

Episode 5-2: Special Needs Parenting #2

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Transcript:

Jocelyn: I don't just need to feel better. I need the truth. And ultimately that will make me better.

Janet: I just want to make it as totally simple as possible for ladies to see that the Bible is really applicable to their everyday life.

Jocelyn: When they understand theology, the application flows out of it quickly with joy.

Janet: It is a journey, but even the journey itself is joyful when I'm doing it, holding the hand of my savior and trusting him all along the way. This is the joyful journey podcast, a podcast to inspire and equip women to passionately pursue beautiful biblical truth on their journey as women of God. When you choose truth, you're choosing joy.

Janet: Welcome back. This is Janet again, here with Jocelyn.

Jocelyn: Hey, friends.

Janet: And if you heard our last episode, you know that we are here again with a special friend of ours, Tirzah Birk.

Tirzah: Hi.

Janet: Who came on our last episode to share with us how can parents of the disabled find joy. And the first episode is very foundational. I highly recommend it. If you didn't hear it, stop this one and go back and listen to that first. But we're going to pick up on that now, and talk a little bit more practically.

Tirzah: So in the first episode, I was really trying to, I hope maybe, convince parents that an essential step toward joy is really pausing to lament. Which means I have to bring my questions,



my doubts, my fears directly to the Lord, and that may involve asking someone to enter into my sorrows,

Janet: Yes.

Tirzah: And to share them and help me to process through this. And I shared some data from my parents survey of just some of the hardships that parents report enduring and just some of the hope that parents who find refreshment in God's word, that really does help them to have joy and peace with being a parent of a disabled child. So today we have kind of two parts in this episode. I'm going to start with a little bit more, let's say, practical opportunities to be like Christ in loving others in some practical and specific ways. And then the second part of today is going to be just answering some, I have six specific questions that I'm just going to hopefully just whet the appetite of God's word has just such rich and precious answers for just six questions or concerns that either I've experienced or I put together from my parent survey that are common among parents. So, we will begin with how parents of disabled children, we have an opportunity to be like Christ in how we love others.

Janet: It's fascinating that you're saying that because I would expect you to say that the rest of us have an opportunity to be like Christ in how we love you. You know? And that's true too, but fascinating that you start the other way.

Tirzah: And that makes me think about our priorities, because we have to really think about getting those in line with what God's Word says. So, Janet, what does God's Word say is our top priority?

Janet: Well, Matthew 22: 37 says, basically, my number one priority is to personally love God with all my heart, mind, soul and strength.

Tirzah: And in order to do that well, I want to refer back to what I said in the first episode, and then I'm going to begin to again start answering some questions that maybe we're going to be thinking through and processing as parents. So kind of pause on that. And then what would our second priority be

Jocelyn: Well, Matthew 22: 37 says that our second priority after loving God is to care well for our family.

Tirzah: And this is not a one size fits all for special needs families. We personally must evaluate what is going to most help our family to love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and mind. And I just really want to encourage us not to compare ourselves with other families, even other families with disability.

Jocelyn: That's great advice.



Tirzah: And parents may need to step back and reevaluate commitments through the filter of will this help me and my family right now in this season we're in, will this commitment help us to love the Lord our God with all our heart and our soul and our mind right now.

Jocelyn: Which to be honest is really not that different from any other average parent.

Tirzah: Absolutely.

Jocelyn: Because we're constantly asking, is this thing that I want to do going to be good and helpful for our family in the season that we're in? So it's interesting how there's some differences and some similarities.

Janet: Well, what I'm hearing is it's almost like you're being crowded to live the way we all need to live.

Jocelyn: Yes.

Janet: You know, like we should all be living that wa

Jocelyn: There's best options. Yes

Janet: But many of us just try to do more than we could and please everybody and don't deal with the fact that i'm doing it for selfish reasons, but I can handle it. And then it's like the Lord's allowed something into your life where you can't hide

Jocelyn: Then there's no way. There's no way to do it

Janet: They really have to be thinking biblically. So I think that's good and hard

Tirzah: We all need to step back and think about those questions, right?

Janet: Yep.

Tirzah: I wanted to ask some ladies from my church who have been caretakers through the life of a child who's now into the adult phase.

Janet: Yes.

Tirzah: I wanted to hear from some ladies from my church what God had taught them, and here are a few of the highlights of what they have learned across their decades of being a parent of disabled. Janet and Jocelyn, would you read what these ladies shared?

Jocelyn: First of all, God has a perfect plan for my life, and this is i

Janet: Wow, that's amazing. God will provide the grace, knowledge, and encouragement I need.



