

[Theme Music: upbeat smooth jazz bassline.]

Welcome to Have Hope; Will Travel. I'm your host Katie Axelson. Right now we're talking about different ways to encounter God.

When we look at how to encounter God we need to recognize a couple of things before we dive too deep. We need to understand that ever since the beginning, it has been God's design to be in relationship with us. Very early in Genesis we see God walking with Adam and Eve. We see God spending time with them. We see God helping them even after they messed up.

Relationship with us has always been God's design. It was broken by the fall, and we've been reunited with him through Christ. So when we talk about encountering God, we need to set a really simple expectation: we need to expect God to show up. Expecting God to show up means that when we show up to our quiet time, we expect that He's going to be there too.

We set out a place for Him. We give Him a chair and a cup of coffee. It means when we're praying over someone, sometimes that means we open our mouths before we've heard from the Lord. We speak truths like "You are known, you are loved, you are cared about, you are important." Maybe those are the exact words that the person you're praying for needs to hear today. We expect God to show up and we're willing to take the first step in faith that He'll take the second.

Expecting God to show up means looking for Him in the little moments. And the still quiet voice, in the moments when it's easier to keep moving, in the sunrise or the sunset, in the peaceful of the day, and the chaos of the day. Opening your eyes to look for Him.

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When it comes to hearing from God, we need to know how He's shown up before, so we know what to expect when we look at how He could or might show up here in the future.

God's creative, He may not use the same way more than once. But it still gives us an idea of His character. So we always need to start with scripture. How do we see God showing up in scripture? We see Him walking in the garden with Adam and Eve. In Numbers 22, we see Him show up through a talking donkey. We see Him show up in a burning bush in Exodus 3. And we see him part the Red Sea in Exodus 14, then the same thing with the Jordan River in Joshua 3. He ignites a water-logged fire pit in 1st King's 18.

God shows up.

We see him show up in Jesus. Jesus is the perfect picture of the Father, because His entire life Jesus points us to the Father. Jesus' goal on Earth is to give glory to God the Father.

We see Him show up feeding hungry people. Feeding thousands of hungry people with a loaf of bread. We see Him show up when He heals the sick, and we expect Him to do the same in our world today.

We see Him show up when everyone around Him is finding freedom: they're finding healing, they're finding hope, they're finding acceptance, they're finding comfort. Some of them are also finding conviction. He shows up like that too. But it's always rooted in the love of the Father.

We see God show up in the book of Acts. We see tongues of fire fall on the people in Jerusalem. We see different languages understood, we see the Spirit of the Lord sending people to different cities. We also see the Spirit of the Lord preventing them from entering different cities. That's Acts 16.

We see Him show up in dreams and visions. And we see God's people acting on those dreams and visions in ways that take more faith than we can ever imagine. Look at the obedience with Joseph! I don't think it was his design for marriage to marry a pregnant woman and take his new born baby and wife to a foreign countries as refugees in the middle of the night. But an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and so he did it.

What about in Acts 16, when the apostles look for a place to pray, and they find women who happen to be believers. They wanted some introvert quiet time with God and instead they found some extrovert evangelism opportunity. And they were invited into the city to share the gospel in brand new ways. God showed up!

So I don't know what season of life you're in right, whether it's easy for you to believe that God's gonna show up or whether it's hard. But recognize that He always does. But that doesn't always look like what we expect. When we think about encountering God we recognize that God has shown up, we get to act out of that faith and that trust, that even if our whole world implodes God is still good. God is still love.

[Transitional music interlude plays, an off-beat electric riff.]

Sometimes I get asked "How do I know if it's God's will? How do I know if it's God's design? How do I know if I'm hearing God's voice?" Those are all great questions. So let's unpack them together.

How do I know what God's will is for my life? God's will for my life is the same as it was for Jesus' as life: to glorify the Father.

So what does that look like in my life? Does it look like this college, or that college? Does it look like marrying right now or marrying later? Does it look like taking this job or that job? Does it look like buying my house? Does it look like having roommates? I don't care!

I don't know, because it looks like doing what it's going to take to draw you and in those in your world a closer to the Father.

And if you can do that owning your own home with a space for ministry to invite people in, that's what you're supposed to do. If it looks like living in community and reaching out to your neighbors and loving everyone who walks through your doors? That's what it looks like to be in God's will.

