

# 94-Donna Chacko Full ep.

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## SPEAKERS

David Sandstrom, Dr. Donna Chacko

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### Dr. Donna Chacko 00:00

And that's when I changed specialties and I worked in Washington DC with immigrants and homeless and that's where I really got an education about what health is and, and how stress just devastates health if you have I don't know if you can pay your rent and you know your husband's an alcoholic, whatever the circumstances were you were abused as a kid, the discrimination it, you know, you're going to have a wealth of health problems and misery and that's what they had. And then this is what this is what really really got me to see how when they those folks, were in a situation where they, for the first time had hope. It was like the magic ingredient.

### David Sandstrom 00:52

Welcome to the Natural Health Matters podcast where it's all about maximizing your health potential, so that you can look and feel your best at any age. I'm your host, David Sandstrom, naturopathic doctor and biblical health coach, and this is episode number 94. Today we have in the show, Dr. Donna Chacko Dr. Donna is the founder of serenity and health which promotes health in body, mind and spirit based on a foundation of faith in Jesus Christ. Dr. Chacko practiced medicine for decades as a radiation oncologist. And later as a family medicine doctor. She's the author of pilgrimage, a doctor's healing journey. Dr. Chacko Welcome to Natural Health Matters.

### David Sandstrom 01:35

Oh, I'm very, very, very happy to be here with you today, David.

### David Sandstrom 01:39

Yeah, I really looking forward to this conversation. I know that we're very like minded. And you know, here in the natural nation understands that we maximize our health potential when we

align our lives more fully, with God's natural design for spirit, mind and body. And there's a lot there. And I know you have you were a medical, I guess you still are a medical doctor, do you keep your medical license? Current?

D Dr. Donna Chacko 02:01

No, I love my license go. When I retired eight years ago, nine years ago. What I do now is more is not as a licensed physician any longer.

D David Sandstrom 02:12

Okay, so tell us a little bit about your story. How did you how did you come to be practicing medicine in a traditional fashion for so long, and then branch out into the holistic realm? I'd love to hear that story.

D Dr. Donna Chacko 02:23

Okay. Well, I always love being a doctor. And I did that for decades. And I, I really was content with it very happy with it. I changed and my view of health changed is what happened. And it was a long, painful process. But eventually, I really did come to understand that my own path to full abundant health had so much to do with my spiritual journey. And I and I learned how much my crazy and control overactive mind was causing me misery, and how it's hard to be really healthy when you have a really, really painful crummy relationship. Ongoing. And just so you know, a combination of major events, one major event and several minor events just changed and broadened how I looked at health, and I retired when I was 64. I had, I had had some health issues, some major burnout, which was one of my events. Oh, God, I really wasn't ready to stop, you know, that's why I got my, I was by this time on on an intentional self healing recovery kind of plan. And I got myself pulled together. And that's when I founded serenity and health and I just had this calling to share what I had learned about health of body, mind and spirit because I saw too many too much suffering too. Too much avoidable suffering, you know, and I could just see the many ways people could help themselves to feel better. And that was my mission. And it was all very much faith based by this time because of my own journey.

D David Sandstrom 04:17

Yeah, that's really good. How long ago? Was that, that you started serenity and Hill

D Dr. Donna Chacko 04:21

eight years ago? Yeah.

D David Sandstrom 04:25

You know, I think there's a lot of people listening, maybe not the regular listeners of this show.

But if someone's just checking in, they may be inclined to say, you know, faith and health. That sounds good. But you know, you're not going to pray your way out of cancer. So why don't you talk to the natural nation or that listener, a little bit about the connection between our faith and the peace that knowing God brings and how that's connected to our physical vitality?

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Dr. Donna Chacko 04:54

It just, it's, it's the basic of what I like to talk about. So I appreciate that question, David. There are so many links between faith and health. And the first and I think really the most critical, because it was the most necessary for me was, once one comes to a full acceptance that you believe in God, and that that means something. And that you must ask yourself what that means. And that you're willing to surrender to that. Then, you know, you, you have to spend a little bit of time save my problem for years, and I really went through desperate times in my marriage was that I never had time for God or me or anything I never slowed down. So the first thing it has to do with to slowing down giving God some time in your life, giving yourself some time giving God some time giving yourself the benefit of even if it's 10 minutes of Day of committed, quiet time, and I think of any single step, a person could take that that is number one. I mean, so many folks, I felt it that you have had it in your life, David, you just get stuck, you feel lousy, you can sleep, you're anxious, you're worried your family's a mess. You know, there's it's a complicated world. And yes, it's sometimes seems like there's no options, you just fell on this treadmill feeling miserable. So I never felt when I was going through that, that I had time. I had no insight. Yeah, so I'm sympathetic with how difficult it is. However, it is imperative you if you wish to recover and heal and feel better you you have to give yourself and God some time. And that involves some time for listening, listening to God listening to others listen to your body.

