

## Transcript for the podcast “Worthy: Celebrating the Value of Women.”

**Hosts:** Elyse Fitzpatrick and Eric Schumacher

**Episode 8 — Guest:** Melanie Penn

**Date Aired:** March 23, 2020

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Eric Schumacher 0:08

Welcome to Worthy, a Christian podcast that celebrates the value of women. Each week we'll bring you conversations with women and men on the value of women in the church, home and society. We will not always agree on everything. But we do agree that God is glorious, the Bible is true, women are valuable, and respectful conversation on this topic is essential in our day.

Well, welcome to the Worthy podcast. I'm your host, Eric Schumacher, along with my co-host, Elyse Fitzpatrick. Elyse, how are you doing today?

Elyse Fitzpatrick 1:16

I'm good. I'm good. Thank you. It's actually--ooh, it was sunny a couple minutes ago, and now it's cloudy. Oh, I'm so bummed out.

Eric Schumacher 1:24

Yeah, we're gonna stop talking about Southern California weather. One of the things that I love about this podcast is we get to talk to some of our favorite people in the world that sometimes we've been able to get to know over the internet or through their books or their music, but now we get to hear their voice and chat with them. And our guest today is special to us because she was sort of a partner with us in this Worthy project. Melanie Penn recorded Worthy, the worship song, and we'll listen to that here in just a bit. Melanie is a singer, songwriter, and a worship leader based in Brooklyn. And for many years, she was a mainstay in the New York City theater scene and an award-winning musical theater actress. She primarily toured with the Broadway musical, Grease, one of my favorites from childhood and perhaps the present. She transitioned to singer-songwriting and released three songwriter albums. Aside from being a song leader at Redeemer Presbyterian Church, she's also Director of Development for City to City, with over 450 new churches in global cities helping them out. Mel is in the process of releasing her fifth album, and she releases one song a month. And so if you head to her website, [melaniepenn.com](http://melaniepenn.com), you can put your email address in and you will get sent that song every month. So Melanie, welcome to the podcast.

Melanie Penn 2:59

Hello, Eric and Elyse. So nice to be on with you.

Eric Schumacher 3:03

Yes, it's good. Good to hear your voice. And speaking of your voice, we're gonna take a moment right now just to listen to that song Worthy.

Melanie Penn 3:12

(Singing) - In your likeness and bearing your name,  
you have made us to rule and to reign  
to be fruitful on earth and to image your worth  
, declaring it all "very good."

But we tarnished the worth of your name  
, and like Eve we were covered in shame

, but despite what was done you have promised a Son,  
a king who would rescue and reign.

Worthy! You are worthy  
of all glory and honor and power and blessing and fame!  
For you made us. In Christ, you saved us  
. Make us worthy, Lord, to bear your name!  
Through the ages in famine and feast  
, you have called from the greatest and least  
countless women of faith who found hope in your grace  
and spoke of the kingdom to come. From the weakness of young Mary's womb  
came a champion to conquer the tomb,  
One whose life and whose death would be our righteousness  
and blessed is the one who believes!

Worthy! You are worthy  
of all glory and honor and power and blessing and fame!  
For you made us. In Christ, you saved us.  
Make us worthy, Lord, to bear your name!

Though we have fallen, we have strayed  
and clothed ourselves in shame.  
Though we have made ourselves unworthy of your name.  
Though we are broken and abused  
, mistrusted and misused,  
we find our hope, our joy,  
our life, our worth in you.  
By the Spirit your work has begun.  
You are sending your daughters and sons to bear children of faith by proclaiming your grace  
until Christ and his kingdom have come.  
On the day when all things are made new  
, we, the Bride, will be brought to the Groom and then clothed in his worth, we will rule on the earth  
and all of creation will sing,  
"Worthy! You are worthy  
of all glory and honor and power and blessing and fame!  
For you made us. In Christ, you saved us, made us worthy, Lord, to bear your name!"

