



God Hears Her Podcast

Episode 193 – A Spiritual Crisis Part 1 with Melissa Harrison

Elisa Morgan, Eryn Adkins with Melissa Harrison

[Music]

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Elisa: Melissa, that we're gonna be talking to, is super impressive. I mean, here are some of her credentials. She's a bilingual journalist with more than 20 years of experience in television and radio. And I gotta tell you, you know, I can't even speak one language very well. Anyway, she's worked as a news anchor and reported in six different television markets.

Eryn: Wow.

Elisa: Including ones in New York City, in Dallas-Fort Worth, and also for *ABC's World News Tonight* and CBS radio [Da, da, da, da]. There is so much to her. And...and now she lives in Dallas. And she is an executive in residence at Southern Methodist University, SMU, where she teaches digital media.

Eryn: That's awesome.

Elisa: And she's working for an amazing group for professional women, especially called 4Word. It's the number four and then *w-o-r-d*. But you know what? There's so much to her story. So while we could get a little intimidated by all those credentials, you know, I want to invite you, Eryn, and everybody else to listen in close; because this is a woman whose story has really shaped her and, as a result, shaped her ministry. Welcome, Melissa. Glad you're with us.



Eryn: Welcome, Melissa. We're so grateful to have you here.

Melissa: Thank you so much.

Elisa: So, you know, let's just dive in. You've done these amazing things, and you've had a robust career. And you still do, although you've shifted to a different seat on the bus, if you will.

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: Can you take us back in terms of your story growing up, um, your faith journey? Fill us in on...on Melissa.

Melissa: Where to begin? Where to begin, right? So I grew up in Grand Prairie, Texas, so right outside of Dallas, was adopted into my family when I was 16 months old.

Eryn: Oh.

Melissa: So my...yeah, I was in the foster care system in Dallas County, have just recently discovered some birth siblings, which has been a whole other...that would be a whole other podcast.

Elisa: Whoa. Okay.

Melissa: Um, just the discovery of where we're from and where God's brought us from. But I grew up in a wonderful family, family that was, I think they were third generation in our hometown. So my grandparents were good friends, and then my parents were friends with those children. Then I grew up with the children of those. Um, so it was really fun that the multi-generational upbringing of just having a truly a tribe like it...

Elisa: Oh, wow, yeah.

Melissa: ...you know, being raised by a village really, really fun. But I had a teacher when I was in high school. And I was just at the local high school, public school; but we had a teacher who was really passionate about journalism and storytelling. And so it was so fun to just discover the power of storytelling and to be able to imagine what it would look like to actually have a job where my job was to tell people stories. I'm like, that would be amazing. And so I fell in love with journalism at that age in my sophomore year of high school and knew that that's what I wanted to do. So to start out, you really have to start in the



middle of nowhere. So I went to Baylor for undergrad, and then I started working in local television news there, ended up Waco, Abilene, Texas, Jackson, Mississippi, Birmingham. It's kind of like playing minor league ball. You have to start out in minors...

Elisa: It is.

Melissa: ...and you work your way up. And you want that to happen cause you want to make mistakes in Abilene...

Eryn: Yes.

Melissa: ...not in Dallas or New York City.

Eryn: Yeah, right, exactly.

Melissa: So, but you know, it really is about the journey, the people I met. I worked many holidays, lots of 2:00 AM wake-up calls. You know, the morning show starts oftentimes, you know, 4:00 or 5:00 AM. The evening show, you don't get home till after midnight. So it becomes this struggle of work-life balance. And so much of your identity is wrapped up in the role, because people will recognize you. And I learned really early, you know, whether it's at the grocery store, out at a restaurant, and like, you know, people know who you are. And there's kind of that responsibility with that and also the real beauty. Cause you get to be a part of a community, and you're a trusted voice. And especially back in the day 20-25 years ago where people really watched local TV news and connected with that local personality.

Elisa: Absolutely.

Eryn: So Melissa, you're at the beginning of your career. What happened in your personal life during that time?

