



# God Hears Her Podcast

## Episode 187 Building Community as a Mom

**Elisa Morgan & Eryn Eddy-Adkins with Tara Edelschick and Kathy Tuan-MacLean**

[Music]

**Tara:** God invites you to share your story. God asks you to trust and obey. God transforms your pain and then invites you to be an agent of shalom. And we see this with all of these mothers. And as long as they don't say no, no matter what you're going through as a mom, there is transformation. And there...and God can use you and all the pain you've been through to help you be an agent of shalom in your family and then in...in the world.

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**Vivian:** You are listening to *God Hears Her* a podcast for women where we explore the stunning truth that God hears you. Join our community of encouraging one another and learning to lean on God through Scripture, story, and conversation at [godhearsher.org](http://godhearsher.org). God hears her. Seek and she will find.

**Elisa:** We are connecting with two really smart women who are also really knowable. And I love that combination, because if I just said smart, I'd go, I don't belong here. But if I said just also the rest of it, we all belong. So Tara Edelschick and Kathy Tuan-MacLean, you've come together to write this Bible study *Moms at the Well*, and you've been partnering for a while. It's not like a new thing to really help moms grow in their faith and in their understanding of Scripture. So Tara and Kathy kind of cue us up here. How did you guys meet, and what brought you together, especially on this topic of moms and development?

**Kathy:** Well, Tara and I have been friends for a very, very, very long time. She married my colleague Jeff, who I've worked with in campus ministry for 28 years now.

**Elisa:** Yeah.

**Kathy:** So we've known each other since you met Jeff, and you came as a student or a ministry at Harvard. And we have had the privilege of walking alongside each other in a lot of different ways. So in the beginning it was on campus serving graduate students at Harvard. And then as Tara had kids, it was [godhearsher.org](http://godhearsher.org)



in mothering together. Uh, we say in the book that I was at the hospital the day after, I think her son, Zach, was born and got to hold him. And she got to encourage me in the very challenging journey. We've also been in a prayer group that really came around one of our friends who was in crisis. And that prayer group has prayed together for 20 years now.

**Eryn:** Wow.

**Kathy:** My experience of motherhood is I've been a working mom throughout my whole motherhood journey. I was part-time with InterVarsity for about 11 years and really put doing a lot of leadership or intensive campus ministry on the side for these years that I was primarily parenting. And then after my kids got a little older, I started serving in more leadership roles. So currently I serve as the National Faculty Ministry Director for InterVarsity. Our vision is faculty following Jesus together. We're trying to see faculty doing that on every campus in the US.

**Eryn:** Wow.

**Kathy:** We're at about 103. Uh, the goal, of course, not for us to plant our flag, but for God to gather faculty together. There are about 5,000 campuses, so there's a long way to go.

**Eryn:** Wow.

**Elisa:** That's really important. And I can see how that dribbles over into your whole calling here. So, Tara? You got to know Kathy. Tell us your version of how y'all first got connected.

**Tara:** Like she said, I met her very early on. I think the first time I met her, she was leading a Bible study for me and my husband was walking around bouncing her baby, who was a little fussy at that...who was a little fussy at that time. And then as we've walked through motherhood together, she mentioned our prayer group. We've had one person in our prayer group died. We've had two divorces, addiction, like really painful stuff, kids who've suffered, suffered, suffered. There's mental illness, there's disabilities, like the gamut. I mean, it's life, right? And so we've cried together and prayed together and shown up together and cooked for each other. And this is a powerful group of women who've just said, we're staying. And now we just made a vision statement about walking each other to Jesus at the end.

**Eryn:** Wow.



**Tara:** That's like, we're like committed. We're gonna do it to the end until the last one standing. So Kathy and I are big advocates of you gotta do this as a team. Like God did not intend us to go through life alone and gutting it out and hiding in the pantry, eating cookies. We might still hide in the pantry eating cookies, but God wanted to give us a friend to talk to about it. That's our life and our dream right on campus. That's what we try to create for students, working moms, especially in the academy, is sort of Kathy's wheelhouse. But then Kathy had this dream to write a book about spiritual direction for women and wanted to do a survey. So some other women and I helped her with that survey. And then we decided, let's do this together. And we surveyed altogether over 700 women...

