



God Hears Her Podcast

Episode 189 Choosing Faith in College with Dr. Carolyn Weber

Eryn Eddy-Adkins & Vivian Mabuni with Dr. Carolyn Weber

[Music]

Carolyn: How can my daughter always remember, right? It's the take and eat, not take and think. Take and eat in remembrance of Me. Put your body back together that's been pulled apart by so many things. Remember in Me, and undo the lie, that first lie in the garden, you know, that you're not good enough because you are perfect and good in Him and a daughter of the King.

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Vivian: Well, welcome everyone to *God Hears Her*. Today, we really are excited, and we have the honor of being able to have conversation with Dr. Carolyn Weber. And for those of you that don't know her, she is an award-winning author of the book, *Surprised by Oxford*. So there's a whole story. She's internationally known and is just a fantastic author that's impacted even people in our lives, in the Our Daily Bread world. So we're just excited to be able to get to hear from Dr. Carolyn Weber. And we would love to kind of have you maybe share a little bit about who you are and where you are right now and what it was like for you growing up. So welcome Carolyn to *God Hears Her*.

Carolyn: Thank you so much, Vivian. This is a delight. I appreciate all of you and what you're doing and the good work in God. Yeah, I teach at New College Franklin, which is a lovely, small, Christian liberal arts college with a classical curriculum. And it's really icing on the cake for me after 30 years in academia, being able to teach at a place like that. I just so love my colleagues and the students there. I have four children, including my oldest. She's graduating from high school. She's just starting her first year of college, and then twin boys, 15 and a younger one, 11. I grew up in Canada, a mid-sized town in Canada, London, Ontario, Canada. Actually, which is a delightful place cause it's like a little mini-London, England. Like so many others, I grew up knowing who...who Jesus was, but not knowing who Jesus was. You know, I...I would've defined myself as agnostic, because I couldn't disprove God. My kind of loosely Catholic, European immigrant background, but really sort of fell away from any notion of faith after my godhearsher.org



grandparents passed away and that influence. And my parents, like so many other families; loving but broken. And uh, my parents eventually divorced. My mom was basically a single mom raising us and just a fabulous, amazing woman. And my father was in and out of our lives. I loved my studies. Reading was my escape, my way of surviving, my way of loving what I was doing in the world. But when I arrived at Oxford University, beginning my graduate studies, I was on a Commonwealth scholarship. Um, I had been quite poor growing up as a result of my father losing his business and that and some other challenges, and had always had scholarships and worked jobs. But this was a huge scholarship and a huge opportunity, and it gave me the chance to study there. But when I arrived there, I was pretty hesitant about trusting in any sort of father figure, you know, men in general. But also God to me, seemed a fairly empty concept. But also personally, I think that there was this longing I had for something more that I really think defines all of us. It resonates with every single person I've ever met or known. And that for me, started to be funneled through my studies.

Vivian: So before we continue that story, I would love for you to tell us a little bit about Oxford too, because I'm imagining that many of our listeners might not even know where Oxford is...

Carolyn: Right.

Vivian: ...or how it fits like Oxford, Cambridge is kind of like Harvard, Yale or whatever. If you could kind of give us a little bit of a context of Oxford and how you even heard about Oxford, that would be wonderful too.

Carolyn: Absolutely. I...I mean, I knew of it a bit growing up, but I had no intention of going there...never expected to go there. My husband fell in love with it years and years ago when he watched *Chariots of Fire*, but...

Vivian: There you go.

Carolyn: ...I was actually really tremendously homesick when I won this scholarship. I didn't want to go and, um, which sounds awful to say cause it's probably the most, Vivian, one of the most beautiful places in the world to study. Right, especially to study English literature. I mean, it's...

Eryn: Yeah.

Carolyn: ...thousands of years old and it has, you know, the biggest library in the world. And it has...all the colleges have these little libraries. And I think it's very different again, from a North American type of



campus; because it's a collection of little colleges all together under the umbrella of the university. Everybody has their own little community in place, and every college has its own library. But you pop into the little doors or gates or quarters lodges, and then it opens up into these beautiful gardens or these amazing architectural, you know, vistas, these incredible places of learning. The beauty runs so deep. You feel smarter there. And if you just put your hand on the wall, you can sort of fill the heartbeat and the hum of all these thinkers. It's a very beautiful place that just encourages, I think, community and love of learning. It's also a place of great fun and intellectual stimulation and the respect for ideas. As I say, I sort of tumbled into it by winning this, um, Commonwealth scholarship and going in many ways, quite reluctantly.