Eric Schumacher 7:24

Melanie, that was great. Thank you so much for recording that for us.

Melanie Penn 7:27

Oh my gosh, thank you for writing such a beautiful song and including me. It was a pleasure to sing it  
and I still sing it. That chorus is pretty catchy.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 7:35

It is so catchy.

Melanie Penn 7:37

I must admit.

Eric Schumacher 7:38

That's good. That's all David's work on that. He's the musical composer. Yeah, that was great.

Melanie Penn 7:45

It is. It's an awesome song. And how is it being received? Do you know? Like, are you able to see how, kind of, people are tracking with it?

Eric Schumacher 7:54

I haven't. Elyse, you were just at a women's conference where they used the song. What was the response?

Elyse Fitzpatrick 8:01

I was. It was really wonderful. I have to tell you. The conference did two things, Eric. The first thing that they did was do a dramatic reading of your Courageous Women piece.

Eric Schumacher 8:15

Oh, that's great.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 8:15

That was so beautiful. And then we sang the song, and it was beautiful, and people were crying.

Melanie Penn 8:22

Wow!

Elyse Fitzpatrick 8:22

Yeah, it was very, very well received. And I have to say, yeah, same for me too, about, you know, humming and singing that chorus sort of over and over again. It's really kind of amazing.

Melanie Penn 8:37

Oh, it's great. It's beautiful. I think people will continue to discover that song, and I just look forward to that.

Eric Schumacher 8:46

Yeah, I hope so too. I haven't seen too much response yet. So if you're listening to the podcast, let us know about it.

Melanie Penn 8:53

Hey, take it from me. It takes time. It takes time.

Eric Schumacher 8:56

Yeah, so let's get there to your songwriting. First of all, let's hear a little bit about who Melanie Penn is. Tell us a little bit about who you are and your journey.

Melanie Penn 9:09

Well, I, um, gosh, that's always such a broad question. I'm a singer. I live in New York City. I grew up outside of Washington, DC. So I grew up in the DC suburbs. And I was a classical music singer. I was

groomed to be an opera singer from a very young age. But then I transitioned into musical theater as I went into professional singing after conservatory and then I transitioned into songwriting. So I've kind of had a circuitous musical journey. But the emphasis on singing has just, I mean, that's been the constant relationship of my life, the relationship to singing. So I haven't lived in a lot of places. I've only just lived in New York and growing up in Virginia, and then I went to college in Indiana, but that's me. I'm not, I don't have tons of hobbies. I just like sing and keep my life going.

Eric Schumacher 10:10

So what is conservatory? All I know about conservatory is it's a place where people get murdered in Clue.

Melanie Penn 10:15

Oh, that's right, with the candlestick! Conservatory is just a fancy way of saying a music school, like a university level music school.

Eric Schumacher 10:25

How early did you start singing in life?

Melanie Penn 10:28

I'm not sure when I sang my first notes, but I had my first public appearance. I was six, I think. I was like the child soloist in a Christmas Eve service at the Falls Church Episcopal Church, if anyone out there knows that church. It's kind of a prominent congregation inside the DC beltway. I sang on Christmas Eve, and then that was it. That was the beginning of my illustrious career.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 10:56

So Melanie, did you always see your music gift as coming from the Lord, something you were going to use for the Lord? Or when did you make that switch, if there was actually a switch that happened?

Melanie Penn 11:11

Do you mean like a switch into "Christian music" or something like that?

Elyse Fitzpatrick 11:15

Yeah, or even, I guess when, what's your faith journey? Did you see yourself singing for the Lord as a youngster? Or was that just something you were doing? Or?

