



God Hears Her Podcast

Episode 195 – Created in God’s Image with Ellen Wildman

Eryn Eddy-Adkins with Ellen Wildman

[Music]

Ellen: Looking at women in the Bible, like Deborah and Mary and Mary Magdalene, seeing and thinking about how their body was a part of their story. For Mary Magdalene, for example, you know, she was healed by Jesus, and that includes her body. I'm thinking, *how did she feel in her body? How did she understand that as part of the miracle?* And the more that I thought about being made in God's image, the more that I realized it really affected every area of my life.

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.

Eryn: Well today, *God Hears Her* family, you have just me and a very, very special guest named Ellen Wildman. There's a few things that we're going to dig into today. We're going to talk about body image, worth, we're going to dive into her devotional, *Already Whole*. This woman that we have today is a powerhouse. I mean she has her bachelor's in Bible and Ministry to Women from Moody Bible Institute and her Master's in Biblical and Theological Studies from Denver Seminary. Ellen, welcome to the *God Hears Her* podcast.

Ellen: Thank you so much. I'm so happy to be here.

Eryn: I'm so excited to have a conversation with you. So I would love, before we like really dig in, I would love to know: what was Ellen like as a younger girl? And how did you kind of find the Lord in your journey?

Ellen: Ooh, great question. So I kind of grew up going to church. My parents had us in programs. They were really focused on missions as well. So I started going to mission trips at a young age, and I don't actually know the exact age when I accepted Christ cause it was just a part of my life, a part of my culture that I grew up in. But it was around second or third grade when I remember starting to pray a lot. I was a very anxious child, and so the first verse I ever memorized was about lying down to sleep, knowing the



Lord would protect you. So I memorized that as a young kid, and I really do think that, even from a young age, I remember seeing Jesus as my Friend and seeing Him as someone that I could go to when I felt anxious or when I felt worried. So I always had that relationship and that connection with Jesus, even as an elementary schooler. And the more that my family got involved in missions and involved in local serving and local missions, the more my heart grew for others and for the Lord. And then I realized that I liked studying the Bible and telling others about how to study the Bible, so that led me to Moody. And then I kind of fell into writing just... I thought everybody liked writing. [laughter] And then I started working at a Christian publishing company, and I realized not everybody liked that or enjoyed writing. So my passions kind of just all aligned at that moment of teaching women theology and really just empowering people. I realized a lot of my friends, in particular, didn't feel empowered to go directly to the Bible themselves and study the Word themselves. They felt like they had to go to a pastor or to a podcast or to a sermon or whatever — which are all great things — but I realized a lot of my friends would come to me with questions, and I would point them back to Scripture.

Eryn: Mmm. Was there somebody in your life that modeled that for you? Or was that just something that was just innately in your DNA? Or where did that curiosity come from?

Ellen: Yeah, I think a lot of it was born out of not having someone...

Eryn: Oh, okay.

Ellen: ... if that makes sense.

Eryn: Yeah.

Ellen: I think when I first went to undergrad, to Moody, I felt like I was in the position where I wasn't sure if I had enough smarts and enough tools to understand Scripture. I remember sitting in classes and them talking about even like Calvinism versus Arminianism. And I was like, *what? I don't know what you're saying.*

Eryn: Yeah, yeah. Like what are those? What do those mean?

Ellen: *What is that? What is that?* But I was too nervous to ask the question. And the more that I studied, I realized, first of all, there's never like a situation where you can't ask a question. It's totally fair to not know those things. But, also, I want to be that safe place for other people where they can come and be



like, *I really don't know about this*. Or *Do you think there is a place in Scripture that says this?* Or even with *Already Whole*: how does scripture talk about our bodies and body image and self-confidence?

Eryn: What would you say is a common thread when it comes to ... maybe there's a lie that was a common thread amidst your friends or your life that has caused women to not believe or to love their bodies and to see themselves how God sees them.

