



God Hears Her Podcast

Episode 201 Breaking Free of Shame with Jess Connolly

Elisa Morgan, Eryn Adkins with Jess Connolly

[Music]

Jess: And so I just kind of started to ask, if John says, "If the Son has set you free, you are free indeed," how much of that do I get to experience here on earth?

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Elisa: So, Eryn, you know how passionate I am about impacting generation after generation. I mean, I'm old now and it's not about me, like it ever was. But you know, it's about passing things down generation to generation so that...

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: ...we create a legacy that continues to live on for Jesus. And today we're gonna be talking with a woman who's just as passionate about that. She's in a different generation than me, so that's really cool, and really specifically wants to talk today with us about struggles that women have issues, being super tired, body image, eating disorders, inadequacy, etcetera. But this is who it is. Dun, dun, bing. You ready?

Eryn: Bing! Yes, I am. Wow, that was a really good setup.

Elisa: Thank you. Thank you. This is Jess Connolly, and she is an author and a church leader and a coach. And her books are exactly what I've just described about helping women break free. One of them is *You Are the Girl for the Job*, one's *Breaking Free From Body Shame*, and her newest one is *Tired of Being Tired*. She's the founder of Go + Tell Gals. She also helped start *She Reads Truth*, and we've had those gals on with us before...

Eryn: We have.

Elisa: ...so that's super fun. So, hey, welcome Jess. We're so glad you're here.



Jess: Oh, thank you guys. It's my joy to be here. Thank you so much for your work, and thanks so much for just inviting me into the conversation. I'm grateful.

Eryn: Jess, I'm so grateful that you so boldly empower women to learn to love themselves so that they can love their communities. So I just think that's really great.

Jess: Oh, my joy.

Elisa: How did you get to the place where you understood that there's not the zero sum power game? That if I have power you don't, or if you have power, I don't?

Jess: Hmm, wow. What a great question. To be honest, I found myself in, in a more formalized ministry, specifically online writing and speaking and coaching in kind of a roundabout way. Since I met Jesus, I've been obsessed with mission and ministry my entire, Christian life since I turned 15. And I've mostly served in the local church context. But something interesting happened in my early 20s, and that is that my family went through a season of intense brokenness. Year after year after year, we struggled with poverty. We lost a baby. We kind of basically were like mission field dropouts. We had some really hard situations happen living in full-time missions that were really difficult. And all throughout all of these struggles, I was a mommy blogger. And I say like, if somebody asks, like, how did you come to write so many books or get published, etcetera, I would say like, I was a mommy blogger with like a train wreck life happening and people couldn't look away, which made them read my blog. I really, really, really needed God. And so I'm very grateful that, from an early age, from early adulthood and fresh in my faith that I had a real understanding of 2 Corinthians 12:9, that "His power has made perfect in weakness.: The Apostle Paul says, "So I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses. So His power may rest upon me." And I think, yeah, I think I just had this really strong understanding early on that the gospel is the best thing about me, that people who had tidier lives still needed God, that the messy parts of my life did not disqualify me from His love, from ministry, from calling, from any of those things. And so, I'm thankful for really the...the victory and the vision that pain afforded me.

Elisa: Mm. That's not an easy place to get.

Eryn: Is there a circumstance that you can recall on like a specific memory?

Jess: Whew. What a great question. You know, I have a story that I...I have not told for years. But I would say was just a...a marking moment in my life. So there was a season in the...in the thick of this season, my husband and I, we had run a maternity home, which is a very strange mission-oriented job.



So we ran a maternity home, meaning we had pregnant teenagers come and live with us. So we would have, um anywhere from three to six pregnant teenagers come live with us in this...in this farmhouse at a time. And we would walk them through pregnancy and help them kind of decision make how they were gonna raise these babies or if they were gonna place for adoption and walking them through an open adoption process. And so it was just a really wild, intense...

Eryn: Yeah.

