything with us. He's eight years older than I am, so... He hates when I say this, but it was more of a brother-sister relationship. I just really valued him, and he would set me up with his roommate, who sold door-to-door knives. And I was like *oh boy...*

Elisa: Oh, gosh, yes. Mm-hmm.

Teresa: ... *I don't know if that's maybe my person.* But we would set each other up with all sorts of people in our lives. I set up his best date ever, and I'm still waiting for my version of that "best date."



Elisa: Uh-huh!

Teresa: And we were just best friends, and we just really loved each other, you know...

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: ...brother-sisterish. And then...

Elisa: Kindredness, yeah.

Teresa: Kindredness! And then one day realized we were in love...

Elisa: Wow!

Teresa: ...And four months later we were engaged, and four months after that we were married. Four months after that I was pregnant...

Elisa: Boom!

Teresa: ...Four is a ... Yeah. Once we were in, we were all in.

Eryn: I love it.

Teresa: Now February is 16 years...

Elisa: Gosh.

Eryn: Wow!

Teresa: So, yes, it was kind of a whirlwind in the beginning. And in our very short period of dating, we went to an auction. Again, this was back in Seattle, and there was a black-and-white photograph that was one of the auctioned items of a little boy in Malawi who was praying.

Elisa: Oh wow!



Teresa: ...And it just spurred a lot of conversation. Ben and I knew that we wanted to live a life outside of ourselves. We wanted to live something that was different. We just didn't know what that meant or what that looked like. We just felt it deep within us. And, again, we weren't even engaged yet, but we knew that we were heading that direction. Something that night, just standing in front of that picture, took the blinders off. And God told both of us just, you know, not audibly, but just deep within our hearts, *Adoption is where I want you — specifically, Africa.* And adoption's been huge in my life. My mom has two brothers, one's biological, one is adopted. The biological brother had four biological kids and then became a foster parent, and they've had over a hundred and... I think a hundred and fifty kids in thirty years.

Elisa: Oh my word!

Teresa: They added on...

Eryn: Wow!

Elisa: Goodness!

Teresa: ...Yeah. They added on 3,000 square feet of their home just for bedrooms. Like it was their ministry. It was their life.

Elisa: Wow!

Teresa: And so I saw all of this...

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: ...through my whole life. And I never wanted kids. I didn't mention that part. I never had any interest in children. I thought, you know, I'm just going to live in Europe and live a very international life, and who needs kids and that? [laughing]... Obviously, at this point, God had changed my heart on that as well. You know, then Ben and I got married. We got pregnant real quick, and then Anton arrived. And six months later I was pregnant again. And just... things happened so quickly, and as soon as our second son, Leith, was born, we really felt like, *Okay, God, this is the time to start figuring out the adoption thing. What is that? What does that look like?* And so...

Elisa: Mm-hmm.



Teresa: ...we start in just studying all sorts of what...the expectation for each country. What are their qualifications? And every country is different, you know. Married a certain number of years, you can have kids. You can't have kids...

Eryn: Wow.

Teresa: ...they need to be of this age, just all sorts of different things. And every country was different. And we just fell head-over-heels in love with Ethiopia. And we already knew that we loved the food...

Elisa: Oh yeah...

Teresa: ...so that was our starting off point.

Elisa: Yes!

Eryn: I love that. That was the starting point.

[Laughter]

Teresa: And just fell in love with the culture, fell in love with the people, and really wanted a baby girl since we had two boys. But within that waiting period of bringing home our baby girl — her name is Imani. She is now — oh my gosh — she's almost 12! We really also felt like the Lord was asking us to bring home an older boy. And, again, this didn't make sense and, again, this was fast. And we would continually go into the back portion of our agency's website to just kind of pray over those kids, or with the older kids, or the kids with special needs. And one night we really like this specific kid was pointed at us from God.

Elisa: Hm. Hm.

Eryn: Wow.

