

Season 3 | Episode 17

From Anger to Acceptance

Robert and Nelly Kapen

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Crystal Keating:

I'm Crystal Keating and this is the Joni and Friends Ministry Podcast. Each week we're bringing you real conversations about disability and finding hope through hardship, and sharing practical ways that you can include people living with disability in your church and community. Be sure to subscribe wherever you listen to podcasts or find us at joniandfriends.org/podcast.

Robert and Nelly Kapen are here joining us on the podcast again to share openly about the journey from being angry with God to accepting a new way of life after an unknown virus left Robert a quadriplegic. They'll also talk about leaning on the support of their family and Christian community as they sought contentment one day at a time. Welcome back to the show, my friends. It's so good to see you again.

Robert Kapen:

Hey.

Nelly Kapen:

Hello.

Crystal Keating:

Hello. Well, if you missed our first episode, you're going to want to listen to Robert and Nelly's story about his recovery and their marriage, and just the way that God worked in and through their life. Robert, after your life was radically changed by this virus, how did your paralysis and inability to speak impact you spiritually?

Robert Kapen:

The first year...

Nelly Kapen:

The first year...

Robert Kapen:

After I got sick, I still was emotionally...

Nelly Kapen:

After you got sick you were still emotionally...



Robert Kapen:
Numb.

Nelly Kapen:
Numb.

Robert Kapen:
So I still loved God.

Nelly Kapen:
So I still loved God.

Robert Kapen:
Then the following two years...

Nelly Kapen:
The following two years...

Robert Kapen:
The numbness went away.

Nelly Kapen:
The numbness went away.

Robert Kapen:
And I was left with depression.

Nelly Kapen:
You were left with depression.

Robert Kapen:
And anger.

Nelly Kapen:
Depression and anger.

Robert Kapen:
I wanted nothing to do with God.

Nelly Kapen:
Didn't want nothing to do with God.

Robert Kapen:

But through that time, I saw God working in my life. And now I'm in a good place.

Nelly Kapen:

So through that, you saw God working in your life. And now you're in a much better place.

Robert Kapen:

Now I want him more and more.

Nelly Kapen:

And you want him more and more.

Crystal Keating:

Yeah. I think we've heard from many people who suffer a life-changing accident or diagnosis. After they've been completely healthy, completely mobile, they have their hopes and dreams and depression hits, and especially with a lot of frustration and anger and questions towards God.

Robert Kapen:

Yeah. After my anger, I really felt God speaking to me.

Nelly Kapen:

After my anger I felt God really speak to me.

Robert Kapen:

And he gave me John 9:3.

Nelly Kapen:

And he gave me John 9:3. "It was not because of his sins or his friend's sins. This happened so the power of God could be seen in him."

Crystal Keating:

Yeah, absolutely. And that gave you a lot of hope because it wasn't something you did, but you started recognizing that this could have happened so that the power of God could be seen in you. And I know that was a changing point for you to dissolve some of the hate and anger that you were wrestling with.

Robert Kapen:

After I read that verse....

Nelly Kapen:

After you read that verse...



Robert Kapen:
I did not feel...

Nelly Kapen:
I did not feel...

Robert Kapen:
Like the weight of the world was on me anymore.

Nelly Kapen:
That the weight of the world was on you.

Crystal Keating:

Yeah. It really lifted your spirits. The Holy Spirit has a way of taking us in our dark depths and actually giving us that ray of hope to start moving us forward. Nelly, I know that you were in a friendship with Robert and eventually a relationship and marriage. What was it like for you to see Robert wrestling with God? And how did that impact your own faith?

Nelly Kapen:

It started challenging my faith. I realized that since he didn't want me to talk about God and he actually asked me one day to leave God at the door, which meant I could not pray for him anymore, that we were in some sort of unequally yoked relationship. Honestly, I thought something was going to happen to him because one day he said like, "Hey, I cursed at God and I don't want to talk about him anymore."