Jess: ...job...live in job, you know? And we felt like our time in that season was ending, and we actually felt called into church planting in that season. And that was right around 2008 when the recession hit. And so financially, it was just a very intense time to get out of essentially full-time mission ministry work to try to do some other kind of ministry mission work. And so we entered into this really intense financial struggle season, living well below the poverty line. We had three kids at the time. For a season, we were unhoused, just, um, needing to live with different family members, move from place to place. It was just incredibly, incredibly difficult. Every day felt like such intense stress. I...I, you know, I just, so much pressure. But during that time I went to a large mega church in the area that we were staying at, um, staying with some family members. And it was like a midweek service, like a midweek worship service. And I remember feeling so incredibly disqualified from the message and so incredibly disqualified from the community. And...and it was only shame that spoke that over me. Nobody else told me that. Nobody told me I wasn't good enough, or nobody told me I didn't belong there. But I sat on the back row, and...and my husband and my kids had not come. I just felt like I needed to be in the house of the Lord. And so I was sitting on the back row, and y'all, I was just a wreck. I was just a wreck. I remember crying. I think at one point, I wasn't sitting straight up. I was like laid on a couple of seats.

Eryn: Oh oh.

Jess: And some women, some older women, came and gathered around me and started praying for me. And I...I could barely hear what they were saying. I couldn't tell you to this day right now what they were saying. I do remember one of them, before they walked away, she was like, if this is about a man, you tell me his name, and I'll find him. And I was like, it's not. It's not about a man. It's not about a man. Um...

Elisa: [laughter] Oh, I love that.

Jess: But I would say, it was around that time that I got also really interested in the story of Mary Magdalene and her person and her narrative in the Bible. And it was probably around that time that I realized that she was the first human person to see the resurrected Jesus. She was the first person



commissioned to go and tell the gospel. Literally, Jesus tells her to go and tell, which is why I named my, my ministry that. And it was around that time that I found out that her first encounter with Jesus was healing her from demon possession. And I was like, He really does take the busted women on the back row and not only see them and not only call them worthy, but also speak calling into their life. And all that had kind of happened in my life at the same time. And I was like, I think I...I want to spend my life equipping women who maybe feel like they're the messiest one on the back row.

Elisa: That is anointed. What a beautiful starting point. I mean, that's a calling point. And now how long ago? That was 2008. So, you know, we're going forward...

Jess: Yeah.

Elisa: ...18 years, something like that. That's amazing. And so now looking at your life, what has happened from that time forward? How has God shepherded you to impact others and especially on some of these broken kind of topics?

Jess: Yeah, well, it's really interesting, I think being someone who is in ministry for a long time and specifically who writes books for a long time, I wish for me that every book I wrote was like, you know, a new strength or like some new thing that I'm an expert at. But typically it tends to be, for me, at least in my ministry, that I acknowledge some area of brokenness or weakness in my life. God heals it. Some time passes, and then I'm able to serve other people out of that. And so while you can definitely qualify that as like strength to strength and victory to victory, and I do believe that's God...how God leads us, from the outside, it also can really look like from weakness to weakness. It can also look like from problem to problem to problem. So that how I would say the last, you know, 15 years has gone for me is that as I've continued on in ministry, as I've needed God in new ways, as I've encountered or even maybe become aware of broken places in my life, I've been able to let the light hit them. And God sometimes, occasionally brought messages out of that. So yeah, if I looked at the sequential nature of like the books that I've written, that's how they've moved about.

Eryn: When you use the word *busted* which I just love that word, I think that's a great word, to explain. Cause sometimes you just do; you feel busted by life. It just keeps hitting at you. What has happened I guess, for you to have had felt an accumulated...I'm sure, an accumulation of things that made you feel busted?

Jess: Yeah, I think some of it was subtle messages of shame that the enemy spoke over me. Some...nobody had to say it, you know. I could look at other young moms with a couple of kids and their families and say like, wow, that is a tidier story. That looks easier. They don't seem to struggle in the
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same ways that we struggle. And maybe some of that wasn't even true. Maybe that was assumptions I was making about the outside of their life. Maybe it was, to some degree, it is actually very difficult financially to be in ministry. You know, that is...that is a risky endeavor for many of us to...to step into a life of ministry.

