



God Hears Her Podcast

Episode 203 – The TEND Method: A Scripture First Approach with Mariel Davenport

Elisa Morgan and Vivian Mabuni with Mariel Davenport

[Music]

Mariel: We want to look at those verses and ask: *What is this teaching about God?* Because God's Word is primarily about God, not about us. It begins by revealing God to us. And so, if we can lean in and look at just a few verses at a time and ask: *What is this teaching about God?* It is amazing how He will illuminate that to us.

[Theme Music]

Eryn Eddy-Adkins: 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.

Vivian: One of the things I love about being a part of *Our Daily Bread* and *God Hears Her* being produced by *Our Daily Bread* is the whole vision and passion for Bible engagement. I love that our guest today, Mariel Davenport, shares the same kind of passion. So Mariel is an atheist-turned-Christian through reading the Bible, and she is passionate about helping women learn to engage in the Bible. We're going to talk about that through her TEND study method. Trained in precepts and community Bible study, she is a mom of two grown sons and a married to her college sweetheart, salsa garden lover, which I just love Mariel's heart for the Word of God, and for women to really be rooted and grounded and confident in their approach to the study of God's Word. And so, welcome Mariel to *God Hears Her*. And we are thrilled to have you and would love to hear some of your backstory of what brings you to this point. But just to kick us off, would you mind sharing some of your story of how you went from atheist . . .

Elisa: Yes.

Vivian: ... to a follower of Jesus?



Mariel: Yeah. Well, thank you so much, ladies. I am so excited to be here and to get to chat with you guys and just share God's story of what He's been doing. So, yeah, I grew up in a broken home. I had a lot of dysfunction and instability growing up. And so, by the time I was a young adult, I decided I was just an atheist. I didn't want anything to do with God. I didn't think He existed, and I didn't want to go to church or, you know, do anything to do with that. As a young wife at the time and a pregnant mama, a coworker put a Bible in my hands and challenged me to read it. And I thought, *that's fine. I'll read it*, but only to disprove her and even disproved my husband at the time who was very... had grown up in church and just very much like, "We're gonna take this baby to church" And I was like, "I don't want to do that. I don't want anything to do with that."

Elisa: So, a question here. Did you grow up going to church at all? Or why did you decide there's no God? Was there another reason that you went, *Mm-mm, can't do God?*

Mariel: Yeah, I think it was just because so much had been unstable in my life. I felt like if I couldn't see God, He couldn't possibly be real. He couldn't possibly exist.

Elisa: That makes sense. Okay.

Mariel: I felt like I just needed something tangible to give me stability. And getting married young, I really think my catalyst into getting married, the whole reason was I needed something to hold onto. And I thought, *well, my husband will be a great savior*. And husbands do not make good saviors.

[Laughter]

Elisa: Yeah, great point right there.

Mariel: He's a great husband, but not a good savior.

Elisa: The mic drop right there. Yeah, we could be done.

[Laughter]

Vivian: I'm curious with your relationship with your coworker. How did she come to the point of giving you a Bible?

Elisa: Yeah.



Maribel: Yeah, yeah. She... you know, looking back, I'm like, *wow, I want to be like her*, because she cared about me. She cared about my new pregnancy and was always seeking out time with me to talk with me and have coffee and just develop a friendship. So, I trusted her, and so through conversations, she was just like, "you know, have you ever even read a Bible?" And I was like, "no, I've never opened one." So she just gave me it, you know, at work one day and was like, "Hey, I've got this extra Bible. You're welcome to read it." And was very non-threatening. I mean, I remember feeling very, like, it's all on me. It's not like she's forcing me to do anything I don't want to do. And it was just very natural and just a kind lady.

Elisa: Where did you start reading? Did she tell you, or did you just start someplace?

Maribel: I don't remember her telling me any place to start. So, when I opened it for the first time, I just started in Genesis, like how you would start at the beginning of a...

Elisa: Wow, you're brave! Yeah.

Maribel: ...of a book. Yeah. I had no idea what I was getting into, you know? And so I started reading. And as I read, it was mind blowing. I mean, I had never heard of Moses or Noah or Abraham, so I really didn't know any of these people that were in Scripture that were clearly dysfunctional. And I could relate to that. And they were clearly unstable, and I could relate to that, you know. But I was just blown away by how this God was holy and yet pursuing these messed-up people. And I don't even know why it never dawned on me that maybe it's not true. I just kept thinking, *wow, this is amazing. This is so real and so colorful. And, you know, who makes up a story like this, you know?* So, I was all in from go.

