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Week 5: WFL

Randy Robison and Tammy Trent

Vance Pitman

In the studio

TAMMY: Hello, everybody. I'm Tammy Trent and this is Randy Robison. If you're joining us for the very first time, let me be the first to say welcome to *Life Today*.

Do you ever feel stressed out? Do you ever feel filled with anxiety? Do you ever worry? Well, if you do, then you're not alone. But what do we do with that? There is a pastor that I absolutely love his teaching and his new book, the *Stressless Life*. He's going to help us walk through what it looks like to be free from stress. So let's talk to him about it today.

Welcome, Vance! It's great to have you here.

VANCE: Thank you, Tammy and Randy. It is an honor to be here. Appreciate you inviting me.

RANDY: Well, yeah. Now so you look like a pretty chill guy. Has your life always been stressless?

VANCE: No, it has not. I don't—I definitely can't claim that testimony. Actually, the book was born out of my own personal journey of a collapse that I went into in my own life. In about 1999, I sensed God calling my wife and I to, and our family to a new season of ministry. We'd been serving in the Bible Belt as pastors. One morning I was reading Luke chapter four, and Jesus made this statement, "I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also for I was sent for this purpose."

That day, we sensed God calling us, like missionaries, to go to some other city, some other part

of the world, plan our lives to engage and proclaim the gospel, and expand the kingdom. So we just said, Lord, yes! We don't know where, and we don't know when, the answer is yes. A couple of weeks later, a church reached out to me from Georgia and said we feel led of the Lord to start a church in the fastest-growing city in North America, Las Vegas, Nevada. And God's put it on our hearts you are to be the pastor of that church.

Well, Las Vegas had never entered my mind, wasn't on my radar. I mean I'm from Alabama originally, and if you're from Alabama you don't go to Las Vegas, and if you do, you don't tell anybody. Where I'm from, they don't think Las Vegas is hell but they think you can smell it from there like it's close.

But that's what God did. God moved my family to Las Vegas, Nevada in 2000 to join in his activity of starting a church. And church planting is hard anywhere. It is always a difficult season but there is also a great blessing. And over the course of the first 10-12 years, we experienced both. We experienced God's favor in unbelievable ways with a rapidly growing church that inside of three years had more than a thousand people coming from many different languages and cultures. We were experiencing the growth and the blessing and the favor of God but that creates all the challenges of where you're going to meet. We had to meet in nine different locations in ten years. We had economic collapses. We had moral failures on our team. We had construction problems that we ran into with being in a place like Vegas. There are all kinds of issues.

In about 2012, the church is now a few thousand people. We finally moved into a permanent facility, my body just shut down. I came home from work one day. Been working for years this 60, 70, 80-hour-a-week workweek. Came home, had dinner with the family, and noticed I couldn't even process conversation. Went upstairs, laid down, thinking I'm going to take a nap. And I slept for eight straight days.

My wife finally got me out of bed and took me to a doctor and he says I had a physical version of a mental breakdown. Stress had so overwhelmed my body that my body said enough and it shut down.

RANDY: Actually, I've known other people that have been through that kind of thing, a physical, complete shutdown. What do you do with that? You cleared yourself medically. In other words, you didn't have some kind of disease.

VANCE: For sure. And Randy, you make an important point because any time you write a book on the subject of stress or anxiety you need to be very clear to say, and I am in the book, that there are medical and chemical situations that people need medical and chemical help for. I believe in a God who can do miracles but I also believe that God's given us the wisdom to know that if I have a medical problem that needs a medical solution, I just don't pray my way out of that. I need to let the wisdom of medicine speak into my life.

But I had been cleared medically. I didn't have anything medical or chemical or physiological other than he just recognized that the volume, the way that I was dealing with the stressors in my life had led me to a very unhealthy place physically, emotionally, and even spiritually to the point that my body said enough is enough. It hit a breaking point. And some people will even watch this and hear me tell this and be kind of shocked if they hadn't read the book because I don't tell this story a lot, other than in the book is the first time I've told it. It is not that I'm ashamed of it, it's just that you think I should have known better. I should have never let myself get to that place. But that's exactly what happened to me.