Eryn: Yes.

Elisa: Yes, yes. And it's difficult to be in your 20s and have a family, three kids.

Jess: Yes, a hundred percent, exactly. But then some of it, you know, if I'm honest, were overt messages of shame that, that people would come and say like, why can't you guys get this together? What is happening here? You know, I'll never forget, a man pulled my husband aside at one of the churches that we were at, that of course we are no longer at. He brought the verse to him about how, you know, a man who can't provide for his family is worse than an unbeliever.

Elisa: Oh my goodness. That was edifying, yes.

Jess: Yeah, you know, you're obviously in some kind of sin. You're obviously in some kind of situation that you can't provide for your family. At that time, I feel like our capacity as a...as a Christian community to have compassion for people who are going through hardship has...has increased. There's obviously still a lot of room for all of us to grow in the way that we treat people who are just...just experiencing the effects of a fallen world. But, so yeah, some of those messages were overt, and some of them were just subtle, or just...or just there.

Elisa: To make a little bit of a turn here, I love your...and...and appreciate your honesty so much, Jess. Your transparency here. You know, all these messages that get piled up on us come from a...a fear of being vulnerable. I know exactly what you're talking about in terms of, I look at...I would look at all the other mommies and think, you know...

Jess: Yeah.

Elisa: ...they've just got it all together. And then I would begin to, I think the Lord helped me with this. I'd begin to imagine what was going on behind their garage door or their apartment door. I'm constantly being led to the reality of my makeup-ness, you know, in terms of what I make up about people

Jess: Yeah.



Elisa: Is usually wrong, you know. They're usually more like struggling. And...and one of the "strugglies," you know, that you share about is your "struggly" with a body image stuff. And boy is that so normal. And Eryn shared a lot about how difficult it is to be undersized. And I'm now old, and I have parts of me that will not stay where they're supposed to. And I'm like, what are you doing over here? You know, and it's just...it's so embarrassing. There comes the shame again. You know? It's like I'm supposed to wear a bathing suit. No. Anyway, you're right in the middle there. You know, what is that message of body shame and whatever season we're in? What has God brought you through on that?

Jess: Absolutely. So, for me, I was kind of in the thick of, again, ministry by the point that I...I started really digging into my body image. I was already...I'd already written a couple of books. I was traveling to teach. We were leading our church, and I realized there were all of these parts of my life that I had believed God about. I had obeyed God and said yes in this thing, and it had redirected my life this way. So many things that were based on what I believed to be true about God and the kingdom and His Word.

Elisa: That's encouraging, yeah.

Jess: Yeah. I was like, this is great. have a life that is...is patterned after obeying God, except for the way that I talk about my body, the way that I treat my body. And I have believed God and experienced freedom in all these other issues. And freedom from addiction I had struggled with and just all these other different things. Like, wow, He...He can really, um, break us free except for I...I kept this one part. Like except for the way I feel about my body. I'm always going to feel that way. Everybody feels that way. All Christian women feel that way. And so I just kind of started to ask, if John says, "If the Son has set you free, you are free indeed," how much of that do I get to experience here on earth? How much of that maybe my...I get to experience as it pertains to my body? And so, actually in the thick of the pandemic, in the early days of the pandemic, I had already done a lot of body image work with therapists and other pastors and had started to really kind of search some truths about, what does God say about our bodies? Where can I get a working theology of the body from...from Genesis to Revelation? What is true about our bodies? And so I'd already done a little bit of that work, but I was having a conversation with my book editor one day early in the pandemic over Zoom. And she said, "Hey, how do you think women feel about their bodies right now? They're stuck inside. They're not exercising." And I was like, "Oh, I can tell you that I'm seeing the memes. Like I'm seeing people post. They do not feel good about their bodies." And she said, "How do you think they're gonna feel a year from now?" And I said, "I don't think they're gonna feel very good." And she said, "Here's what I want you to do." She was like, "This is just a...a little practice for you." She said, "I want to invite you to go buy every Christian book you can find on body image, and maybe some non-Christian books." And she was like, "I want you to just see what you can find." And I did that. I did the research. And unfortunately what I found was very little information. And, heartbreakingly,



