



God Hears Her Podcast

Episode 213 – Your True Story with Mary Marantz

Elisa Morgan & Eryn Adkins with Mary Marantz

[Music]

Mary: So, "At last, exhausted," is each of us going out and trying. Go, get into the number one law school. Do it. Did that fix anything for you? Get a book deal, become a bestseller, get a podcast. You know, win an award in your local PTA, whatever it is. And realizing that there's a sixty-second celebration, and then you're right back to being you. So, "At last, exhausted," is I let you run, and run, and run, and run, and try to achieve your way into worth, and when you reach that point where you're exhausted, good. Now the real work can begin.

[Music]

Vivian: 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: Hey friends, before we get started, feel free to download or print our new Bible study show notes to fill out while you listen. You can find those on our website. Now let's get into our conversation.

Eryn: Elisa, I had just the privilege and opportunity to be on our guest's podcast. And...

Elisa: Woo, nice.

Eryn: ... I know, so, I kind of have a sneak peek into conversations with her, and I'm so excited that we get to just dig into learning about how she got to where she is today and, you know, she's a bestselling author to her book called... *Dirt* and *Underestimated*. And I just love both of those titles. They're very... gritty, I would say. And so, I...

Elisa: A little dirty, yeah, yup.

Eryn: ... so, I'm really excited to have our guest. Mary, welcome to *God Hears Her*.

Elisa: Hey, Mary, so glad you're here.



Mary: Oh, my gosh. Thank you both so much for having me... any conversation that starts off with talking about grit is A-okay with me. I think that's...

Elisa: Yeah.

Mary: ... a very good sign for things to come.

Elisa: It's been fun having these podcast swaps where one of us goes on someone else's podcast, and then they come on ours, because I think we just get this beautiful, I don't know, more full-orbed conversation. So anyway, encourage listeners to go check that one out that Eryn did with Mary. So, any who, let's dive in.

Eryn: Mary, tell us... I would love to know maybe a little bit of your origin story, like, how did you come to know God? Was that in Your childhood, and if not...

Elisa: Yeah.

Eryn: ... like maybe share a little bit of your childhood with us and then we can go in from there.

Elisa: Yeah,

Mary: Yeah, yeah. Definitely. So, I was born and raised in a single-wide trailer, in rural West Virginia on the top of a mountain called Fenwick Mountain. For anybody who's been to West Virginia, it's in between Richwood and Summersville. And my dad is a logger to this day, is a logger like eight generations deep in our family...

Elisa: Wow.

Mary: ... were loggers and.. and coal miners...

Elisa: Just to pause for a second, because some of us are city... folks, so... a logger, as in L-O-G-G-E-R?

Mary: That's right. Good clarification. Cause I... I technically am a lawyer, so that's very confusing. Yeah, that's right.



Elisa: So that meant that he cut down trees, and stripped them, and got them ready for manufacture, for furniture and such?

Mary: Yeah... Georgia Pacific was the big mill...

Elisa: Wow.

Mary: ... in our town when I was growing up, so a lot of, you know, lumber for building houses and things like that...

Elisa: Thank you.

Mary: ... yeah. So, loggers and coal miners. My mom cleaned houses when I was little, and then she started working for a company called Ames, and then she left when I was nine. They got married super young. My grandma Goldie lived right next door. Our trailer was sort of parked on their backyard. So, she's a huge figure in my story, and she's the one who honestly started taking me to Sunday school when I was little...

Erynn: Oh, cool

Mary: ... neither of my parents really went. My mom had gone to a Baptist church when she was younger, but by the time I came along, neither of them really went to church. First interaction I remember having with God was even before Goldie started taking me to Sunday school. I felt like God was in the stars and drew down close enough to leave fog marks on the glass. I felt pretty clearly that I, having given the gift of words, for a long time I didn't tell people that because it felt like, something you weren't supposed to claim. But it... very clearly as most stories unfold... folded, it has been a gift of words that's been used on repeat over and over. As soon as that conversation happened, then it was like I could start to see God sort of all the time...

Erynn: Oh, wow.

