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Week 38: *Christmas Shoes and Smiles*

Randy Robison and Tammy Trent

Benjamin Windle

In the studio

RANDY: Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm Randy Robison. Tammy is with me. I have a question for you, Tammy. I know you've been through some really difficult moments in life. What we would call catastrophic. Have you ever thought of a catastrophe as good?

TAMMY: Definitely not. I've not.

RANDY: That's why today's guest is interesting. He's got a book called *Good Catastrophe*. It is written by Benjamin Windle. He's an author, speaker, was a long-time pastor and he joins us. Good to have you, Benjamin.

BENJAMIN: It's a joy to be with you both today.

RANDY: So the obvious question I set up is the title of your book, what in the world is a good catastrophe?

BENJAMIN: I think in our culture today, we struggle to see those not just words together but those concepts placed together. And yet, when you look at the subject of challenge and pain and trouble in scripture you do see that there is this symbiotic relationship between our challenges and our growth. So I wanted to provide people with a blueprint to find their way through pain. After 20 years of pastoring, I think we'd recognize some dark clouds have formed on the horizon of our culture, and we need to let the light in. That's what *Good Catastrophe* is all about.

RANDY: I was just going to ask about your accent. Were you pastoring in Australia or were you pastoring here or both?

BENJAMIN: I've pastored in both, the U.S. and Australia but I've spent the last 14 years back in Australia. So you're hearing the Aussie accent.

[Laughter]

TAMMY: I love that.

RANDY: It is the same wherever you go. We're reading scriptures from the Middle East but we're here in America and Australia, and we all face these things. As a pastor, you've seen so many different things. What are some of the things that shaped your perspective on the painful parts of life?

BENJAMIN: Well, I'm a pastor's kid so I was raised in ministry. I think when then when you get into it and you're in it for 20 years and you're pastoring and doing church work you start to see the true lived human experience, people's actual lives. You visit hospital beds, you walk with people through financial collapse. You're there at funerals. I think it gives you an empathy for the challenges and the complexities of life.

Here's one of the things I've learned. God potentially could save us from all pain but he doesn't. That's not the normal Christian life. And yet, a lot of people like me were raised almost with this unintentional narrative that if you put God first, and follow Jesus, somehow, you'll get a pass from challenges and trials and adversity in life. And then mud gets thrown at the canvas of our lives and we don't know how to deal with it.

And we have younger generations that are in desperate need of resilience. The biblical version of resilience is called hope. And hope is a dynamic that goes to work in the midst of our pain. It's there for us in our most difficult moments. And it is the turn that God

uses to bring those challenges and imperfections for our good and for our growth.

TAMMY: The hope and the turn. It's not just waiting for us to get on the other side of whatever our circumstances are, but it is in the middle of it with us. Hope is right now available to you if you're going through something really hard. And many people will ask why does bad stuff happen to good people? Why does God allow these things to happen?

Do we have an answer, pastor to that or not really? Or is it the maturity of our faith to say look, I don't understand. I don't understand but my faith says I will believe through it all.

BENJAMIN: Yeah. You talk about hope in the midst of the challenge. We really do need to de-couple hope from our circumstances. So I call that outcome-based hope. In other words, God, if you do A, B, and C for me then I'll put my trust in you.

But what about hope when we don't get the endings we want? I've had some of those in my own life. And the question you asked, I think so many people are searching for, God, where are you in my pain? Where are you in my trauma?

The big discovery of this book is that God is there. He's there in the midst of our storms and our trials and our challenges. But maybe he shows up in unexpected ways and he works in us in ways that we don't anticipate. He's there.

TAMMY: Absolutely.

RANDY: You've got a term from Tolkien. You add the words EU to the word catastrophe, eucatastrophe. What is that?

BENJAMIN: Well, that's Tolkien's word. You know the writer of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*, and the movies and so forth that we watch today. He coined this term, "eucatastrophe." So for him, it is a writing philosophy. When I read the word, I'm like, oh, my goodness. There is no native English word that captures what he captures in this

thought.

He had this idea when he was writing that when all seems lost with the main character, there is no way out. It's the darkest, it's the midnight hour, and there would be a sudden turn toward joy—a good catastrophe in the middle of your pain, God at work. That narrative is woven throughout all of his books that have become movies. And I chose that for the title of the book because I want to show people that hope is not reserved for your good days. Hope is not reserved for when you think you can figure it out yourself. Hope is there when you feel like my life is a catastrophe right now. Hope is available.

