

April 22

Latter-day Saint Women Podcast Transcript

Mihaela Ganea King | After the Trial of Your Faith

SHALYN.

Hello, and welcome to the Latter-day Saint Women podcast, where we share the legacy of women of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. You'll get to know the faithful women who shaped our past and hear from inspiring women of faith today. I'm Shalyn Back.

KARLIE.

And I'm Karlie Guymon. We are your cohosts. And today, we are so excited to welcome Mihaela Ganea King to the show, who is joining us virtually from California. Mihaela, welcome.

MIHAELA.

Thank you. It's so good to be here.

KARLIE.

We're excited to have you. We're excited to have this technology that can connect us, and we're excited for our listeners to get to hear from you and hear your inspiring story. We won't give away too much in the introduction, but Mihaela was born and raised in Romania. She is a convert to the Church of Jesus Christ. She's a professional musician, and she's a mother who has endured the challenges and heartache of infertility and pregnancy loss and the triumph there as well. So Mihaela, thanks again for being here. And we're excited to help our listeners get to know you.

MIHAELA.

Thank you.

SHALYN.



Well, Mihaela, let's just jump right into your story. As Karlie hinted at in the bio, you have lived a very interesting and dynamic life full of faith-promoting stories and experiences. But your life began in Romania, a place where spirituality and religion had been just quashed for decades by the government. You told us you don't remember praying often as a child. Your mother told you only to bother God about the "big things" but that one particular prayer you offered brought a huge miracle in your life and the life of your family. Can you share with us the story?

MIHAELA.

Sure. So I was born in Romania, and I grew up there for the first 17 years of my life. And the government was a socialist government; they were voted in. And when they came to power and also throughout my growing up there, they went about the country and destroyed lots and lots of monuments of historical figures of the past and of artists and leaders that made a difference in the Romanian history. So along with that, they were trying to erase the past and start a new way of leading. And along with that, they also demolished hundreds and hundreds of beautiful old churches. They just came out flat and said, "There is no God." They denied the existence of God, and they replaced it with their new socialist ideals. So it took about a generation from the time they came to power to really take out religion out of people's lives. People could not go to church; they would lose their job if they would be seen in church. So people stop going to church. They're not allowed to get married in the church or get baptized—their little babies. And Romanians were very religious people by nature. So a generation later, people stopped teaching their children the scriptures or reading together or praying, so I grew up in this kind of environment where my parents didn't know a lot because they were not taught. So my mom I remember telling me, "God is big and very important. And you pray if you have something very big or important, but don't bother Him with little things." And I remembered that, so I never prayed because I never thought I had something super important. But when I was 13 years old, my father, who was the CEO of the biggest engineering firms in Romania, he was sent to Syria for just a few days by the government to just sign off on a huge oil refinery that was gifted from the Romanians to the Syrians. And then he was supposed to come back to Romania and be there.

So those three days that he was sent for turned out to be three years because the refinery had hundreds and hundreds of problems. So the government said, "Just stay there and fix it all." So we were by ourselves with my mom in Romania, and my dad was in Syria. And



there was no hope of being together because this project was an endless project. My dad knew that this could not be fixed in a few years. So my mom tried to go visit my dad in Syria, and the government said, "No." They never allowed husband and wife to be outside of the country at the same time because they were afraid that they would flee. So my mom couldn't visit my dad, and my dad was only allowed to come to Romania one week per year. So we found ourselves in the situation separated and not having a hope of being together. And during one of the weeks where my dad was allowed to come to Romania, my mom and dad went to a park in secrecy and spoke, because our home was bugged. So they had to go to the park and just whisper and have a conversation. So they decided that the next time my dad would be given a passport while he was in Syria, he would attempt to flee, which kind of was the only way we would have a hope to be together as a family. So sure enough, a year later, he was in Syria and he was given a passport to come back to Romania to visit us. And instead of coming back to Romania to visit us, he fled. He went to Germany and applied for a visa as a political refugee. Now, we were left in Romania in a Communist country, my mom by herself with two teenagers. I was 14, and my brother was a year younger. And the government really harassed us and gave us a lot of problems because they really hated that my dad fled.

So my dad wrote to anyone he knew all over the world, and he asked to find a sponsor. So he found a sponsor in a friend in Los Angeles that he had previously worked with in Romania 30 years before. So this man was wonderful. He said, "I'll sponsor you and your family." And he did. And my dad arrived in America while we were still in Romania. So the challenge now was, how do you leave a Communist country who never allowed people to reunify with their family, even if they're political refugees? They would just deny that time after time. People were waiting for 10 years and still trying to leave the country. And they still couldn't. So we applied legally; we put our papers in to leave. And I remember one time, the security people from the government came to our home and told my mom, "You will never leave, and your children will never leave the country. So you might as well not even try." So my mom, she said, "You will not let me leave, but God is bigger than you. And with His help, we will leave." And I was like, "Oh!" I was mortified at the time because they didn't mess around. They'd take you to jail in a minute. But she had the bravery to say that.