Does it look like to take a secular job or a ministry job, I don't care. Because in a ministry job you get to invest in other believers. And in a secular job you get to invest in those who would never set foot in the church. You get to be the missionary in your secular job.

Sometimes it's a matter of apples and oranges. Picture a kid going to his mom saying "Mom, I'm hungry. Should I eat this apple for a snack, or should I eat this orange for a snack?"

Unless the mom is planning to make an apple pie later that afternoon, she says "I don't care, son. I'm glad you're eating a healthy snack. Pick which ever one you'd like and throw the garbage away."

[Transitional music interlude plays, an off-beat electric riff.]

Sometimes we get so caught in "What is God's will for my life, or this season of my life, or these next steps," that we forget that He's given us a lot of good choices, and He's given us the freedom to choose if we want an apple or an orange.

Recognize I say that standing at a crossroads of my life. I got a Master's degree a couple months ago. Do I use that degree? Do I continue to work in my secular job? Where do I go next? I don't know! But I know that I'm gonna glorify God regardless of what I do and where I go.

Because I know that He is still good and I know that the purpose of my life is still to bring Him glory. Within that, there are still boundaries for what does it look like to honor the Lord. God's not gonna ask you to do something that contradicts scripture.

But how do I know that contradicts scripture? You have to read the scripture! That's the only way you're gonna know if what the Lord is asking you to do is an alignment with his word. And in scripture He gives you a lot of really good practical ways to recognize what His word as. Let's read Galatians 5.

[A guitar begins to strum in the background as Katie reads.]

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance [or patience], kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit,

let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other."

The fruit of the Spirit shows us a picture of God: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. It shows us what God looks like. And it is an invitation for us to look the same. And here's the thing: it's not the "fruits" of the Spirit. It's one fruit. All of those things put together are one fruit. So when you read that list: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, where are you seeing as play out in a life? Where are you seeing yourself fall short on those in your life?

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There have been seasons from me when I have run very short on patience. I have been spitting fire at everyone and anyone. The situations frankly sucked. There was very little I can do about them. And I had to come to the Lord every single day and say "Lord give me patience. Give me endurance, give me peace, help me walk through this."

And I think sometimes there's a fear among believers that we don't wanna pray for patience because then God gives us opportunities to practice being patient. I don't think that's the picture of God that I want my head. I don't want a picture of God who's gonna do the opposite of what I've asked. I want a picture of God who's gonna be there to help me walk through the situations placed in front of me. Which means I'm gonna pray for patience, and if that means my situations get harder I'm gonna draw closer to the Lord and pray for more patience.

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That same passage says "Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying one another." Seems simple enough. The passage gives us a "Yes, do this. No, don't do that." But it looks a lot different in real life. Sometimes it's hard to not envy someone else when you feel like they're getting to live your dream. You see the opportunity that you want as well given to them instead, time and time again. You see both of you putting in the same amount of effort and one sees bigger payoff than the other.

Or becoming conceited! Hey I have a Master's degree in this, I know how this works! That's arrogance. There's a time for feedback and there's a time to submit to the leadership above you. Knowing the difference requires discernment and time with the Lord.

[Transitional music interlude plays, an off-beat electric riff.]

So when we think about hearing God's voice, what fruit does what I think I'm hearing bear? Does it bear the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control? Does it bear the fruit of conceit, of envy, of arrogance? That's a good way to help me discern what's going on. When I'm hearing God's voice, does what I think I'm hearing glorify

God? Is it in alignment with how we see God act in the scriptures? Is in alignment with what we see in the person of Jesus? Does it honor God? Part of honoring God is, does it honor the other person in the room? Does it honor of the person that this word is being given to? Does it honor of the leadership I have submitted myself to? Does it honor, love, and respect them? Does it honor, love, and respect me? Sometimes we think that God wants us to go through hard things so that we can grow, and sometimes that's true. But God's not gonna ask you to stay in abusive relationships so that you can grow. God's not gonna ask you to stay in a toxic work culture. There is a time where we suffer for the Kingdom of God. But in all of those times, especially in scripture, we see that the Kingdom of God was strengthened and that God was with the apostles when they faced persecution and their faith grew.

