



Special Needs Mom: A Disabled Faith Recovers

Callie Grant with author Diane Dokko Kim

Callie: Diane, we are so glad to have you on the show today. Thank you so much for joining us.

Diane: I'm delighted and thrilled to be here with you, Callie.

Callie: Let me share a little background with our listeners. You and your husband worked together in the mission field for many years before you became parents. Then your firstborn, Jeremy, was diagnosed at the age of two with autism and ADHD. That triggered in you a profound spiritual crisis that resulted in a phenomenal book entitled *Unbroken Faith: Spiritual Recovery for the Special Needs Parent*.

Callie: One thing that blindsided you was the fact that you had worked in ministry so faithfully. What did you expect from God about your family and when it didn't turn out that way? How did you feel toward him?

Diane: As you mentioned, my husband and I had been serving in ministry for about 20, 25 years and back in 2003 our family of three at the time, and our first son Jeremy, he was just a baby. We had returned from serving one year abroad on missions. And when we came back, we were all full of spiritual fire from a very fruitful year abroad and he committed to full-time ministry and all the testimonies. But our little baby wasn't talking.

Diane: He was 18 months at the time. So we thought, "Okay, well maybe he's just confused over all of the different languages he'd heard abroad." So, we had him tested for speech delay. Well, fast forward about six months and a thousand other tests later, it wasn't a speech delay and it turned out to be autism. And I wish I could testify that I responded in a way that at least I expected myself as a missionary and ministry worker to [respond].

Diane: But I didn't. I was absolutely gutted and it was devastating. And to be quite honest, I felt like God had betrayed us. We just stepped off the mission field and committed ourselves to full-time ministry and this is what we'd got? So that was the journey, the

beginning, the genesis of our disability story and really our testimony of God's faithfulness, and what kickstarted this book.

Callie: Well, because of this wrestling with God, it is a spiritually penetrating book that anyone can benefit from. Joni Eareckson Tada wrote in your forward that "it was medicine for a hurting heart." How did you feel about God at that time in the early days?

Diane: Right. Yeah, that was... I live out here in Silicon Valley where it's a tech world and my world, my spiritual life just went blue screen. It was a complete reset and it felt ironic and I felt trapped at the same time because we had this glorious testimony of serving God and all of that. So I really felt trapped. I didn't know where to go. I felt like I couldn't be authentic in my pain. We had just given all these testimonies and whatnot.

Diane: So what ended up happening was I was grieving, but because I felt like I had nowhere to go, I felt I couldn't be honest. I ended up just kind of pouring everything into this password-protected document and that ended up being my resting place. That ended up being my Mount Pennell, where I really did business with God. And so for a period of about five years, I really wrestled with God.

Diane: I dared to throw up questions that I would never dare to ask to any living being and I pretty much had my fist raised to the skies. And so for about five years, I really wrestled with God and the promises of God. If you're a good God, how could you let this happen? Why us? Why our child? Is this how you're going to treat us? Are you going to fix this? And if you're not, how am I going to trust you again?

Diane: So I really wrestled with the word of God and really took it to task. And I found that as I would read through the word of God, it actually read through me. And the situation that I thought would be the death of my spiritual life is the very set of circumstances that God would use to draw me into a closer relationship with him and understand his truth in a way that I never had before. So the word of God came alive in a way that I never had expected.

Callie: That's amazing. Okay. You didn't resolve obviously all this with God overnight. You write that your experience shattered your armchair religion and galvanized it into an unbreakable faith. Looking back, what were the defining realizations for you?

Diane: Right. I think looking back to 2004 when we got that diagnosis, there were actually two diagnoses going on. One was the disability for my son. He had a cognitive disability of autism, but there was actually a different diagnosis for me. I had also been spiritually disabled. And so yeah, we were both in a way disabled. He was a cognitively disabled and I found myself being spiritually crippled, and so I really struggled with how was God relevant anymore? What does God have to do with this? How is the Bible relevant?

Diane: When I talk about an armchair religion, I look back... I kind of divide up our family's history, kind of like history divided by BC and AD and it was before autism and then there's after autism. And everything that I had done or said or even preached or gone to

the other side of the planet to tell others about became a blue screen and an armchair religion to me.

