



God Hears Her Podcast

Episode 135 – Our Sisters in Iran with Lily Meschi

Elisa Morgan & Eryn Eddy-Adkins with Lily Meschi

Lily: Honestly, I was just numb to myself. I was very distrusting too, even of my own closest family members. I felt like I was betrayed, stomped upon, taken advantage of, and didn't really have a future to look forward to.

Voice: You're listening to *God Hears Her*, a podcast for women where we explore the stunning truth that God hears you, He sees you, and He loves you because you are His. Find out how these realities free you today on *God Hears Her*.

Eryn: Welcome to *God Hears Her*. I'm Eryn Adkins.

Elisa: And I'm Elisa Morgan. Have you been keeping tabs with the stuff happening in Iran? Well, things can seem dark or hopeless. But today's guest works with Iran Alive Ministries to bring hope and salvation to the people of Iran by broadcasting 24-hour Christian programming.

Eryn: Lily Meschi is a strong and resilient woman who came to work at Iran Alive Ministries after facing many personal struggles in Iran, Germany, and eventually, America. Join us to hear Lily's inspiring story of God's pursuit for her heart during this conversation on *God Hears Her*.

Lily: I was born and raised in Iran into a nominal Muslim family. As you know, because Iran is an Islamic nation after the revolution of 1979. Anybody who is born in that country is automatically a Muslim. And so I was born into a family like that. We were practicing the basics of Islam in our family as our way of connecting to god. My family was very god-honoring. And they wanted to do anything that they could do in their power to stay connected with a supreme being. And so all they knew was Allah, which was the god of...of Islam. And all I knew was the god that I was introduced to through my family as well as my school. We had a great life. It's me and my two sisters and my mom and dad. The five of us were very...very closeknit. We loved the unity that we had in our family, very loving family. Dad was the breadwinner. Mom was a stay-at-home mom. My dad was very successful. He was very honoring in our family and his family, in our community that we were in. And so I always looked up to my dad. He was my hero growing up. I always wanted to be successful like he was, honoring as he was, and respectful and all that. And so, when I was 16, mom and dad really sheltered us. They didn't really talk to us about any issues or anything like that. But all of a sudden, my mom said, we are moving to Germany.



Eryn: Wow.

Lily: And it was a surprise to us.

Elisa: Gosh, yes.

Lily: And...and we had vacationed to Germany before, because my mom's side of the family lived there—my uncle, my aunt, my cousins, all that. And we thought, oh great. We're going to Germany again. But this time, my mom was selling all of our possessions, our home. And so we were like no, this is a serious thing. While we were kind of excited about the move, I was also very nervous.

Elisa: And did you speak German?

Lily: I didn't.

Elisa: Okay.

Lily: That's why I was very nervous.

Eryn: I bet.

Elisa: Okay.

Lily: When we first moved, it was such a great, I mean enormous culture shock for me, because it's just...everything's so different. I would see kids in Germany smoke cigarette back behind the schools. Where I grew up in a segregated girls' school where we were wearing hijab in...in schools. And so there was no boys around all that. And so it was extremely hard for me to really adapt to the new environment, not to mention the language barrier that I had. You know, as a teenager, we go through inferiority complex and really having self-esteem issues, self-images and that are distorted and all of that. All of that, combined with language barrier and trying to fit in the German crowd and all that really created enormous amount of insecurities in me.

Elisa: I'm sure. Did you wear the hijab yourself still?

Lily: Oh no.



Elisa: Okay.

Lily: No, we didn't.

Eryn: Really?

Elisa: So you laid that aside, okay.

Lily: Yes, again, we didn't...we were nominal Muslim. We weren't really devout Muslim to...to wear hijab or anything. We were doing everything the government dictated to us to do which was the compulsory hijab in Iran at age nine.

Eryn: Wow.

Lily: And so when we got out of the country, we weren't really under those restrictions anymore. So we weren't wearing hijab, yeah.

Eryn: What was the catalyst to move to Germany? Was there a specific reason as to why? Or was it just to be close to family?

Lily: My dad's very successful business went belly up.

Eryn: Okay.

Lily: And so my mom and my dad both thought that we should move from Iran. And so we followed our family.

Elisa: So you've got inferiority of being a teenager, you've got a different language, you've got a whole different culture. And now you've got a financial situation. Oh.

Lily: Not only that, my dad stayed in Iran. My older sister stayed in Iran.

Eryn: Oh wow.

Lily: It was me, my younger sister, and my mom who moved to Germany.

Elisa: So you were separated.



Eryn: Okay.