When you're suffering for the Kingdom it's an opportunity to grow closer to God instead of pushing Him away. And don't get me wrong, I've done both. But the scattering of the disciples in Acts 8 when they're spreading the good news all over the Earth is one of the biggest period of growth for the Kingdom. And so that suffering that I'm working through: is it still glorifying God?

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A key ministry leader in my life just got a hard diagnosis. And I was talking to a friend who's also been heavily influenced by this leader and we were talking about how this is going to be such a hard loss for the Kingdom if he doesn't survive this diagnosis.

But then I had to stop for a second. I thought, no! Even if he doesn't make it he's going to spend every minute of the remainder of his life fighting for Jesus. Fighting to find joy in what's going on. Fighting for the Kingdom. Which means he's still doing ministry, he's just doing it right now from hospital room. And every doctor and every nurse who walks into that hospital room is going to know that something is different. If they don't see it in him, they'll see it his wife. And don't get me wrong I'm confident they will have bad days, but even on those bad days the Lord is still gonna be glorified.

[Transitional music interlude plays, an off-beat electric riff.]

So when I hit hard seasons, when I'm frustrated with an injury that will not go away - despite my persistent following of instructions - when I'm frustrated with a situation that doesn't change, the only prayer that I've got is "God received the glory due to Your name for this opportunity. God receives the glory due to Your name for my current suffering. God receives the glory due to Your name for my obedience. God received the glory due to Your name."

And sometimes, that glory does not come through me. Sometimes I'm spitting fire and I'm just as big of a problem as those who don't know the Lord. And that's a chance for me to step back and to encounter God and to sit with Him and say "Hey, this is really hard. I need the strength to get through another day."

I did it this morning. I sat down with the Lord, jeopardized this Podcast episode maybe not getting done on time so that I could sit with the Lord and say "This is what's going on, I need your help." And I didn't walk away with all of the answers. But when I sat down I had no peace whatsoever about any of my options. And when I walked away, I still didn't have a solution but I found peace that the Lord is with me, and the Lord is walking through this alongside me. He is going before me, He's cleaning up behind me, He's really good at damage control. He's holding my hand and we're walking together, and He is covering me and showering me with His love regardless of how hard or how easy my situation is. Regardless of if my situation changes. He's here with me.

And so I'm gonna keep stepping, and I'm gonna keep trusting that because He's got my hand. If I'm going the wrong direction he is going to say "Hey Katie, let's go this way."

And because my situation has not changed, tomorrow I will get up and I will do the exact same thing. And I will say "Lord I need you. Lord take my hand, Lord receive the glory due to Your name. Lord, let's step forward. Lord, what do we need to do to get through today?" And we'll take it one day at a time. And maybe one of those days will involve a significant life change, and maybe it won't. Maybe my situation right now is so hard because the enemy hates that I'm here. Because the enemy hates that I'm bringing glory to God's name, maybe the enemy hates it and my opposition isn't actually from the Lord. Very, very rarely is the opposition actually from the Lord.

[Transitional music interlude plays, an off-beat electric riff.]

So here's my challenge for you this week: every time you seek to encounter God, I expect you to expect Him to show up. I wanna know what you noticed that's different. I want to know what you feel, I wanna know what you see, I want to know what you experience. I want to know how He comes through, because He always does. And if you're not sure, I want you to open the scripture. And I want you to take a look at how you see Him showing up that's documented in history. My recommendation is that you start in the book of Acts. If you're not that open to all the wild Holy Spirit stuff and a plot line that looks a little bit like an EKG, start in the Gospels. Look at the gospel of John and see how Jesus shows up to the people around him, and how He loves every single person that He encounters. Hit me up. Let me know how it goes. You can find me on Instagram @KatieAxelson or you can email me at Katie@katieaxelson.com.

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If this Podcast was helpful to you, it would mean a lot to me if you would leave a rating and a review on iTunes and Spotify so that other people can find it as well. Like I said, let me know how it goes for you to encounter the Lord with the expectation that He's going to show up in a way that looks like Jesus. In a way that's going to bring glory to the Father, in a way that's going to honor those around you, in a way that's going to bring love, joy, peace, patience, kindness,

gentleness, and self control to fruition. Let me know how it goes, because whenever you trip over or whatever goes well for you is what we'll talk about next.

Have a great week!

[Theme Music: upbeat smooth jazz bassline.]