

[Theme Music: upbeat smooth jazz bassline.]

Welcome to Have Hope; Will Travel. I'm your host Katie Axelson, and as we stay here in Minnesota: oofda. Welcome to 2021. Anyone else thinking that the fourteen day free trial is enough, and we're ready to cancel our subscription to this entire year? I've been really nervous to record this podcast, because there's always going to be a lag time between when it's recorded and when it's released, just because that's how content creation works. We need to transcribe it, upload it, all the things. Normally it's not that big of a deal. But right now I have no idea what the world is going to look like on this fine Martin Luther King Jr. Day. As of the time when I'm recording it, there's a blizzard headed my way tomorrow, President Trump is about to be impeached for the second time, and we're set to inaugurate Joe Biden as the forty-sixth president later this week. Oh, and we're still in a pandemic. Who's that YouTuber who does the videos of like, her previous self from a couple months ago and they're talking about what's happening? Yeah, I kind of feel like I'm living that, but it's only a few days apart. So if Trump is impeached, like does he get removed from office and Biden's the forty-seventh president? All the questions. If you're looking for an expert in those kind of matters, you are at the wrong podcast.

The world is changing so quickly. Some of it's for the better. Some if it's...well, yeah definitely not. In seminary they taught us the only theology that stands is what's true at the funeral of a four-year-old and at the gates of Auschwitz. If I can modify that to say: the only theology that stands is what's true when white supremacist lead by the president of United States seize the Capitol, a pandemic rages burning out healthcare workers and claiming a life of otherwise healthy individuals, the new year has not brought any change to our set of circumstances.

So here we are MLK Day 2021. I feel a little bit like that moment in Parent Trap when Meredith -- the stepdad's girlfriend - the step dad? The actual dad's girlfriend! -- realizes there are two of them and they're actually twins. If I could insert a clip of the video here I would, especially if it were gif, but it's a podcast so there goes that. We're not even far enough into this new year for our habits to have formed! Generally takes twenty-one days, we're not that far. This podcast was originally going to be about forming new identities and establishing new goals for 2021. Yeah, that's so three weeks ago. We've moved on from dreaming for the future and we're pretty much in survival mode as we're in the final days of the current presidency and roll out a vaccine that should end the pandemic. The end is in sight. Hope is in sight. But we're still here.

And I don't really want to go into the theology of suffering because that quickly leads to end times theology, which I think would be super dangerous to go into right now. So again: if that's what you're looking for, you're at the wrong podcast. Yet here we are, or at least here I am. I've just spent a whole three minutes trying to convince you to be listening to a different podcast. And if you're still hanging out with me here at Have Hope; Will Travel, I appreciate it. Have Hope; Will Travel. "Have Hope." What does that even mean on days like today?

In the absolute smoothest of all transitions, those of you who have been following me on Instagram know that for the last couple weeks I have been trying to donate blood. It's been like,

a month and I keep getting deferred for low iron, which is unusual for me but not really all that concerning, because I donate a lot, I work out a lot, I'm a woman, these are all reasons for iron to be low. So annoying, but not alarming. And about once a week I show up with a donation site, they take my iron and I leave. I'm surprised they don't know me on a first-name basis yet at this point. But today on the eighty-seventh try, my iron levels passed on the first time. So that was pretty exciting, and honestly I was surprised. And so I'm working with Megan and we go through all the questions, and nope haven't been outside the country in the last year - paperwork's easy. My veins are easy, Megan even got it on the first try by the way, she deserves a high-five for that because even though my veins are huge -- they always compliment me on how nice they look -- and then they miss. Every time. Megan did not miss, Megan got it on the first try. Megan also said I was the fastest donor she has ever had, but the time she told me was like, kind of slow for me because I've been single-digits number of seconds higher than the required time for a donation to actually be usable. Yeah, if you donate too fast they can't use your blood, that's a thing.

