



God Hears Her Podcast

Episode 194 – A Spiritual Crisis: Part 2 with Melissa Harrison

Elisa Morgan & Eryn Eddy-Adkins with Melissa Harrison

[Music]

Melissa: And it was just this sense of He saw us. Like all that time I wondered *where was He? Did He really not see her? Did He not know?* But this bag of chocolate chip cookies was this divine moment where I'm like, *the Lord sees me. He has been with me all of the days of my life. He knows.* And it was such a moment in that beautiful summer of just these beautiful stories.

[Theme music]

Vivian Mabuni: 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. God hears her. Seek and she will find.

Elisa: Welcome back to *God Hears Her*. Last week, we heard from Melissa Harrison about her deep grief and hurt after getting the news that her mother was murdered. If you haven't listened to that episode, go back and check it out for part one of Melissa's story. Today we're diving in again as I ask Melissa: How did you put one foot in front of the other to eventually return to your faith?

Melissa: Part of the journey for me was, after my mom died, you know, a lot of times I'd go out on stories and things where I... You have to maintain a certain distance from the people you're interviewing to remain professional. And for me, there was a story I got really close to the family. It was a woman had been abducted. I got close to her grown adult children through the search process. And then when her body was found a few days later, it was so difficult. It was hard for me to just go home and return to my own life at the time. And I said to a photographer of mine, I said, "You know, what do we do? We show up on these people's doorsteps the day their world is falling apart. And I make sure my lipstick's on, and I'm looking good. And I report, and then we leave. We just leave them. And I know the nightmare for them is often just beginning." And he was a very good friend of mine. He's actually the photographer who was at the dinner party the night I was hosting it in Birmingham, and he drove me home to Texas. So he had been with me in the darkest hours. And he said to me, he said, "you know, Melissa, I think that you might need to take a break. Like you are wanting to do more than this role will allow you to do. You actually..."



your job is to just report and say what happened and then get in the car and leave. But if you want to do more,” and he said, “maybe there’s... you should write about what you’ve been through, or do something longer form, you know, that would really allow you to connect with victims of this.” And so there was an opportunity to go to New York for my master’s degree at Columbia University. And one of my things that I’d always wanted to do was live in New York City, and so it was kind of a bucket list item. And I thought, *look, I could do this for ten months, do this master’s program, and then come back to Dallas and return to television news.* And before I went, a woman who was my counselor through a lot of the time after my mom died and really helped me through that, she said to me, she said, “you know, Melissa, you’re going to New York for Columbia.” She said, “but I think God is taking you to New York for something else.” And I remember thinking, *okay, Carolyn, yeah, God’s got a plan, you know?* She said, “God’s got a plan for you in New York.” I just...

Elisa: Pat, pat pat...

Melissa: ... yeah, exactly, like *that sounds great.* I decided not to trust and all of those, but you know...

Eryn: Hmm. Yes, I’m done with that. Yeah.

Melissa: Exactly, exactly. But what ended up happening is when I moved to New York, there was an organization called Priority Associates. It was part of Campus Crusade. It was their workplace ministry for young professionals. And my realtor in Dallas told me about it and said, “you know what? You should check this place out cause it could be a great way to meet other young professionals, quality people in the Big City.” And I was all about building a social network. I mean, that was fine.

Elisa: Wow.

Melissa: ... And I wasn’t ... like I could still go to church. I could be in a Bible study even. I just wasn’t really facing the hard questions about how I was feeling about God at the time. But when I went to Priority Associates, I met all these amazing women. They were top of their game, you know, just partner at Goldman Sachs, principal ballerina at New York City Ballet, news anchor for Fox News, really incredible women, but they were such high quality and really like a deep faith. So I was really drawn to them and wanted to have more time with them. So one of the women had just graduated from Dallas Theological Seminary. She also had just moved to New York, so we got to know each other. And she said, “Hey, what if we start a small group on Wednesday mornings? Why don’t we just do like a Bible study?” And I was like, “Well, sure, if you wanna teach it and you know, that’s fine. And then I could just send out the email.” And so we started... I could do that part, the social part.



