



# God Hears Her Podcast

## Episode 96 – Growing Through Grief

### Elisa Morgan & Eryn Eddy with Karen Booker Schelhaas

[Music]

**Karen:** I mean, this has been a journey for sure, of letting go and realizing... I mean, you know, I think a lot of things in our lives break and there's kind of this idea that you can sort of glue things back together. And in some... some cases, God does help you glue some things back together. But when someone dies, like, the life I had really shattered. I mean, there weren't pieces I could glue together. I can't glue back some pieces and hand my kids, you know, a father offering anymore. I can't. That's gone. And... and I've had to really let go of that control, of feeling like that's my thing to fix or heal. And God really has shown up for my kids in ways that I... I really... It's hard to put words to it, frankly.

[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*.

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

**Elisa:** And I'm Elisa Morgan. Have you ever lost someone close to you? Maybe a friendship suddenly ended. Or you've grown distant with someone that you shared a great connection with. Or maybe someone you deeply loved has passed away and you've been living without them.

**Eryn:** Today, we are talking with a woman who knows about loss and grieving all too well. Karen Booker Schelhaas lives in Colorado and is a full-time mother to five children, including two who were adopted from Ethiopia. In 2019, she was widowed and lost the love of her life. But instead of that being an end for her, her faith kept going and grew in her a passion to serve the grieving at her church and in her community.

**Elisa:** Karen is a dear friend of mine, and I am really excited to have this conversation with her on *God Hears Her*. Eryn, do you have somebody in your life that you, like, text almost every day?



**Eryn:** Oh yes. Yes. I'm grateful that they don't get tired of hearing from me.

**Elisa:** Well, I am so excited to introduce you to my texting buddy, and my walking partner, and my neighbor, and a woman I have known for, gosh I think we decided thirty years at least.

**Eryn:** Wow.

**Elisa:** Karen. Karen Schelhaas. And Karen, welcome.

**Karen:** Thank you, it's great to be here.

**Elisa:** Yeah, yeah.

**Eryn:** Karen, it's so nice to meet you.

**Elisa:** So, Karen, as we start off, can you walk us through your story?

**Karen:** Well, I am the oldest of four children and started out my journey in Kansas with my parents and three younger brothers. And we moved to Colorado Springs, Colorado when I was a freshman in high school. And I really did have an idyllic childhood. Went off to Wheaton College in Chicago, spent four years there, made some life-long friendships. I had great four years of college, graduated from college, kind of went through a nasty breakup, had sort of sworn off men for a while...

**Elisa:** Yup, yup.

**Karen:** ... and was busy working at a Christian non-profit. And at my mother's prodding, of course, you know, the mothers are always right, said, *Hey, go... go try out this Bible study called 'Twenty Something' for people your age.* And I went one time, and my husband Brant was leading the group. And I didn't know he was going to be my husband at that point, but about a month later he called and asked me out and we started up a great friendship, you know, falling in love, really. Hiking and biking out on the Colorado trails. And were married about, goodness, eight months later in the summer of '95. Fast forward, we had our first baby about two and a half years after we were married, and all was kind of going according to plan. And took us a while but we got pregnant with our second child and about an hour, or maybe five hours, before that baby was born, we learned that he had a rare genetic condition and would not survive much beyond birth. And so, I gave birth on July 5<sup>th</sup> of 2000 to a little baby who died about an hour after he was born. And that was really my first experience with things going way, way, way off script.



And was sort of plunged into grief with my husband and we had, you know, a little two-and-a-half-year-old at the time. And I, you know, I had... I had no coping skills, really, about how to handle that. And so, I remember being out on this road that I can see from my window here today, and it was about six weeks after he died and, you know, I'd never really lost it with God before. I had known and walked with God my whole life. And I was driving back from something, and I was alone in the car, and I remember just... it... it just bubbling up, and this just fury came out of my mouth. And... and I just started screaming at God and I'd never done that in all of, you know, at that point my... all of my thirty years. And... and there was this quiet stillness after all of this, you know, grief came out, and it was like God just whispered, *I can take it, keep it coming...*

**Elisa:** Wow.

**Karen:** ... *I can take it, keep it coming.* And so, I learned in that moment that, you know, God can handle everything that I give Him, and that lament really can become this form of worship...