Eryn: So you said you were homesick.

Carolyn: Mm-hmm.

Eryn: How did you overcome being homesick and starting to step into this new season of your life far away from home?

Carolyn: Part of it was just loving my studies, so thinking, okay. And my mom was so excited for me. And our phone bill was sky high, right? This is before cell phones, you know?

Vivian: Yes, yes.

Carolyn: It was like I was a sky-high phone bill. So I first did sort of stay out of duty, but then it was also largely Christians. For one, I fell in love with Oxford and the community and the...its beauty and its love of learning. But within that too, it was really Christians who were so hospitable, who were really welcoming, that I was having more and more conversations with. They seemed to be popping up everywhere, and it was incredibly annoying.

[laughter]

Carolyn: You know, these sort of little...

Eryn: Very inconvenient.

Carolyn: ...yeah points of light, you know, popping up everywhere. I was really drawn to that more so eventually as well. And that, um, that sort of genuine love for the person, even if in disagreement.



Vivian: Mm.

Eryn: Yeah.

Vivian: When you think back on that time, were there specific conversations that were pivotal for you in your own spiritual journey?

Carolyn: Oh, absolutely. For one, there was a...a young man. He was living in the staircase next to me, and he was really one of the first people to clearly articulate the gospel, to ask me who God was to me. I had never really been asked that question, just a really simple question that's not off-putting, not heavy-handed, not jumping in a *Mere Christianity* question. I felt like a hummingbird that hit the glass hard. No one had really asked me that kind of question. And so I remember being really shaped and challenged by those conversations. We were neighbors, so we would have them often, sometimes casually or sometimes over coffee, meeting other students meeting...I did have some key faculty members, many who were really quite sneaky. You know, I think a lot of people didn't play their hand. It's a bit like, you know, *The Gambler*, you know. No one to hold them and no one to fold them type of thing. Like, no, you know, when to [inaudible]. And there were many that could be just very blatant about what they believed. And I really appreciated that, cause there was actually a fresh honesty in that. It was really invigorating and inviting. And there were others that were just very sort of subtle or gentle, or really just had made the time to talk with you or to walk with you or to hear your questions—that unhurriedness that Jesus embodies to people and meeting them where they're at. And conversely, there were conversations from people who were not believers in some...in some ways even very staunch atheists that were actually quite convicting for me as well.

Eryn: Yeah.

Vivian: No, that is so true, and it's so much more robust than a life of do's and don'ts. As you are walking through being exposed to people internationally who all are believing the same God, the same Bible, for you, what was the point in time where you said yes to Jesus? I will follow You. I will now turn my allegiance to You.

Carolyn: Mm. My moment for me actually I remember really distinctly was coming back from a really wild party, a Valentine's Day party and everybody drinking and doing all this and everything else. And it wasn't that I was a goodie-two-shoes necessarily. But I just remember really being hit by the...the acuity of that, that there just really wasn't anything else. If that is all you believe or where all those things...and what is



the big *why* in life? The big “so what?” what is the purpose of, not only life and all these big, amazing decisions you're doing when you're a student at the precipice of so many exciting things. But what is...what is the purpose of the baby that's born stillborn? You know, what is the purpose of somebody who passes, who's really elderly and you're at their deathbed? What do things come down to? And that shining point of light was...was Jesus. And I accepted that fully in my little wacky dorm room.

Vivian: Wow.

Eryn: Wow. What advice do you have for somebody that has a difference of opinion and faith and they're trying to navigate that relationship? Because I feel like you probably can speak so much into that from what you were surrounded by and with, and questions that you had in yourself, and then the, probably the conversations and maybe some arguments. What would you...what...what guidance or advice would you have for somebody that doesn't know how to have those conversations? Or maybe they're scared to have the conversations about faith.

Carolyn: Oh, that's a great question.

Eryn: That's...that's different from theirs.

Carolyn: Maybe to answer that in a few tiered ways.

Eryn: Yes, yes.

Carolyn: Because overall, I mean, I think the...the big question for me initially was just atheist or agnostic or Christian on that overarching level, you know. Who is God to you? is a great place to start.

Eryn: I love that question.

Vivian: That's a great question.

Carolyn: Because you know, all these questions, you can't unthink them.

Vivian: Yeah.

Eryn: Yeah.