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David Sandstrom 06:54

I love it. That's really good stuff. And I would add to that, yes and alone time. So meditation with the Word of God, and in quiet time is super important. I would never argue that. But also, we need to extend that same practice into our rest into our sleep, and give ourselves permission to let go of the troubles of the day. And just put your head on the pillow and rest that you're safe. Rest in the fact that you're safe and you're loved and you're a child of God that will enhance sleep. And as you know, when we sleep. When we sleep well. It our bodies work better. Our mental emotional capacity is improved, our memories improved. And our physical vitality also is improved as well. And and I think that, you know, it all starts with that connectedness with God. That's where our ultimate source of pieces,

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Dr. Donna Chacko 07:45

right? Well, you know, in my research and study, as I was putting together serenity and health, I was so intrigued by all the research about meditation and mindfulness. And those were two new things to me. In a way as and you're always, wow, you think about that. So many religions, so many cultures, over centuries have meditated and felt benefit. Yeah. And I researched and learned a lot about the roots of meditation in Christianity. And I also learned a lot about mindfulness. And I ended up and in there, there really two keys, I think, to my own journey, and I think could be hugely helpful to others. I ended up with a committed practice of meditation

following the guidelines of something called centering prayer, which is just a quiet meditation, where you you don't use words, you don't use sight, you just surrender. It's in say, Yes, I accept the presence and action of our God. And you know, just like the research said, over time, not weeks and months, over a few years, I I know my crazy overactive in control, brain slowed down a little bit, it became a little bit more open, a little able to more Be at peace and listen. And the second prayer practice is, is we laid it in these these are two huge things that will help people find health is this thing about mindfulness and you know, trying to stay in the moment instead of being up in your head. So you know, anguished about the past or worried about the future. I spent all of my time up in my head and my To Do lists. And I mean, I made myself crazy. Probably made other people crazy, too. Right.

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David Sandstrom 09:44

Well, that makes sense. I mean, you graduated from medical school, you've got to have a type A personality, right? Yes. The way you're wired.

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Dr. Donna Chacko 09:51

Yeah. But I realized I knew I wasn't even listening to people I was up in my head. And so I One or two, I read a book, I stumbled on a book, God sent me a book, which was called sacrament of the present moment. And it was written in the 1800s. And it was about just grabbing on to the divine action of eternity special moment and just knowing you're in God's grace at that time, if you are there in that moment with the Lord, instead of being up in your head, and I took that, and I in just for myself, I developed this little practice, which I call God centered mindfulness. And my goal was to say my little prayer, which was simply my lord, oh, my god, St. Thomas's words, anytime I thought about God during the day, or anytime I needed God, like if I was anxious, stressed, irritated, happy, grateful, whatever. And in the beginning, it was hard to remember to say it, but with concerted effort in six or eight weeks, this, those words started just popping into my mind. And now, dozens and dozens of times a day, they interrupt some kind of negative thinking, or anger or stress. And brings me to the moment. And I just think this is the most exciting prayer ever, because it's a prayer. I'm turning to God, it takes no time. If you're busy. And it makes you mindful. If you're getting stressed, or you're about to say something you shouldn't say, you know, you put your it pulls you back a little bit to take a breath and start over. Yeah. So as I have spoken to people, I realized that this business of stress and anxiety in the head going is it's a problem that many people that I share with many people.