RANDY: Interestingly, you mention that literary term because there is that whole hero's arc in stories. If you understand that you see it in all the stories. And that dark night of the soul is a key element. You look at that and you go, is that something just writers invented or is this a stamp that God placed in our soul that says this is part of the process to get you where I want you to be?

I know I struggle with it. I know Tammy struggles with it. I think we all struggle with this idea of a good God allowing pain and difficulty to get us where he wants us to be. But is that the way you see it? Is it just part of the artist creating the—

BENJAMIN: Firstly on Tolkien, and I'll speak to that. Tolkien was a Christian. Tolkien converted C.S. Lewis. So I think his writings are a reflection of his Christian faith. He said the cross is the greatest eucatastrophe in human history.

In terms of processing pain, my youngest son was attacked just a number of years ago, horrifically, by a Rottweiler. I still remember that day and the panic and the trauma. And just God, where are you right now? When you're a parent, and your child goes through something like that, it changes it from being an intellectual conversation of what-ifs. Like this is my life. I'm experiencing loss. I'm experiencing pain. God, where are you in this?

If our idea of hope means this, good outcomes here and now, we'll be left wanting. If we

can stretch our perspective of hope to an eternal perspective, see life under the sun, life here and now, the way God sees it, that will include hardship, trials, and pain, but hope is at work in that even though we understand our ultimate answers are not here and now. But Heaven is real and the heavenly perspective is crucial in the Christian worldview.

RANDY: What happened with your son?

TAMMY: Yeah! Please.

BENJAMIN: He's a beautiful little guy. Just a lovely little guy. It's been amazing to see God at work; it is one thing in your own life but in your children's life. He made a miraculous recovery just in multiple ways how his face was spared. It was a life-threatening injury. He has a large scar. He went for his jugular. And it was just horrendous. He is not afraid of dogs. He's full of joy. He's had to navigate through trauma. And again, to me, it is holding both, the tension of that, that's all so real. He's had to process what he went through but God has been at work in that in a hundred little ways and in a handful of really significant ways for him to recover in the way that he has and have such a bright optimistic outlook on life. So thank God!

TAMMY: You've been through, as I've read through your book, a few dark holes yourself. I know you have gone through so much personally with your brother. So many have lost the love of our lives or people we have loved to cancer. And I know your brother went through that. How was that season for you, pastor?

BENJAMIN: I think I'm still navigating my way through it because it is not old history for me. My older brother passed away well, we just had his one-year anniversary. And you know, I didn't even realize it was the day. And on that day, my eyes welled up with tears and I'm like, oh my goodness, it's been a year! So it's amazing how just something about your body even knows. We lost my brother to a very difficult and prolonged cancer journey. We were only 18 months apart and kind of almost grew up as twins. Grew up in the 80s, it was a great era. It was heartbreaking walking the cancer journey and the

treatment. He has a young wife and children.

So I lost my brother, and then I lost both of my paternal grandparents within three months and went through a major life transition. So it was like it all happened at once. And we hear that and honestly, I've preached about it, but then when it happens to you and you try to apply your own preaching, this is very difficult, this is very hard, and I fell into a dark hole. I wasn't sure how to get out.

I think a lot of people feel that way when storms hit, perfect storms hit and pain comes in a cluster. It brings friends along, friends like loneliness. And some of the people I thought would be there for me weren't there in the ways that I had anticipated or expected and you have to navigate through that.

I'll say this. If our Christian worldview, if our perspective of God doesn't set a seat at the table for the challenges of life it is a very brittle belief system. It holds up when the sun is shining, but when you go through loss and grief and the unexpected, there's got to be more grit in our understanding of how hope is at work.

That's what *Good Catastrophe* is presenting. Not only should we tolerate pain and not avoid it, but recognize God uses adversity. He doesn't create it. But he uses it as one of the great tools for crafting our human experience. And I think that's the beauty that comes out of it.

TAMMY: Do you teach us how to do that in a book like—because so many people want to run away from pain or put it someplace and revisit it later. I'm overwhelmed, I can't deal with it. I'm depressed. I feel the anxiety. I feel the stress of it all. I'm angry at God. I feel abandoned and I don't know what to do. I don't have the tools. I'm not equipped to know how to get through something like this because I wasn't prepared for it.