Mary: ... It went from just in the nighttime into the... to the daylight hours. There's this really beautiful line, I'm very proud of, that says, "He was in the green of the grass, down to the very pigments. The bird stepping into freedom off the branch. The sunlight, when you still close your eyes, you could feel it on your face. And the cold hard ground, once you broke it up in your hands, you could never forget how it felt. He was color and freedom and fire and dirt." That moment in the yard with the trucks up on cinder



blocks, and the stray dogs, and the bonfires and the wildfires planted in painted tires. I felt like God said to me, *one day you're going to see it. One day you'll understand. I'm going to put words to your story, and then you will see it was all a part of it, right? The muddy, the hard, the broken, the beautiful. I was in all of it. And your story won't be wasted.* And, Eryn and Elisa, the thing that I heard being, you know, just little and hearing that, I feel like what I heard was *you have to go be so successful that it will be okay that your story started this way.* Or, like, *I'm going to do something so big with your life. This will all make sense.* And I've spent a lifetime unraveling that.

Elisa: That's so... that's profound. Mary... I... I like the way that God made it so personal as... but also, He made it like a label or a descriptor over you that you tried to live into. And as you embraced that and lived into that... and I love how you're sharing very honestly that you thought it would go one direction, and it kind of was clarified. Hey, all of us, I think, have that kind of experience, but in such different ways.

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: Okay... Take us deeper... Are you able to talk about why your mom left you?

Mary: Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. There's a good adage in writing that says true, truer, truest. So, there's the story... the version of your story you have always known to be true. You lived it, you were there, this is what happened...

Eryn: Yeah.

Mary: ... And then there's the truer version, where you start to get the perspectives of other people in the room. Well, they were standing on the opposite side. What did they see...?

Eryn: Yeah.

Mary: ... You know...?

Elisa: That's good.

Mary: ... And then the truest being, what... what does God say about it? Right? Which is what we were just talking about, a part of that.

Eryn: I love that breakdown.



Mary: And so, for me writing this book, it was really important for me to even go back another generation or... or two to sort of say, well, *where did this start in our family tree?* And so, my mom, when she was fifteen years old, came home from school one day and there was a note on the counter from her mom saying, *hey, you're fifteen now. You're old enough to take care of yourself. The bills are paid through the end of the month. There's some macaroni shells and canned tomatoes in the cabinet. Good luck.* And to this day, my mom will eat macaroni and tomatoes...

Elisa: Whatever, yeah. It's painful.

Mary: ... cause it's just sort of, like, what she survived on...

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: Yeah.

Mary: ... And so, there was a history and a legacy of being abandoned and becoming sort of the abandoner. My mom was seventeen when they got married. She wore the... her wedding dress to her prom, she did double duty. She was twenty, about to be twenty-one, when she had me, and I can remember by the time I was three or four, her having these very grownup conversations with me. She sort of saw me as like a... a... a peer, or an equal, or a best friend, where she would say to me like, *oh, you know, we... neither of us got a chance to sort of sow our wild oats. We grew up too fast*, what have you, to the child who... who made them grow up fast, you know? And so, she took this job, I mentioned Ames, the department store. She... they offered a job with their remodel team where they would travel all over the country opening new stores. And so, it was this really interesting way of leaving, because it was not like the door shut and she was gone. It was actually, in some ways, harder than that because she would come back about once a month, and then once every other month and then once... six months or whatever. And so, it was kind of a series of her leaving.

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: That's hard. Yeah. She was like launching herself, when she, you know, really the role was to help you launch, but you weren't quite there yet, so, yeah. So, in and out and in and out. Yeah. Woof.

Mary: But what was cool is that, like I mentioned, the... the grownup Mary writing this book... true, truer, truest, I had just started my podcast in 2019, and so I had the gear, I had the microphone and the headphones, and I'd been sort of, in really in this muscle memory of, like, asking curious questions and,



like, journalistic and you know, investigative-journalist kind of questions. And so, I ended up doing a three-hour phone call with my mom...

Eryn: Wow.

Mary: ... between the first draft of *Dirt* and the final draft where I was able to kind of, like, hear the truer and the truest versions... including that her job was the one that had health insurance...

Eryn: Yeah.