Vivian: You know, the Holy Spirit is at work. And, you know, it says in the Scripture He's our helper, He's our teacher. He leads us, guides us into all truth. That's really amazing. So, from there, tell us what happened.

Maribel: Yeah, and that's exactly right. I mean, the Holy Spirit does His job, you know, and just illuminates Scripture to those that lean in. So, by the time I got to the end of Book of Genesis, my eyes were opened. And they are... at the... at the last chapter, they're actually looking into Joseph's coffin, and they're going to carry his bones back to the promised land. And it just... the mortality of that hit me of just *what's gonna happen to me then when I die? If this God is real and He is pursuing these messed up people, then He just might be pursuing this messed up girl*. And so I went back to my coworker and was like, "I want to know this God. What do I do?" And...



Elisa: Wow!

Mariel: ... she was like... Now looking back, I'm thinking I wish I could have memorized her face better because I don't remember her exact response. But I can just imagine she must have been excited for me. But I do remember that she told me "That same God, that same Holy God is pursuing you and sent His Son for you. And if you'll surrender your life to Him, your life will never be the same." And I was like, "I am all in!" I knew I was a sinner. I knew I had lived a life for myself and had been shaking my dust fist in His face all those years, and so I couldn't get enough. I was just like, *yes, Lord*. I want to know Him and surrendered my life to Jesus at that point.

Vivian: Well, that makes so much sense of why the Bible is such a passion of yours to be able to help other women be equipped and to engage in the Bible. I am curious how you began the way you engage women in the Bible and your TEND study method — T.E.N.D. How did that all come about?

Mariel: Yeah. Well, so once I surrendered my life to the Lord, I knew nothing else than the book of Genesis at that point, and so I started studying every... like taking every Bible study I could find. I mean, if there was a Bible study offered in a church within driving distance, I was in it. I was taking sometimes two or three Bible studies at a time. I just... I could not get enough of this God and His Word. And a couple years later, there was a pastor. I would say about three years later, the pastor of the church we were attending came to me and said, "Would you lead a women's Bible study?" And I was like, "well, I don't know anything. Man, you don't want... you don't want this teacher." And he was like, "oh, you'll be fine. I see a gift in you, and I know that you can do it." And put a Bible study in my hands and was like, "Here's a VCR, you go to town!" And so, you know, I just had to show up and push "play" and walk these women through. At that time it was a ...um... a Beth Moore Bible study. And then we did Kay Arthur Bible studies and, I mean, just anything, you know, that I could get my hands on. And I just started leading women. Well, after a few years I realized at the end of a spring semester of Bible study, what do we do? How do we get into the Word over the summer when there's not somebody telling me what to do every week and how to get in the Word every week?

Vivian: Yeah.

Mariel: And so I thought, *I really want to hear God for myself*. Some of these Bible teachers that I had loved and learned so much from felt like they had kind of gotten between me and God, between me and His Word. Where originally, I was able to just go to the Word, you know? I was able to just open the Word and God was able to speak to me. So why would that not happen anymore? And so, at that point, I decided I'm just gonna seek God for how to get in His Word for myself. And at the same time, I had



planted probably about my fifth salsa garden that spring, and I grow salsa ingredients. I do not have a green thumb.

Elisa: There it is.

Mariel: But I do grow salsa ingredients, so tomatoes and jalapenos and peppers and cilantro. I was tending to my salsa garden that summer, and I really felt like the Lord was just reminding me that is how He tends to me. It's just little by little by little. It's not this plow through in chapters at a time. It can just be slow and methodical and intentional. And so that was kind of the start of my TEND method. I just developed it in order to have something that was repeatable because I wanted to teach my young boys how to get in the Word at that point and ... and to teach these women that God had entrusted to me how to get in the Word. And so I just started my own self every morning, just started going through this TEND method of Bible study. And it was amazing to me as I taught my young boys. They were about 6 and 8 at the time, and we were homeschooling. And I was able to teach them how to do it, and they were just picking it right up. And so I started to teach my Bible study to do it. And, I mean, these women were just amazed at how God could speak to us through His Word. And so, it really has changed my life, my approach to God, to His Word, to be able to get into it for myself and just see the Holy Spirit do His job of, you know, illuminating the Scriptures to us. Jesus said He would send Him to do just that. And so why would we think He wouldn't do that?

Elisa: So what is the TEND method? Do those letters T.E.N.D. stand for steps, or what's unique about it?

