



## 9: The Daily Struggle of Salvaging

Hi, I'm Elisa Preston. You're listening to episode 10 of Praise Through It.



This podcast is based on Philippians 4:8, which says “Finally brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, whatever is excellent and praiseworthy -- think about these things.” My goal will always be to help you see an old burden in a new way, to see the praiseworthy side of your daily struggles. To see life in a way that brings hope, and in a way that shows the glimmer of light that inevitably shines, even in the daily grind. If that's something you're working on or you'd like to be a part of, listen in.



In the last 15 years, my military family and I have lived across six cities and in nine homes. And I know some of you military families listening blow me out of the water with that, but that's our story so far. In none of those homes have we had a basement or extra storage space. So we've kind of always just lived our life out in the open. Our former DVD collection was on wide-open shelves. The books I'm reading, always on an end table. Whatever TV show we're going through, the DVD case is always on the TV stand. (By the way, once in a while, we actually don't stream. It's a nice little throwback). And since 2015, our daughter's toys have always had space in our main living area. We maybe could have made a play area, but I liked having her in our great room. I always thought that would make her feel like she was 100% part of the family. “Mommy and Daddy live here with their books and their card games and their computers; I live here, too, with my puzzles and games and toys.”

The flip side of that though is feeling crowded on a regular basis, especially when everything isn't in its very specific place that Mommy has created. And even when everything was in its place I would look around almost every day and want to Marie Kondo all the way up and down my house. I would go to friends' houses and wonder... why do they have so much less stuff than me? What do their kids do to stay busy? I have one kid, I don't like to shop, we don't indulge toy

whims and certainly don't consider ourselves hoarders or huge collectors of anything tangible. So, what was I doing wrong?

Then I would remember: number one, stop comparing yourself. And number two, these people to whom I was comparing myself to - thinking they were better cleaners and better at keeping a house than I am - well, sometimes that's true (laugh), but most of the time: they just had more or different space. They had big garages and separate play rooms and basements wherein the mess could hide. So while fighting the monster of comparison against these women who I love, I also reminded myself - just because you can't see the mess doesn't mean it's not there. And, I thought, there's something to be said for living your mess out loud.

I do not mean that keeping your house a mess is the answer, or that blasting your heart out in every public space is the way to go. I also don't mean to downplay the importance of simplicity and tidying up, because they are essential for soul care.

But do you know what happens to our brain and to our body when we try to keep our mess inside? When we do that, when we live our mess only on the inside, we are essentially giving that mess mental real estate. That's a term I learned from Dr. Caroline Leaf. And anything that earns mental real estate earns actual space in our neural system and goes on to become part of who we are, an actual, physical, study-able part of our bodies, whether it becomes a protein or a collection of cells or a morphing of our DNA code. And it can manifest itself however it sees fit: defensiveness, gluttony, avoidance, frugality of spirit, excessive fear, excessive pessimism, underlying anger, outright anger, and so many more.

Researchers used to think that the brain was this fixed hub of activity that didn't change; and now they know that the brain is neuroplastic and the brain ebbs and flows with how we think, how we speak, and how we act. The brain can be trained, retrained, and untrained, which is one of my favorite things I've learned over the last five years.

So every time we choose to live our mess on the inside, we are sending signals to our whole self that says THIS MATTERS, PAY ATTENTION TO THIS. Our brain is neuroplastic - neuroplasticity is the concept that our brains change and mold based on our choices. We are training our brain--through our mind--in a very specific pattern of behavior, we are creating a specific experience based on what we think, say, and do.

In matters of everyday life, this can create a problem because we're essentially mistreating, mistraining, and limiting ourselves by letting our mess take up all this internal space.

Now, in matters of abuse and trauma, that kind of brain activity can be life-saving. Also, once we've moved past the survival aspect we can start sending our body new signals. Aundi Kolber, a trauma therapist and author of a book called Try Softer, calls it being a compassionate witness to our stories, which can work in trauma healing as well as in everyday life.