Ellen: I think it all comes down to the biggest lie is that our body is disconnected from God and disconnected from our faith. And all the other lies fall under that. The lie of my weight is the determinant of my worth. Or I need to make sure I'm keeping up with the trends of beauty culture and body standards and all that kind of stuff. And even that there's a quick fix around the corner. We should try this new thing always. But, yeah, they all fall under that idea that the way I see my body is kind of disconnected from my relationship with God.

Eryn: Hmm.

Ellen: And I think a lot of that is because of the culture we live in, you know, separating that. But when I realized, in my own personal study, what it really meant to be made in God's image and how that could affect my body and how I saw my body, it was so incredibly freeing that I just was like, *I have to tell everyone about this*.

Eryn: Mm. Okay. Can you take us on a journey? What was that like for you? What was the aha moment or the heartbreak that caused you to face that and go, *okay, I need to explore this more with God?*

Ellen: I really think I have always struggled with body image and self-confidence; but again, it was always pretty disconnected from my faith. And I would maybe come to God with those feelings, but I would never connect like, okay, God created my body, but that doesn't affect how I see it or how I feel in it.

Eryn: Yeah.

Ellen: So that was my story for a long time, I would say, until even after college. And then there came a point when I started kind of delving into the secular body-positivity world, self-love world. And I found some really helpful tools there, some really helpful ways to view myself, but I felt like something was always missing.

Eryn: Hmm.



Ellen: Because although it was helping my body image, and although I was learning how to kind of tune out those cultural ideas and those ideas of quick fixes...

Eryn: Mm-hmm.

Ellen: ...it was... it still wasn't connecting with my faith. And then really what all changed it for me... I don't even remember how I got into it or how I found it, but that idea of Imago Dei, being made in God's image in Genesis 1:27. I just came upon that, and I had that aha moment where I was like, *okay, I've read this a million times, but this is talking about my body. Every part of me is made in God's image, including my body. And what does that mean?* And I started gathering resources and looking, you know, the big pile of dictionaries and commentaries and all that kind of stuff, because I was so excited about the idea that this freedom in Christ, and freedom in Christ in the way I see my body, had been waiting for me that whole time. It had always been there, but I just hadn't found it until now. And that was probably — I don't know — maybe six or eight years ago.

Eryn: Yeah.

Ellen: And ever since then, I've just been telling everybody about it and kind of formulating the words in my mind. And then when I started writing, it was challenging because I was revisiting a lot of those times where I was really self-conscious or where I didn't like my body.

Eryn: Yeah.

Ellen: So that was challenging, but at the same time, I could look back and see like, look what God has done through His Scripture and through really recognizing the power of Him creating us in His image.

Eryn: Hmm. That's so good. I want to just tap on something that you said that I was taking notes on. You know, you said you found some tools that were in like the self-care, self-love, more secular space. I'm curious as to what those were.

Ellen: Yeah. For me, I would say I struggled a lot with my relationship with food. I grew up in a house that we dieted a lot. There was a lot of diet talk; so a lot of the tools I found outside of my faith were more about like making food more neutral, you know, not good and bad foods. Learning to eat everything in moderation and not say like, *oh, I have this dessert. I have to eat it all today.*

Eryn: Yeah.



Ellen: Or *I have these foods I can't eat. They're off limits.* And I really do think those things did help me in my journey with body image and self-love, because it got me more to a body-neutrality standpoint, which is another thing that secular body positivity talks about.

Eryn: Yeah. What is that? I'm curious what that is.

Ellen: So it's kind of like the goal ... or my goal is self-love, loving your body. But you can't really go from not thinking about your body or even disliking your body directly to loving it. That doesn't work.

Eryn: Right, it's a journey

Ellen: Yep. So, for a lot of people, the starting goal or even the end goal is body neutrality, which is just seeing your body as neutral. It's there, it does good things for you, but it's almost like you don't even have to think about it very much. And I think a lot of those secular tools... also just learning self-care beyond like bubble baths and cupcakes.

Ellen: Yep.

Eryn: Which I do love both those things, but...