Jocelyn: No matter how hard, isolating, hard this situation seems to me, he is all I need. He sees, he knows, he understands.

Janet: My son is God's creation.

Jocelyn: I have the privilege to be the hands and feet of Jesus to this child. I get to attempt to help him understand God's love for him through the way I treat him, speak to him, and respond to difficult situations and challenges.

Janet: Christ is my model. He set the example.

Jocelyn: A deacon and his wife helped us. They told us we were still serving God, but God had changed our ministry. Our ministry was now to our boys. So as parents, and especially me as a mom, I had to realize that they were my full time ministry and that honored God.

Janet: It took years of study and growth to create that mindset.

Jocelyn: I devoured books on spiritual growth and leadership

Janet: I had devotional and prayer time every morning. Wow, that's beautiful.

Tirzah: So we're talking about parents have the opportunity to be like Christ in how they love others. And in order to do that, we have to think through our priorities. That first is my personal growth and loving God. And second is caring for my family. And then third is going to be creatively thinking of how to love others outside of the family. And I just really have on my heart to encourage parents that church attendance needs to be an area of top priority. And I just think of 1 Corinthians 12 verse 22, which says, the parts of the body, and he's talking about how a physical body is an illustration for the local body of Christ as a local church. The parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable. The special needs family is indispensable to the church.

Jocelyn: Wow.

Janet: I feel like we need to stop there and just, families with special needs, in their family need to hear that. They're not a burden to the church. It's not, if I really love people, I won't go and make-- they're indispensable. We need all parts of our body.

Tirzah: And there are likely to be seasons for a special needs family where maybe church attendance is not possible. But I just really want to encourage us that this should not be a permanent situation for anyone who is able to leave their home and go to church. We just don't see a category in the Bible for people who are able to gather, but permanently decide not to gather with other believers in the local church. I shared in part one that maybe a third of



American families are affected by disability. And I just dream that our churches would also have a third of the families affected by disability.

Janet: Wow.

Tirzah: And what I see and I hear from many parents is just, it's just so hard to be a meaningful part of a local church

Janet: Yeah.

Tirzah: And can we just acknowledge the reality is it is hard.

Janet: Yes.

Jocelyn: I'm sure.

Tirzah: And it is uniquely hard. For families of the disabled-- it can be-- to attend church

Janet: Sure.

Tirzah: And we may wrestle with thoughts like we are going to be such a burden on this church as you just said, Janet. I wrestle with that. How will my child respond to being in church? Are they going to judge my parenting if my child is out of control or has a difficult response? And I'm probably not going to be able to pay attention or get anything out of church anyway. It's just too hard. And I, boy, I relate to this, ladies. We just started bringing Isaiah in with us to our Sunday night service. And he's a pretty happy guy, but he can start shrieking and screaming loudly.

Janet: In happiness.

Tirzah: In happiness. And it can be so very sweet. But a recent time, just as soon as it was time to be quiet, it's the serious part of the church service. And Isaiah just started shrieking loudly. I was just so embarrassed and I tapped my hand lightly over his mouth to, that sometimes communicates to him, it's time to calm down and be quiet. He bit me so hard. I just wanted to die of embarrassment and pain. And I did have to get up and go take him out and walk him around and I can come back later. So I understand as a parent, just the temptations in our heart. This is a uniquely hard thing to think about is being a meaningful part of a local church. But I really want to appeal to parents who are tempted to give up on going to church. There's so much we could say about this. I just want to say two things. It really comes down to, do I really believe God at his word? Am I going to trust God on this? I think of Hebrews 10: 25, which says, let us not neglect our meeting together as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near. So, am I going to trust God? And then, just appealing on a human level, don't we want churches to be places that embrace and welcome the disabled?



Yes, right? That's what I hear from parents of, oh, if only their churches were better. Well, we have to lead the way by being humble and willing to do that.

Janet: And I love that, because I do hear that a lot. And I want my church to grow and be better. And it has been just so sweet to watch, you know, at our church now we have a family service where more children are in it, and I believe the sermon is a little shorter and it's probably a little louder, would be my guess.

Jocelyn: They do different songs, I think

Janet: Yes. But I know that there is one young boy in there who is deaf and we have a man in our church who interprets for him during that time. But because they were willing to still come to church, still find a way to be involved, it was awkward. I'm sure that not everybody pays attention all the time. He's the only one that has an interpreter one on one. How weird is that? But, as a result The church body that goes to that service, so many of them are asking to learn ASL.

Jocelyn: Oh, that's interesting.

Tirzah: I love that.

Janet: But it's only because he was there.

Jocelyn: Wow.