Lily: Now to put things into perspective, we had a great life in Iran. We, I mean, lived in the best area of Tehran in Iran, lived in a large home, three-story house. And now when we moved to Germany, the three of us moved in with my cousin into a two-bedroom apartment. She also had two small children of her own. And so we shared one of the kids' rooms. And so talking about changes, I mean we went from you know, up there to below zero. And so we had to also adapt to that type of environment.

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: Yes.

Eryn: All of that can shape your identity. And you can find your worth in every bit of that. And it sounds like you were stripped of anything you would find your worth in.

Elisa: So true, Eryn.

Lily: Absolutely.

Eryn: And then you're like, big question mark, who am I? What's going on? What's going to happen for my future? Will we always live separated? Will it be temporary?

Lily: Yes.

Eryn: All of those questions at such a young age. So how long did you live in Germany?

Lily: We lived there in two years right, just as we adapted to the new school environment and learned the language and were working, my dad who had moved to the US with my uncle basically who had been in the US in Austin, Texas, for over 30 years.

Eryn: Wow.

Lily: He was an established businessman. So my dad and my uncle basically partnered up with this man and basically helped my dad open up his own restaurant in Austin, Texas.

Elisa: Okay, now take us forward into the next layers of your story.



Lily: When I was 18, so two years after our move in Germany, my dad, as we were talking on the phone every so often, one day he asked me. He said, Lily, this business partner of mine, he's also Persian. And he has been helping me a lot in...in my journey of opening up this business and all that. He seems like a very nice guy. And he has shown interest in getting to know you for marriage. And this guy has not even seen me or anything like that. At age 18, really when you come from that belief system of what we really grew up in in Iran, very patriarchy society, very male-dominated, and my dad being so honoring and respected in the community and all that; when he put his stamp of approval on his business partner, even encouraging me to talk to him, I trusted that this would be a very favorable relationship. I trusted that this would be something that my dad would never ask me to do something if he didn't have my best interest at heart. And so I started talking to him. Later I found out that he was 14 years older than me. When I moved to the US, he acted as if we were already married. And he wouldn't really leave my side or anything like that. He was just always there with me. I felt trapped from...

Eryn: Sure.

Lily: ...the moment I arrived in Austin, Texas. And honestly, from the moment I met him, things just went south.

Elisa: If you're comfortable share a little bit more about what "going south" meant for this. You're not even yet married.

Lily: Yes. We're not married.

Elisa: You have alarms going off in your being.

Lily: Yes.

Eryn: Yeah.

Lily: We weren't married. And my mom at this point was in Iran.

Eryn: Okay.

Lily: She was stuck in Iran, because she moved from Germany to Iran to basically go back there, tie up some loose ends with the business and all that while my dad was in...in the US. So for a while, it was just



the three of us, me and my two sisters in Germany. Then my dad was in the...in the US. The whole migrating from one country to another and all, I was very vulnerable.

Eryn: Absolutely, and not knowing your voice fully too.

Lily: Yeah, I felt like I was just going through life aimlessly and missed my mom, my sisters. My dad was very broken because of everything that he had lost. I mean in his late fifties, he had to start all over again and so just seeing my dad how broken he was and all that. Very quickly after I moved to the US, I was sexually exploited. And in the times that I was extremely broken myself and vulnerable. And that just created so much shame and more insecurity.

Eryn: Sure, and confusion.

Lily: A lot of frustration and confusion. After that, it was almost like I was forced into this marriage, because a lot was at stake. My mom wanted to also reunite with us. She needed a visa to come. And she was waiting for my wedding invitation for her to be able to get her visa to come. And so my dad's business was opening up, and it was at stake. It was...I felt like I just went with the flow not knowing what I was doing, didn't really feel I had the guidance of my parents. Because everyone was busy with their own thing. I didn't want to be a burden on anyone else really telling them my true feelings of what am I feeling right here right now?

Elisa: Can we just pause there for a second? Cause that is so heavy.

Lily: Yeah, it is.

Elisa: I mean as you're describing it, Lily, my heart is so heavy for you thinking about your age and language issues and the helplessness of your finances and the separation from your parents and your very natural historic trust in your father. There is just so much pain in that. And thank you for your honesty too...

Lily: Yeah.

Elisa: ...of saying that you were frustrated. I mean I'd be furious too, which is...

Lily: Yes.



Elisa: ...like you're so trapped, just so trapped. And I can hear the...you didn't really see you had any other options but to move ahead.