Melanie Penn 11:29

I mean, I definitely--that's such a great question. And for me, as a young person, I just enjoyed singing so much, and I was good at it. So that became very attractive to me, and I was intrigued by everything that had to do with singing, whether it was the anatomy of the voice and proper vocal technique and all of the vocal repertoire that we have from centuries and centuries. I was, like, really intrigued with all that. In terms of the intersection of faith and singing, that really happened because churches love good singers. And I loved church growing up, because they let me sing there, and it was a way I could go sing. And, I don't know. It isn't supposed to be like it's an audience setting, but for me, because I don't think that I had a real relationship with Christ, it was kind of like that. It was like, wow, I get to sing in public and there's people who listen, and it sounds beautiful to them. It wasn't until I moved to New York and became a Christian in New York after the events of 9/11 that I really became more of a worship leader. And then when I started writing songs, my faith became embodied in the songs.

Eric Schumacher 12:52

Tell us about those events around 9/11 and how that worked to bring you to faith.

Melanie Penn 12:58

9/11, obviously, is one of those events where if you are alive, you can answer where you were when that happened. So I was in my apartment on Seventh, or no, I would have lived on Second Street at that time. I lived in the East Village. I had been in New York for about a year pursuing--I was like checking coats and waiting tables and stuff and pursuing music as much as I could, pursuing theater work and stuff. And yeah, I watched the Twin Towers fall from the roof of my building in the East Village. And I thought, Oh my gosh, life could just end at any time. It was really my first encounter with death. I had never encountered death before like that, and I thought life could really be over at any moment. I need to get my act together. I'm like this hedonistic person. I don't even know what my values are. I went to church the next Sunday, and the only church I had heard of at that point was Redeemer. So, although I had, I definitely had a faith background, I mean, I grew up going to great churches. My parents are like beautiful believing people, but I didn't really encounter Christ as a person until the weeks after 9/11 in 2001. And I don't think that's uncommon. I think a lot of people grow up in the church, but that doesn't mean that they have encountered Christ or that it is at all real to them.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 14:32

Right?

Melanie Penn 14:32

Yeah, that would, that would be me. I'd be in that category for sure.

Eric Schumacher 14:37

Hey, friends, this is Eric. Elyse and I are so thankful for the responses that we have received to the Worthy podcast. We've heard from so many of you who have told us these conversations are helpful, thought-provoking, and even refreshing. The episode that you're listening to today was recorded before the nationwide coronavirus outbreak and response. And as you know, this time has brought a few changes to how the world works. One result has been the cancellation of many speaking engagements because people can't gather. And those cancellations have resulted in the loss of important income. While we are not suffering in the ways that so many may be, we do pay the costs associated with the production of this podcast. And while those expenses are not excessive, they are significant in a time of lost income and uncertainty. We have another 14 episodes left to record, and we have the funds to produce those. However, we feel that if we're unable to raise consistent funding for future episodes, we may need to suspend the podcast. That said, if you would like to support us at any amount, we've set up a Patreon account so that you can do so. Visit it at [patreon.com/theworthybook](https://patreon.com/theworthybook). There you can schedule recurring donations of any amount from \$1 to \$50, and you'll also find some gifts and rewards at various amounts of donation as our way of saying thank you for your generosity. Again, that's [patreon.com/theworthybook](https://patreon.com/theworthybook). You can also find a link to it on our webpage, [worthybook.org](https://worthybook.org), or in the show notes. Thank you again for listening, for being our friends, and for joining us in these important conversations.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 16:47

So you ended up at Redeemer. That's really amazing. How was that for you? I mean, I know that Tim Keller is very, very interested in making church something that's not too terrible for unbelievers or for newbies. Right?

Melanie Penn 17:06

Right. Yeah.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 17:07

How was that for you?

Melanie Penn 17:09

I mean, it was, for some reason I kept going back when I started. Okay, so I started going and if anyone out there has visited Redeemer, I was in Hunter College Auditorium, which they met in for many, many years.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 17:25

Yeah, I've been there.