Janet: They didn't learn it, and then he came. He went. They saw it. And now that they're, the interpreter was teaching a Wednesday night class on that. It was over 60 people came. Many of them were from that service.

Jocelyn: That is so interesting. I had no idea.

Janet: So they're wanting to learn enough.

Jocelyn: To love him.

Janet: They're now bringing in other, like, trading out. Others will practice the song all week so they can interpret the song for this young man. I just think, someone had to lead the way.

Tirzah: There's a parent who had courage.

Janet: Yes, yes.

Tirzah: to humble themselves and say, this is going to be -



Janet: when we didn't have a great program for it. We had an interpreter, we didn't have a great program. And they came.

Jocelyn: And I don't think our church has done it perfectly. Like,

Janet: Of course not. We're growing.

Jocelyn: How would we grow? Yeah, we're growing in it. But I have really enjoyed over the years seeing families who bring their special needs children into service. Like there are different noises. That is a part of that life

Tirzah: There sure are.

Jocelyn: And they're not at times that you would think they should be happening. And anytime, anytime a random noise comes up, you're tempted to just jump because it's random and, you know, sometimes loud

Tirzah: and turn and look.

Jocelyn: Right. Yeah, but it's, I've thought through the years, like, wow, it's so cool that that child is in this service, worshiping God with all of us, with our unique weaknesses. They are just more on display. But they are a welcome part of this service and we're better off because they're in there.

Janet: And because they've been doing it for years, we get used to it.

Jocelyn: Yeah. You just know. You just know it's that person

Janet: And it's not quite so surprising when there's a noise. It's like, oh, it usually just makes me smile because I'm like, oh, they're here.

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Janet: That's cool.

Tirzah: So here are a few kind of practical ideas or suggestions. Again, not that you have to do all of them, but here's some thoughts I had. I would encourage parents, if you're new to getting involved in a church, maybe you might prepare a list of problems that might arise in the child being in church or in Sunday school. You might prepare what circumstances would you like to be called out of the service to come and help your child?

Janet: Yes.

Jocelyn: That's a great question.



Tirzah: What recommendations for discipline do you have for volunteers? You might ask if to meet with the child care workers and ask them, what do they recommend? One thought I had is maybe there's a volunteer who could be a special buddy for my child and stay with them. And then I just want to encourage parents to be just really gracious with the fact that the people who are helping my child are volunteers who love God so much that they're sacrificing their time to be with my child. And many of these folks are not even parents at all. So, let's just be really thankful for their efforts and, and can I say failures?

Janet: Yes.

Tirzah: Let's be thankful.

Janet: Yes.

Tirzah: And I have heard you say this, Jocelyn, I love this, that the goal of going, for me as a parent. My goal, going to church on Sunday is not, I go to church to worship, but I go worshiping to church. And what we mean by that is if the only time I'm getting spiritual feeding is in church, I'm going to be devastated when I'm not able to focus or pay attention, or if I'm called out of church. We need to view my private time with God is the primary source of my spiritual nourishment. And then lastly, I just want to encourage us to be really gracious. I know that parents of the disabled, we have heard thoughtless, insensitive, maybe even cruel or flippant comments that can be deeply painful. And do I understand that what God's word says is true, that our natural way of living, even for a Christian, is self focused? And can I be gracious toward people, even if, they do directly sin against me in their comments

Janet: Yeah.

Jocelyn: I'm going to ask to add on more recommendation to this.

Tirzah: Go for it.

Jocelyn: Because we were very helped when we had a premature baby who came home from the hospital with a heart monitor. When nurses were gotten for us to serve as our nursery workers. So they had special RNs just for our baby because she was on a heart monitor and they realized that we needed to be able to go to church. And so I want to recommend if you have a special talent, if you have a special skill or you're highly trained, you should make yourself available to serve in your area of expertise also in your church.

Tirzah: What a great idea.

Jocelyn: Because there are parents who need your expertise and would really benefit from being able to go to ABF or service. And actually have some undistracted time to be with other people but also to hear from the Lord. So you should



Janet: And be confident that there's someone there that would know how to help.