Eryn: [laughing] And bath bombs. Yep. Yeah.

Ellen: Yes, great.

Eryn: Yeah, there's something that goes beyond that.

Ellen: Yes. Learning that self-care can be like moving my body in ways I enjoy and finding out what that means. And also like napping, you know,

Eryn: Wait, hold on. We've gotta pause on that for every woman, cause I think that we appreciate the napping.

Ellen: Napping is very spiritual.

Eryn: It really... it really is. A holy nap is a true one.



Ellen: One of my professors in seminary said, “sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do is take a nap.”

Eryn: Mmm.

Ellen: And every time I wanna take a nap, I think about that. And I'm like, *well, my professor said that so it must be true.*

Eryn: Yes, I love that. One of my mentors told me, 'cause I used to feel so guilty when I'd fall asleep in Quiet Time in the mornings. I would just lay down, like I'd get a coffee, and for some reason I... you'd hit to getting to my Bible and in my journal, *I'm so tired, I just wanna take a nap.* And I felt, I'd like speak shame over me, and it just made me feel even heavier and just felt bad. And she told me, she said, “you know, sometimes I realize that God's calling me to rest in Him. And it's not by reading Scripture, but it's actually visualizing resting in His arms.” She gave me that visual, and so that's... anytime I fall asleep during a quiet time, I'm like *I'm just resting in the Lord's arms. That's where He is calling me.*

Ellen: Yes. Yes. I saw something recently that said something like, “the great news is that when God makes plans for us, He factors in our humanness.”

Eryn: Mm. Aww!

Ellen: And I was like *that's so helpful.*

Eryn: Oh, and so much grace in that.

Ellen: Yes, because even with my body image journey, or even with self-love, I would have moments of like, *am I doing this wrong?* Quote-unquote, “doing this wrong.” But God factors in our humanness and our freaking out or our not doing things or all that kind of stuff.

Eryn: Gosh, it's so true. With all of that, like the bubble baths and the being neutral to your body, it's still not acknowledging that God has created it by being neutral. Right?

Ellen: Right.

Eryn: So one thing I wanted to ask you was like, how did you mentally go from like what's instant gratification? Because really it's like if you do that every day, it remedies it for that day. But it doesn't



remedy for the long game of seeing how God sees you. So what was the journey of like sustainability and really trusting in what God says about our bodies? And maybe there's a Scripture, or maybe there's a story in the Bible that captured your attention. I'd love to learn more about that for you.

Eryn: Let's take a quick break to hear an exciting announcement.

Jade Gustman: When life's answers don't come easily, you need real conversations with real women who want to give everything back to God. That's what *Unshakeable Moxie* is all about. It's a love letter praising our Heavenly Father for His faithfulness. This six-part Bible-study journey explores the topics everyone is afraid to discuss out loud and then sees what Scripture has to say about them. Get a copy for you and gift one to a friend with our special BOGO deal. You can find a link for that in our show notes.

Eryn: Now let's learn from Ellen on how we can trust that what God says about our bodies is true.

Ellen: Part of the journey was just discovering that I will never fully be able to accept my body outside of seeing it as God's creation. Because when I did the secular tools or read the secular books and all that, it was helpful, but it always left me feeling like at the end of the day though: *How do I feel about my body even when I have these tools?* And the more that I reflected on being made in God's image and honestly looked at a lot of examples of women in the Bible, not necessarily how they felt about their bodies, cause you know, there's not a verse that's like, "Deborah loved her body and felt good about it."

Eryn: [Laughing] Right. Right.

Ellen: But looking at women in the Bible, like Deborah and Mary and Mary Magdalene, seeing and thinking about how their body was a part of their story. For Mary Magdalene, for example, you know, she was healed by Jesus, and that includes her body. I'm thinking, *how did she feel in her body? How did she understand that as part of the miracle?* And the more that I thought about being made in God's image, the more that I realized it really affected every area of my life.

