

Season 4 | Episode # 19

Abortion Survivor and Voice for the Voiceless

Sasha Carpenter

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.

Sasha Carpenter is back on the podcast today to share God's amazing story of hope and redemption after she survived a failed abortion and was adopted into an incredible family who loves Jesus. Sasha now serves as an adoption advocate, a voice for the voiceless, and a part of Ting Ministries, an organization started by her parents and her 10 sisters that serves orphans and vulnerable children around the world. Thank you for joining us again.

Sasha Carpenter:

Thank you so much for having me.

Crystal Keating:

Well, Sasha, you've traveled to all the countries where your sisters are adopted from. That is pretty exciting. So, what's it like to be part of a large adoptive family with so many different personalities and needs and I mean, even just traveling internationally, that's a big deal.

Sasha Carpenter:

Yes. Well let me say, there is never a dull moment in our house, and you know, the thing that I love to share about my family, really what growing up in such a, not only multicultural but as you said, a family with so many different special needs and needs you know, that are not going to necessarily quote unquote, get better. Mm-hmm. Some of my sisters are gonna remain having the needs that they do, you know, fairly substantial or severe needs, for their life.

Um, you know, you hope that when you bring a child home that they'll grow and that they will show improvement and all of my sisters have. However, similar to Joni's own story, there's times in, in the life of someone with a special need or disability, that just means major adjustment for life.

And I think one of the things that, I really like to just share with people is that it has taught me really what it means to serve and to sacrifice and, and to love as Christ loves. When I think about my sisters and the needs that they have, it has taught me to have grace for someone that doesn't grasp a concept or can't do things physically as quickly, or as ably as you can, to have patience. We always say, you know, with the wheelchair that Ellianna has and all of our strollers, you know, we don't go anywhere quickly.

To slow down, um, in a sense, and just enjoy each day for what it brings. My sisters have taught me that time and time again. In me personally, my CP is such that it's fairly mild. Without my sisters to teach me these lessons of service and grace and patience, I would have grown up to be quite arrogant in my quote, unquote my own abilities. But my sisters and, you know, the CP and the way that it has impacted my life, even in small ways, you know, together, those things have taught me that we do each one of us need the Lord every moment of every day.

Yeah, and to continue to turn to him as Proverbs 3 says, you know, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, lean not on your own understanding and all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your path straight." He has a purpose for each person's life, and he knows what that is.

If we trust in him, he will make that evident in his own timing. And so being able to give to my sisters of my time, of my love of, of caring. You know whether it is swimming in the pool or taking all seven of us to the beach. We just went to Ocean City, New Jersey, and just enjoying the boardwalk and getting all of us onto the beach, the multiple trips back and forth and, if we were not willing to give in that way, what enjoyment would be missed? What a blessing would be missed in our lives, in their lives, and even in the lives of others who are watching. The scripture talks so much about how the Lord came to be a servant and he laid down his life for his friends.

My sisters daily, they have shown me the value and the truth of God's word in that way. And so, I'm so thankful.

And then our travels, I've been to each of the countries where my sisters are adopted from, and just to see with one's own eyes, the plight of orphans in these countries has just shaped me and changed me in ways that I can't even begin to express.

And, um, I'll just give one example of an adoption trip that touched me very personally. We traveled to Ukraine in 2014 and we visited my sister's orphanage, which they called "Dom Invalidov", which means literally house of the invalid in Russian. You know, I was very cognizant of the fact that I, as a 16-year-old at the time, had I not been adopted, I would've aged out. I would've spent my life in a "Dom Invalidov" and aged out without ever having known the love of a family.

And so, when we went to my sister's orphanage and saw the conditions, and what you saw in front of you was a large room. There were just rows and rows and rows of beds, and everything was white, white walls, white pillows, white sheets. Forty children in a room and there was not a sound. There was one boy who could still speak.

Most children had lost that ability just due to lack of that personal care, not having anyone to talk to. This one boy, his name was Nicolai was speaking and our translator said, Sasha, he's telling you that he wants the pretty girl to come and sit next to him and talk to him.