Mariel: Yeah, so the TEND method, it is an acronym, T.E.N.D. So "T" is take time to pray. When we come to God's Word, we start by praying and just asking God to speak to us through His Word. And then "E" is examine the Scripture, and that's where I like literally with my hand and a pen, write down the verses that I'm tending through that day. And so it's usually one to four verses a day. It's not a lot. It's enough to just write them out. And it's amazing what happens when we slow down enough to write something down because we will notice details in Scripture that we gloss over reading it. It's just... it's such a different thing when we take the time to write it down. So "E" is examine the Scripture. "N" is notice the lesson. And that's where we want to look at those verses and ask: *What is this teaching about God?* Because God's Word is primarily about God, not about us. It begins by revealing God to us. And so, if we can lean in and look at just a few verses at a time and ask: *What is this teaching about God?* It is amazing how He will illuminate that to us. So then after we've written down what it's teaching about God, then I ask: *Is there a sin or a promise, an action, an example or a command in these verses?* And so by looking at that, you know, is there like something stupid the disciples did? Well then that's an example to not follow. So that's what I would write. Or is there something amazing that somebody's doing or a way that someone's



responding to God that's positive. And so that's an example that I could follow or an action that I could mimic. And so I'll write down the lesson of whatever is being taught, truth that's being taught. Not necessarily applying to my life, because I think a lot of times Bible study methods tend to jump right to application. So we look at what it's saying, "I can do all things through Christ," and then we jump to *so that means I can do this through Christ*. And that's not what's happening in that particular context, so I think it's important to look at, you know, what is being taught originally to that original audience. And that's what I do when I notice the lesson. And then "D" is do what it says. And that's just responding to God's Word. How am I going to respond to God's Word today? If this is true of God, or this is the lesson He's teaching me, then how am I going to respond based on my regular Wednesday or my circumstance with my husband or this issue I have with a coworker, how will I respond? And it's just little, tiny precept-upon-precept, just little tiny steps. Because when we plant a garden, we don't just like throw it all in there and the next day come and pick all the tomatoes. Like I wish it would work that way.

Elisa: Right, right.

Mariel: But I plant those little seeds or those young plants, you know, in early spring. And it's not until midsummer, I start being able to pick red tomatoes off the vines. And so it really is a process, and it's just little by little by little, having that consistent time just cultivating intimacy to hear God speak.

Vivian: I love that. I am privileged to have a copy of *Ruth*, which is your first TEND study method. And I have read *Ruth*. I have studied *Ruth*. I've read books about *Ruth*. And sitting down and implementing this method, my eyes were opened to new things. Just like you said, Mariel, it was really rich. And I was like, *wow, this is so helpful to have to write out, like you said, by hand*. I think they've done brain science things that us actually writing things out helps us to process in our brains differently than even typing on a computer. And that discipline of slowing down really did open my eyes to a lot of new things. Now I gleaned a lot from that, but I'm curious from your experience, like what difference does it make to study using the TEND method individually versus with community? What have you seen, and what would you say to that?

Mariel: Yeah. Well, individually, just like you said, it's very much a just slowed down approach that you really do see God speak to you in ways that you may have just completely overlooked before, when you go faster, you know. There's something about community that is just so sweet. I mean, we serve a triune God. He himself is community, and He created us for community. And what is amazing... There was a method of gardening — and I'm sorry to keep bringing it back to gardening y'all, but this is ...

Elisa: Good. It's a good illustration.



Vivian: Keep going, keep going!

Mariel: [laughing] ... Bible study and gardening! And a few years ago I learned this method called companion planting, and so it was telling me like if I plant my jalapeno plant close to my tomato plant, there's a worm that likes to eat the tomato plants that won't go near them if it has to go through the jalapeno plants.

Elisa: Oh, that's awesome.

Mariel: ... because of the spicy jalapeno. I guess the leaves are spicy too. I don't know. And so that method of planting, I started doing. I've been doing that for years. Like I always have my, you know, jalapenos real close to my tomatoes and stuff. And thankfully as of this morning, we don't have worms, so it must be working. ...um... So I think that in a lot of ways that's how we are, you know. As we come together in community, we are like companion planted. We come together, and a strength you have helps a weakness that I have. And something that God showed you can speak right into something that I need, and vice versa. And there's so much strengthening and sharpening that comes from coming together in community and just sharing God's Word and sharing what God's teaching you. It's not having to hear necessarily a lecture from somebody, but rather just: *What's God teaching Elisa? What's God teaching Vivian? What's God teaching Mariel? And let's all like just share that, you know?* It's such a tool I think that God uses intentionally. I mean, that's why He wants us in community so that we can kind of see Jesus in one another and ... and be just matured as Ephesians 4 tells us. Matured in that unity to grow and know Him better and reflect Him better because we are in community.