Eryn: Yeah, the logistics I got.

Elisa: Yeah. Got it.

Melissa: Exactly. I'll make like a breakfast. New Yorkers are great because if you make like a casserole, they think you are just this gourmet chef. They're so easily impressed.

Eryn: That is so funny! That's so true.

Melissa: So great because nobody cooks. Nobody cooks there. And so I would bring the casserole, and I'd send the emails. And we... for a year, it was, you know, almost a full year we did this study. And she led us through Romans, and it was very... it was good, but it was very safe. Nobody got really personal. It was more about just coming together. We'd say our prayer requests, but they weren't too deep or too personal. And that next summer she had to take a step back, and she asked if I would be willing to lead it. And I knew, hard stop, like I was not in a place where I could lead a Bible study. I just like... I don't really think that's what I could offer. But the group really wanted to keep meeting, and so I just relied on my ...um... journalistic skills. And I said, "okay, everybody has a story, so why don't we take turns each week of the summer? And you just ...

Elisa: You clever girl!

Melissa: ...share your story."

Elisa: Clever girl! But she saw something in you that she called out too.

Eryn: I'm so curious. What happened after you started leading the Bible study?

Melissa: Yeah. God showed me through that... those stories. And the women were getting to me on work-life balance issues, or eating disorder, or wrestling with forgiveness. It was one week the woman who came in and talked about forgiveness, she was a woman who everybody really admired in the group. And it's like she's beautiful and successful and talented and... and she just said... the first thing she said was... her topic was on forgiveness. And I thought, you know, I wonder what happened to Claire that she's had to forgive someone. I wonder what that was about. And Claire's first words were, "We need to cut the crap," she said.

Eryn: Yes!



Melissa: And I'm like, *wait, what? What did she say?*

Eryn: I love it!

Melissa: ...She's like, "we need to cut the crap." She's like, "you actually don't know anything about me." She's like, "let me guess, you think I've got it all together because I look put together, maybe cause I'm successful or cause I'm volunteering all the time. But," she said, "the truth is I'm a mess. And I can't say this to anyone." She's like, "What I'm gonna tell you, I've never told another believer, but..."

Elisa: Oh wow, good for her.

Melissa: ...if I can't say it here, we're wasting our time." And she said, "I had an abortion in college, and I can't forgive myself. And I'm volunteering all the time at this ministry because I so desperately want to earn grace cause I just don't feel like I can just receive it." And so, as you can imagine, walls came down, and women opened up. But for me personally, this is the moment when God really started to reveal to me His character through people's suffering, because everybody was sharing it. Whatever it was, was their deepest moment of pain or struggle, but that God could meet them there, and we could see His goodness through all the stories. The thread of His presence, even when we feel like He's not there, and there's some very specific ways that He showed up for me that summer. And one of them that I don't share often, but I... just a little side story. When I was growing up, my mom, I mean, birthdays were a big deal. And all the things were a big deal, like in many of our homes. Right? The traditions, the Christmas pajamas, the big day for your birthday, all the things. But one thing we had that was really just known to us was our Gotcha Day. And our Gotcha Day is that day we were adopted. And nobody ever really knew what day that was other than my mom. But that day I would come home, and there would be like a brown paper bag or some gift bag on the bed with our name on it. And inside would be almost like stocking stuffers, like something small...

Elisa: Sweet!

