



God Hears Her Podcast

Episode 29 - When We Don't Fit In

Elisa Morgan and Eryn Eddy with guest Vivian Mabuni

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[Music]

Vivian: ... Learn your own heritage cause that's part of...

Elisa: So you can bring it forward.

Vivian: Yes, because American is not white, and we tend to start to think that that...

Eryn: Yeah.

Vivian: ...is the normal and that's not necessarily normal. It's... it's its own experience. And so the more that my white sisters can learn their heritage...

Elisa: Okay.

Vivian: ...I think that that's such a great value to be able to understand and celebrate...

[Music]

Announcer: 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*.

Elisa: Welcome to *God Hears Her*. I'm Elisa Morgan.

Eryn: And I'm Eryn Eddy. And as we gear up for season three, which begins on March 1st, we wanted to take the time to share a few of our favorite previous episodes with you. And I gotta say I'm really excited about the program we are going to revisit today.



Elisa: Me, too, Eryn. Vivian Mabuni is an Asian American which, as she will share, is a hugely important part of who she is. And because of her ethnicity, she has a unique story to tell, and I'm excited to hear it again today. Just some quick info on Viv. She's an author and a podcaster who wanted to carve out a place for Asian American women to explore and validate living at the intersection of East and West.

Eryn: So let's get to it. Here's our conversation with Vivian Mabuni. This is *God Hears Her*.

Elisa: Vivian, I just want to be upfront and very personal here and go *You have a unique cultural heritage*. I can tell by looking at you. And people who are just listening to our voices...

Vivian: Yes.

Elisa: ...they may not know yet.

Vivian: Right, they might actually see my name and see Vivian Mabuni...

Elisa: Uh huh.

Vivian: ...and think I'm possibly African.

Elisa: African! Oh!

Vivian: ...or something like that. I'm actually Asian American. My cultural heritage ... my parents were born in China. So I'm Chinese. I grew up speaking Mandarin. My grandma lived with us, so I retained probably a first-grade level.

Eryn: Wow.

Vivian: So I can't understand a newscast in Chinese, but I can probably understand a...a soap opera. So, that's part of my heritage, but I was born in Wisconsin.

Eryn: Okay.

Vivian: I grew up in Boulder. So that's why I have no accent. And I...

Elisa: Wisconsin. Boulder, Colorado...



Vivian: Mm-hmm.

Elisa: Wow!

Vivian: And now...

Eryn: I know.

Vivian: ...I'm in Southern California. So like most Asian Americans, we are a blend of Eastern and Western. So when I go to China or Hong Kong or Taiwan, I don't fit in. And I don't feel like I fit in here in the US, even though I was born and raised here, because I look different. And people think I'm somehow from somewhere else. If they ask, "where are you from?" and I say, "Well, I grew up in Colorado," then the question is, "Where are you *really* from?" And it's...

Elisa: Yeah.

Vivian: ...like, "no, I really did grow up in Colorado."

Eryn: Yeah.

Vivian: I was born in Wisconsin. You know? So that can actually be a micro-aggression, you know, for an Asian American to be asked "where are you really from?" Probably...

Elisa: It can be a what?

Vivian: A micro-aggression, like...

Elisa: What does that mean?

Vivian: It's like... It's an othering, like you're actually asking me my ethnic heritage. But I'm answering honestly. I am really from Colorado. Because if I asked you "where are you from, Elisa?" you'd say, "I'm from Colorado."

Elisa: That's right.

Vivian: You know, and I'm saying "I'm from Colorado," but you're not believing that I'm from Colorado.



Eryn: Yeah.

Vivian: You're believing...

Elisa: I see.

Vivian: ...that I'm from some other country.

Elisa: Micro-aggression.

Vivian: Yes.

Elisa: Otherings. So it...

Vivian: And other...

Elisa: ...separates us.

Vivian: Mm-hmm. Yes, so, you know, I have a US passport. I've never lived anywhere else. I am an American citizen by birthright and everything else, but I'm still seen as 'other.' So there's that... that sense ... So for your listeners that might be familiar with third-culture kids. That's like either ex-pats or missionaries that have been raised in another country. They don't ever feel like they fit in that other place.

Eryn: Oh wow.

Vivian: ...um... They kind of feel a little bit lost. That's how Asian Americans typically feel as well, because it's not like I can go to Taiwan and feel like I fit in.