**Eryn:** Okay.

**Tara:** ...and asked them what it's like to be a mom. And I'm just going to tell you one key finding, which I think will tell you why we wrote the book. So at the very end of the survey, it's like, is there anything else you want us to know? Which is a great end of survey question, if you're writing your own surveys. And women said, your survey made me cry. Nobody asks me about my children who have died. They don't count me as a foster mother. They don't count me as the grandmother raising the kids. They don't talk about that my marriage is falling apart and I'm still raising kids. And just nobody asks me about like, oh, I'm enraged at my kids. I'm allowed to say that.

**Eryn:** Yeah.

**Tara:** So there's a deep need in the Christian church for women to be able to say and to kind of resist the narrative that we're this superhero people.

**Eryn:** Right.

**Tara:** Either we're ignored, right? Like none of the sermons are about us. None of the programming is about us. It doesn't take our needs seriously. Or we're kind of beatified. We're all Mary, and we're not all Mary.

**Elisa:** Yeah.

**Eryn:** Right.



**Tara:** None of us are. And so there's just this deep longing to be seen, to be seen and heard, which is why I love what your podcast is all about. So women want to be seen, and they want to be heard by God and by each other.

**Eryn:** Yeah, in community, yeah.

**Tara:** Right, and yes.

**Eryn:** That's awesome, Tara.

**Elisa:** Your heart is so passionate. I can feel it beating. And just full up honest, Tara, I think a lot of people know I was the CEO of MOPS International for 20 years...

**Tara:** Oh.

**Elisa:** ...now The MomCo it's called. Moms are desperate to know God, and they're so alone. And they do cry, and nobody really listens. And they feel so isolated. So in your work with your Bible study *Moms at the Well*, how do you connect women to each other?

**Kathy:** Well, as we were putting this book together, because the original goal, like when I wanted to write this book and I tried to write this book for 20 years, it was on spiritual formation for moms. And for much of that time I was thinking, I have all the conflict, and I have none of the resolution. And...and it took...

**Eryn:** [inaudible] to say that.

**Kathy:** ...20 years, right? To get to...

**Elisa:** Felt need. Felt need, felt need.

**Kathy:** Yes.

**Elisa:** Yeah.

**Kathy:** And the resolution of course is Jesus, and Jesus walking me through many, many years of ultimately coming to, yeah, I made a lot of mistakes and I'm forgiven. And somehow my kids are gonna be okay even. Though they may not be where I want them to be because God loves them, right? That was



just this long, long journey. But as we started writing this book, we kept on saying, you know, the problem is for us, the journey of doing these hard things in community has been the key. I think there's a...a challenge of women feeling like they can be honest with God. But there's also the problem of women being seen by each other. So that's why that ends up being central. I do think if people do the book by themselves, they'll be fine, but it's gonna be way better in community. So how do you find each other? You ask God to help you find the people who you might be able to do it with. And then I think you take a risk, and you just try. So we're seeing it happen where churches are organizing it, and that makes it a lot easier for moms. So for those of you who are women's pastors or women's ministry leaders, that may be a wonderful service for the moms in your congregation. But I think if you don't have that to just take the risk and ask a friend, would you be willing to go through this with me? And you know, we say in our leader's notes that are on our website, this might not be a seven week study. It may take you a year. Like you could literally take each of the day devotionals and spend time on that. And it's not a race. It's definitely a journey that we're inviting moms on.

**Tara:** Ultimately, no matter what we say, we can give you lots of ideas. You kind of have to be a little bit brave. Cause it's scary.