Melanie Penn 17:26

And they don't meet in there anymore, but so many people have memories from Hunter College Auditorium and I certainly do. I was like, "Who is this guy? He's like, preaching for so long and everyone's taking notes and I don't get it." And then I was kind of like checking out the girl who sang up front, and I'm like, "I don't know if she sings that good." I mean, I was just like, I was just there. I was there as an observer and a consumer. And I was also there because all of New York started going to church after 9/11. I mean, really, there was a mass migration back to church, and Redeemer is one of the only churches that actually kept its increased attendance in the weeks after 9/11. But eventually, like four or five weeks in to my going back to Redeemer after 9/11 it started to sink in. And I was also going back every Sunday, even though I thought the sermons were too long. And Tim to this day kind of like loves that about my testimony, because I'm like, "hey, not everyone loves the 30-minute sermon, Tim." But eventually I really heard the gospel. And Tim is so gifted at applying scripture in a way that hasn't been heard before. And he--I think a lot of preachers in our time can reach the heart, like they can go for your emotions and hope they reach your mind. And Tim has kind of flipped that I think. He is able to reach your mind and then access your heart. And that's definitely what happened with me.

Eric Schumacher 19:12

So, you went on to lead worship at Redeemer? And you are the Director of Development for City to City?

Melanie Penn 19:22

Yeah, I'm one of them. Yeah, I think they call it advancement now, Director of Advancement. And it's been wonderful for me. I work for an organization called Redeemer City to City that Redeemer started. That organization, I've been very loyal to City to City, and City to City has been very loyal to me as I've been building an artist's career in New York. And right now I partner with about a little over 100 families in the US to help them give philanthropically toward the global work of City to City, but it's like really flexible. It's kind of like the ideal artist's job because I don't have to be in an office, you know, and it's not set hours nine to five. So if there's any like burgeoning, or any artists out there, it's like, get yourself a flexible job, like get yourself a job where it's not having to sit in one place all day, because then you can really make anything happen that you need to.

Eric Schumacher 20:23

Yeah. So what does City to City do? And how did you get that job?

Melanie Penn 20:30

I got that job, because I had, I was doing musical theater through my 20s, and I eventually just started burning out. I was like, "Oh, I don't like this." But when I was in town, I would lead worship at Redeemer. I was like the east side worship leader. And when I realized I wasn't going to audition for musicals anymore and do kind of the on-the-road musical life, I was like, "Oh, my gosh, I think I'm going to need a job." Like, I'm not going to have a job. If I don't audition for shows, I don't have a job. And so this one Sunday, there was a little ad in the bulletin that said, the Church Planting Center, which became City to City. Oh my gosh, I don't know if this is interesting to everyone. But the Church Planting Center needed a coordinator. And I just thought, "Oh, I bet I could do that." I mean, I don't even know. I had never even like gone on a job interview before. I'm like a singer and an artist. So I interviewed and got the job. And I just worked there ever since doing a myriad of things and saw the organization grow and enable church planters all over the world.

Eric Schumacher 21:41

Yeah, I think that's a great example of how a woman's gifts can be used to bless the church. And what's your experience been like, I assume, working with church leaders as a woman?

Melanie Penn 21:58

Great question. Um, well, for many years, I was the only woman at City to City. I was the only woman on staff and I have always felt for the most part that I really have had this kind of global band of brothers, like very big brothers. And there's kind of like the, you know, built-in family of guys kind of looking out for me and making sure I don't just bring, you know, go on a date with any scraggly guy in New York. You know, I always had a lot of protection and men looking out for me. I know for sure that women in the professional ministry workplace have had a lot of sticky situations. And I probably, I think I have had--gosh, Eric and Elyse, I don't know. I'm either blind to sticky situations when they happen, which I think is one of my best and worst qualities. Or I think God has just shown me a lot of favor, and I stepped into an environment that was very forward thinking, you know, so I have had--the situations that I've had that have been troubling haven't, in my view, been systemic. They've been because every once in a while you run into a jerk, you know what I mean? So, and that happens no matter who you are or what job you're doing,

Elyse Fitzpatrick 23:17

Right. I was going to ask you, you know, as far as worship leading goes, I know there are churches that would not allow a woman to lead worship. So do you--and I'm sure that Tim and Kathy probably walked you through that? Or maybe not. I mean, did you get pushback? Were you aware of pushback from that? Or is New York just different than Kansas?