Melissa: ...but personal. And then she'd always make these homemade chocolate chip cookies that I loved of hers. So, when my mom died, like everybody knew about when my birthday was or the Christmas Eve, I got like ten pair of pajamas from all of our friends cause they knew that tradition, and they tried to keep it alive. But Gotcha Day was just kind of forgotten. And so when I'm a part of this group in New York, I'm trying to discover... cause my ten-month master's program is over, but here I'm part of this group that I'm like, *something is happening here. This is magical.* It's amazing. This was... healing was happening. And while every week in that group, I was hearing the stories, also God was doing things



in my life. And one of them was that I needed to determine if... My lease was up, and so I was putting things in storage, trying to decide if I'm gonna stay in New York or go back to Dallas, which was the original plan. And as I'm praying about that, one of the women in the group, she said, "you know, my husband and I are gonna be out of town for a few weeks. Why don't you just stay at our place while you're trying to decide and determine this?" And I said... you know, another thing I said to myself after my mom died was like, *never trust or lean on anyone for anything*, was kind of this mode I went into, like *just be self-sufficient because then you won't be let down*.

Elisa: Yeah, be strong.

Melissa: ... People will leave or something happens. So I really was like, "I can't just accept that from you. That's a really sweet idea, but I really can't. I would feel much more comfortable if I paid you for your home or something. You know? just feels like a lot to just stay there without pay." She's like, "no, we've prayed about this, and we really feel like we're supposed to offer you this." So they were gonna be out of town. She left a key for me. And when I got into the house, I went upstairs into the room and on the bed was a brown paper sack with my name painted on the side of it. And inside were chocolate chip cookies from my favorite bakery in New York, Lavain Bakery.

Elisa: Oh, Melissa!

Melissa: And I just... I mean, I have to tell you, I remember so well like the entryway of that room. I feel like... And you know, I'd been a runner back then, and I felt like I'd been running and running and running. And God was like, *just stop! Like let Me love you. Stop running. Let Me love you through people...*

Eryn: Yeah, through people, through community.

Melissa: Yes. And it was just this sense of He saw us. Like all that time I wondered *where was He? Did He really not see her? Did He not know?* But this bag of chocolate chip cookies was this divine moment where I'm like, *the Lord sees me. He has been with me all of the days of my life. He knows*. And it was such a moment in that beautiful summer of just these beautiful stories, just seeing God's presence so tangibly. And He just wooed me back to Him. But so much of... so much of my healing took place in that community of women leaders who were willing to get real and really share authentically. And one thing I did really pray through and asked my counselor one day after my mom's death. I said, "is there anything my mom could have done differently?" And she said, "you know, Melissa, the only thing your mom did not do, she did not let anyone in her circle know the depth that was ... she was struggling with Max." And I think it was generational. I think it was a protection of him. I think there's a lot of reasons.



Elisa: Maternal. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Melissa: ...But the thing is, that night in our home, she did things that... she was scared. She locked a door that was never locked. It's the door they could have easily gotten in and grabbed her purse and been out. That was the plan. But she locked it. It was a side doggy door, never locked. She wore a ring every day that she put back in the original box, back up... up in a basket in her closet under scarves. So she was hiding valuables.

Eryn: Yeah.

Melissa: You know, she did things... I'm like, had she just let anyone know that she was scared. But because she was the leader, cause she had to have it all together, because she was the go-to for all the people in all the circles, she didn't give herself permission. Or she didn't feel like she had that, you know, just that ability, that freedom to share. So for me, I think at that community of women, it was when somebody just said like, "we gotta stop pretending like we have it all together in this Christian community. We've gotta be honest when we're struggling and be able to do so in a safe way, you know, but in a way that we can really receive the help we need." So that's where I think so much of what God showed me in that group was just what happens when we're willing to create a safe space. You must create a safe space and hold it so carefully. But I do wish that my mom had had that or given herself permission to go there.

Elisa: Melissa, that is so full circle. Thank you for sharing so deeply. And, you know, what you just said is that's your passion now, is to encourage women to take the risk to share with other women, to ask for what your mom couldn't ask for, you know, for help. For what you couldn't ask for, too, for a long time. And I guess maybe that's... is that your heart motivation behind what you did with "Pure," that movement, and then also what you're doing now with "Forward" is to invite women to recognize their needs. Let me... let me hear it in your words, you know, how this has worked out in your current life investments.

