



Season 4 | Episode 5

## How to Choose Joy When Coping with Severe Allergies and Environmental Illness

### Danika Deva

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Crystal Keating:

I'm Crystal Keating and you're listening to the Joni and Friends Ministry Podcast. Each week we're bringing you encouraging conversations about finding hope through hardship... and sharing practical ways that you can include people with disability in your church and community.

Danika Deva is joining us on the podcast today to share how she learned to find freedom and hope through acceptance after developing a serious illness that isolated her from the people she loved and the places she enjoyed. Welcome to the podcast, Danika.

Danika Deva:

Thank you for having me. I'm delighted to be here.

Crystal Keating:

Oh, we're so glad to speak with you today. And Danika, can we start off by hearing a little bit about you? Please share with us how your life changed in 2016.

Danika Deva:

Yeah, I would love to share. I was teaching at a local university and decided to take the job as an educational coordinator at a boys and girls home. I knew I could, you know help those kids from hard places and it would just be a delight to connect and love on them. And when I got to the home, I started having severe migraines immediately. My eyes were running, congestion, and losing energy. And I thought, well this is just a difficult job, you know? All the things that you think.

Um, started having confusion and systemic inflammation and didn't really know what it was. Went to the doctor, you know, did the normal things, took antihistamine and it continued to get worse. The flu-like symptoms created severe bone pain and joint pain and muscle pain. And it would feel like I had the flu for five to seven days.

And it just kinda kept going and going. And I just, you know, adapted. I remember about six, seven months later, I went to a conference. When I came back from that conference, I noticed I felt better, but then it hit me like a ton of bricks and I just got super sick and I started reacting with all kinds of reactions, twitching and stabbing pain and migraines.



I just realized something was seriously wrong. The thing that really changed my focus was when I got lost coming home from work and I realized I was in a different city, and I had to Google my way home. And that's when I was like, I need to go to the doctor and get to the end of this.

And I went to many doctors, and they tried to figure it out, allergy testing to find out what I'm allergic to and why I was swelling and why I wanted to vomit. And suddenly my body started being allergic to animals and hyper allergic to grasses and mold, and I became reactive to the sun. If I went in the sun for even three or four minutes, I would just go into the sleep light state for six to 12 hours or longer.

So, I had to carry an umbrella when I was walking in the sun. Chemicals, uh, started affecting me, laundry detergent, and any cleaner I used. And I started losing the ability to eat foods. I have an "Another Food Bites the Dust" list, 'cause I would eat avocado one day and the next day my throat would go numb and I knew I couldn't eat avocado anymore or nuts or celery.

I got down to 20 foods and my body just kept shutting down and shutting down. And what was really happening is I was reactive to mold and mildew and dust, and then my mast cells in my body, which are your emergency cells, they just went haywire, and they turned, in just hyper-reactivity. So basically, I became allergic to nouns, which I say people, places, and things. But that's really what happened.

So, I started wearing masks and a respirator, a mold respirator. When I went into the schools with the students, I stopped working in my office and this was pre-COVID. So, I kind of started the fashion trend of wearing masks and, uh, uh, you know, life just had to change. I had to go into isolation to protect myself because avoidance was the best thing. There's medicines that you could take, et cetera.

But it was just an awful time of isolation. Moving back home, working from Zoom before it was popular, and just trying to avoid anything that could trigger a reaction so that I could feel the best that I could. So that was up until 2018, I started having the students come to my house to study with them.

And again, just accommodating the best I could on the good days and the bad days. Then in August, I didn't want to go to church. I had to leave my church that I loved because I was allergic to the church. I joked to my pastor that I wasn't allergic to his sermon. His sermons didn't make me sick; it was the church.