Eryn: Right.

Vivian: My values are that of the US. So...

Eryn: Wow...

Vivian: Yeah.

Eryn: ...So how did that shape you seeing yourself? Like per... like internally?



Vivian: Yeah, you know, it's a great question because I've been on a journey, really.

Eryn: Yeah.

Vivian: And some of it has been learning to actually embrace and celebrate my ethnic heritage, because most of my life I spent trying to fit in. So I...

Elisa: And almost ignoring your heritage?

Vivian: Yes, and just kind of pushing that down. So outside my home... it was living like in two worlds. So outside my home, you know, I was a cheerleader, I was a junior-class president, you know, I did all the things I knew to be all-American...

Eryn: Yeah.

Vivian: But I also knew that I would never date the captain of the football team because of how I looked. So there was certain things that I could not achieve because of how I looked. So there's that...

Eryn: Wow.

Vivian: ...wanting to fit in and never really fitting in and that drove so much of my life, and then kind of turning a corner when I started to realize – you know what – it was not an accident that God made me as I am, and there's a lot to celebrate. And bringing together my eastern and western values is unique, and it's needed, and part of the conversation that needs to be happening. There's such a lack of representation ... um ... in the media, in... in every facet and arena.

Elisa: So this has now become a passion for you...

Vivian: Mm-hmm. Yes.

Elisa: ...to...to directly address the cultural division slash barriers...

Vivian: Yeah, more so.

Elisa: ...that we...



Elisa: ...experience.

Vivian: In fact, I just started a podcast for Asian American women called *Someday is Now*. And I'm interviewing Asian American women on leadership and cultural journey, our ethnic journey. And what I'm excited about is that it really is for Asian American women, but non-Asians can listen and learn about Asian heritage and culture. So the stories that we share that were painful, maybe to a non-Asian it'd be like, *oh, I didn't understand the "where are you from?", like how is that in any way hurtful?*

Eryn: Right.

Vivian: It's a conversation that I'm having with my other Asian American friends, and it's like, *oh, now I can understand*. So...

Elisa: Can we back up to that? Just because I've been in that pickle a zillion times, um, with an Asian person, with an African American person, with an international person, and I can't recognize the... the accent that I'm hearing.

Vivian: Sure.

Elisa: Is there a way... what I really want to know is: "Tell me your story."

Vivian: Yes!

Elisa: Wha... wha... what I want to know is: "How did you come to live here?"

Vivian: Yeah.

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: And I don't want to be insulting. Is there another way I can ask that...

Vivian: Sure!

Elisa: ...question?

Eryn: That's a good question.



Vivian: That's a great question. I think ... um ... "Share with me your ethnic heritage."

Elisa: That sounds so mouthy.

Vivian: Yes, but...

Elisa: (deep silly voice) "Share with me your ethnic..."

Vivian: Yeah, I'm cur...

Elisa: ...heritage."

Vivian: And...and I would say to my White friends...

Elisa: Uh huh.

Eryn: Yeah.

Vivian: Learn your ethnic heritage as well, because my friends... I have one girlfriend who's Dutch-American, and she has so much about her life and upbringing that is very Dutch... Dutch-American.

Elisa: Okay.

Vivian: And I have a Portuguese American friend, and there are certain recipes and ...uh... ways that they celebrate. There's just something to be celebrated. So even if you're a mix of Scottish and English and... Learn your own heritage cause that's part of...

Elisa: So you can bring it forward.

Vivian: Yes, because American is not White, and we tend to start to think that that...

Eryn: Yeah.

Vivian: ...is the normal, and that's not necessarily normal. It's its own experience. And so the more that my White sisters can learn their heritage...



Elisa: Okay.

Vivian: ...I think that that's such a great value to be able to understand and celebrate, you know, who we are and the different aspects that, you know, *my German heritage actually helped me to be very timely, you know, like that's part of the excellence that I do is a very German thing.* Or that, you know, *my expressiveness is very Italian in its nature.* And we were all immigrants...

Elisa: That's right.

Vivian: ...except for Native Americans...

Elisa: That's right.