But this isn't my first rodeo, and so she's asking me how I'm feeling and all those things, and I say, "I feel great, never had a problem." So we're finishing up and Megan smiles at me under her mask, and she's like, "You were made for this." And she's like, reflecting on my easy paperwork and my easy veins and how I'm feeling great and that iron thing was just a little unusual, but I smiled all the way to the snack table because I actually made it through the donation, right? But because of Megan's words, "You were made to do this." I was made to donate blood. Of course I was made to do a lot of other things too, but I'm totally fine being made to donate an hour of my life and a little bit of blood every few months so that someone else can have life. And when I got to the snack table there were two stickers waiting for me, so proud of my accomplishment. One said "I donate for the cookies," yeah definitely needed that one because yeah, I do totally donate for the cookies. Snack Time Out is my favorite time out. And then the second one said, "My blood gives hope." And I reflected on Megan's words, "I was made for this," and the sticker that says "My blood gives hope." I was made for this. I was made to give hope, it literally runs in my veins.

And when I first titled this podcast, the word hope was actually a placeholder until I could figure out what was actually going to be the right word. So I tried a bunch of them like, Have Peace; Will Travel. Have Joy; Will Travel. Have Jesus; Will Travel. And they were all good, but none of them felt like the right fit. Or at least they didn't feel like that to everyone whose opinion actually mattered to me as I was naming this contest. They all told me "hope" was the best word. So the name of the podcast stuck. Have Hope; Will Travel. But what does that mean today, especially since we really can't travel? And it's really hard to have hope?

This brings me back to Lamentations 3. Lamentations is an old book written by a prophet, Jeremiah, and you can find it right after his self-titled book. And it's a really heavy book of anguish, crying out to God. And then you get to chapter three. In the NLT he writes,

"Yet I still dare to hop when I remember this: The faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning. I say to myself, 'The Lord is my inheritance; therefore, I will hope in him!'"

I will hope in Him, not in myself. Not a change in my circumstances. Not in a change of leadership. Not in new opportunities or a New Year. I will hope in Him. So today, for a second, I want you to sit down and reflect on what you know to be true about God, no matter how horrific the world is. Because God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. And if we're going to put our hope in Him we need to know who He is.

So take a look at who you see God to be. The best place you can see that is in the books that are called the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Because you see the picture of Jesus. And especially the stories where Jesus is talking about His Father. Because there are no truer pictures of what God looks like than when the Son talks about the Father. So take a moment to reflect on the stories that have come to mind about the Son talking about the Father. Flip open your Bible. Read some of them and see. Who does Jesus say God is? Because that's who God is. Whether it feels true or not, that's who God is. And so what does it look like to put your hope in Him? To dare to put your hope in Him?

Sometimes hope feels like a dare. Sometimes it feels really, really hard. Like right now. Yeah, definitely like right now. But I dare to hope because I can remember this: the faithful love of the Lord never ends. Scripture's clear on that. We see it in so many times, God gives a second chance. We see it in Thomas, when he's doubtful of what's happening and he asks for the same thing the disciples already have. And Jesus comes to him and says, "Touch me. Put your hands in my pierced side, look into my eyes and know that I am Him." He loves Thomas the way He loves everybody else. God's mercies never cease. Oh, mercy, what a beautiful thing!

Sometimes you get caught on the difference between grace and mercy. Mercy is God not giving you what you do deserve. Grace is Him giving you what you don't deserve. Think about it this way: you are a child and you have been outside playing in the mud all day. And you run through your mother's nice clean house. Mercy is your mom not getting mad at the mud you just tracked across the carpet. Grace is your mom saying, "Hey I just made these fresh baked cookies, do you want some?" Grace and mercy. They are both awesome. God's mercies never cease. He never stops not getting mad at you, if I can use a couple negatives, are you with me? He never stops not getting mad at you for dragging mud all over the clean carpet. He's got mercies. He's got no shortage of them, He hands them out generously. For you. Great is His faithfulness. He is faithful. He is good. He does what he says He's going to do. Even when we don't see it. Even when we don't feel it. Even when we're pretty sure the world is falling apart. Great is his faithfulness.

His mercies begin afresh each morning. There are some mornings when it's that sentence that gets me out of bed. I remember going on a mission trip several years ago, back when we were allowed to travel, and we packed every day so full that I did not have the energy to get out of bed come the next morning when my alarm went off. And I would lay there and I would go, "It's

a new morning. You have new mercies. I'm relying on your energy 'cause when my feet hit the floor I'm pretty sure I'm going to fall forward onto the other bed in this hotel room." Yeah, I never did that, though it actually kind of seemed really appealing most days. But you know what, every day God showed up, and every day He sustained me, and every day we moved forward. So a lot of days if I'm struggling, I'll remind myself of this scripture: that God's mercies begin anew each morning, the mercies that never cease start over.