Teresa: We asked for more information, and in the meanwhile we started asking for prayer and discernment from everyone around us — all of our family, all of our friends. Our pastor and his wife are dear friends of ours, and — I kid you not — every single person said, "No. Do not do this."

Elisa: Oh!



Teresa: ...In fact, a very, very close family member to me sat me down, knee to knee, and said, “You are going to destroy your family if you bring home this boy.” Everyone thought, again, we were doing too much, too, quick, *This is insane. You are one of those Americans that just try and save everyone.* So we sent back an email saying, “I’m so sorry to have gotten your hopes up. I just don’t feel like he’s the right fit for us.” You learn in our story four is humongous. I mean four is in everything. It’s bizarre! And so four months go by, and we get a call from our agency saying, “It’s time to go pick up Imani.” And so we are starting to talk about the details around that, and she also says, “By the way, that little boy that you had asked for information about, he has been moved from about 10 hours or so outside the city to about 15 minutes outside of where you’re staying, where your guesthouse is. Do you have any desire to see him, because...”

Eryn: Oh!

Teresa: ...he would have no idea. If you just brought gum and jump ropes to the orphanage, he would just, you know...everyone would just think that...”

Elisa: No expectation, yeah.

Teresa: No.

Elisa: Okay.

Teresa: Comes out, between Ben and I, that we thought about this little boy all the time. We prayed about him every day, independently, and we just thought the door was closed. So we didn’t even talk about it. And so that day we fly into Addis Ababa, the capitol of Ethiopia, and we go over to Ezekiel’s orphanage first. And as we’re pulling in, he’s the first one to jump, you know, run out the door, jump down the stairs, and come greet our van. And he immediately starts playing soccer with Ben, and all the boys and girls kind of start running a...around, you know, playing this little impromptu game. Meanwhile, I am leaning up against the van, and other little girls are starting to braid my hair. And I’m just praying over — his name is _____ [Thomasgin?] — *Lord, I pray that You would find a family for _____ [Thomasgin], that You would just surround him in love,* and just, you know, praying over this sweet little kid who was right around 7, 6. And over and over, almost like the Lord was standing next to me whispering in my ear, He said, *This is your son.*

Eryn: Mm.



Teresa: ...And I'm ignoring it because I'm praying over him, that he finds a family. And just like a broken record: *This is your son. This is your son.* And finally, it sunk in, and I was like [gasps] *Oh my gosh! Lord, this MY son! And he's living in an orphanage, and that's not okay.*

Elisa: Oh.

Teresa: ...And we were there for hours playing with him, and we just fell in love with him, and left that day. And we knew that Imani was extremely sick. She was nine pounds at five months...

Elisa: Oh my goodness!

Eryn: Wow.

Teresa: ...and just super malnourished, just like you would see on, you know, those horrible commercials with the big, distended tummy. Her skin just falling off of her limbs. Her face looked like a little turtle. So we were all in with Imani. We were trying to get her home even earlier than we were supposed to. She had had bronchitis for four of her five months and had never ...

Elisa: She needed...

Teresa: ...been taken to the doctor...

Elisa: ...healthcare. Yes, yes.

Teresa: ...She needed emergent care. Yeah.

Elisa: Yeah.

Teresa: So we were deep in with the embassy trying to get expedited visas for her and all these things. So we did not even talk about this little boy until the night before our red-eye. And Ben says, you know, "What do you think? What do you want to do? Have you been praying about this?" And I said, "I know a hundred percent what we're supposed to do, but I want to hear it out of your voice first." And he said exactly what I felt. And so we realized that day that we had been praying for prayer and discernment from people that had different callings than we had.

Elisa: Hm.



Eryn: Huh.

Teresa: And, yes, having that from friends and family is important; but, really, we need to be listening, ultimately, to Christ — not to the people who have different callings than we have.

Elisa: Mm-hmm. Because they were looking through a lens of what made sense to them...

Teresa: Yep.

Elisa: ...And sometimes — I mean I want to say this carefully — but sometimes what God has for us doesn't make sense and...

