



**This Undone Life Together Podcast**  
Season 2 – Relentless

A God Who Is With You in Your Transformation  
September 22, 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 biblical history that make up the pages of my newest book, *Relentless: The Unshakeable Presence of a God Who Never Leaves*. My goal here is two-fold. First of all, I want to help you to know that you are not alone, but, secondly, I want you to find solid evidence of God's presence in your story, because, whether you can feel him or not, he is with you always, and he will never leave.

Today, we're talking about chapter 9. "A Transfiguration: A God Who Is With You in Your Transformation." Now, this is all about the moment when Jesus goes up on the mountain. He takes Peter, James, and John with him, and he is transfigured before them. Before we really dive into the subject matter, I have a question for you. Have you ever walked into a room and felt completely out of place?

You just feel like there is something inherently flawed about you that you do not belong. I think all of us have had that experience at one time or another. We know what it feels like to be in a room, even a room we were invited into, and yet still feel completely out of place. That could be a real room or even a figurative room on social media or online or wherever it may be that you just feel out of place in your own skin.

We were ice skating. Yes, it's true. This was several months ago. We had gone on a trip in the winter (my family of my youngest three children and my husband and me). I had slapped on ice skates to show my family I am, indeed, an ice skater. I know it's hard to believe. I usually prefer to have two feet solidly in a pair of tennis shoes or hiking boots, but I actually grew up ice skating at some different friends' house, so I had learned how to ice skate a little bit, and I actually have a little bit of a knack for it.

My family had no idea this was a skill I possessed, so I was actually quite proud of myself that at 48 years old I could show off and pull off a double axel. Actually, no double axels for me, but my children were actually super impressed, and my ego grew enormous in a very short amount of time, which was about the time I fell flat on my butt, but that's a whole different story.

In the middle of ice skating, a 5-year-old girl came up to me, as we were skating around this cute little ice-skating rink at a ski resort, and asked me this question. "Why do you have a hole in your neck?" True story. "Why do you have a hole in your neck?" Well, I didn't, in fact, have a hole in my neck, but I have about a one-inch scar that's round in my neck where a tracheostomy allowed me to breathe and kept me from choking when I was going through the worst of my treatment and recovery.

As far as tracheostomy scars go, it actually looks pretty good, but it's still kind of gnarly. It does look like I have a hole in my neck, and for a 5-year-old she was just stating the obvious. "Why do you have a hole in your neck?" but she wasn't done. She went further. Then, she looked at me and squinted with that question mark in her eyes. "Hmm... There's something shifty about you."

She looked at me and said, "Stick out your tongue." Yep. That's what she said. Here's the deal. I don't have a tongue to stick out. There is nowhere for it to go. It's kind of tethered to the

bottom of my mouth. It's enough of a rebuilding of a semi-tongue that allows me to talk and swallow and eat, although not very well, but there's nothing to stick out.

She had seen the hint of something different inside my mouth. It's a different color than a normal tongue because it was pulled from tissue on my left arm, so it looks different, and she could see that this is not a normal tongue, so she was trying to get me to stick my tongue out. Now, I've grown a little bit accustomed to getting asked questions from children about why I talk the way I do and why I look the way I do, but I wasn't expecting it that day.

Even at 5 years old, she could spot something different about me. It was all very innocent. She was a sweet little girl, but she could spot that there was something that made me different from all of the other grownups she knew, so she pointed it out (the hole in my neck and the tongue that looked weird).

Let me tell you, even though I've grown accustomed to it, and I certainly don't blame a 5-year-old for her innocent question, it's not always easy for me when people point out my differences and how I'm different. I'm very well aware of how I have some very obvious differences. Just living with the differences even if nobody mentions them is hard enough, but when other people notice and comment on it, however innocently, it just stings a little.

It's not their fault, and I don't mind answering questions about it ever. In fact, I appreciate when people ask me very honest questions about it, but it's still painful for me to acknowledge there is something different about me that will be different about me until the day I die. This isn't going away. This is my new normal.