Lily: Exactly. I didn't feel like I had any other options. As you can imagine, this marriage was extremely abusive and controlling, very toxic. It was to a point that it was a daily struggle for me. Honestly, I was just numb to myself. I was very distrusting too, even of my own closest family members. I felt like I was betrayed, stomped upon, taken advantage of, and didn't really have a future to look forward to. One day when I was at the lowest point of my life, I was just walking dead. I was just walking around aimlessly. I felt trapped for the rest of my life. Because I tried to separate from him, and he wouldn't let me. And so one day my mom contacted me and said, Lily, we have a few friends coming to visit us from Oklahoma. And they specifically asked to see you. And so I went to my mom and dad's house wallowing in my own depression and sadness and brokenness and all that. As I stepped into their home, I sensed this incredible feeling of love as the moment I walked in. And so they embraced me. They...they loved on me. And I...I totally received their love. For the first time after forever, I felt like oh my gosh. I'm actually accepted and loved without any string attached.

Eryn: Without having to do or be or...

Lily: Yes.

Eryn: ...anything.

Lily: Yes.

Eryn: You didn't have to do anything...

Lily: Anything.

Elisa: [inaudible]

Eryn: ...but to show up.

Lily: Exactly.

Eryn: Which I think so many listening right now and myself included, desire that to...

Lily: Yes.

godhearsher.org



Eryn: ...show up and be and not have to do anything to be loved.

Lily: Yes, the friends came in prayerfully. They came to really share the good news with us, share Christ with us. And so they had lots of CDs, DVDs, Bibles with them. And so we had no idea what they were doing. In the living room they were watching *Jesus* film, the life story of Jesus.

Elisa: Oh sure.

Lily: And so I sat there and watched it with them, didn't really think much of it. Because growing up, we kind of grew up around religious movies of prophets, and Mohammed, Moses, Noah, all of that. And so this was just another religious movie to me.

Eryn: Yeah.

Lily: But about two weeks before my mom invited me to their home, I remember vividly that I, in my own faith of just knowing that there is a God, you know, not even in an Islamic way. I just...I looked up as I was doing some work in the kitchen. And I said, *God, I know You're real. Will You show Yourself to me?*

Elisa: Whoa.

Lily: *Will You make Yourself known to me, because I'm desperate. I need to know You. And I want to have a fresh start.* And because at age 19, my life was going south. I mean I was depressed. I was broken. I was desperate for change. And so when I was watching that movie, there was a part of it that one of the women there, she said, "Lily, did you know when you believe in Christ, all things will become new? All your past will be wiped off, and all things will become new." I got stricken. I was like oh my gosh. This is my prayer. This was what I prayed for two weeks ago. How did she know that? And so that was a seed that was sown in me right then and there that I just got me thinking. And so when I got up to leave, one of the girls there said, "Lily, I know you've been struggling. But you know, I know things are just not going well in your marriage and your, you know, your immigration. It has been a toll on you and your sisters and everyone else. Do you mind if I share a part of the Scripture with you? And at this point, I'm like I'm at..."

Eryn: What do you have to lose?

Lily: ...at the end of my rope.



Eryn: Yeah.

Lily: What...I'm...I've got nothing to lose here. Okay, share with me whatever it is that you want to share with me. And so she opened up the Word of God to John 1:1. "In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God, and the Word was God." Then she read on John 1:14 that "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." And Jesus was that very image of God. He was the Word. He was with God. He was God. And so that Word became rhema in me. I mean I was filled with supernatural faith right then and there, which I would call it a Holy Spirit encounter right then and there. At this point, I want you and your audience to know that I held no knowledge of Jesus, of His deity, of Trinity, of nothing. I knew nothing about Jesus other than He was one of the greatest prophets just like Moses and Mohammed and all the rest of them who performed many miracles. I just knew that. I knew that Jesus was the miracle prophet. But when she read that to me, John 1:1 and John 1:14, there was this sense of knowing that was imparted into me that I just tears started rolling down my cheeks. I never forget that moment. And without her even asking me, if you believe in Jesus, if you confess by your mouth and believe in your heart that He is your Lord and Savior, you become a new...you become a believer. Without her asking me, I said Jesus is my Lord and Savior.

Elisa: So suddenly, He's not just another prophet.

Lily: He wasn't. I knew He was my Lord. I knew He was my Savior right then and there. And I said, where do I begin? I want to go to church. I want to be a Christian. I want to follow Him.

Elisa: Well hallelujah. I mean that's amazing, so...

Lily: Yes.

Elisa: ...that's what I mean by these obstacles. Sometimes it's just a stunningly dramatic.

Lily: Yes.

