

9/26/23

Week 40: *Christmas Shoes and Smiles*, last week

Randy Robison and Tammy Trent

John Burke

**In the studio**

**RANDY:** Welcome to Life Today! I'm Randy Robison. And Tammy, as they saw in the opening tease there, we are talking about near-death experiences.

**TAMMY:** Woo!

**RANDY:** Have you ever had one?

**TAMMY:** I haven't.

**RANDY:** Do you know anyone that's had one?

**TAMMY:** I don't and I'm fascinated by it, honestly. I'd like to know more.

**RANDY:** I don't—did you grow up, was it okay to talk about these things?

**TAMMY:** I don't think so. I think it was kind of a spooky thing. Like you don't—no, that's not even biblical or godly. I was even like, you don't talk about that stuff.

**RANDY:** But it is interesting. It's interesting. So we're going to talk about it today. And we have the perfect guest to talk about it and put it in a biblical perspective because that's where we start. John Burke is our guest and he has a new book called *Imagine the God of Heaven*. Great of you to be here because this is so fascinating.

**JOHN:** Great to be back.

**RANDY:** So your background is in pastoring and church planting, and things like that?

**JOHN:** I was actually an engineer for years, and then I became a pastor. I started a church in Austin, Texas; my wife and I did.

**RANDY:** How did you make that jump to near-death experiences?

**JOHN:** Well, actually it goes all the way back to how I came to faith. I was an Agnostic and my dad was dying of cancer. This is way back in the late '70s, early '80s and someone gave him the very first research on near-death experiences. This is when people clinically die, they have a heart attack, no heartbeat, no brainwaves, and yet they're resuscitated, or God brings them back miraculously. And they talk about how they experienced the life to come.

And I saw this book on his dresser. And like I said, I didn't believe in God, I thought Jesus was a legend. I read it in one night and I said, oh, my gosh, this could be real evidence that there really is an afterlife, and maybe even evidence for God. And that opened me up to actually seeking and actually starting to study the Bible. And I came to faith in Christ not long after that.

And I just had a curiosity. I have a curious brain. So really, for 30 years I studied well over 1,000 of them trying to understand how what these people are saying fit with what the Bible says. In 2015, I wrote the book *Imagine Heaven* showing that the theology of Heaven that you see in the Bible is what they are describing. And so I was trying to show that.

In *Imagine the God of Heaven*, what's fascinating is after interviewing hundreds of these people, studying thousands of them, of all the beauty of Heaven, of all the wonderful reunions of the incredible experience beyond any words what they commonly said, I

mean person to person if they encountered God they said nothing—nothing compares to just being in the presence of God; that he was the love we've always wanted.

**RANDY:** So it was less about Heaven and more about the God of Heaven.

**JOHN:** That's what I'm writing about in this next book is showing how the love story of God throughout the Bible, that he's been telling throughout history, his character, his attributes, his heart for people. And what he wants. How we relate to him. How we walk with him. That that is actually what people are experiencing of God all over the globe. And that's the crazy part is that they're experiencing the same God of the Bible all over the globe.

**TAMMY:** Okay, so I'm at home watching television right now, watching John on television on Wednesday, okay, of all the people you've interviewed, all the stories that you've written about, tell me a couple. Convince me that this is real and these people have really experienced God. Do you have a couple of favorites?

**JOHN:** I do. Let me say first of all, I was skeptical about them for a long time. And I write in *Imagine the God of Heaven* about the ten points of evidence that any alternative theory has to answer to. And it's what convinced me. Like just really quick, verifiable observations. So when people die, they say that they leave their bodies but they're still there. They have a spiritual body.

I think Paul actually may have had a near-death experience. In Acts Chapter 14 it says he was stoned to death in Lystra. They dragged him out of the city and left him for dead. And then he gets back up and goes back into the city, which I wouldn't do. I would not advise that. But interestingly, Paul says in Second Corinthians 12, "Fourteen years ago," he's talking about himself, "whether in the body or out of the body, I don't know, but I was taken up to the third Heaven and saw and heard things inexpressible." And then he talks about these things, and these things correlate with what these people are saying.

So one of the things he said is we still have a spiritual body, buried and broken, raised in glory. It is buried in weakness but it is raised in *dunamis* or power. And they talk about that. That we're ourselves and initially, when they die, they're in this spiritual body but they're there in the room, and they can see the resuscitation taking place.

So there have been many studies done. You know, millions of people have had these experiences. Gallop poll found that one out of 25 Americans has had a near-death experience.

**RANDY:** Really? They just don't like to talk about it.

**JOHN:** Well, it is a sacred thing. That's what you realize. They get the kind of like—and they're like, you don't understand. Because they say it is more real than anything they've ever experienced in this life which is hard to understand even.

