

**02/20/23**

**Week nine: WFL**

**Randy Robison**

**Abdu Murray**

**In the studio**

**RANDY:** Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm Randy Robison. Glad to have you with me because I have a guest that I think you're really going to enjoy. His name is Abdu Murray, and he has a book called *More Than a White Man's Religion*. I know that's probably got you going, what is that about? We'll talk about it but there are some interesting things you'll want to hear.

Appreciate you being here. Abdu, great to have you here.

**ABDU:** Great to be here, Randy, thank you for having me.

**RANDY:** Before we get into the book and some of the issues that you hit there, I really would love for them to hear a little bit of your background, how you got to where you are today.

**ABDU:** Sure. Yeah. Probably people are thinking, Abdu and Murray? So what's this Arabic first name and the Scottish last name? What's the deal there? My real last name is Mhn'i. This is an Arabic word, of course. When they came over, they changed it to Murray so now I'm somehow Lebanese—

**RANDY:** They do that.

**ABDU:** So now I'm Lebanese and Scottish which is weird. I'm not. I'm actually Lebanese. But I was raised as a Muslim. I was born in the states, raised as a Muslim and I

took Islam pretty seriously, even at a young age. I would engage in spiritual conversations with people. I was still a red-blooded American boy, a teenager, and a young adult. So I talked about the things that people normally talk about. But at some point, conversations would almost always turn spiritual. I cared about eternal truths, eternal verities, and eternal destiny quite a bit. I thought Islam was the cat's whiskers. People should believe it.

And so I took it upon myself to try to tell people about that; about why Christianity is wrong. And one of the reasons why I focused on Christianity so much is that Christians were sort of low-hanging fruit in the area I grew up in.

**RANDY:** Why? Because their faith wasn't that strong?

**ABDU:** Well, they were available. So I'm a child of the '80s, so to speak. I was born in the '70s, I remember the '80s. In the '90s and the '80s, it was still fashionable to say you were a Christian even if you didn't mean it.

But in the east, when you—in the Middle East, when you identify as a specific religion you mean it. Now you don't always believe everything about that religious system, but it forms your identity. So I thought the people who said, oh, I'm a Christian. I'm a Presbyterian. I'm a Pentecostal. I'm a Baptist. I'm a Roman Catholic, whatever they said they were, I thought it meant something very profound to them.

So I'd ask them a question, "Why are you a Christian?" "Why are you this?" "Why are you that?" Most of their answers were "tradition." Well, I said that's not good enough. Because you can't trust your eternal soul to a faith that someone else has thought through. Have you thought through it yourself? And usually, they hadn't. And so I said, "Well, I thought it through for you."

So I would go about showing them why I thought they were wrong. And here are 15 arguments why you shouldn't trust the Bible, why Jesus can't be God, or why the Trinity

makes no sense, and the cross is blasphemy. I would go through that litany of things. I would do it conversationally though, I wasn't very antagonistic.

But along the way, there were some Christians who knew what they were talking about and that started a journey, a nine-year journey into the investigation of the Christian faith, historical, scientific, theological, and existential. Would it matter to my actual heart? And eventually, I found that the Christian faith satisfied all intellectual avenues I had but also the emotional avenues I had.

And I gave my life to Christ after nine years of doing that. So since then, I'm a trial lawyer by training, but I've gone into ministry, so I've become an advocate, as it were, for the Lord marshaling the evidence for the Christian faith. How is it that the Christian faith speaks to the credibility of the mind's questions but also the longings of the heart's yearnings?

**RANDY:** What was missing in Islam that you found in Christianity?

**ABDU:** Well, it is interesting because that which I hoped was true in Islam, I found to actually be true in Christianity. So you hear this phrase, right, Allahu Akbar? Normally, when you hear this, you hear it in the media, and you know something bad happens. Something explodes or something like that. This is unfortunate because most Muslims—

**RANDY:** Not fair.

**ABDU:** It's not because most Muslims don't use that phrase as a terrorist chant. They really don't. It means God is bigger, but the connotation is God is greater. So for the Muslim, God is the greatest possible being. There can be no being greater than God. Of course, that makes sense to anyone who believes that God could possibly exist, including Christians.