Eryn: Yeah,

Ellen: Because it helps me to see my body as beloved and as good because it was made by God, designed by Him, and blessed by Him. But also, it helps me to give others more grace, because I think I can see them as being made in God's image. When others are struggling with body image, I can think, *yeah, I've been there. Here's how I have found freedom.* And I can see that struggle a little bit more as the



work of culture and even the work of like a spiritual attack more than, *oh, this is just how it is, you know?*
Us girls gotta get on the newest diet.

Eryn: Yeah. I love what you said whether it's culture or a spiritual attack. Ultimately, at the end of the day, the enemy wants to destroy and distort the way that God sees us and how He values and views us. And he does anything to do that. How have you navigated being able to not have like a bitterness or insecurity towards what culture says that we should look or be like? Or what is attractive or what is sexy? And the reason I ask that question is because, first off, I have struggled my entire life in the way that I look. And maybe somebody on the outside would say it would be quote-unquote "ideal" cause I'm small, cause I'm four-eleven, and I'm tiny. But I was the runt in all of middle school and high school. I was the last to hit puberty. Basically in my entire life, I would always look around and I hit everyone's armpits. People would say really rude and mean things to me about my weight. Then I've always dealt with the struggle of believing I can't even live to the standard of what culture says. And I've fought so hard to just not have jealousy, resentment towards what is the ideal, because I'm not the ideal. And there is no ideal! (laughing)

Ellen: Right.

Eryn: So how have you navigated in your journey of seeing women and not being bitter or resentful towards them? Or seeing them as villains?

Ellen: I think even, based on the story you shared, that shows how broken the ideal is because once you realize that even someone you're looking at as, *oh, I wish I was like them. I wish I had X, Y, Z, that they have.* They're thinking the same thing about someone else.

Eryn: Mm-hmm.

Ellen: So even those who fit into the quote-unquote "ideal" are struggling with the same things.

Eryn: Yes.

Ellen: And I think that is what a lot of body positivity has taught me is that it's not people that have really even created these. Maybe we perpetuate the standards a little bit, but we haven't created and maintained these. It's really diet culture and the industry of always making us feel less than and like we're missing out on something. And, to me, that feels very unifying in that we can unify against something instead of against each other.



Eryn: I love that. Yeah.

Ellen: I mean, I think about that moment in “Mean Girls,” which is very random, where they’re all saying like, “I don’t like this about myself. I don’t like this about myself.” And then Lindsay Lohan’s character can’t think of something she doesn’t like because she hasn’t been brought up in diet culture.

Eryn: Mm.

Ellen: And just like how we can have those moments with our community of like, we all have something we don’t like about our body. I think we can do the opposite and see, *oh, here’s diet culture out here. Here’s unrealistic beauty standards. Let’s fight against them together.*

Eryn: Yeah, I love that. So I have three stepdaughters, and I am aware now of how I talk about myself in front of them, whether I’m getting ready, putting makeup on, putting too much makeup on. But I’ve also witnessed Livy, who’s our, she’s nine, and I’ve known her since she was like five. And she wanted to put foundation on when she started watching me put foundation on, and she... I remember this clear moment where she was just covering her whole face in foundation. And it wasn’t her color of her skin, and I just thought, *oh!* Like that’s a small thing, but it made me aware of how much I am influencing young women that are around me and how they see themselves by how I see myself and how I talk about myself in front of them. What are your thoughts on that? Have you experienced that personally? Have you seen that?

Ellen: Yeah, our words really matter, and our words can make a big difference. But I think it comes down to our personal journey will impact how we talk about ourselves and about our bodies. That’s what I’ve noticed. I am much more mindful now of how I compliment other people, even something as simple as I may be... You know I’ll still compliment someone’s hair or their makeup, but I’m noticing more like, *wow, that person really made me feel seen.* Or that person said something that was so encouraging, and I’m still thinking about it a few days later. So I might come back to them and say like, *Hey, thank you so much for saying that, that really, you know, turned my day around.* The more that I have worked on how I see my own body and how I feel at home in my own body has changed the way that I speak to others. Because I think I want them to feel this way too. And I don’t want to be a part of making them have a moment that derails them.