But they initially can see their resuscitation. Now, studies have been done on the observations they've made that they shouldn't have been able to make because they were unconscious and found that 98 percent of them were completely accurate to about six percent of those had some questionable things. Only one percent, one to two percent inaccurate. So they're making observations.

**RANDY:** It's not just that. You talked about last time you were on the program how they were making observations of things that they couldn't physically see from the location they were at, whether it was on the roof of the building or a perspective that they wouldn't have had even if their eyes were open and they subconsciously picked up on it.

**JOHN:** And that's just one of ten points. Like another one, blind people, when they have a near-death experience, they see the same things. They have the same experiences.

**RANDY:** And they don't have the frame of reference that we would.

**JOHN:** And they can see. They experienced God in the same way.

**RANDY:** Okay, what does God look like? Let's get the God part. What does God look like for the ones that you think are legitimate near-death experiences?

**JOHN:** Let me tell you, you wanted to hear a cool story. One of the things that is just amazing is after I wrote *Imagine Heaven*, I kind of quit writing. I said, okay, Lord I did what you wanted. Interestingly, your dad was one of the ones that got me back writing. Because the Lord started saying to me through lots of people, you're going to write again. And your dad called me and said, "Hey! Betty and I just read *Imagine Heaven* again. I felt like the Holy Spirit wanted me to call you and say you need to write on this again." It was one of 12 people that did that.

God brought these stories from all over the world. And I think what he's—I believe this is an apologetic, these are testimonies from all over the world for our global age to show that this is the God of all nations, he always has been. For instance, Santosh Acarchi, a manufacturing engineer, grew up in India, Hindu, that's all he knew, his pancreas ruptures. He hears them call Code Blue. He leaves his body, he can see his body there, and this brilliant light appears. Now this is common, that God appears as this light. And they say, "brighter than the sun but not hard to look at." Santosh said, "I knew this light was divine. I knew this was God and I knew I had to obey him. But I instantly fell in love with this light. Because I knew that he was there to protect me and take me somewhere safe."

They traveled. So another commonality; they go through this tunnel and they're traveling somewhere; he doesn't know where. They come to, and this is what's wild, this place where the light parks over this place that Santosh describes as a giant enormous compound—gorgeous. If you've ever been to India, which I have many times, there are compounds everywhere, these walled communities. So I was trying to figure out what do you mean? He's describing Revelation 21. He's describing the New Jerusalem but he didn't know it. And so he says, "very high beautiful walls." And he said, and this is

another commonality, "On the other side you can see for miles and miles." Like your vision is not limited.

Which we would think, oh, that's not biblical. But actually, it is. John in Revelation 21 is taken by the spirit to a very high mountain, and yet he reads the names on the gates of the New Jerusalem. How? That's what they say. So he sees the city and he describes it as this walled place with beautiful—such beauty inside, mansions inside, and 12 gates, all of them closed to him. And they were guarded by angels. And when he saw the angels guarding the gates, he knew this was the kingdom of Heaven. And he longed to get in. He said, "This is what we were created for."

And then he sees hell as well. So he's up on a platform and he looks down to his left and he sees this, he describes it as an abyss, and dark, darkness. And at the bottom, it looked like fire, that's what he describes. He's Hindu.

**RANDY:** Has this guy read the Bible much?

**JOHN:** No! He has not read the Bible at all but he is describing it. And he looks to his right and there he sees, he says, the Almighty on a throne. And he knew this is God but he was appearing now as a man. But he looked at his eyes and they were like John described in Revelation one, like eyes of fire, like flames of fire. He sees his whole life flash before him. All his sins, and he falls down and he says, "Lord, forgive me, Lord, forgive me." Because he knows, that's what I deserve.

**RANDY:** How did he know it was Christ and not a Hindu God?

**JOHN:** He doesn't yet. He doesn't know who he is. He just knows it's the Lord. He just knows it's God. And he's saying this, "Forgive me, Lord! Forgive me, Lord!" And then the Lord speaks to him. And he said his voice was compassionate and tender and merciful. He said, "I knew I deserved this so I didn't understand why he was so merciful and compassionate."

He said, "I'm going to send you back. And I want you to love your family and especially your daughter. She needs your help right now."

Think about that. The Lord knows us all. He is so intimately involved. And even if we're not involved with him, he knows us and he's there for us. And so he sees this and this is what's wild. To the right of the throne, he sees an open narrow—he calls it a very narrow gate that was open to me and I could see into the kingdom of Heaven. And the Lord said, "I'm going to send you back."

And he said, "When I go back, Lord, I want to come back and go through that narrow gate. How do I go through it?"

And he says to him, "The wages of sin is death. I want an honest relationship. Walk with me and surrender daily to me." And he sent him back.