Melissa: Yeah. Well, you know, it's interesting because we had that small group. And I was praying about how might God be calling us to really go deeper together, because that summer was beautiful. We had 12 women in May, and by October we had over 45 women that were just coming out of the woodwork. And numbers are great, but what happens is it's often hard to stay deep when you get bigger. And I felt like the Lord was really showing me, you know, get these women out of the city. It was just so clear. It was like, *get them away from the city, away from the noise*. So for me, it was looking at, okay, let's plan a retreat. I really felt on my heart we're supposed to do a retreat. And at the time, you know, when you're



just growing in your faith with the Lord, either just becoming a Christian or in a new season, I feel like He makes things so obvious that sometimes later it takes a little more digging.

Eryn: Yeah, it's so true.

Melissa: But it was so obvious. He's like, *get them out of the city*. And like the next day somebody told me about a retreat center in the Catskills that was great. And then, you know, we're praying about who would I have speak? And we were reading a book by Lysa TerKeurst at the time, and she wasn't very well known yet. And I'm like, "I'll just call this lady and see if she'll come speak." And so we had Lysa TerKeurst at the Catskills. There were like 40 of us. Beautiful weekend. A year later, a woman who was part of that group came to me and she said, "you know, Melissa, you do a great job of gathering women. Would you consider planning like a retreat for us" that's similar to something they had in New York at the time called the "New Canaan Society." And it was a group of bankers in New Canaan, Connecticut that would meet on Friday mornings. But every year they would have this big annual conference, and they'd bring together like 800 to a thousand men. And she was sick of it. She's like, "my husband goes every year, and he comes up with a stack of business cards." She's like, "my job is bigger than his, and the only thing for me is the potluck lunch at the church at a time I can't go because I have a job." And so she said, "would you think about planning something like that?" And I'm like, "yeah, I think that'd be amazing." So we... I was thinking it'd be like the event at the Catskills. We'll just get a speaker, book a couple rooms, and then just, you know, plan it. Well, we surveyed women to find out, cause the New Canaan always had theirs at a really nice resort. So it was like, well, will women be willing to pay? Or do they want the cabin in the woods? What do they want?

Elisa: Yeah.

Melissa: And we surveyed women, and true New York style, they told us what they didn't want. They didn't want fluffy. They didn't want cheesy. They didn't want inspiration. They weren't looking for a celebrity to tell them how to live out their faith. They were not... they didn't want a lot of pink.

Elisa: I love it.

Melissa: It's so funny. One woman said, "I don't want an estrogen fest where I feel like I'm being made to cry every five minutes."

Elisa: Oh gosh. Yep. Yep.



Melissa: I'm like *so New Yorker!*

Eryn: I love that though.

Melissa: So we knew... I know, right? People wanted to get really to the raw element of their relationship with Christ and just such a pure... That's where that word "pure" came out. A friend of mine from Dallas was like, "Melissa, have you ever read the definition of the word 'pure?' It's being "thus and no other, free from anything that weakens or pollutes what something's designed to be, and containing nothing that does not properly belong." So we were just planning one event, and we're going to help women kind of look at their, like: Who are you, not compared to one another, but thus and no other? You know, what is weakening or polluting what God has designed you to be? And what's in your life that does not belong? Is it a mindset, a habit, a relationship? And so we went with Pure, called it "Pure 2008." We sent out the email, and the woman called from the Sagamore two weeks later. And she's like, "okay, two things. Number one: you need to write a book on how to sell an event in a recession," she said. "Because number two: you have sold out the hotel. You have over 300 women from 26 states coming to this." And I was like, "what? Who are these people?" She's like, "I don't know. I'll send you the guest list. You're gonna need to find out." And so I panicked, cause it was almost like if you're having a dinner party, and you tell people, "invite friends." And then it takes on this whole life where I'm like, okay, almost a hundred women from Texas were coming. And we are in New York! Like, and I'm from Texas, so there was that part that I'm like, nothing that... No offense, but I am thinking these women... What is this... what's gonna happen when they all come, and the New Yorkers are here? And all the things...