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David Sandstrom 11:49

I want a couple of thoughts on that. And what is the code that you use from the from the biblical passage, my Lord, my God, that came from the doubting Thomas, right? That's what Doubting Thomas came from. And he's, the disciples had seen the risen Jesus, but he hadn't. He said, I think you guys are nuts, I don't believe and until I can stick my finger through the hole in his hands. I'm not going to believe. And the next time Jesus showed up is Hey, Thomas, Hey, Tom, come on over here. Hey, have a look. And he and he stuck his fingers to the hole in his head. And he said, My Lord, and my God. And I think it's illustrative for us to say, well, it took a lot to bring Thomas out of where he was, in that, that stress. And to just rest in the fact

that Jesus was Lord. And I had the same can be true with us, you know, we get caught up in the busyness of the day, and just surrendering to his love, and goodness is, is a is a major, major hurdle, that if we can get over, we can just rest in that wow, what what peace it brings. You know, when I was researching for my book, *The Christians guide to Holistic Health*, I came to the conclusion of this, there's two things that we need to trust and believe in about God. And that is, he loves us enough, that when he tells us to do something, it's for our benefit. And when he tells us to avoid something, it's for our protection. We've got to hold on to that. And we if we can surrender to His love and goodness to say, look, God, I know, you have my well being in mind. Wow, the peace that we can enjoy the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy and peace.

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Dr. Donna Chacko 13:31

You know, David, I wouldn't be doing this. Now. If I hadn't had, you know, a crisis and a pivotal moment in my life, when I was close to 40 having to do with just absolute desperation and crisis in my marriage, and just, you know, terrible concern that my daughters were being ruined because of the dysfunction and the shame and the anger. And you know, I had no insight. I could just blame everything on my husband, right. I was too busy, busy to deal with it anyway. And it just got and I had not intentionally but because I was too busy a sort of abandoned my childhood faith by that time. So I was just floating free. And you know, that pain, took me to my knees. It took me to God and I hadn't, I didn't want to get a divorce. I didn't want to stay married. I didn't want my kids to be ruined. I didn't want any of the options that seem to be on the table, you know. And it was the most awful time in my life, but it was the absolute best time in my life. And I know you've heard that kind of a story before but I eventually just, I just had to turn to God and give up and surrender. Yeah, and listen. And I clearly felt called to stay married. And I told my husband I would not return to the divorce lawyer. And we did To have a relative return of peace to our family, I was by this time moving ahead on my adult journey as a follower of Jesus, which was the first time in my whole life, you know, as an adult, I was on this journey. But you know what happened a few years later, he got leukemia and died. So it was like, wow. And it was after that, that I made, I just continued on my own journey to try and figure out what this all meant, and my spiritual journey. And I, that's when I changed specialties. And I worked in Washington, DC, with immigrants and homeless and that's where I really got an education about what health is, and, and how stress just devastates health if you have I don't know if you can pay your rent and, you know, your husband's an alcoholic, whatever the circumstances were, you were abused as a kid. The discrimination it is, you know, you're going to have a wealth of health problems and misery. And that's what they had. And then this is what this is what really, really got me to see how when they those folks, were in a situation where they, for the first time had hope. It was like the magic ingredient. I mean, an immigrant who would have come to the clinic every week, a new immigrant, I'm thinking of a young woman, many, many problems, headaches, stomach ache, backache, insomnia, anxiety, depression, you know, a new immigrant living in her Auntie's living room, no money, no friends couldn't speak English. And it meant she stopped coming to the clinic, until she returned six months later, like a transformed person. And what what healed her of all those ailments. She started going to the charter school for immigrants for ink to learn English, she made friends, she had a part time job, and she had hoped she was cured. And I saw that kind of thing repeatedly. And that that was all part of my learning. Yeah,

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David Sandstrom 17:13

I'm thinking, Oh, the Zig Ziglar teaching, you know, one of the greatest motivational speakers

that ever lived, say he was a follower of Jesus Christ. And he was asked a question at a seminar. And they said, he said, Can we just think our way can power power positive thinking, Can we think our way into health and happiness? And he said, No, you can't? But it sure does help?

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Dr. Donna Chacko 17:37

Yeah, absolutely. No, no, absolutely. But if you don't start with the thinking process, and you know, some quiet some reflection, some time, some pair, you you, you may not be able to move ahead and have that hope or motivation or be able to take that first intentional step without which you're not going to make progress. Right, you know,

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David Sandstrom 17:59

you know, just to take that one step further, I would suggest if and you're not oncologist, and I want to, I want to be respectful of your your position there. But, you know, if a doctor sees a grim outlook, and the prognosis is not good, and says to their patient, you know, it's, it's time to go home and get your affairs in order that can bring their real, they can just pull the rug out from under a person and leave them with no hope. I would suggest and I've said this for many years, I said it in my book, Christians, God Holistic Health, and that is, anyone that's gone on to defy that diag, that prognosis and go on to beat cancer has to have said in their minds, at some point had had a, like a line in the sand and say, You know what? I'm not going to accept that. I'm going to believe that I can beat this.