Jocelyn: Yes. We would have never, ever left our daughter in nursery if they had not gotten a nurse for us. It was very beneficial

Tirzah: What a blessing. So we're talking about the opportunities parents have to be like Christ in how we love others. That includes thinking through our priorities. And a priority according to God's word has to be commitment and involvement in a local church, not simply necessarily attendance. But how can I be invested in the people? And along those lines I just want to address the outside commitments need to be lower priority than family commitments. Some of us as parents, we may need to remember that my outside commitments are a lower priority. I may have to say no to even good opportunities for the sake of what will help my family to love God with all my heart and soul and mind. And on the other hand, some of us need to be encouraged to look for ways to serve others and to pursue friendships. Here's a couple of thoughts I had in terms of practical ways to pursue friendships with others. How can I be praying regularly for others around me? Is there a meal I could make and send? Is there a way that I could have an in person or a virtual Bible study or a prayer meeting? And maybe in my case, as having a son in a wheelchair, it's easier for people to come to my house. You can invite a couple or a family from your church to come to your house. And you might just lovingly explain ahead of time, like, hey, here are some things that you might see in our home. My son might be making these noises. He may have seizures. Here's what the seizure looks like. And here's how we handle it, just so that they know how to prepare for that.

Jocelyn: One time you came to my office because I was handing off ministry to you and you brought Isaiah with you and you placed him on the floor and he was just rolling around and having fun and he got stuck under my chair and I was like, I don't know what to do. And it was so helpful because you were just like, Oh, this is normal. We just scooch him back out to the middle of the floor. It was so helpful that you had a little explanation because you're used to it. And I am not used to it. And so that was very helpful.

Janet: Yeah.

Tirzah: And that's helpful for me to hear of how I can lovingly prepare others and communicate, Hey, here's what normal is, and here's how we handle that. So I just want to encourage parents to think creatively. How can I serve others and pursue friendships with others. Next, I want to talk about how we can have an opportunity to be like Christ and how we plan for the future. And I want to be really clear to say that trusting God does not mean I sit back and I do nothing. I really believe it's precisely those who do trust God who work diligently to find solutions that will -- what can I do to please God? A godly parent of a special needs child should research diligently to find good medical care and to think anticipate questions. So I put together a list of questions in the areas of spiritual considerations, medical considerations, and future planning. And I just know as I have thought through these, I can handle each of these questions either by faith or by



fear. So I wrote out a prayer for myself that I'd like to share with you to maybe illustrate a little bit of what might this sound like because the reality is, there is fear in each of these questions that can come up in my heart. So this prayer was something I wrote for myself in researching a seizure treatment for my son's really scary seizures that he has. I'm just going to read this out for us. God, I know that you have chosen this for my son, and only you know if these seizures will continue or if there's treatment out there that will stop them. Is there anything too hard for you? I know that you can heal my son, if that is what is best for him. Will you please heal him? But I know that you may choose to allow these seizures to continue, and if so, I know that you are not keeping any good thing from me. I know you allow evil you hate to accomplish good that you love. I know that you know things I don't know about why you have allowed him to have these horrible seizures. It doesn't make any sense to me and I hate, I hate them, but I believe when I stand in front of you, I will agree with you about everything and I will say you are so good and everything you did was right. I sure don't feel that way right now, but I believe it. Help me now. Will you help me find the most helpful information and answers? Will you help me to understand what I'm reading? Would you give understanding to the doctor to carefully review? And guide us to a good plan. Amen.

Jocelyn: I'm so thankful you included that actual prayer

Janet: Yes.

Jocelyn: Because I think that it will be helpful for other parents to hear what it has sounded like for you to be honest with God about something difficult.

Janet: Yeah.

Tirzah: Thank you. Okay. So here is a list of some spiritual considerations that I thought of, not an exhaustive list. Janet, would you read those questions out for us?

Janet: I will. And all of these questions we're also including in the show notes. So for those listening, they don't have to furiously write everything down. You can if you want, but you don't have to, you can just listen. Spiritual considerations. Have I personally talked directly to God, pouring out all my thoughts, fears, concerns, and complaints? Have I personally been working diligently to know God, to look for His answers and put my hope in that? What am I putting my hope in? If only blank were to happen, then I'll be content or happy. Where am I putting my efforts into getting out of the suffering or have I given into despair or into wrestling with God's word for his answers? Do I need to find a godly biblical counselor or a mentor to help counsel me personally? Knowing that half of marriages that have a special needs child end in divorce, should my husband and I ask to speak with our pastor or biblical counselor to help us? What is my husband's view of our family's future? What is my view? What are his goals? Mine? Are those goals in line with God's goals? Are they reasonable? How can we love God and love each other as we plan for the future? What areas do we disagree on? What are we doing to discuss and



prayerfully find a way to agree? Have we asked our pastor for advice? Have we looked up resources to help us? Wow. Those are phenomenal.

Tirzah: Thank you. I'm sure that's not an exhaustive list, but just some things I came up with. Jocelyn, would you read a list of medical considerations?