Elisa: The blend.

Eryn: It's true, the blend of both polar opposite states.

Melissa: Exactly. And I got in the shower, and I felt like the Lord was just like, *Melissa, I'm in charge of the guest list. You prepare for royalty because the daughters are the Most High King are coming, and you need to be prepared.* And it was truly like a spirit of excellence just fell. It wasn't perfectionism. It was very much like this excellent... *just love them well.* Every email, every interaction, the whole event, that it would be so specifically tailored to them. We found out specifically like: What are your needs? What are you struggling with? We went back and did a lot of like research on each of them, got a survey. We would also ask the question: Do you have something you could speak on? Are you a licensed therapist, or have a skill, or as a coach?

Elisa: That's smart. Yeah. Mm-hmm.



Melissa: And then the next woman who registered, you know, was somebody who worked with couples, Christian couples on, you know, issues of intimacy. And it was very much this beautiful way that God brought it all together. And it... So "Pure" kind of was birthed accidentally in that way.

Eryn: Well, moving forward, how did you meet your husband in the midst of all of the work you were doing, and how did you end up working for "Forward?"

Melissa: Yeah, it was interesting because I had met somebody I started dating two years prior, when we were planning "Pure." And that guest list was coming, and we were having like three months to get ready for them. I had been dating somebody at our church, and he was so irritated with me because every time we had plans, I was like, "I'm so sorry. I'm gonna have to cancel because I need to meet this woman to pray with her." Or "I've gotta go to this brunch," or I, you know, "but I'll be back." And he's like, "you know what? You are like every other New York woman. You're so focused on your project, on your business, on your plan. You know you're gonna wake up at 40, single, with no kids." It was so interesting.

Elisa: [whistles] Wow!

Melissa: Needless to say, we broke up.

Eryn: Yeah, I was about to say, yeah, "Bye!"

Melissa: And I'm like, *oh my gosh, I'm...* He's in ministry. You would've thought this would've been like amazing to see the move of God, but he was irritated, so we broke up. But then the last day of the event at the Sagamore, a woman came up to me and said, "are you dating anyone?" And I'm thinking, *not anymore!* And she said, "well, my boss's name is," and she said his name. And then she's like, "and he lives on the West coast, but he's, you know, we all are like, he's gotta get married. He's just, you know, a great guy, grew up in the mission field." She's like, "I've been watching you all week, and I feel like you guys would just hit it off. You have such a similar heart for ministry." And she's like, "And you need to bring this to Northern California, and you need to have it at this hotel."

Eryn: I love it.

Melissa: And then she left. And I'm like, I don't remember her name. The boss's name was kind of a different name. What hotel did she say? Like we want to go there, and I was like, "I've gotta get ahold of that lady." So it took a year...



Elisa: Oh my goodness!

Melissa: ... before our paths reconnected. And then she introduced me to her boss who lived in Portland. So I'm on my way back from Portland, and I'm on a flight and I'm sitting next to this woman. Before takeoff she starts talking about workplace ministry, women in the workplace, you know, all these things. She hangs up, and I said, "you know, I'm so sorry. I did not mean to be eavesdropping, but who are you? Like, what do you do?" And she said, "Well, my name's Diane Pattison, and I just wrote this book *Work, Love, Pray*. I just hung up with my editor." She said, "this book is coming out. We're going to have a couple of book groups in Portland and Dallas, and I'm launching something called Forward." I was like, "oh, that's amazing! That's so great!" She told me she had been COO at two large companies. And I said, "you know what? We should have you come speak at our next conference. Maybe you could be like our luncheon speaker or do a breakout for our C-Suite women, and then we could buy your book for everyone when it comes out." And she's like, "that'd be great!" So she came that next year to our Northeast Conference in Hershey. And we just started a friendship. My husband — now husband, boyfriend at the time — who lived in the Northwest, I would be going back and forth to date him. And Diane and I would meet up for coffee. We'd go for a walk. I helped her when she hired her first employee. She's like, "Hey, could you meet with Katie and just talk to her about ministry?" And I'm like, "I'd love to." And so we just had this fun, very friendly relationship where we'd connect when we could. And when my husband and I got married after that and ended up having children, his company brought us back to Dallas. And it was at that time that I really grieved because we were on... I was so happy to be married, loved that we were having children. But I had to leave New York, and it was really that leaving the place where you have your healing and just go through such beautiful community there.