**Eryn:** Yeah.

**Karen:** ... because it speaks to a relationship. And I don't have to clean it up for God, and I don't have to have all the answers before I go to Him, and I don't have to... have to have it figured out. So, the death of that child certainly, you know, rocked us, but we did move forward. And... and long, long, long story short, the legacy of that baby that died actually became the adoption of two children from Ethiopia, something that we had never pursued before or been open to up until that point. And... and a long, you know, it is a... it is a long story, but we ended up having two more biological children even though there was a twenty five percent chance of that rare genetic disorder showing up again. We did have two more children, and that's a story and a podcast in and of itself.

**Eryn:** Yes.

**Karen:** And then, in 2008, we did go down to Ethiopia and adopted two children ages two and five, so brought the grand total to five. And thus began just a very busy season of what, you know, we called the Schelhaas Seven. Such a special family moniker. And, you know, it was just a very busy life. Brant kind of, you know, had the provider hat on his head. We went through a couple of seasons of unemployment, watched God's faithfulness through that. At one point, Brant was working five different jobs to take care of our family so that I could be at home with all these little kids, and, you know, was willing to do any and all work. As I look back on that, I... I see how that really spoke so much to his character, and who he was, and his humility. So, you know, we adopted those two children in 2008, which have been the joy of our



lives. You know, adoption doesn't always go that way, and, you know, we've certainly had our share of heartaches in our family, but that has not been one of them. It's been a... a really amazing journey for our family. We're a biracial family, and live in a predominantly white area, and that... that became a story in and of itself. But, you know, just really busy season of running kids to activities and sports, and being involved in our schools and church, and neighbors, and doing all kinds of fun things together, and really just, you know, living this amazing life. I mean, a little... little pause button in there is that before... right, like literally a year before we adopted our children, I had a couple of surgeries go terribly wrong and I actually lost half my intestines and was in the ICU...

**Eryn:** Wow.

**Karen:** ... for two... for two weeks, and... and had to fight my... and really claw my way back to health.

**Eryn:** What was that due to?

**Karen:** Well, the truth is I probably had too many babies.

**Eryn:** Okay.

**Karen:** And it did a number on my body. But they went in, and... and a... you know, what... what was supposed to, you know, fix me ended up, I think, leading me down a road that kept me very dependent on the Lord. And I even, at one point, had a bag that I had to change in the middle of the night. And I had, at that point, three little kids, and had to have friends coming each day to come and help us as I navigated that road to recovery.

**Eryn:** Which that, in itself, I mean that level of caretaking, you know... hooo, I can't imagine with having kids and... just ha... and, you know, you're worried about that thing popping, let's be honest right? It's just... it's...

**Karen:** Right. Right. It was very humbling experience for sure. But, and, you know, I... I am sort of by nature capable and strong, and it was really a time for me to watch other people care for me, care for my children. I couldn't pick up my two-year-old, and Brant obviously returned to work, and then obviously served our family at night. But I had friends there one... one after the other, day after day, and learned in that experience, I think, something that would serve my future, which was, you know, community is so incredibly important. We cannot live outside of community. And that's especially true of the grief process. And, you know, so it was interesting because, you know, as I... as I'll get further into the story, you know,



Brant had that experience of having to live through, you know, signing the living will and all the... the next of kin orders, and all the things that we weren't expecting when I was in the ICU, and I think...

**Elisa:** For you. Yes, for you, yeah.

**Karen:** Yeah. And... and so we... and so we both have been on, you know, both sides of this now and have had to take care of each other and we learned a lot through that experience, I think. And it gave him some empathy for me when I was on the other side of the bed caring for him. So...