I didn't know Russian. But it was just a profoundly moving moment in my life to literally come face to face with, wow, this is what my life could have, would have been, had I not been adopted.

And that is what the Lord used to truly open my heart to want to learn Russian, to want to give back, and, and instill that passion in me for the plight abortions, particularly in Eastern Europe.

And then to couple that with, you know, my amazing birth family story. The Lord has just continued to give such amazing experiences, not for myself, but then sharing that with others so that together we can be a voice for the voiceless.

Crystal Keating:

Yes. Amen. Well, and that's kind of how Ting Ministries started, your Christian nonprofit that your family founded, which serves orphans, especially orphans with disabilities around the world.

Sasha Carpenter:

Sure. Ting Ministries began through my sister Avi's adoption from the Philippines and to date, the Philippines remains our largest area of ministry. But we are one ministry with one purpose, which is to proclaim the gospel. I think of Mark 16:15 "And then he told them, go into all the world and preach the good news to everyone." That really along with Proverbs 31:8-9, "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly, defend the rights of the poor and needy." Those two verses really encapsulate the purpose of Ting Ministries.

We work in, um, eight countries. That is the Philippines, Pakistan, Indonesia, Bangladesh. We also work in Ukraine and Russia and Romania. And we then work as well in the United States. So, what we do in each of those countries looks slightly different depending on the needs of the people and the culture. In the Philippines, we do a lot of food outreach.

We have what is called the Tin Tin Feeding Program. Tin Tin was the nickname of my sister Avi, so it's named after her. And actually, the Tin Tin Feeding Program is recognized on the national level by the government of the Philippines to aid children who are vulnerable and at risk. We also do outreach to remote tribal groups on varying islands.

And we have what's called the Tin Tin House, a place started by our pastor in the Philippines. And he has taken in over 20 former Muslim street children who now live with him and are Christian and just as on fire for sharing the gospel and helping orphans and vulnerable children as their dad. So, they have gone back to their own islands, their own tribes, their own biological families and shared the good news and, and serve alongside of him in these differing ways.

In Romania, we do animal rescue, but we also through animal rescue reach the needs of the people there. We have provided groceries and family support. And so, our ministry partner there is, uh, is doing the animal rescue, but then when people bring animals to her that are in need, she's able to share with them the gospel and learn about them, develop a relationship with them so that we can, in turn, help the surrounding families in the village. We also do disability ministry there for special needs individuals as well.

Crystal Keating:

Well, Sasha, I wanna talk about you. You know, in our first episode, you touched a little bit on the fact that you live with cerebral palsy. And so, I'm curious, how have you overcome some of the limitations that you may experience? I know it's mild, but what are some of the ways that it affects you and how are you working through those things?

Sasha Carpenter:

Yeah, so, you know being an individual with really mild CP, when I was growing up, I did go through many years of physical therapy. I wore orthopedic braces, and it was much more noticeable. I couldn't really walk independently until at least elementary school.

And even then, when we had long distances or field trips, you know, my mom was always there. She was literally beside me, almost like retraining my brain to learn how to walk properly and how to do these physical tasks independently. And so, I've come a really long way, thanks to the patience and the hard work of my parents who just saw the potential in me from a very young age and determined that I was going to do this.

You know, a lot of people when I was adopted thought that I would never walk, that I would use a wheelchair, and that I would be in special needs classes. Well, you know, now I walk independently. I'm learning to drive, and I graduated Summa Cum Laude from Bucknell. So, praise the Lord for the ways in which he has, um, enabled me to overcome these challenges. On a day-to-day basis, now I would say that my CP has just given me a platform in which to share with people, to advocate for those with disabilities.

To show people that people with disabilities are people too and that they're approachable. You don't need to fear them. You don't need to be uncomfortable around them. Their lives are just as valuable, first of all, as their able-bodied peers but also that they're just like people.