RANDY: Well, I think that's how we get there is not recognizing that we're going there. What did you do?

VANCE: Well, I had some people in my life that kind of came around me at that time. I was kind of slow to the technology game. My kids kind of drug me into the iPhone era and I wasn't a big fan. Even when I started using the iPhone, I would have all kinds of problems. And they taught me something. They taught me what was called the hard reset, that when you have a problem with your iPhone, the best thing to do is turn it off, shut it down, reboot it and let it come on and most of the time that fixes whatever it was. And that works, most of the time.

I had some people come into my life and say, we need to do a hard reset in your life. It is time to shut it down. I was traveling everywhere, I was speaking everywhere, I was pastoring our church, I was leading all the meetings, I was casting all the vision. And for nine months, other than some preaching, they shut everything else down on my calendar. I didn't get to go to the office, I didn't get to lead a meeting, I didn't get to cast any vision, I didn't raise any funds, I didn't get on an airplane, which for me was a weekly affair. And shut my life down to begin to reorient my life in dealing with these things in a new way because Jesus offers us something different.

We don't have to just endure life. We can enjoy the life that he's called us to. It is what he's promised us in the scripture. And for me, I had missed out on that. I'm not saying, and what I'm saying today that as Christians we're not going to have stressful things in our lives. We're all going to experience stressors. Those are going to come. We can't eliminate those circumstances. As a matter of fact, Jesus even says, "In the last days, difficult times will come." We will have challenging circumstances. But as believers, we have the opportunity with Christ in us to experience those things and live through those things in a very different way and that's what the world needs to see.

TAMMY: How do we identify stress in our life? What's that thing we're looking for? How do I know? Like I'm stressed out or maybe I'm just overthinking. Like how does a person know, to the point, pastor, where I'm stressed out, I better make some changes or I'm about to fall asleep for eight days?

VANCE: Exactly. Well, I define stress like this. It is fearful concern when life's demands seem greater than my ability to meet them. So when I have a situation or circumstance in my life, it can be physical, financial, relational, whatever, organizational, but I look to myself and say, man, I don't have the capacity to meet this need. I don't have the resource, I don't have the wherewithal to overcome this. Then I have two opportunities there. One is what I call in the book stress. It is fearful concern. I can't control the stressor, I can control my response to it. I can get stressed out. I can become obsessed with it. I can worry about it. It can keep me up at night. I can look to myself and say, how am I going to fix this? How am I going to solve this? That's fearful concern,

that's stress.

Genuine concern, we are to have concern. We're not to be careless people. Genuine concern doesn't look to oneself and say how am I going to fix this? Genuine concern looks to the Father and says, Lord, what are you going to do in this situation? Fearful concern leads to stress. Genuine concern, the biblical word for that is *burden*. And what have we been invited to do? Cast all our cares on him because he cares for us. And in the New Testament, the prescription that Paul gives us is to be anxious for nothing.

The word *anxious* there is the same word that's translated worry, stress, and anxiety, in the scripture. It is this fearful concern. And Paul says, "Be anxious for nothing." And it's not a consideration for us to pray about. In the Greek text, it is an imperative. Meaning to be anxious is to live disobedient to the call of God on our lives. But he says rather than be anxious, he says be anxious for nothing but in everything through prayer—what's prayer? Conversation with the Father.

So when that thing in my life comes up that is bigger than my ability to meet it, rather than looking internally and trying to figure it out, I begin to have a conversation with the Father through prayer and supplication; that's the word pleading. It means to pour your heart out. With thanksgiving let your request be made known to God. And here's what he says, then the peace of God, which passes all comprehension will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. I can take that concern, lay it at his feet and what he gives me in exchange is peace.

RANDY: Those two don't mix, stress and peace. I kind of think it is one or the other. I looked up the word that's translated as nothing, and in the Greek, it means nothing! Right? So we kind of have no excuse. When we see in ourselves, okay, I'm stressed about this. I don't have peace which would be another way to measure it, I think. Do I just pray? Do I just read the Bible more? I listen to people that are like, I've prayed about it, I read the Bible more, whatever, confessed. You know. There's got to be something deeper. What did you find as you worked through this in your life?