Eryn: Yeah.

Teresa: Oftentimes, yeah!

Elisa: Yeah, and...and He...He will guide us through. And I think you, you know, we've heard this in a lot of conversations, and you've said it as well is that He's going to equip us for that to which He calls us. He's going to provide what is needed.

Teresa: Yeah. And I think, for my folks anyway, they were scared because they had seen all these kids come through my uncle and aunt's home.

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: And, you know, there's a lot of pain and struggle and trauma surrounding th...this. And as parents, you always want the best for your kids, and you want them to be happy. You want them, you know, life to be easy for them and for everything to be rainbows all the time. But that's not reality, and that's not how we grow.

Elisa: Right.

Teresa: ...I mean if you have something really horrible happen to you, whether you find out about infidelity or cancer or just something really, really hard, what friend are you going to go to? Are you...

Eryn: Right.



Teresa: ...gonna go to the one that's always like bubbling and happy and they've never had anything hard happen in their lives? Or are you going to go to the...

Elisa: Yeah.

Teresa: ...friend that has been through hell and back and is still...

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: ...praising the glory of God? And still has that...

Eryn: Yeah.

Teresa: ...deep resonating joy and you know? And, really, the latter is who I would go to. And you have to go through that hard stuff to become that type of person, a person of substance and a person of texture and just richness...

Eryn: Yeah.

Teresa: Even as parents, we hate having our kids go through any of that stuff...

Elisa: No kidding.

Teresa: ...That is the important stuff. Yeah. So we brought him home. He renamed himself Ezekiel. And he is now just about 17. He turns 17 in about a month and a half. And he is amazing and lovely, and we're looking at colleges, which is bizarre.

Eryn: Oh!

Teresa: But, again, four months after we brought Ezekiel home, and we had Imani home already, we found out we were moving to Denver, and we were in San Antonio at the time. I...I neglected to say that, for my husband's ...uh...work. From San Antonio to Denver, and we had bought a house that was deemed uninhabitable, and we love ripping things apart. That's one of Ben and my great loves is just a lot of the construction projects. We've lived in so many houses through the years because we love making something that is a throw-away into something that is of value.



Eryn: Mm.

Teresa: ...So we were very wrapped up in... financially in this home. And it was naptime, and I was scrolling through Facebook one day, and there was a post about this teenage boy that needed a family, who was also in Ethiopia. And, again, very financially invested in ... ahem ... updating this deemed-uninhabitable home, really wading through a lot of trauma and hard stuff with Ezekiel. And, you know, in a new city. We hadn't been there for very long. And suddenly I burst into tears, and I'm like *God, this is my son*. Out of the blue!

Elisa: Goodness!

Teresa: ...We were not looking to adopt anytime...

Elisa: Wow!

Teresa: ...soon, especially not a teenage boy!

Elisa: Yeah.

Eryn: Yeah.

Teresa: ...You know that's...that's a lot different than a little baby. And...

Eryn: Yeah.

Teresa: ...Ben and I are like annoying high school kids. We talk every five minutes... [laughter] ... whether it's via text or phone calls. And I'm sure that I have like twenty texts on my phone while we're chatting from him. *How's it going? How's it going?*

Elisa: Mm, mm.

Eryn: Aww!

Teresa: ...But that day it was just radio silence. And it was like the Lord was preparing each of us individually before we _____ [gave birth?] to have a very big conversation that evening. So he walks in the door after work, I'm stirring dinner on the stove, he comes and kisses me, and he's like, "Hey, we



need to chat.” And I just basically verbally vomited all over him, and I said, “Is it about a boy named Abreham? Cause I think it’s our son.”

[Laughter]

Eryn: I love that!

Teresa: And his eyes got real wide, and he was like, “Actually, yeah.”

Elisa: Oh no way! No way!

Teresa: And it was...

Eryn: Wh-wh-what?!

Teresa: ...he saw the same kid’s story, different social media outlet, different person posting, but same child.