Mary: ... you know, and, like my dad's logging business was not paying the... all the bills at that point, so she was sort of, you know, covering the gap. And we had nice Christmases, even though we were in the single trailer, there were always a ton of toys. It's a very interesting concept in Appalachia, the nice Christmas concept... which happens because she has this job. She's able to get the discounts, and put it on layaway, and what have you. So, she... in her mind, I mean the... going back a generation, like I just mentioned, they didn't have running water...

Eryn: Wow.

Mary: ... They didn't have indoor plumbing, and so we had a nice new at the time trailer when they first bought it anyway, and I got toys for Christmas, so, like, what was I complaining about? She had one pair of shoes a year when she was growing up...

Elisa: Yeah.

Mary: ... So, we started to get some depth and some nuance...

Elisa: That's very helpful.

Mary: ... when we moved beyond true to truer.

Eryn: You know, I'm really... I'm struck by you sharing how, like, you are so gracious and kind toward your parents, and toward your mom specifically, and experiencing abandonment at a young age. I would imagine that was a journey of, like...

Mary: Yeah, oh sure.



Eryn: ... not allowing bitterness and resentment to seep into your heart to... cause I think a lot of people will paint a narrative and want to live in it, cause it keeps them safe...

Mary: Sure, yeah.

Eryn: ... and it makes them feel validated for the pain. You've done **so** much work to be able to graciously share. Share a little bit, like, how did you... was that... was the Lord tapping on your shoulder, telling you, *hey, don't, like*, just, yeah. I don't want to guess.

Mary: Yeah.

Eryn: I'm excited.

Mary: I think that a couple of important things happened there, but one is God's timing is perfect. And had I written this book when I first... Well, so, I knew I wanted to be an author since I was five, but I knew I wanted to write this book in particular since I was in college and law school, and I think if I had been given the opportunity to write this book right out of law school, or while I was still in law school, it would have been a much more bitter version. So, I write it instead, *Dirt* comes out the year I turned forty... which gives you a whole lot of time to realize how hard being a grownup is, and to mess up a bunch yourself, and to really start to build some empathy. I was forty and messing up, and my mom was twenty when she had me. So, there's a lot of empathy baked in there. And so, there... that was a big part of it is just timing and getting the chance to... make a bunch of mistakes yourself. And then the second answer I would say was the first draft. The first draft really was like getting poison out of a wound. Just dump it all out. Dump it all out, say it for the first time ever, you know...

Eryn: Yeah.

Mary: ... say this happened to me, get it out there, and then, I turned that draft in to my editor, Kelsey, and what happened was she was still finishing up a project, so I didn't hear back from her for twenty-four hours.

Elisa: Oh boy.

Mary: And that is all that it took for me to have... I kind of have lovingly called it my Ebenezer Scrooge Christmas Carol moment, where I had seen a future I was not happy with, and I wanted to know if there



was still a chance to change it. And so, that's when I did the call with my mom, and I did a call with my dad...

Elisa: Wow.

Mary: ... and I cut like fifty thousand words, and wrote fifty thousand more, ended up with seventy thousand total. And this is the book that it was always meant to be, but the... getting out all that poison out of the wound had to happen first.

Elisa: You know, that's a really insightful writing technique, but it's an insightful life technique. Eryn's a big journaler. I've had my hand at it, and I remember the first draft of the book that was my memoir, *The Beauty of Broken*, my editor read it and he said, *oh my gosh, I... this is so depressing*. And I went, *well, it's my life*, you know? But... but... but I needed to...

Mary: That's, it was my life.

Elisa: ... get it out, you know? And... and lots of times we do. So, even if you're not, like, going to write a book about it, you know, I think the concept... Yeah, of... of writing out your pain is a brilliant one. And I love, Mary, how you... you turn the corner in that too, and shared how, as you look at your own life, suddenly your mom's choices didn't look so crazy...

Mary: Yeah.

Elisa: ... and you... empathy being the road back together is beautiful.