Elisa: God's able to get through anything, isn't He? What happened with your marriage, and how did God then begin to call you forward into His work and...and use even your darkness for His glory?

Lily: Yes. I can tell you that my marital issues remained. But I was a new person. I knew that I was blessed. I was chosen. I was accepted, and I was loved by the Creator of this universe. I knew that I have a future. I knew that God had a plan for me to prosper me and to give me a hope and future. And so I started digging deep into the Word of God, started going to church, started reading the Word in spite of all
godhearsher.org



difficulties. I remember one day I was reading my Bible in the morning, and he came to the living room. He grabbed that Bible. He threw it across the room. He was like, this is all bs. Why are you even doing this? All of that. But His grace was fresh for me every single day.

Eryn: Wow.

Lily: He gave me strength. He gave me the ability to...to go on. One thing that, as a new baby believer, I heard from believers or read it myself. I don't know. I had my mind set on no divorce, because the Word of God says, He hates divorce. And I want to anything and everything that's pleasing to Him. So I had that settled in my mind that I'm not going to divorce unless I'm led to. And so I tried very hard. I struggled, struggled to help this marriage go forward and really have the revival. Unfortunately, when the other person is dealing with a lot of different issues and does not want changes, things cannot change. God will not move unless we move at times. And so...

Eryn: That's a good word.

Lily: ...God miraculously set me free from this relationship after 14 years. But hey, I counted it all as joy. It helped me build my character and perseverance to become the woman that I am today, to have compassion for the women that are going through abuse today, for really developing this heart within me so that when I see women going through hardship and pain in their marriages, I can comfort them just like I was...I was comforted by the Lord. I don't know why this was in part of my story to really go on for 14 long years, but I do know that God knows my best. And I trust that He had something planned out that He will unfold for me in the future years.

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: I think of the story of Joseph in the Old Testament whose brothers sold him into slavery. And at the end of his life when God released him, and I like the language that you used "freed you".

Lily: Yes.

Elisa: You know, he said that you know they meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.

Lily: Yes.

Elisa: And it's really hard for us to understand why our good God will allow such suffering. And yet He does promise that He will redeem it.



Lily: Amen.

Elisa: And I so appreciate your commitment to that understanding, yeah.

Lily: Absolutely, and He has redeemed my life. My wasteland actually He turned into a beautiful, beautiful field. And He has given me a new life. He has allowed me to be able to now, you know, have a voice to speak to those issues, to the cultural dispositions in Iran that sets young girls up for marriage with older men that child marriages, temporary marriages, and things like that that are common practices, everyday practices in Iran, that I'm able to shed light through the opportunity we have through the broadcast. We have about an estimated six million viewers on a daily basis of our broadcast.

Eryn: Wow.

Lily: So this is a platform that God has given us to be able to speak to those issues in Iran. And so I am so grateful that He has allowed me to go through this journey of my life so we can now minister to so many other women that are lonely, struck down and oppressed in Iran. And even here in the US as well. You see them every day but more commonly in Iran because of the environment in which they live.

Elisa: As you get up every morning and think about reaching these six million and so many of them voiceless as you were...

Lily: Yes.

Elisa: ...what is your prayer? What is your desire? What are you committed to in terms of responding to God's nudging you to make a difference? You know what's your...what's your passion for the women in Iran?

Lily: I want them to know who they are. I want them to know their true identity, realize their true identity of how loved they are, how accepted they are by the heavenly Father, how they are crowned with honor by Him. We are sons and daughters of the heavenly Father in heaven, of the Creator of this universe who holds all power in His hand. And I want them to see that and not depend on men or money or credentials or things of this world, even education or anything like that, knowing that God loves them just the way they are. And they are precious in His sight. Everything I do, I want them to understand and realize their true value and identity in Christ.



Eryn: Yeah. What advice do you have to somebody that's listening that maybe has the temptation of like just the thoughts of retracting back to maybe not feeling deserving or worthy of the new self and they go back to the old self or believing that maybe it is what it is and this is good enough.

Lily: It's a struggle for me every single day. Because shame wants to creep in. Worthlessness wants to creep in. The...the sense that we're not adequate enough. We're insufficient. We're weak. We don't have the right education. We don't have the right credentials. We're not like our peers. We're not further ahead. All of that...the...the whole comparison complex creeps in. What helps me, Eryn, is the daily walk and the quiet time that I have with the Lord. That intimate relationship, that reminds me every single day, I will not leave you nor forsake you. You are Mine, and I am yours. So you are My daughter. I will not withhold any good things from you. And that just reassurance that I hear from His voice every single day allows me to go on feeling whole in Him, feeling that He has completed every weakness, that I am strong and even in my weaknesses because of Christ that lives in me. Cause if we are left on our own, we will feel all those feelings of inadequacy and not enough and weak and I can't do this and all that. But with Him, we can do all things. With Him, the impossibilities will become possible. And I...I just encourage everyone who is listening to be diligent with our quiet time with the Lord on a daily basis, on an every moment basis, just...just knowing that He's there with us.