So when I see a book like this, and knowing what I went through, thinking that this might have helped me as well, is that why you wrote the book? To give us tools to help us see

the hope in something that we don't have to wait for it but when something happens in our life, the rug is pulled from underneath us, we can jump into it with Jesus and know these inner details of our lives. And we can experience hope in that moment in that season.

BENJAMIN: Yes. I tried to lock my pain away. You close a box, you turn a key. And I found it sits there and waits for you for when you're ready to process it. I discovered through relooking at the story of Job, even the smallest measure of God's intervention in our lives brings about a dramatic renewal. God picks up our problems, God picks up our pain. And in the hands of God, it is not an immunity pass from the pain, he turns it, in that moment, towards our good and towards our growth.

So hope is not just, I hope my outcomes may change in the future. Hope is a dynamic that works in the here and now to bring about the turning of the tide in our spirits and in our lives.

RANDY: We like to ignore the fact that Job is in the Bible. As well as Lamentations! Which is okay to grieve.

And by the way, I want to say, if you're watching, and you're going through a very difficult time, we have a prayer line available anytime you want to call and talk to someone, have someone pray for you. So you can dial that number on the screen. We want to be here for you because we're not just about interviews, we're about ministering to you wherever you're at.

But Benjamin, I have a question for you because I think we're in a place, we can slip into a place easily and we're there and that is that the church is getting a little out of balance. When you hear sort of the good life message, I want to be careful because there are some wonderful promises in scripture. But where is the balance between health, wealth, and prosperity and the reality of the pain that we go through?

BENJAMIN: I guess there are different perspectives on that. I think largely there is a hope narrative that worked for a previous generation. But with the complexity of our world right now, I think we need to revisit that and recognize that again following Jesus in scripture, in the writings of Paul, and in the central characters of the Old Testament, these people went through deep challenges. I think there's a lot in the writings of the Apostle Paul that we need to relook at. Because Paul saw no incongruence in a burning bright hope that Jesus could change everything. And yet, he wrote openly about shipwrecks, beatings, a thorn in the flesh, and here is my human experience. He saw no wall in between those concepts.

When we put them in separate categories and we say you're either going to live the good life with God and it's going to be blessed, and there's going to be miracles, and there's going to be breakthrough, and he'll take away all of your pain—yes! In Heaven. We need to break that wall down and recognize the normal human experience is filled with complexities and imperfections but that doesn't mean that God's not there. God works in the normal day-to-day challenges and in the big crises of life.

RANDY: And in the brokenness. You have a metaphor in the book on brokenness involving a piano. I'd love for you to share that because it's meaningful.

BENJAMIN: It's my favorite little story in the book for me. Keith Jarrett, 1975, drives to the Cologne Opera House and he has requested the Bosendorfer 290 Imperial grand concert piano but the staff placed the wrong piano on the stage. Instead of the Bosendorfer 290, it is a small piano. Some of the keys get stuck, the pedals don't work properly, and to boot, the piano was terribly out of tune.

Jarrett has a decision to make. Do I get up and perform in front of the over 1,000 people who are waiting for me or do I pull back? He steps up, and he plays. In real-time, he adjusts his composition as he plays this broken piano. He works his way around so that the thin base register sounds better. If you listen to the recording, he's groaning as he plays strenuously. That midnight concert is called (double dots over o) "The Koun

Concert." It's also the best-selling instrumental album of all time. It sold over four million copies. You would think the best-selling instrumental album is in a beautiful studio like this, acoustically-treated, with the best equipment, and yet, it is on a small, undersized broken piano.

Here's the point of that story. None of us get the Bosendorfer 290 Imperial grand. We all get the broken piano. And we all have a choice to make. Do we step up and play what is on the stage of our lives? And trust this. God brings his most beautiful masterpieces from flawed instruments. And my encouragement to everybody is if you felt like life handed you a broken piano, how can anything beautiful come from the challenges that I've faced? You'll be amazed at the song that you have to offer the world, not in spite of the problems but because of the beauty that comes out of those imperfections. It is a great story.

TAMMY: Oh, I'm crying. I absolutely can relate to it. What an incredible visual for me being a musician, being a singer myself I can so relate to it. God bless you. Thank you so much for your life, the way you've stepped into hope and then shared it with the rest of us. We need it so desperately, I think until the time we see Jesus in Heaven.