But here's the problem. Is that if God is truly the greatest possible being, then all things

that would denigrate or insult that greatness have to be opposed. So for example, the reason why I oppose Christianity specifically or thought it was right-hearted but wrong-headed was because I thought the Trinity doesn't make any sense. How can God be the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and not be three gods? And if God the Father needs help from God the Son and the Holy Spirit, if he needs help then he can't be great. Or God the creator gets trapped in a body that sweats, needs to eat, walks around, falls asleep, and then dies at the hands of the sinners he created? How could this God possibly be great?

Well, what I discovered over the course of this journey was that it is the very things that I was objecting to in Christianity which as denigrating God's greatness are the very things that demonstrate God's greatness. So God is great not despite the Trinity but because of the Trinity. It demonstrates God's greatness because God is a relational being and needs nothing else to exist to experience relationship. He doesn't need you or me to exist. He is relationship, Father, Son, Holy Spirit; one God in three persons who are in eternal community in the Trinity.

The crucifixion of Jesus is, and this is where it was a linchpin for me, is that if God is the greatest possible being, then he would express the greatest possible ethic, it just naturally follows, which is love. And he would express the greatest possible ethic in the greatest possible way. So if he doesn't do that then he isn't the greatest possible being. Well, what's the greatest possible way to express love? It's self-sacrifice. And only in the Christian faith do we have that.

**RANDY:** It says, "No greater love than this that a man lay down his life for his friends."

**ABDU:** And when I read Romans chapter 5, verse eight, everything that I wanted to be true elsewhere was finally coalescing to be true not only historically, but in a way that mattered to me. For God demonstrates his love, his greatest possible love, his love without limits, his self-sacrificial love that while we were enemies of Christ, while we were sinners, Christ died for us. The greatest possible being expressing the greatest

possible ethic in the greatest possible way.

So if God is truly the greatest possible being, as all Muslims hope he is, then he must be the God of the cross and empty tomb.

**RANDY:** Wow! What did that satisfy other than intellect?

**ABDU:** Well, a couple of things it satisfied in me is that there is a certain sense of religiosity. Every worldview, I've often taught this way, other religious systems, they're all fundamentally different. They're superficially similar, except in one way. They are all fundamentally the same in that they teach that you are the savior. You are the solution to your own problem. If you do enough good deeds, you'll please God and you'll go to heaven. Or if you do enough things where you work off your karma. Or you devote yourself well enough, you'll become enlightened and kind of become God or become one with the universe, whatever it might be.

You see we're always the solution to our own problems. Christianity is extremely practical but it's also starkly real. It says you can't be the solution because you are the problem. So you need someone who is not you to save you from you. So religiosity breeds certain anxiety because you're thinking, am I measuring up? How can I possibly measure up? Christianity tells you, you don't need to. Is that it is the God who reaches down who pulls you up as opposed to you who reaches up in an effort to climb up. And so it relieves that anxiety.

But the truth that I found, that God is the greatest possible being, achieves a sense of satisfaction. That if there is a God, then I finally found a worldview that is not only satisfying this need but is coherent; that every doctrine of Christianity, the Trinity, the incarnation, and the cross all makes sense of each other because atonement happens because there wasn't a fake transaction, you see.

Muslims will often object and say that God takes, in Christianity, there is no real

transaction because if God is the Father and the Son then all he does is take money from his right pocket and put it in his left. There is no real transaction at the cross, no one paid for anything. But if the Son and the Father share the same nature, but they are different personhoods of the Trinity, then the Son makes the payment to the Father on our behalf. So the Trinity makes sense of the atonement. And the atonement gives glory to the Trinity. And the Holy Spirit reminds us of all those things.

All these things intertwine. So honestly, there is a sense of awe in all of that. It is like that is not only true, but it is awesomely true.

**RANDY:** I want to hit some topics in the book because first of all, the title is a little jarring, *More Than a White Man's Religion*. Why are you singling out white men in this?

**ABDU:** Yeah. Well, it's interesting you say that because the title is actually a signal that it is not just singling them out, but it is including them. But it is more than that. The reason why we single out white and male is because, in the book I try to address the, I think increasingly vociferous objections to the Christian faith. That it is a religion that is either created by or manipulated by white males to dominate people of color and women. See, I've been on a lot of college campuses and spoken in secular venues all over the place. The questions have typically been historical. Can we trust the Bible historically? Or science? Does the Bible and science have an irreconcilable conflict? Does evolution prove that God is out of a job? These kinds of questions.

