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Week 36: *Christmas Shoes and Smiles*

Randy Robison and Tammy Trent

Addison Bevere

In the studio

TAMMY: Hello everybody. Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm Tammy Trent and this is Randy Robison. Got a question for you, and for you. Do you ever struggle with wondering why God doesn't answer your prayers?

RANDY: Yeah.

TAMMY: Kind of? I definitely have been there. Like feeling like your prayers are ineffective or an absolute waste of time. Well, today's guest is going to help us walk through some of that, and maybe come to an understanding of why prayer is so important in our lives, especially as Christians.

Addison Bevere, I'm so glad that you're here. I want to tell you I was reading your book on the plane coming here yesterday. And I was in seat 7A, maybe, crying my eyes out. And you would think, why are you crying about prayer? But I think it was because I had so many aha moments. And I think that there are so many of us that have walked with Jesus for a really long time and have hit different places in our relationship with Jesus, in our prayer life, where we feel ineffective. Like I don't know what to pray anymore, and I don't know why God isn't answering. I don't think I'm hearing the voice of God anymore.

How do we get to a place in our lives, in our Christian walk with Jesus to pray effectively and to know that God is there and he is listening and answering us? How do we grow in our prayer life?

ADDISON: Yeah, that is a great question and I think it is something we're all wondering.

RANDY: It is like the ten great questions right there.

TAMMY: I'm eating my hair but I'm so sorry. I just had so many on the plane. I took so many notes and had so many things to say but I was growing already reading your words.

ADDISON: Wow! Well, I believe it is a part of our journey to discover what it is to be human. We want to connect with God. We were made to commune with God. And for so many of us, our idea of prayer has been so transactional. And because it's been transactional, we've been left feeling disappointed. Because prayer isn't a formula to solve, it is an intimate experience to share.

And so often when it comes to prayer, when things don't work out the way we expect them to work out, we immediately think, oh man! What have I done wrong? What have I missed? How was I off? How was I in the wrong with how I went to God? And God's actually saying, no, let's let prayer be about me, how I'm working in your life. Let's let prayer not be you grasping for me. Actually, let's let prayer be a position where you're grasped by me. Let's allow this to be a place of intimacy and connection where I take you to new places of knowing and being known.

RANDY: Let me just ask for a little clarification. This idea of transactionalism. The scripture tells us to bring our requests to God. Scripture tells us the prayer of a righteous man availeth much. So shouldn't I go to God and say, God, this is what I need and what I want? Yeah, if I really want to be spiritual, I will say, not my will but yours, right? Jesus taught us to say that. But yet, I'm expecting—I'm expecting to get something even if it is a not now or a no, I'm expecting some kind of answer. But shouldn't God answer some of our prayers?

ADDISON: Yeah. And that's stuff we wrestle with. Because hey God, I prayed things, you didn't respond. Therefore, either you don't respond in prayer, and to our prayers, or there is something wrong with me and that's why you're not responding. So a lot of us shrink back in guilt and shame. And prayer is one of those places where we're not going to tell people we're bad at it but

we believe we're bad at it. Like we've been following Jesus long enough where we should be better at this. But we don't want to tell people that we're struggling to connect with God and understand what prayer is all about.

But to answer your question, there is a moment in the garden that I love that I think brings the tension of prayer, brings it front and center. We see Jesus in his moment of greatest need, the Garden of Gethsemane where he is crying out. And he says, "Father, if there is any way this cup could pass, please let it pass." He is specific. So God wants us to be specific in our prayers. There is a lot in scripture about asking. The Greek word *aiteo*, which means to ask, means to put a demand on God. It means to ask with a sense of you expect a response. It might not necessarily be what you're asking for but you know you have a right to make a request, you know you belong in the presence of the one you're bringing that request to.

So first of all, he was specific. Second, he was steadfast. He prayed again and again and again. And for so many of us, the process of praying prepares us to better understand and receive what we're asking for. It is going to God and contending that prepares us to receive what he has for us. So he's steadfast.