Melanie Penn 23:41

Well, I think New York is different from Kansas, and Kansas from New York. I mean, they are very different contexts. When I started leading worship at Redeemer--and by the way, if you've been to a Redeemer service, it's not like your traditional worship leader setting where you're kind of like impromptu praying over a congregation and there's kind of a lot of ad lib. There's none of that in a Redeemer service. So it really is about guiding in song and facilitating the congregational singing experience. But at the time, this was unknown to me, because like I said, I can be oblivious, but I didn't--the song leader always reads the Scripture. So I go back and I listen to old Tim Keller sermons and I'm like, oh, there I am. You know, I know my voice and I can hear my voice through the years in these sermons as my voice changes. I'm like, there I am reading the Scripture. And actually, even though I'm a singer, I loved doing that, reading Scripture aloud in front of people. I just, it was the highlight of my

week. I took it so seriously, I practiced. Okay, anyway. I didn't realize that that was considered like really avant-garde for a PCA church. I don't know what it is now. At the time in like, 2001/2002 when I started--yeah it was 2002-- that Redeemer was considered, like "Wow, you're really out there." Like letting women read Scripture in the service. And of course, I love that phraseology, which we run into sometimes. It's like, oh, you let them, like you let them. You let them read Scripture publicly in a service. And it's like, yes, we let them. But I didn't know that that was considered kind of controversial at the time.

Eric Schumacher 25:22

That's sort of bizarre to me. I grew up--I understand why it could be controversial. I grew up in a conservative Lutheran Church in Iowa where the Old Testament and New Testament readings and the Gospel reading, I think were all done--well, we had people in the congregation who rotated through men and women. And so I think it wasn't till I got into Baptist contexts that it was looked upon weird to have a woman do the Scripture reading. But I love to hear that voice.

Melanie Penn 25:56

And why is that? I mean, do we know even why? Like, I guess I missed the verse when it was like, oh, when you read these letters aloud in your midst have it only be men? I missed it. I missed it.

Eric Schumacher 26:10

Well, I think for some people, they equate that with teaching.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 26:14

Yes.

Eric Schumacher 26:16

Which I don't. And, you know, Paul speaks of women prophesying and praying in the service. I mean, to have that female voice. We just had a--you know, there's some Sundays in our church, and we alternate between men and women doing the Scripture reading, and there's some Sundays where just having a female voice read the text is--it just adds something to it. And the same with the men. And since we alternate, and it's always the sermon passage, we're just going through books. We don't plan who's reading what. But it just sometimes strikes me and gives a different perspective.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 26:55

I think it has to do with, at least this is what I've heard, that if a woman is reading scripture, then that's authoritative. Like you have a stated worship service, and so then a woman reading Scripture is authoritative. I don't agree that it is authoritative in the way that the preached word is, but I've also heard people fussing about women giving announcements because that's authoritative because women are telling people they should go to a picnic.

Eric Schumacher 27:28

Yeah, or turn to hymn number 303.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 27:32

Yeah, yeah, that's authoritative.

Melanie Penn 27:34

Too far, way too far. Well, I've noticed that as well, with a variety of voices in public worship, even if it's spoken word. And women's voices kind of have a higher frequency, obviously. And there's something very like, it does something to the nervous system, even like a higher-frequency voice. I've thought about that a lot. My friend--you guys know the scene in Shawshank Redemption where they're all out in the rain, the prisoners are out in the rain, and they put a record player on. Oh no, they're not raining. It's a sunny day and they're outside in the prison yard, and they put a record player on and it's a woman's voice singing and all the prisoners just like stop. Do you know this scene?

Eric Schumacher 28:19

Yeah.