And I remember my first prayer was while I was walking from the music school that I was attending back home. And every day I would pass by this beautiful big church, and I remember going inside of the church



once during this time, and I said a prayer. And I think this was my very first prayer that I said. And I thought, “Heavenly Father, this is big. This is important. This is a reason for me to pray. We need to leave Romania, and if there’s a way to leave, we will leave with your help.” And that’s all I said. And I had a lot of hope in that prayer that He would help us, our family. And sure enough, 10 months later, 10 months to that time, we received a passport and a visa to leave Romania. And we left. We didn’t tell anyone. My mom didn’t tell her mom; we didn’t tell our uncles, our cousins. No one knew because we were scared that something would happen and we couldn’t leave. So we left, and even my family—they’re not religious—they recognize to this day that that was a miracle and was by the hand of God that we’re here. And we are so grateful. And I’m so grateful for that, just that experience, the whole story. But that’s the way my faith started. That was kind of the seed that first started my faith in God.

KARLIE.

Wow. That’s a big and a serious challenge. We all encounter different challenges in life. That’s a pretty big and serious challenge to be faced with trying to reunite a family. And I really appreciate just the testimony of prayer that you shared. Thank you.

MIHAELA.

Of course.

KARLIE.

So you kind of hinted, Mihaela, that you were leaving music school as you were going to say this prayer in a church. And you’ve told us that from the time you were a little girl, your whole life was all about music and that your family’s life was all about music. And you were trained in violin performance at a music school in Romania from the time you were just a young girl, and then you continued your music training when your family moved to the United States. And so it seemed fitting to me when we were getting to know you that you were introduced to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints through music. It was through teaching music as a teenager. So we’d love for you to share with us how an interest in the gospel was first planted in your heart and then how you persevered to receive your own witness and testimony of the restored gospel despite some big obstacles or trials to your faith at that time.

MIHAELA.



Sure. It brings me back to a story when I was five in Romania. My mom was one of three girls. And her two sisters were in a car accident. So one died instantly in that car accident, and the other sister had severe brain damage. And during their 20s, I was five. And we were very close to my aunts. And I remember just since that day when my aunt died, asking my mom and my dad, “If one day I will die, then why am I here on the earth? Like, what’s the whole purpose? Why am I here if one day I’m going to die?” They didn’t know. So I’m sure they told me something, but it didn’t really bring me any peace. So I was really burdened by this question. I grew up with this question heavily on my mind as a child and as a teenager. It felt like a really heavy burden not having an answer to it. So fast forward, now I’m in America. We just got here in 1989. A year later, I got my first job. And I was a violin teacher at a music school in Arcadia. And the very first student that comes in was this little girl—she was 11—Melissa Worsley and her mom. And I gave her the lesson. And at the end of the lesson, her mom asked me, “Mihaela, where are you from? I noticed an accent.” I had probably a thick accent then. And I told her, “I’m from Romania.”

And she started crying. And I thought, “Oh, yeah. Life in Romania is pretty bad, and it’s pretty hard but not that hard.” So it turns out that they were members of the Church of Jesus Christ, and they had six children of their own. And they were praying and fasting during that time to know if they should go to Romania, particularly Romania, to adopt a baby. In the news, there was a lot of talk about Romanian orphanages at that time, so that’s why. So to them, that was an answer to their fast and prayer that they met me and I was from Romania. Well, they were amazing missionaries. They invited my whole family to their home. They right away gave me a Book of Mormon, and they invited me to church. And I remember when I stepped foot in their home for the first time—again, I was fresh from Romania, from a Communist country—I stepped foot in their home, and I felt something so different. And I thought, “Oh, wow. This feeling—whatever this is, I want this. I need this in my life.”

And it was just a thought in my mind, and it was there. But I go back to that because I still remember how I felt at that time. So pretty soon, I started going to church to play my violin. And pretty soon, all my friends were members of the Church. So my whole social life was a lot of singles. I would go to their dances. And they asked me if I would take the discussions. I’m like, “Sure. I want to know what you believe in.” I was just curious. I didn’t have any desire to change or join the Church, but I was curious. I wanted to know what my friends believed in. So this is where the importance of planting seeds is so strong in my mind, and



there's so much value in planting seeds. Because the first two times I took the discussions, everything the missionaries taught me, they were just planting seeds. Those missionaries that taught me the discussions, they have never heard of me joining the Church. They don't know that I'm sealed to my husband. They don't know I have children. They have no idea. I'm just a girl that they taught and never committed to anything.

And they went home. They got transferred. And so anyway, I look back on that, and I also want to talk to missionaries, like, "You're planting seeds, and that's so important. And you may not see the fruits of your work, but it is of uttermost importance. And you will know one day." So moving on, I just kept my social life with all the members of the Church. And a year later, I woke up with a huge desire to know more about the Church—actually, not to know more about the Church, to know more about myself and about my relationship with God and the purpose of my life. It was just a strong desire in my heart. So I thought, "Oh, where do I start? There are so many churches. Where do I go?" And I said, "You know what? Every Sunday I'm going to start going to a different Christian church." And I did. I took a year, and every Sunday I went to a different church. And I waited till the end, and I talked to the pastor or the bishop or the leader, and I would ask questions. And I thought, "You know what? I will know."