Eryn: Yeah.



Ellen: Or making them second guess something. For me, a big part of that is as simple as I never talk about my like relationship with food or my weight or size, unless the other person does. Because I've noticed that for some this number — size — might be so uncomfortable, and they would never want that. For some, that's their goal. Same with relationship with food. For some people, like they want to get to a place where they don't eat a lot of sugar. Some people, like me, love desserts, and I want to have dessert every day. So it's just the more that we find out what works in our relationship with our bodies, the more mindful I think we naturally are of how other people will interpret the way that we're talking about food and bodies and our appearance and all that.

Eryn: Yeah. That's really good. What woman sticks out to you in Scripture? Who was the one that captivated you the most?

Ellen: I have always loved Deborah.

Eryn: Okay.

Ellen: I think because she is such a great example of a leader in Scripture. She's so powerful. But she's one of those where, you know, it doesn't talk about her body. It doesn't talk about how she felt in her skin. But part of me thinks that, in and of itself, is a good example of how the way we see our bodies is important, but it's not the most important thing. We've all heard those sayings of like, no one's going to remember your jean size at your funeral and that kind of thing. And the reason I love Deborah is because I can look at her as someone as an inspiration, and as someone who was living out their calling. And at the same time had a body, existed in the world in a body. And I love being able to think about how she interacted in the world as a woman in her body.

Eryn: So would you share, for somebody that doesn't know who Deborah is, pull back the curtain of who she is in Scripture?

Ellen: I actually have a devotional on her in the book, so Deborah's in Judges. And I'll just read a little bit of my devotional, so the verse that I pulled out for her is Judge 4:4–5. It talks about how Deborah was leading Israel at that time, and she held court under the Palm of Deborah.

Eryn: Mm-hmm.

Ellen: And Israelites would go to have their disputes decided, they would go to her. So I write here:
Deborah's relationship with her body is uncertain. But here's what we do know. Deborah was a judge, the



only female judge described in the book of Judges, a leader in Israel. She was wise, discerning, and bold. To be a leader, she had to be confident and self-assured. We see this in Judges 4 when Deborah instructed Barak to go to battle with Sisera, and as a result the people experienced 40 years of peace. In fact, in Judges 5, Deborah praised God saying, "Hear this, you kings; listen, you rulers: I, even I, will sing to the LORD. I will praise the LORD, the God of Israel in song." Deborah had a grounded and steady faith in God, and she unequivocally got her calling and confidence from the Lord.

Ellen: Now this is kind of what I was talking about. I write: *We look to the Bible for examples of self-assured, fearless women. Deborah is a wonderful example. While the details of her life are largely unknown, we can affirm that she was a confident leader who relied on God. Deborah was daring and courageous, and people took her seriously. May it be the same for us.*

Eryn: Mmm.

Ellen: And then I just say, "I can look to her example as I heal my relationship with my body and come to terms more fully with who I am."

Eryn: Mmm. That's so good.

Ellen: And I think there's so many examples in Scripture, like I said, of women who are amazing leaders, whether it be in their community, in their broader culture, in their home. And just to think of, as we heal our own relationships with our bodies, what type of qualities do we want to emulate from those women?

Eryn: Yeah, exactly. What kind of qualities? Yeah, that's a good word. Maybe somebody that's listening right now that she's like, *oh gosh, yeah, I don't... I don't have a great relationship with my body, and I want one. But I don't even know where to begin in involving God in this journey.*

Ellen: Yeah.

Eryn: What would you encourage her may be some practical ways as her first steps?

Ellen: Yeah. So at the beginning of the devotional, I have a list of affirmations for the journey. And I think a really good place to start is what I say in Affirmation One: Reflecting God is an essential part of who I am. I am made in His image, His living, breathing handiwork.

Eryn: Mm-hmm.