Elisa: I’ve got goose bumps!

Eryn: Wow!

Elisa: Yeah.

Teresa: The boy was in one of our agency’s orphanages. So it just...

Elisa: Wow.

Teresa: ... *Okay, God.* So we prayed about it together that night and called them the next morning and said, “Hey, we are interested in learning more about his boy named Abreham.” And they said, “Sorry, he’s actually already started the paper process with another family.” ...um...

Eryn: Oh wow.

Teresa: ...And she said... And because we know her well at this point, because we’ve already

Elisa: Yeah.



Teresa: ...brought home several children, she said, “Off the record, this is not a good fit...”

Elisa: Oh!

Teresa: “... but, legally, there’s nothing that I can do...”

Elisa: Okay.

Teresa: “...so I’d suggest you pray them out.”

Eryn: Ah!

Elisa: Wow!

Teresa: ...So we did!

Eryn: Oh. my. gosh!

Teresa: ...It took several months. But we got a call from them and said, “The family that was initially pursuing him actually decided on a sibling group. ...um... Are you still interested?” And so we brought him home quite a few months later.

Eryn: What’s so beautiful about your story is this willingness to live a bold life. I mean it’s just such a testament to how, because that is your desire to live a bold life, God entrusts you with bold decisions...

Teresa: Mm.

Eryn: ...that others may look at them and...and, like you said, like *I can’t believe they’re doing that*. Or *They’re adding, you know, (quote-unquote) “more chaos.”* Or...

Teresa: Right.

Eryn: ... *Why can’t they...* or, you know, all of those types of statements that could’ve been said to the side. And it’s just so sweet to see how God has put almost like these blinders on the sides of your peripherals to move forward, to continue to make bold decisions — and not just individually, but both of you guys as a unit...



Teresa: Yes.

Eryn: ...as one. That's so beautiful, and I love earlier what you were sharing about you, you know, dyed your hair pink to live a bold life day to day, because you've made big decisions that were bold, like big moments that were bold. But I think that, even those decisions that you've made that were big, the day-to-day, I mean, that's why God entrusts you with those big decisions, because you do that. That's just so beautiful...

Teresa: That's so good. Thank you for that.

Elisa: Are there times, Teresa, when even though you've intended to be bold — are there times when you have felt missed or not heard or overwhelmed or frustrated or alone...

Teresa: Yes.

Elisa: ...eh... in...in...in your desire to be bold?

Teresa: Yes. So we did bring home one other girl, little girl, after Abreham, but rewind back to living in San Antonio. We had just brought home Ezekiel, so we had ages 3, 4, an infant that had a lot of health issues and then, you know, a boy that was just about to turn 7 that spoke not a single word of English, had significant trauma and trying to figure out who was *this White family that I'm suddenly ...*

Elisa: A part of, yes.

Teresa: ...*living with?* Yes, you know, *this is my family, but I don't know them. What does that mean?* And it was a time of extreme exhaustion, and right during that point, Ben's job had changed. So he had always had a position within this company where he could just work from wherever. And this was before it's now where we do that a lot.

Eryn: Yeah.

Teresa: ...It wasn't as common back then, ten years ago.

Elisa: Sure.



Teresa: ...And he would just work from his phone. He'd be home a ton, we would do lots of stuff together, and he would just take phone calls when he needed to or hop on the computer when he needed to. Suddenly he was having to be in the office a lot of the time and traveling a ton, so I felt like a single mom a lot of the time. So any of you single moms or military wives, I can only catch a glimpse of just that exhaustion and overwhelm that you often feel. But one day I just had hit my breaking point, and I collapsed on the kitchen floor and just bawled, just ugly cried.

Elisa: Oh gosh, yes...

Teresa: ...And I had...

Elisa: ...been there.

Teresa: ...you know...

Elisa: Yes, mm-hmm.

Teresa: ...two...yeah, I think every mom has probably been there at some point... [laughter]...

Eryn: Yes.

