



This Undone Life Together Podcast
Season 2 – Relentless

Looking For God in the Beginning of Your Story
March 24, 2020

Are you aching for a love that will never leave, a presence that will push back the dark? If so, I have good news for you. God's love is relentless even when your faith isn't.

Welcome to the *Relentless* podcast, a 15-episode podcast designed to give you a behind-the-scenes look at the stories and the biblical history that make up the pages of my newest book, *Relentless: The Unshakable Presence of a God Who Never Leaves*. My goal is twofold: to make sure you know you're not alone and to help you discover solid evidence of God's presence in your story, because he is with you every single moment. He will never leave you, even if you can't feel him or see him, and even if your story doesn't look like you thought it would.

Today, we're talking about chapter one. This is episode three and chapter one, "A Garden: A God Who Has Always Wanted to Be with You." In this particular episode, I opened it with a scene of me when I was a little girl in the favorite tree I would play in, and I also started talking about my parents' faith experience or lack thereof and what that very early year was like for me. In short, I am a person of faith. I have come to faith and lived a life basically where I've never known life without Jesus.

I know Jesus and love Jesus because of a man named David Mostek . Dave Mostek was a co-worker of my dad's when my dad came back from Vietnam. He had spent two years in the United States Army. He was going to be drafted, so he enlisted, because he wanted to choose to serve rather than to be drafted.

He spent a year in boot camp, basic training, tech camp, and all of those kinds of things to get ready. Then, he spent a year in Vietnam. He was on a radar artillery unit. They basically used radar to identify where the enemy was and then to help gauge where the artillery would be aimed. It was not a fun job. He was next to all of the heavy artillery, so he had a lifetime of hearing loss as a result. Vietnam was a mess. Right? It was just a hot mess.

My dad was a 26-year-old when he was in Vietnam. It was something like that. I'm trying to remember. I think he was 25 or 26 when he was in Vietnam. He came back from Vietnam. Within a year of when he came home I was born. It's funny how that works. When he came back from Vietnam, he came back to go back to college. They sent him home to go back and finish his degree, but he also started working... I believe that's when he started working at State Farm, and that's where he met a gentleman by the name of Dave Mostek.

Dave was a co-worker of my dad's. Dave was a Christian. He loved Jesus. At work one day, he asked my dad if he would come to church with him. That's it. I mean, it's quite amazing. We don't realize how a simple invitation (inviting somebody like a neighbor or a friend or a co-worker or whoever) to come to church can make such a huge difference, but literally I am a person of faith today because a stranger named Dave went out on a limb and invited my 27-year-old broken dad who had just come back from Vietnam to church.

My dad had only been married for a couple of years. He was a new father. I was only a couple of months old. For whatever reason, when Dave offered this invitation, my dad said, "Yes." It changed everything. You will read throughout the pages of *Relentless* that my dad didn't just have a hard time in Vietnam, but his whole entire life had been hard up to that point.

He had endured pretty significant physical, emotional, and sexual abuse within his family of origin, and then graduated from high school, did college, and went to Vietnam as a young

man. I have boys who are 27, 26, and 22 right now. I can hardly imagine them dealing with what my dad dealt with in Vietnam.

He came back, and for whatever reason, whether he recognized he needed more than what he had or whether he felt some kind of responsibility because he was a new father or whether he recognized he was having a hard time dealing with all of the things in his life, he said, "Yes," and went to church with Dave. He took his new wife and me to church with Dave Mostek.

What's so interesting is... I'll fast forward a little bit for a moment. Like I said, I've never known a time in my life when I didn't know Jesus. This was a significant, massive break in generational patterns. Massive, because one person invited my dad to church. It shifted and changed a generation, but we didn't heal overnight.

My dad was still a young man who had dealt with some pretty significant early childhood abuse, neglect, and trauma and then the trauma of Vietnam, so it was a massive shift, but there was still a road of healing that needed to be walked that would take decades and generations, quite frankly.