Diane: And so I had to really reset and ask basic core questions. And so things like in the Bible it says God understands everything we go through and I'm thinking, "Well, God never had a child with a disability. How does he understand this? How dare he say that?" Right? He never dealt with fatigue or having to fight with school districts or trying to convince doctors of a situation or fighting with insurance.

Diane: If he's God, if he exists and if he really is omnipotent, then he just snaps his fingers and things happen. So how dare God say that he understands this? How does God understand this? And so that really triggered a hunger and a desperation for me. And so as I read through the word of God, it would read through me and it says "the word of God is living and active" and I really experienced that.

Diane: Just to give you a few examples starting from the book of Genesis. God was the first parent of the universe and when he was preparing for his first kids to come, he splashed out big. That was the best nursery in the entire universe, right? And so he was so filled with joy and excitement over his child, just like any parent would be and how I had been as well. But then just a few chapters in. By the time we get to Genesis 3 with the fall and then just a few chapters later, by the time we get to the account of Noah, those kids didn't turn out the way God expected either.

Diane: They filled his heart with pain and he was gutted. These kids that he had so much hope for. They broke his heart. And I was like, "Oh, an almighty God understands how I feel." And then-

Callie: That's wonderful.

Diane: Yeah. And then the book of Psalms came alive to me in a way that it never had before. And I never appreciated this until I went through this, that the book of Psalms is actually the thickest book in the Bible. It's like 150 Psalms or chapters, so to speak. And they're all lament and grief. There are Psalms and a lot of them are from David screaming out at God. Are you up there? Do you see what's happening down there? Do you not care? How can you let this happen?

Diane: And so those words became my words for the first time ever, Psalms. And so through that it was eye opening to realize that God gives me permission to grieve. He gives me permission to scream up at him. He gives me permission to ask these questions. And so that was just the beginning, just to give you a couple of data points of really God revealing, "I get you, I'm with you. I grieve with you, and and I grieve for you, but I'm going to do something with this," because he's a redeeming God.

Callie: That's so true. Wow. Well, I loved that part in the book where you wrote this psalm for a special needs parents and one line in there jumped out at me that I did want to ask you about was you don't want their pity. "I don't want their pity, Lord," you were crying out to God that you didn't want the pity of other people.

Diane: Right.

Callie: Explain that.

Diane: Yeah.

Callie: At that time that's how you felt.

Diane: Right.

Callie: Yeah.

Diane: Right. And I think when a parent receives news about their child, like a diagnosis, you're gutted. And I think there's this triple whammy that I experienced being a Christian, being in ministry. And I think being a woman as well, where it was really hard to admit that I was really struggling in my faith and the irony of faith communities is that everybody means well.

Diane: And so when we got the diagnosis and we shared it publicly with our church and our church friends, of course they all flocked around us. And then we heard things like, and every special needs parent has heard this before, they would encourage us like, "Oh God gave you this child because he knew you could handle it" or "He only gives special kids to special parents" or "Children with disabilities or special needs are a blessing." And honestly, I was like-

Callie: You probably wanted to smack them.

Diane: I did, Callie. I really did.

Callie: Oh dear.

Diane: But I gave the right churchy answer. And I said, "Thank you, I receive it, and I'm trusting in God." But meanwhile I was dying inside.

Callie: Oh, bless your heart.

Diane: I was.. Yeah. And I was dying, and I felt so conflicted that I didn't know what to do with that. And so, yeah, it was really hard.

Callie: Wow.

Diane: What do I do with this?

Callie: Well, it can be uncomfortable because you know it's devastating and you don't know what to say, but people are also empathizing because new parents spend a lot of time dreaming and wondering about the future of their baby. And in one chapter entitled

Kingdom Currency, you describe a slippery slope that is steep and cruel as your dreams died one by one.

Callie: Your thoughts were that your son won't have friends, can't go to college, won't be able to have a work or a career, won't get married, won't have a family and the list goes on and on. So explain to us the kingdom currency that you came to know and how it turned your thinking around.

Diane: Right. Now, as I mentioned, I live in Silicon Valley, so it's very clear what people consider blessings, right?

Callie: That's true. Yeah.