some of the Christian books that I found and read and purchased from Amazon, were some of the least kingdom-minded perspectives on body image. I heard just some intense messages of shame from the Christian voices. And so I thought, this is not it. This is not it. So I just went on an...an exploration of God's Word and...and really kind of dug into this promise of, if You created our bodies as good, do we spend the rest of our lives trying to make them good? Or can we spend the rest of our lives agreeing that they're good? And if so, what would that look like? What would it look like to stop trying to make my body good, and instead just come into alignment with the truth that it already is? And so that's what...that's what *Breaking Free From Body Shame*...

Eryn: That's good.

Jess: ...is about for me.

Eryn: Wow.

Elisa: That's so freeing. It's not a program with 12 steps.

Jess: Noo.

Elisa: It's...it's really a...I like the word *alignment*.

Jess: Yeah.

Elisa: You know, alignment with what God says is true. Rather than trying to push and huff and puff ourselves...

Jess: Yeah, yeah.

Elisa: ...to some other place. We receive, don't we?

Eryn: Yeah, what do you think contributed to forming your perspective of your opinion of your body, Jess?

Jess: Yeah, well, you know, the first thing I say for women is like, hey, shame off you if you feel bad about your body. You did not start this fight. You were born into it, so...



Elisa: Shame off you.

Jess: Shame off you.

Elisa: Shame off you. Not shame on you. Shame off you.

Jess: Shame off you, yes.

Elisa: Yes.

Jess: Shame on you is a message from the enemy. So we know that shame off you is the message of Jesus.

Eryn: Yeah.

Jess: Because He literally died on the cross to take shame off of us, to die for our sins, and rise with our redemption in hand. So all that being said, we're just born into a narrative about the brokenness of our bodies from media, from culture. But I would say most specifically, what's interesting about how most women are informed about their body, how their narrative is formed, is actually hearing other women talk about their bodies. So, thankfully in 2025, we don't have as much overt body shame from one person to the next. So thankfully, it is becoming cul...very culturally inappropriate to talk negatively about somebody else's bodies. Now we still do it, people still do it, and Christians still do it, and it's messed up and it's broken, and it needs to stop. But what is far more culturally appropriate, unfortunately, is to talk negatively about our own bodies. And so unfortunately for most women, they are learning what they believe to be true about their bodies from how their mothers, from how their aunts, from how their grandmothers speak about their own bodies. And so that was, you know, unfortunately how most of my narrative was formed. Not just media and not just culture and...and what was promoted and what was praised, but also how I heard other women talk about their bodies. And then, so I would say that message became cemented and incredibly dangerous for me after I became a believer. And I heard believing Christian women talking in a defaming way about their bodies and maybe even adding some spiritual oomph to it. Maybe even sounding as if that's how God would talk about their bodies or how God would speak about them. And so I would say that was probably the most negative narrative in my life was after I became a believer.

Elisa: So let me apply that for what I just shared. There are places in my body that don't stay where they're supposed to stay, what I was saying. And I...I've been so blessed by an essay that Anne Lamont



wrote about the aunties, aunties, which is an essay about her thighs, and how she has learned to take them boldly to the beach and she doesn't even wear a coverup, and she's proud of her...

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: ...aunties. And that's what I try to do when...when I look at my body.

Jess: Yeah.

Elisa: It's tough because of a lot of things that you're saying, Jess. But I really like that alignment piece. I mean, our bodies were made to break, you know. I mean, because of the fall.

Jess: Yeah.

Elisa: They will age, they will shift, they will diminish, they will get ill, and to accept that as part of this one precious life we have, as Mary Oliver says...

Jess: Yeah.

Elisa: ...is a beautiful gift back. So I hope that, for everybody who's listening and heard me defame my places that don't stay in place, that's what I...I mean, I'm working on that too.

Jess: Yes.

Elisa: I think we all are. And that's a beautiful...thank you so much for that application for me so I could say all that.