I Googled; "How do I find a church that's a new building?" And I drove like an hour and 15 minutes to go to church. Ironically it was my seventh time at that church. Didn't want to go and I was arguing with the Lord the whole drive. And I'm like, okay, Lord, I trust you. You say to trust in the Lord. I keep trying to understand and the Lord, I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

And I was repenting the whole way and I get to church, and I had worn my cloth mask. I started reacting, started to pass out. My blood pressure was crashing. Go outside. Luckily, they have a



police officer outside just in case. Um, waited five, six minutes came back in, and God gave me a song called “Healed” and he said past tense. I’m like, huh, that’s interesting.

And they asked who wanted prayer? I went up front and suddenly this zinging when the pastor prayed over me went from my shoulder where he touched me to the center of my body. And I’m like, Lord, are you healing me? Cause I was praying for healing every single day. And then I’m like, God, are you just doing half, one side?

Are you right-handed? You know, I’m trying to figure out what was happening. And I said, God if you’re really healing me when I take my mask off, my face will be white instead of lobster red. Cause I didn’t go into anaphylaxis at that church, but I did turn red and feel sick. And I went in the bathroom afterwards and my face was white, and I knew that God had healed me.

To what extent, I didn’t know. I just had to go, okay, do I throw my epi-pens out the window? How about the 200 to 300 antihistamines I take a month? What do I do? You know, called my family. I’m like, God healed me. He healed my shoulder at the same time, and it was very exciting. Ended up moving back to town so I could be near my family and did quite well until my house molded.

So, the first time, I lost everything in my classroom. And then the second time, my house molded in August of 2018, and I lost everything suddenly. Cause once cross-contamination happens, when you’re hyper allergic, um, you can’t keep anything that’s not glass, or you can try to clean. It doesn’t work.

So as my house molded, again I just got sicker and sicker. Didn’t know why, and I’m like what’s happening. Decided to move in with my dad, adopted dad. He lives in Japan, and I was going to go back and work from there and help him pack up and move back to America. And, um he had a stroke and so I moved in to stay with him and help him and heal.

And I got sicker and sicker in that home. I didn’t know that I would go into round two. So, June 2020 round two hit me like crazy. I was just outside playing cards and suddenly I couldn’t even count my cards up, the points, because the cognitive brain fog that happened. Um started going to anaphylaxis, lost my voice, fluid filled my lungs.

And then that was the start of what I call round two, where it hit me so hard, anaphylaxis after anaphylaxis. You know, my hair is falling out. I feel like I’m dying. Went down to 10 foods on my “Another Food Bites the Dust” list. It was brutal. It was really brutal. Ended up moving out to live in a camper. And all I did was sleep and pray and sleep and pray and beg God for healing and sleep and pray.

And God has slowly healed me this time. Little by little by little, different aspects. I can tell emotional healing, physical healing. I remember the day, October 13th, where I had no more anaphylaxis. And that was just very nice to know because you just don’t have to fear suddenly dying, but I was still allergic to mold, but it was like 20 days ago when God miraculously healed me, I felt singing through my body.



I knew he was healing me. I called tons of people. I'm like pray now for me, pray over me, show up in my driveway and pray for me. God's doing healing. He told me he was going to heal me, but I was just waiting for the exact time. And so, since then, I've been able to go everywhere and do things that I never thought I would do.

You don't think you could travel again? You don't think you could go into your kid's home. My son lives in a hundred-year-old building, so it's been very exciting. But I understand that feeling of being stuck, like emotionally and physically and trapped. You know, when you're living from day to day wondering, okay, if I eat this, am I going to die?

Is my fluid gonna fill my lungs? Do I need to go to the hospital this time or not? It's just a hard, difficult place to live. And in isolation, as people know because of the pandemic, it's very hard to be alone and sick, and going through this. So, that's kind of the short version of the story.

Lots of miracles, very cool miracles, lots of difficulty.

Crystal Keating:

Well, and I know many of our listeners can relate to that sense of uncertainty, the ups and downs of a disability or multiple chemical sensitivity, or allergies in your case. How do you manage kind of the unexpected parts of life when you were sick?