Diane: Having kids go to Stanford, having your kid get a job at Google or any of the tech companies, getting a Tesla, having stock options. It's very clear what success and achievement are and there is such a culture of achievement here. And so, to be a family with a child with a disability where those, most of those things will probably not be an option for us, is a very stark reality. It's a very stark contrast.

Callie: It is. Yeah.

Diane: So I really had to contend and I struggled with, "Okay, so my kid will never be able to do what 99.9% of the kids and families strive and struggle for." And so Jesus really has to make a difference if you're living in that space, if you're in the middle of this. And so when I talk about Kingdom Currency, I think the eye-opener was as I went back and again wrestled with God, realizing Jesus, the son of God had none of these things.

Diane: He didn't have a college degree. He never worked at Google. He was never a homeowner. He didn't get married. He didn't have the children of his own. He didn't have a spouse. His friends ditched him in his deepest time needs. So all of these things that we measure in our earthly currency, Jesus actually had none of those things.

Callie: That is such a great analogy, a comparison there. Yeah.

Diane: Right? Talk about stark.

Diane: Exactly. Right? And yet, do we consider Jesus, the Son of God, a loser? Not at all by any stretch. Right? The world would consider him a failure because he didn't hit those marks. But I mean we know that he is the Savior, and he lived a tremendous, worthy life. And so it was really an eye-opener and a page turner for me in a real paradigm shift of what kind of currency I'm going to define my child's life by and by our lives.

Callie: So was that another thing that was just revealed to you reading your Bible?

Diane: Yeah, it was, and it wasn't an instant thing. Again, it was a period of about five years of struggling with the word of God and going through it and wrestling with it. I mean, like

okay, I kind of joke about it that God and I had a throw down, it's like, okay, Bible. You're real or you're not.

Callie: Don't be messing with Diane.

Diane: Exactly. It's like, okay, this mere mortal dare to throw down with an Almighty God and we can kind of guess how that usually goes. The Almighty usually wins.

Callie: Well, he was so gracious to you. I want to bring up a couple of other examples from scripture that I feel like the way you work the Bible passages into your book really speak to special needs parents. They speak to all of us, but you write about in Matthew 16, you say, "If Peter couldn't argue the cross out of Jesus' calling, we ought not negotiate it out of ours. Let us rebuke that within us, which revolts against the suffering that yields our sanctification."

Callie: Wow, that's a powerful statement. How did your faith take you there?

Diane: Right. I think first we all avoid suffering, right? As a human being, that's just in our nature. We want to be comfortable at all costs and as much as I decry the concept of country club Christianity, I talk about that in the book. Deep down, I really want that. I want to be uncomfortable. I wanted to be cozy. With our words, with our mouth I say, "Oh yeah, I know that Christianity is not, following Christ is not a country club experience."

Diane: But deep down I would, I really wouldn't mind if it was cozy like that.

Callie: Yeah, well we like comfort. It's true and it's-

Diane: Exactly. So that's who we are as human beings. And I think even in our nature as parents, we tend to over help. Like these days there's such a trend of helicopter parents or of lawnmower parents, right? And so I am willing to shortchange my child's long-term gain for a short-term win. And we see evidence of that in the culture, just even with the college entrance scandals and things like that.

Diane: But I've learned to be appreciative that God does not parent me like that. God does not parent us like that. There is a quote that Joni Eareckson Tada, who is my spiritual hero, says, "God permits that which he hates to accomplish that which he loves." God permits that which he hates, which is sometimes suffering injustice to accomplish that which he loves. And we see that through Jesus.

Diane: God permitted him to go through all of that suffering, but Jesus submitted and it was through that, that we experienced redemption and eternal salvation, all of those things. And so that was again a game changer for me, that I am not called to a life of country club and comfort-seeking, but as a follower, Christ, I'm called to a way of cross-bearing.

Diane: And so you know that old hymn, "Jesus doeth all things well"? Not easy. The hymn doesn't say Jesus doeth all things easy. Doeth all things *well*. And so when I talked about

Peter arguing with Jesus and Peter says, "Never, Lord, that shall never happen to you," which is an oxymoron, right? We can't really say to God, "Never, Lord," we just contradict ourselves.

Callie: That's true.