Mary: Yeah. Mary Karr wrote a book called *The Art of Memoir*. She's a very talented, gifted memoirist who wrote, like, *The Liars Club* and *Lit*, I think is the name of her other big one. In *The Art of Memoir*, which I highly recommend to anyone who wants to write period, especially if you want to write memoir, she talks about the best memoirs are willing to punch themselves in the face first. In other words, you are not the victim of the whole story. Like, there... you can... two things can be true: you can have had horrible, horrible things happen to you that you should never have to live again, you should have never had to live the first time...

Elisa: Right.



Mary: ... you would never wish on anyone else; and you are also not called to stay the victim of your own story, right? There's victory in the story.

Eryn: I think God honors that, too. I think He honors that because He... He can, in our story, overcome anything if we allow Him to step into that. Okay, so, you said a lot has happened in your life from when you were younger, to going to law school. And then you mentioned, when you... you look at your life, you're messy at forty and your mom was messy at twenty. Share, maybe, some spaces in between that's developed your faith journey, and how did you come into the awareness that you are just as messy as maybe your mom was at twenty?

Mary: Oh yeah, I feel like, you know...

Elisa: Just punch yourself in the face.

Eryn: I want to... Yes. On the... on the...

Mary: ... So, you know, I... I do go to Yale for law school, graduated law school, and immediately became a wedding photographer with my husband, Justin. We were only a year or two into doing photography that we started speaking at photography conferences. So, we went full-time in, like, 2006, right when I graduated. We spoke at our first conference in 2007, and we just had that, like, *oh, we're ready*. And then I started speaking at some Christian creative conferences. I sign a five-book deal with my publisher, like, there's all of these, like, headline days where if it was, like, all I did was print you out my one page resume, you'd be like, *well, it doesn't seem that messy. It actually seems like what are you complaining about?* But then there's, like, the reality of doing any of those things. Writing is messy, entrepreneurship is messy, especially when you're wired like I am, which is a whole other conversation where I talk about and underestimated never ever wanting anybody to ever see you struggle. Being from Appalachia, being a child of the eighties, being an Enneagram four with a strong wing three, like, we never want anybody to know something isn't working. And so, you... we're really good at creating the resume, creating the polish on the top, but the truth of the matter is, like, entrepreneurship is a whiplash rollercoaster with a sharknado thrown in. You know, like... day by day, it's up and it's down. And I've been a full-time entrepreneur for twenty years. So...

Eryn: Yeah.



Mary: ... they're lean years, and then they're harvest years and everything in between. And... times when I've... I've repeated the same kind of, like, criticism coming out of my mouth as, like, I heard growing up or...

Eryn: And what does that look like specifically?

Mary: ... A... a lot of the criticism has to do with performance being the way to earn love. You know, if you're not going to do an A plus plus performance, if you're going to dial in a C minus and call it good enough, good is better than perfect. I don't even know what that means, you know...?

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: Yeah.

Mary: ... And so, I'm very, very tough on myself, which means I'm also very, very tough on the people that are closest to me, that I love the most. Like, I demand excellence. And when I was growing up, I actually got paid for good grades... it was a wildly effective...

Elisa: Yeah.

Mary: ... technique where if I got an A plus, I got five dollars; an A, I got four fifty; an A minus, I got four dollars; a B plus I got three fifty; and after that, I believe is when I started... I had to start paying them... which told me that there's a cost to anything less than A plus... perfect.

Eryn: Oh yeah. Yeah.

Elisa: Yup.

Mary: And I've carried that through...

Elisa: So, it's your job to make good grades, literally. Yeah.

Mary: Yes, yeah. And... and I definitely wear that mask of, like, *you are as loved as what you've done*.

[Music]



Jade Gustman: Hey friends, I'm just popping in to tell you about a new *God Hears Her* reading plan called *Cast Your Cares*. This ten-day reading plan is available in our show notes, so be sure to check it out.

Elisa: That's a really prevalent formula for so many...

Mary: Yeah.

Eryn: Yup.

Elisa: ... of us, you know, you come from a... a... a unique background, but for so many of us it's like, you know, what have you done for me lately...?

Mary: Yeah.

Elisa: ... Well, not enough, so, no love for you today, girl. And so many of us grow up under that. How did God convince you, because you just rattled off this beautiful resume. How did God convince you that that resume and those achievements weren't really your worth? Something else was, how did He convince you and what did... what was the answer to what your worth is?