As a result of that, I have a heightened awareness of humanity's discomfort with differences. Although we are very well-intentioned and good-hearted, we are not comfortable with differences. We feel awkward. We're not sure what to do. We try not to stare, but we stare anyway. Right? Our eyes go right to the thing that's different.

I've caught myself doing this with other people. We just don't know what to do with differences, so we work very, very hard to try to be as normal and blend in to everybody else as possible. There are always some awkward moments when I go to the grocery store or the bank or the school where my kids go or wherever when there's a split second when they ask me a question and I get ready to answer, and I have to brace myself knowing the minute they hear my voice they will look up startled at the different sound of my voice.

It happens all of the time, and it has been difficult for me to learn how to walk into a room knowing some people will notice my scars or see the burns or hear the lisp in my voice or whatever. I want to blend in and be the same as everyone else and feel normal. At times, what has happened is I have gotten smaller and smaller, and I've started to hide more and more.

For example, it took me four years...that's a long time...to change my voicemail message on my iPhone. I had a voicemail message with my voice before my tongue was cut out, and honestly, I didn't want to let the girl go (the girl with the perfect speech, the me who I used to be). I didn't want to say, "Goodbye," to her, so it took me four years to finally change my voicemail message.

Here's another example. Sometimes when I'm working with colleagues, whether I'm at a conference or whether I'm speaking or coaching or whatever, I skip meals while working at these events simply so I don't have to endure the embarrassment that comes with eating with other people. Eating and talking is impossible for me, so at times, I will skip nourishment. I will skip meals simply to not have to deal with the embarrassment of that.

Another example is I've long wanted to do more podcasts and videos. In fact, this podcast here has taken me months to get up the courage and do, because I really struggle to push past the fear of embarrassment and rejection and just the difficulty of doing it. What I want you to

understand is those are just some personal examples from me, but I want you to consider it for you, too.

You have your own differences, and your differences may not be a speech problem or an eating problem or anything like that with scars or a hole in your neck, but you have something about you that makes you feel different and makes you feel disfigured in some way. I want you to connect with that right now, because there is a truth that we both need to understand and embrace.

Behind our discomfort with difference is a need for significance. Behind our discomfort with difference with the ways we feel different or disfigured is a deep need for significance. You and I, whether we consciously are aware of it or not, are always stacking ourselves up against each other. We're always comparing appearances or talents or successes or careers or children or marital status or ministry. Whatever you want to name it, we're always stacking ourselves up against one another.

Somewhere along the way we've grown to believe we need to look a certain way, sound a certain way, live a certain way, and behave a certain way in order to be accepted. Our value comes out of our ability to blend in and not look different. As a result, we are always wrestling with these differences.

When we respond to this human complexity (the fact that we are all so different, look different, sound different, and behave different and that some of us are flawed emotionally and some of us are flawed physically), we usually land in one of two camps. That's what I talk about in this book. These two camps are grace and truth.

The grace camp is all about making concessions for all of the flaws. Lots of grace and lots of flaws. Now, we're not talking about physical disability here but the flaws of human

complexity (the flaws of all of us being different and those who have addictions or struggles or whatever it may be).

There's the grace camp which just says, "Everybody is accepted. Everybody is loved. It's no big deal." There's lots of grace, and it almost becomes a license for doing whatever we want, whatever we feel like, whenever we want with no thought of consequences or repercussions. Then, we have the truth camp.

The truth camp is all about speaking the truth, and we don't care who we step on in order to get to the truth. That's full of legalism and judgment. There are lots of hardcore rights and wrongs, black and white. The truth camp. Grace is all about the gray; truth is all about the black and white. We have two options.