Diane: But I realized I do that all the time and that's exactly what I did as a special needs parent. I'm like, "Me? A special needs parent, with this child? Why? Lord, why would you give such a delicate, needy child to someone as flaky and insensitive and clueless as me? Never, Lord." But this was his unique assignment for me, for our family. And something I share with families who have a child with a disability and have what's called and well-known in the special needs community. It's called a spiritual IEP or an IEP.

Diane: In the public school system, for typical developing kids, they follow the general curriculum for third grade, fourth grade, and fifth grade. But for children with a disability, they will have what's called an individualized education plan. And so the team and the teachers, and the parents will get together and say, "Okay, what are reasonable goals for our child? What's going to be the curriculum?" And they custom make it for that child according to his gifts and abilities and limitations and challenges as well.

Diane: So I really believe that God has a spiritual IEP for every single one of us, and it's going to look different.

Callie: That's a great analogy.

Diane: Yeah and it's going to look different. And so when Peter says to Jesus when he's talking about John the [disciple], "Well, what about him?" Basically, why does he get that and I get this? Well, Peter, your spiritual IEP looks different.

Callie: Yeah, you just got to deal with it.

Diane: Right.

Callie: But it is individualized and only God could do that.

Diane: Right. Because he knows each of us so well. He knows the unique challenges that each of us have and so he's going to maximize a life plan with challenges, the appropriate level of supports and such to maximize our character, our faith, and our witness.

Callie: Wow, that's great. You also draw interesting parallels with the experience of Mary. How can special needs moms especially relate to and learn from the life of Mary when it comes to feeling blessed.

Diane: Right. Oh Mary, I love talking about Mary. The quintessential mom, right? Of history.

Callie: She gave birth to the Savior! Yes.

Diane: Exactly and Mary never meant so much to me until this set of circumstances came into my life.

Callie: Oh interesting.

Diane: I was first introduced to Mary when the angel of the Lord comes to her and greets her: "You who are blessed and highly favored." And I never really thought about that until people started telling me, "Oh Diane, you're so blessed because God entrusted you with this child." And I'm thinking, "This doesn't feel like a blessing and it certainly doesn't feel like a favor." That's how I felt at that time. And so I really resonated with Mary because her plans had been hijacked.

Callie: Yeah, yeah.

Diane: Her plans, she was married or betrothed to a nice Jewish carpenter. They had a nice domestic life to look forward to with probably some nice furniture. But all of a sudden, that just went completely out the window. She found herself with basically an unplanned pregnancy, which was very unwelcome news. And the angel of the Lord tells her, "You will give birth to the son of God. He will be the cause for the rising and fall of many, and a sword will pierce your heart too."

Callie: Wow.

Diane: Yeah and later on she's called most blessed among women. And so that meant so much to me because my plans got hijacked, and I certainly did not feel like this was going to be a blessing. But we know later on, we know later on history remembers Mary as the [mom of the] Son of God, and what did she say? She said, "Let it be to me as you have said." And so that posture of trusting God and submitting and surrendering to his plans for her life, for her child, for her family, yielded eternal benefits for all of mankind in history.

Diane: And so that gives me significant encouragement and marching orders for me when I feel all of my plans had been hijacked, to trust that yes, a sword may pierce my heart today, but God will redeem this because he is a redeeming God, and he will make this a blessing in a way that only he can.

Callie: Well, you've come to that a couple of times now that just returning to the fact that he is redeeming, and it looks to that future hope that we have.

Diane: Right, right. And it's interesting because I knew that yes, you know, in Heaven all things will be restored and things like that. But amazingly, and I can say this after 17 years, there have been incredible blessings in the past 17 years and I, I'm convinced of it. And so 17 years ago when I first heard this news, and I did not think that it was going to be a blessing, I would look to [special needs] parents who were further down the road, and they experience in there some kind of, they were at this place of Christian zen. They were joyous.

Diane: And I'm like, okay, so there's something to be said about this. So just hang on, just hang on. You might be in the thick of it now, the steepest part of the learning curve and you're in the season of grieving and that's okay, but I wouldn't have said this then, but I definitely say this now, that this is both the worst and best, most greatest blessing that God could have permitted and repurposed for us.

Callie: Wow, we hear that so much. I mean from special needs families. We hear it from people who have terrible diagnoses, and it's just a common theme in God's dealing with us that we come to feel blessed through really difficult circumstances. So thank you for that.