New love. New grace. New passion. New excitement. It's a new day. Yet, let yesterday be gone and let the mercies begin afresh each morning.

I say to myself, "The Lord is my inheritance." He's my inheritance. He is the prize that I get at the end of the day. It's Him. No one else. Nothing else. It's him. And that's enough. Because He is good and He is love and He is faithful and He cares for me, and He cares for my situation. And the things of this world break His heart, just like they break ours. And it's not in a right or wrong, left or right, he said/she said kind of way. It's a love and compassion, and what does it look like to make the world a better place? Because that's what He invites us to do, is to love one another, to hear one another's stories. To be the hope in the world.

And because He's my inheritance, I will hope in Him. We've talked about this before. A vaccine is not the hope of the world. A new president's not the hope of the world. Change is not the hope of the world. All of those things are good and I think that it's time for all of those things. I am beyond ready for all of those things. And it's going to get better, but it's not going to change everything. Our problems are not going to go away. Just because those things have come - [A lullaby chime suddenly begins playing in the background and Katie turns the sound off.] - My phone just an alarm went off, telling me it's bedtime. Well we're going to keep talking, so just ignore the lullabies in the background.

I will hope in Him. I will hope in Him. I will dare to hope in Him. 'Cause some days, that's all I've got, and some days it's all I really need.

On this Martin Luther King day, I want to offer you a challenge. I want you to pull up King's "I Have a Dream" speech. Read the whole thing in its entirety. You probably did that in school at some point, it's time to revisit it. Because it's a speech of hope. And there are a lot of things that King says there, that are true here. And there are a lot of things that we need to reflect on in our own lives and in our own worlds, before we can look at, what's it look like to move forward from here? Because hope doesn't just stay in the same place, hope is part of the change. Hope moves forward.

So what does it look like, to be part of bringing King's dream to reality in our world today? And we remember King, and we remember his work. We remember a pastor, an activist, and a vital voice to the Civil Rights Movement but we also remember that not everyone liked King. He was assassinated, he was killed, and not everyone's going to like the positive voice that we're trying to bring to the world. But if we're trying to make a difference for the lives of others, trying to make their lives better, being a voice for the voiceless, then I think we need to be ready to not

have people like us. We need to be ready to remember that King lost his life, and Jesus lost His life, for ticking off enough people. So what does it look like to be a voice -- like these peaceful leaders -- who were still killed for trying to make the world a better place?

That's the "Will Travel," part, right now. Will travel from my old mindsets, my old way of thinking, my old ideas. Will travel from who I used to be. Will travel from what I was grown up with -- what I was grown up with! -- what I grew up with. Will travel from what everyone else around me believes. Have Hope; Will Travel. They go hand-in-hand. There are other things that go hand-in-hand with them too, but that would be way too long of a podcast title. Have Hope; Will Travel. And here's the reality: we're not always going to get it right. So, what does it look like to be the first to apologize? To be the first to admit that we don't know it? To be the first to be willing to learn and to do something different? Because God's faithfulness is great. His mercies begin anew each morning, which means the mess-ups you had of yesterday - sure there will probably be repercussions in your everyday life that you need to take care of, but they're not standing between you and God anymore. So don't dwell on them, don't sit on them. Let the past be the past. And what does it look like to live in new mercies today? To hope in Him again today. To trust what you know is true from seasons of life that are easier. To know what is true from what we see in scripture. To know what is true, from what we've experienced. And to hope that the God of yesterday, is the God of today, is the God of tomorrow. He is the God who is. He is the God who is Love, He is God who is Peace, He is the God who cares. So sit with Him for a minute, let Him know what your heart feels like right now. Let Him know that you're stressed, that you're anxious, that you're concerned, that you're sad, that you're irritated, that you don't even know what to feel. It's okay if there aren't words right now, that's one of the beauties of God. Scripture says that Holy Spirit intercedes for us when we don't know how to pray. "Groans" is the actual word that some translations use. I take that to mean He understands what I'm saying even when I don't have words to put to my feelings.

There is such a thing as righteous anger. On January 6th when we were watching the Capitol be overtaken, it was triggering to a lot of different people groups. The Black population, the Jewish population. Both the Confederate flag and the Nazi flag were flown at the U.S. Capitol. Do you know how many people lost their lives so that would never happen? It enrages us. It's not okay. And so, what does it look like -- in our lives today -- to make it not okay? To have hard conversations with people, of:

"Hey I didn't appreciate that you said that."