Mary: Yeah, so there is one of the very last entries in *Dirt* that then becomes the very first entry in *Slow Growth Equals Strong Rates*, which is my second book, is the answer to that. And I'm just actually going to... I'm going to read it to you real quick So, these are words that wrap up *Dirt*. I thought the story was over and God was like, *yeah, that's cute*. It is, but it's got to kick off the... the very next thing we got to go work on.

At a certain point, you stop running. Breathless and at last exhausted, you double over at the pain of a lifetime spent proving. You've run so hard for so long, you've gone so far out into the world, only to keep finding yourself back at the beginning. You have spent a lifetime starting over, breaking loose to run free, only to be taken captive again and again. This one truth always dragging, always clawing at your heels, like the heavy chains you never asked to bear. No matter how hard you run, you can't outrun you. So, you crawl there for a while, panting through the pain, and then you curl up and surrender, and rest your face on the cool hard ground. Death to this old life you once knew. A mourning of what was lost before the thrill of hope takes flight. A dying of self to become a new thing. This time, one with both roots and wings. God set me free. Of me...

and so that one phrase, "At last, exhausted," is the answer. I have often said we taught entrepreneurship, marketing classes, business classes, to photographers for years. And what happened to us when we were coming up, and we were just doing all the things, and doing it super fast, is other entrepreneurs who were seasoned would say to us, *you got to slow down or you're going to burn out*. And we'd be like, *okay,*



grandpa, you don't know, like, what we're capable of, you know, watch us go. Like, sorry you can't keep up...

Elisa: Yeah.

Mary: ... And then you fast forward a little bit, and we're the seasoned entrepreneurs, and we say it to the new crop and they're like, *okay, grandma*, you know...

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: I know.

Mary: ... And so, I think, just like burnout, you have to experience it for yourself to truly understand it. And burnout, by the way, is not coasting off the side of the road, running out of gas gently. It's ninety miles an hour, and then you slam into a brick wall, and the transmission falls out...

Elisa: Yeah.

Mary: ... It is a very sudden stop. And so, in the same way I can tell people, *hey you... you're never going to be able to achieve your way into worth, by the way, you're never going to be able to do that*. And they're like, *okay, grandma*. So, "At last, exhausted," is each of us going out and trying. Go, get into the number one law school. Do it...

Eryn: Yeah, yeah.

Mary: ... Did that fix anything for you? Get a book deal, become a bestseller, get a podcast. You know, win an award in your local PTA, whatever it is. And realizing that there's a sixty-second celebration, and then you're right back to being you...

Eryn: Yeah.

Mary: ... So, "at last, exhausted," is I let you run, and run, and run, and run, and try to achieve your way into worth, and when you reach that point where you're exhausted, good. Now the real work can begin.

Elisa: Yeah, that's good.



Eryn: I love that. I had to get tired of myself in order to change, and I had to get tired of the feeling of needing to perform, or be, or do, in order to know that I had worth and that I could offer something to somebody, be of value, be of service. And you... you do have to get exhausted. But there is this, like, space in between, before the exhaustion where you keep tricking yourself, or rationalizing your choices that are actually destructive, that are hurtful to yourself and the people around you. Were there any choices that you were making that you kind of rationalized before you got to the space of running into the brick wall, or was it...

Mary: Oh, yeah, sure.

Eryn: ... Yeah.

Mary: Yeah. I'll just get... I'll rattle off a few...

Eryn: Yeah.

Mary: ... having... having an employee, *well, let's just...*

Elisa: Here's a list...

Mary: ... *dig in...* Survey says...

Elisa: Well, here's my resume. Yeah, okay.

Mary: ... hiring an employee, full-time with benefits, as a little baby photography business because we just wanted other people to see how, you know, successful our business was...

Eryn: Yup, I did that.

Elisa: I did that, too. Yup.

Mary: Yeah, that'll do it.

Elisa: Staff equals success.



Mary: Yeah, that'll do it... we did, and I would... actually, this one next one I wouldn't trade because it is such a fun, cool story that I think, like, when I'm old and gray, I'll look back on. But we... we rented a tour bus with our faces on the side and did a coast to coast speaking tour...