Teresa: ...And I had two toddlers, you know, crawling on my lap trying to figure out, *What's wrong with Mommy?* giving me those, just slobbery kisses on my cheek, you know what I'm talking about...

Elisa: Aww!

Teresa: ...and just trying to care for me. And I'm holding Imani in my arms. Meanwhile, Ezekiel is looking at me from a couple feet away like *What is happening? This lady has lost it!* And I was like, *Lord, is this what You called me to? Because this isn't so fun!* [Laughter] *And I can't do this. This is too much. I don't want to do this.* And I just felt like He was, again, whispering in my ear the word "first fruits." And I knew what first fruits were. I've read the Old Testament. I know that they are a gift that you give to the Lord, you know, your...your perfect crop, your ...

Eryn: Mm.

Teresa: ...you know perfectly white lamb, your...the first, best back to the Lord in thanks for what He has provided. I get the concept. Didn't understand how that applied to me at all...



Elisa: Right.

Teresa: ...I have no...

Elisa: Yeah.

Teresa: ...ears of corn. I have no wheat. I have no lamb or goat. And...

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: No house!

Teresa: ...Right, yes, *Tell me, God.* And I felt like He was saying, *you're not giving Me the first fruits of your time.*

Elisa: Mm.

Teresa: And I just sat there. And when you're talking to God, just kinda the world slows around you. And I was like *Okay, tell me more what that means.* He said, *Well, you've been doing all these things, but where am I in it?* And I realized that I had been living in survival mode for so long that, again, I had just kind of accidentally planned Him right out of things, again.

Elisa: Sure, sure.

Teresa: I was one of the leaders at our MOPS group, so I was surrounded by other women. I was a leader in my Bible study, and really I was going to both those things, not so much as learning more about Christ or Scripture, but really as free childcare... [laughter]... and a cup of coffee that I could drink when it was still hot. And...

Elisa: Way to be honest. Yeah.

Teresa: Yeah...

Elisa: Yeah, yeah.



Teresa: You know I couldn't ask for help because I felt like, *Okay, God, everyone said, "Don't bring these kids home," that we...*

Elisa: Oh man!

Teresa: *...were doing too much. And so who am I to ask for help?*

Eryn: Right.

Teresa: *...And my family actually followed us to San Antonio, so I had my mom in town, my dad, my brother, my grandma. Everyone followed us, even though we knew that it wasn't our forever place. And, again, I was involved with MOPS and Bible study and church and all the things. I could not humble myself and admit the fact that I was struggling.*

Eryn: That's so relatable.

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: Yeah... [laughing]...

Eryn: That's so relatable, especially when you feel like the choices that you made... You almost feel like, in that, you're like ... [a humming noise starting in the background here]... *Did...did God just abandon me...*

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: Right.

Eryn: *...in the middle of this? Like He...*

Elisa: Cause He was the only one. Yeah.

Eryn: ...He was there...

Elisa: Yeah.

Teresa: Yeah.



Eryn: ...He was so present, and now these emotions I'm feeling, and the circumstance is so much bigger and hard and heavy...

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Eryn: ...that you wonder where He is in any of that. And I think sometimes we think that those big acts of faith secure us to not struggle.

Elisa: Mmmm, true!

Teresa: Oh, that's so good! Say that...

Elisa: Yeah, yeah.

Teresa: ...again, Eryn!

Eryn: Those big acts of faith secure us to not struggle. That's what we think. That's what...

Teresa: That's what we think!

Eryn: ...we tell ourselves. So then when...

Teresa: Yep.

Eryn: ...we struggle, we think we did something wrong, and we're being punished. Or we took a wrong turn, or maybe we missed God completely...

Elisa: It's our fault, yeah.

Eryn: ...in the decision. It's our fault. Shame comes in, and that's exactly what the enemy wants us to do is to believe what, you know, *maybe you mee... you know, this is why, you know, God really thinks this.* Or, you know, *You should have been listening to Him all along and you didn't, so now you're...* And that's what causes isolation, which then causes depression, which causes just like ...