"Hey, I don't know if you realize it, but that was incredibly racist."

"Hey, I didn't realize that this phrase had those connotations. I'm going to try to remove it from my vocabulary, but I don't know that I'm going to do a great job. Will you help me be accountable?"

"How can I support you?"

"How can I love you better?"

These are the kinds of questions that we ask all the time at Have Hope; Will Travel. They're important questions, they're conversations that need to be had both on a podcast and in real

life. And at this point you know the drill. You've encountered a podcast and it reminded you of someone else, you send the episode to them and you have a real life conversation. We don't have a guest today, but that doesn't mean that you're off the hook. There are still real life conversations you need to have.

And maybe it's just getting to know someone, like in the four minutes it took me while I was donating blood, I got to hear a little bit about Megan's story, about her dreams, about her family. I'm one of the few people at my workplace who speaks Spanish. Which means our custodial staff regularly asks me questions. Questions about procedures, of how do we want this done, especially in the ever-changing Covid-world where we're trying to be cleaner than ever. But questions about myself, about my life. And I've gotten the chance to ask them the same questions. To know about their families, to know what Covid is like in some other parts of the world. To know that I've actually been to their town on the other side of the world. Getting to know people. I was in a digital meeting and could be overheard by a security worker. I wasn't sure that he knew the whole context of the conversation that the one quote that I said, if it were taken out of context, would not have gone so well. And so I immediately stepped out of the meeting -- the digital meeting - and I said, "Hey just so you know, if you're hearing things, this is the larger conversation we're having," and he said "I wasn't hearing anything," and I said, "Well I want to make sure what you that you know what we're talking about, in case you do hear something." And when I told him more about what we were talking about, his face lit up. And I didn't go back to the meeting for probably five minutes, because I was hearing his story. A gentleman that I had just met that day, with a story I got to hear.

All around us there are people who have stories to share. They might be ready to share their story, and they might not. But my friend, your job is to open a space where it's safe for them to share their story. Where it's safe for them to talk about how they're feeling. Where it's safe to be a listening ear to what they have to say. To better understand how they see the world, and to better know where they're coming from. I think about this story of the woman with a bleeding disorder in Mark 5. Jesus is on his way to heal and he stops to heal this woman. Not just to heal her, that already happened when she made contact with the edge of his robe, but to hear her story. Her whole story. Without shame, without judgment, just to listen. To put everything else on hold, and to listen to this woman's heart. As a follower of Jesus, hope runs in your veins too. It's literally in your blood. When you're having a hard time remembering it, put your hands on your wrist, put your hand on your neck, and remember it is running through your veins. And on the days when you know and you're confident of that hope, take a look around you. Notice the people in your midst and be willing to hear their story. Recognize they might not want to share it. Right now is a really hard season and I would be exhausted if I were telling my story over and over again. But you can still be a safe place that they're able to tell their story as much as they're willing. Have a question or two prepared if you want to follow up and continue the conversation and if they seem engaged. And if they don't, that's okay too. Just remind them that you're there. And as always, remember that Jesus wants to hear your story, your whole story. Even the parts you can put words to, even the parts that frankly, tick you off. He's willing to listen.

So my friends, on this Martin Luther King Day -- and by "on this Martin Luther Luther King day" I actually mean a couple of days before because I'm pre-recording -- take a moment to reflect. To dare to hope. To dare to be the change you want to see in the world. To dare to make your world a better place. And then do it all over again tomorrow.

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

Big thanks for listening, my friends. I know it's a little bit heavy this week, but I'm glad you're here with us. Pop over to Instagram at @KatieAxelson, let's connect there. You can also find more materials at KatieAxelson.com. My goal is always to help you take one step closer to Jesus. I also had the opportunity to appear on two different podcasts this week. I was on Radiant Pearl Living episode 30 and What's Next for Women podcast. Be sure to check those out as well, share some love, maybe you found a new favorite show. Don't leave this one though please! We'll see you again in 2 weeks. Be blessed my friends. Know that I love you, know that I care about you, know that Jesus loves you, and He cares about you, and know that we can dare to hope, even in the midst of hard circumstances.

[Theme Music: upbeat smooth jazz bassline.]