Ellen: So I think if we start there, what does it mean to reflect God just in who I am, not in anything I've done, not in anything I want to do, just as His creation that He created beloved. What does that mean? That's where I started. You know, I didn't start by being like, *Hey, I love my body all of a sudden*; but by thinking, *wow, God created everything around me, but He only created humans in His image*.

Eryn: Mm.

Ellen: We're the only part of creation He created in His image. Why did He do that? What does He want me to do with that?

Eryn: Mm-hmm.

Ellen: And I think, although that's a big question, it's also an easy way to start when you think about your own body and you think about: Why does God create us differently? Why did He create me this way? How does that reflect how I see my body even today?

Eryn: What would you say to somebody that's really... just really discouraged by the way they view themselves?

Ellen: It can be helpful to remember that this is a journey, as we've kind of already talked about. As with anything, we're all going to have days where we might not like how we look, or we're really fixated on a certain part of our body, or we're really struggling with our relationship with food. But especially in this journey, because your body is always with you, you can't really put aside your feelings for the day and be like, *I'll revisit it later*.

Eryn: [laughing] Yep. Yep.

Ellen: So I think in that moment, for me, and what I would say for others is it's always helpful to think, *okay, this is just a day in my journey. This isn't encapsulating my whole feelings about my body or who I am. This is just a bad day*. And that happens. We have bad body-image days. We have days where we swipe up on a sponsored Instagram ad for weight loss, something or other, you know? We all have that, but to view that as just a bad day instead of a bad life or a bad body has been really helpful to me.

Eryn: That's so freeing because I think... I can get in my thoughts and go like, *my feelings are the future...* [Laughing] so easily. However I feel the intensity of it, I can... I can take it to *this is the forever*, you know, instead of going, *this is a bad day, this is not my... my life. This is not a bad life, this is a bad day*.



Ellen: And I think because body image and beauty standards and toxic culture are so pervasive, it's always going to be a journey. I'm to the point now where I have one of those thoughts, and I don't think *Ellen, get it together!* I think, *wow, this industry is trying so hard to make me hate myself, but I'm not gonna do it.*

Eryn: Yeah.

Ellen: So. Everyone is going to have those moments where we doubt ourselves or where we feel bad. But think reframing it, *I'm not gonna succumb to the beauty industry body standards*, can feel kind of freeing and almost like rebellious. Like, *Hey, I'm actually not gonna diet for my wedding.*

Eryn: Yeah. Well, as we come to close, Ellen, I'd love to know is there anything that's on your heart that we haven't covered that you'd love to share with the *God Hears Her* community?

Ellen: Yeah. I think one thing that I was thinking about this morning is the subtitle of the book is *90 Devotions for Being at Home in the Body God Gave You*. And I'd love to just encourage the *God Hears Her* community that this is really a journey of coming home to yourself. Your body is the only thing that you will be with for your entire life. You can never separate from it. You can never leave it on the shelf and come back to it. It's always there. That can weigh on us, or we can find ourselves coming home and taking a sigh of relief, like, *wow, this is a good thing that God created in His image for me to live in for my entire life and to rest in.* And I found that really freeing, and I think that the idea of being at home in your body helps us to believe that we're worthy of self-discovery. And we're worthy of feeling at home in our bodies with God's help.

[Theme Music]

Eryn: Thank you, Ellen. What a beautiful and thought-provoking conversation. 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. You can find a link to share with us, as well as a link for Ellen's new devotional *Already Whole* in our show notes. Check all of that out at GodhearsHer.org. That's God Hears Her dot o.r.g. You can also find some of the other conversations that we've had on body image in our show notes if you'd like to dig a little deeper on this topic or feel like you need more after this conversation. And one more exciting announcement: Our 200th episode is coming up! As part of the celebration and a thank you for all of your support, we are doing a giant giveaway full of goodies. Check out our social media for entry rules and keep an eye out for our 200th episode. Thank you 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 Chriscynthia and Alicia for all their help and support. Thanks everyone.

Elisa Morgan: 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.

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