Melanie Penn 28:20

Well, a friend of mine equated a woman's voice in worship like that. Like kind of just like a bunch of prisoners in the world sometimes and like we go to worship together. And then like, a woman's voice comes on, and you're like, oh, okay, you have my attention now. It's like I'm focused again, I'm present. And I kind of never forgot that he described it that way.

Eric Schumacher 28:45

That's good. I might start sucking on helium balloons before I preach.

Melanie Penn 28:53

You both have very nice speaking voices, by the way. I'm very picky about that stuff.

Eric Schumacher 29:00

I'm kind of curious to hear a little bit more about your work in musical theater, in part because I grew up in love with musical theater. What is it like to be a woman in the musical theater scene?

Melanie Penn 29:13

Oh, gosh, well, it's been a long time now, I must admit. It is kind of a rock-and-roll lifestyle, at least when I was in it. Because you're on the road, and it's a bunch of young people. And when I was on the road in musical theater, I tended to be a little bit more introverted, like I kind of would do the show and go back to my hotel room. So I don't really know if there's a difference between men and women in the experience they have, but there is a difference between getting immersed in the artist's lifestyle on the road and not, and all the baggage that comes with that. So I must say that, the biggest tour I do every year in my artist project is a Christmas tour and it is about the least rock-and-roll experience for anyone who is on it, and I like it much better.

Eric Schumacher 30:17

Now, you toured with Grease, right?

Melanie Penn 30:20

Yes.

Eric Schumacher 30:21

Were you with Frankie Avalon?

Melanie Penn 30:23

I was!

Eric Schumacher 30:24

Yes! Elyse, was he your heartthrob crush when you were a teen?

Elyse Fitzpatrick 30:28

Uh, no. No, no, no, I was more of the Beatles.

Melanie Penn 30:35

Yes, it might have been--Frankie Avalon might be a little before your time, honestly, Elyse.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 30:42

Like a tiny bit before my time. But listen, the Beatles. I saw the Beatles when I was 13 years old in Los Angeles, and it changed my life forever.

Melanie Penn 30:51

Oh, I bet!

Elyse Fitzpatrick 30:52

When they first came to the United States, I saw them at the Hollywood Bowl. That's a whole other story. But anyway, no I'm a Beatles girl.

Eric Schumacher 31:05

And you just saw them again, didn't you, recently?

Elyse Fitzpatrick 31:09

I saw Paul McCartney. This is the coolest thing Mel. I have a 21-year-old grandson, and he for Mother's Day last year took me to see Paul McCartney when he came here to San Diego. And it was like, I don't know, 50 years later, from the first time I saw Paul McCartney. And now I'm there with my grandson. And it was one of the most beautiful experiences of my life, quite frankly.

Melanie Penn 31:43

Amazing! And how is his singing voice? Is he still just like--

Elyse Fitzpatrick 31:47

You know, he's older. He's older.

Melanie Penn 31:49

He's in his eighties!

Elyse Fitzpatrick 31:49

Yeah, but you know, the production value of what he does when he tours, I mean, it's worth it. Even if his voice isn't as strong as it was. The music, the lights, the everything? I mean, it was amazing.

Melanie Penn 32:07

Wow, that's really cool.

Eric Schumacher 32:10

Melanie, can you still do the hand jive?

Melanie Penn 32:13

I probably can! I haven't tried to, but I certainly did it enough times.

Eric Schumacher 32:18

Let's talk a little bit about, so you moved out of Broadway, into the church. And at some point you decided to work on, instead of performing other people's songs, writing and singing your own. How did that start?