Eryn: I love it.

Mary: ... with a whole crew of us who would set up at the stops and then we'd, you know, teach for six hours and then break it down and drive overnight, but we'd had a driver who drove for U2. U2 and me... and so, he was definitely downgraded there. That's okay... so, anyway... you know, and so we... that whole tour cost eighty thousand dollars...

Eryn: Wow.

Mary: ... and that whole tour made eighty thousand and one dollars or something like that. Like we... we barely broke even. But... and apparently with tours, that's even, like, a big, you know, success, but... but, like, I wouldn't change it. It was such an adventure. It was so wild. And also, I super did it because I wanted so badly to be at the place of other people in our industry who were doing it, you know? So, I would say a lot of mine come down to trying to impress people you don't really ultimately even like that much or, you know, whatever, don't even care that much about. Whatever. Spending money, and doing things, and taking risks, and... I think, like, the nuance of this conversation is that so many of these things we talk about are either flip sides of a coin, or they're on a spectrum where there's a level of them that are good. It is good to be willing to take calculated risks as an entrepreneur, run it to the extreme. It is bad to always be flinging yourself off the ledge because you need somebody else to see how important you are. So, there... I live in... I live in shades of gray...

Eryn: Yeah.

Mary: ... and nuance. But... I would say most of mine, especially when it's like, *oh, why are you so messy?* Really came down to appearances, and... and what...

Eryn: Yeah.

Mary: ... you know, like, I talk about the most put together woman in the room going from having, you know, mildewy clothes in the trailer to feeling like clothes were my Kevlar and I couldn't go to a conference without a new outfit. You know, there was just always this, like, icing on the cake I was putting on.



Eryn: An appetite, almost, that you're having to satisfy and fulfill.

Elisa: Yeah, and I was thinking a treadmill that's really hard to get off of. You know...

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: ... a lot of these metaphors help us understand it. You know, when... when you, at last, exhausted, you know... when you come to that spot, I mean, we can sit there and be exhausted, and that can be the end for a lot of people. That... that's as far as they go, just in a, like, fetal position in the dirt, and that's it. You know, how did God meet you in that and... and how... Did He lift your chin? Did He pull you up by your armpits? Did He sit on you? Did... what happened? You know, in... in that...

Eryn: Hit you upside the head, cause sometimes we need that. Okay? I needed that in [inaudible].

Elisa: Just a hug... How... how did He... How did He bring you forward?

Mary: The chin felt right. The chin felt right. The lifting of the chin felt right. The eyes... So, I'm going to tell a little story. When I was four, this will... explain a lot about everything we've been talking about. When I was four, my dad got it in his head... my dad is the one who, was in, like, vocational classes, like, logging classes basically in high school, when everybody treated, like, the big, in his words, big dumb logger. And so, me being an A plus student, me being president of the honor society, and class president, and head cheerleader, and all this stuff was very important to him...

Elisa: Yeah.

Mary: ... and so when I was four, he'd got it in his head on a whim that I should, at the huge Christmas pageant at the Macedonian Methodist Church, where it's standing room only, the entire mountain packs into the sanctuary... I should stand in front of them and recite, from memory, not reading, but recite from memory, the entire *T'was the Night before Christmas* poem, which we practiced, and practiced, and practiced. And I did... and that year, I did it perfectly. The second year, wanting to get the same high of *my kid is the*, like, you know, *gold star up there*, he wants me to do *T'was the Night Before Jesus Came*. And this time, I didn't memorize as much or practice as much, and I ended up having to be prompted twice, which to me was, like, I may as well have just have failed everything. And so, the end of the night, the tradition was the parents brought a gift and put it under the tree, and all the kids in the pageant would open one gift that night. And so, I'm sitting on the stage with my little, like, patent-leather Mary Jane shoes and my white-ruffle socks, you know, kicking back and forth with my head hung really low...



Elisa: Oh, baby.