Well, in 2014...you'll get to this later in the book, so this is a bit of a spoiler and you can skip over this if you'd like...my dad died of pancreatic cancer. At his funeral, I'll just never forget it. It was August 28, 2014, when I spoke at his funeral, as did my brother. Sitting in the audience were Dave Mostek and his wife.

They sat in that audience at my dad's funeral. They were still friends after all of these years. Forty-three years later, and they were still friends. To be at that funeral and to talk about my dad's faith and his love of Jesus knowing the gentleman sitting in the audience who was responsible for my dad being introduced to Christ was there... Talk about profound!

In a very sad, weird twist of irony, within just a couple of months of Dave going home from my dad's funeral, Dave himself was diagnosed with lung cancer, and he died very soon after. It's such a mix (this mixed bag). We have two perspectives here. We have a guy who didn't heal. He didn't heal my dad and didn't heal Dave. Both of them died in their early 70s, too young.

Was it a God who doesn't heal or a God who made sure both of these men and their families knew him? I mean, there are really two ways to look at it. Right? That's really what the beginning of this book, *Relentless*, is about. It's setting the stage of this tension between a God who doesn't heal and who doesn't take the pain away and yet a God who will move heaven and earth to bring people to himself. How do we reconcile that? How do we bring those together?

One of the most difficult faith challenges for me personally but for many is trying to reconcile this tension and trying to reconcile the existence of pain and suffering primarily in the lives of innocent children like my father with a God who doesn't do anything to stop it. My dad endured horrific abuse in childhood (emotional, physical, and sexual). I already mentioned that. It was far beyond what any little person should have to experience, and it marked him significantly, and it would eventually mark me as well as his daughter.

I think of that with my own children. My youngest three children's early years were marked by significant abuse and neglect. This has marked them, and as a result, it marks me as well. I'm the daughter to a man who had early childhood trauma and the mama to three children who have had early childhood trauma, and it's not easy to be the daughter of one and the mother of the others.

At the same time, my father, as an adult, became a person of deep, unflinching faith. I mean, he loved Jesus with his entire heart. He knew what he believed. In fact, nobody could come to our house without my dad talking about his faith. It was rather annoying at times. When I was

a teenager and my dad would try to share the gospel with a waitress at the restaurant or the person who came to the front door, I was so annoyed and embarrassed! Yet, it was so clearly such a part of his DNA. Jesus was everything to him.

Did he ever really understand why God allowed him to suffer as a child? Did he understand why God allowed him to suffer as an adult? Did he ever gain any kind of clarity around God's lack of intervention in his early childhood trauma? As far as I know based on all of my conversations with him, no. He never got any answers as to why. He never got any explanation as to why God didn't pluck him out of that horrific early childhood and give him a better circumstance. He never got any answers to that.

Even so, he believed God was with him and that God was good, so there are a couple of different ways to look at it. This is what is so interesting. This is the tension. My dad could have focused on everything that went wrong (the fact that he had an alcoholic father and a promiscuous mother). He could focus on how his parents divorced when he was 5 and he was tossed back and forth between two very dysfunctional households.

He could focus on all that went wrong with Vietnam on top of everything else, or he could sit there and say, "I had this horrific early childhood experience, and at the same time, God gave me two grandparents who prayed with me and prayed for me as long as they were alive. On top of that, God made sure a gentleman named Dave met me at work and invited me to church when I was 27 and brand new to marriage and parenting."

Did God turn his back on my dad or did God make a way of provision even in this place of suffering? I mean, it's the tension. Right? You hear that. You see this conflict between so much good and so much evil that is together, and we have to decide what we do with God there. Are we going to focus on the ways God didn't deliver or focus on how God did deliver?

God delivered my dad through two faithful grandparents and a man who was brave enough to invite him to church and show him hope. Those were significant to him. In all of this, basically there are no real answers today. I'm not going to be able to serve up to you a nice, clean answer on a silver platter. I don't think that would make us happy anyway, but there are two truths I gain from this that have been a really good anchor for me.