**Elisa:** So, tell us what happened with Brant.

**Karen:** So, in 2016 we launched our first born to college, which I thought was going to be my greatest heartache of that year. And about four weeks after he left for college in Boston. You know, Brant had started losing some weight, and he was tired, and we just thought, *well, you know, that's what's going to happen, you're getting older and it's just aging.* And he happened to go to a doctor and, on a lunch break, and the guy said, *hey, let me pull a blood panel and let's just take a look at some of your numbers.*

**Elisa:** And how old is he at this point?

**Karen:** At this point he's 46.

**Elisa:** Okay.

**Karen:** So, three days later we're in an oncology office, and they let him know that, you know, it looks like you have a very rare form of blood cancer. And this is a... this is a really healthy, active, slim 47-year-old man, whose greatest physical ailment had been a sinus infection. So, we go from that to you have an incurable, stage four blood cancer. Not only is it rare, but you have the rarest form in what's something called the blastoid variant. So, I have a wonderful family, and my brother, actually, had been diagnosed with a form of cancer a couple years before, and so had been knee deep in the research. He's a researcher by nature, an engineer by profession. And he was on it so quickly, and we quickly discovered that the best doctor to deal with this disease was at MD Anderson in Houston. And this is where I just have to pause, because I want your listeners to really hear how, even in the greatest pain and heartache, God shows up. And if we keep our eyes open, we can see Him at work. And... and one of the biggest ways that happened was, you know, so my son had just left for college, and they have this wonderful, vibrant parent community. And in my desperation, I typed on this Facebook group chat to all these parents, *hey, this just happened to our family. We're a month into school, and we were reeling, and we...*



*we'd covet your prayers. Within an hour of sending that message on the parent board, these are to all strangers...*

**Elisa:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Karen:** ... I get a message back from a woman in Houston, Texas, and she says, *Karen, our youngest is a classmate of your son's. I know we don't know each other, but we have a second home and it's a mile and a half from MD Anderson. And when you come down here for treatment, it is yours to stay in, to sleep in, to rest in, to cook in, and we will meet you. We'll greet you at the door when you arrive. Out of nowhere, God's provision.*

**Eryn:** Wow.

**Karen:** And we threw it out to our communities in Denver. And I'm... I'm here to tell you that in a two-and-a-half-year journey, that is a way that God showed up time and time again, through my new friends Jennifer and Kenny. They are both of African descent, and so, simultaneous to all this going on, my daughter who's from Ethiopia experienced a really difficult, racially motivated thing at her predominantly white school. And they came around me in ways I don't even have words for, provided wisdom...

**Eryn:** Wow.

**Karen:** ... gave me good advice, and that actually ended up leading to my daughter founding the first black student alliance at... at her high school. It's actually the first one in the district. And it's...

**Eryn:** That's amazing.

**Karen:** It's still, you know, doing amazing... amazing work. And my younger son actually gets to benefit from it. So, you know, they had a car in the garage, gassed and ready to go, because I kind of made a joke like, *oh, we... you know, we don't want to be any trouble, we'll just walk over to the med center, a mile and a half away. And she just, like, burst out laughing and she's like, Karen, you do not walk anywhere in Houston, Texas in August and September.*

**Eryn:** In August? [Laughter.]

**Karen:** Yeah, she's... she knew what she was talking about...



**Eryn:** It's going to be a little hot!

**Karen:** ... and so we... we ended up having a... having a car that they left for us, and she'd always have flowers on the ca... on the counter, with some kind of encouraging note, and clean sheets where we could lay our weary head. And I'm telling you this... this home became a place where we could really find refuge from the storm. I mean, they showed up... they showed up during treatments, they would come sit with me, they'd take me out to dinner and make me laugh when Brant was in the hospital.

**Eryn:** Wow.

**Karen:** I mean, they... they showed up. They... they showed up in so many ways. You know, I... And part of the story, too, is I got caught in the Houston hurricane. You know, Hurricane Harvey.