Mary: ... And he comes up and he is like, *oh*, and he's disappointed. Let me be very clear with you. He is not pleased. But he says to me, like, *kid*, cause he always called me kid, *why haven't you open your present?* And I was like, *well, that's only if I did it right, and I didn't. I messed it up.* And he kind of, like, thought about it for a long second and he's like, *well, what if this gift is just cause your old dad loves you and not because of anything you did to earn it?*

Elisa: Wow.

Mary: So, it's that kind of energy. That kind of like lift your little, you know, forlorn chin that's looking down...

Elisa: Yes.

Mary: ... back up. I think it's that kind of energy.

Elisa: Okay. And... and for... for women, anybody listening who's... didn't have a dad like that, who didn't lift their chin and say, *your old dad loves you*, you know, did God repeat that kind of a sentiment over you? Or... or how did you come to understand how God views you when you're not making A pluses and memorizing things perfectly?

Mary: The honest answer is I think slowly I came to understand that, slowly. And through making the same mistakes over and over again, finding myself back in a completely exhausted, running and striving. I am very wired to run and not stop running. You know, I.... I kind of draw this analogy to the girl in the red cape being chased by this big, bad wolf. You run in front so hard from your story, you stumble into success. You feel like if you stop for even a minute, then that thing ripping at your heels will catch... catch you and kill you, and then finally, breathless and at last, exhausted, you look back over your shoulder and you can see that you are the girl in the red cape who's been running, but you're also the wolf. That voice in your head telling you to run and not stop running, that voice is your own... and then, like, I kind of, like, revisited that scene from the perspective of the wolf, that at a certain point the big, bad wolf is afraid of us because we learn how to twist the thorn in its paw to keep it chasing us. And so, one of the biggest fears I hear from women I coach, from women who've read these books, whatever, is that there's a fear that if we do the work to get healed, then we will lose all of our drive. We will lose the wolf chasing us, and we will have to just, what? Become content being ordinary, average...



Elisa: The ordinary. Yep. Yep.

Mary: ... We'll just disappear altogether. And so, that's what I mean by slowly. Slowly, and over, and over, and getting it wrong, but I think there's something really beautiful that happens in your forties, which goes back to the timing is... is really divine, where you're just too tired to care what people think too much, either is an unraveling, there is this softening from years of trying and getting it wrong, and trying again, and I think wisdom finally gets a chance to take root, because you're just too tired to have these tightly-gripped fists anymore, and you're... you open your hands and you're more willing to release the things that just never ended up satisfying. They numbed, but never satisfied.

Eryn: That's good. Are there any, like, key verses that you could, maybe just share with the woman that's listening right now that does feel exhausted, or feels like she doesn't have any worth? Is there... are there any key verses in Scripture that you go to that you can maybe speak or read over her?

Mary: Yeah. Yeah. I think for me it's... Jeremiah 17:8, and it's talking about... they will be like a tree planted by the water. You know, that their leaves will stay evergreen, that they... in the heat, they will fear no drought. They will continue to produce fruit, and that for me... It also, that similar language appears in the Psalms, and it... it, both of those really to me have similar imagery, of course, to... a vine and the branches. And I, going back to what I was saying earlier about being from Appalachia, a strong, stoic, stiff upper lip, we do... never want to have to ask anybody for help, Appalachian, child of the eighties, we feral cats who... basically raised ourselves. So, as long as you're home by dark, it's fine. And then that... that Enneagram three where we really want people to see the shiny achievements, all of that kind of combines to... as soon as we get back up off the ground and things start going, we're like, *okay, God got it. I'm going to run ahead. I'll let you know if I need You*, and we get...

Elisa: Yeah.

Mary: ... untethered. We stop abiding really quickly, and we run that... we don't want to have to ask for help. We don't want to have to have anything ever handed to us. We have to struggle to feel like we deserve it. And so, anything that feels like God did it, it actually feels like we failed in...

Elisa: Yeah.

Mary: ... some way. We want to co-create, we want to get our hands dirty, we want to be part of it. And so, I have had to learn that lesson over, and over, and over again, of just how quickly I wilt and wither... when I am not abiding, when I'm not tethered to the vine, when I'm just a branch trying to grow fruit on my



own, and how quickly I do struggle in the drought, how quickly I do stop bearing fruit when I get away from the water.