Yet, faith (the spiritual life of becoming more like Christ) is about marrying the two together and bringing the two together. Grace and truth. It's not an either or. It's both and, and, truly, only Jesus held the two in perfect tension. The rest of us are always going to get this formula wrong. We're going to land too hard on the side of grace or land too hard on the side of truth. We actually need both. We need both grace and truth in order to really reflect Jesus.

In this particular chapter, as I mentioned, I talked about Jesus at the top of the mountain with the disciples when he was transfigured before them. I also talked about my love of NFL football. Hello! My favorite ever. In fact, right now as I'm recording this podcast, a football game is on, and I am missing it, because you are that valuable to me, but I just need you to know I'm feeling a little bit of pain that I'm missing the football game.

I love NFL. Really, the reason for that is I grew up watching NFL football games on Sunday with my dad. We'd always have a football game on in the afternoon during NFL season. After church, in the morning, and before we'd go back to church at night, those Sundays were basically... You could either call it an *NFL sandwich* or a *church sandwich* depending, but I had

church on either side and a good slab of NFL in between, and it was about the best sandwich ever. I loved it. I am a huge NFL fan.

In fact, as I record this, I have my game-day tee shirt on. Yep! I have my game-day tee shirt on out of honor to my love of NFL. In the NFL in football it's all about the rules. Right? We have the rules. It's black and white. There are boundaries. There are lines. There are all kinds of limits to how the game is played. If we want to play the game, we have to do all of the rules.

Yet, that doesn't serve us very well in the faith life, because we all need grace as well. In that moment with Jesus at the top of the mountain with Peter, James, and John, we see the coming together of grace and truth in perfect harmony. Jesus was God in the flesh. He was in human flesh. That means he got sick, he had to sleep, he didn't feel well some days, and he had body odor. Just imagine it. He was human.

At the same time in a brief moment on the top of that mountain, Jesus was transfigured before his disciples. It wasn't that he changed people completely. Basically, the veil of human flesh was lifted for a moment to reveal to the disciples who he had been all along: God. It says they fell to the ground because it was so terrifying. He turned white as lightning. His clothes were whiter than anything anyone could bleach. He literally revealed a hint of his divinity in front of the disciples, and even the hint of it was enough to drop them face flat on the ground.

What's interesting is, while Jesus is transfigured before his disciples, Elijah and Moses show up as well. Now, the disciples would have recognized that Moses represented the Old Testament law (the rules of faith) and Elijah represented the prophets (the ones who enforced the law and the ones who reminded God's people they needed to follow him and follow in obedience to his law). Moses and the prophets were like the lines on the football field or the rulebook. They were the ones who were all about truth.

Yet, Jesus is standing there before the disciples transfigured, and Jesus ultimately represented grace. Where the law separated us from God, God pushed in and came near in the incarnation or the flesh of Jesus. It was this perfect marriage of religiosity of the law and the prophets with God's loving presence that came near anyway with his grace.

Grace and truth met on the mountain and showed itself to Peter, James, and John while they witnessed all of this. It's so interesting to me this moment of Jesus being transfigured, because it was a brief moment, but something big was about to happen. After Jesus was transfigured, he comes back down the mountain. Peter, James, and John come with him. They go back down the mountain because there was work to do with God's people.

Shortly after that, Jesus would be arrested, brutally tortured, completely disfigured, and crucified. He would be beaten. He would be unrecognizable he was so severely beaten and crucified, and he would die. In other words, God is the perfect marriage of grace and truth, but God willingly didn't stay at the top of the mountain where the glory was, but he descended to the bottom. Rather than stay on top of the mountain, he came down to meet us and to be disfigured for us.

Saint Augustine said, "In my deepest wound I saw your glory, and it dazzled me." I am a woman of wounds. I have a hole in my neck. I have a tongue that looks funny. I have a tongue that I cannot stick out, but you are a person of wounds, too. We all are. Every single one of us has wounds (ways that we are disfigured).