I don't want to take away from the fact that you are healed, and God is blessing you. I'm so thankful. Praise God.

Danika Deva:

I call that area of the scary unknown, but it's a lot less scary when we tune into the Father. Right? And so, for me, I constantly just say, "Hey, go to God, go to God." We never know.

We think we know what's happening next. But I mean, we know that COVID kind of showed us that we don't have control. So, go to the Father. Seek him, repent, and surrender everything, and then repeat. That's kind of my motto, you know, over and over because we do get stuck.

Our mindset will be, oh, well, I'm just trapped and it's never going to get better. And that's not true. Even through the worst time of our lives, we can still minister. We can still love on people. We can still pray. If all you're doing is flat on your bed on your back, you can still pray.

There's always something that we can do to give back to others, even in our pain. I remember in 2020 when my body was basically dying, I said, God, I need to die. I can't live anymore. I just can't, I wasn't suicidal or anything, but I just knew my body was shutting down and I was dying, and it was 11 o'clock at night.

And I get a phone call at 11:05. And my friend Nancy called me and said, "Danika, I know it's late, but I just knew that I could call you for some hope because my eyes are bleeding and I'm



going blind.” And I was like, okay, Lord, I’m still supposed to be here. That was probably one of my most hopeless moments.

He asked me to minister out of my most hopeless moment when I’m like, take me home right now. We’ve all been there, right? We’ve all been at that spot. And it was God saying, no, no. I’m not done. And you can love out of this. You can help others, even out of your pain, out of being trapped, even when you’re feeling completely awful.

And so, I’ll never forget that moment. And fast forward like, eight months, she was blind, and we went to a concert together and it was like, I’m in a church that has mold and I’m breathing fine, and she can’t see, but she’s laughing her head off at the comedian. Right? It’s so cool how fast forward God shows up, and even out of your desperate moments to bring you back together, you know.

Crystal Keating:

Joy of friendship and knowing that God is with us. Well, you talk about purpose being really, I think, linked with hope. So, what are some of the ways that we can eliminate hope destroyers? I think finding our purpose, finding God’s purpose through our suffering is really powerful. What are some other ways that we can eliminate hope destroyers in our life?

Danika Deva:

Yeah, I have something that I call a Power Page where I create practical solutions for everyday life. And one of my Power Pages is to eradicate hope destroyers because we know that hope only comes from God in his word.

We sometimes substitute that. But God’s word is very clear that that’s where hope comes from. Certainty is one of those things. Certainty defeats that doubt of knowing that I know that God has a plan and purpose for my life and he’s going to bring goodness, even out of that difficult situation like Jeremiah 29:11 says. Hope demolishes discouragement because we can choose to be joyful in our difficult times. And God says, you know, don’t fear. Confidence destroys our defeat or despair that we might have. We trust God in each of our situations. Promptness diverts delay. Sometimes we don’t have hope because of that delay that’s happening. But if we can move ahead with boldness knowing, hey, even sick, I can do this for the Lord, or he’s asking me to do this.

And then we trust in that. It just helps us. Obedience, again, it eradicates diversion. It’s too easy to get sidetracked by the news, by life, by other people. When we just obey, what is the thing that I can do in my situation right now? And then we do what God tells us. We accomplish what he asks of us. Um, clarity nulls distractions.

When we keep saying, okay, I know God, you said this. I don’t need to look back. I can move forward and just keep focused and again, tuning in. Redirection of course, you know, that the enemy wants to detour us. Our mind wants to, friends do, and know we have to follow the path that God says I put you on, I allowed you on. Sometimes we chose ourselves. We have to follow that direction and ask the Lord for that specific direction. And then boldness breaks down all the



dread and despair, like, will we know we're boldly doing what God has called us to do. We do it in confidence.

It's just freeing. And so those are some of the hope destroyers that I focus in on when I'm just at my wit's end. I'm just like, nope, I need to eradicate all these things that come at me to block my hope, which isn't God.