Callie: Let's see. I want to jump back to a focus on Jeremy a little bit here. One of your concerns early on was whether your son could know God. Tell us your perspective on the spiritual capacity of a special needs child now that your son is 17.

Diane: Right. So Jeremy was diagnosed at 18 months and he's now 17. And I would say roughly socially and speech wise, he functions maybe about age three or four, so that's considered pre-verbal. So at this point he can say a few sentences just to express basic needs, but it's not like you could have a conversation with him. So it's really hard to know what's going on in his mind because you can't have a conversation with him. Or it's one way, we're speaking at him, and he might reply with a word or so, but because he's functionally pre-verbal, non-verbal, it's really hard to know what's going in because so few is coming out.

Diane: And so Jeremy's capacity, I always wonder, like, is he getting this? How can he know God if he can't check off the boxes? If he can't indicate that he wants to be baptized, things like that. And so there are fewer things that have really challenged me as a parent in the faith department. This is truly an area where I have to live by faith. Faith is being sure of what I hope for and certain of what I do not see it.

Diane: So I have to exercise my faith for his faith, that I am certain that God is doing and speaking and connecting with him even though I may not see evidence of it, but I have to exercise my faith that God is at work and that he's working. We joke that Jeremy speaks Jeremy-ese, he has kind of this Babel or echolalia is called in the world of autism, but I have to trust and believe that God speaks Jeremyese. If he knows the count of hairs on his head, then God speaks Jeremyese, as well.

Diane: I don't speak Jeremyese, yet. I'm trusting when I get to Heaven, all things will be unlocked. and we will all speak Jeremeyes. But I just have to believe that, that God is at work. And so my job is to be faithful and leave the fruitfulness to God.

Callie: Well, how do you nurture Jeremy's faith?

Diane: I wish I had a great spiritual answer for you. I think I feel like I'm just kind of stumbling along doing the best that I can with this. I think the first thing is for ourselves to be healthy spiritually, relationally, and emotionally. One of the practical advice that professionals give to parents is one of the best gifts and assets that you can give your child is a healthy you, is a healthy parent.

Callie: Oh yeah, sure. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Diane: And so whether that means taking care of ourselves in our marriage, taking care of physically, emotionally, and definitely spiritually. And so it's really important for my husband and I that our faith is healthy and that we are doing what we need to do to prioritize our spiritual relationship with God because we cannot give what we do not have.

Diane: So for us, embodying Jesus as much as we can because we are his primary witnesses. He's going to experience God's love primarily through us because he lives with us. And so also the other component of faith is so much is caught versus taught. So it may not be in the words or the lectures or the Bible studies or the family worship, that we have or don't have. But it's going to be how do we love him. How do we exercise patience and compassion and all of those things that do not come naturally to me, to us in the flesh.

Diane: So first it's our nurturing our own spiritual wellbeing and growth and discipleship. And I would say secondly, because we're not sure what channel he speaks, what love language he is, I just have to try all the different channels. So being plugged into community, being plugged into our church, making sure that he knows other people who can love him with the love of Jesus and embody, and be Jesus with skin on for him.

Callie: That's wonderful. There was a time, Diane, when you were blindsided by your low expectations of Jeremy. Do you mind telling our listeners about the tooth fairy experience?

Diane: Oh yeah, the tooth fairy. I think back when Jeremy was maybe around 10-years-old and his younger brother Justin was around six. So for years we just assumed, okay, it's on me. / assume autism, he struggles with figurative language and abstract. So let's not confuse the child. So for years that Santa Claus and the tooth fairy did not come for Jeremy. He got gifts and things like that, but I was like, "No, it's an abstract concept, so let's just not confuse the child."

Diane: But then when our second child came along, Justin, four years later, he's a typically developing child. And so we did all of that for him, so the tooth fairy came. And so for years and years and years, the tooth fairy came for Justin, but not for Jeremy. Well, one year, I think when Jeremy was around 10 when he comes up to me and says, "envelope, envelope," kind of concerned. I speak a little bit of Jeremyese. So I figured that he was asking for an envelope. And so I gave him an envelope and he fished out his own tooth out of his pocket.