Melanie Penn 32:34

Well, all these transitional life moments--we're touching on them. I always was interested in being an artist like, Melanie Penn the artist, but I never thought I could write songs. So my musical upbringing was always very focused on, well how could I just fit my singing voice into another context where the music is written for me? And that really leads you to stage productions, right? Or like singing jazz music, maybe. But I even remember thinking also like, Oh, I could never move to Nashville and be an artist, so I'll just move to New York and be on Broadway, like that's so much easier. And eventually, my true desire to be an artist in my own right just overpowered everything else. And I had a boyfriend in New York who was a well-known piano player. He played piano for a lot of singers. And so I was kind of in the whole singer-songwriter world on the Lower East Side, really, in the aftermath of like, Norah Jones getting really big. And there was this real heyday of female singer-songwriters in New York at that time, and this guy I was dating was kind of a part of that. Meanwhile, I had this lifelong theme, like this lifelong refrain that I had spoken over myself that was like, oh I could never write songs. No one else said that. I said that. I said that. And so one day we're in my apartment and I was singing to myself in my kitchen, and the guy I was dating at the time was like, "What are you singing?" I'm like, "Oh, I'm singing my thoughts." He was like, "What?" I sing my thoughts. Don't you sing your thoughts? He was like, "No, I never sing my thoughts." And he's like, "What are you singing? Sing that to me again." And he's like, "Your thoughts rhyme?" And I'm like, "Yeah, well, yeah, of course. Like, it's just a thing. I don't know. They rhyme."

Elyse Fitzpatrick 34:53

Doesn't everybody's?

Melanie Penn 34:54

Yes. He was like, "Melanie, you write songs." And that tiny moment in my kitchen in the East Village started to make me think, "Wait, could I?" I mean, this is late in life. I'm in my mid 20s, at this point. Most songwriters have already dipped their toe in way before this. But I was in such agony in the musical theater world that I just didn't have a choice, except to try to write songs. And I started to get annoyed too, going to see other women. Oh, and this is kind of an interesting thing that ties into the work you guys are doing. But I started to get really annoyed going to like the Living Room and Rockwood Music Hall and these really iconic places in New York and seeing other women sing their own songs. And like, I couldn't go and enjoy it, because I was like, I want to do that. How can I do that? And I think what that taught me was when you have this feeling, you know, either toward another woman or maybe toward another human that's just like, I want that. What's that thing? That it doesn't have to be a negative. Like, it doesn't have to be feeling jealousy or envy. It can actually be a little bit of a guiding light. If someone is representing something that you want to do, it's an unpleasant experience. But guess what? Starting something new and going after something you want is often kind of unpleasant. So anyway, that's how that happened. I don't know if that jumble of thoughts make sense, but that's how I kind of transitioned into songwriting.

Eric Schumacher 36:40

I really like that perspective, what you just shared about seeing a woman singing her own songs and saying, "What's that? I want that." Yeah, and it not being wrong. You know, it's not envious. A few years ago, I had a publisher contact me about a piece of fiction that I'd written, and she was interested in pitching it to her team to see if it could be published, and nothing ever came of it. And I was talking to Zack Eswine, and he said--and we were talking about that experience. And somewhere along the line, I've been trained to think that if I really wanted something and it didn't come to pass, then it must have been sin and God was showing me what my idols are. Right? And Zach says to me, he says, "Isn't it sometimes good that God gives us those little experiences just to encourage our hearts with the things he's created us to do? Like just to propel us along further." And it was such a good, alternate perspective to the, you know, it's always sin.

Melanie Penn 37:51

Right, right. Oh my gosh, we need that because I wasn't like watching the weather girl on the news and being like, "Oh, I want to do that." It was really specific. And, um, repeat what you just said about thinking it's sin. Cuz I think a lot of--say that one more time.

Eric Schumacher 38:11

Well, somewhere I had been trained to think that if I wanted something and it didn't come to pass, then it must have been an idol. And I needed to repent of it.

Melanie Penn 38:21

Okay, piggybacking on that, did you guys ever hear, "If you have a desire that's too strong, God will take it from you."

Elyse Fitzpatrick 38:33

Oh, yeah.

Eric Schumacher 38:33

Oh, yeah.

Melanie Penn 38:35

You guys, I just think this is crippling theology. And it's both of those things together. And I think it's held people back from their dreams.

Eric Schumacher 38:44

Unpack that, because as a creator, you're moving into a new realm as the singer-songwriter. I think your first album came out 10 years ago?