I remember one of the missionaryies said, "This is the only Church with the fulness of truth." So I thought, "You know what? If I find truth, I will recognize that. I will know." And at the end of that whole year of searching and very genuine desire to know, I remember feeling very discouraged and really lost spiritually because I felt like, "No, I haven't found it. And I don't know if there is a church out there that has a fulness of truth." So in that year of discovery and of search and a struggle, it came to me at the end of that year that, "Hey, you never gave the Mormon Church a true try." I never took the discussions really wanting to know. So I thought, "I want to know. I want to know if what the missionaries taught me is true, and I'm ready. And this time, I really want to know because I want to know." So I called the Worsleys, and I said, "I would love to take the discussions in your home. Can I come by?" And they were like, "Yes, come on over!" They were so excited, of course. And it took me five months of meeting with the missionaries every week and praying and fasting and going to church and committing to everything they asked me to live my life by. And everything they were teaching me, I was so willing to live by.



And I read the whole Book of Mormon cover to cover. I read *A Marvelous Work and a Wonder* cover to cover. And I would just show up with pages and pages of questions for the missionaries, and they would just answer them. And I still didn't have an answer after five months of this genuine effort. And my whole life became really consumed. I just needed to know if the Church was true. And I got to the point where I couldn't sleep, and I couldn't focus on my school, and I couldn't eat because I really needed to know. And it was really urgent. And I couldn't get an answer from the Spirit. And I remember meeting with the missionaries once and just crying and crying and thinking like, "Why am I not receiving an answer when I want to have one, any answer?" I didn't want it to be true or not. I just thought, "If it's true, I will join. I'll be committed for the rest of my life. But I just want to know either way." So one of the missionaries or Brother Worsley—I can't remember who—they said, "Mihaela, is there anything in your life that might be prohibiting you from receiving an answer or from feeling the Spirit?" And I thought, "No, I'm doing everything right. I want to know."

And then I thought about it. I thought, "Well, I'm still drinking coffee, but that couldn't possibly be it because I'm super willing to give it up. It's no big deal for me." And they're like, "Yes, you need to stop." So I said, "Oh, no problem. I'll stop tonight." And it's just that I didn't know. The missionaries didn't ask me to stop drinking, so I didn't think it was a big deal. So I stopped drinking coffee that night. And the very next night, I said a prayer, the same prayer I have said hundreds of times in those five months. And I asked Heavenly Father if the Church was true. And the answer came from the Spirit really strongly, where all my fears or all my doubt was removed, and it was so strong. I had to ask Heavenly Father to stop the Spirit because it was so overpowering. And I knew the Church was true. It was absolutely amazing. I learned two things from that experience. And one is that obedience is so important, showing Heavenly Father that we want something and that we're willing to obey Him. And the other thing is that truly the miracles do come after the trial of our faith. And that was a trial of my faith, and I have never doubted my testimony. It has always been an anchor to me through my whole life to this day, through all the challenges and beautiful things I've gone through. So I often look back and I think, "Oh, I'm so grateful it took so long because I'm so much stronger now because of that trial and also the miraculous strong answer I got." So that's my story.

SHALYN

As you were talking, I am just hearing you had so much patience. You put in so much effort. You had such a strong desire to know the truth.



And I was just thinking, I feel like those are really important principles to have when you're committing to living the gospel, but then also I was thinking that'd be helpful when we're recommitting to the gospel, when we have trials in our faith, or we have these questions or these doubts. You're naming all these things, and it's like, "I was obedient. I was patient. I prayed. I was doing all of these things." And even though it took a while, the answer came. And like you were just saying, the blessings that came from that decision are just incredible. And anyway, that's what I took away from it. And I hope that that's inspiring to our listeners too. It's like even if they are members of the Church and they have been for however long, these principles still apply when we have questions and when we have doubts.

MIHAELA.

Right. Things can take time. And we live in a society where everything's fast and convenient, and we want things right away. We're not used to waiting anymore or putting forth the effort that it takes to accomplish something hard.

KARLIE.

Right. Well, and I just think of how all of those experiences and steps built on each other. These seeds that were planted it sounds like brought about this genuine interest maybe in spirituality and that put you on this search across different beliefs and churches and then brought you back.

MIHAELA.

Right.

KARLIE.

And I think with Shalyn, I agree. I just think that in the middle of those trials of our faith, it can be really easy to ask, "What is going on? And I am seeking with"—like you said—"such sincerity." And you have such great desire, but it's helpful to hear you say looking back that there was purpose in that, that it made that answer that came all the more powerful and valuable and treasured.

MIHAELA.

Right.



KARLIE.

I appreciate hearing that. And like Shalyn said, I think that will encourage a lot of people listening. It encouraged me.

SHALYN.

Mihaela, after you joined the Church, apparently you shocked your parents with the last-minute decision to attend graduate school at BYU, because you had already been accepted to a top music school in Boston. And you admitted that although this decision didn't make any sense, you felt and you knew it was guided by Heavenly Father. So you proceeded. What were the unexpected blessings of trusting in this decision?