There are people in this world right now who need hope as well and we've been able to step into those places, into those communities, and bring them not just hope but so much joy. Take a minute and watch this.

On the mission field

James: We want to give children like these, beautiful children shoes—children all over the world. There goes another one! We want to give them shoes.

You know what Jesus said? "Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not."

You know what? We are the representative of Christ. We are his body, we're his family and we can share his love. We love these little children. We're going to give these little children shoes. Look at these beautiful little feet!

Betty: They have nothing, really but they can still play, they can still have fun. They're children! I think that's what they're supposed to be instead of having to worry about walking around without any shoes where they step on stuff and hurt their feet and also get diseases through that too.

James: Betty, they just tough it out and they play but we found out right here in this area that hookworms get in the skin, maybe where they have a little tear in the skin, get in the bloodstream, ultimately into the intestines and cause very serious disease and sometimes death.

Just look here! This boy has had a blowout in his tennis shoe! He has played so hard and gotten so dirty.

You need to wash your shirt, man!

Isn't it great to see? The kids, they want to have fun. We're going to love them with your help. We're going to give them good new shoes. We—not me—all of us together! Let's put shoes on all these beautiful children's beautiful feet! It would just be such a wonderful gift to make at this time and I hope you will do all you can. Just give as many pairs as you can to bless as many children and their families as you can.

End of clip

In the studio

RANDY: You know I can honestly say that one of the greatest lessons I've learned from my parents is when you see a need you fill it. Many years ago, they saw the need for children not having something on their feet. Not just a comfort issue but a health issue,

and they said you know what? We're going to do something about that. And so many of you who watch this program, you saw that too and you said we're going to fill that need.

And you know, we have provided, Tammy, so many shoes for children around the world. I'm just honored to be able to sit here with you and to continue that. And to say to our friends who are watching, hey, there is a need. Let's be the answer to that need.

TAMMY: Do you know what I want to say to them? There goes another one! Or that kid had a blowout in his shoe. I love your parents so much. Your dad is so great with the kids and so is your mom. And they speak truth.

These kids just want to be kids and play. I can't think of a better gift in this season than to give them a pair of new shoes, especially if they've never had a pair. Some of them are wearing hand-me-downs. Some of them have a blowout and they need a pair of shoes. So what an opportunity that we've been given to bring joy, to bring life, to bring fun in this way.

You can be a part of that with us. We are—gosh, we have a goal this year to bring 150,000 pairs of shoes. We've done over 2.5 million; is that right?

RANDY: Hard to believe.

TAMMY: That's crazy!

RANDY: That's conservative.

TAMMY: I was thinking because every time I go on one of these trips it's just—there's so many. There are so many kids and they keep showing up from every community because they're ready to get a gift. And I'm so happy to be a part of that.

Do you know that it only takes \$36 to give ten pairs of shoes to children, \$72 will give 20

pairs, and \$180 will give 50 pairs, Randy?

RANDY: A \$1,000 gift will provide 275 pairs of shoes; that's 275 children who will receive a gift of new shoes this Christmas if you're able to do that.

And don't forget, we also have the corrective surgeries. So many children would like to smile this Christmas but they physically can't. And we're able to go in and for a gift of \$500, you can provide one corrective surgery. Many of you can do more than that, and I would ask you to consider that. But whatever you can do. It's about, we say Christmas is about the spirit of giving, and really, it is about being obedient to our Lord saying, Lord, I see them. I'm going to do my part, whatever it is. Let's all just be a part of that promise that it's greater to give than to receive. And this Christmas is a wonderful time to reach out and give a pair of shoes or give a child the ability to smile.

Will you go online right now or go to the phone and make the best gift that you can? Let's put shoes on their feet and smiles on their faces. Join us this Christmas as we reach out with the love of God around the world. Give the best gift you can.

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

In the studio

RANDY: I hope you are calling or going online and making the best gift you can. We can make it such a special Christmas for so many children. And today, when you make your gift, if you'll request Benjamin Windle's book, *Good Catastrophe*, we would love to send it to you. I've just been so blessed by this, Tammy.

TAMMY: Yeah, me too, Randy. Thank you. Gosh, he's amazing! You're outside of Nashville.

BENJAMIN: We're neighbors, right?

TAMMY: I'm going to come see you.

BENJAMIN: It's been fun to spend some time in Nashville.

RANDY: It's been fun spending time with you. Thank you for being with us. We'll see you again next time on *Life Today*.