Elisa: You know, Mariel, early in our conversation, you talked about how you were a brand-new baby Bible reader, and you hadn't practically gone past Genesis. And your pastor goes, "Hey, I'd like you to lead a Bible study." I love that and how it fits in with your commitment and passion for community. And one of the things we love talking about on *God Hears Her* is that we've all already been invited to invest our influence however God opens the doors, you know. So what would you say to women who feel inadequate to even pick up a Bible? Maybe they're even kind of struggling to read their Bible. And then what would you say to the woman who loves her Bible but just doesn't quite feel like she knows how to begin to help other people love their Bible?

Mariel: Yeah. Well, for the one struggling to even get into God's Word, I mean it is... we can all relate. I mean, it is a loud and noisy world that we live in. It is vying for our attention and our affections in every way. And so, I think the realization, like you said, that God is inviting us, even her, even you, whoever it is, you know. God is pursuing the heart of every single one of us if we would just come to Him. And even



in my doubts and even in my skepticism and really probably anger and pride, God still was willing to reveal Himself to me when I got into His Word. And He saw my need and met me right there. So, I think my answer to the lady who is struggling to get into the Bible, I would say just begin. There's no wrong way to do it. There's no wrong place to start. God's Word is alive and active, and He is able to equip us through it and sharpen us through it and teach us through it. And the Holy Spirit in us is Who will illuminate it to us. So, there is nothing that she has to consider to do right, except open it and say, "Lord, show me. Show me, just like you showed Mariel, You show me." You know, and He will do it. And yeah, and for somebody that loves the Lord and loves time in the Word and wants to share it with other women, doesn't know where to start, I think it's the same idea of just we are invited. God says, *would you just open your mouth and I will fill it*. And that's all I had to do. I just had to say, *yes Lord, I don't know what I'm doing*. And I really think the more we say "I don't know what I'm doing," the more He's like, *that's exactly where you need to be*. Because it's in our weakness that His power is made perfect and that we are able to see, *oh, only God could have done that because I couldn't have done that*. And I don't know how many times I've led a Bible study and thought, *I don't know how I'm gonna do it this time. I mean, this particular lady's there, or the pastor's wife, or you know, somebody important or whatever*. And the Lord's like, *oh, that's exactly where you're supposed to be then*, because now I have to depend on Him. And our need for Jesus is really the whole point. We're just supposed to be needing Him. And so when we think, *oh, well this isn't working, I'm not doing this right*, it's us thinking we've got to do it in our own strength. And He's right here, and He'll do it.

Vivian: I love your heart, Mariel. There's such a graciousness that you exude and it kind of helps everyone to kind of exhale and go, *oh, okay. It doesn't have to be so complicated*.

Elisa: I wonder if I could ask you. Sometimes we come to a passage, and especially if we're really slow in it, it allows our brains to chew on it, meditate on it, you know, the way Scripture encourages us to do. Can you think of — and I'm putting you on the spot — but can you think of a passage that was just really confusing to you? And did it take going back more than once through a verse, maybe piling the verses on together, you know? Can you think of an example of confusion in how God maybe met you in that or how you got untangled?

Mariel: Yeah, I'm flipping back through Mark to kind of jog my memory. And, you know, there was... that whole section he talks about, I think it's in chapter 13. It was over and over, cause I'm only doing, you know, one to four-ish verses a day. So I'm going really slow, and it took a while. Mark 13, where He is talking about the second coming and the fig tree and, you know, all of that. And I remember thinking, *wow, like this is a lot of, you know, end times, and I don't totally get this. And what's going on here?* But in those kind of places, because I have it highlighted here too when I did it just recently of just asking the



Lord, like, *but what's the one main thing that You're telling me about Yourself? Like, what is it about You that You're telling me here?* And so, one of the big things was that He *is* coming, that He has a plan. That just kept standing out, like God has a plan. So, in my day, then today, if God has a plan, a big plan, and, and they were all within this plan, you know, then what does that look like today? And it just felt so much more like there was meaning in my day. There was... it mattered because God has a plan. Like none of this is surprising Him. And so, when things come that I feel shaken about or, you know, having young adult children launching, there's plenty to be shaking. And I feel like, *oh, I don't know where they're at, or I don't know what they're doing.* But God has a plan. And I can rest in that. And... and even if I don't understand everything about this fig tree situation, you know, it's okay because God has a plan, and He's using all things. And so, He even, at the end of Mark 13, it talks about being on guard and keeping awake, watching. And I kept highlighting that, just the idea of “awake” just kept coming up. And those kind of key words, like when you're writing it down and you're writing down “awake” for like the third time, you're like, *wait, there might be something here.* And so that's the kind of thing that like, *Lord, how do I need to be awake today in my life for seeing You? How are You working in the world?* You know? And so it's these little tiny nuggets that just... He seems to highlight as you write it down. And we don't have to understand everything, but we get to hold onto the things He does reveal. Deuteronomy 29:29 tells us that “the secret things belong to the Lord, but the things revealed belong to His children” and the ones after them. And so that's really what I'm after, is just, *Lord, what is the revealed thing? You're always revealing Yourself, so who are you here?* And just then, how do I respond to that? How am I going to put feet to that today? Why, you know, why does that matter in my marriage today or in my work circumstance or decisions I have to make? *And if what You're telling me is to keep awake and be alert...* I mean He's telling that to these disciples who, not even five minutes later they're falling asleep in Gethsemane over something huge that's about to happen. And they are completely oblivious to it. And I'm like, *Lord, let me not be oblivious to what You're doing.* And so it's just these little prayers, little nuggets, and just words that stand out that, I mean, we don't have to understand everything. We just have to hold onto who He is when He reveals it.