Nelly Kapen:

And you know, bad theology will tell you, "Oh something bad's going to happen to you now." But I think I was just waiting for something and just saw God's grace through it all, just waiting and waiting and seeing he loved him and people will still love on him and God loved him through people. So one day after church, I was really sad about this whole thing. I asked the friend after church, he was a youth group pastor, and he said, "Don't worry about him. Nothing can snatch him out of God's hand," which is a Bible verse that I had to cling on.

Crystal Keating:

I think that powerful truth from John 10, where nothing can take us from the hand of God and that God can withstand the anger that we share with him. And if we're his, that he will meet us there. And like you said, God was gracious and so merciful. What helped you both to hang on to hope when anxiety and despair could have overtaken you?

Robert Kapen:
We learned that every couple is unique.

Nelly Kapen:
We learned that every couple is unique.



Robert Kapen:
Like the way...

Nelly Kapen:
Like the way...

Robert Kapen:
The person loves on his wife.

Nelly Kapen:
The way the person loves on his wife.

Robert Kapen:
The way he loves everybody is different from the way I love on you.

Nelly Kapen:
Yeah, we learned that every couple is unique and different and the way someone else would love on their wife, it's not going to be the same as the way Robert would love on me.

Robert Kapen:
And then not having expectations.

Nelly Kapen:
Yeah, definitely, not having expectations.

Robert Kapen:
Because then we always fight.

Nelly Kapen:
Because we would start fighting or bumping heads. Right?

Crystal Keating:
How did you find contentment through it?

Nelly Kapen:
I was the one who was struggling more as everybody's getting married. Everybody's getting engaged and married and having kids and buying their houses. I learned that I had to start being thankful for one thing every day. Whether it meant having a job or whether it meant having a boyfriend or just being thankful for the one thing. And then one thing became two things. And then there were three things I would be thankful for. And gratitude keeps growing after it starts with one thing always, right?



Robert Kapen:

And for me it's being a light for the next person.

Nelly Kapen:

And for you, it's being a light for the next person.

Robert Kapen:

And I remember 2 Corinthians 1:3-5.

Nelly Kapen:

2 Corinthians 1:3:5 "All praise to God, the father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our merciful father and the source of all comfort. He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others when they are in trouble. We will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us." Really realizing that my struggles will bless somebody one day; my anger, my anxiety, or just my discontent will possibly help somebody one day.

Crystal Keating:

Yeah, the trials that you've encountered in the way God's speaking to you and teaching you are things that you're going to turn around and be an encouragement to others. And I know Robert you've said that some of your greatest joys are sharing your own struggles and the wisdom that you've learned with others. And that is so true. And as long as I've known you, you've had an amazing, amazing, supportive family. You've had Christian community. You've had people pouring into you and you pouring into others. What are some of the most helpful ways they've supported you through the years?

Robert Kapen:

First off, I reluctantly...

Nelly Kapen:

First, I would reluctantly...

Robert Kapen:

Ask for help.

Nelly Kapen:

Ask for help.

Robert Kapen:

Reluctantly because I don't like asking for help.

Nelly Kapen:

Because you don't like asking for help.



Robert Kapen:
But we all need it.

Nelly Kapen:
But we all need it.

Robert Kapen:
And when the worst they can say...

Nelly Kapen:
The worst they can say...

Robert Kapen:
Is no.

Nelly Kapen:
Is no.

Crystal Keating:
That's true.

Nelly Kapen:
Yeah. And also realize that we can be an answer to someone's prayer. Somebody's always asking, "Hey God, use me, help me." And by not asking for help, we're not giving them an opportunity to glorify God or to serve God. So just humbling and asking; they don't know our needs unless we ask.

Robert Kapen:
And I found out as a person who's disabled, I've learned while being disabled, you need to network...

Nelly Kapen:
And then you find out when you're disabled, you need to network...

Robert Kapen:
Because if someone can't help you...

Nelly Kapen:
If someone can't help you...

Robert Kapen:
They might know a guy.

Nelly Kapen:
They might know a guy.

Crystal Keating:

That's good. You guys are sharing advice for people who might need community, even though you feel reluctant, reach out. And even if you have that one person, if that one person can't do it, maybe somebody else could, right? And I think that was your experience kind of with Joni and Friends. That was an aspect of a community in which you reached out just for something random, like "How do we travel with a wheelchair?" And that opened up lots of doors. What about your family? I mean, how has it been leaning on the support of your mom and some of the people from your church you talked about in our first conversation, people just dropping meals at your door. That's awesome!