**Elisa:** There are also a lot of moms who might be listening right now who maybe don't have a very strong relationship with God, and...and maybe they're not really sure what it means to ask God for a friend. How would you speak to them?

**Kathy:** Well, I would say that, no matter where you are, God wants to communicate with you. So one of the ways, I always think we take a risk, and we say, God, I really want a friend, what should I do? And then just be quiet for a couple minutes, and then write down whatever thoughts you might have.

**Elisa:** Practical.

**Eryn:** I like that.

**Kathy:** And then find someone that you can say, hey, I have this need. And it doesn't have to be a fellow mom, right? If you wanted, maybe there's a friend who doesn't have children. Maybe there...it's your partner. Maybe it's your pastor. Maybe it's just someone you know that you kind of trust and you can say, hey, I really feel the need to go deeper in a friendship. And do you have any suggestions? And maybe if I want a fellow mom, do you have any friends that you might set me up with? It does take courage, like Tara said, right? It takes a step. But because God loves to answer prayers that are in God's will and that we be in community, and real community is definitely in God's will. It's always a gift. But I believe it's a gift



God wants to give us, and so we do take some steps towards it. I do think that the, um, the idea of stretching with wise vulnerability may be another important step.

**Elisa:** That's good.

**Kathy:** And I use that...this is a term a friend of mine uses in her ministry about stretching with wise vulnerability. Cause sometimes dumping it all is not wise, you know. And maybe sometimes dumping it all with someone who isn't yet trustworthy is not wise, cause maybe they won't do with...

**Eryn:** Right, hold it well, yeah.

**Kathy:** Yeah, they might not cherish it or protect it or help you with it the way you want...but to stretch a little bit, right, to begin to tell your story.

**Elisa:** Good word.

**Kathy:** To begin to be real. If you haven't yet been real with God, to begin there with where you really are and what you really feel, and what you really think and what you're really struggling with. God is totally trustworthy. So I think that God, we can totally dump it all on, like just dump away with God. But with people to take small steps of wise vulnerability.

**Tara:** That's so good. I think also in our own group, people hear like, oh, you've had a prayer group for 20 years. You're gonna walk each other into Jesus's arms. Like, that bar is really high, right?

**Elisa:** Yeah.

**Eryn:** Right, yeah.

**Tara:** Yeah, I could never get there. The truth is, we've had some things that have not gone well, really painful things. We shared in another podcast about a time I was super-judgmental and someone got really, really hurt. like really hurt. And then Kathy had to mediate between us. And everybody...all our group was like...

**Eryn:** That's [inaudible]. That's awesome.

**Tara:** ...I know who you're talking about.



**Eryn:** Yeah.

**Tara:** And so when you're talking about wise vulnerability, sometimes we just put a toe in. Like because after that, it's not like everything's easy. Cause now it's like, oh, if I screw up too bad, Tara might really harsh on me, right? So I had to apologize. She forgave me. But even then, it's like it's a little tender at first.

**Elisa:** Yeah.

**Eryn:** Yeah.

**Tara:** And so to expect that things are not gonna go perfectly, people are going to hurt each other, people are gonna disappoint each other. It's almost impossible for women to not be judgmental toward one another, right? We have to really, really pray, and...and we need a lot of healing in that area. And so our prayer group of 20 years does not look like God's ideal prayer group of 20 years. But we're committed and we do it anyway, right? And we love each other over the...like that's what happens.

**Eryn:** I love that you shared that, cause that's realistic. And that helps somebody to not go, oh wait, and I listened to this podcast, and they said that they...they experienced this for 20 years. So the group that I'm in, it's messy. So, therefore. I'm tapped out. I'm not gonna pursue it any longer cause it doesn't sound or look like what I heard. So I just really love that you were honest with that's...that's what community can look like, can look messy. And it can look like, hey, own that you were judgmental to that person. And I just...that accountability is really, really awesome.