Vivian: ...And so the Polish that immigrated here, you know, they were decidedly Polish. And the Irish that moved here stayed in Irish communities for a long time. There's a strong relation, and so when you have Hmong that move from Vietnam or whatever, there's... there's a strong rooting that takes place when we know who we are and where we're from...

Eryn: Mmm.

Vivian: ...in that sense.

Eryn: And its... that's beautiful. And it... you learned that at such a young age. Like when you said... I kinda wanna go back when you said when you were in high school, you always knew that you weren't gonna date the popular football quarterback. That's a powerful shaping at that age.

Vivian: Yeah... yeah.

Eryn: And then you said, you know, being White isn't American.

Vivian: Mm-hmm.

Eryn: So I wanna talk more about that, cause that does shape you for when you move forward in life, how you see yourself, what choices you make...

Vivian: Sure.



Eryn: ...what relationships you say yes to, what relationships ...

Vivian: Yeah.

Eryn: ...you say no to, and thinking that there's a limitation on you by the way you look.

Vivian: Sure.

Eryn: How did you break free?

Vivian: And so I would say that there still are...

Eryn: Yeah.

Vivian: ...some limitations...

Eryn: Okay.

Vivian: ...because of how we tend to approach normal...

Eryn: Mm.

Vivian: ...So when I ... Growing up, going down the Barbie aisle, you know, at Target, there were no Barbies that looked like me.

Eryn: Yeah.

Vivian: And so that's just saying something, like, you know... And I'd turn on the TV, and up until "*Fresh Off the Boat*" or whatever, there were no characters...

Elisa: That's right.

Vivian: ... that looked like me or families that operated like me. So every time that there's a portrayal on media, it's like perception is reality...

Elisa: That's right.



Vivian: ...Wo all of a sudden people decide that I'm really good at math and that I know Kung-Fu, or I'm really nerdy or, you know, I don't know anything about... There are assumptions made because of how I look...

Elisa: And they're negative?

Vivian: because there's... and negative because of the portrayal on media. And I think that that changes when you have a movie like *Crazy Rich Asians* where you have really good-looking leads...

Eryn: Right.

Vivian: ...who are doing a normal story where they are falling in love just like all the other movies, and no one did Kung-Fu ...

Elisa: Right.

Vivian: ...but they ate with chopsticks and they ...

Elisa: Yeah.

Vivian: ...you know there's just a...

Eryn: Yeah.

Vivian: ... it was just a seamlessness that ... The cinematography was great. The costumes were great. But it was decidedly Asian and Asian American in some regards. So, does that answer your question?

Eryn: Yeah, it does.

Elisa: And maybe... this is super sensitive, and I want to be honest with it. I think, Eryn, some of what we're experiencing here is what we need to name. And its "white privilege."

Eryn: Yeah.

Vivian: Mm-hmm.

Elisa: What is it? Vivian, do you have a good definition for it?



Vivian: Um, I think it's centering the White experience as what is normal and correct. It's almost like ...um... my daughter... Here we are in California, right? It's 2019, and she's in high school. And her little blonde friend goes – they were talking about something _____ [ethnic?] and she goes, “Well, you're not... you're not American. You're Asian. I'm American.”

Elisa: Okay.

Vivian: ...you know, here my daughter was also born probably in the same hospital that she was born in, in the same...

Elisa: To American citizens...

Vivian: ...year.

Vivian: To American citizens...

Elisa: Gotcha.

Vivian: ... But there's this sense that my daughter's not American because she's not White. Does that make sense?

Elisa: It... it does, and I'm not sure I'm... I'm learning. as so many of us are...um... One way I understand it, it's almost like blinders. It's almost like you put on colored contacts.

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: And we haven't talked about it enough . . .

Vivian: Yeah.

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: We haven't brought it forward enough. Well, I think especially in Christian circles, it's newer language to us. It's not new in many circles, but...

Eryn: Yeah.



Elisa: ... to just identify it. To put it on the table and say *this is something that we need to take responsibility for...*

Eryn: Yeah.

Vivian: Yeah.

Elisa: ...when we look through a certain lens...

Vivian: Yeah.

Elisa: ...we're going to see...

Vivian: Yep.

Elisa: ...skewedly. And I just want to say *our bad*, you know. That's hard. And...

Vivian: Yeah.

Elisa: ...and I own that.

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: So.

Vivian: Yeah.

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: Yeah.