What I've noticed is the questions have shifted. They're still asking those questions but the primary question they're asking now is not is the Bible true. They're asking is, is the Bible moral? And the common social surge right now is that the answer is no. The Bible promotes slavery, it promotes racism, and it promotes patriarchy that puts women down. That's the common feeling right now.

So they're never getting to the truth issue because they can't get past the moral issue. So the whole point of the book is to say, the Bible is not a white man's—it's not a white

man's religion but it is more than that. It includes white males, but it doesn't exclude anybody else. And so it is a book about ethnic equality and gender equality.

**RANDY:** It's interesting that that's the argument. Not just the truthfulness, but the morality of the Bible. I get you can go through history and say well, this person who claimed to be a Christian acted immorally. You can look around today, you're going to see that. I can't look at Christ and say that. Is that what you do?

**ABDU:** And that's interesting because every single chapter—so I go through some difficult passages in the Bible. When I say "difficult" I don't mean that you shouldn't read them. You should immerse yourself in them to find out how do we get the truth out of this stuff? So passages that seem to condone, and only seem to condone slavery, for example. Passages that seem to condone women as being somehow subpar to men, how do we explore these things?

But we look at them through the lens of the life of Jesus. Because you don't look at something that seems cloudy through a cloudy lens because it will just get double cloudy. You look at it through a clear lens, and Jesus's life is the clear lens that I think brings into focus the scriptures that came from before him, in terms of the Old Testament and before his incarnation.

So when you look at the life of Jesus, I think you're 100% right, is that if we look at his life, I think he explodes these myths. There was an atheist, a well-known atheist, who made the comment to a friend of mine. He said, "I look at the life of Jesus and one thing is clear, he is not a product of his time." And that's interesting because you look at every other prophet of other religious systems or every other founder of religious systems and they're always moored into—their commands, their ethics, all these things are always moored in their time. They're stuck there.

Now the Bible has a historical context, of course, it does. But it is not trapped there. So many things can be explained in a historical context but they're also timeless. It was

Lesslie Newbigin who said that Christ is our eternal contemporary. He is ancient but he is contemporary all at the same time. And Jesus is not that because he bucks the system. An outwardly sexist system that kept women from getting an education, he championed them. An outwardly racist system that said that either it was in the nation of Israel, the non-Jews are lower than Jews. Or the Romans who thought that Jews were dogs.

**RANDY:** And the Samaritans.

**ABDU:** And the Samaritans are a great example. No one liked them, neither Jews or Romans. And Jesus bucks that system over and over and over again. And he didn't do it in contravention of the previous scriptures, he did it in fulfillment of them.

**RANDY:** Interesting. And he didn't just talk about it, he literally did things about it.

Okay. I've got so many questions. You'll have to get the book if you want to get into the details of this. It is available wherever you get books. But I have to ask you about one that you mentioned because this is a sticking point for a lot of people, and it is controversial and it splits denominations and things like that. You can see my notes, can't you? [Laughing]

**ABDU:** I know where this is going anyway because this is the most controversial thing in the book.

**RANDY:** Women's roles today, how do you see them scripturally?

**ABDU:** The one thing I'm going to say might disappoint some people. I'm not going to resolve a 2,000-year-old controversy.

**RANDY:** Oh, come on! We've got two minutes. You can do it!

**ABDU:** Exactly! Exactly! Well, here's what I would say though, is that the reason why



this is controversial, and in terms of, and from my view evangelistically, outside of the Christian faith, why women either leave the Christian faith or are on the outside looking in saying why would I join this faith, is because Paul seems to say, women ought to be silent in church. I do not permit a woman to speak even. If she has a question, ask her husband and all these things.

This goes back to the historical context. Paul, in several places, in Timothy and First Corinthians, is talking about women in terms of historical context. In that context what you had was a nascent church, a fledgling church, a just coming out of the cradle—not even out of the cradle, it's still in the cradle church. And what you needed was qualified clergy to be able to spread the truth and not be subject to error.