Jocelyn: Sure. Ask yourself, how would blank, fill in the blank, help my child and our family? There is Christian liberty on receiving all kinds of medical treatments. If the greatest commandment is to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind, then we can filter. Should we do this treatment, surgery, therapy, or medicine through the lens of, will this help my child or our family better be able to love God and love others?

Janet: Excellent.

Jocelyn: Should we get more medical testing? Would it be helpful to get the next test? Will knowing more information better help us to love our child, care for him, and plan for his future? Should we get a second opinion? Should we switch doctors?

Tirzah: And then in the area of future planning, Janet, would you read those questions?

Janet: Should we get life insurance for each parent? If I were to suddenly die, would it be a big burden on my spouse and vice versa? Do we have a will? Who will take care of my child in the event of my death or our deaths? Have we, should we make a special needs trust? What does my child's future look like? How can we prepare now for that future to the best of our abilities? What changes to our current home should we save and plan for for the long term care of our child? What equipment will best help us take care of our bodies so that we can take care of our child for as long as possible? For a diagnosis expected to result in a shortened lifespan, how will we decide to continue extending our child's life versus choosing to not try to extend life? Have we planned ahead and discussed our goals before a crisis comes? If possible, the parents should communicate their plan to other family members ahead of time.

Jocelyn: Those are great.

Janet: Yeah, they are.

Tirzah: And I just really pray that this is not overwhelming. I think this really could be, but I just want to encourage parents of what would be maybe just one, what's the next step for us? And maybe is this something that I could sit down with my spouse if I'm married and discuss this with and prayerfully consider.

Janet: And I think it might be a great list to slowly work through with someone else helping you. Like you don't have to do all this yourself.



Jocelyn: Absolutely.

Tirzah: Yes.

Janet: Maybe you can. Maybe you and your spouse are really, that's great, but if it's overwhelming, let somebody else help you.

Jocelyn: I agree.

Tirzah: So I want to spend the rest of our time talking about the opportunity that we have as parents to know God and to delight in him as we turn to him. Janet, what does turning to God mean?

Janet: Well, I mean, literally, we just need to go to God. Meaning we don't just try to figure it out. We don't even just try to use biblical principles. We are going to be looking to God's word to understand who he is and what he's like, but then I am literally going to him in prayer, not just talking about him

Tirzah: I have put together a list of six common questions that a parent of a disabled child should or might think through. These have been in part my own questions as well as questions that were brought up by this parent survey. And there is so much that could be said about each of these questions to answer them. So this is not going to be an exhaustive, here is all of what God's word has to say about these questions. But I really hope to whet your appetite with here is just the beginning of what God's word says. And I hope it will inspire you to continue looking for more answers in God's word. And I hope this will whet your appetite to look to God's word for answers as there's so much that can be said about each of these questions. So Jocelyn, would you read the first question for us?

Jocelyn: The first question is, is God mean, cruel, and keeping the good life from me

Janet: Which, I mean, I would just say is not a temptation only of special needs parents.

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Tirzah: By no means. The lie that God isn't really good is the oldest lie.

Janet: Yeah.

Tirzah: It's literally the first lie of Satan to Eve in the garden.

Janet: And we're still buying it.

Tirzah: And I know this has been talked about on this podcast in so many excellent ways. So I'm just going to be summarizing that teaching. In Genesis chapter three, Satan comes to Eve and



says, did God really say not to eat of the fruit? God knows that your eyes will be opened like God's and you'll be wise knowing good and evil. What Satan is suggesting is. God is keeping something from you that would be really good. And if you just had that thing you desire, then you would have it all. You would have the good, happy life. And God doesn't want you to have that good thing. And the reality is I am deceived into thinking I know what's best. According to the Bible, when I'm clinging to what I think is best, I'm actually thinking that I know better than God. Even when what I want is a good desire, I am deceived. So to be specific, would a disabled child really have a better life if he was, in quotes, "normal?" Does being, "normal" make one happier? Does it give one a more satisfying life? I am deceived into thinking that that would be better.

Janet: Yeah.

Tirzah: Would I really be happier if my child was "normal?" my life might be easier. But would that really satisfy my soul and give me what I'm looking for? I am deceived into thinking having an easier life is a better life. And what happens in Genesis three is that Adam and Eve really directly disobey that one commandment they were given. They have earned death, which was what God told them would happen. But God in his kindness, instead of immediately killing Adam and Eve, he actually promises the judgment, the punishment on the serpent who is Satan. And he foreshadows a human offspring will be coming. We know that refers to Jesus, who would crush forever the serpent. And instead he only curses Adam and Eve that their lives will be filled with many kinds of frustration, including the frustration of not being satisfied with what God has given to us. And when I see that frustration, that should lead me to turn back to Jesus when I see how unsatisfying my life is apart from him.