Vivian: Well, I appreciate you saying that because as, um, as a woman of color, I think, you know, what God intends is for us all to live in unity, but unity is not uniformity. And I think that the more we can actually, I think, have the conversations...

Elisa: Mm-hmm.



Eryn: Yeah.

Vivian: ... there's really healing that takes place because of relationship. So when you come to my house, you take your shoes off before you enter the house. That's just...

Eryn: Yeah.

Vivian: ...what we do. You know, it's just it's...

Elisa: When you come to my house, two dogs attack you.

Vivian: Yeah.

[Laughter]

Elisa: It's just what we do!

Eryn: Oh, yes!

Elisa: [inaudible]

Eryn: And I keep my shoes on!

Elisa: [inaudible] I... I apologize to you profusely for the slobber, you know, but to respect...

Eryn: Yeah.

Vivian: Yeah.

Elisa: ...to respect your customs.

Vivian: Yeah, and just to have, you know... just to... to expand. I think expansion ... cause I have...

Eryn: Yeah.



Vivian: ...so much to learn. I understand some Asian, but there are so many different types of Asian as well. So there...

Eryn: Yeah.

Vivian: ... each have its own uniquenesses. And, you know, it's like my son is dating a Latina. And she's beautiful, and I want to understand more of her culture as well, you know, but she's grown up half in Mexico, half in LA. And ... and her story is beautiful, and I have a lot to learn too. So I think it's that if we can start to have honest conversations, talk about "white privilege," understand that there are, historically, some really horrible things have happened to ethnic minorities, and to learn our history. So in my podcast I even have a 'did you know,' which starts to go through like: Did you know that there were Chinese that fought in the Civil War?

Elisa: Excellent.

Vivian: I don't think any history book shows that...

Eryn: Yeah.

Vivian: ...but there were Chinese that fought in the Civil War, you know, so we need to be about learning more to be able to dismantle some of that. Um... The thing that I find most fascinating, the book I've probably recommended more than any others, *Just Mercy* by Bryan Stevenson.

Elisa: Okay.

Vivian: He's a Harvard Law graduate; brilliant African American young man. He said the reason why Germany and Rwanda and other places where there are horrible things that have happened...

Elisa: Genocide.

Vivian: ...Genocide, holocaust, those kinds of things. The healing takes place because you cannot go anywhere in Rwanda... I've been to Rwanda twice. You can't go anywhere in Germany without there being memorials to say *this is what happened*, so that it will never happen again. As a visitor to Rwanda, you have to go to the Genocide Museum to see what happened so that it will...

Eryn: Yeah.



Vivian: ...never happen again.

Eryn: Wow.

Vivian: We have not done that in the United States.

Eryn: Right.

Vivian: We still are in denial.

Elisa: We cover it all up.

Vivian: We just don't...

Eryn: (inaudible)

Elisa: We...

Vivian: ...look at...

Elisa: ...white wash.

Vivian: Yes.

Elisa: ...it.

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Vivian: And so that's where we need to learn our history, and we need to understand that pulling yourself up by your bootstraps in those situations – if that was your starting point, you'd be in the same place.

Eryn: Right.

Vivian: ...if not further back.



Elisa: Yeah.

Vivian: You know what I mean?

Elisa: Right.

Vivian: My African American brothers and sisters have such histories of resilience and strength that have come out of injustice. And that's true with Latino, Asian ... I mean there's just story after story...

Elisa: Well, and it's not something new to modern culture. The Bible is filled with horrific stories...

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: ...of injustice...

Vivian: Yeah.

Elisa: ...and people who were ignored and invisible and abused...

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: ...and just incredibly mistreated.

[Music]

Eryn: I'm so glad that you mentioned the biblical story there.

Elisa: Yeah, well, it's true. There's so much injustice in the Bible. And one of the major themes of Scripture is how God sees and hears and cares for those who are victims of injustice.

Eryn: Yes, that's so true. And our conversation with Vivian Mabuni is not even close to being over.

Elisa: No, it's not. And when we come back, we'll be talking about several really current topics. Vivian will begin by referencing how women have been historically treated differently, and how God meets us and guides in those moments. And we will also explore her story of surviving breast cancer, which will lead to some very practical ideas for how we can be a friend to someone who's going through a tough time or suffering in a...another way. That's coming up right here on *God Hears Her*.