Carolyn: And they create kind of a big elephant in the room. And so...

Eryn: Yeah, they do.

Carolyn: ...if you're going to say that there's no God, okay, well, it's still a bet on a horse, right? As Lewis says, I mean, you can't escape faith. Even, um, an atheist bet is still a form of...of faith. So what are your reasons for that? Oftentimes it's just sort of offered up as...as a just an automatic nihilism. But we have to, uh, doubt as wisely as we have to believe. You know, so oftentimes I just wasn't actually as compelled by arguments against God as I thought I was going to be. And that was incredibly inconvenient as well, right?

Eryn: Right.

Carolyn: Because we don't have to contend with those larger issues of who we are also called to be in that light. We seek to be known. I mean, you think about even the name of this podcast, right? We seek to be heard. We seek to be seen. We want to be known. What I was drawn to in some ways with the Christian faith with...was that it was not fair weather. You know, there wasn't this sense of loving people when you're only in the mood.

Eryn: Right.

Carolyn: Love was an actual verb and...and a decision. And it has a bigger place, and there's an ordering of loves as well. There wasn't a grace that could be earned. You know, you check off these certain things and then you reach...

Eryn: Right.

Carolyn: ...nirvana or whatever else, and then what's the ending in that as well? So there were lots of stripes of people from all the different cultures. And this Aristotelian notion that you can entertain lots of ideas without necessarily accepting any of them. And I think that's really important in our society to have these civilized conversations. Because, you know, we are all brothers and sisters. We really are. I mean, and that's how Jesus approaches everybody from everywhere. So I think within that, looking at different religions, looking at who really is Jesus, why am I a follower of Him? Why are these people followers of Him? Who is He really? Not following somebody who's holding him up as a banner or twisting Him to his needs or...



Vivian: Right.

Carolyn: ...hasn't really looked at who He is with their own hearts righteous and clean before God. But who is He for me? Who am I when I speak to Him at the well? He knows me, and...and so how do I respond to that? And He knows everything about me.

Vivian: Yeah.

Eryn: Yeah.

Vivian: I think there's such a humility in that kind of a posture. As we have conversations, it's not about us trying to convince another; but it really is a connection of our humanity and being able to shine a better picture of who Jesus is and point people to encourage them to seek Him...

Carolyn: Right.

Vivian: ...and not a religion per se, but really wrestle with who Jesus really, really is and what He says. And if what He says is true, then what does this mean for each of us? And that's kind of that question, but I think sometimes Christians can mistakenly feel responsible for the salvation of all people. And so every conversation, there's an agenda...

Eryn: Right.

Vivian: ...rather than a genuine curiosity and a willingness to lean in and to connect on the things we can connect on, but also in it, unapologetically point to who Jesus is in our lives. And that...that beautiful wrestling that we don't have all the answers, and we may have more questions than answers. But it doesn't have to rattle us. If anything it connects...it can be a point of connection. And then there's truly that hope, which you were talking about, Carolyn, where you saw the difference in the Christians. Like you kept meeting them left and right. But there was something significant and different about each of them. And I...I think that that's really true. And I have met believers sitting on an airplane or, you know, in random places. It's not a personality; it's just this glow of a surrendered life. And it just...there's such an instantaneous connection with brother or sister, you know. It's like we...

Carolyn: Absolutely.

Vivian: ...part of that. It's just so amazing. Okay, really...



Carolyn: It is amazing.

Vivian: It is amazing. So, you have a daughter heading off to college. I have had that experience with my own children. And there's this letting go to have them really, in many ways, own their own faith for some that have grown up in a Christian home. How are you feeling moving into this new season? So in the raw, in the real, but in the moment, like. What are the things that are going through your mind? What are your hopes for your daughter, just in her being able to retain her faith in the midst of where she's going to school and all that? What are some of the things that are in your mind right now as a mom sending a child off to college?