**Elisa:** I love that because it's just another stereotype we need to move beyond.

**Eryn:** Yeah, yeah.

**Elisa:** Nobody's gonna be a perfect mom. Nobody's gonna have perfect children, and nobody's gonna have a perfect friend. Nobody's gonna be a perfect friend, yeah,

**Tara:** Right.

**Eryn:** Yeah, community...you have to have courage in community. And to that point, in order for me to trust somebody with my hard things, I long to know you experienced hard things. And so I'm curious, what are some hard things that maybe you could share?



**Kathy:** Well of the things that we started with was, basically the premise of the book is in serving women and talking with them about what are the hardest things they've gone through. We actually just took the top six. So the ones in there—worry, anger, comparison, control, right? All of these things are what women reported. And of course, because we are women and moms, we struggled with every single one of them. But the thing that was kind of astounding was how many? Because I think something like 81% of women reported losing their tempers in the past year. So it's pretty much every person who's living in a house with children is losing their temper. And so that sort of thing, that's my besetting sin and issue. This is why I think parenthood was so hard for me. I swore I was not gonna be an angry mom like my mom. You know those vows that totally don't work at all. I was an angry mom, and I really, really wrestled with, you know, I, and I did everything. I went up for prayer, I did therapy, I did spiritual direction. I did tons and tons and tons of confession. And to some degree, I mean, this is sad. I don't feel like it totally went away, right? I didn't feel like God healed that character fault in me. My spiritual director actually said to me at one point, you know, cause of course every time I met with her, I would be reporting my latest bout. And she was like, you know, I'm a very patient person. And I have never been as angry as at my children. And I frankly don't think it got better till they got older. And I was like, oh no! If this is true of her, what's gonna happen to me? And of course that's actually what happened to me. Them getting older is what's helped. Like my deep dark character challenges may not have gotten solved. And yet God is gracious and has covered. And I've confessed my sin over and over to my kids. And they're kind of funny. They're like, yes, they love to joke about how I got angry, but they're also like, Mom, it's not such a big deal. Like, stop.

**Eryn:** Yeah.

**Elisa:** We have such high expectations for ourselves, and thank you for being so honest. Honestly, Kathy, because I think we can all relate to that.

**Eryn:** It's freeing.

**Elisa:** I appreciate what you're saying about how when they get older, sometimes we get a grip. But I think it's when I got older, the older I've gotten; the more God has revealed to me that I'm just really not in charge of other people. God loves our children so much more than we do. We just feel the weight of the universe on our shoulders when that baby is in our arms. It's like, oh my goodness, I have to be everything to this little human being. I mean, literally, we are their food. We are their shelter. That's the way it starts. So the process of relinquishing them to God is just incredibly painful. And I think maybe as we back up and look at the big picture of motherhood here, that's one of the things that is so intense for women. When you become moms, something like a switch goes on in you. In your work, what other kinds





of experiences have you heard moms reporting about how they change when they become moms? Or how is their relationship with God different when they become moms?

**Tara:** So I think for me, the besetting sin out of this list...really, I struggle with all of them; but my worry combined with my need to control. My children say I have dictator syndrome. They're all adults now, so they think that's hilarious to bring that up over and over. Remember how mom has dictator syndrome, which I didn't think was so funny when they were telling me when they were kids.

**Eryn:** Sure, yeah, I bet.

**Tara:** But now I get it.

**Eryn:** That [inaudible] more angry.

**Tara:** But yes. I think that I didn't know how much of a control freak I was. When you talk about like what changed after kids, I had a stillbirth seven days after my first husband died.

**Elisa:** Oh, honey.

**Tara:** And I didn't become a Christian until after that. So I became a Christian, then I met Jeff. Then we got married, then I had this baby. So of course I was gonna be worried. I was terrified the whole time I was pregnant. And I was probably gonna be overly-controlling. It's part of my nature, and then you add this...