**Elisa:** Harvey, yup.

**Karen:** I'd never been in a hurricane before.

**Eryn:** Golly!

**Elisa:** Yup.

**Karen:** And, you know, I mean, Kenny's on the phone with me, I mean, I would take food up the stairs every night because I got stuck at the place, and Brant was stuck in the hospital. And so, I, you know, would take food upstairs thinking, you know, I'm going to... I'm going to come around the stairs in the morning and see a flood in the basement, because, I mean, the water got all the way to the front step...

**Elisa:** Yes, yes.

**Karen:** And so, they were just, you know, on the phone with me constantly, and I'm telling you, I was a stranger...

**Elisa:** Yeah.

**Karen:** I was a stranger.

**Elisa:** And they welcomed you in.



**Karen:** And they treated me like family. And they still do...

**Elisa:** What a gift.

**Karen:** ... and they're like an older brother and sister, truly. And... and such a gift from this experience, so...

**Elisa:** Karen, bring us forward to Brant's death and that... passage. And then into how do you get up the next morning and the next and the next and the next. And how do you raise teenagers, and how do you care for yourself. You have such a rich library of experience. And I can hear, already, what you've shared, that you've drawn from what God allowed earlier in your life, each step. And I... and I hear that the layering of lessons that are not mistakes that, you know...

**Karen:** Yeah, preparation.

**Elisa:** Yeah. And I'm hearing the enormous value of community. But bring us forward to how it evolved.

**Karen:** Yeah, in our Denver community, I mean, we flew down there on Southwest Airlines and never once paid for a plane ticket. That's how our community came around us. And my... my dear, loving parents showed up and cared for the four children that were still living here. They're in their, you know, late seventies, and... and showed up and really were the hands and feet to my children. So grateful for them. You know, we got about... I don't know, we got to this wonderful clinical trial, great experience with the doctor, we got about an eight-month period of remission where we were able to live, and breathe, and move, and go on vacation. And Brant was able to coach his last season of baseball, which was incredibly meaningful to our fourth child, [Brock]. And then, you know, we all went and celebrated my parents fiftieth wedding anniversary in California at Mount Hermon, where we had been 33 years before. Had this amazing couple of weeks in California with my whole side of the family. And got back, and about three days later found Brant in the closet, and we quickly... my oldest was home, still, from college. We ended up taking him to the hospital and that began a slow march to what would be the day that he went home, on April 12<sup>th</sup> of 2019. So, it was about a two-and-a-half-year journey. It eventually, you know, the blood cancer ended up going to his brain. I will remark here about an incredible season. It was at Thanksgiving, it was our daughter's sixteenth birthday, and I got a phone call from Houston. Brant's parents also travelled down there several times so that I could be here with our kids for some big moments, like birthdays and... and sporting events. And they were down in Houston, and I got a call that Brant had had a massive seizure and was in the ICU. Without going into all those details, ended up flying all of our children down there, the day before Thanksgiving, to sit vigil at their father's bedside and he was in a





coma. And, you know, just all the visuals you can imagine of that experience, and so I was there with my five kids, watching all... And of course, you know, Jennifer and Kenny had a seven-passenger vehicle waiting for me when I showed up with the kids. And, you know, I really like Jerry Sittser. I like his take on miracles, because God performs miracles to bring Himself glory. And... and I do see, you know, that He... He performed miracles in Scripture. We got to see a miracle that week in the ICU. But, you know, Brant eventually died. And the... and the truth is, the people in Scripture that had the miracles or came back to life, they eventually died, too. So, it seems to me to be a moment where God's glory gets to shine through. And we watched that that week in the ICU. Brant woke up, and my kids got to squeeze his hand, and they got to speak. And he fought for about six weeks to get back to us in rehab down there and then was back in time for Christmas. We got that last Christmas together, and then it was kind of a long, slow march to his death on April 12<sup>th</sup> of 2019. So, you know, woke up the morning of April 13<sup>th</sup>. I had plunged some tulip bulbs into the ground, just in defiance, I think. The... the fall before when the remission was over, and he was again dealing with the cancer. And... and they came out in all their glory on the morning of April 13<sup>th</sup>, and... and they were blooming, and none of my neighbor's tulips were blooming. And I remember thinking, *okay, beautiful things can rise out of this hard ground.*