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Dr. Donna Chacko 18:49

Would you agree with that? Well, it's complicated. But But what I do agree with what you said is that the attitude of the patient has a huge amount to do with how much they suffer. Yes. And if you are optimistic, and hopefully you're you're better able to care for yourself, you have all those positive endorphins and things floating around. If you trust Jesus, I always talk about the the, quote, health benefits of trusting Jesus, obviously, we don't have our faith and believe in God and trust Jesus so we can be more healthy that that's ridiculous, right? However, however, I think Jesus is very, very happy to give us this bonus, this grace of feeling better when we trust Him, and that includes people who have advanced cancer. And I mean, I remember seeing folks and thinking even way back then how easier it is to go through a terminal illness. If if you are at peace versus if you are just desperate and angry that this has happened to you. And so it's an example of how, you know, we're not talking about a prosperity gospel, you do everything right, you're going to be healed. But if you trust God, and do the best you can, you will suffer less positively, in my view,

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David Sandstrom 20:20

I totally agree with that you and I are on the same page here. You know, God's in control, God is sovereign and in charge, and sometimes he will use suffering and sickness to, to bring somebody to a place of more spiritual maturity, no doubt about that. But if we, if we worship Him and love Him the way we should, because he's worthy of our worship, that's the reason

why we surrender to Him. The nice fringe benefit of that is the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, self control. Who would argue that though all of those qualities are not health promoting? They are right. So it's not name it and claim it. It's not saying, hey, if I do this, this has to happen. No, no, no, that's not true. But why don't we just behave the way Jesus taught and act like true disciples, and let the chips fall where they may on the outcome, just trust in his wisdom and his guidance, and enjoy some of those side effects?

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Dr. Donna Chacko 21:28

Right. But of course, the and you mentioned this earlier, the whole other side is that we can't just expect him to take care of us that we've been given this gift of our bodies and our health, and we are stewards. And I believe, I believe it's part of our responsibility as Christians to take care of that gift and take care of their body, because then we can better do HIS Holy Will. And, but it's not easy, as we all know, to have healthy habits and, but, but we have a lot of power over our health, you know, some something like 70% of chronic disease in our country right now. Could be cured or improved. With the adoption of healthy habits. Now, I find that staggering, really, and but I know how hard it is, it's not easy to change habits are you? So that's another part of this whole thing. And that's where like groups come in, and communities that's an advantage of church or faith groups are, and there are plenty of churches and, and faith organizations that direct their, their efforts toward health, trying to learn how to do that how to set a tiny goal that's reachable and take a small step. Maybe you're maybe you're only month, the only change you're gonna make as you're gonna walk for 15 minutes, three times a week. Okay, that's great. You do that?

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David Sandstrom 23:06

Yeah, I totally agree with that. So let's talk about some of the specifics. Let's say someone's listening, and they have metabolic syndrome. They're overweight. Maybe they're diabetic, anxious, depressed. They're a follower of Jesus Christ, and they feel stuck. They feel like, this is my last life, what would you say to that person?

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Dr. Donna Chacko 23:28

And there's a lot of those people, David I, or lesser degrees of Yeah. Well, I think the first thing is, like I said, to make sure you have a committed prayer time to listen to God. And, and everybody does it differently. I found tremendous benefit from meditative prayer. In addition to what I use with the Bible, I'm a Catholic. So I go to Mass and I've, you know, learn a lot and grow closer to God a lot through that way. However, your faith everybody has their own but you I believe, no matter how lousy your life is, how crummy you feel, how busy you are, that you have to do that. And if you're already doing that, maybe it's time to reevaluate. If you're not satisfied, maybe you need a different prayer practice, or a prayer partner or a Bible group or something. But that's the first thing. The The second thing is to figure out some to think about the what you can do for body, mind and spirit. And just think about it. Benjamin Franklin had this huge routine. Did you ever study what he did for self improvement? He had this whole book and columns like an Excel chart of all the things he was going to do to improve himself. Well, we don't have to go to that extreme but time to think about so you're going to have your

prayer time. And then pick one other thing which bothers you the most, you're your weight, you don't exercise, you watch too much TV. So maybe it would be a very small commitment to do some exercise with a very limited goal if you do nothing. Like I said something like three times a week, 15 minutes, it depends on where you're at, of course, and, and what ever go You set, Sunday is a great day, the Sabbath to sort of reevaluate in your, in your prayer time where you're at with your care of body, mind and spirit. Where are you at? Is God pleased with what you're doing? In terms of eating, of course, that's always a challenge. And I'm not one that recommends specific diets. But I've been hugely impressed with how few fruits and vegetables people eat, when they if they really take the time to count how many servings a day. So I frequently start with that recommendation, because I think many folks get through the day. And they might have two or three most three servings of fruit or vegetable. I mean, think about it. If you have toast and coffee, or an egg or whatever, for breakfast, and you might have a sandwich for lunch. I mean, you're to dinner, and you've had what one tomato in your sandwich.