Melissa: I went through, in my mid-20s just a really heartbreaking situation. I was in my mid-20s, 25 years old, working in Birmingham. And so that was, you know, halfway through that climb up the ladder and really focused on wanting to get into a top ten market. So the markets are ranked from...by population. Number one's New York, number two's, LA, and then like number 236 is, you know, middle of nowhere, you know, Montana or something.

Eryn: Yeah, I love it. Yeah.



Melissa: But when I was in Birmingham, I was there working as a reporter. I was hosting a dinner party actually one night when I got a call from what I later discovered was a detective who called to tell me that my mom had actually been murdered.

Elisa: Oh.

Melissa: And growing up in the home that I did, my mom was an amazing, amazing woman. I mean, truly, if I had had an apprenticeship of women's ministry, it was growing up in her home. Because...

Eryn: Wow.

Melissa: ...Cindy Tamplin loved women and really was a champion for women. And she was really the ringleader, the, you know, in our local community, in our church, in our family. She was the matriarch in many ways, and she was the glue that held of a lot...a lot of those social circles together. And she was beloved. So this was never in a million years, something that I would have imagined would be something that would happen to her and then part of our story.

Eryn: So at that moment when you received the news, where was your faith at that time?

Melissa: You know, my faith at that time was very much, I felt like I was in a good place. I prayed; I spent time in...I was in a local Bible study. I was navigating new adulthood, that mid-20 kind of figuring out where do I fit? You know, some friends are getting married and moving into that role of mother, even some of them starting to have children. I was very passionate about the work I was doing and trying to reconcile, you know, what does that mean for me If I pursue this career? Will I have a family? Am I making a choice? What's God's plan for my life? Could I miss His plan? Will I miss the person I'm supposed to marry? All of those things like...

Elisa: Oh, that's...that's big.

Eryn: So real.

Melissa: It's so big. Yeah, so at that time, I would say I was really in a strong place with the Lord. And anytime I was shaken or questioning or fearful, I would pray. I actually had a dream that my mom died a few months before she died, and...

Eryn: Wow.



Melissa: ...woke up and prayed to the Lord. *Lord, I could not imagine if something happened to my mom. You know, just protect her.* And so that's why one of the reasons why it was really hard when I got the news too, is just this question is where, where is God? Because I really grew up with a faith that you reap what you sow, you know, putting out into the world what you want to receive. I didn't know anyone, at least at that age, I wasn't privy to a lot of information of the, you know, family, friends who had maybe gone through struggles. But what I saw is the people in our church were people who love the Lord and really good things happen to those people. And God really protects and there's a lot of, you know, promise for following the Lord, and it's a good life. And so when there was suffering, horrific suffering in my story, that's when I really started to question God's goodness. And is He really omnipresent? And if so, where was He? And how do I trust Him? And so it was really a spiritual crisis at that moment.

Elisa: It's really confusing...

Eryn: Yeah, [inaudible]

Elisa: ...when our good God who died on the cross that we might have life, when that good God allows such tangible, inexplicable suffering.

Eryn: Yeah.

Melissa: Yeah.

Elisa: So how did you move forward through this? Or did you?

Melissa: Yeah. I mean, there is that moment after something, I think any loss, you make the decision. Do you get out of bed the next day or not?

Elisa: Yeah. Yeah.

Eryn: Yeah.

Melissa: You kind of have to decide. For me, there was a lot to do with a death like that. There was a lot of, I mean, we had criminal investigation. We ended up having to arrest. We had two murder trials.

Eryn: Wow.



Melissa: I was the executor of her estate. She had a business that I needed to reconcile and...and deal with the buyout with her business partner, all of these things, you know, a house to sort and clean and determine what to keep and what not to. So I was very busy with the business of her death.

Eryn: Yeah.

Melissa: What I really had to determine very quickly is, could I continue in the role in my job that I had? Could I put the lipstick on, be on camera, say "Good evening. Thank you for joining us. Topping our news, three people have been killed tonight." Could I...could I read the words of these stories again and not fall apart?

Eryn: Right.