Janet: Wow.

Tirzah: Janet, would you read the next question?

Janet: Sure. Is God really in control?

Tirzah: The answer, I am just fully convinced from scripture, God is fully in control. And that means he specifically chose and he made my precious son, Isaiah, the way that he is. There's just so many examples in scripture. I think of Exodus four, where God is telling Moses, I have called you to this position to be the deliverer of my people. And Moses says, Please don't pick me, which boy, that sounds like me as a special needs parent. No, I don't want that job. And God's answer in Exodus 4: 11, one of the things the Lord says to Moses is when Moses says, I can't do it, I'm not a good speaker. God says, who made man's mouth? Who makes him mute or deaf or seeing or blind? Is it not I the Lord? So the Lord is not apologizing for the fact that he makes each of us, the way that we are. Jocelyn, would you read Isaiah 46:9-10?



Jocelyn: Isaiah 46:9-10 says, I am God and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning.

Tirzah: This verse has impacted my prayer every single, I would say week. I think about how from before the beginning of time, God already declared everything. Janet, would you read from Psalm 139, verses 13 and 16?

Janet: Sure. You, God, formed my inward parts. You knitted me together in my mother's womb. You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed.

Tirzah: And I just lastly want to share from Romans 11: 36, I think if I had to pick a life verse for my son, Isaiah, I think it would be this from him, which is God and through him and to him are all things. So, this is from God, this comes through God, and the purpose of this is to God.

Jocelyn, would you read the next question?

Jocelyn: How does God feel about watching me suffer

Tirzah: This sounds like a fuzzy question. But for me, it has been a deeply, deeply theological question. And what I mean is this, if I conclude that, okay, God's in control, but he's cold and distant, he doesn't care about my suffering. Why would I want anything to do with him? But to be a Christian means to have a personal relationship with God. How can you have any kind of intimate relationship with someone who's cold and distant? So I have a several part answer to this from scriptures that have been really sweet to me. My first answer to address this from God's Word is that God hates evil and suffering. He is not gleeful or joyful in our pain. Just because God allows suffering and even chooses it, it does not mean that he is passive, cold, distant, or eager to dispense it. Janet, would you read Psalm 56:8 for us?

Janet: You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle.

Tirzah: This makes me think about when Isaiah was very small, actually before he was born, I always struggled to have a consistent time alone with God's word because I had three kids in three years, so I could not be expected obviously to have a consistent time alone with Lord. So now I have four children. I'm learning one is severely disabled. They're zero, three, four and five. And I was just so desperate each morning that I had to spend time with the Lord. So I would go sit in a specific chair in my house and I would plug my ears with my fingers because I had all the kids home with me. We were working on homeschooling and this was the time everyone's eating their breakfast, everyone's fed and changed. And I would sit in a specific chair and I would plug my ears and I would read God's word and I would just cry. And that happened, you know, every day for a long, long time. And then at some point later, I was no longer crying, but I was regularly spending time in that chair. And I overhear one of my children saying, where's mom? And the other child goes, Oh, she's crying in her chair. And I was not crying anymore, but I was



sitting in the chair and God had taught me to have that precious time alone with him. But I have not even remembered all of my tears that I had ever cried. But God collects our tears in his bottle. Jocelyn, would you read John 11:35?

Jocelyn: John 11:35, Jesus wept.

Tirzah: So Jesus, this is talking about when he is about to raise his good friend Lazarus from the dead. So he already knows everything. He knows the full end. He knows what's going to happen. And even so, he enters into the sorrow of the death of his friend. This is not a distant and cold God. Janet, would you read Lamentations 3:33?

Janet: He does not afflict from the heart or grieve the children of men.

Tirzah: Another translation of this verse says, He does not enjoy hurting people. Verse 32 of Lamentations said, Though he causes grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love. Our grief is temporary, but experiencing God's steadfast love is forever. And I just love this quote from Johnny Erickson Tada that just lives on repeat in my brain that kind of summarizes some of these truths from God's word. God allows evil that he hates to accomplish good that he loves. And boy, doesn't the cross illustrate that for us

Janet: Yes. He is so big.

Tirzah: So we're answering the question of, is God cold and distant and cruel? And another way I want to answer this is saying that, how God sees us. He sees us as completely spiritually dependent. As parents, we may see many dependencies our children have to have on us. They may be physically dependent on us, maybe mentally dependent, et cetera. I know that not everyone listening has met my precious son Isaiah, but he is just not able to do anything for himself. He has very low vision, so he cannot see to be aware of danger. When I put food in front of him, he can't even recognize the food. He cannot reach out his little hand to grab the food. He cannot lift food and put food in his mouth. That is how dependent he is. Absolutely everything has to be done for him. And when he's hungry, this is just so sweet, when he's hungry, he just opens his little mouth like a baby bird, and he just will sit there and hold his mouth open and just wait for the bottle or the spoon to go into his mouth.