MIHAELA.

So I joined the Church. And a year later, I applied for my master's. And I got accepted to—my first choice was to go to Boston University. And I loved their program. They had a top program in the country for music, and I had a great violin teacher there picked. And I was ready to go. I had an apartment. I had a roommate. Everything was ready for me to go. And also Boston was such a cultural place for music and art. So I was really excited. And I was an accomplished violinist by then, and I just wanted to become a better violinist. And that was a perfect place to be. So three weeks before I was ready to go, from when school was starting, I had a really strong prompting that I should go to BYU. And I thought, "BYU?" BYU did not have a great music program. And I did apply to BYU, but it was not high on my list. I didn't grow up with BYU on my mind. And for music, I thought, "Wow. Boston would have so much more opportunities for me." But that prompting came with a desire to go. And I thought, "Oh, how am I going to tell my parents that I'm going to BYU or that I want to go to BYU?" But I did, I said, "You know, I just feel like I need to go to BYU." And that did not go very well at all.

They just could not understand why I would make such a decision, understandably so from their perspective. And I went to BYU because I knew that that's where I needed to go. And a master's degree is two years long. So when I went to BYU. The violin teacher that was there had cancer that summer, and she passed away right before school started. So I started my master's, and there was no violin teacher at BYU. So try explaining that to your parents. So I felt like I needed to go to BYU and there was no violin teacher at all. So I just stayed at BYU, and I soaked up all the wonderful spiritual devotionals. And I made incredible violin friends in the violin program. We all helped each other and listened to



each other play every week; we were each other's teachers, so to speak. And BYU took that year to interview and search for a teacher. The next fall, my second year, they hired Igor and Vesna Gruppman, and they are a world-renowned violinist couple that are from Russia, and they studied in Russia. She studied—Vesna studied with David Oistrakh among others, and Igor studied with Jascha Heifetz, who are the top violinists of all time. Everybody knows Jascha Heifetz and David Oistrakh. And they come to BYU, Igor and Vesna. And oh, they came with such amazing knowledge. They changed my life and all their students' lives. They changed our technique to play with the Russian technique, which is like a big sound and this big, beautiful sound. And I became their assistant pretty much right away just because I soaked up everything and they knew that I was a master student. And I just loved them so much.

With becoming their assistant, I got the opportunity to teach all their students every time they were out of town performing, which was quite often. So I had that tremendous experience that I would not have had anywhere else for sure. And the most wonderful thing that goes into the story is that they had a true understanding of the purpose of music, how music is a spiritual tool. It's a language of the Spirit that can testify to people of truth, that can uplift people's hearts and answer prayers, and that we as performers are a tool in Heavenly Father's hands to do that work for Him—basically to share the gospel through music. So, wow, just learning that was so empowering and so inspiring to me, and it gave me purpose to my life as a musician. And you feel those things—if you're a musician, you know. You feel the Spirit when you perform. You sense that there is something more to music than just music, but to be taught those things and be nurtured was absolutely phenomenal. So that's what happened at BYU. And I stayed there for three years. So I did two full years for my master's with them, and then I stayed for two years because the Music Department asked me to teach at BYU, to become a violin professor. So I was there for two years teaching.

But the most important thing I feel like I learned is that Heavenly Father will ask me to go to BYU through a prompting, and I followed it. And there was a whole year of unknown. And it wasn't an immediate, "Oh, I was told to go to BYU. Here it is. Here are your wonderful teachers." No, it was a whole year of, "Wow, there's nothing happening at BYU for music. Why am I here?" And I didn't really doubt it because I had a sense that I belonged there. But there was a great value in that lesson that sometimes God will ask us to do things, and it won't be obvious right away as to why He asks us to do it. And we obey, we go into darkness, we have to take those steps of faith and also trust that there's purpose



and there's a reason even when we don't see it and even when it doesn't make sense. That whole year didn't make sense to anyone. But then, of course, after that year, then everything made sense. And it was wonderful, and it changed my life. And I look back, "Wow, what would I have learned at Boston?" I would have learned some new pieces for sure, like a handful of new repertoire. But the lessons that I took from BYU in studying with the Gruppman's and also all my friends that I made there, they've changed my whole view as a musician and as a human being.

SHALYN.

Again, more patience. I'm kind of sensing this theme.

KARLIE.

I love this story. I think that we learn so much as men and as women. But I just think as women, we love to hear each other's stories, these times where we have been refined, like Shalyn says, by patience or just like, "This doesn't make any sense. This is not the logical decision." You probably had envisioned this path for yourself of what things would look like as you attended school in Boston and where you would go after that. And you never could have even maybe imagined the opportunities—

MIHAELA.

Never.

KARLIE.

—that you would have had at BYU. And I love what you shared about learning that music was the spiritual tool. And I think we feel that, but to, like you said, have that articulated and taught to you, can you share how you took that understanding and that teaching from BYU of the power and purpose of music and how you've shared that as a teacher of music students across the country?

MIHAELA.