Carolyn: Hmm. It's such a profound question, isn't it? Because it's a bittersweet time. Of course, it's exciting, and of course it's a great adventure. And it's terrifying, and it's grief filled, right? Lament is an important thing as well. Oh yes, and I feel that for all my students. And I think this is what we try to do at New College Franklin, where I'm teaching as well, is root our students in Christ in their identity, being in that and in community around that as well. So that you matter. You're not anonymous, that you're not just acquiring all this knowledge without wisdom. So whatever you go off to study, I would hope my children again would have that pearl of the kingdom. You know that, how can we help them keep their self-worth in Christ first, because they're going to succeed and fail. And sometimes the successes are worse than the failures. And they're going to meet all sorts of ideologies in person and in books and things like that. I come from, you know, largely unbelieving world, right? So I had one foot in each world when I was at Oxford, and it was very sort of a doubling of having this believing...these believing friends and...and then unbelieving family and friends. You want so badly, you know, for them to know the hope that you have or for them to be saved out of sheer dear intention. And so going back to that first love with God, thinking about that with our children. How can they have that first love? Cause anything else other than that is an idol—anything else. And that constantly shifts out of our vision constantly for us too.

Vivian: Yeah.

Carolyn: And so even as Christians, you know, even when we're witnessing out of fear, sometimes we're witnessing because we're afraid people won't be saved or we're...or we want to be affirmed in what we believe. Or we don't want to be standing alone, or we want the popularity or the attention, or the affirm...any of those...any of those trappings because we cannot be left to our own devices. You know, keep putting us back like a GPS to that first commandment. And I pray that my...my children would have that. And I think especially my girl, it's our only girl. She's our first. There's so much messaging about self-worth of women, right...and objectifying in women and not having a voice and all those things, which is completely the opposite of how Jesus treated women in the Bible, right?



Eryn: Right.

Carolyn: Completely.

Vivian: That's right.

Carolyn: Which is also all the more radical given the timeframe.

Eryn: Right.

Carolyn: They were the first ones to witness the resurrection. Now, probably because women talk a lot, so He knew He would spread the gospel.

Eryn: Yeah, and spread the word, yeah.

Carolyn: I mean, the woman at the well is so relevant to things today. You know, these things don't change. And so, how can my daughter always remember, right? It's the take and eat, not take and think. Take and eat in remembrance of Me. Put your body back together that's been pulled apart by so many things. Remember in Me, and undo the lie, that first lie in the garden, you know that you're not good enough, because you are perfect and good in Him and a daughter of the King. And that's just not something only on a mug or a t-shirt.

Vivian: Yeah.

Carolyn: You are a daughter of the King. He is the lifter of your head and your shield. And there are going to be times in life where you think you have to follow someone, but you have to follow Jesus. And there's gonna be times where He bids you quiet and times where He bids you speak. And I think that's why it's also so important to have fellowship, to...to make sure that fellowship is a huge priority at any time in our lives and any season. But I think especially for these young people, if they're leaving their home, their familiarity, whatever else, to really pray that they would have good friends in the Lord; that you can be real with, that you can be accountable to, that you can, um, talk and pray with, that you can have fun with and you can be serious with, that you can [inaudible] high and low. There's all the difference in the world between friendship and fellowship. And friendship, again, is fair weather. And friendship is great, and people might show up, they might not. But fellowship is, like I've said to my students, right? It's a fellowship of the ring, not the friendship of the ring. You know...



Vivian: Yes.

Carolyn: ...there's something deeper because you know that you can...you can go with repentance or you can go with truth, or you can go with pain, or you can go with sorrow, or you can go with joy.

Eryn: Yeah, questions.

Carolyn: Questions. They are called to walk with you and you with them.

Eryn: And I think it's so important that we model that in our home...

Carolyn: Absolutely.

Eryn: ...for us to desire that for our kids, because it's so easy to negate that.

Carolyn: Right, or to just.

Eryn: To not prioritize that, right?

Carolyn: Absolutely. It's so hard, or to be busy, busy, busy.

Eryn: Yeah.

Carolyn: My kids will now say like, even they've said, they remember who I was having coffee with when they're on the playground. You know, like you...you're gonna still make, you know, make time for that, those really precious sisters in Christ. Um, and...and also wonderful men too, you know, brothers in Christ as well, like that brother and sisterhood, but to fill the cracks with it.

Vivian: Mm-hmm. Yeah, yeah. It's how we were meant to live. My husband and I worked in college ministry for about 28 years with Cru, so we would get the students where the parents were super over-involved. So they'd be calling like, can you go and visit my son in the dorm, but don't tell them I sent you, you know?

Eryn: Sweet.

Vivian: We would get that kind of call. And we'd have the concern, you know, like...



Eryn: That's awesome.

Vivian: ...the helicopter parents that would not leave their kids alone. And we'd also have intersections with students who came to Christ, and then we would later find out that there had been family members who had been praying for them. And it's just such an amazing time when students can really set down some roots that will really carry them through the rest of their lives. Um, so it can be such a pivotal, like complete trajectory changing years, these four years that can impact the next 40 plus. So we would love Carolyn if you would be willing to pray for those parents that are listening that...