Diane: He must've pulled it out by himself, stuck it into the envelope, ran over to his room, stuck it under the pillow, got in the bed, and giggled as he was waiting for sleep to come. And that just broke my heart, Callie, into a million pieces.

Callie: Yeah. That line just, I've got chills right now from that story. Just I can imagine as a mom, I think you said shatter in a million pieces because of all the heart and soul and worry

and concern, and then to see that he could have that kind of joy over that. He was understanding. Oh me. What a testimony of him, you know? And the human spirit, which is always present no matter whether we have special needs or not.

Diane: Right.

Callie: So that's amazing.

Diane: Yeah. Yeah, that just floored me and God really used that to teach me, "Diane, don't low ball what your child can do. Don't underestimate what he can do and don't underestimate what I can do for him, through him and with all y'all."

Callie: That's so true.

Diane: Yeah.

Callie: Are there any particular ways that you've seen God working in Jeremy's life?

Diane: Yes. And they're always in unexpected ways. We just talked about the tooth fairy, and I'll be honest with you, I still have to challenge myself and check myself with low expectations. Because you know he's 17 now. He has one where you're a school, a high school to go and then he goes into what's called a post-secondary.

Diane: Meanwhile, I'm watching all of the same age peers go to college and all these things. So I have to really watch myself.

Callie: Aww, that's really tough.

Diane: Yeah and not low balling, but not setting myself for heartache. And so it's a fine line. But there's a couple examples. Glimmers, I call it where God will use it like manna to say, "See, I'm working. I'm doing something here."

Callie: Ah, I love that.

Diane: Yeah. A couple of years ago, so we are part of the special needs ministry at our church. And so Jeremy works with a one-on-one buddy and one day Jeremy came up to him in the middle of the day and he found a picture of a classroom and they all had their eyes closed and their hands down on their desks and Jeremy brought it up to me, tapped at the paper and said, "Praying."

Callie: Wow.

Diane: Yeah.

Callie: That's really amazing, Diane. Are there other examples that you have of these glimmers that you've seen in Jeremy?

Diane: Yeah. I think the biggest one, the biggest confirmation that God gave us recently answers the question of who's going to take care of my child after I'm gone.

Callie: Oh, that's huge.

Diane: It's huge. This is like the universal, it doesn't matter what the diagnosis is. Every parent with a child with a disability, this is going to be the plaguing negative question until the day we die. What's going to happen to our child after we die? Who's going to take care of them? No one could take care of them and know this complicated bundle in the way that we could. And so this is something that we, that every parent struggles with the issue of conservatorship.

Diane: And I talk about that extensively in the book. And so I will just share with you the cherry on the top recently because our child is turning 17, we started conservatorship planning. So putting all the legal things in place, the trust and wills and all of that before he hits 18. And of course, we got to the part where we have to think about, we have to put some names on these lines. Who will we entrust in the event of our passing, which is inevitable?

Diane: And as we sat around as a family and had a family meeting, we were amazed that we found four to five names that were so easy to say and that we knew we could trust. And that when we asked them, we were fairly confident that it would be a yes.

Callie: Wow. That's amazing.

Diane: It is amazing. It is amazing. It is truly the biggest burden and worry and concern and fear. And through that, God really made clear to me that verse, "seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all of these things shall be added unto you." That all of these things, this is the biggie for us.

Callie: It was the big one. Yeah.

Diane: It was the biggie. It was the biggie the day, the five seconds after we got that diagnosis back in 2004, but we committed ourselves to live before the Lord and seeking his righteousness and to live in a way that would honor him and to serve him. And God took care of the rest. And all of these things were added on to us.

Diane: And I can't guarantee that it's going to look the same for every family, but I only know my story and I can only share my story of how God has been faithful and God has been working. So this may not necessarily have to do with his life right now, but it's such a guarantee and a reassurance of his life to come, the part that I have zero control over.

Callie: Right. Wow. What peace you must have about that. That must be...I can't imagine. You write about all the therapists and doctors and specialists and volunteers, all the people in Jeremy's life that love him. Not as much as you, but you're amazed at their love and dedication and just the circle of care that you have is so strong.