Now, the unfortunate reality of that time in the first century, is that women, despite Christianity's best efforts, were not educated. So they could not be qualified teachers yet. But it was so, women were in fact, and we know this from some of the historical records surrounding the time of Paul, that in those churches Paul was writing to, women were being influenced by either a prior pagan background they had or new pagan religious beliefs that were saying things like childbirth is a form of slavery. Or other things like headaddresses mattered in certain ways and that type of thing.

**RANDY:** Where do you escape that? Do you just look at the totality of scripture? Do you look at other examples of women in the scripture where God has empowered them to be able to teach?

**ABDU:** I think that you do that exactly. You look at the totality of scripture and you need to look at the four corners of the document, which that's the legal concept that I get from my legal training. If you look at one thing and pluck it out of context you can misunderstand it. But if you take a look at the entire context—so First Corinthians chapter 14, for example, where it seems to suggest that women shouldn't even speak, well, in First Corinthians 11, Paul talks about prophecy, and women prophesying and praying in church out loud. That necessarily entails speaking. So Paul can't be

condemning in First Corinthians 14 the very thing he condoned in First Corinthians 11.

Now does that mean certain offices and that kind of thing? That's more of a controversy that I didn't try to resolve in the book. But what I do try to resolve is the so-called idea of sexism that Paul is talking about; that somehow, he is denigrating women to a place where they can't speak. Well, that's not true because First Corinthians 14 has a specific historical context I just mentioned. And First Corinthians 11 has a similar context where women are vaulted to a level higher than they were in the Jewish system, in the Rabbinic Jewish system at the time, or in the Roman pagan system at the time. So it is quite revolutionary in a pro-women state.

**RANDY:** Very revolutionary at the time. And he commends women on their leadership on other matters.

**ABDU:** But he names them. Little subtle things, like Priscilla and Aquila. He named Priscilla and Aquila. Now a Middle Easterner, a Middle Eastern Jew at the time, if he's going to mention Priscilla at all, and he might not have even mentioned her. If he's going to mention Priscilla and Aquila, he would do it backward. He would mention Aquila first and then Priscilla because Aquila is the man. But he doesn't. He doesn't do it by mistake. He does it on purpose. He mentions her first because her role is so prominent.

**RANDY:** So when you step back and you look at your life and your experience, your search for truth, where do you land for people who are just not maybe certain that Jesus is the way, the truth, the life?

**ABDU:** That is such a great question. So what I would encourage people to do is to take a look at the evidence of the life of Christ. Is he who the Bible says he is? Let's try to put away any notions of the caricature of the Bible that the media and others would foist on it and say what does it say? If you're going to reject it, reject the real thing. And if you're skeptical about it, fine, but use your skepticism as a way to drive you towards truth. Chesterton said that joy is the gigantic secret of the Christian. He is going to say, that for

the Christian, even though there are peripheral questions that remain unanswered in this life, the central questions, who am I, how did I get here, why am I here, why is here the way it is, and how do I get out of this mess? Those four questions have answers. The peripheral questions might not—not on this side of the heaven but the central questions do. So joy is the central part of the Christian experience, and sorrow might be the peripheral parts.

But for the skeptic, it is the opposite because the central questions don't have answers yet. Maybe the peripheral ones do, but the central ones don't. So what I would suggest is that knowledge of the truth and embracing the truth brings freedom and joy.

**RANDY:** Oh, that's good! And that freedom and joy bring action. And out of our gratitude, we can reach out and do the good works for which we are created. I want to show you one of those opportunities right now and then ask you to be a part of it. Watch this.

### **On the mission field**

**TAMMY:** When we walk into these villages, they basically are looking at us asking, can you help? Can you do something?

>> She's saying, we don't have another one. What do we do? We need to use this one.

**ANNOUNCER:** For children of poverty, gathering in a pond or stream to have fun is not the reason they're there. It is for the purpose of survival. Without water, these children and their families would not live more than a week. And when they have no other choice but to drink contaminated water, illness, and all too often death, become the bitter consequence of that inescapable choice.

**TAMMY:** Not one child has ever said, "The water is perfect. The water is great. I'm feeling fine." Child after child—same story; they're struggling.