Melissa: If I couldn't do that, then I had another problem. I had to determine what I'm gonna do. Cause this was my livelihood. But I really determined then and discovered, and I think it was survival mode, of how to separate my work from my spiritual crisis, if you will. And journey like, for me, I had to put the game face on. I had to get in that space. I had worked really hard to get to that place. And I felt like it was the one place, even though that business can be very crazy and stressful and chaotic, in many ways, it felt like an area I could control. I knew how to work hard. And God had gifted me with skills to be able to succeed in that field. So my mind, the harder I worked, the more successful I was, the more I could protect myself from...

Eryn: Yeah.

Melissa: ...you know, having to deal with all of the emotion that came along with losing my mom the way I did. So I really fought to keep my position, even when the news director asked, "Hey, maybe you need to take a break," or "Maybe this isn't the role for you." I...I wanted to prove that I could do it. And I was really determined too, to be a better [quote unquote] "journalist" out of it to never ask the questions, like, how did you feel when you heard the news that your loved one was killed or died?

Eryn: Yeah.

Melissa: How do you think somebody would feel? That's a really poor question. Like be a little more creative.

Elisa: Not professional.



Eryn: Yeah, right, yeah be a little bit more creative, right.

Melissa: Yeah, yeah, and also just...there were a lot of things that changed for me the way I report.

Eryn: I bet.

Melissa: Victims have a name. They had a life. You could tell of a trial or a case in 30 seconds, but tell me about the person and what's been lost. And so I was very committed to that. So I became, in a lot of ways, really a strong journalist out of it, um, more sympathetic and empathetic for sure.

Eryn: When you grew up so fast having to handle being an executor, and all of those decisions that you're having to make while also grieving and then also processing your career, what was your thought life like in that moment? Was it really like compartmentalizing it?

Melissa: Yeah, you know, one of the first things that I felt after I heard the news was just this sense of, you know, I remember having this thought, you know, just stay sane. Just stay sane. And I think part of that came from the fact that I'd had so many people that I'd interviewed that really lost it in those moments, you know, would faint or you know, urinate on themselves or scream hysterically, things that are completely understandable. But for me, it was really important to understand, I think God gave me a soundness of mind and a presence. And so I initially went into reporter mode, like initially just as the detective. I mean, instinctively. Five questions. You know, was there any sign of forced entry? Was she alone? Do you have a murder weapon? Do you have a suspect? When was she last seen alive? And he is like, okay, who are you, first of all? But I said, I'm a reporter, and I know what you're telling me is true and I don't want to be left out of this investigation. So that was really important to me. And I think there was a soundness of mind that was really supernatural, that God allowed me to be thinking clearly and be present. So there was that.

Eryn: Yeah.

Melissa: And then there was, you know, spiritually for me, there were a lot of questions that I was very scared to ask; because I didn't really know how to process an anger with God, process the questioning God. Am I allowed to question God? Is it okay to do so? But for me, there came a day about, oh gosh, it was three or four months after I was getting ready for my Bible study on a Thursday morning, and really stopped myself and just said, wait a second. Like what am I doing? Do I worship or can I worship this God anymore? And that's when I really had a moment where in my mind I broke up with God. It was a moment of, you know, God, where were you? And there will never be a time in my life I need You more than I



needed You in those 10 minutes. And you say in Jeremiah 29 11, you know the plans you have for us to prosper, not to harm us, to give us hope and a future. She loved you. Where was her hope? Where was her future? The question of all things working together for good out of Romans 8 28. Like I...I don't think I can believe that. This will never be good. Nothing good will ever come from this. This was not necessary. So I really broke up in my mind. I was like, I'm done. You know, C.S. Lewis talks about the hounds of heaven just being after you. Because for me, the hounds of heaven, just really in ways that God only can just would not leave me alone, would not let me go; but it was a dark time. The irony is because of my role, I looked like I had it together. People thought I was really doing well. And so the more I could mask behind that, the better and longer, I didn't have to answer some of the tough questions or really just face them because I was so busy with my work. So it was really a process, a long like five-year process between when she died, and when I think of coming back to the Lord in a very authentic, authentic way.