Diane: Right. I would say that's one of the biggest perks and unexpected blessings to this life is the incredible people. I really say that people in the world of disability and special needs community are just the cream of the crop in terms of human beings. We talked about Mary and the unexpected blessings that would come. I would say this is probably one of the hugest, unexpected blessings. There's that song "Mary Did You Know?" Did you know this was what the future held?

Diane: Mary had no idea, and I had no idea. The people, the therapists and the educators and the volunteers, and the ministry workers that bring me to tears. So yes, I have experienced the worst that humans can be.

Callie: Yeah. You ran into that.

Diane: Oh yeah. The glares, the comments, the insults, the rejections.

Callie: The bureaucracy.

Diane: The bureaucracy. I've experienced the worst that humankind can be, but through this, God has also given us access and privilege to do life with some of the best people on the planet. We would have never come across this world, this village, were it not Jeremy being that ticket for us to experience blessings in this way.

Callie: That is so wonderful. That is just beautiful. You came to experience that quote, "Nothing compares to the help, hope and empathy we find in Jesus" unquote. Christians say that kind of thing a lot in a variety of circumstances. And it sounds so vague. It's almost like one of those-

Diane: Cliches.

Callie: Cliches. Yeah. All the cliches that you heard when Jeremy got his diagnosis, right? But there you are giving some of those yourself. I'm kidding! But they do sound vague, and I'm wondering what ways Jesus has done this for you over the years. Giving you the help, hope and empathy that nothing compares to coming from our unseen Savior and/or is it something that you have to experience to really understand it?

Diane: It's such a colossal question, Callie. It's such a great question as well. And we've talked about a lot of this so far in our discussion. You know how you were told the Holy Spirit is unseen, right? So this is kind of how like back in the Sunday school days we explained to kids the Holy spirit is like the wind. You can't see it, but you can see what it does.

Diane: And so God's faithfulness, all of the help, hope and empathy that I talked about that we have found through Christ has been the Holy spirit, God working in our lives around us. The way he's moved through people, the tribe that we just talked about, the incredible people that have come into our lives to be a source of blessing—I call the first responders. First responders who are willing to do life with us.

Diane: I shared about how the word of God came alive in a way that it never had before. So the Holy spirit moved me through the word. Holy spirit moved through people. The Holy spirit moved me through circumstances. I talked about those glimmers through the tooth fairy moment, through the conservatorship people. The people that we can entrust our child to after we're gone. God working through circumstances and God working through my heart.

Diane: I would say that's probably the biggest miracle. Yes, physical healing. If Jeremy one day woke up tomorrow and he no longer had autism or the other five or six other things that he's actually got going on as well, yes, that would be a miracle. But to me, equal miracle is that God took a heart of stone and bitterness and rage and anger, who was this close to saying, "I'm out of here. You're not real. None of this is relevant. None of this is legitimate."

Diane: And the things that I have been sharing with you for the past, I don't know, however many minutes Callie, and that I fully believe it, and I would die on a hill and say, "This is my story. This is my song." That's a miracle too.

Callie: Yes, it is. It is. And that's a beautiful summary of what we've been talking about today and I could just keep you forever because there's so much in this book, because it's got so much of the Bible in it, and I love that. But in closing, Diane, what would you ask God for new parents who are experiencing the trauma of a special needs child? Sort of what would your prayer for them be?

Diane: The shortest answer would be, "God, I pray that what you have done for me, you would do for each parent, who is grieving right now. I pray that God would be the exact same God that he has been for me and my family for over 17 years. That he would be exactly the same even more to every single parent who's grieving, who's crying out because this is not the way they expected their life or their family or their child to be.

Diane: I pray that he would be the God who draws near to the broken-hearted in this very moment when it feels like God is nowhere or God doesn't exist anymore, because we have this now. I pray that he would be as he has been for me, the one who draws close to the broken-hearted parent. I pray that he would communicate to those parents that they have permission to grieve; that God is with us. God is with you, he's grieving for you, and he's grieving with you. And I also would wish and pray that God would make it clear and give them hope that he is a redeeming God.

Diane: That the very thing that you as a parent, that I once thought was the end of our story, was just the beginning of a new one, because he's a redeeming God. That's the only kind of God he knows how to be. So I pray for every parent or family that might be in that season right now, darkness. Remember that God is a God that hovers over darkness and he's just waiting to bring order and light and blessing."