**ANNOUNCER:** Our mission teams have spoken with heartbroken families from Cambodia in the heart of Asia, to wind-swept Zambia in Southern Africa, in rural villages in Central America, and poverty-stricken areas of south Asia, whose children's waterborne illnesses were so severe they died before anything could be done to save them. So massive is the problem that nearly 800 million people worldwide do not have access to clean water.

**TAMMY:** There are hundreds of thousands of children dying every year because of contaminated water. Let's change that for them. Let's be the change. Let's do something now. Let's not wait until it is too late, 'til we lose another child who can't do anything about it, until we lose another family, 'til they can't do anything about it.

We can do something now. We have an opportunity to be life to so many people who need it so desperately through fresh, clean water.

**End of video**

**In the studio**

**RANDY:** Wherever we go around the world to drill wells, we go in the name of Jesus to give them life eternal and to give them life through fresh, clean water. When you partner with us, you go there too. We can't do it without you.

I've been to these places. I've seen the contaminated water, and the lack of water sources. And unfortunately, I've seen graves that are short because there are children buried there. I don't want to see any more of those. God sees those too. I think that's why he sent you and I to reach into these places with his love, not just in word but in deed to say we want to give you—we want to give you something.

You've got to think from their standpoint. They've got to be wondering, why would people I don't know from halfway around the world go to all this trouble and expense to

give me clean drinking water? It's a good question and we've got the best answer—it's the love of Jesus.

Go to the phone or go online right now and make the best gift that you can knowing that it will be reaching into their world and sharing the love of Christ with them. The average cost of a well is \$4,800 and that's average across the 20 nations, the 350 wells that we plan to drill this year based on a lot of different factors, some places are harder to get to, and deeper to drill.

The bottom line is that a gift of \$4800 will go towards one well. That will change the lives of on average, a thousand people. People come from all over to this well. This isn't just some little thing in the backyard. This is a big deal. This is a life-changing deal. It's community. When you do that they will then have the clean drinking water that doesn't take the lives of so many.

The need is urgent. They need it now. If you can give \$48 that will go towards clean drinking water for ten people. A gift of \$144 will go towards clean drinking water for 30 people. You can touch a life today, but it means doing something right now. Go to the phone, go online, make the best gift you can. When you give Water for LIFE, you're giving the life of Jesus and the love of Jesus. Let's do it right now.

### **Begin video clip**

**ANNOUNCER:** *Every day thousands of lives are lost to waterborne diseases, and nearly half of those are children under the age of five. Through Mission: Water for LIFE, you can give mothers hope and children a future as we provide clean life-giving water for thousands of children and their families before it's too late.*

*With your gift today, you can help drill and establish 350 water wells this year! Your gift of \$24 will help provide clean water for five children. A gift of \$48 will help provide for ten. \$72 will provide for 15. And \$144 will help provide life-giving water for 30 people*

*for a lifetime.*

*With a gift of any amount, we'll send you *The Birthright*. This book is a liberating and life-changing celebration of your birthright as a child of the King. Discover the joy of coming home to your Father's warm embrace.*

*With your gift of \$100 or more, we'll also send you the "Moments With Him" mug set. These two beautifully crafted coffee mugs feature scripture on the side, the perfect way to start your day and reflect on the goodness of God.*

*Finally, please consider a gift of \$1200 to help provide water for 250 people or a gift of \$4800 to help sponsor a complete well, and request our new, inspiring bronze sculpture, "Consider the Birds" inspired by Jesus' words in Matthew 6:26.*

*Please call, write, or make your gift online today.*

**End of video**

**In the studio**

**RANDY:** I hope you're going to the phone or going online to make the best gift you can. We will demonstrate the love of Christ to every nation – every one – every one! That is the point of this book, *More Than a White Man's Religion*. You can pick it up wherever you get books. I highly recommend it. It is a great read.

And I appreciate your witness, I appreciate your intelligence, your thoughtfulness, and your time right here today.

**ABDU:** It's a pleasure. Thanks for having me on.

**RANDY:** Thank you for watching. Come back. We've got more right here on *Life Today*. If you ever miss a program, go to [LifeToday.org](http://LifeToday.org), you can see them all there. We'll see you again next time.