Everyone has struggles in life, whether it is physical or whether it's something we can't see. So, my story has just enabled me to encourage people and kind of bridge that gap between the two worlds, if you may. With my sisters particularly, sharing with people on how to be a friend with someone who has a special need. Because if you, you know, haven't grown up with it or you don't have a disability yourself, I totally get it.

You don't know necessarily how to interact. You don't know what someone's needs are. But that is one thing that my sisters and my own experience with CP has taught me. And I hope to be that bridge and build a better community for us.

Personally, now a lot of people don't even notice that I have CP. If they do recognize that I have a limp, I'll often get the common assumption that oh, did you twist your ankle, Sasha? No, nope, I have CP. And particularly when I was in college, they would come to me very concerned, you know, hey, do you, do you need to go to the nurse?

Do you need help? And I say, oh no, I have CP. The faces, the look of shock. Oh, wow, I just offended the disabled person. I could see it in their faces, and I would say, oh my goodness, it's

not a problem. And it would open the door, not only to share a little bit about disability but also, you know, my story.

So, it's pretty cool. And people often ask me, if the Lord would take away your CP, would you want that? And the answer that I have often shared is no because my CP has made me in so many ways who I am today. And growing up with a disability myself has taught me grace and patience and understanding for those that the world would look at as being weak or lesser valued. But also, what a blessing that he has given me this life, and the things that I can do I should do all for his glory. Amen.

Crystal Keating:

Your story is truly incredible. Grace and humility that God has worked in your own heart to use the things that could bring you to a different and darker place are places of light and hope for you.

And I've just loved talking to you, Sasha. So, as we finish our conversation, I just know that you have a great sense that God's given you a platform to be a voice for the voiceless, just as you quoted Proverbs 31:8-9. So how is God using you in the lives of those who cannot advocate and speak up for themselves?

Sasha Carpenter:

Well, first of all, it's just been a blessing and a privilege to be able to share my story. I have been so blessed with the story that the Lord has given me and with the mission of Ting Ministries to be able to daily be that voice for the voiceless.

There are so many ways in which I, and we all can be that voice, but in particular from my own personal story, I have had so many opportunities to share with other adoptees, you know, the truths that I have shared today. And I hope that anyone who is listening truly takes them to heart, whether it is the truth of our identity. You know that we are created in the image of God and that we are created to be God's hands and feet on this earth. And that as Ephesians 1 says, in love, God predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ. He has freely given us the forgiveness of sins.

He has lavished his grace on us. He has made known to us on the mystery of his will. It's all wisdom and understanding, you know, all the gifts that we have. Whether it is the question of that the identity all that we have in Jesus Christ. Whether it is to someone who is experiencing grief through the loss of a loved one. The Lord has used the lives of Avi and Rachele to touch not only people that know us here in the United States but as I shared earlier, the Tin Tin Feeding Care Program, all because of one little girl with severe special needs.

Now hundreds of thousands of children are being reached with the gospel. Praise the Lord. Whether it is and this is a, a one that is very near and dear to my heart. If there is anyone listening today that has experienced the pain of abortion, whether you are a survivor, whether you are a mother or a father, or a sibling who has been impacted by that, I just wanna speak to you in this moment and say that the Lord loves you.

The Lord forgives you. Amen. I forgive you if you need to hear those words, cuz words are so powerful. If you need to hear those words of forgiveness, know that I forgive you, if that is something that is needed in your life.

I just want to hug you and share that forgiveness with you today. And the Lord loves you and the Lord forgives you. And I pray that whatever you might have going on in your life today, whether it is any of the things that I've mentioned or just being a caregiver for those with special needs, I just wanna encourage you. I pray that my story encourages you and touches your heart. And most importantly, I pray that it turns us to the truth of God's word. That it would just encourage us all myself included, to get back into God's word and to seek him first. Amen.

Crystal Keating:

Sasha, thank you so much for that encouragement and for the grace.

God is a, a God of grace upon grace and it's just been such a delight to speak with you, Sasha. May God continue to use you and your story to touch the lives of many. Thanks so much for joining me on the podcast today.

Sasha Carpenter:

Thank you.

Crystal Keating:

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