Daniel: Hey, *God Hears Her* fans! My name is Daniel, and I'm the producer for *God Hears Her*. And I want to take just a moment to thank you for being a part of the *God Hears Her* family. I also have some exciting news. We are already preparing for another season of this podcast, with new episodes beginning on March 1st. Kari Jobe, Ellie Holcomb, Sally Lloyd-Jones are just a few of the names that will be joining us. And, of course, Eryn, Elisa, and our entire *God Hears Her* team can't wait to share these conversations with you. As we prepare for this new season, we are wondering if you'd be willing to help us reach more women with the message that "God hears her." We are so thankful to be able to offer these shows for free, but as you are well aware, free things still cost something to someone. And so, if you've found this show to be helpful, would you also be willing to support this work? Your gift of any amount will go a long way in helping us not only launch Season Three, but will help us record and launch future seasons of this show, so we can reach more women with the life-changing message that *God Hears Her*. Visit GodHearsHer.org/donate to give today. That's GodHearsHer.org/donate.

[Music]

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

Elisa: And I'm Elisa Morgan. And in just a moment, we're going to hit "play" on the second part of our interview with Vivian Mabuni. We're taking a little bit of a turn in this next part. First, we're going to talk about how women have often been treated differently simply because they're women. But we'll also get to hear some of Vivian's amazing story of surviving breast cancer, and specifically discuss how we can be a friend to those who are going through tough times or are suffering in some way.

Eryn: The next part of our conversation is super practical. And I hope that you'll stick with us as Vivian offers some tangible ways to be a friend to those who are going through things that we can't understand. But before we jump back into our conversation, we want to let you know that if you missed anything in today's show, check out today's talking points included in the show notes. The show notes also include a link to order *God Sees Her* devotional, as well as a link to a free resource. It's a two-week discussion with Vivian Mabuni about her book *Open Hands, Willing Heart*, where she helps us discover the joy of saying yes to God. The discussion was hosted by *Discover The Word*, a daily radio show from Our Daily Bread Ministries. And, again, that link is in the show notes. The show notes can be found in the podcast description, or visit godhearsher.org for all this and more. That's God Hears Her dot o.r.g.

Elisa: So let's get back to our interview with Vivian Mabuni as she picks up our conversation on injustice with a comment about how women specifically might be in a position to see racial injustice more easily, because in some ways, women have been treated differently. You're listening to *God Hears Her*.



Vivian: And I could say too, I think women get it a little bit sooner sometimes because we have been the only woman in the board room, or the only...

Eryn: Yeah.

Vivian: ...woman sitting in whatever meeting or have experienced in our own way inequality because of not getting paid for the same work.

Eryn: Absolutely.

Vivian: You know, so, I think that there's an identifier immediately when you talk about, okay, *that's not right. That's not fair.* It ought not be, like, *why am I not getting promoted because I'm a woman? Like, this is...*

Eryn: Right.

Elisa: ... you know, it has nothing to do with skill set, experience, so I think women can get it a little bit sooner sometimes, in my experience.

Eryn: Yeah. That's good. I remember one time when I first started my business. I got invited to this entrepreneurial event that they do once a month that's in this fancy high rise, and it had been going on for about seven years.

Vivian: Mm-hmm.

Eryn: And the reason I got invited was because they finally decided to start inviting women.

Vivian: Wow!

Eryn: And there was a part of me that wanted to be like, *I'm not going.* You know? Kinda like, *oh good job,* you know, like... I kinda like... like an attitude...you know?

Elisa: Yeah.

Eryn: And then the other part of me was like, *I'm gonna show up and show...*



Elisa: *I'm not only going; I'm going goooooood.*

Eryn: *And I'm gonna wear an awesome outfit.*

noise

Eryn: Yeah. Yeah.

(laughter)

Eryn: You know, you op... you invited us? I'm coming.

Vivian: That's right.

Eryn: You know?

Vivian: That's right.

Eryn: And it... I could have taken the negative route of like anger and mad at like southern business men because, you know, I live in the South. And I decided I'm gonna show up, and I'm not gonna allow any like what would be injustice, uh, impact my integrity and my character of wanting to lean into an uncomfortable...

Vivian: Sure.

Eryn: ...situation.