Elisa: There's another layer of this story as I understand it. Melissa. Your mom was murdered, but you had another family member that also was deeply affected, which also affected you deeply.

Melissa: Yeah.

Elisa: Can you talk about that?

Melissa: Yeah. So my...my younger brother, Max, we adopted Max when I was eight years old. He was my answer to prayer. He was my Christmas wish for every year that I can remember that I wanted a baby brother, sister.

Eryn: Oh, that's so sweet.

Elisa: Oh, I love that.

Melissa: Wanted a baby brother or sister; grew up without one. And so at eight years old, I was...I came home from school one day, and I was told we were going to the mall, and we were gonna be shopping for my new baby brother, a pair of OshKosh B'gosh overalls, if you remember the OshKosh.

Elisa: I do remember those.

Eryn: Yes.



Melissa: Oh, so fun. And I was just stunned. And my parents waited until just a couple of days before he was coming, cause they didn't want to tell me and there be any chance that it wouldn't happen. So I came home from school a couple days later, and there he was. And it was just this beautiful five-month-old baby boy who was a distant relative. I was adopted out of foster care. Max was a distant relative on my mother's side.

Eryn: Okay.

Melissa: And so it was this incredible moment of just being able to be his big sister and growing up with him. He really admired and looked up to me for many years.

Elisa: Of course, of course.

Melissa: So it was just this really...yeah, it was a really sweet relationship. I have three kids now that are within four years of each other, so they are always at each other. But Max and I, I think I was more like a second mom to him.

Elisa: Sweet. Yeah.

Melissa: So it was really sweet. But Max, Max, which a lot of boys I've later discovered through just research and doing a lot of study on this, boys who are adopted especially are likely in their teenage years to go through a period where they really soul search and feel lost oftentimes. Where do they fit in? Why that deep rejection...

Eryn: Yeah.

Melissa: ...of why was I not wanted? They don't...they don't consciously realize this usually. It's something just deep seated. And Max started to drift, and I...and it happened very quickly. And when it started to happen, I could recognize that my mom, and I think it's why I had that dream that she died. I recognized there was something off, cause she was the one who had all the answers. And she could study and read and...and I could just sense that she was struggling with what to do with Max. And so between May, this is in '99, so 25 years ago. But between May and October, Max had started hanging out with some friends at his school. One of them in particular, who came from three public schools he had been kicked out of for assaulting teachers, this kid.

Eryn: Oh, wow.



Melissa: But he was in this private Christian school my mom had moved Max to that year. Max was upset that she moved him out of the big public high school I had gone to. Cause he loved sports, and he wanted to play in that division. But she said to me, she said, you know, Melissa, Max is a follower. She's like, you're a leader. But Max is a follower and I'm afraid sometime he's gonna be caught somewhere. Somehow it's not gonna have been his idea to go there, but he's gonna get caught in the middle.

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: Insightful, yeah.

Melissa: Very insightful. But Max started hanging out with this friend. And it was interesting, because I offered for Max to come with me in Birmingham that summer. I said, "You know what? Why don't you come to Birmingham, spend the summer?" So Max pops over to Birmingham and he...he's like a chameleon. He can really fit in his environment. And so when he's with good kids, he could be really good. But you know, the influence of bad kids impacts him. But he came for the summer, and he really seemed great. But then when he went back home, he started hanging out with this kid again. And it ended up that they were at a party one night, and they went to our house. My parents were divorced and Max ended up...he's supposed to be at my dad's house. He told his friends, Hey, my mom's a Sunday school teacher. She'll go to bed early. We could get into her house and get some money that we owe these kids for at least alcohol. It was never discovered if there was more. But Max ended up, uh, going to our house and my mom was there. And then this kid who Max was with, who was with him, ended up violently. I mean, it wasn't...was not premeditated. But he...this kid ended up violently attacking my mom in the process. She wasn't asleep, and Max was present. DNA evidence shows, and all of the testimony shows that this was not premeditated, but because Max was there when it happened; even though he didn't actually commit the crime. It's called felony murder in Texas. If five people go in to rob a bank, one person pulls a trigger...trigger and kills someone, all five people are guilty of the capital murder. Because the murder would not have happened without the robbery. And so it's not true in every state, but in Texas it is. And because Max was there and went in to take money without her knowledge, he's equally responsible for the death. And so we had two murder trials, and he ended up being convicted of capital murder. Both of them dead and Max. They were sentenced to life in prison.