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David Sandstrom 26:28

So where did that? Where did that come from? That you have to have a bagel and coffee for breakfast? Who wrote that one?

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Dr. Donna Chacko 26:33

I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. But I think this is a real good place to start. And you're you're the nutritionist. But this is someplace where I will frequently ask people to start how many servings a day counted up for a few days and see, and I don't get too specific, you know, a handful of something or one piece of food or, I mean, the vegetables are, I think the most important, but anyway, and set some modest goal. Five or six servings is a very modest goal, but it's not easy to achieve. So I think if anybody out there with who's stuck, does something like these several things I mentioned, evaluate your your prayer practices and modify or increase or change as needed. Do something so that you can move your body in some way and and that start addressing the foods you eat? Are you eating what God intended us to eat? What you don't now some people will need professional help coaching. talking, you know, joining a group, I don't think we're meant to be on this journey alone. Part of my serenity and health. I do programs at my church, I give talks, we have a women's group called caring for body and soul and we meet weekly, if anybody's eastern time zone. And once they get up early, you know, let me know we'd be happy to have new members, we're very

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David Sandstrom 28:04

glad to share that link with us. At the end of the episode.

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Dr. Donna Chacko 28:06

Yeah. And then I put in I, I wrote this, all of my life learnings, and how I understood this and summarized it in a book that I wrote last year. And and I'm really, I'm really proud of that book, because people have told me it helped them a lot because I really sort of I was very honest

about my personal life and the my painful journey and what I learned. But it's so it's not just a memoir, though, I wanted to then turn that into what I learned in what I know can help you. And that's what I put up

**D** David Sandstrom 28:51

There's a lot in the book. But I just I just want to kind of summarize what you just said. And that is if someone's feeling stuck, and they don't know where to turn, do some reflection, spend some time thinking contemplative ly, and ask yourself, well, what can I do better? You know, and start out small shout out with the baby steps. Maybe it's a short walk in, you don't have to start off with a five mile run. How about five minutes, you know, start there. As long as you're moving in the right direction, small change over time, will have massive potential. And then again, you know, make some changes to eat, you don't have to revolutionize what you're eating and drinking throughout the day in a week's time, or a date one day. But start off small and move in the right direction. And you'll see you'll will you will see note and notice progress over time.

**D** Dr. Donna Chacko 29:44

Yeah, you know what they say you to see a change, you got to make a change. That's right. That's the hard truth.

**D** David Sandstrom 29:51

So I want to ask you, you wrote a blog post called the Red dumpster and it got a lot of attention. So tell us what what is the red dumpster?

**D** Dr. Donna Chacko 30:01

While the red dumpster was a real red dumpster that appeared two blocks away from my house in front of someone's house after the elderly lady died, and my my friend, and her neighbor was just so moved, watching all of the old lady stuff be dumped into the dumpster. And it just provoked such a discussion amongst us about our stuff, and our connection to our stuff. And our mortality. And trying to think about those who we will live behind. When we die, are we going to leave them a mess. And it was just designed to help us think through and accept our mortality dealing with end of life planning. It's a It's, I think, an act of great love and respect for anyone, for our family members to take care of end of life planning while and do when you're well and healthy. So, you know not It's not easy to talk about picking a funeral? Or do you want to be cremated? When somebody's already sick? That's awful. That's so hard. But it's not hard when you're Yeah, well. I mean, it's a little hard. But it's easier, much easier. Yes, yes. And so that was sort of the drift of it. And, and also just thinking about our overconsumption, and how much stuff we have, and trying to encourage all of us to simplify our lives as best we can and share are excellent. I