Jess: Yeah, well listen, my...my parts don't stay in place either. And I don't think it's defaming our bodies to...to mention it, to notice it. Like, interesting, I woke up and what was supposed to be on the left was on the right. Cool, cool. So I...I...just so you know, shame off you as well. Because I think...I think noticing it and mentioning it and even like sometimes making light of it, like, wow, that's...that is very interesting.

Elisa: There you are. There you are. Wow.

Jess: Wow, surprise.



Elisa: There's that muffin top, okay, yeah.

Eryn: Jess, what were some key, verses, prayers, perspectives that pertained to what Scripture says about our bodies that you weren't finding in...in all these other books?

Jess: The idea of the difference between, in Greek, the *sarx* and the *soma*. So I would say this is a biblical misconception that is actually really informing people, and specifically women, about their bodies in a negative way. And so the difference between the *sarx* and the *soma* and then in the New Testament is the *sarx* is the flesh.

Elisa: And that's S A R...

Jess: S A R X. So most of the time that we see the word *flesh* in the New Testament, the Greek word is *sarx*. And that word means *flesh* like your sinful desire, what we need to put to death. Now, unfortunately, there's not a huge delineation of when we're talking...

Eryn: Okay.

Jess: ...about the *sarx* and the *soma*. The *soma*, s o m a, that's the Greek, um, like English transliteration, is the body.

Elisa: That's good.

Jess: And from Genesis to Revelation, the *soma*, the body is good. God made the body and called it good. Jesus' body, His glorified resurrected body, His human body, pre-death, good. *Soma* good. The needs of the *soma* are good. Needing to rest, good. Needing to eat, good, needing to nourish yourself, all good. All of the desires of the *soma* are good. The desires of the flesh, the *sarx*, are...are a spiritual flesh, are bad. And we want to put the *sarx* to death. Why this is such an important...important clarification specifically for women, is that especially women are taught from a young age that if they deny their *soma*, they are somehow being strong.

Eryn: Yeah.

Jess: So if you feel hungry and you don't eat, you have good willpower. If you're tired, but you push through, you are somehow resilient. If you need to cry, but you're in a board meeting and you're able to



stay stoic; you are obviously a fantastic leader. You're strong. But all of that would...would deny the needs of the *soma*.

Elisa: Yes.

Jess: Um, and so when we mix it up, we think, oh, I should deny the flesh. So it's good if I know how to deny my flesh, if I know how to not eat, if I know how to push hard, if I know how to keep going, if I know how to be resilient. We've mixed up the two. We should deny the *sarx*. But we should honor the *soma* because God honored the *soma*, because God loves the body. Cause He made...made the body. His kingdom comes and His will is done when His people do His will. And so to even care for our *somas* is to take care of what He cares about. Um, so I would say that's a huge...a huge message that I...I hope people will pick up on, that caring for the body that God gave them...

Eryn: Love that.

Jess: ...is good and it honors God. I would say another...another really just like helpful truth about God's Word, is that we falsely believe that the body doesn't matter, that it's just like this flesh suit. It's...it's all gonna go away. It doesn't matter. But the fact that we have an embodied Savior who came to earth in a body, who is still embodied, and that we are made in His image, shows us that His body matters. In fact, His body matters so much that His body and His blood purchased our place in the throne room of grace. They accomplish something in Him. We celebrate it when we celebrate communion, remembering His body and His blood given on our behalf that we might be reconciled to God and reconciled to one another. That body matters. And so we have a lot of people believing falsely that it's really spiritual if you don't care about your body, if you just think like, oh, this old bag of bones, it's gonna go away one day. When everything really in Scripture points to the idea that we're gonna get a new body in the new heaven and the new earth. But we're gonna have a body, we're gonna be embodied people. And the way that God made our bodies does matter. And again, this has such wild implications. Because if you believe that it's somehow spiritually mature to deny the needs of your body...

Elisa: Yes.

Jess: ...to not care for your body, to neglect over your body.

Elisa: Yes.



Jess: Not only will you miss out on some presence of God in practicing embodiment, but you'll also probably neglect your body or treat it harshly, or not know how to care for other people's bodies in a...in a compassionate and caring way. So it actually has just wild implications in the way that we live our Christian life.