VANCE: That's a great question, Randy. It's a great way to think about it because what I'm not saying with this book is here are the one, two, three steps that you deal with, and then you move on. What a lot of Christians are looking for in this arena, and really as it pertains to any sin, and that's what stress is because Jesus said don't do it. He said, "Don't be anxious for anything." Paul said, "Be anxious for nothing." Twice in the scripture, we're commanded not to do this. So it is an issue of disobedience. And you know this, God never said don't do something because that something was going to bring us joy and pleasure. He said don't do something because he knew it was going to hurt us. He knew it was going to impact our lives. And that's where so many people are living right now.

The American Stress Institute did a study that showed 77 percent of Americans have physical symptoms impacting their body as a result of stress. And one out of every two people, 50 percent didn't sleep good last night because of stress. When Jesus said don't do this, he was saying don't do this, he was saying don't hurt yourself.

But the way we deal with this is through the means of the relationship. What I can't promise people and nobody can this side of heaven is deliverance from stressful situations. What we can have is what Jesus promised and that is victory in the midst of the stressful situation. And in the midst of the stressful situation, I can turn to him and moment by moment experience that victory. I have to in my own life, having experienced this back in 2012, walked through this collapse, reorienting my life, I still today have to moment by moment take these things back to the Father. Because today I'm going to have some stuff happen in my life. I'm going to be on a TV show where I'm going to have to either respond to that with oh, my gosh, how am I going to do this? Or I can say, Father, you've given me this opportunity. You've placed me in this position. So Lord, what do you want to do here? And how do you want to use this for your glory?

And when we do that, he takes our stress and he gives us his peace. And I love that Paul said, "It is the peace of God." He doesn't say it is the peace from God. It is the peace of God. It's literally God's peace. It is the same peace that Jesus had in the boat asleep in the storm and the way. Everybody else is freaking out—

RANDY: That's a—that's a—I like that!

VANCE: Jesus is asleep. That's the peace he wants us to have. That's the peace he's promised us. And when I settle for less than that, I'm settling for less than what he's offered me through that relationship. So it's that abiding relationship where moment by moment when I start to pick it up, I have to be mindful to take it back and lay it at his feet and trust it to him and get that peace. And the watching world needs to see this. They need to see this.

RANDY: It is not a remedy, it is a lifestyle. How are you doing with your stress?

TAMMY: Man! I love that you said, it's a lifestyle. It is a lifestyle being very quick and aware of stress in your life to know that man when it is coming on, I have an opportunity now to respond. How am I going to respond to this? I'm going to give it to the Father. I'm going to trust him with all these pieces and let it go. He's given me permission to give it back to him.

What a relief that we have that. So many of us want to hang on to it, try to figure it out ourselves, and that's when we start to—I start to just Oooouh! It is a heavy load. I don't want the load. I've got enough loads in my life, I don't need that one.

VANCE: He doesn't want you to have the load. He invites you to put that on him. What Jesus offers us is not the absence of struggle. It is the peace of God in the midst of the struggle that distinguishes us as followers of Jesus, that's a witness to a watching world, that Jesus does make a difference in this thing called life.

RANDY: So you've preached this out at Hope Church in Las Vegas.

VANCE: I did. We preached the series.

RANDY: How has it impacted people?

VANCE: We've seen it be used to set people free in their daily lives as they moment by moment

pursue intimacy with the Father. Jesus instructed us in John 15, "I'm the vine, you're the branches. Apart from me," he said, "you can do nothing." He said, "If you abide in me and I in you, you bear much fruit for apart from me you can do"—it is that same word—"nothing."

The problem is we think he said apart from me you can't do big things. Let it be a big thing. We all of a sudden pursue intimacy with the Father. But that's not what he said. He said, "Apart from me you can't do anything." And if we understand that and that's what clicked for people in our church is, he didn't just care about the big stuff. He wants me moment by moment to live in relationship with him, in fellowship with him, intimate with him. He's invited us not into a religion of do's, don'ts, rights, wrongs, rules, and regulations. He's invited us into an intimate love relationship with himself. And all these things he desires to use to cultivate intimacy with him.