And there's a third component, he was surrendered. He said, "Not my will but yours be done." We want to swing the pendulum. We want it to be really easy. We want it to either be God, I give you my list and you answer everything on my list the way I expect you to answer it, and prayer works, or I'm just going to pray a vague prayer, not my will but yours be done.

TAMMY: So you've listed the three. Have you ever struggled yourself with the three? Have you ever been in a season in your life? Because I want to know I'm not alone, Addison.

[Laughter]

Have you ever struggled yourself and just thought, what am I doing wrong with my prayer life right now? Have you been in a dry season?

ADDISON: Absolutely. I was going to say not a season, multiple seasons of my life. But there was one season in particular where I navigated insomnia for five years. I lived in a perpetual fog. I felt like God had abandoned me. I would reach out to God in prayer and I didn't sense God's presence.

I remember toward the end of this season, my wife had invited a few couples over for a time of prayer. I was like come on! Really? Are we doing this? Because I knew that moment would happen where everyone is sitting and they're talking about how God is touching them and ministering to them. And all I wanted to do is pour out my complaints to God. Like that's where I'm at, just being real. Like that's where my prayer life is.

And we're sitting there and we're talking and my wife shares and she looks at me like hey, it is your turn to share. I'm like I'm not sharing. I'm not saying anything. Everyone else is crying and talking about how God has touched them. And I'm just sitting there and I'm quiet. And finally, I shared with them and said, "Hey, to be honest with you, I haven't sensed God's presence in years. And I feel like I'm being faithful, I feel like I'm checking the boxes, I'm doing the right things but God has checked out of my life. And honestly, I don't know what to do."

And I discovered in that season because I had an idea of myself and I had an idea of God that I struggled to let go of during that season. And I realized that God has a way of not delivering us from a thing. For me, it was insomnia. For so many of us, when it comes to prayer, we want the answers. We do because we want to get life right. But I learned that peace isn't found in having all the answers, it is found in being in tune with the one who is the answer. I discovered that God has a way of not delivering us from a thing if he knows that that thing will ultimately deliver us to him.

See, I had a transactional—going back to the transactional view of prayer. But God is like actually, no. This is about intimacy. This is about you letting go of old constructs, old ideas of what it means to be a son, what it is to be someone who is in connection with me. I'm encouraging you, I'm creating an environment for you to let that go so you could be grasped by me in a fresh sense.

RANDY: I think it is funny, we oftentimes pray for God to show us our purpose or to help us fulfill our purpose. But we're not there yet, and the process of refinement, of conforming us to the image of Christ, which is his ultimate goal of sanctification, we don't—we want to skip a lot of that.

What I hear you suggesting, both from experience and from study, is that sometimes a lot of the frustrations we may be experiencing, a lot of the dry seasons is a part of that transformation that will ultimately get us to what we're praying for.

ADDISON: Absolutely. It prepares us. Like those specific requests, they're good for us because they create tension in our lives. We pray vague prayers. We don't know if God is responding to our prayers. When we pray specific prayers, we have to wrestle with God's answer to our prayers or what seems like a lack of an answer to our prayers.

Prayer is the gateway into the heart of God. It is the gateway to understanding how God created us to flourish in human relationships. It is the gateway to understanding ourselves. We're so obsessed with the therapeutic in our world right now, I think so much of that is we've let go of the robustness of prayer.

TAMMY: What is prayer?

[Laughter]

Someone is watching today going what is prayer? What's the simple—simplest prayer I could start with right now?

ADDISON: Okay, I'll share a prayer, a very simple prayer. Three words: I am here. I'm going to explain what these words do for me. I take a deep breath and I pray, I am here. Number one, the great I Am is here. God is with me in this moment. Whatever I face in this moment, God is with me.

Number two, because I'm here I can't be somewhere else. We're really bad, really bad at living in the non-present. God is saying, actually, meaning, purpose, and connection happens in this present moment. So for me, "I am here" is a surrender to this place. I can't be in two places at once. I'm not God so I'm going to be here.

And the third dimension of this prayer for me is, I am here in this place and time. I'm not where I once was. I'm not where I'm going to be. I'm here in this journey. That's okay. It's been a good growth, it's been a good work.