Janet: Wow, such trust.

Tirzah: Yeah, such dependence.

Janet: Yes.

Tirzah: And when I see my child's physical dependence, God wants us to see that is how we are spiritually.



Jocelyn: That's amazing.

Tirzah: And actually, God's word says Ephesians 2, we are actually dead. Ephesians 2 says we were dead in our sins, which means we were unable to do anything right apart from God's work. The only way we were able to live apart from Christ was to follow our own desires. Apart from his work, we were unable to see the danger of living for ourselves and that this path leads to destruction. And then God sees us with great compassion and affection. And we know that because we were dead in our sins according to Ephesians 2, God's heart is drawn toward us. Verses four and five of Ephesians 2 says, but God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead, In our wrongdoings, he made us alive together with Christ. God loving the needy is a theme throughout scripture. I just briefly want to mention Isaiah 56. God is talking about gathering all of the misfits, the foreigners, the eunuchs, just all of the misfits he's gathering up together. In Matthew 14: 14, Jesus looked at the crowds with the sick. He felt great compassion. That's what that verse says. Mark 2: 7 says it's not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. The passage on the Beatitudes from Matthew 5 verses 1 through 11 can be summarized by saying, The ones who see their need are the ones who are accepted and blessed by God. So, I'm answering this question of how does God feel watching me suffer? And I want to continue by saying God loves us even when we did not reciprocate. One of the challenges of interacting, one of the reasons I used to feel intimidated by seeing a disabled person is just the uncertainty of how will they respond to me and I don't want them to feel awkward, etc. And the reality is, especially for my Isaiah, he cannot smile or laugh or interact in the ways that my other children would have. He just does not reciprocate. He's not able to reciprocate that. And how does God treat us when we had nothing to reciprocate? He drew near to us.

Jocelyn: Wow, that's beautiful.

Tirzah: Jocelyn, would you read Romans 5: 8?

Jocelyn: Romans 5: 8 says, but God demonstrates his love toward us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us

Tirzah: That means that before we ever did anything right, God loved us in the greatest way anyone can ever love us. When we were God's enemies, Christ died for us. Not only were we not thankful, not responsive, like my special needs son is toward me, I was even worse. Before I was a Christian, according to God's word, everything I did was for myself, which made me an enemy of God. So I just want to encourage everyone listening. When you get to love someone who does not appreciate you or reciprocate, or even maybe entitled, or demanding or unthankful, we get to be like Christ.

Jocelyn: That's really amazing.



Janet: Yeah.

Jocelyn: Wow.

Tirzah: Janet, would you read the next question for us?

Janet: Why does it feel like my life is so hard and others' lives are so easy? Why is God asking so much of me? I'm so alone.

Tirzah: I just really want to encourage you to go back and listen to the episode on loneliness. Janet did such a precious teaching from God's word. So I'm just not going to repeat what has already been taught because that was done so well. But I just, when I think of this response, I just think of the example of so many humans in history and in the Bible that went through just incredibly difficult challenges. And so here's a list of some Bible characters, some passages that I would encourage someone who is having this is the hurt of their heart, you might consider the story of Joseph, what the call of Moses was, what Isaiah went through, the experience of Jeremiah and what circumstances God put him through, the call of John the Baptist, the disciples, and I think of the people referred to in Hebrews 11 that we don't even hear by name what they endured.

Janet: So you're not alone.

Tirzah: That's right. Jocelyn, would you read this next comment?

Jocelyn: No one understands what I'm going through

Tirzah: And boy, that is a great temptation in suffering. Because if I keep telling myself, nobody understands what I'm going through, I don't want to speak for myself here, I giving myself permission to indulge in bitterness and self pity. And all kinds of similar sins. Again, there's so much that could be said about this. I just want to have Janet read for us just one passage. This is from Hebrews 4 verses 14 through 16. Janet, would you read this for us?

Janet: So then, since we have a great high priest who has entered heaven, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe. This high priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do. Yet he did not sin. So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.

Tirzah: Only God understands what it's like to be a full time caregiver.

Janet: And that's enough. It has to be.

Tirzah: Janet, would you read the last question I have for us?



Janet: Is God punishing me or my child?

