



5: Going All In on Hope

Hi, I'm Elisa Preston. Welcome to episode 5 of Praise Through It.



This is a podcast based on Philippians 4:8, which says, brothers & sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is admirable -- if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about these things. Here, we practice seeing the praiseworthy side of our daily struggles. I'll offer you a perspective that shifts our eyes from our daily grind to seeing the beauty in the mess, the order through the chaos, the glimmer of hope that inevitably shines. If that's something you're working on or you'd like to be a part of, listen in.



Last October, one of my very best friends invited me to an overnight at the beach with her. It would be our last rendezvous before I moved away so it was an immediate, all-in yes. She and I are experts at squeezing every bit of fun and talk and time out of any time we spend together.

Before checkout at noon and after we had taken a post-sunrise nap, we made our way to the hot tub and pool in the back of the hotel. I had always wondered why people staying at a beachfront property would choose the pool instead of the shoreline. The pool is right there on the other side of the gate that leads to the beach. Well, now I know why. Because it's relaxing, there's no sand whipping in your face, and it's easy access to the food and the restroom without all the stickiness from being on the beach for hours. And plus we had spent hours on the beach the night before. So in the morning we went into the hot tub because, why not?

Now, I'm not a typical wild child, so forgive me if this doesn't sound crazy to you, but it was to me -- I suggested we go from the hot tub, run and jump into the cold pool, then hurry up and get back into the hot tub. I wanted to experience the extreme, sudden change. I wanted to go all in. I didn't want to worry about how cold I'd be. I didn't want to worry about the tingles of heat that would ripple through my body once I hopped back into the hot tub. And I didn't want to worry about possibly being disappointed if it wasn't all I thought it would be.

If there is one thing that the last 12ish months has done, it has given the perpetual pessimists of this world their day. I mean, worse things could be happening. Also, we are a year into a global pandemic, learning what it means to be an anti-racist and an ally, engaging in and observing the

culture wars that just seem deeper and more profound, and we are experiencing significant public political ideology differences among our people. We have perfected the art of disappointment. We know what it means. We know what it looks like to expect disappointment. And we know how and when to expect disappointment. So much so that we've come to think that's normal and healthy.

Let me tell you something, just because it's normal does not make it healthy. Let me say that again: just because it's normal does not make it healthy. Just because it's commonplace does not mean it's for us.



What I really want to tell you is that I get it. I walked 2020 as well, my friend, and in many ways it was not kind to my family. In many ways it was, like the friend who lived with us and became our Quarantine Family, and the oodles of extra time we got with each other, especially with our daughter. But in big ways, 2020 wasn't. We had to pivot last March, big time. For me, it was another chance to learn what's next. For my husband, it was another notch in the NOW WHAT column. And you know what? I didn't blame him. Not one bit.

Still, as with everything, there's a balance to oscillating between optimism and pessimism. And I think that scale keeps getting significantly weighed down on the wrong side. We keep letting the disappointment take root and grow, and we're letting it crowd out the hope. We're letting it crowd out the optimism.

I'm going to be honest: I'm not digging it. Like I said, I know it's all normal, the undercurrent of disappointment and pessimism. We've been living in chronic, pervasive stress for a year, at least. Expecting disappointment is a natural tendency, any counselor or neuroscientist will tell you that.

I don't think we have to permanently choose between pessimism and optimism. But I DO think that if optimism underlies our general disposition, our hearts will be lighter, our perspectives will be healthier, and our relationships will be stronger.

I just know that I have to start dreaming again. I can't wait for all the things that are out of my control to get better or to change enough so that I feel free. I just can't do that to myself. I have to plan vacations for next year. I have to think about first grade for my daughter. I have to decide that I want to learn to ski next winter. Even if none of it happens, I have to dream. I have to be optimistic and hope that they do happen.

One of my favorite combinations is brain and Bible. I love when neuroscientific research shows God's flawless design. One of my favorite scientists in this arena is Dr. Caroline Leaf. She taught me that my brain is neuroplastic, it is malleable. She talks a lot about mental health and about how changing deeply rooted thought patterns--such as anticipated disappointment, chronic fear, pessimism, and anxiety--has a significant impact on our physical health. I did her 365 Day Switch on Your Brain devotional last year, which I highly recommend. Thank you to my friend Brenda who gave it to me.

On Day 209, I read that “neuroplasticity can operate for us as well as against us, because whatever we think about the most will grow.” And I know that we’ve all heard versions of that; what you focus on expands and things like that. But what she has shown in her research is that it expands because we literally wire our brains to be whatever we are focusing on. We plant on our brains, on our neurons, on our neural pathways, the things that we focus on. So we literally change our brains with what we focus on.

And in the case of the years 2020 and 2021 (so far, anyway), I think we’ve stayed stuck in the Disappointment Box for long enough. I think we’ve trained our brains to expect disappointment, so much so that we’ve trained ourselves right out of the optimism, right out of the hope. And I think we’ve let it take over too much of who we are, individually and collectively.

So what should we do? My first course of action was to start dreaming again. And I encourage you to do the same. I’ve put a deposit down on a vacation in February 2022 and I have high hopes for a few more. Might they be cancelled? Sure. But I’m done giving everything a disclaimer right from the start. I’m going all in. I’m remaining in hope and optimism and if the disappointment comes, I’ll feel it deeply and then move on.