**Elisa:** I remember coming to your house, Karen, and I was stunned by them. I remember your posts on CaringBridge, and various texts, and you would have your coffee out there in the... the days after Brant went to heaven, went to be with Jesus, and you would remark on the resurrected beauty that God had gifted you. And that... that was stunning, and... and yet it doesn't take away one drop of the pain in... in your soul. There were so many days that I would text with you. And you taught me this as you walked with me through Evan's recent bout with bladder cancer, and you helped me get the lay of the land at MD Anderson and everything else. But sometimes I would just send you a heart in the text, or sometimes I would just heart your text and you would say, *that's enough*, you know, *that's enough, that means just as much as a million words.* And... and I just... I remember it's been nearly three years, now, and you have been a widow, that, you know, club nobody wants to join. And you have scratched and clawed your way from the love of your life to a life. Can you talk to us about how you've done that? And, behind you in your home office, hangs a painting. And it's a gift from this precious family you've been referring to. And it was hanging in that home where they had invited you to stay, and they gifted it to you to hang in your home. Maybe as you're beginning to unpack how you've managed to start again, what is that painting? What is it about, and what does it depict, and what does it represent?

**Karen:** I think for me it represents defiant hope.

**Elisa:** Oooh, oooh.



**Karen:** I do. I see it in her eyes. You can see it behind me...

**Elisa:** Well, what is it? Describe it. Yeah.

**Karen:** Well, I think you could look at my situation, and I could, you know, I... in a lot of reflection, I've looked at my situation and thought, *this is utterly hopeless*. You know, the father of my children is gone. I have four of my five kids are teenagers. I'm in the thick of life, I'm in the most expensive season of my life, and... and the guy that had the MBA is now gone, and...

**Elisa:** Yes. Oh, gosh.

**Karen:** You know, I... and... and so that picture, actually, we had loved it.

**Elisa:** Describe it, Karen.

**Karen:** It's a woman who's in this beautiful gown, but she has this look on her face that's not downcast, she's looking forward. And I just see in her a lot of what I think God has planted in me, which is this defiant hope, you know? I don't get to choose where I've been planted, but I can choose whether or not I allow God to let me bloom. And often I'm not like this gorgeous bush full of lush hydrangeas, I'm like the little pink flower on the cactus in the desert. But I think God has continued to help me put one foot in front of the other. I've been very honest, I think, about my grief, which I think in turn has given permission to my children to be honest with their grief. Kind of like that moment, you know, twenty years ago, when I was driving down the road and it just all erupted before the Lord. And you realize, you know, He can handle anything that I give Him. And that lament really is that form of worship. The day after Brant died, I was greeted by the tulips and my oldest and I strapped on our running shoes, because that's what we do. And I would say that God has really helped use discipline in my life, like making my bed every morning, and cooking for the kids, and responding to phone calls, and dealing with an 18-inch stack of folders of business things that were not in my wheelhouse or my language. And God's been really faithful to walk me through, you know, everything one step at a time. So, I think that defiant hope that you see in her eyes is just a constant reminder. And... and she showed up, I mean, I was sitting here in the middle of the pandemic, and the doorbell rang and there was this giant package on my front door. And it was just like an oasis in the desert, honestly. And so, she's been sitting behind me in my newly remodeled office.

**Eryn:** I continue [inaudible] so inspired by this family, having the emotional and financial capacity to bless you. And the Lord just knew, He just knew to place them in your life. And who would have thought that a Facebook message to strangers would lead...



**Karen:** Strangers.

**Eryn:** ... to holding you.

**Elisa:** But you asked, too. You asked. She asks, she defiantly hopes, she is brave, she is courageous. Recently, you've begun to work in a group called GriefShare, I think it's called, at our church. And you help other people work through grief. You've been through the program for yourself. You know, what's your advice for people? What have you learned about grief? A... a kind of a deep respect for it, I... I think. You know? What... what... what can you put into words for us all?