Crystal Keating:

Well, and we need to be reaching out and when we're in need, just like your friend did to you, that we are taking those thoughts captive, and we're asking God for help, but then inviting other people to pray with us and for us. It's like borrowed strength, you know? I don't have enough of the will to do it, but I pray that God would do it in me and friends to come alongside of me, which I think is so powerful. We need the church; we need people to come alongside of us. And, you know, you mentioned having to unlatch or let things go in your life. So, what are some of those things and how did you do it? What was the purpose of that?

Danika Deva:

Yeah. Through round two, God took me through a season of unlatching from everything and it was, it was brutal. I'm not going to lie, but on the other side, it is beautiful. So just to define unlatch, it's like, if you're holding your hands tight on something. It's like letting go and just surrendering it to the Lord.

And it sounds like it's a simple step, but it's really a process. And I think that's what God asks of all of us. Right? We think we have control, or we want control, but we are constantly surrendering to God.

So, I had to unlatch from stuff, losing my whole classroom the first time, losing all my belongings. It's like a fire, you know, they're just gone. But people don't realize how can you be allergic to that? Well, because there was mold in the vent system and, and not being normal because of hyper reactions.

I can't buy a bed. I tried to buy a bed and I was reactive to it, you know after ozoning it twice and cleaning it with the sun. I mean, brand new. The average person doesn't understand that type of thing. I had to let go of relationships. I couldn't attend weddings, funerals, special events, travel.

Can't go into hotels, severe reactions. Unlatching from work, you can feel quickly like you're a loser when you can't work.

Even if your identity isn't found in that, right? And then suddenly you're unlatching from income. And you're like, okay, like for almost a year, I didn't work. And that means it was hard to pay bills and I had to completely depend. I remember one time sitting on my deck and I'm like, God, how am I going to pay these bills?

And he's like, listen to the birds, be like them. And I'm like, yeah, you're right. He goes, I take care of them. Okay, Lord. I'll be like the birds, and it wasn't two weeks later. I know. Yeah,



exactly. And they're chirping really loud and I'm writing it down. And I go outside, and I was carrying groceries, and my blueberries spilled all over the ground.

Well, who do you think ate those blueberries? The birds. God provided. That's how God works. But I had to learn to unlatch from income, the desire to have income, that desire to work and actually having money and friends, family, and churches helped support me during this time of crisis and the government, going on some food stamps and aid and things during this total time of desperation. Um, I had to unlatch from an attack on my integrity when some people don't believe you're sick or don't get it. They see you smiling in the park where you're getting your haircut, thinking all that's cute. She's getting her haircut in the park. Not realizing I can't go into a hair salon because the chemicals are outrageous. They'd say, oh, you're fine, but they don't see you when you can't walk because you had a reaction or you're in the hospital with anaphylaxis. I had to unlatch from grief.

That sounds kind of funny, but from grieving the many people you couldn't see, the many things you couldn't do. I had to give my grief to the Lord. So, everything I unlatched from, I surrendered to God, and I did that through my Freedom Sweep process. I had to unlatch from music. I am a musician and my instruments molded.

My guitar broke and I bought a keyboard, and I was allergic to the felt or something in the plastic that it came brand new. So, I'm like, really God? You took away music from me and everything else. I was mad, you know? Sometimes I had to give that to the Lord. You had to unlatch from your health, never knowing if you're going to go into anaphylaxis or knowing if this food's going to make you react or this chemical. It's a very, very difficult place to be. Think of everything you did this week. You probably went to church. You might've gone out to eat. You might've traveled. Now delete those from your life. That is what an avoider has to do. Whether it's from multiple chemical sensitivity or environmental illness, you have to micromanage your life so that you don't hyper-react.

So, all of those things I had to unlatch from and let go and say, okay, God, you're in control.

Crystal Keating:

Danika, all of that sounds so overwhelming. How did you actually get through that without falling into deep despair?