Absolutely. That's one of my favorite things to share. So after BYU, after teaching there for two years, I moved to New York. And in New York, over the course of a couple years, I opened my own music school because I knew in my heart that—I performed a lot. I performed full-time when I first got there, and I started teaching on the side. And while performing, I opened my



own music school because I knew that my purpose in life was to share music from the Spirit and teach children about their role as a musician and how they can have the Spirit and they can be instruments in God's hand. So I opened my own music school. And it was very successful because New York attracts the best musicians. It also attracts the best lawyers, the best in every field. So it becomes very competitive. And competition can often have a negative edge to it, and "I'll try to make it, but I'll have to push you down in the process." And I had a different vision. I wanted to share this vision that I learned at BYU about the purpose of music.

And I did. I worked with kids from every field and walk of life. And their parents were so thrilled that they could learn really high-quality violin playing and become really great violinists but also know that their talent was a gift that they could share with people. And I didn't put in a religious way. I put it in a way that, "You're talented. That gift is from God, and we have the privilege of sharing that with other people," as we did about three or four performances a year. And all the performances had a service quality to them. So we had a fundraiser for the 2004 tsunami victims, and the kids raised money for their music. We went and performed with all the kids for homes for elderly or for the homeless shelter, and they went around and just did service with their music. And it was wonderful. And the kids loved it, and their parents loved it. And I've been doing that since I left BYU, not just in New York. But I moved to California after New York, and that's how I teach my kids. They know who they are, and they know their purpose as musicians. So it's wonderful, and I love it.

KARLIE.

I love that so much, because I took music lessons growing up, and I just think to infuse kids with more purpose and, like you said, to be able to step outside that competitive, harsh environment, but to show them there can be more to this. I just love that so much. So we're going to back up a little bit. You, again, felt led to go to New York City, but you didn't have a job yet, and you didn't have a lot of savings. I think you said you'd sold your car, and that was all the money you had. So miraculously though, you told us that on your second day in New York City, you auditioned and you were quickly hired by an orchestra. But you were having a really hard time finding a place to live. There's sort of a miraculous ending to this story and a lesson that you learned. So tell us about how you ended up finding a place to live and then what other growth came during this period of living and working in New York City as a single member of the Church.



MIHAELA.

I love New York so much. I still do. So when I got there—I went there with a friend from BYU. She was also a violinist. And we stayed with a friend for a week, and we told her, “We’ll stay with you for a week, and then we’ll get our own apartment.” So we got accepted by an orchestra that first week there. We auditioned and got into Jupiter Orchestra, and we were thrilled. But we realized quickly that to get an apartment in New York, you need to have a letter from your employer saying that you earn at least \$150,000, and this was back in 2000. So this is quite a while ago. And you could not get an apartment without a letter of employment. So we searched and searched, and we took two-and-a-half weeks looking. Every day we knocked at doors and tried to find apartments. And we didn’t have a letter, and they’re like, “No way.” So we thought, “Well, okay, this is the way they do things in New York. We’ve got to find a letter.” So I called one of my musician friends I worked for before and said, “Hey, can you write me a letter? We can’t get an apartment. We’re going to be on the street pretty soon, and I need a letter saying that I’m earning \$150,000.” And they said, “Sure, no problem. I’ll write you a letter.”

So we got the letter. And that weekend I went to church, and I just knew in my heart that that was not the way to go. That letter was not true, and it was not right to use it. So I thought, “Oh, Heavenly Father, I’m breaking up the letter, and I’m putting it in the trash.” And did it. And I said, “I’m so sorry. I just don’t know how to get an apartment. We have no more time. I’ve been living in my friend’s apartment for three weeks, supposed to be a week. And I don’t know how to get an apartment, and it’s impossible. And we really need help.” So the next day, we said, “Okay, let’s cover Inwood today. Inwood was a north part of Manhattan. We had covered every other area in Manhattan. So we went to the north part in Manhattan, and we start knocking doors. And we run into this Russian superintendent and said, “We’re looking for an apartment. Is there any apartment that we can have?” And he said, “Yeah, we have an apartment. Do you want to see it?” So we went.

It was a huge two-bedroom apartment. New York apartments are tiny, tiny, tiny, tiny. You learn to live on no space. These were huge compared to the typical New York apartment. And we asked how much it was going to be—\$1,500. Wow, compared to the \$2,500, \$3,000, \$4,000 that apartments were in New York. We’re like, “Oh, great. It’s ours. We want it.” So we’re waiting for him to say, “But I need the letter.” He never mentioned the word *letter*. He never asked for a letter. We never talked about a letter, and we got



the apartment. The only thing was the apartment was a total disaster inside. The previous renters had left a disaster. He said, “Well, you just have to clean it up yourself. That’s all.” And we did. But we got an apartment, a huge two-bedroom apartment for \$1,500, which was half of any other apartment. No letter. And that was the next day after we put our letter in the trash. The very distinct thought came to me that day, “The city can change you very fast. You have to be strong, and you have to make a decision right now that you will change the city and the people around you for good, and you won’t allow the city to change you.” And that was an amazing lesson. I needed that experience because the hand of the Lord was so obvious. We were desperate. The timing was important. And that’s the beginning of my journey in New York.