Elisa: I love that you connected that to resilience, you know, our crazy mythology of what we think we need to be, and that makes us resilient. And isn't that wonderful? You know, brave woman. Would you talk about that in terms of what issues are you seeing women facing today? I mean, you've been writing recently about I'm tired of being tired. And I'm thinking about I'm...I'm tired of being strong. I'm tired of being the one who has to carry, and that's supposed to be the godly warrior, etcetera.

Jess: Yeah, well my research and my studying for *Breaking Free From Body Shame* definitely led me to writing *Tired of Being Tired*. Because I had this kind of instinctual thing that started spinning in me that I was like, okay, if I cared for my body, if I really cared for my body, if I lived free, if I lived as free as I already am, if I believe my body is good, how would that then have a ripple effect in my life? And part of that was I would rest differently. And so I would say, what's interesting for me about fatigue and about rest is that we tend to see it in a very one-dimensional light. So we see fatigue and rest as like your...your body's physically tired, so you get physical rest. But what I find for most of us right now in...in the current culture we're in, is that we actually have many different types of fatigue. There's spiritual fatigue. There's emotional fatigue. There's physical fatigue, and there's mental fatigue. And knowing what kind of tired we are will also speak into and inform what kind of actual rest we need. And all of that is actually very important to our relationship with the Lord. Because I...I find that for many of us, we don't know where we end and where He begins. We don't know what we're responsible for and what He's responsible for. And so we've somehow kind of bought this lie that we graduate from needing Him.

Eryn: Yeah.

Jess: Kind of going back to all...all the way at the beginning of our...of our conversation. Like I had this moment 15 years ago where I really needed God. Well, I don't want to get over that. I still actually want to be the girl who acknowledges that I need God, that I can't parent my kids on my own, that I can't lead anyone on my own, that I can't make it through a meeting on my own.

Elisa: No.



Jess: That I can't come to any kind of wisdom on my own, that I actually am going to need God's help continually. And I can receive it, not only in my physical body, but also in my mind and also in my emotions, and also in my spirit.

Eryn: Hmm, that's good.

Elisa: As we turn the corner, Jess, and you send us off with some final-ish thoughts, you know, what's...what's, capturing your attention right now in terms of what women are struggling with, but maybe what you are struggling with and how you keep on keeping on in a healthy way with your faith?

Jess: I really just can't say this enough. This is what God has on my heart for women right now, is that I think that we want our stories to be a good bit tidier than they are. I think we're even okay with like a past part of our testimony saying like, that season was really hard and here's what God taught me period. Let's move on. And then the rest of my life, yeah, I lived in victory. Unfortunately what I'm finding is that is not how it works. We...we actually do not graduate from needing God.

Elisa: Yeah.

Jess: And to some degree, that really can be a story of...of living from victory to victory. But it doesn't feel like that. It...it really does often feel like you're living from weakness to weakness or pain point to pain point or even new sin, acknowledging new sin to new sin. You know, like, wow, I didn't even know I struggled with that. And now we gotta deal with this, the whole thing. And I...I think if I could just encourage women to not be fatigued by that, to not let the enemy distract them with shame about that, that you...you have not somehow broken life because it is hard for you or difficult for you; again, maybe after it already was previously. But that your kind and good and compassionate Father is coming toward you with mercy. And He's still placed you where you're at on purpose for the good of others and His glory. And He's not surprised by your pain, but He's also not unmoved by it. So yeah, that's what's on my heart and that's what I'm... I'm preaching to myself right now these days too.

[music]

Eryn: Jess is fantastic. It was so inspiring to hear about how we can shake the shame off and do our best to get the true rest we need.



Elisa: Well friends, be sure to check out our website for a link to Jess's website and her books. There you can also find *God Hears Her* resources and blog articles. Check out 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]

Elisa: Today's episode was engineered by Anne Stevens and produced by Jade Gustman and Mary Jo Clark. We also want to thank Will and Dave for all your help and support.

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.

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