Now two years later, Santosh's daughter is invited to sing at a church because she was a choral major. She invites Santosh and his wife to come. The message is that Jesus is the gate through which the sheep enter in and the narrow door.

**RANDY:** And he recognized it.

**JOHN:** He was overwhelmed and he started reading the Bible and he came to faith in Jesus.

**RANDY:** Okay.

**JOHN:** And I have Imams, Muslim Imams in Rwanda, people related to the prophet Mohammad in Tehran, same kinds of stories all over the world.

**RANDY:** That's what I was going to ask. Because of the great story, Santosh, right? How

do we know you're not making it up? Or he's not making it up? Right? Because I'm a little skeptical. But you're saying, no, it is repetition, over and over again.

**JOHN:** Over and over. But also think about this Randy. Santosh is a manufacturing engineer and he is a Hindu. What does he have to gain by making that up?

**RANDY:** Not much in India.

**JOHN:** Another guy is a Hindu anesthesiologist. What does he have to gain? An imam, a Muslim imam who has now had six death threats on his life? What does he have to gain saying Jesus rescued him?

And so I point that out but also, even in the United States, the people I have in my book are C.E.O.'s, they're surgeons, they're commercial airline pilots, engineers. They don't have—they don't need to write books to make money.

**RANDY:** And in a lot of cases, you don't want to necessarily tell your friends these things because they'll think you've lost your mind.

**JOHN:** Absolutely. It doesn't help their credibility in their profession. Again, like I said, thousands of them. And they say the same overlapping things, which doesn't make any sense unless—you know, the scientific principle is that what is consistently observed is real. Well, what do you make of this? And that's what I'm trying to show in this book is I'm trying to show that—you read about 70 different people in *Imagine the God of Heaven* who experienced the same God across cultures, not necessarily the God they were expecting. But what I'm also showing is that this God hasn't just shown up in our modern age of NDE's. He's been revealing himself all along. So I'm showing historically how he told us how we could know. And he put signs in history. And he foretold what he would do through Jesus, the Messiah. I'm showing all of that, as well, along with the heart of God so that when you read—I mean, I'm hoping I believe when people read this book first of all, they'll have a far more comprehensive view of God's story through the



scriptures, of God's attributes.

But here's the other thing. We read about God but we can't help but put him in a box a little bit. We know he's powerful and sovereign and glorious and all that but they're just words. But you know when you hear a 12-year-old, I have a 12-year-old in there who describes and she says, "I came back realizing all these words are trying to describe something that is indescribable." But when you hear her, Karena Martinez from Columbia, who finds herself under the weight of God's glory at his throne in this sea of glass that she describes but she's never read the Bible either, you know? And comes back. She loves Jesus now like crazy.

So what I've realized is God is giving us testimony in our global age that hey, I've always been the God of all nations. I mean stop and think about it. The very first thing he does after the flood in Genesis is he creates a nation, Genesis chapter 12, out of Abraham and Sarah, and he says, "I'm going to bless you to bless all the nations on earth. Through you, all nations on earth will be blessed." That's what he was doing through the whole Old Testament story. He was preserving his record in the scriptures so that we would know the Messiah when he came. And now, he's showing hey, I'm still blessing all the nations. Anybody who calls on the name of the Lord, Joel said, anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. And that's what these people are showing.

**RANDY:** I want to hear more stories but we don't have time. So *Imagine the God of Heaven* is the book by John Burke. And the good news is that you don't have to have a near-death experience to experience Jesus. We have scripture.

But also, Tammy, I know you know this, we can be the expression of Jesus to all the nations of the earth as he said. We have that opportunity right now.

**TAMMY:** Yes! We do. Like John said, we've been blessed to be a blessing. I just took a trip not too long ago to Central America. I got the chance to step into that place of joy and giving and being a blessing to so many children. I want you to take a look at this. It's

pretty awesome.

### **On the mission field**

**TAMMY:** These are tough conditions. These people are living in absolute poverty. I'm sure it is hard to provide for your family. I don't know what they have. I don't know what their need is. But I love that I don't have to figure it out, God just sends us. He sends us and he says, show up.

It's what I do love about *LIFE Outreach*. For the many years that I've traveled with them around the world, wherever we see a need we just jump in. Whatever it looks like, we're thinking of kingdom-minded things. We're thinking of saving a life but saving their very life, their soul. To me, that's the gospel, what it's all about—spreading the love of Jesus Christ and sharing the good news of Jesus.

You know, James and Betty started this *Christmas Shoes and Smiles* years ago. I think their heart was absolutely about just showing the love of God, especially to these children all around the world. And it's so, so wonderful. The joy they feel getting something brand-new! Gosh, it just could change everything for you! Oh my goodness, baby, you need—you need these shoes.