Vivian: Mm.

Elisa: I love how you're really emphasizing too, and I think it's super important. We can get very task driven in one-verse-at-a-time kind of thing. And it's so important to thread these understandings together. Yes, you slowed down, and it's just one bite. But to just take them out of context like that, we could conclude, *well, I'm never supposed to sleep again.* You know? And that's not at all ...

Vivian: Right.



Elisa: ... what she's saying in this passage, you know. And I'm thinking about how Luke described Mary, how she treasured and pondered these things in her heart in... A couple of times he said it in chapter two of the Gospel. And I think about how... I mean, did anybody walk this planet with more challenge in front of her, besides Jesus, you know, to understand the indescribable things that were happening? And I think that's a clue right there. You know, she threaded these understandings together like little, like you're saying, little treasures, little bits that come together. And you put them together. So thank you for that illustration, Mariel. That's really helpful. Thank you.

Mariel: That's a great picture of it. I agree, cause it's really, it's just putting these little pearls together. At the end of a week of TENDING through several verses, I will pause and look back over the week and just sort of reflect on: What is the theme that I'm seeing God show me here? And I think it's that idea, like you're saying of, you know, just taking the time to sort of reflect on: how is this all connecting? Because there is a bigger picture. It's not, you know, when we put a seed in the ground to plant, it's in a whole garden. Like there's a whole situation happening here. We're making salsa, man, there's like a plan. But the one little seed is important to this whole big picture. And so, yeah, being able to sort of thread those together the way Mary did, that's... that's a great picture of that.

Vivian: You know, what strikes me is our instant-gratification society that we live in, where we get really frustrated if a website doesn't download within, you know, a second or two. And we're refreshing things, and we just expect that little seed to overnight be a full-grown plant. And it takes a discipline to really slow down and chew on these truths. And I think about all... like just your picture, even when you were nursing, to take a verse and have it written out and meditate and think on those things. And we actually do have time. I know I use the excuse, *I'm just so busy*, and I'm like, *but I wasn't so busy to spend an hour doom scrolling on Instagram*. I mean, you know, it's really a matter of choice. I love that there's a combination of a challenge to women to engage and to tend and to lean in and to not give up and to take in on a very consistent basis the Word of God and understand in its context. And I really sense, especially in your... the ways you've described it Mariel, that there's a lot of grace and there's a not having to know everything. So there... it's just accessible to wherever you are in your journey. And that's really powerful too. So thank you for blending both. Is there any last-minute things you'd want to share?

Mariel: Yeah, well I appreciate that, Vivian. I really think... um... you're so right. And I think we need the grace. We... we've got to grace ourselves and know that God graces us. But I think my biggest thing I would say to all these women is just be careful that you don't believe the lies that you can't understand Scripture. No matter who you are, if the Holy Spirit lives in you, you can, by the power and grace of God, understand His Word. And so don't let the culture and don't let the distractions and those sort of things tell



you otherwise, because God is so faithful to His Word. And He will accomplish what He set out to do with it.

[Theme music]

Vivian: Hey friends, be sure to check out our website for a survey where you can share your insights with us. What do you think of the podcast? Who would you like us to have a conversation with? Find that survey and more *God Hears Her* resources at Godhearsher.org. That's God hears her (dot) o.r.g.

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

[upbeat music]

Vivian: Today's episode was engineered by Anne Stevens and produced by Jade Gustman and Mary Jo Clark. We also want to thank the amazing our Daily Bread Ministries phone team for all their help and support. Thanks everyone.

Elisa: 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.

[ODBM Theme]

Elisa: *God Hears Her* is a production of our Daily Bread Ministries.