**D** David Sandstrom 31:49

DAVID SANDSTROM 33:15

I love it. You know, one of the verses that spoke to me profoundly over the years is John 10:10, I've come across that they might have life and have it abundantly. And I asked myself, what is the what is the abundant life, you know, I grew up in Fort Lauderdale, which is the yachting capital of the world. And we lived on a canal and my brothers and I have we had boats, and we'd go out and we see these, you know, 90 100 foot yachts, and all this, you know, extreme decadent, luxury. And the motto with most of my friends was he who dies with the most toys wins. And that's the environment I grew up in as a young man. And, you know, it's easy to get swept up in all that. But then when I started meditating on Jon's antenna, so wait a minute, you know, you know, an expensive important driveway and a big boat. In a fancy car that is not abundant living, that's not at all what Jesus taught. In fact, he taught quite the opposite. Significance in life is found in the context of loving relationships. And that's the spiritual component to health is our loving relationship with God and loving relationship with one another. And the love relationship we have with ourselves, our sense of self worth, and our self love, is in a really important part of our overall health, wellness and our vitality. You know, it's not selfish to take care of yourself, you know, on an airliner, they tell you, in the event that we lose cabin pressure, put on your mask first, before you assist the child. The reason is, you are of no use to the child if you're unconscious, right. So the same could be said with our health, I would take care of yourself, because it's the most loving thing you can do. Because then you'll have the energy and the vitality and the motivation and the clarity of mind to love others well, and the truth of the matter is the way we treat ourselves, how well we love ourselves is tied to how well we will treat in love others

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Dr. Donna Chacko 33:56

Yeah, yeah. And I mean, the fact of the matter is, the better we treat ourselves and the healthier we are, the more we can enjoy our boat. If we happen to have one nothing wrong with it all start working on with it, it kept him protected. Exactly. And like the, the guy who had in the Bible who had such abundant crops, he had to build a second barn. He was so proud of himself, except of course he died that night and, you know, so yeah, it taking care of your health. Our health in a way is a little selfish. I mean, that's the wrong word. But you know, we're the ones that benefit. Yeah,

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David Sandstrom 34:40

Absolutely. You know, when we do things God's way, we won't regret it. You know, we there's there's benefits and blessings attached to doing things God's way. Again, no guarantees. But you know what you put you set yourself up for success. Shifting gears just a little bit. You talk in your book about emotional Health, and how that's connected to living abundantly. So could you speak to that just a little bit?

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Dr. Donna Chacko 35:07

Yes, I'm really glad you brought that up because it was a huge part of my journey. For years, I never wanted to think about seeing a psychotherapist or anything like that. I was just too busy to think about things. But the as my brain quieted as I had a little more time, and was developing serenity and health, and reading a lot and learning a lot, I started having all these questions about why I was the way I was, and why had I married so young, so quickly. And why

had I not been able to communicate with my husband, and what was all that what was going on, right. And at the same time, I started writing my book, which started out as a pure self help book, but then morphed into a memoir. And the second I tried to write a memoir, I realized I, I was a mess, and I was confused. And you know what they writers always say, I didn't know this. But now I know this, they say that. You it's only by writing that you learn what you want to write, that you learn. And I. So that's what happened to me, I started writing my memoir, like I was so confused. And then I spent a lot of time studying psychology and emotional health, and saw a psychotherapist, and here's what I learned. Number one, I was so driven to work, because of the way I was raised, not in a bad way. And I didn't have bad parents, I had imperfect parents, I had imperfect parents who loved their three children. But my brothers and I, above all else, we learned to work. And I did not understand how driven I was for all those years. So it was like I had no choice. I didn't realize what a problem that was for my family to be working all the time. And maybe especially as a doctor was even harder, because especially in those days, part time was hard. And you know, you're getting all kinds of rewards for being the good doctor. But the bottom line was, I was driven to work. And I had no clue that that was going on. And the second thing that was very detrimental in my marriage was that I never learned how to communicate my wishes or needs or desires. I was much more interested in having peace. I thought that was peace. And maybe this is a little bit of screwed up Christianity. I don't know what it was. But, you know, I never learned I should have said to this man who I married. Honey, I don't think we should get engaged. I just met you six weeks ago. But I got engaged. I couldn't say that even though I remember thinking this is kind of fast. You know, I was I was just finishing, when that happened by after my sophomore year in college. So you add those two behavioral traits, that were just something I learned as a child. That's how that's what worked as a child to keep me sane and happy, right. So when when you finally realize the thought that that's an automatic pressure in you making you be like that, then you have to start thinking, then you become more mindful of it. So now I'm retired, right? Things should be but I can still see those traits driving me and sometimes not to the good of me or others. So I think emotional health requires that we know who we are and try and understand how we are raised and our subconscious and so many things that drive our behavior. And I'm all for if you if you can't figure it out yourself or you think you if you're always mad at people or irritated or have family issues, get some help to try and understand it. I mean, I'm sure we can progress but I know mine I know myself better. And I'm the thing is adding all this together, I'm much more able to respond to a problem. Instead of React.