**Karen:** That's holy ground, that's for sure. Definitely holy ground. Unpleasant, rocky, dark ground, often. And I would say, you know, I mean a lot of people refer to those five stages of grief, you know, by Kubler-Ross, but that... that was for the dying. I mean, I... I think you can experience all five of those things on any given day, so, I think there are no rules to grief, there's no timeline. It's long, slow work. I think initially we jumped out of the gate and, you know, it was kind of shock sort of propels you into those first few months. And it does help soften the blow of reality, but eventually, you know, reality sets in. That fall after Brant passed away, I mean, my daughter got up and spoke to seven- or eight-thousand people five weeks after her... after her father passed away, and got to tell this story of how, you know, we can do hard things. And I really have seen God turn my children into people of influence. Truly. And it's been through great, great suffering. I mean, any mother would never choose...

**Elisa:** Oh, so true. Yes. Yeah.

**Karen:** ... this story for her children. But I am here to tell you that I have seen remarkable things happen through and in my children in spite of losing their father, which speaks to the power of God in our lives. And He does not leave us alone in this. And so, in 2019 I launched, you know, that daughter to her first year of college. I mean, she started college five months after her father passed away and... and, you know, my oldest, Booker, went back to his senior year, which was a heavy, you know, lots of labs, and really busy. And then the pandemic hit in March of 2020. And simultaneous to all this, menopause decided to show its beautiful face, and so, I was dealing with this wild trifecta of grief, and menopause, and...

**Eryn:** Hormones, and all the things...

**Karen:** And yeah, I mean just not sleeping and crazy, but...



**Elisa:** And you're not even fifty. Yeah. Yeah.

**Karen:** Oh, no. No. Brant died when I was 48. So, yeah. It's just... it's... th... it was just this crazy trifecta and so the pandemic hits, they both, you know, Booker and Brooklyn got kicked off their campuses, so now I've got five kids at home. All five are trying to do school, remote learning. I mean, I don't even have words for the level of... for what that was. However, now that I can look back at it, I mean, we were on family bike rides to keep ourselves from going crazy, and family hikes and, you know, you couldn't be around anybody, but you couldn't be with the neighbors, our... You know, we couldn't be with community. So, we really became our own little community, and we would spend, I'm telling you, two to three to four hours sitting at my dinner table at night.

**Elisa:** Wow.

**Karen:** And I saw some really amazing things happen at that dinner table and it became a really sacred space for our family. And it's where, I think, we learned to really give language to our grief, and where we could come around each other. And, you know, if one was struggling maybe another was feeling a bit stronger, and... and we just, the ebb and flow of that really was beautiful to watch. Especially now as I look back and it really built something in our family that I'm not sure could have been built any other way.

**Eryn:** For somebody that's listening right now that they've experienced an extreme grief, tragedy of some sort, of losing a loved one, and they feel, maybe, that their family is kind of all siloed. Maybe isolated, maybe not collected and together, and they're all processing grief differently because, like you said it...

**Karen:** And we do.

**Eryn:** ... comes in different waves and we all experience it different times, and we're not always on the same time frame of when the wave hits. How did you create a space, and then what are some practical ways that you did that? Maybe emotionally, what was that like for you, but then practically how you applied it in creating unity amongst your family?