And what I have found is that the enemy of our soul wants us to live in the past, and when that happens, we're filled with hopelessness and regret. Or he wants us to live in the future. When we live in the future, we're filled with anxiety. We weren't designed to engage with the past, present, and future. We were designed to engage with this moment.

So to answer your question about what prayer is about, I believe prayer is the way that we connect to the heart of God. If what Paul writes in places like First Thessalonians 5:17 or Romans 12:12, this idea of praying without ceasing is real, then that means our entire lives are supposed to be an integrated prayer. That does not work with the religious box that prayer has been forced into. So obviously, prayer has to be something more than what we've known it to be while still including these fundamental parts of prayers like asking God, going to God, and bringing our requests to him.

RANDY: So since we talked last, because we talked on the *Life Today Live* stream before today, I started thinking about that and I realized that I will pray and repent of my sins, which I should, which is the past. And then I will pray and ask for maybe direction, blessing, wisdom, which is the future. And that was it. There was no present prayer on any regular basis that I can even—I wasn't always thinking of it in those terms. But when I became conscious from talking to you of this idea of present prayer, you realize wherever I'm at I'm able to ask for wisdom or discernment or sometimes God is like be quiet. I've got to listen to that too. That is a whole different dynamic because then you can pray without ceasing in a sense, which sounds like some weird kind of nice

idea from church.

You're saying that—to me, that was the missing piece. I got the future prayer down, I got the past prayer down, it's this present thing and that's transformational.

ADDISON: It is. Our lives flourish when we're present to the presence. Present to the presence of God but also present to the people in our world. Because if you want to enjoy a good life, be present to the people in your world, to whoever is around you. That will transform their life and it will transform your life. You will see things, you will garner insight that will lead to foresight. And that is so powerful.

And prayer is how we center and how we're present to the day, and how we know when to speak and we know when to be silent. So many of us, we're terrified of the silence of prayer because, in that place of silence, we hear the voice of accusation. We hear you're not enough, you'll never be enough. And that's not what this is all about.

RANDY: Did you struggle with that one?

ADDISON: Absolutely! I've struggled with that one.

RANDY: I didn't know. But a lot of that comes from our upbringing, religious upbringing. I did have a level of that, God's probably not happy with me because I'm not perfect. And so, when you dare to go to him in prayer, it better be with full repentance and then more repentance. And then maybe you'll be okay. But I think that's a wrong view of God if you look at the prodigal who was looking in the pigpen. The Father was not like what we think God's like.

ADDISON: Like he ran to him. He received him. He spoke dignity, and honor to him with a ring. I look at Hebrews four and this statement that the writer of Hebrews makes, like God, the word knows. It searches, it divides, soul, spirit, bone, marrow. There is nothing unseen, nothing unknown. And that sounds scary. I think that's where we stop. But then the writer of Hebrews goes on to say, "Since then we have a High Priest who can sympathize with us in our

weaknesses, that knows the struggle, that knows the pain." And I believe the great pain is the belief that we're separated from God. I believe Jesus fully encountered the human experience on the cross when he cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" I think that our greatest temptation is to believe that we are forsaken by God.

TAMMY: What do we do with unanswered prayer?

ADDISON: So I feel like with unanswered prayer, I feel this need to fix it, to balance the equation, if you will. And the reality is when there is a prayer that isn't answered, there is a tearing in us. And as long as we view this transactionally, going back to the old and trying to return to what was old and trying to recover what was old, we'll actually miss out on the faithfulness and goodness of God, and how God moves through unanswered prayers. I kind of want to put that in air quotes because I believe that there is no prayer—no prayer when it leaves our lips that does not find its rest in the Father's heart until its time has come.

God's not afraid of our doubts. He wants us to bring our doubts to him because doubts lead us to faith. You can't experience faith unless you first doubt. Otherwise, it is just a continuation of what you already know, what you could already see, and what you could already perceive. And God is saying, no, I'm calling you to fresh ways of understanding yourself, understanding pain, understanding promise, understanding purpose, and that is going to come with a profound type of disorientation that often comes in and through moving past and beyond but being honest about unanswered prayers.