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#### David Sandstrom 39:49

I really liked that good stuff. You know, the Bible says that a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife and the two will become one flesh and That's a profound statement there. And I believe that there's a lot of Christians out there that say they look at that passage, they say, Well, you know, I've moved out of the house, I'm financially independent, I don't rely on my parents for any, I don't ask them for money. And so I've left parents. Well, maybe not. Because as you just articulated, we have a lot of things that we grow up with in our homes, our our siblings, and our parents teach us lessons that we don't even know. And we consider those that behavior normal, because that's all we don't know any different. That's what we were raised in. And sometimes it takes some reflection as an adult, to look back and say, Wait a minute, is this emotional state? Or are these beliefs? Are these expectations serving me? Or are they harming me? You know, for instance, in a home, the dad always took out the garbage. So a young girl says, Oh, if a husband loves his wife, he'll always take out the garbage. That's what my dad did. But guess what, your husband doesn't like to take out the garbage. Right? So

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Dr. Donna Chacko 41:12

no, no, that's a wonderful example. It's complicated, with all kinds of stuff like garbage and Christmas vacation and birthday cakes and bedtime hours and air conditioning.

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David Sandstrom 41:24

Absolutely. And then we bring these expectations into our relationships, and it creates stress so that we have to learn how to work through them. One last thing I'd like to say on this is, you know, a seven or eight year old or even a 13, or 14 year old, their prefrontal cortex is not developed to 25 26 27. So their ability to handle traumatic events is compromised. And children often make some really bad conclusions about their place in the world, and the meaning of certain events, because they don't have the capacity to process them. So it's, it's worth taking some time and revisiting some of those traumatic events in your past with perhaps a professional and see if they can guide you through. Wait a minute, is that normal? And is that serving you?

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Dr. Donna Chacko 42:14

Right? The therapist that I saw, use the word distorting, she said, you were a kid. And your your intake was distorted what you know, your interpretation was distorted. But that's what you remember. That's your reality or truth. That's,

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David Sandstrom 42:37

so you talk in your book about ACEs or adverse childhood events. So just speak a little bit about Yes,

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Dr. Donna Chacko 42:44

good. Oh, oh, my gosh, David, when I worked in Washington, DC, I worked in a medical recovery facility for homeless people. It's called Christ house, it was an amazing place. It was a residential facility for staff. So I lived there. And both there and in the clinic, these people had kazillion diagnoses. And at the time, I had not heard of ACEs because this was a while back. And I just couldn't imagine why some people should have six or eight diagnoses and all these problems and mental illness and obesity and and drug addiction, and cancer and immune disease. Oh my goodness. Then a few years later, I learned about ACEs. So an ace is an adverse childhood experience. And in the 70s, I believe the first study maybe a this was done. And basically, it's been learned that if a child experiences a trauma, whether it be abuse, neglect, that could be divorce, it could be food insecurity, witnessing violence. Yeah, traumas like that. This is how the study was done. The rest of their life, they will have a higher incidence of most health conditions, behavioral problems, psychological problems, things like obesity, drug addiction, jail time. Yeah, the list goes on. It's an astounding piece of information. And as this so then when I learned this, I go oh, that's what was going on in Washington. Those people

all probably had an ACE score 10 which is the highest and I have reflected on this. A lot in the thing is let me point on this is a hugely important for those listening. If you have a high ace, you're not doomed. There are many things you can do to heal just the kind of stuff that Dave and I talk about is how you heal yourself from aces, but just knowing that might make you feel better, like you're not crazy. You're not you know, there's an explanation so not alone. You and you're not alone. And just knowing aces, it just helps like, like, for example, if I know of a child who appears to be in a unfortunate family circumstance, or if I was a teacher or a church member, you know, there's a big push now to have as awareness, trauma awareness, so that we can reach out and help and prevent these problems, because the studies show that even if one person offers love and constant support doesn't have to be huge, to a child going through some of these stresses in life, sometimes that's enough to get them through. So learning about ACEs helps, you know, helps us deal with other people better. And it helps us heal ourselves, those who have aces, and I think it should help us be very, very merciful and understanding and less judgmental, especially if you're in healthcare or where you're intersecting with somebody that you think is like, what's wrong with this person, or, you know, and to understand, they didn't come from where you came, or they may have come from hell, and they may be so far ahead of you, in their spiritual development and emotional development, they have come so far.