Eryn: Wow.

Elisa: Oh, Melissa, we just gotta sit with that a second. That's so much. So you lost your mom, and you lost your precious Christmas gift of your baby brother.



Melissa: Yeah.

Elisa: So no wonder you're wondering who the heck God is.

Eryn: Right.

Elisa: And where'd He go?

Melissa: Yeah. You know, the last conversation I had with my mom, she told me that Max...I had a...just a gut instinct. It was three days before her death. I was like, I feel like something is not right at home. And I was on a story in Birmingham, and I told my photographer, I said, "We need to stop, and I need to, uh, call my mom." And he said, "Well, what's going on?" I said, "I don't know. I just feel like something's not right." And when I called her, she said, "Okay, Max has left home. But don't worry, we're gonna be okay. You know, I'm meeting with a counselor. People are praying for us. It's gonna be okay. This is just typical mother-son stuff. You cannot fly home. Do not try to come save us. I've got this. It's okay." And it was a moment that I really chose to believe that it was gonna be okay. And I think that was really hard too. In hindsight, should I not have believed it would be okay? Should I have been on the next flight? Again, where is God? Do we have to take care of all the things because we can't really trust that He will if we don't try? So that complicated my return to Him, I think too, was just really where...where are You? I think with Max, it's still the thing to process.

Elisa: Absolutely.

Melissa: It's so much, you know, to your point of just processing, uh, that loss. Cause a lot of people ask me, you know, how's your brother? And sometimes it's just, I feel numb. It's just a lot to think through. Cause it's, you know, it's hard. You love somebody so much, you wish you could save them from themselves and mistakes they've made, but there's just nothing that I could do to help him.

Elisa: This narrow path between stepping in and being responsible and being a help and attending to those internal nudges from the Holy Spirit, and relinquishing control, knowing that I'm not in control of another human. You know, I'm...I'm not responsible for..

Eryn: Yes.



Elisa: ...other people's choices. I'm responsible for my responses to those choices. You know, somewhere those two things come together in our faith. And I'm not sure we ever totally make sense of them.

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: But we have to live, you know what I mean? That's our choice is to live.

Melissa: Yeah.

Elisa: So...so how did you put one foot in front of another and how do you still?

[music]

Eryn: Well, friends, we're gonna stop right there. Join us next week for part two of this conversation where we explore Melissa's healing journey and how she eventually came back to her faith. You don't want to miss it.

Elisa: Well, friends, we'd love to hear from you after listening to an episode of *God Hears Her*, take a minute to just share what stood out to you. What did you learn? How did it speak to your heart, or how has it impacted your journey? Is there something that you wish we'd explored further, or a question that you wish we'd asked? Maybe there's a topic that you're hoping we will dive into in a future episode or a guest that we will invite to join us. Your reflections and questions and insights help us grow together as a community of women seeking God's presence in every part of our lives. You can find a link to share all of that with us in our show notes. Thanks for sharing your voice and your heart with us.

Eryn: We are so excited to let you know that we now have a *God Hears Her* YouTube channel. Be sure to subscribe to watch the video version of the podcast. You can find the link in our show notes. Find that and more at godhearsher.org. That's godhearsher.org.

Elisa: Thanks for joining us and don't forget, God hears you. He sees you, and He loves you because you are His.

[music]



Eryn: Today's episode was engineered by Anne Stevens and produced by Jade Gustman and Mary Jo Clark. We also want to thank Luanne and Kathi for all their help and support. Thanks everyone.

Elisa: 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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