**Karen:** That January of 2020 I joined a GriefShare group at my church. And I remember showing up and the leader was a woman named Dawn. And I can talk about that later, too, just this community of local widows that God has provided for me that has been so life giving. But she was one of the first, and I ended up attending with one of my widow friends, who we were widowed within a month of each other. But Dawn was about, I don't know at that point, six years out from her loss and I remember looking at her at the front and going, *she's upright, and she's working, and she's contributing, and she's smiling even.*



**Elisa:** She's living, yeah.

**Karen:** And it was... Yeah, and it was evidence to me that, you know what? Maybe I will survive this. Maybe I won't always feel how I feel today, which is, you know, gutted. And trying to get my kids through the hardest experience of their lives. And so, we were about halfway through that GriefShare group, which gives you wonderful tools, teaches you that grief is not linear, that we need each other, and that there aren't really any rules to grief, and that everybody does it differently. So, I'd begun that sort of training, going every week, and then the pandemic hit, which ended up being such a gift. Because you ask about the tools, Eryn, that I was able to employ, you know, really around my dinner table because that's when we convened as a family. It was this moment where I finally had access to some of those videos from the GriefShare program that I wouldn't have had access to if we hadn't gone, you know, virtual and started meeting on Zoom. And so, I was able to show some of those videos to my kids, which really...

**Eryn:** Yeah, that's cool.

**Karen:** ... sparked a lot of conversation. And God used those as tools for sure. And I think just, you know, we were shoved in this house, I mean, 24/7, and so you couldn't hide. You know, you couldn't hide your raw grief. And have my kids seen every tear that's fallen from my eyes? No. They have not. But they've seen a lot. And they've seen, you know, I think I've had two and half days since Brant passed away that I could not get out of bed. And they witnessed and watched, and I think it's given them permission to go, *you know what, there's no rules for this, and it's going to hit us all differently each day, and we're going to find grace for each other.* I would encourage listeners who feel like, you know, their family's gone off into different corners to just be patient. Give lots and lots of grace. And realize that people are doing the best they can with what they've been handed. People really are.

**Elisa:** I've been really struck by how you'll text me and say, *it's a bad day*, you know, *it's a grief day, please pray for me.* Or, as you have looked at the months stretching ahead of you, and you knew well what tasks you had to face. You had to clean out your basement, and all of your family's stuff, you know, from...

**Karen:** And my closets.

**Elisa:** ... And your closets. And then, you... you know, did some freshening of your house to create a new home for the future of your family. And... and then you would look at, *I need to get a job.* You know, and many, many widows face that, you know. But I've been struck by the way you looked at it and you



would say, *I can take this week, or I can make sure I build this memory in my daughter's life, or I can make sure that we have another family experience.* And you didn't try to get it all done immediately. You took your time, and you did your work to get it done. Yeah.

**Karen:** Yeah, it's the one day at a time concept, really. I have a... a dear friend [Christa], who banged out these... on... on a piece of metal on this bracelet that I wore every day during that journey with Brant, and it said, *One day at a time.* And sometimes it's an hour at a time, and you just, you do the next right thing, you know? It was that stack on my desk of all the business things. I mean, there's a business to people dying. And it was a language... a lot of language that I didn't speak. I had to learn new languages, I had to make phone calls, I've learned I have to hire experts when I don't understand things. And you just do the next thing. You show up at the next game, you sit at the foot of the kid who's crying, and you listen, and you realize you can't fix, and you can't control it, and you can't heal it. That it's God's work to do. But you can be present, and you can just look for those opportunities every day.

**Eryn:** So much surrender in that.

**Karen:** And I'm a control freak. I mean, I'll just be honest.

**Eryn:** I was going to say it's... that's so hard.

**Karen:** I'm a cont... type A, control freak, and this has been a journey, for sure, of letting go and realizing. I mean, I think a lot of things in our lives break, and there's kind of this idea that you can sort of glue things back together. And in some... some cases God does help you glue some things back together. But when someone dies, like, the life I had really shattered. I mean, there weren't pieces I could glue together. I can't glue back some pieces and hand my kids, you know, a father offering anymore. I can't. That's gone. And... and I've had to really let go of that control, of feeling like that's my thing to fix or heal. And God really has shown up for my kids in ways that I... I really, it's hard to put words to it, frankly.

**Elisa:** You're facing a new challenge, really, in just the next few days from this conversation. You're starting something new. Tell us about what your new challenge is and how you feel about it.