TAMMY: You can't know the peace of God unless you know the God of peace. A brilliant pastor once taught me that.

VANCE: That's a good word!

TAMMY: His name was Vance Pitman. It is a simplistic sentence but so powerful, so much in that. You cannot know the peace of God in your life, which we all pray for and ask for unless you have an intimate relationship with Jesus and knowing who God is first in your life. Then I think all of the other starts—for me, starts to fall into place. I will know the peace of God when I know exactly the character and the heart of Jesus in any situation.

VANCE: I like to say this. My emotional health rises and falls based on my time alone with Jesus. When my intimacy with Jesus is right, everything about my emotional health, and my mental health rises and falls based on that.

And for me, it is about moment by moment walking with him. And that's why—to anybody who is watching this today, the first step to experiencing this is to know him. Like you can't—you said it—you can't know the peace of God apart from knowing the God of peace. You have to

know him. But it is not just knowing him. Once you know him, it is about cultivating the relationship with him and that's where we have to win the victory moment by moment.

TAMMY: And walking and stepping out in obedience. I'm the kind of a girl that is learning that later in life, the obedience. Because I love it. Obedience for me is tied so closely to blessings. So as I'm starting to walk in obedience, the blessings of God, and the peace of God have been surrounding my life and I'd rather live in a place like that than a stressed-out place.

VANCE: But don't miss this about obedience. Jesus said, "If you love me, you'll keep my commandments." So here's the way I heard that for a lot of Christian life if you love me, you better do what I say. So we think the goal is obedience. But that's not what he said. He said, "If you love me, you'll keep my commandments." The focus was never on obedience. The focus is on intimacy. And as I pursue intimacy, obedience is the fruit, not the focus of my life. The enemy would love for you and me to focus on obedience. Do you know why? Because we can't do it.

RANDY: I heard the same way, man. I heard it the same way. I thought I have to prove my love through my obedience.

VANCE: And when you finally get it, now there is freedom.

TAMMY: Yeah! So I was just going to say there is freedom not just for me in that today but probably many people hearing that.

RANDY: I'm stress-free—stressless. Good! I would like for people to get this.

TAMMY: I would love for you to have this book, the *Stressless Life*. I know it will be life-changing for some of you, and it will bring a lot of freedom in your life. So when you call and partner with us today, we want to send you this. So request this book and we'll get it out to you right away.

But first, I want to show you this amazing piece. I was able to go over to this incredible village and see some heartbreaking things that I want to share with you today.

On the mission field

ANNOUNCER: Water! Earth's most abundant natural resource: yet out of this abundance only a tiny fraction of it is suitable for drinking. And suitable is a loose definition.

TAMMY: This is their only source of water right here. This is his only source of water. And this is where they have to come every day, all the way down here, to get their water. I mean, you can look around and you can see that it is very dirty and muddy, and there are frogs all over that I actually see at the moment. And you can see the contamination in it. You can see that there has got to be much disease and illness with each sip that they take.

Announcer: While the problem here is serious, the solution is surprisingly simple, and it's already been implemented in this Central American village.

Betty: This is a time when I don't mind watching them stand here and pour water over their head because I know it is good water.

James: That's right! This is a place for which we give great praise to God in gratitude. But we need to drill hundreds of wells like this all over the world. And you can see, if you can't look at these children, look at their faces, look how happy they are, and understand the importance of clean water, it becomes the center of life, schools spring up. We want children to get an education and we want them to come and get healthy, clean drinking water.

[Cheering]

End of video

In the studio

TAMMY: I give praise and I am so grateful to God for what he has done through this ministry through the years—and what he will continue to do.

Thank you so much if you have partnered with us in the past. Thank you! We're grateful for you. If you haven't had a chance to do it, this is a moment I'm going to take to encourage you to join us in this fight to bring clean water to people that desperately need it. I have been working with this ministry for many, many years on mission trips all over the world. But you know what? That same heart that I had then, the passion for those children is the same heart I have today. I'm a little older, a little wiser, but my passion has not changed, and the cause has not changed, and the need has not changed. There will always be a need for clean water. We'll always find those places where we can go and tell those stories and bring them to you and tell you of their great need and help change their lives to help save their lives, and to bring them the gospel of Jesus Christ. We get to be a part of that.