KARLIE.

I love the story. And I just keep thinking about what you said, that was just, “I don’t know how.” And to hear your example of, “I’m going to trust that if I am taking the right steps in the right direction, that Heavenly Father can help me if I’m choosing to do things His way.”

MIHAELA.

Right. That’s exactly right.

KARLIE.

And I just think that’s a great example and can inspire people to make similar leaps of faith.

MIHAELA.

And I also feel like with God, nothing is impossible. It’s just over and over all these experiences in my life, I’m like, “Wow, with God, truly nothing is impossible.” It’s not immediate, but you can accomplish the impossible with His help. It’s amazing.

SHALYN.

Well, Mihaela, we appreciate you opening up so much about your life. It’s so fascinating. We all are just loving to talk with you. So we’re going to move now, after you were in New York for several years, you were prompted to move to California. And that’s where you and your husband met online and married in 2010. But you told us that when you got



married, you thought you had “graduated” from the trial of being single, which I love that because I feel like you’re not alone in thinking that from then after marriage would just be like smooth sailing from what you’d already gone through. You shared with us that it was completely devastating that you were ready to start a family right away but were unable to get pregnant. You and your husband, Sterling, now have four children—so ages nine, five, and then twin three-and-a-half year olds, which is similar to my situation. But you traveled a long and very difficult journey to grow your family. You shared with us a heartbreaking story of a miscarriage with twins after you felt what was a very clear impression from the Holy Ghost to proceed with another fertility treatment. Can you share with us this story and what you learned from the experience?

MIHAELA.

So in 2010, I did get married to my husband, but that was after 15 years of being single and wanting to be married and having a full and rich life at BYU and also in New York, where I’ve had so many wonderful, wonderful experiences socially and spiritually and musically in every way. But the longing was that I just wanted to be married, and I wanted to have a family, and I wanted to be a mom along with all those wonderful things that were happening. And I was looking for my husband. I was praying. I was doing everything I could. I probably fasted more than I should have. And I didn’t find my husband. And I knew he was coming, but I didn’t know when. And it was a difficult trial because it was so long. I was 37 when I got married, and my husband was 38. And I thought, “Wow, in comparison to 15 years of waiting, I think we may have little trials, but I think we’ve accomplished our big trial. My big trial in life was to find my husband, and now that I found him, I think we’re good.”

So we got married, and we wanted to start a family right away. We didn’t really have any time to waste, so we started trying right away. And we couldn’t get pregnant, and I thought, “Oh, we will. No worries. I’m sure it will come. That will be a great blessing. It’ll just happen.” And it didn’t happen. So we started doing some fertility. A year into our marriage, we started doing fertility treatments. And fertility treatments are extremely expensive, which is a huge stressor when you’re newly married and you don’t have any money. So we started doing some fertility treatments, and they did not work. Then each one was such a blow emotionally and just so difficult. Then the doctor said, “Your other option would be to do an IVF.” And IVF is \$20,000 to \$25,000, and it’s one try. No pressure, just one try for \$25,000. And we didn’t have \$25,000. And I just remember thinking, “I really want to have a baby. Where are we going to find the money?” Then I was crying and



crying and praying and thinking, “How are we going to get this money?” And my mom saw my desperation and said, “You know what? We’re going to refinance our house, and we will give you some money.” So they did. And they gave us money for all those treatments we had done so far and two IVFs.

So we did an IVF. And it worked, and we got pregnant. And we had a baby. And we were beside ourselves. We were so excited. We had Lincoln. And Lincoln now is nine. And then I thought, “Hey, let’s do another IVF.” So we did another one when he was nine months old. And it did not work. So my husband after that said, “We have a baby. We are so blessed. Let’s count our blessings and move on.” And we are now in our 40s. And I thought, “No, I want to try another one. I just want to try one more IVF. I just feel like we should have another baby.” And my husband is like, “We don’t have another \$25,000. And how are we going to make it work? Let’s find out what the Lord has in mind for our family.” So we spent an entire year praying, fasting to know what the Lord’s plan was and if we should do another IVF. So we did another one, and there was great hope there. And we got pregnant with twins, and we’re like, “Oh my goodness, that was just amazing.” And one of the twins disappeared just after a few weeks. We saw there was a heartbeat at six weeks, and then it just disappeared. It was called the vanishing twin syndrome. But we still had one, and that was so exciting.

We had another ultrasound at eight weeks, another one at 10 weeks. And we saw the heart; it was starting to develop. It was just so exciting. And at 10 weeks, the fertility doctor said, “You are graduating. You can tell the whole world. Your chance of having a miscarriage is less than five percent. You’re fine.” So at 13 weeks, I went to my first appointment at my regular ob-gyn, and I had a lot of confidence. I told Sterling, “Go to work. You don’t need to worry. I’ll go by myself. We’ve already done three ultrasounds. We’re fine.” And I went. And the ob-gyn did an ultrasound, and there was no heartbeat. And I felt like my whole earth underneath me was shattering, and it was just beyond devastating. I had never, ever in my life had to question. But I felt like this cloud of confusion and darkness and deep sorrow came over me, and I just couldn’t process all that. I was like, “Oh, we spent a whole year praying and fasting. And Heavenly Father knew that this was so hard for us, and we just wanted to do the right thing. And there are so many components to that—sacrifice of money. And it just turned into this, and why? Why would He ask me to do something like that if He knew the end from the beginning?”