That's the truth. That is the truth. We are disfigured. The hole in my neck is the least of my wounds. I have wounds far deeper, far more grotesque, and far more difficult than the scars people can see, as do you. Yep. That's the truth, but the grace is that Jesus left the glory of the mountain to be disfigured on our behalf. God meets us in our wounds (the ways we are flawed and different and not as whole as we had hoped to be).

Those flaws, those wounds, and those disfigurements of ourselves don't have to be a source of our shame because God can transfigure what life has disfigured. Jesus came down the mountain and chose to be disfigured so what is disfigured in us can be transfigured into glory. Jesus started with glory and went to disfigurement so we could start with disfigurement and go to glory.

That means we can mourn what has been wounded, we can validate our pain, we can honor what we've endured, we can acknowledge it and honor it and validate it, but at the same time, we mustn't forget to celebrate how we've been healed and transformed and transfigured by the perfect marriage of truth and grace.

Not completely. We are not completely made whole. We are not completely restored or completely transfigured, but we are on the way to that, and we're going to live this life with scars on body and soul until we finally go home, but someday a day is coming when we will be made whole, and it will be like Jesus on the top of the mountain where God himself will transfigure everything we have lost, everything that scarred us, and everything that has wounded us. God will transfigure with Christ. We will be made new.

The Bible says he will make all things new. Our mountain moment is coming! Our mountain moment is coming! Right now, we're at the base of the mountain, but that's where Jesus is. He came down it to be disfigured with us, but our mountain moment is coming when God is going to transfigure with the light of his grace and his truth everything that has been disfigured and broken in this life, and it's coming!

When we look for God's presence in the place of our transformation, we will see hints of the glory that is yet to come. This is the ninth Altar Stone: looking for God's presence in your transformation. We can embrace the truth of holiness, righteousness, and goodness (what we are aiming for).

What it requires for us to be close to God is righteousness, holiness, and goodness, but we can also and we must also embrace the grace of a love that meets us when we can't reach that. We don't possess any of those things. We don't possess holiness, righteousness, and goodness on our own, but the grace of Jesus meets us there, and it comes together in this beautiful marriage of both/and, not either/or.

When we realize this ourselves and when we embrace the fact that the truth of God and the grace of God meet us in Jesus, we can see a woman with a hole in her neck or a man with a history of alcoholism or a pattern of broken marriages or a neighbor or a friend who is broken and flawed and we can look at them and see them through the eyes of love. That is grace and truth together.

Jesus' road to glory was paved in poverty. Jesus sows poverty. This is hard for those of us in Western civilization because we don't want poverty. We want affluence. We want comfort. We want significance. That's what this drive is. Our fear of differences is a fear of a lack of significance.

This is contrary to the American dream and the American ideal. Even our churches at times portray more glory than poverty, but if you and I want to find God in our transformation, we need to choose the road of poverty instead. We need to choose the road of poverty, allowing God to transfigure what has been disfigured.

That's part of why I wrote this book. It's part of why I tell the hard parts of my story. It's because I need to walk the road of poverty. I need to walk the road of poverty because Jesus did it for me. Friends, I want you to look for the ninth Altar Stone, a God who is with you in your transformation.

If you feel poor, if you feel broken, if you feel like you are a person of poverty, then you are in a good place for grace and truth to transform you. That's where Jesus hangs out, in the place of

poverty, so look for him there. Look for evidence of a God who is with you in your ongoing transformation.

You will not arrive to transfiguration until the day you see Jesus face to face and you are made whole, but for now, you can see hints of the glory that's coming, the glory that comes only through Christ. It's there, and when you find evidence of that, I want you to mark it, because that is your ninth Altar Stone.

Thank you, friends, for joining me today. It is so much sweeter and more bearable to do this life together. Even better, we have a God who has promised to always love us and never leave us. "I will not leave you as orphans," Jesus said. "I will come to you," and I believe him. I cannot wait for that day. Now, that's something worth living for.

*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.*