[speaking simultaneously]



Teresa: Yeah, it's so cyclical...

Eryn: ...oh, just an array of things...

Teresa: ...isn't it?

Eryn: Yes!

Elisa: Down...down the rabbit hole. Yeah.

Teresa: Yeah! And it was really that day that I...

Eryn: Mm.

Teresa: ...just felt like, *Okay, I cannot live like this anymore. I, first of all, have to ask for help. But, more so, Jesus, I need You! I can't do this on my own.*

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Eryn: Yeah.

Teresa: And so I said, you know, still kind of fighting with Him, though, *I'm sorry. When am I gonna have time with You? I'm barely making it through anyway.* I can't get up any earlier because Imani still wasn't sleeping through the night; therefore, I wasn't either. I... Sleep was precious at that point. I was falling asleep not at stoplights, at Stop signs. That's how...

Elisa: Oh gosh!

Teresa: ...exhausted I was!

Elisa: Yeah.

Eryn: Ohh!

Teresa: So I knew that was not an option for me at that point. And naptime, every mom knows, that is your precious time. That's when you get stuff done. That's when you throw a load of laundry in, or clean



up the playroom, or do the dishes, or whatever it is. And that's when you get some stuff done. And I was like, *God, how am I supposed to give that to You, cause when am I supposed to do stuff otherwise?*

Eryn: Yeah.

Teresa: And I just felt like that was the first fruit that He was asking me to give up. So I started, whenever the kids would go down for a nap, I started just sitting down with my Bible. I would, at the time, was doing a lot of Beth Moore studies. Still do a lot of Beth Moore studies — what am I talking about? I love her stuff.

Elisa: Yeah.

Teresa: So, you know, Jesus brought me back to life as I was intentionally writing my prayers in a prayer journal, cause I couldn't just sit there and pray, or I was fall asleep. I had to write them out.

Eryn: Yeah.

Teresa: And He brought me back to life! I still — because God is the Inventor of time — He allowed me to do time with Him and still get all my stuff done.

Elisa: Like multiplied it, yeah.

Teresa: He multiplied it...

Elisa: Wow.

Teresa: ...And I have no idea how, but everything still got done that needed to be...

Elisa: Mmm!

Eryn: Wow.

Teresa: ...And I felt more joy and peace and patience and just all of... list it all down. And my family could tell that I had more patience, more kindness, you know. Ben would comment on it, the kids would comment on it, and I realized, *Okay, this is truly bringing light and life to me.* And so, every single day, for years and years, I did naptime devotions. And then, at one point, God asked me to get up early in the morning. And that was after we brought home Kids 5 and 6, and we brought them home at the same time,



and it was ... [music starts here] ... another act of *I'm sorry, no! At what point do I have time to get up early? I am exhausted. I can't do this.* But it was just an act of release. *This is my sacrifice to You, Lord. Even though I think I can't do it, now You are giving me the energy and the ability to.*

Eryn: Yeah.

Teresa: ...So now that's been eight years where I get up before the family. And it has changed so much and brought so much to my family, not just to me.

[Music]

Eryn: When life gets busy, we tend to forget about the significance of taking even just a short quiet moment with God. I love how Teresa shared her emotional shift after prioritizing time with the Lord.

Elisa: Her story connects in so many beautiful ways. And I love how she still has to learn to give it over to God, over and over again, because we can all forget to do that sometimes.

Eryn: Yes. Yes, Elisa, so true. 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. You can also find a link to learn more about Teresa Swanstrom Anderson and her books. There are also links to connect with Elisa and me on social. You can find these links when you visit our website at godhearsher.org. That's godhearsher.org.

Elisa: Thanks for joining us. 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 Gabrielle Boward and produced by Daniel Ryan Day, Mary Jo Clark, and Jade Gustafson. We also want to recognize the amazing Our Daily Bread Phone Team for all their help and support. Thanks everyone.

[Music]

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