**Karen:** So, I know it's been a great privilege for me to be here for these last two and a half years with the kids. I had done some subbing at our local charter school for about three years before Brant got sick. And actually helped co-author a book with my friend Kacey about her story of being shot in the library of Columbine. That was simultaneous to Brant being sick, and so it was a good distraction, but also a wonderful, you know, story to watch beauty from ashes as I was walking through my own ashes for sure.



That project actually was released probably ten days after Brant passed away, literally. So, you know, the timing wasn't lost on me. But I have been here for the last two and a half years, and I feel grateful for that provision to have been here full time with the kids and to help us kind of move forward as a family. And to be here to catch a lot of the grief and to be present with the kids. But it's become very clear that, you know, the end of Brant's health coverage is nearing, and I need to provide health insurance for my family, specifically three of my kids who live out of state. I have... two of my daughters are in college, and then my son is getting ready to depart for Brazil for a really cool experience there that's been delayed twice because of COVID. So, I really saw that writing on the wall, and I began to, you know, peck out my resume, and talk to people and open doors. And...and God really has opened a door to work in my son's school district, which keeps me on my two youngers son's schedule, which feels really important to me right now. But it's also a way for me to love on some kids in the special education department. I'm looking forward to, you know, hopefully loving people well. And stepping outside of my home, there's definitely been some grief to that. And... and a change in my schedule, but I... I do believe God has created this doorway, and I've learned to walk with Him through the doorways that I don't always understand, you know, exactly what's on the other side. But I've learned in this experience that I really can trust God. I mean, I said that before, you know, for all those 47 years before, but I have seen it time and time again. How, you know, God with us, Emmanuel, has just... it's changed my life, and it's changed how I can get myself up, and out the door, and try new things, and make those phone calls, and show up at games by myself, and He's promised to go with us, and He does. And I... I've seen that more times than I can count since I've been widowed.

**Eryn:** Would you pray over the woman that's listening right now, that is maybe carrying an immeasurable amount of grief and doesn't really know where to place it or what to do? Maybe she's listening to this right now in her bed, or maybe yesterday was that day.

**Elisa:** Right.

**Eryn:** Would you pray over her right now?

**Karen:** I will. I will. *Lord, we come to you as the God who hears us. God, you promise to be with us in the valley of the shadow of death. You promise to be with us in the middle and the in-between, and You promise to be with us on the mountaintop in equal measures. God, I know what it is to kiss that floor of that valley, and to be laying face down in the dirt. Lord, I pray for the woman who may find herself there today, would she know that, deep in her bones, that You are the lifter of her head. That she doesn't have to rescue herself. That You alone can rescue from the darkness, from the depression, from the worry, from the anxiety, Lord, that you are with us in those experiences, but that You lift our heads, and that You*



*give us the strength. You carry us when we don't have strength to walk, but then You help us put one foot in front of the other. Lord, you are the Author of hope, and Lord, without You we are hopeless. And so I pray, Lord, that for that woman that is distraught today and in more pain than she ever thought possible, that she will sit at Your feet and trust You with her story. Trusting that You have good things ahead, and that You will be gentle with her and kind, and that You are close to the brokenhearted. God, give her the strength to walk with You through that. Show her just little tiny glimpses of what might be ahead, and that there are good things ahead, and that You will not leave her in her distress. In Jesus' name.*

[Music]

**Elisa:** I've had the privilege of knowing Karen for years, and I am so thankful that her perseverance has led her to where she is today. She is truly a gift, and I know that her experiences speak to many who are in the same situation.

**Eryn:** She is so inspiring for those of us in the midst of a deep pain. You can get through it.

**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. The show notes have a link to learn more about GriefShare. And there are also links to connect with Eryn and me on social. You can find these links when you visit our website at [godhearsher.org](http://godhearsher.org). That's [godhearsher.org](http://godhearsher.org).

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

[Music]

**Elisa:** Today's episode was engineered by Gabrielle Boward and produced by Daniel Ryan Day and Jade Gustafson. We also want to recognize Kim and Linda for all of their help and support. Thanks everyone.

[Music]

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