**Eryn:** Trauma.

**Tara:** ...this trauma. And so over and over and over, I just kept basically saying to God, sometimes, not basically, sometimes directly like, I'm just gonna do this my way. Like, I know I could love them no matter what, and they're gonna be great no matter what; but I really want them not to struggle with this disability. So move aside. You can love them later and tell them they're great later, but right now we're gonna drive.

**Eryn:** Yeah.

**Tara:** So I pushed a lot in ways that I think made my kids feel like they weren't good enough? Want to hear a cool gift in the middle of it? Well, I don't even know how to call it a gift. But a...a little girl from our church who I met when she was four, by the time she was 14, her mom had died. She had OD'ed. And



her dad was still in the middle of addiction, so she moved in with us. So...and she was the same age my daughter would've been had she lived.

**Elisa:** Oh wow.

**Tara:** And it was so clear to me from the beginning. Like, I'm not gonna fix all this trauma. I just have to love her and let her be. And God somehow used that to help me get a little closer to being like that with the boys. So things...I can't say, nothing changed. They would stay...say I am still too controlling, too worrying. And I think that's right. And God has been really good in the middle of it. And I have felt seen and known by God and by all the women around me. And so some things changed with motherhood because they felt, like you said, just so important. It's just so important to get this right. And none of those sins would surprise or struggles, if...if you're not comfortable calling it sin. For me, I am. But none of those struggles would surprise anyone who knew me when I was 12. It was all there when I was 12.

**Eryn:** It's in your temperament too.

**Tara:** And it went into, yes, exactly. And then it went into hyperdrive when I had kids.

**Eryn:** Yeah, and experiencing trauma.

**Elisa:** I think a lot of us, as we were talking about, especially when you receive your children, but then on through their lives, it's like, we want to give them what we didn't have. Or we want to keep them as safe as possible, you know? How does studying mothers in the Bible impact moms?

**Kathy:** Our first chapter begins with Hagar, and our last chapter ends with Hagar. She's my favorite character in Scripture. Because here is this woman who's enslaved, who is not of the family. She's Egyptian, who is forced. I mean, it's basically sex slavery, right? Forced to have a baby. She had no say in that. Who is treated so badly that she decides she's gonna flee. They decided to use her as a way to get what they wanted, speaking of control, right? They lost hope that God was going to provide. And so they came up with this plan to use her against her will to fulfill this. And so she seems to be the most unlikely person who would show up in Scripture. And not only the most unlikely person, that she is the first person the angel of the Lord ever shows up to in Scripture. Not only is she unlikely, but God goes and meets her as she's running away, as she probably will die. Because it's like a 200-some-mile journey as a single pregnant woman to try to get back to Egypt. She was given up probably by her parents because of poverty. And so there's nothing to even go back to. And the angel of the Lord comes to her and meets in a way that she dares call God by name. She gives God a name. No one else in Scripture



does that. And she calls God *El Roi*. You are the God who sees me. And then God tells her, you're gonna have this son. You are to name him Ishmael, which means God has heard you in all your misery. So she learns what no one knew yet that this God is the God who sees and hears. And she brings that back to Abraham and to the people that God is gonna create this very, very foundational piece of God's character.

**Elisa Morgan:** And so in studying these moms in Scripture, you've just humanized Hagar in a beautiful way. Who among us hasn't felt seen or heard? Or who among us has not felt used? Who among us has not fled from what we experience when it's just horribly painful? And yet God met her, and God redeemed her story. And He could do the same with us.

**Tara:** Absolutely. And so we have all of these women, every chapter is, almost all of them are mothers; but some of them are not. And in each one of them, this template that we see in Hagar comes up. So God meets us where we are. And you learn that with the mother who...who's worried that her daughter is dying, the father who's worried that her daughter's dying. You learn it from Sam. The...we call the Samaritan woman, Sam...that God shows up where you are. Rachel and Leah, who are caught in this comparison trap, God shows up. God invites you to share your story. God asks you to trust and obey. God transforms your pain and then invites you to be an agent of shalom. And we see this with all of these mothers. And as long as they don't say no, and usually that happens when God says...asks them to share their truth. A couple of them say no, and then we don't see any of the transformation. But as long as you don't say no, no matter what you're going through as a mom, there is transformation. And there...and God can use you and all the pain you've been through to help you be an agent of shalom in your family and then in...in the world. And we see that through every one of these mothers in Scripture.