RANDY: Read that part that you wanted to read.

TAMMY: If I can get through it. Like I'm just so [Emotional] I feel the weight of unanswered prayers. I feel the weight of something not going your way. And I think so many people walk away from their faith because their prayers aren't answered. And they give up and they don't think God is listening in the silence. The voice of the accuser is so strong and so heavy. And there's so much of the lie but a little of the truth to pull us in enough to keep us from a connection with God, and to keep us close to the heart of God and chasing after that. So we walk

away.

Your words, the *Words with God* have meant so much to me and taught me so much about prayer. And I feel like every believer, it is like when we come to faith we should be taught immediately about prayer. Sometimes we skip over that, Addison.

And I think chapter nine is my favorite chapter of your book. I'm going to read it many times. You probably never want to tell someone to start in the middle but chapter nine ministered to me so much. And this passage just says, "Prayer is so powerful that God must retain the right to grant certain requests within our desired timeline. But the moment a prayer leaves our lips it begins its work."

That is powerful, Addison, right there. "The moment it leaves our lips it begins its work. There is no prayer that goes unheard but for our sake, there are prayers that must go unanswered. But no prayer, even the bad ones are without purpose. Even a wrong step is better than no step. And the truth is, every finite step in the light of God's infinite wisdom is less than a perfect step. So run to the Father or away from him if you must, but for Heaven's sake don't stand still. God has a way of guiding people who move their feet."

That meant so much to me and it might mean so much to you today, too. I hope it does in the sense that God is saying, keep moving. Some way keep moving, keep trusting, and keep praying even in the silence. There is never a time when Jesus is not speaking or listening or present in your life. You cannot take that as abandonment. God is so walking this out with you. He wants you to understand prayer. And Addison, that's what you're teaching me. Thank you so much for that gift to me.

ADDISON: Thank you. And that was my experience.

TAMMY: Was it really?

ADDISON: That was my wrestling with God. I felt abandoned by God and I realized, the silence

was not a rejection, the silence was an invitation, an invitation to know him in ways that I didn't think were possible. And that for me, has changed everything. And so that's one of my favorites—like that's one of my favorite paragraphs in the book. So, Tammy, I love that it spoke to you the way it did.

TAMMY: Deeply, yeah.

ADDISON: Because God can handle it. He can handle—like be honest with God, whether that's running to him, or being honest about why you feel like you must run away from God. God will respond to us in those moments. It is the apathy, it is the indifference, it's the I've got to be in control of all the answers and so I'm going to deny what's going on here, that's what's dangerous.

RANDY: So good. Now, Addison, I know some people will want to get your book. We want people to get your book not because we want them to have a bunch of words but because we want them to have *Words with God*. So I want to show you an opportunity where we can exchange gifts.

There are some people that we are called to notice, to not be indifferent to, to not be apathetic towards. And this is a great time of year, with Christmas, that we can show them the love of Christ. And when you participate with us today in this outreach, we will at your request send you Addison's book, *Words with God* so that you can be blessed like Tammy has been, and all of us have been. This is big. So watch this and request Addison's book today.

On the mission field

ANNOUNCER: As the world celebrates the birth of Jesus this Christmas, *LIFE Outreach International* is also celebrating nearly two decades of spreading this good news in a very special way with shoes! Yes! Shoes! We, along with our mission partners located throughout the world, have provided two and a half million children with a gift of shoes. Children who in many instances have never had a new pair of shoes.

ISAK: We all celebrate different holidays around the world. The holiday that is pretty common to most of us is Christmas. That's what it feels like here today. It feels like Christmas for us because we're getting to do one of the most incredible things and that is to bless these children with a pair of shoes.

ANNOUNCER: It is because of friends like you that we have been able to reach remote areas every year providing the gift of shoes and sharing the good news of Jesus.

This year we want to, once again, see children's faces light up with smiles as they receive a new pair of shoes. Unfortunately, there are children who can't smile because they suffer from a condition known as cleft lip or cleft palate. The good news is our annual Christmas Smiles outreach allows us the opportunity to minister to some of the world's poorest children who have no hope of correcting their condition with surgery.