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David Sandstrom 46:25

There was only really good stuff there. Donna, I want to add one thing, and that is, nobody gets through life and escapes this. We all have aces in our lives. Yes. And it's new knowledge that we need to say, Okay, where are mine? And how are they affecting me? And that will that will go a long way towards building a more abundant life and more health and vitality on all levels of spirit mind body? Absolutely.

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Dr. Donna Chacko 46:59

Because I mean, I'm a perfect example of what you just said, Dave, I took my a score, and it's really low. I mean, if you buy the standards of that specific test, it's just a survey that anyone can take, and you answer the questions, and you get your score. And mine was really low, which would predict, you know, write less problems. But I've explained to some of the things I took from childhood, from my loving but imperfect parents, we all we all have traumas that

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David Sandstrom 47:28

We don't get past the age of, you know, six to 12 months without experiencing something. You know, I would argue even in the womb, there can be trauma. But anyway, so Donna, that was that you've shared some great, you've dropped a lot of value bombs here. Could you just kind of summarize for the natural nation, and maybe give us some low hanging fruit that you think would be easy to implement? For the for the listening audience?

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Dr. Donna Chacko 47:57

Well, I will, and I'm going to be repeating myself because it bears repeating. If you're in a mess, and stuck and feel just crummy and unhappy. Just sit down and reflect on it and start making a

and stuck and feel just crummy and unhappy. Just sit down and reflect on it and start making a couple of tiny changes. First being your prayer life, your quiet reflection time, maybe it's going to be time in nature, maybe you can combine your prayer time and walking in nature. However you do it. Commit to it, not for the rest of your life. For one day, for one week, and every week, reevaluate how you're doing. Think about the same thing about your movement, your activity, are you are you how much time are you spending watching TV or on the screen? Can you cut back? Can you make one tiny commitment for the first week? Maybe you're just going to have no time except you can do a half hour walk on Saturday. That's fine. That's perfect. That's wonderful. Yeah. And do that once a week. And I mentioned before about the the fruits and vegetables as well. But above all, I think is the absolute requirement to tune in, tune into yourself tune in to God tune in start listening and and not being in charge on the go planning. Just step back in and let God help you along.

**D** David Sandstrom 49:22

I love it. That's all really great stuff. So data if someone wants to go deeper with you, and they want to get a hold of you, what's the best way to do that?

**D** Dr. Donna Chacko 49:29

I would love to hear from all of you. My website is serenity and health. That's three words a nd serenity and health.com. i It's all volunteer I send up a monthly blog on topics like this. And I'd love it if you subscribe to the blog. And especially I would be really honored if you would check out my book. I put heart and soul in that book. By the way, I just received three awards last month from the Catholic Media Association for best book in marriage and family, best self published book and honorable mention in healing and self help, and I was blown away.

**D** David Sandstrom 50:12

That's really great. And your book is called pilgrimage book doctors healing journey.

**D** Dr. Donna Chacko 50:19

Yes. And it's described on the website, it's available, and Amazon and Barnes and Noble make sugar major pain doctors healing journey,

**D** David Sandstrom 50:28

I will make sure to put a link in the show notes page for that. Right. Right. Donna, thank you so much for spending some time with us today.

**D** Dr. Donna Chacko 50:35

It was really a pleasure. And I'm really happy to have met you,

D

David Sandstrom 50:39

David. Likewise, for more, go to the show notes page at [davidsandstrom.com/94](https://davidsandstrom.com/94). There you can find an audio as well as a video version of the podcast. I also put links to all the resources that we mentioned, as well as a full downloadable transcript. If you're enjoying these conversations, I sure would appreciate you telling a friend about it. Ya know faith based conversations centered around health are difficult to find. And if you tell a friend about it, I believe they'll thank you for it because it really is very useful information and a lot of people can benefit from it. But they don't know that we exist. So the number one way someone finds a new podcast is a friend tells them about it. So I sure would appreciate you telling your friends about the show if you're enjoying it. That's it for now. Thanks for listening. I'll talk with you next week. Be blessed