Robert Kapen:

And I have a couple of friends that will come by and watch a game with me.

Nelly Kapen:

And you have a couple of friends that will come and just watch a game with you.

Robert Kapen:

And they came for like an hour. They would not need to spend a whole day.

Nelly Kapen:

Yeah. It was like an hour. They wouldn't need to spend a whole day and they didn't need the right words. They just needed to watch a game with you.

Robert Kapen:

Be there.

Nelly Kapen:

Be there.

Robert Kapen:

In my depression.

Nelly Kapen:

In your depression.

Robert Kapen:

And then eventually I opened up.

Nelly Kapen:

Eventually you opened up.

Robert Kapen:

And when friends come over, it gives my mom and Nelly a breather.

Nelly Kapen:

When friends or family come, it gives me and your mom a breather. So we can do something like read a book or something that we... Take a nap. Yeah.

Crystal Keating:

Yeah. So all those little things that, maybe it's just an hour a day of hanging out with you, I mean, I hear you loud and clear. It is nice to have a friend with you. They don't have to solve it. They don't have to say the right thing. They can just be with you. And it's incredibly comforting to you.

Robert Kapen:

Then it's God's job.

Nelly Kapen:

It's God's job.

Robert Kapen:

Not ours.

Nelly Kapen:

Not ours, right.

Crystal Keating:

Amen. Well, as we close our time together, Robert and Nelly, what encouragement would you share with someone longing for a place of rest and contentment in their circumstances? Whether it be because of a disability, a new diagnosis, unwanted divorce, infertility, loneliness, whatever. Those that may be feeling angry with God. What advice would you give or encouragement?

Robert Kapen:

Do not compare someone's circumstance...

Nelly Kapen:

Do not compare someone's circumstance...

Robert Kapen:

With your own.

Nelly Kapen:

With your own.



Robert Kapen:
God has them...

Nelly Kapen:
God has them...

Robert Kapen:
Where he wants them.

Nelly Kapen:
Where he wants them.

Robert Kapen:
And he has you where he wants you.

Nelly Kapen:
He has you where he wants you. And just to add to that, there's going to be seasons. There's going to be seasons where everything is falling apart, not just a disability, but like you said, infertility, a divorce, someone having cancer in their life, and which almost all of us have somebody or know somebody.

Crystal Keating:
Right.

Nelly Kapen:
But we can also be a blessing to them. Whether it's a struggling parent or a single mom, we borrow kids or we borrow puppies, or we've helped people. And if you don't have the help, maybe you can be the help to someone else.

Robert Kapen:
The last thing...

Nelly Kapen:
The last thing...

Robert Kapen:
Is learning how to accept God's perfect timing.

Nelly Kapen:
It's learning to accept God's perfect timing. It's not always going to be a bad day. They're always going to be a good day. I mean, we just came back from a road trip, but I just remember seeing like all the hills and valleys, it's such a beautiful thing, but there's ups and there's downs and it's much better than driving down on a flat road, I think.



Crystal Keating:

Through the ups and downs, God is with you. And like you said, he'll never allow you to be snatched from his hand. He's holding you, he's with you. If you want to hear more about Robert and Nelly's story, if you want to see pictures and updates, you can go to our podcast page, joniandfriends.org/podcast. And you can also go to kapenwrites.com. That's k-a-p-e-n writes.com. Nelly and Robert, thank you so much for being on the podcast again today. So encouraged.

Nelly Kapen:

I love you.

Robert Kapen:

My first podcast.

Nelly Kapen:

My first podcast.

Crystal Keating:

We love you guys!

Nelly Kapen:

Love you.

Crystal Keating:

Thank you for listening today. If you've been inspired, please send me a message, or leave a five-star review on your favorite app. That's a great way to help other people find encouragement from these conversations. And to get our next episode automatically, subscribe wherever you listen to podcasts. I'm Crystal Keating and thank you for listening to the Joni and Friends Ministry Podcast.

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