>> But thanks to James and Betty, and the friends of *LIFE Outreach International*, we're able to make lasting changes in children's lives through corrective surgery.

ANNOUNCER: *LIFE Outreach* has partners who work with some of the world's most skilled surgeons who have performed thousands of corrective surgeries for children. These surgeries not only protect them from health-threatening issues but provides the gift that lasts a lifetime -- the gift of a smile!

So this Christmas season, as you gather with loved ones and friends to celebrate the birth of Jesus, demonstrate his love for others by providing *Shoes and Smiles* to children in need.

End of video

In the studio

TAMMY: I love this part of our ministry so much, Randy! There is nothing more exciting for me in all the travels that I've done, truly, with *LIFE Outreach* where I get to sit with these kids

and put a brand-new pair of shoes on their feet—some of them for the very first time! It's so much fun and they're so happy about it.

Do you know that we have given away over two and a half million pairs of shoes to children around the world?

RANDY: And it's not just two and a half million children, rather that have been impacted by this, because we go out later and we see that the children are passing them down. Kids outgrow shoes! But these are so durable that they last for years and years and years.

And they're not just a nice thing. In a lot of cases, they do prevent some very serious diseases. And so it's yes, it's wonderful to give a big gift but it's also wonderful to do something that is improving a child's health, protecting their feet, and something that can be handed down.

And the amazing thing is that this is so economical. It is so affordable! How affordable? Let me tell you. Ten children this Christmas can receive a brand-new pair of shoes like this one for \$36. Your gift of \$36 today will give ten children brand-new shoes. A gift of \$72 would give 20 children a pair of brand-new shoes. And many of you, most of you I would say, could give \$180, which would provide shoes for 50 children. What a great thing!

Yes, it is early but we're talking about Christmas because we need to be ready. We've got people in the field ready to go. We've got children in need. We need to get the shoes in the right place. So we're asking you to join us now, to call or write. Make the best gift you can. Whatever you can do, whatever God puts on your heart to do.

Some of you could do more than shoes, you could do a smile. And Tammy, I know you know what an amazing thing that is.

TAMMY: It is so amazing. It changes the lives of these children forever. \$500 is all it takes to do a corrective surgery. There are so many today that can do that. Can just say, let me do that. I want to be a blessing. I want to change the life of this little one. Go online, make a call to us

today, and be a blessing to these children. Let's help change their lives forever.

Begin video clip

ANNOUNCER: Poverty is a killer, and because of it, children needlessly suffer, not only from a lack of food and clean water but also from a lack of things we often take for granted, like a simple pair of shoes. Far too many children living in extreme poverty have never owned a new pair of shoes. And while that may seem minor in light of all their needs, walking with bare feet puts them at risk of life-threatening infections and diseases that could lead to crippling consequences—and even death.

By responding today, you will help secure and make ready 150,000 pairs of Christmas shoes to be shipped and delivered to children around the world just in time for the holidays. Your gift of \$36 will help provide ten pairs of shoes. A gift of \$72 will help provide 20 pairs. And a gift of \$180 will help provide 50 pairs of Christmas shoes for children in need.

As a thank you for your gift of support, be sure to request the beautifully crafted, green crystal shoes ornament, a treasure to display at each Christmas. With your gift of \$100 or more, you may request this keepsake boxed set featuring three of *LIFE's* crystal Christmas shoe ornaments.

Finally, please consider a gift of \$1,000 or more to help provide over 275 pairs of shoes or two children with corrective cleft lip or palate surgeries. With this gift, you may request the beautiful bronze sculpture, "Consider the Birds."

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

End of video

RANDY: Please do go online or go to the phone. Do it right now. Let's be ready to make this Christmas such a beautiful one. Be sure to request Addison Bevere's book, *Words with God*. Tammy, it blessed both of us. I think it will bless them.

TAMMY: Absolutely. Addison, thank you for being so passionate! I hope it just stays there for the rest of your life because we need it. We appreciate you.

And we appreciate you. Thank you so much for watching. We'll see you next time on *Life Today*.