Elisa: You know, if... if it's okay, let me just read a few verses from John 15. It... it just so resonates. This is John 15, the vine and the branches and...

Mary: Yup.

Elisa: ... abiding. "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener... Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine, and you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." It's a... it's such a... a... a soft, and you were talking about this, Mary, it... it's such a soft way to live, that in... we get up in the morning and instead of, you know, [pbfft sound] here's my list and, [panting sound] you know, how fast can I run and how far can I go? Instead, how long can I sit in God's...

Mary: Yeah.

Elisa: ... presence? How much can I consider? How am I attaching to Him. And then, what might He do through my attachment? That's a radical shift. It really is.

Eryn: Yeah.

Mary: Radicals. Not only radical, but like I said, I love nuance, and I think, like, sitting in the conversation of how hard that is for some of us, to live soft because...

Eryn: Yeah.

Mary: ... there's a line in *Underestimated* where I talk about peace feels like an existential threat to survival mode...

Elisa: Yeah, yeah.

Mary: ... you know, peace... peace feels like a threat to its very survival, right? Like it... it is...

Elisa: Yeah.



Mary: ... it... for those of us who feel a familiar comfort returning to the chaos and the instability of the childhood we witnessed, the hard life that we've had, the struggle that it's always felt like we had to do in order to accomplish anything, living soft feels like a radical act of courage...

Eryn: Yeah, that's... yeah.

Elisa: Because peace equals giving up. You know...

Mary: Right.

Elisa: ... peace equals being lazy, or not being a survivor, or whatever.

Eryn: Or being bored.

Elisa: Yeah. [Blah sound] Bored, ew!

Eryn: Yeah, yeah.

Elisa: The worst.

Mary: Yes, right! What am I supposed to do now? Sit around and eat bon bons? Yeah, exactly.

Eryn: Exactly.

Mary: Yup, right.

Elisa: That's good, Mary. You've been so honest, and I'm really grateful that you have been willing to go to some of those really tender places...

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: ... and express them. Can you share maybe something God has spoken over you about His love for you, and His value of you just as you are.

Mary: Yeah, I would say that one of the biggest messages and conversations that God and I are having lately is being okay with the Mary-sized portion. So, every day that I was writing this last book, every



single day, I woke up and I prayed this prayer: God, give me a Mary-sized dose, portion, of access to Your infinite well of creativity, and the overlapping shore where it meets Your infinite well of wisdom, this, sort of... I'm using alchemy just as a metaphor, nobody get upset, this alchemy of explosion of new ideas that comes out of Your infinite well of creativity, Your infinite well of wisdom, but, like, only a... a Mary-size portion... because otherwise I feel like my face is going to blow off, like in... Indiana Jones *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Right? Like, we... we only need the Mary-size portion. And so, I was just having a conversation at a retreat that I was at where they were talking about, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and whether or not that was never, ever... are you going to have any of that knowledge or you're not ready for it yet. Now, I don't know the answer to that, that's a deep theological question, but it got into these conversations of the things we are protected from, the knowledge that we're protected from cause we're just not ready yet. And so...

Eryn: Yeah.

Mary: ... seasons of preparation. So, I think a Mary-size portion in... in the shortest version, that means a human size portion. I know that if I got [music] in... access to the infinite well of wisdom of God, I would drown in it. That would not be a... a blessing, but a burden, right? If I knew all the things that God knew, that would be a burden.

Eryn: Yeah.

Mary: And so, it's... it's me being met at this cross-air intersection where my gifts meet my story being fueled, tethered to the vine of an infinite well of wisdom and creativity. But we don't flood a plant with a fire hose. It's just what you need to thrive. So, it's a human... It's me recognizing my humanness and the limitations that are actually kind of beautiful of being human.

[Music]

Eryn: We can't do it all. Yep. What a beautiful and relatable lesson from Mary. Well friends, be sure to check out our website to subscribe to our email list, read the newest blog articles, or check out the *God Hears Her* books and devotionals. Find that and more at godhearsher.org. That's godhearsher.org.

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

[Music]



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

[Music]

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. [Music] *God Hears Her* is a production of our Daily Bread Ministries.