Elisa: I think what you're reflecting, Eryn, is... um... wow. It's like a... a 'Yes God' kind of a thing. We can get all kinda hissy because we've been so late to be invited to the party...

Eryn: Hmm, that's good.

Elisa: ...or we can say, *I'm invited to the party and thank you for finally recognizing that because by the way, God invited me a long time ago.*

Eryn: Exactly.



Vivian: That's great.

Elisa: *You just...*

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: *...recognized that.* I remember forty years ago being one of six women enrolled in a masters of divinity program...

Vivian: Right.

Elisa: *...in seminary.*

Vivian: Yes.

Elisa: And I struggled with a lot... being the first a lot of those things. And every time I'd, you know, go through it *and how do I look?...*

Vivian: Right.

Elisa: *...and all that junk. But, bottom line, what God would say to me is, Elisa, the door's open. Go through it and stick your foot in the door for the next women who's...*

Vivian: That's right.

Elisa: *...coming behind you.*

Eryn: I love that.

Elisa: And that's what I've done. And you don't have to be some crazy liberal, you know, *blah, blah, blah...* you know...

Eryn: Right.

Elisa: *...setting your bra on fire to do this stuff.*

Vivian: Yeah.



Elisa: But you can be obedient.

Vivian: That's right.

Elisa: ...to where you're invited...

Vivian: Yeah.

Elisa: ...because God's already invited you there.

Vivian: Yeah.

Eryn: That's right.

Vivian: That's so good.

Eryn: It's allowing...

Vivian: That's so good.

Eryn: ...those circumstances to not define...

Vivian: Mm-hmm.

Eryn: ... you...

Vivian: And...

Eryn: ...cause you know how you're defined.

Elisa: Yes. Saying yes and going through.

Vivian: And I would say, as white women in this day and age, you know, to all the listeners of the podcast, if you are...

Elisa: Who are white.



Vivian: ...who are white... who happen to be white and... and beyond.

Elisa: There you go.

Vivian: ...um... But if you are an event planner, then be intentional about making space, and open up the platform to include women of color. And have that be normal and not just have women of color come to speak on racial reconciliation.

Elisa: Yeah.

Vivian: Because we are more than that.

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: Yeah.

Vivian: In other words, I'm a cancer survivor, and that's part of my story, but it does not define the whole of me. And I can come...

Eryn: Yeah.

Vivian: ...and share about my cancer story, but I have actually other things to offer as well. And so there's definitely a sense of... there's a power dynamic too that ... You can throw onto a poster, you know, all these diverse faces, but if the leadership is not diverse where the decision making is taking place, who has the say on money...

Eryn: Yeah.

Vivian: ...and allocation. Those kinds of decisions, if they are not being spoken into by people of color, then it's going to... you're just going to continue to perpetuate.

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Vivian: So diversity is more than just having an ethnic worship band at a church. You know what I'm saying? So...



Eryn: Absolutely.

Vivian: ...I think in that sense that, you know, the same idea with you leveraging like your... keeping your foot in the door for the next women coming into seminary, I think, in the same way with people of color, with women of color, you're being intentional to say, *you know what, we're incomplete.*

Elisa: Mm-hmm. That's a great way to say it.

Vivian: You know?

Elisa: And there's also the issue of ages, you know, and different generations being represented.

Vivian: That's right.

Elisa: ...of different lifestyles, in terms of socio-economic.

Vivian: Yes.

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: We could go... kinda go on and on here. Instead of segregating our offerings into little cliques, which is so difficult, you know...

Vivian: Yeah.

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: ...can we be more intentional...

Vivian: Yeah.

Elisa: ...about being inclusive and hearing from all of us...

Vivian: Yeah.

Elisa: ...women who...



Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: ...represent the body of Christ and the ones who Jesus died for as well.

Vivian: Absolutely.

Eryn: Yeah.

Vivian: Absolutely.

Elisa: You know, you... you talked about you're a cancer survivor, and... and how does illness keep you from being valued or seen or noticed or ...

Vivian: My first pass would be I think it's ... probably a plus side of it has been places to connect with people...