And it was just so hard. I just remember not even going to church for a couple of months because socially, I just couldn't handle people asking me how I'm doing, even like, "How are you?" And I would just sob uncontrollably. So I stayed home for a couple of months, and I just felt miserable. And I remember one Monday morning, I woke up, and that cloud of darkness and heaviness was gone. And I was light, and I was back to myself. And I said, "Oh, Sterling, I'm feeling back to myself. I don't know what happened." It was very black and white. And I had experienced this depression for two months, and all of a sudden, I wake up and I'm feeling great and happy and light. And he said, "Oh, I forgot to tell you. Yesterday, when I went to church, the bishop told me that he and the bishopric fasted for you yesterday." And I thought, "Oh, wow, that's what it was." It was an answer of their fast in my behalf. And it was the right time, and that cloud was lifted for me, and my brain was lifted. Immediately, when I was back to myself—I'm a real multitasker, and I like to move forward and do things. So immediately I thought, "Okay, let's look into adoption. I still feel like it's right for us to have a baby, so let's look into adoption." So as we were looking into adopting, we learned that there is a way to have donor embryos. You carry a baby, you give birth to the baby, and you can nurse the baby, and it's like your baby. And it sounded so appealing to me because I loved carrying. I had an easy pregnancy with Lincoln, and I loved nursing. And it was just a wonderful experience. And I thought, "That sounds right. That's for us."

Within weeks, it worked. And we had Alden. And then within a year, a little bit after that, we did one more. And we had the twins. And we have four children now, which is absolutely miraculous considering what age we got married. And yes, it was just by the hand of God. But looking back at that painful story of my miscarriage, I just learned that we can't make any drastic decisions when we are in a tragedy or suffering or we don't understand. And I also learned that that experience, as painful as it was, had to happen in my life because I had to have closure on doing one IVF after another and keep having the hope that just one more IVF would work. That door had to close in my life, and I had to know that I had to look for other ways of having children. And that's exactly what happened.

I'm actually grateful that I went through that, which is really hard to say. But I have three other children now, and it's amazing.

KARLIE.



Thank you for sharing such a personal story and one with a lot of pain and a lot of, like you said, suffering and anguish. I think there are so many women that feel so many of those same emotions and go through very similar experiences. And I just think as I was listening to you, a few things—that it was okay for you to be sad and to be feeling those emotions that you were feeling, a very natural reaction to that confusion of, “I thought we knew that this was the right thing for us and that we were led to this.” And I really appreciate you being vulnerable and sharing that that’s how you felt. And I love talking with you because you have this perspective of now being where you are in your story. Looking back, you can better see maybe this is why things turned out the way that they did. And it’s so hard to do when you’re in the thick of it. Your example of just kind of hanging on and then “Let’s look from this vantage point down the road of what this might mean.”

MIHAELA.

When you’re in the darkness of something tragic happening and not knowing why it happened, you don’t know why it happened, and you cannot see your puzzle. Your puzzle is incomplete, and you cannot see the whole picture. But what helped me hang on was my knowledge that really I know that God is kind and good, and He’s my Father that loves me.

And knowing His attributes, knowing the way He is as a God, He’ll never want to hurt me. I didn’t understand why this happened, but He doesn’t want to hurt me. So I know that, and I knew that. And I hung on to that. And I knew that there had to be a reason, and I didn’t understand it. But I hung on to that thought that He’s good and He loves me and He cares and “I have no idea what He’s doing with me right now, but hang in there.”

KARLIE.

I love that, because I think of women in a variety of situations that are questioning, “How could a loving, kind, understanding, all-knowing God allow these things to happen or stand by and watch them happen?” But I think holding on to truth taught in scripture, taught by prophets, holding on to that, studying that, that can reassure us in those moments, like you said, of darkness when there isn’t a lot of clarity. So thank you for sharing about these miracles. And we want to move now. One of your twins suffered brain damage at birth and struggles with developmental delays. You’ve shared that with his disabilities have come both tremendous challenges and also some wonderful lessons. And we’d



love for you to share some of those challenges and lessons that you've learned with our listeners.

MIHAELA.

Yes, absolutely. So when the twins were born, Abram was born. We have a boy and a girl—Abram and Caroline. And Abram was born first, and he was fine. But he stopped breathing after a few minutes. They were very premature; they were 32 weeks. I just went into labor, and they couldn't stop it, so they were born. So he stopped breathing, and they couldn't intubate him fast enough, so he didn't breathe for about five minutes; therefore, the brain damage. So he has cerebral palsy, which just means damage to the brain because of lack of oxygen, either in uterus or at birth. For him, it was at birth. We did not know that until he was one, that he had cerebral palsy. Yeah, with raising a child with special needs, there are a lot of challenges and a lot of wonderful lessons that they teach you in that process. Cognitively, he is doing great. He's only slightly delayed. So he's very aware of his surroundings. But physically—he's three-and-a-half years old—and physically, he can do the things that a five-month-old baby can do. So imagine a three-and-a-half-year-old boy that wants to run and wants to be outside and do what his siblings want to do, and he can't. He can roll, but he cannot even sit independently to play with his toys or walk.