Danika Deva:

Yes, it is extremely overwhelming and honestly, it sounds cliché, but it was God. I literally would just say, God, what do I do? God, how do I handle this?

God, I'm sad today. I'm lonely today. And I would sometimes just say like, God, could you just show up and somebody would call, or somebody would text me saying, I'm praying for you. And then relying on the body of Christ. I mean, I have this philosophy of circles where you and God are in the first circle. If you're married, then it's your spouse because you're one.



And then you have your immediate family and then you have your body of Christ. And those people, the immediate family, and body of Christ are so precious because I can call them and say, can you pray? Many a times they stayed up all night on a phone with me, two people I can think of while I was in anaphylaxis, because for me to go to the hospital unless absolutely necessary, it was more reactions, right? From COVID chemicals, cleaning, and alcohol wipes, I mean, everything could trigger. So, if I could manage it at home with my rescue meds, it was safer. Many people stayed up all night long, praying for me and staying on the phone.

Okay. What's your blood pressure now? How you feeling? That precious community is unbelievable. And it wasn't just something that's developed. It is developed through friendship and things, but we also have to ask. Jesus asked his disciples to pray, right? They kind of fell asleep a little bit, but, but he asked. We have to ask one another to say, I need you now.

That is okay. I had to unlatch from even the pride of saying, I need you now. Can you come over and please copy all my taxes because they're contaminated and they're in the tub outside so that I could actually do my taxes. I had to ask for help. And the precious community of God through prayer, through ministry, through finances.

I mean, when I moved from my camper, I moved into a home that I thought was safe and it has been safe. You know, one church just did a food drive for me, and they brought me pants and curtains and all this food. I had nothing; you know. I ate 10 foods. And so, God said, hey here's food.

You can eat food now. I said, thank you, Lord. You know, those things are life-changing when you have community and I stress to everybody, find community. Yes. I had to switch five different churches, and that sounds awful because I choose a church by the building. If I'm not allergic to it, I can go there.

Yeah, right. But the gift of that is I say I have lots of pastors and pastors' wives, and friends, and family in all these churches. They're all my home church because that's how God took something awful, which, oh, I gotta switch churches again to look this church, I'm not reacting to, it's almost brand new. Great, I'm going there.

Crystal Keating:

Well, Danika, it's obvious that God has sustained you by his spirit, but through community. And I just love your perspective that even though in our perfect world, we go to one church, and we stay there, and we're committed for years and years. God gave you the ability to visit many different places and have relationships with so many people. Oh, my goodness. And I love what you said.

It made me think about the promise that his mercies are new every morning. And sometimes I have to look for mercies. When I have down days and I think, how am I going to do this? God will bring someone, and I think, there's your mercy, Lord. You promised that your mercy would be new, and it came through that person.





Danika Deva:  
Yeah.

Crystal Keating:

Danika, I've just loved what you have shared, and I know you're passionate about helping others find connection, purpose, and joy through being intentional. So, would you like to share some parting words of encouragement to our listeners today, especially about being intentional in the midst of hardships?

Danika Deva:

Absolutely. Psalm 145:1-7 says, "I will exalt you my God and king and praise your name forever and ever. And I will praise you every day. Yes, I will praise you forever. Great is the Lord. He is most worthy of praise. No one can measure his greatness. Let each generation tell its children of your mighty acts. Let them proclaim your power. I will meditate on your majestic, glorious splendor, and your wonderful miracles. Your awe-inspiring deeds will be on every tongue, and I will proclaim your greatness. Everyone will share the story of your wonderful goodness. They will sing with joy about your righteousness."

I believe that gratitude and praising God is a huge part of finding hope in those areas where we're stuck or difficult situations, as a world, as a community, as a church, as a family, and individually.

Crystal Keating:

Amen. Those are some great words. Thanks, Danika, for joining us on the podcast today.

Danika Deva:

Thank you for having me.

Crystal Keating:

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