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Vivian: ... like automatically ... It's interesting because with a cancer diagnosis, it's one of those joining a sorority that you never pledged kind of thing. So there's just an understanding of life, you know, going through chemo, and, you know, all of those things that is sobering and challenging. But the instant that I meet someone, there's just an instant connection. It's given me access into a world that I didn't every know about before. And so it just ... it's provided a place of greater sensitivity to others and a knowing that I didn't know before, because I think I took a lot for granted, like, *I'm healthy!*

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Vivian: You know, I take Advil when I have a headache, and that's about it, you know. It's like I had no idea. So now when I meet someone who's going through Lyme disease or chronic pain or, you know, kidney failure. Whatever it is, it's like it's not cancer, but I can relate to doctor's appointments and, you know, blood work getting done and on and on. So there's... there's a relating that takes place because of it.

Eryn: Do you feel like there is also... you become known for that illness? So people don't... they'll ask you constantly how you're doing...

Vivian: Yeah.



Eryn: ...pertaining to your illness...

Vivian: Yes.

Eryn: ...instead of how you're doing apart from it?

Vivian: Yes.

Eryn: That it becomes almost an identity...

Vivian: Mm-hmm.

Eryn: ...and you want to be seen past...

Vivian: Yes.

Eryn: ...your illness...

Vivian: Yes.

Eryn: ...right?

Vivian: Yes, definitely. And I think that it's learning to try to understand that the person asking really genuinely cares and not getting like, *ugh, here we go again...*

Eryn: Right...

Vivian: You know?

Eryn: right, right. Sure.

(inaudible)

Elisa: It gets tiring.

Vivian: Because it is tiring... it is tiring.



Elisa: And boring even.

Vivian: Yeah. And it's just... it's like there's just ... because it was so hard...

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Vivian: ...there's just the desire to move on...

Elisa: Yeah.

Vivian: ... and not be the poster child for breast cancer. And every October, you know...

Eryn: Yes.

Vivian: ...here's the reminder again, and all the pink ribbons, you know...

Eryn: And all the pain you went through, and...

Vivian: Yes, I just...um...

Eryn: (inaudible)

Vivian: ...so there's a little bit of...

Eryn: Right.

Vivian: ...that, of just really wanting to be able to move ahead. And at the same time, and literally simultaneously, there is the wanting to be able to encourage someone who's in that season right now too. So it's a little bit of my own healing where if you could picture like a sponge. It can only hold so much water. There's only so much of emotional capacity that I can hold. And as the farther out I get from the actual diagnosis and treatment, I think that it squeezes out some of the water to take in some more. But I was at maximum.

Elisa: Yeah.

Eryn: Oh.



Vivian: ...for quite a while, you know, and I just could not take in any more pain, anymore, you know, 'I have a friend who has, you know, this. Can you email them?' And I'm like, *I don't have that*, you know?

Eryn: Yep.

Vivian: But I'm the closest they know to someone who's gone through something similar. So there's a time factor, as well, and my own healing process that squeezes out some of that water to then hopefully expand more to help take in a little bit more.

Eryn: That's really... that's powerful. And I love that analogy. When I went through my divorce, I was that friend where people... They didn't know how to connect with their friend going through it, but they would...

Vivian: knew...yes...

Eryn: ...connect me with them.

Vivian: Yeah.

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Eryn: And at some point I had to develop that healthy boundary, because it was causing me to not heal, cause I kept reopening wounds by living in someone else's story.

Vivian: That totally makes sense. Yes. Yes!

Elisa: So it's a bit of a principle for all of us who have friends who are suffering. How would you [principalize?] that, Vivian, you know, what would you say? What helps? What maybe do we avoid? Perhaps check out the sponge? You know? Ch... che...

Vivian: Yeah.

Elisa: ...check out how full...

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: ...that sponge is before we add more, but...



Vivian: Yeah.

Elisa: ...Any other principles?

Vivian: Well I would say that unsolicited advice ...[laughter] ... Just don't.

[Laughter]

Elisa: I have a friend who said that unsolicited advice is always interpreted as criticism.

Vivian: Ohhh...

Elisa: Isn't that fascinating?

Vivian: Wow! I don't think I would've...

Elisa: Because when you don't ask for it...

Vivian: Yes. Yeah.

Elisa: ...you receive it as somebody's correcting you.

Vivian: Wow!

Elisa: So just wait to be asked...

Vivian: Yeah.

Elisa: ...or don't say...

Vivian: Yeah.

Elisa: ...a thing.