Would you consider joining us today? We're going to drill 350 wells this year in 20 nations. And do you know what? It takes all of us to be a part of that change. So let me break it down for you. For \$48, it will provide water for ten. For \$144, it will provide water for 30. And for \$4800, we can go in there and drill a complete well, Randy, that will change the lives of so many, about a thousand people in that village for a lifetime!

RANDY: Yeah, and it is interesting because we've been doing this long enough that we know we've seen the averages, we know the overall budget, the average numbers. So we can say, \$4800 will give a lifetime of fresh, clean drinking water to a thousand people.

And it's a beautiful thing. I think, Tammy, when I see something like this, I see images where there is dirty water, I see images where children are drinking their only water source. It is not out of ignorance or not out of misbehavior. It is out of not having a choice.

I just can't help but think of the story of the good Samaritan where Jesus says to love your neighbor. And we wonder who our neighbor is. Well, it is the person in need. And too often, it is

easy to walk right by. Look, I've been the other two guys in that story too. I've seen a need and I haven't filled it. But what we have right now is an opportunity to say you know what? I'm going to pause for just a moment and I'm going to share the love of Christ with someone, not just in word, but in deed. I want to show them the gospel, demonstrate the love of Christ. And clean water is a very simple way to do it. And yet, it is one of those most basic things that can have a profound impact, not just on the life of a few but on the lives of many. And that's why it's a privilege, it's an honor to go to people in the name of Jesus and say, this need is filled.

We want to fill a lot of needs. We have a big goal, 350 wells across 20 nations. We want you to be a part of it. Will you go to the phone or will you go online and make the best gift you can? If you've given, as Tammy said, if you've given before, thank you. Please give again. If this is your first time to consider it, don't walk by. Pause for just a moment. There is no gift that's too small when we come together. Will you go online or go to the phone? Do it now. I pray that you will.

Video begins

***ANNOUNCER:** Every day, thousands of lives are lost to waterborne disease, 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 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 Daughter, written by James and Betty's granddaughter, Laney Rene. This insightful book invites all girls and women to walk in the freedom of their God-given identity and embrace who they really are.

With your gift of \$100 or more, you may request the "Great is the Lord" decorative blanket

featuring the words of Psalm 145:3. This beautiful blanket is perfect for comfort and cold weather and a reminder of your help with Water for LIFE. 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 bronze sculpture, "A Cup of Water" inspired by Jesus' words in Mark 9:41. Please call, write, or make your gift online.

End of video

In the studio

RANDY: What a great opportunity to be life and love for people that need it. I hope you'll go to the phone, go online, and make the best gift you can. You can make a difference. We love it when you partner with us.

If you want Vance's book, the *Stressless Life*, do ask for it today when you make your gift towards Water for LIFE. And Vance, it's been such a pleasure. I appreciate just the wisdom that you have shared with us. I want people to know about what you're doing. In addition to the church, you're part-time with the church but the Send Network. Quickly, what are you guys doing to plant more churches?

VANCE: So Hope, we planted Hope. And out of Hope Church in Las Vegas, we started about 80 churches out of our church in the Western United States. From there, I was employed by what's called Send Network; it is the largest church planting network in North America. And from the platform of Hope, now I work for Send Network and we're about planting churches all across—it's churches planting churches everywhere for everyone. Last year we started 745 new churches across North America and are believing God for a church-planting movement that will see the kingdom of God expand again in North America.

RANDY: I love it. Well, if you keep sharing the wisdom of God that you share in this book, I know it's going to bear good fruit. We appreciate you.

VANCE: Thank you. Thank you both for having me today.

TAMMY: Yes! Thank you, Pastor, for being here. And thank you for teaching me a new perspective on obedience today. It was really good for me. Thank you so much. And thank you for watching and we'll see you next time on *Life Today*.