Elisa: Melissa, you know, we started with this tragic, horrific, heartbreaking turn of you losing your mom and really your brother in a prison sentence. And then you struggling with your faith and just what kind of God would allow this. And you've taken us on a dot-to-dot-to-dot-to-dot kind of journey. Through His precious leading and your surrendering, following, and the surprises and the discoveries and the shocks, and the *What?!* What the point is, is how God knew and then wooed and then interacted and then invited you. And you continue to respond to His invitation. So, as we close this, I wonder if you would speak to a woman who's in a very unexpected turn. She's just feeling unseen, confused, very bewildered by what God has allowed in her life. Would you speak to her just for a minute and give her a perspective from your journey and for what you know about God?

Melissa: Yeah, I think the... the biggest thing is just to know that you're not alone, God sees you, and that none of your tears are lost. He is literally holding you right now. And even if this is a time of frustration or feeling forgotten or overlooked, just questioning, you know, *where is God in this moment?* that you can



know, first of all, it's okay to ask those questions. It's actually the beginning of a really... what can be a really rich relationship with God when you're willing to go there and not be afraid. Don't be afraid to tell God how frustrating it is, or how hard this is, or how overlooked you feel, and to ask Him to show you, in ways that only He can, that He's with you, to reveal Himself to you.

Elisa: Mm. Mm.

Melissa: ...And to just know that this is not the end of your story. It feels like it sometimes, and it can be terrifying to think that it may not get better, or that there's not gonna be a new beginning, or there's not gonna be a way out. But this is not the end of your story, and God is going to be able to use all the things that you're going through. Romans 8:28 is real. He can work all things together for good. I can tell you, on the other side of it, even though I would give anything to have my mom back, I can tell you He's used even that for good. And He continues to show me His character. And, you know, your story is going to be able to help someone else; so don't give up because what you're going through and the scars, even the battle scars and wounds and just — ugh — the blood, sweat, and tears sometimes of just getting through the day, God's going to be able to use your story to really help someone else. So not only is it gonna be redeemed for you, but you're gonna be able to be a light for other people. And on the other side is gonna be a faith that can be very rich that you will not ever want to give up, because even though you've had to go through what you've done or what you're going through to get there, your faith will be rich, and you'll be able to reach people that other people just can't cause they really don't understand. But God's gonna use it for good and so don't give up. And just trust that He has got you, because there is a dawn even on the darkest, after the darkest night. There's a dawn coming, so don't lose hope during this time.

[Theme music]

Elisa: Melissa's story is amazing. The Lord gives us an opportunity for our faith to grow even during the very hardest seasons.

Eryn: Yes! Well, friends, we'd love to hear from you. After listening to an episode of *God Hears Her*, take a moment to share what stood out to you. Your reflections, questions and insights help us grow together as a community of women who want to seek God's presence in every part of our lives. You can find a link to share with us in our show notes. Thank you for sharing your voice and your heart with us.

Elisa: We're now announcing our season break. It's been so fun to be in the midst of Season 14. Keep an eye out for our re-releases this summer, and join us for Season 15 starting August 4th. If you missed any episodes, you can find them 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]

Elisa: Today's episode was engineered by Anne Stevens and produced by Jade Gusman and Mary Jo Clark. We also want to thank Peggy and Jody for all of their help and support. Thanks everyone.

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

[Our Daily Bread Ministries theme sound]

Eryn: God hears her is a production of our Daily Bread Ministries.