These shoes that protect their feet will keep them from danger, will keep them from infection, from injury, from hookworm that ultimately could lead to death. This is an important need right now all around the world.

So if you've given before, thank you so much. If you've never had a chance to give to this ministry, this part of it, *Christmas Shoes and Smiles*, then I would encourage you to make the best gift you possibly could. We want to keep putting shoes on children all around the world. We want to do it all. It's been a great year, it's been an incredible year of ministry, whether it's been water, whether it's been food, or whether it's been shoes. Right here

we're so blessed to do kingdom things. And together, we are changing the lives of people all around the world. We couldn't do it without you. We love you, we appreciate you. Thank you so much!

### **In the studio**

**TAMMY:** [Laughing] Honestly, I love watching that. It is the first time I've actually seen it all put together. What a beautiful trip to Central America that I was privileged to go on and meet so many beautiful people! And so many people with great need, whether us stopping and praying for them or me getting a chance to put on a new pair of shoes. I love this part of our ministry. It brings me so much joy. It brings me a huge smile. And I know it changes the lives of these children, bringing them joy, bringing them a smile, especially at Christmas. I can't think of a better time for us to pour into the lives of people, especially children, who don't have much of anything. But a brand-new pair of shoes, Randy, I mean it seems so simple and it doesn't cost a whole lot to do this.

**RANDY:** No. It is easy. You saw the joy on their faces. It lights them up. We talk about Christmas being a season of joy, my goodness this is your opportunity to do something that really will bring joy to a child but also has the potential to be a real health improvement.

**TAMMY:** Absolutely! You could see some of the danger of some of the feet and the toes and the cuts. And it could actually, and we've heard of many stories before where they have died from that because they're not near a clinic or a hospital where they can get care to take care of that. So for us to put on a little shoe like this—look, it almost fits me! [Laughing] But it's so much fun. And they are filled with not just a brand-new pair of shoes but I think the love of Jesus when we get to love on them.

**RANDY:** They get to know what Christmas is all about. Here's how it looks. You can put shoes, a brand-new pair of shoes that will last a long time. They'll probably actually, the children will probably outgrow them and pass them down.

But you can do that for ten children right now with a gift of \$36. Maybe you can give shoes to 20 children for a gift of \$72. Or 50 pairs of shoes, 50 children for \$180! What a simple thing but it's huge to them.

And there's also one other thing I want to bring to your attention. It is *Shoes and Smiles*. There are many children who cannot express any joy any time of the year because they were born with a cleft lip or cleft palate. We're also providing surgeries. A typical surgery is about \$500, which is why some of you may want to give a gift of \$500 today to provide that corrective surgery. But whatever you can do, many of you can give even more than that. You can give 275 pairs of shoes for \$1,000, or two surgeries, or maybe four or more. Whatever. I'm just saying whatever God's enabled you to do and put on your heart to give this Christmas season, this is your opportunity.

You can share the love and the joy of Christ through these shoes, through these smiles. Will you do it now? Go online, go to the phone, make the gift that God puts on your heart, and let's make Christmas special.

### **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."

This is the last week. Please call, write, or make your gift online today.

**End of video**

### **On the mission field**

**TAMMY:** This is just one of millions of children all around the world in desperate need of a simple pair of shoes. I am so privileged to be a part of *LIFE Outreach* who not only brings water for life, rescue for life, food programs, but also shoes; shoes to children who desperately need them to protect their little feet from cuts, from tears, from even waterborne illness that may get into the cut and infect it. Please why don't you join me today? Go to your phone or go online and do whatever you can to make a difference, just one child at a time—one pair of shoes at a time.

**End of video**

### **In the studio**

**RANDY:** Let's put *Shoes and Smiles* on so many children's feet and faces. We can do it with your support. I hope you're making the best gift you can. It's the last week we'll be coming to you asking for this. So let's wrap it up. Let's give them a great Christmas.

John, thank you so much for being here. I mean these stories are great. I know we just scratched the surface.

**JOHN:** Oh, we did!

**RANDY:** Where can people get the book?

**JOHN:** Anywhere books are sold. Or you can go to *Imagine the God of Heaven.com*. So book title .com. And if you preorder, they're also giving a free audiobook.

**RANDY:** Oh nice! I like that because I'm an audiobook guy. Well, this is great, Tammy, this has been fun.

**TAMMY:** It is! So good, so fun. What a great conversation. I know that many people are always looking for the answers to what might come next. If that's you, today, I want to encourage you to pick up this book. It will help you find those answers. Keep looking, keep praying, keep seeking to find a relationship with Jesus, ultimately, and how much he loves and cares about you. It's in this book. Pick it up and we'll see you next time on *Life Today*.