Melanie Penn 38:57

Oh my gosh, yes.

Eric Schumacher 38:56

And so you're a new Christian. You're learning to love God, and you're learning to love singer-songwriter stuff, and it would be easy to think this new pursuit is unspiritual. And if I'm going to do something Christian, then I should be a worship leader or a missionary in Africa, not someone who's writing breakup songs on wakeup love.

Melanie Penn 39:25

Okay, wait, but--there's so many things in that. What's the actual, like, how would I apply desire--how does desire fit into that or how is God speaking in that? I mean, I really am only an artist, but I must think that all humans are this way. There's something you want, and we will--a great preacher friend of mine who's Lutheran actually, based in Houston, Matt Popovits, he says--

Elyse Fitzpatrick 40:01

Oh yeah, Matt.

Melanie Penn 40:02

Oh, I love Matt.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 40:03

I love Matt.

Melanie Penn 40:05

So are you Lutheran background as well?

Elyse Fitzpatrick 40:07

I have a bunch of Lutheran pals, and Matt is one of them.

Melanie Penn 40:12

Ah, he is just dynamite. But yeah, he says this thing that's like "You naturally drift toward what you want." So it's like, it's not that hard to figure it out. It's like, you're gonna be zeroing in on it even if you don't want to be. And I think what we're supposed to do with our lives can be so tied to desire, and then desire is something in the Christian faith, in the Christian life, that I don't think we've been taught how to hold very well, or how to direct it very well. Because, you know, desire can also be a little bit scary. And it's like, but we also desire bad things. And it's like, well, do we? It's like, I don't know if we actually do when we're talking about our calling or expressing our gifts or like bringing our best selves forward into society. And I don't know about anyone else, but like, those desires far supersede any fleshly desires I've ever had. It's like, so I don't know if that answers your question. But I think somehow learning to listen to desire and follow it and its holy work is really important. I think it can save people a lot of time if they just zero in on their desires kind of quickly and trust that they're there for a reason.

Eric Schumacher 41:41

Yeah, that is just really a fascinating conversation. I think, as a young person, I grew up wanting to be in musical theater and to be a singer-songwriter. Then I grew in my faith in college and decided that the most spiritual thing I could do was become a pastor. And that's a whole story.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 42:06

I'm surprised you didn't go for a missionary

Melanie Penn 42:08

Ok, interesting.

Eric Schumacher 42:09

Yeah, yeah. And so even now, as you know, a few years ago I started trying to write folk and country songs and do that sort of thing. But it's been interesting to think through the decisions we make based on what we think is most spiritual.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 42:24

Yeah.

Eric Schumacher 42:25

I did think missionary first. And then I didn't want to live outside the US.

Melanie Penn 42:32

Well, but Eric, do you feel as though your actual desires changed as you had a faith awakening? I mean, was that also part of it? Because I think that happens too, like, what you actually desire can change.

Eric Schumacher 42:43

Um, I don't know. I don't know. Because I still desire those things. You know, Jenny knows that if we go watch a musical, she is gonna hear me singing show tunes and complaining that I can't be in a musical for three weeks. So--

Melanie Penn 43:01

Hey, well, maybe there's still--there's got to be community theater or whatever in your area, right?

Eric Schumacher 43:07

One day. There's always roles for old people.

Melanie Penn 43:11

I mean, all of it--it's not a perfect science, right? Because then we also have to learn how to cope with unmet desires. And that's a very, that's also very real. So it's a complex life that we live and it's complex to be human.

Eric Schumacher 43:23

Right. That is a great segue to our next episode talking about unmet desires. And Melanie is going to come back with us for another episode of Worthy and talk about another part of her story. So we're going to conclude today's episode, and we would ask that if you've enjoyed this, not only we hope that you've subscribed, but that you would go and like and review and do all the social media stuff you're supposed to do with podcasts and tell your friends and your mom to listen along as well. But we'll be back with you next time with special guest, Melanie Penn.

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