1. *You and I will never have all of the answers we think we need.* Ever. To try to demand answers and clarity and to try to demand that God explain himself is going to be an unresolved demand. There is some suffering... In fact, most suffering is beyond explanation. The truth is I don't think I'd be satisfied with easy answers anyway.

Even if I demanded an answer and there was some kind of easy answer that was delivered to me, it would actually dishonor the extent of my suffering. It's strange, but allowing there to be some mystery is actually a way to honor the significance of my suffering. There needs to be some acceptance of this first truth that you and I will never have all of the answers we think we need, and the truth is we need more than answers. We need a person. We need more than answers. We need presence.

In the absence of answers God gives us himself, and that's what he did for my dad. He didn't give my dad any answers, but he gave my dad himself through grandparents who prayed for him and a gentleman who invited him to church. God gave him himself, and to my dad's last breath he knew God was with him. He didn't have to answers because he had something even better. He had God himself. The second truth is even more important or maybe equally as important. The second truth I've had to hang onto is that...

2. *A lack of intervention from God doesn't mean a lack of love or protection or provision from God.* A lack of intervention doesn't mean a lack of love or protection or provision. My dad didn't escape his trauma. I didn't escape mine. It happened. It is what it is. It scarred him, and my trauma has scarred me, and your trauma has scarred you.

Yet, eventually over time my dad grew to see strong evidence of God's love, protection, and provision in spite of God's lack of intervention in some of his experiences. God's love and protection and provision were very strong, very secure, and very sure even when God didn't always intervene like he thought he would, and I've had the same experience, and that has been even more important to me.

I still don't understand why God doesn't always intervene and is kind of hit or miss where he intervenes sometimes and he doesn't other times, but I've had to embrace and accept the truth that a lack of God's intervention does not mean a lack of his love or protection or provision. Sometimes the way God delivers those things looks different than we expected it to, but it's no less miraculous.

What are you and I going to do with this today? I mean, this is tough stuff. Right? This is the hard stuff, and it's hard to know how to be able to move forward with this. First, it's okay to say, "We don't know why bad things happen." I do not know. I don't have any nice, clean answers, and I'm not going to dishonor your pain by trying to offer one.

What you've been through is inexplicable. What you've been through I'm not going to stamp a cliché or a meme or a nice little trite saying on top of that. It would dishonor your pain and your suffering as well as my own. However, I do believe God's presence supersedes the worst of circumstances. I believe the presence of our pain is not indicative of the absence of God, and I believe this because of ongoing, solid evidence that demonstrates his loving presence, and that's where I'm choosing to focus my attention.

Now, it's your turn. I want you to look for the presence of God in the beginning of your story just like my dad. He found the presence of God in the prayers of his grandparents. In spite of all of the other things that happened, he had two grandparents who prayed for him every

single day and who were waiting for him. They were his refuge for him. That was tangible, solid evidence of God's presence.

I look at Dave Mostek's invitation to my dad to go to church, and I see evidence of God's presence in the beginning of my story. From day one, even though God was not going to deliver me from every bad thing that would happen, he made sure when I was less than a year old that I knew Jesus. I knew Jesus.

I want you to look for the presence of God in the beginning of your story. This is Altar Stone one. Remember, I said you're going to be building an altar of God's presence with 12 stones. This is Altar Stone one. I want you to go back to the beginning of your story, no matter how hard or complicated it was.

I want you to look for evidence of God there and evidence of God's presence there with you. I want you to look for it, and then I want you to mark it, because you're going to need that stone. You're going to need to remember not just the bad things that happened and the pain that happened but how God's presence was with you even there. That's what I want you to do today. Then, we will have more next time on the next episode.

Thank you, friends, for joining me today. Let me tell you, this life is hard, but it's so much sweeter and more bearable when we don't have to do it alone. Even better, we have a God who has promised to never leave and to never stop loving. He said, "I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you," and I believe him. Now, that's something worth living for. See you next time.

Are you aching for a love that will never leave, a presence that will push back the dark? If so, I have good news for you. God's love is relentless even when your faith isn't, and the circumstances you fear might drown your faith could become the stones giving testimony to it. Join me, and let's find evidence of him together.