I have to support him, support his trunk while he walks. Basically, I am his wheels anywhere he goes. He can't even get up from the floor just in sitting position by himself. So lifting him and taking him places and just spending all my time with him just for him to be engaged. We want him to be involved in things and engaged and not feel left out. So tending to him physically all day, it's a huge challenge because I have four kids and they all have needs, and it's exhausting as a mom. And I think of the long-term challenge knowing that having a child with special needs of this sort, it's like a marathon that never ends. He's not going to outgrow his cerebral palsy. He's going to have this challenge his whole life. So it's hard to think of that.

We think of trials—they have a beginning and then an end. But this doesn't really seem to have an end, so that's difficult. I do my work, I do all I can, and somehow things work out. Another challenge is balancing all my kids needs. They all have needs. And they're like, "Oh, Mom, life is all about Abram." And I don't want that to be the case, but he has a lot more needs than they do. So that's a constant challenge, and I haven't figured that one out very well,



how to balance that. But it's a work in progress. So those are some of the challenges that we face. But they're also beautiful lessons just like anything in life, right? He is truly a happy child. He's happy. And he's happy not because he's not cognitively okay, but he's happy because he has a happy nature. And he has an amazing sense of humor, and he makes us laugh. And I learned that happiness truly is not a result of our life circumstances or what we have achieved in life, but it's a choice.

I often look at him, I'm thinking, "Oh, if I were you"—I don't tell them this ever—"but I'm thinking I would be crying." But he's happy. And he's teaching me choose happiness. That's my choice. The other thing he's teaching us is that we can do and we must do hard things. He does hard things every second of his life. The other thing that I noticed that is a wonderful lesson for my older children is that my children have become a lot more empathetic and loving and aware of other people's needs. Like sometimes, I'm just stressed out, and I'm practicing with all the piano—they all do instruments—and I just feel bad for Abram. He's in the other room sitting on the floor, and I'm thinking, "Oh, is he bored of being on the floor?" And I finish piano with all of them, and I go to the other room. Lincoln, my nine-year-old, picked him up—he's 30 pounds; he's heavy. So he picked him up, he put him in his special chair, and he was doing letters with him and coloring with him at the coloring table. And I thought, "Oh, those are just some of those precious moments." Lincoln's teacher at school said, "You know what? He is always asking what he can do for other kids, if he can help them with their projects. And he's always aware of other people's needs." And I think that Abram's teaching them to be that sensitive and empathetic and loving. It's all him teaching us these wonderful lessons we're meant to learn in life—the hard way.

SHALYN.

As we've gone through with this whole discussion, I just think you've had a very challenging life and you've had a very beautiful life. And I just feel like your optimism and faith are completely inspiring. I love how you shared the lessons that you've learned and that your kids are learning too. I just think that Heavenly Father is probably so pleased about their empathy and awareness for others of His children. I think that that's so beautiful. So again, thank you for sharing.

MIHAELA.

Yes, thank you.



SHALYN.

Well, Mihaela, as we end this episode, is there anything else you would want to share with the listeners of this podcast or women of the Church?

MIHAELA.

Yeah, I wanted to talk a little bit about how we can support those around us with disabilities, because we're surrounded by so many people that have disabilities. And I had no experience before I had Abram. But now with him in our family, I look at him and he wants to be just like everyone else. He wants to have friends, he wants Caroline's friends to be his friends, and he wants to be included in everything we do. And he wants to be part of everything we do, and we do our best to do that. But I'm realizing that we need to treat him the same as you would treat anyone else. They look different, but they want to be just like us. They want to have friends, they want to be included, they want to be heard, they want to be valued, they want to be part of things. So I think we need to be willing to go a little bit out of our comfort zone and acknowledge those people around us that have disabilities and say hi and maybe ask them a question and listen. So yes, I wanted to say that.

KARLIE.

That's a wonderful reminder, because I just think of your son is not just your son; he's also a brother, he's a neighbor, he's part of your ward, he's part of us and of our communities. And like you said, as we look around, there are a lot of people who struggle with a variety of disabilities, and they want to be included. And this is such a wonderful reminder to look outside ourselves and, like you said, maybe get out of our comfort zone if we don't have a lot of experience with a close friend or family member. I also know the Church has published recently some really great resources that we can include in our show notes of including those with disabilities in our Primary and in our youth groups and in our adult groups and congregations at church. So we can definitely do that if people want to use it as a springboard to learn more. Thank you. This is just hitting the tip of an iceberg. We could talk for another hour about this, I'm sure.

MIHAELA.

So true. It's so true.

KARLIE.



Thank you so much. And to our listeners, thank you for tuning in to this episode of the Latter-day Saint Women podcast.

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KARLIE.

And I'm Karlie Guymon. Thanks for listening.