Carolyn: Oh.

Vivian: ...have...that are in the same that are in the same place as you even, um, a prayer over them, over yourself.

Carolyn: I was gonna say, you might have recognized my text number when I'm like, can you check on my...

Vivian: I know, exactly. Like, would you just...

Eryn: You're like...

Vivian: ...don't tell them that we.

Eryn: ...that's a good idea. Noted, noted I can do that.

Vivian: Noted, yes. This is the room number, and please don't tell them I sent you. You're like right.
[inaudible]

Carolyn: Oh, love is...love is never wasted.

Vivian: Yes.

Carolyn: It's never wasted. And when it's well-intentioned like that. I would love to pray. That's something close to home for me, and I feel even as I meet with parents this week. And I applaud your hard work in all those years in campus ministry, because it is a really beautiful and powerful place to be. I did the opposite, you know, I...I went away and shocked my family by becoming a Christian, and...



Eryn: That's right.

Vivian: That happens

Carolyn: So, you know, and there are worse things.

Eryn: There are worse things.

Carolyn: But, alright, well I'll...I'll pray for our parents out there in particular. *Father God, our Heavenly Father, who is so good and gives us all beautiful and right things. I thank You for who You are, and I thank you for this conversation today and these lovely women and their hearts for You and their love for You and for others. Thank You for the good work that they do.*

Bless our conversation today and the words as they go out to others. We pray over where they are received and that Your glory would be beheld in them. And Lord, I pray, especially right now for parents of students that are about to leave home, that are about to embark on a great adventure, whether they're going to college, local or far, whether they're taking on some other major step. College is one of the first things we think of at this age, but also employment or military or so many things, options as their lives open up before them as young people before you, Lord. I pray that their faith would be strengthened in You and that You know them each as their own fingerprint, as their own snowflake design in Your own design. That it would not be just that they're formed out of fear or habit, or that they reject You, Lord, as there are more things that come at them. But that You would plant in them and see a fruit that they had, either if they were raised with the faith in their childhood or what they've seen in their parents, or what they're holding in Your heart, You would bring that to fruition and help them recognize and know that in You they have a pearl of great value that no one else can take away, but that would be held tight in their hand.

Or Lord, You would put it in their pocket if they're unsure at the time, but that You would walk with them and that they would know that You are walking with them, that there is no question too big for You, that You are not a fragile God. There is no worry or concern that can shatter who You are, um, that You love them, that they are going into this world with all its possibilities and hope and adventures with You. But even in their suffering and in their pain or in their challenges, You are with them as well. You are our Immanuel.

And I pray too that they would have wisdom out of knowledge, that they would know that they have nothing if they give it all away, if they don't have You. And that they would just continue to grow in their



love for You and uh, that even their doubts would strengthen them in their faith and that they would also honor their parents as a commandment, Lord, and recognize what that means. It doesn't mean they have to agree. It doesn't mean that they have to call every day. It doesn't mean that they can't be irritated, but that they would know in their hearts how their parents have loved them and, uh, that we all try to do the best that we can and that they see in that a print of Your love and care for them as well, and that it grows in them a gracious branch that, again, bears more fruit. Lord Jesus, we love You and praise You. And I thank You for these, um, beautiful souls going out in the world. And I pray that their parents would be also renewed in the hope and goodness of who You are. In Your name I pray, amen.

[music]

Vivian: Amen. If you are a high school graduate, preparing for your next steps, we're praying that the Lord would guide you. And if you're a parent sending a child off, please know that the Lord is with them always.

Eryn: I am so thankful for Dr. Carolyn's experience and the wisdom she was able to pour into us. Well, if you enjoyed this episode, please be sure to leave us a comment or review wherever you listen to your podcast. We would love to hear from you.

Vivian: Before we go, we are so excited to let you know that we now have a *God Hears Her* YouTube channel. So be sure to subscribe to watch the video version of the podcast. You can find the link in our show notes. And there you'll also find a link for Dr. Carolyn's book, *Surprised by Oxford*. You can find that and more at godhearsher.org. That's 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]

Vivian: Today's episode was engineered by Anne Stevens and produced by Jade Gustman and Mary Jo Clark. We also want to thank Pono, Nia and Judy. Thanks everyone.

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.