Vivian: Yeah.



Elisa: Yeah.

Vivian: So I would say...

Eryn: Huh.

Elisa: I know, right?

Vivian: ...to be a good friend, just don't offer advice, you know? The present of presence...

Elisa: Okay.

Vivian: ...is really ... it just really goes so much farther. So whether it's divorce or health issues or loss or any kind of grief...

Eryn: How is... how can we make that tangible for somebody listening?

Vivian: Yeah.

Eryn: If they know somebody that's suffering, that they want to be present. Instead of offer this, you know, unsolicited advice...

Vivian: Right.

Elisa: Don't point to me.

[Laughter]

Eryn: Right, no. I do it too.

Vivian: Well, that's a really good question. I...I can share with what's helpful for me. I'm thinking back to every round of chemo. It just was worse cause I knew what was happening and what was going to be happening in the course of those days. And so there was always this predictable pain, and it would get better. But there's just a point where you... there's not enough energy to shower, and it's just... it just feels awful. And as much as I layered all the medicines, I still felt awful.

Eryn: Oh.



Vivian: ...And I remember my girlfriend Kelly coming over, and we literally... she just sat next to me. And we just flipped through the television channels. We didn't even stay on any particular thing that... It was kind of serving to kind of distract me a little bit, but she just sat with me.

Eryn: Mm.

Vivian: ...And that was one of the most comforting things, cause I wasn't alone.

Elisa: That's awesome.

Vivian: And I didn't have to carry a conversation, and I just was miserable, but someone was with me. And someone saw me.

Elisa: Thank you for that story because I know even imagining entering feels so overwhelming, like we have to do some big thing. And that is so normal, just to come and be present.

Vivian: Yeah. Yeah.

Eryn: Yeah.

Elisa: That's really helpful.

Vivian: And respect that people deal with pain differently, so what actually ministers to me may not be what ministers to somebody...

Elisa: Okay.

Vivian: ...else. It's kinda like people that process externally verses internally. There's no right or wrong, it's just... So there's no right way to do cancer or a right way necessarily to come alongside, as much as to just be available to the degree that that person wants because I... Part of my biggest struggle – maybe as a first born, maybe as dysfunctional as I am or whatever – but I had a hard time learning... I had to learn to be a gracious receiver. It's just so much easier to be on the giving end.

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Eryn: Yeah.



Vivian: The humility that it requires, the dying of my pride, to be able to be a gracious receiver...

Eryn: Yeah.

Vivian: ...that was something that God was kind of working in my own life during that whole season. And so learning to say, you know, if someone offered, *hey*, you ... normally you'd be like, *oh no, no, don't worry about it! I'm just gonna be watching TV* or whatever, it's like fine.

Eryn: Yeah.

Vivian: I was actively learning in my own process to be a gracious receiver, to let Kelly come and just sit next to me on the couch and flip the channels, you know. So that's kind of a part of that, too, so, you know, a friend who might be going through a really dark time right now may not be in a place to want any company. But I would say, you know, set an alarm and text, you know – especially for those who are going through a major loss. There's usually a lot of attention the first few months, and then it gets really quiet.

Eryn: Yeah.

Vivian: So be the friend that would set the alarm for the five and seven months after to kind of check in too. I think that those are some more practical things to just say, *hey*... or a holiday, if they've lost their mom, and it's the first mother's day, you know, just...

Eryn: Yeah.

Vivian: ...set a note, a reminder, I think that goes a long, long way.

Elisa: We pull back from suffering, you know, we... it... it's uncomfortable.

Vivian: Yeah.

Elisa: We're not sure we'll be (quote) "effective and successful" to offer help. And we pull back, and as a result we can end up kind of wounding...

Vivian: Yeah.



Elisa: ...and leaving the sufferer...

Vivian: Yeah.

Elisa: ...feeling unseen.

[Music]

Eryn: Thanks again for revisiting this episode with us. And join us on March 1st for a brand-new episode of *God Hears Her*. But for now, don't forget: God hears you, He sees you, He loves you, because you are His.

[Music]

Elisa: Today's episode was engineered by Ann Stevens and produced by Mary Jo Clark and Daniel Ryan Day. We also want to give a quick shout-out to Emily, Linda, and Maggie for their help in creating the *God Hears Her* podcast. Thank you all!

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