I really believe that whether we anticipate the disappointment from the beginning or we just feel it big at one time, it’s the same amount of disappointment; it’s just a matter of it being spread out over time or clustered all at once. And it’s wise to pay attention to available information. It’s wise to think about things before we jump into them. Also--I think the low hum of disappointment we’ve allowed to run in the undercurrent of our lives does damage to our hearts, to our hope, and to our trust in a Creator who has created us for abundance, delight, joy, and fun. And without those things, I think it turns us toward operating out of fear, which is even more dangerous and even more tiring than the disappointment.

In 30 years, will we be glad that we disclaimer-ed our way out of the hope? In 30 years, will we be glad that we “just in case”d our way out of things instead of planning and hoping and maybe hitting 50 percent of what we hoped for? In 30 years, will we be glad we didn’t go all in for fear of one more big sadness, one more big setback? Or will we wish we had held onto our hope and our optimism? I’m going to say... that in 30 years we will be glad that we held on to our hope and our optimism.

Going all in for hope and optimism means risking your heart, risking all the feelings. But not going in means risking your heart, too. It’s like putting up a dam around your heart because you don’t want it flooded out should the disappointments threaten a tsunami. But then nothing else can get through, either. We start losing out on all the good stuff. The hope. The joy. The delight. The fun.

The character trait of flexibility is a good, healthy one, but it’s not meant to replace our optimism and our hope. It’s meant to help us adapt in the moment, not anticipate doom from the start. That’s an entirely different character trait. Called pessimism. Which we’ve already decided has had its day and should now and forever be ushered out and away.

Now, as a personal admission to you, I'll tell you that in a military family, we learn to dream and hope above and around the training schedules. And, lo and behold, within minutes of finishing writing this episode, my husband told me his April schedule for National Guard and it matches up very nicely with the weekend we planned to take a little semi-local getaway. "Of course," I said to him, after he told me. I just covered my face and laughed. I told him about this episode and he asked me if I'm turning to pessimism. I said no, because I still hope we can get away in the next couple months before he leaves for his next Army school. I still hope, I said, and I just move on with another plan.



What's true is that some of us are still grieving the changed plans that took a hard swerve in March 2020. Back then I said, "See you in a few weeks" to my students and 11 months later, almost to the day, they returned to a building where I no longer worked.

What's true is that living in a time of chronic, pervasive stress is a great excuse to operate out of anticipated disappointment. What's true is that assuming disappointment is easier in the moment.

But none of that is noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, or praiseworthy. And that's what we're here to do, to see the praiseworthy side of our daily struggles, to give the case for going ALL IN. All in for hoping, for planning, in your parenting, your marriage, your future plans, everything.

What's true is that we have the capacity for hope, if only we rest in it. In brain-science terms, this means we have the capacity to change our minds and rewire our brains for optimism and hope.

What's noble is not letting fear win, ever.

What's pure is coming at our hopes with a child-like delight.

What's admirable is teaching our children that when we weigh hope and anticipated disappointment, we always choose hope.

What's excellent is siding with surety and confidence, knowing flexibility might be in your future.

What's praiseworthy is remembering all the times in the Bible when goodness, wholeness, abundance, delight, and fun are promised.

Choosing to go all-in and hope for the best is not being naive, and it is not being ignorant of the what-ifs. It's choosing to live in the space of What If This Does Work. It's choosing the full life, the life of abundant love, the life of extravagant hope, the life of enthusiastic delight.



Let us come at our days with an underlying disposition of optimism. Let us ignite the hope, first in our home and then beyond. Let us anticipate joy. Let us believe for good things. And for Pete's sake, let us send the perpetual pessimist out and away now and forever as we welcome the eternal optimism to be our undercurrent and our new companion from here on out.

Today, may your heart find a space to jump all the way in as you consider a wholehearted life. May your 'all in' bring you to a deeper faith, a deeper connection with your creator, and a deeper way of life that brings peace and joy.

Thank you for listening to episode 5 of Praise Through It.

Life can be messy and chaotic and hard, and we can see that side, and we can find the glimmers of light that shine through our everyday. No rose-colored glasses, but true things that bring hope and joy and peace.

I love connecting here with you every two weeks. If you ever want to connect beyond your speakers or your earbuds, I'm mostly on Instagram as myself, Elisa Preston. You can also find me at elisapreston.com. Right now I'm doing daily Lent reflections on my blog, if you want to head there and sign up, I'll put the link in the show notes. You'll also find more about my books, speaking at your event, and some fun extras. I also love one-to-one chats, if you ever want to say hi or tell me about something an episode made you think of, you can send a message to hello@elisapreston.com - I'm always up for that. I've created public playlists on both Spotify and Apple Music if you'd like a Praise Through It soundtrack to go about your day. Just search the title of this podcast, Praise Through It, on either app under their Playlist feature.



Oh, and in case you're wondering, Rosanna did take me up on the hot-cold-hot and we have the picture and the heart memory to prove it. It was everything I hoped it would be: I felt every pinprick of cold, every tingle of heat. It was uncomfortable, I was a little scared, but it was exhilarating, it was fun, it was absolutely delightful. It was all the good things an adventure has to offer. We allowed ourselves to hope, and then we went all in.