**Eryn:** Tara, that is so encouraging. Some of the women that you mentioned just now, I think they all had a plan of some form of control and their path. And God disrupted it and showed them how much He loved them. And I just, I think to the woman that's listening that may not even recognize the difference between, she's on a path of her own control. I think sometimes we often can think, well, we're just doing what's in the best interest of the kids. And so I can't help but think of the woman listening that may have heard either of y'all's stories of vulnerability, of anger and control and go, wait a second. Maybe this isn't in the best. Maybe I haven't surrendered. Maybe I haven't relinquished, like Elisa said. And just to know that like God, He doesn't shame us or put us in time out as His daughters when we're on that path. I feel like He just leans in and hugs and loves us more. And you...you just reminded us of that. And for that, I'm...I'm very grateful for it.

**Tara:** Thank you for how you said that, yeah.



**Elisa:** And I think at the root cause, I mean, yes, there's some fear; and we've talked about that. Well, God, what might happen if I put my child in Your hands? But at the root cause, I think we have this sense of hyper-vigilance, that we're supposed to be the helicopter, the savior, the whatever. It's all up to us. When God never asked us to parent alone, so many of us have to. But we're never asked to parent without Him, and that is just a huge relief. It's still so, so tough. And we just think about every woman listening. I wonder if you would one of y'all pray for that woman who is desiring a companion, a friend, to get in the Word with, a friend to go through life with. Would you pray for God to provide for that woman who's just going, okay, I am ready.

**Kathy:** God, we thank You so much for every single woman listening right now. And we thank You that they are dear and precious to Your heart and that You are there as their friend. Jesus, You said that You are our friend. And so I pray for each woman to experience Your friendship even in this moment. And God, when I think back to my own story, I actually was really, really lonely in the first years of parenting and complaining about it a lot and begging You and asking You a lot about it. And so I was just reflecting now that Your answer to that prayer was actually, Tara...that you brought Tara into my circle. And she has been such an incredible friend walking with me in every single way. And so, God, to the degree that I have received that gift and that charism of You answering that prayer, I pray that for every woman out there who is feeling lonely. Give them the courage to ask You for that. And then give them the courage to not only seek and explore and be open and stretch in wise vulnerability towards another woman, but also give them the patience to wait and to trust and to receive from You how You see them and You hear them as they wait. God, You have said that it is not good for any human being to be alone. And we confess that the church and our country are especially not so good at that because of our individualism, because of our hurry, because of our drivenness. And so would You slow us down? Would You give us eyes to see the people who need a friend. And God, would You do a work here? Would You do a work of bringing women together in love and community?

**Tara:** In Jesus name, amen.

[music]

**Elisa:** Kathy and Tara are examples of finding community while being in the midst of motherhood. Happy Mother's Day to all you moms listening. We're so thankful for every single one of you. And we hope you find your people to do life with.

**Eryn:** Amen. Well, if you enjoyed this episode, please leave us a comment or a review wherever you listen to your podcast. We would love to hear from you.



**Elisa:** Before we go, be sure to check out our show notes for a link to the *Moms at the Well* Bible Study by Kathy and Tara. You can find out that and more 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.

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**Elisa:** Today's episode was engineered by Anne Stevens and produced by Jade Gustman and Mary Jo Clark. We also want to thank all the moms that tune into our show. Thanks for taking the time out of one of your busy days. We love you. Thanks for listening and being a part of the *God Hears Her* community.

**Eryn:** Our Daily Bread Ministries is a donor-supported, non-profit ministry dedicated to making the life-changing wisdom and stories of the Bible come alive for all people around the world.

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