Elisa: Lily, you have such a heart for your sisters in Iran. And for everybody listening, we can feel removed from a culture that maybe is unfamiliar to us and even diminish whatever the issues are. And it breaks my heart to...to really hear your story, you know, from every step of it. I just wonder if you can speak to the...the crisis of...of humanity that you know is going on and that the statistics or the numbers and to the response that you're seeing...

Lily: Yes.

Elisa: ...through Iran Alive.

Lily: Yes.

Elisa: And maybe if there's any way that people would want to get involved, what they could do.

Lily: Iranian women are very oppressed in Iran because of the injustice that's happening. I mean the inhumane treatment and...and responses to women in general. And they're always relegated as second-class citizens in Iran. It's just the way that space is. It's just the way the culture has been in Iran after the revolution of...of 1979. And I'll tell you a few of them. You know, temporary marriages are very prevalent in Iran. Your audience may not know what temporary marriages are. In Iran, there's a practice that allows



a man to enter into a marriage relationship for a predetermined period of time, whether it's one hour, two hours, four weeks, one month, for him to have sexual relationship with a woman and for as long as they decide to for a predetermined price. And after that period is over, he's free to go with no obligations.

Elisa: It's a different form of prostitution, isn't it?

Lily: It's a loophole for legalized prostitution in Iran.

Elisa: That's...thank you.

Lily: It's legal. And what hurts me the most, and it's heartbreaking to anyone that I share this with, is that this practice, because of the economical issues and the financial advantages that men have over women, it's becoming more and more prevalent every day. It is also promoted and encouraged by the government. Because a man in Islam can have multiple four women four wives at a time if they want to. And so it's legalized. It's justified, and it's becoming more, more and more prevalent. That practice is evil. The legal age to...for marriage in Iran for a girl is at nine, at nine years old.

Eryn: Wow.

Elisa: Oh my goodness.

Lily: You s...you...we hear stories that girls are forced into marriage at age 12, 13, 14, 15 because of the economic issues that they're faced with in their family. And so these are the real harsh realities that are happening in Iran. And it's part of the culture. It's so ingrained in the culture that most of them don't know it any other way. Until we come to the West and our perspective broadens, and we're like oh my gosh. This is so wicked.

Eryn: Yeah.

Lily: This is not right. Child marriages is not right. These are so evil. And so these are some of the things that we speak to, break down, and really help Iranians understand. Cause they're...

Elisa: Open their eyes, yeah.

Lily: ...open their eyes to the truth of what's going on in Iran. And the government has blinded them to really not even knowing it any other way. And so these are some of the things that we're doing. We have different programs that actually talks about the cultural dispositions that needs to be broken off of Iran.



That's why you see a lot of protests now erupting after Mahsa Amini's death. Most of it is because of the injustice that's happening. The women are sick and tired of what's happening to them. And if a woman gets raped in Iran and goes to the court of law, her testimony is counted as half of a man, not even one.

Eryn: Wow.

Lily: And so she can't really testify against the rape herself, because she's not even counted as one person in Iran.

Eryn: Wow.

Lily: These are some of the injustice that women have to encounter in Iran. And so out of frustrations, pent-up anger, all of these protests are now happening in Iran, which has been silenced unfortunately by the government. And their...you know the crackdown on hijab is actually going even stronger now. So my prayer is that the...the eyes and the hearts and the mind of Iranians to open up to the truth of the Word of God to coming to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior and truly experience freedom that comes from within.

Eryn: Yeah.

Lily: Then if we have that virtue from within, then we can experience that on the outside in our environment as well. And so my prayer is for Iran to be set free from the grip of the enemy on this country.

Elisa: We can all be praying for our sisters in Iran and the injustice they are facing.

Eryn: Yes, I am so thankful Lily is raising awareness and sharing her story.

Elisa: Well before we go, be sure to check out our website and find a link for Iran Alive Ministries where you can learn more about their work and mission. You can find that and a link to join our email list on our website at godhearsheer.org. That's godhearsheer.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 Hannah and Judy for all their help and support. Thanks everyone.

Eryn: *God Hears Her* is a production of Our Daily Bread Ministries.