Let me give you a real-world example. When I was in 5th grade I played the flute. I actually played from fourth grade all the way through twelve grade. My seat on stage for early-morning rehearsal was on the end of one of the semi-circle rows. One fateful morning, I picked up my seat--like, I picked up my actual chair--to move it and one of the corners of the chair legs fell off the stage, therefore I fell off the stage right down the bleachers that the chorus used. Yes, thank goodness those bleachers were there. ALSO - how fun is it for a 10 year old to slide down some bleachers and land under a cafeteria table, only to slam her head into the metal when she tries to stand up, in front of 90 of her closest friends to include the boy she had a crush on?!

Absolutely humiliating.

If I had clung to that humiliation, it would have started small. I can't go to band practice again, what a joke I am; I don't belong there. But it would've grown if I had taken that momentary humiliation and generalized it to my whole self: I can't go to college, what a joke. I can't get married, I don't know how to do that. I can't be a mom, who am I kidding? I would have convinced myself over time that I was a fool and that I was an embarrassing human being, and I would have become an adult who operated out of that created truth. Dr. Caroline Leaf says: Our genes - the way our body operates as the outside self - is constantly being remodeled based on life experiences. Staying in those thought patterns of being an embarrassing or foolish human lead us to this sad disposition that we're not who we want to be, that we're not worth loving, that we're not worth being, and I probably don't know you personally but I can tell you with 100% certainty: that is absolutely not the case.

It's okay if you're feeling like a lousy parent on a hectic Tuesday when your toddler throws her lunch off the table. You can share that and commiserate about it with a friend. Live that mess out loud, wipe the carrot off the wall, and move on to your next activity.

It's okay if you and your husband had an argument about where his socks and your leggings go in the closet. It's difficult sometimes to share a space, no matter how long you've been doing it. Text a friend, live that mess out loud, and let it go.

It's okay if you spilled your entire chicken soup on the kitchen floor 20 minutes after finishing a huge, fresh batch. Cry. Live that mess out loud. Then pick it up and eat some cookies.

It's okay if you have someone over and your homeschool stuff isn't put away. We've been collectively isolated for more than a year. Social interaction and community is the goal; perfection of home is not. Welcome your friends, talk about each other's day and enjoy a snack.

It's okay if you hit the REPLY ALL button at work. Own it. Live that mess out loud. Reply All again with a joke and then double-triple check from this day forward.

It's okay if the one day you forget to show up at the bus stop is the rainiest day of the season. Apologize, laugh about it, and remember tomorrow.

We've gotten the message along the way that holding it all tight and nice and dress-right-dress is the only way to do it. It's not. Living our mess out loud is human. It's healthy. It's liberating. It puts our heart in this really pure place where you're not putting on a mask or a facade for anyone or anything, not even for yourself. You're not walking around every corner, hoping some pesky houseguest doesn't open the wrong door, and instead of going in the bathroom she goes in the closet and all your stuff is gonna fall right out. You don't have to be worried about that.

Living your mess out loud is saying: God made me this way. I rest in the true self He made me to be. He made me with all of my ins and outs and quirks and gifts and oopsie daisies and everything else. We strive to make ourselves better, we evolve with time, we have a close set of people we can be extra out-loud with. We go to therapy if we want some help working the mess out. And we let our messes be part of our story, part of who we are, without shame or guilt or cowering.

When we step into confidence instead of shame, then that confidence takes up mental real estate in our brains and in our bodies. We train ourselves--we train our brains--to be people who act like we belong because we do belong, regardless of the mess we're living through.



What's true is that living our mess out loud can be embarrassing and messy and scary.

What's also true is that your story has been written since the beginning of time. God knit you through and through and as we fumble through figuring this all out, He's there with you and for you, cheering you on. And so am I.



Thank you for listening to episode 10 of Praise Through It. I so value the time you spend with me and my voice every two weeks. If you're looking for a way to connect beyond your earbuds, I send a blessing to my readers every Monday morning; I'd love to share that with you. It's a short note of encouragement to start your week and you can read or listen to the blessing, about 45 seconds or less. Sign up right in the show notes.

Look for scripture in the show notes, too, regarding how you were knit together, how God made you in His image, and how we don't have to cower in guilt or shame. Also in the show notes are links to authors Dr. Caroline Leaf and Aundi Kolber, both mentioned in today's episode.

That's it for today. I'll see you next time for episode 11 of Praise Through It.



(Bloopers)

We twain-- (rewind noise)... Our bwain (giggle)...

(Fade out)