Tirzah: I want to answer this by saying, I believe from scripture that suffering and hard things are not a punishment, but they are a testing of my faith. In John chapter nine I would encourage you all to read this. There's this really precious story of a man who was born blind and everyone comes to him and they're saying, Oh, was this because he sinned or because his parents sinned? And Jesus says, No, neither. It happened so that the power of God could be seen in him. The question I want to encourage every special needs parent to wrestle with is, do I follow God only if he makes my life easy? Or why do I follow God? One of the purposes of suffering, I want us to have that view that I can see being a parent of a disabled child, that that is a suffering

Janet: Yes, yes.

Tirzah: One of the purposes is to test. If I'm really going to follow God, even when I don't understand. And that is what faith is. Ladies, I'm going to ask you to help me read through some select verses from Romans chapter eight. Jocelyn, would you read the second part of verse 17 for us?

Jocelyn: But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering.

Tirzah: So this is by no means the only part of scripture that says this. But suffering is a normal part of life that God uses to prepare us for heaven. And we should not be surprised by hardship and by suffering. Janet, would you read verse 18 from Romans 8?

Janet: I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

Tirzah: That means that when I get to heaven, I am not even going to think about comparing everything I gave up, everything I missed out on, all the sacrifices I made, all the ways my life would have been different, all the ways others got to enjoy things that I didn't get to enjoy. Those pain, those sacrifices, my grief, my sadness, will not even be worth comparing to the splendor of knowing God and being with God and enjoying God and enjoying learning and tasting and experiencing everything with God and from God and for God in a fantastically beautiful new earth with unending delight and joy. When I am with God face to face. I believe, though I do not always feel, I believe that I will agree with God about everything. I will say, God, you were so right. Everything you ever did was right and good. Jocelyn, would you read verses 22 to 23 for us?

Jocelyn: For, we know that the whole of creation is groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the spirit groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons



Tirzah: I used to think of this groaning. This is a familiar passage. I used to think this groaning was kind of like a heavy grunt kind of a sound. But I have tasted and seen this kind of groaning as someone that I really consider what a blessing that I was able to give birth four times, where I went through the full groaning of the labor process. And every single time I forgot how painful, first of all it was. And every time I whimpered out to my husband, I can't do this. I can't do this. What a picture of the sufferings we go through. I cannot handle my suffering. It is completely devastating. It is overwhelming. It is painful beyond words. And God chose that picture of labor pain to describe the experience of being a human on earth.

Janet: Wow.

Tirzah: He say, not only is all creation, but even we who have the first fruits of the spirit, we too, who are true Christians, we do groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons. And of course, this chapter eight ends with some very famous verses that God is using all things. Remember the screaming labor pain? God is using and working out all things for good. Well, what is good? He defines it in verse 27. Good is that I would be conformed and shaped into his image. And he promises that he will do that work in us and he will be with us, and that that will bring me true and lasting joy. I actually, as I prepared this talk, I wrote out, here are all the scriptures that God has used to help and teach me. And I just had so many pages, just pages on pages on pages on pages, I had to just cut out so much. Isn't that just graciousness of the Lor

Jocelyn: That's beautiful.

Janet: Yes, yes.

Tirzah: That I had to cut, I couldn't say everything I wanted to say in this talk. So I just, here's a brief list of some other, my personal favorite scriptures that have helped me just really surrender to the Lord's will and trust in Him and know, experience true joy. The book of Job.

Janet: Yes.

Tirzah: Hebrews chapters 11 and 12. 1 Peter, the whole book, but especially chapters 1 and 4. The first two verses of John 15. The whole book of 2 Corinthians, which is just a favorite. I love chapters 1 and 4 and 5 and 12. And Isaiah, chapters 53 and 55 have been so sweet to me.

Jocelyn: I'm so thankful we've been able to talk about this for the last two episodes. First of all, for your willingness to be vulnerable and authentic with us in something that has been very, very difficult for you. But I'm also thankful to hear this truth from you because it comes different hearing it from you than it would coming from Janet, because she hasn't had to live it.

Janet: That's right.



Jocelyn: And you have, and you can call us and other parents with special needs children to be willing to follow Jesus authentically. And that is very helpful.

Tirzah: Thank you for saying that, Jocelyn

Janet: This has been such an encouragement because you didn't downplay the suffering. But we really did magnify the grace and love of God in the midst of it. And whether you have a special needs child or whether your suffering is something different, the hope that you offered is the same. It's what we all need for those of us groaning in childbirth to know God describes that and there is hope for all of that. So thank you for doing that today.

Tirzah: Praise the Lord. I'm just so thankful that there's not even a shifting shadow in God's character.

Janet: Amen.

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