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Week seven: WFL

Randy Robison and Tammy Trent

Aaron Burke

In the studio

RANDY: Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm Randy Robison. Tammy is with me. Good to see you.

TAMMY: Good to see you.

RANDY: Glad you made it this week.

TAMMY: I know, me too. It was a close call.

RANDY: Yeah. It was some fun travel this week. We're glad you're here as well. In life, a lot of times, we go through things that can hold us back. We feel like we're hampered. Tammy, today's guest has a twist on this whole thing.

TAMMY: It is a good twist.

RANDY: It is a good twist. The book is called *The Unfair Advantage*. It's written by Aaron Burke. He is the lead pastor of Radiant Church in Tampa Bay. Aaron, welcome to the show!

AARON: I'm so honored to be here; a longtime viewer. And to think to be on this stage, I feel like I've got to pinch myself. It is a big deal!

TAMMY: I'll pinch you. Let me pinch you.

RANDY: We talked online recently. I liked where you're coming from because so many people see things in their lives that are disqualifiers, or just making me incapable of doing what God has called me to do. But you've got a good take on this. I want to go into that. But I have to ask you first, is this something you've experienced in your own life?

AARON: It is my entire story. I think it is everybody's story. We all have those moments where we look at it and go, this is just plain unfair. But what I've realized with God is we live life forward but we understand it backwards. When we get past it, we go, oh! It was necessary.

This whole thing started when I'm praying for one of our girls on staff. She's gone through tragedy after trauma, issues with her parents, going through a terrible divorce, and a lot of situations. As I was praying for her, I kept saying it's unfair. It's unfair what you've gone through. It's unfair how they treated you. It is unfair how you were overlooked. And as I said it, I felt the Holy Spirit speak so clearly and said, Aaron, it is unfair but it is for her advantage. I stopped for a second and I wrote down that phrase, *The Unfair Advantage*. And I looked at it and I realized that man, there are times in our life that I don't believe God causes it but God can use every unfair thing we've gone through for the advantage that he has for our life.

And I started doing some research, like an unfair advantage. I was thinking about, what are some practical examples? If you want to be in the N.B.A. There's a one-in-a-million shot that your viewers right now are going to be in the N.B.A. One in a million. You're not going to make it. Okay? So I looked at that and I go but what are the chances if you're above seven feet tall? It goes from one in a million to one in six. One in six! So you've got to think that over seven feet tall is unfair. You can't sit on an airplane properly. You have to duck when you go underneath a door. You don't have a bed that actually fits you but you can make millions of dollars in the N.B.A. If you can deal with the unfair thing properly you can walk into the advantage that can be taken with it.

It is the same thing with all of our life. If you learn how to leverage and handle the unfair scenarios that come your way, then you can walk into an advantage and walk into the purpose that God has for your life. That's what I try to outline in the book.

TAMMY: Okay, there is so much joy in your life and you talk about praying for that girl. I want to ask you about you personally. Do you feel like growing up, in your adult life, you had some unfair moments in your life where you just thought, God, this is just not fair. I don't know how to find an advantage in this unfairness.

AARON: Okay, so I got saved at 16 years old—radically transformed. I was the worst kid in my class, worst kid in my youth group that I was at and God got a hold of my life. At 16 years old I went all in; and started a Bible study on my little high school campus. And a few months later, I get expelled from high school.

TAMMY: Can I ask why? Can I ask why? I really want to know.

AARON: I don't want to throw the guy under the bus but it was wrongfully done. Like I didn't do anything crazy. But I got expelled. I got expelled a month before my senior—the end of my junior year before I go into my senior year. I was just voted the senior class president. I was like—I was thriving. I felt like I was living in God's plan.

And everything went wrong. I found myself eating by myself in another school; just lonely, and depressed, and I was so frustrated with God. I felt like it was unfair. It was unfair that I was doing the right thing and had these terrible consequences. Most of it was because of stuff I did before I got saved. And the situation in my senior year of high school when I was going to be involved in my school, I decided to do college credit instead. Go and do my classes on the college campus. Did that. Got a year of college done before I graduated high school. Then I go to college. I graduate college in three years instead of four years.

I felt a call of God on my life, a call to be a missionary; wanted to go overseas and help

people around the world. On the day of my graduation, the director of the missions department walks up to me. I'm about to walk on the stage and graduate. He says, "There is an opportunity that has opened up in South Asia." It's right after the big tsunami that hit, remember at the end of 2004? Wiped out the little island country called Sri Lanka. And he said, "There is an opportunity but you have to leave in three weeks. All your expenses paid, we'll give you a salary. We want you to be there to minister on that island. Can you go?"

I remember having a moment right there going, the only reason I can go is because I graduated in three years instead of four years. The only reason I graduated in three years instead of four years is because I took those college classes. The only reason I did that is because I got expelled. It was the unfair thing that I went through that set me up for the purpose that God had for my life.

I was thinking about my dad. My dad is like the ultimate business guy. I said, "Dad, how did you learn?" He can sell anything. He can sell an Icee to a snowman. Like he is just so good! I said, "How did you learn this?"

He said his parents went through terrible substance abuse, and a lot of issues. His dad was a compulsive, terrible gambler; gambled all their money away. He would come home and there was no food in the fridge—and living on the streets of Hialeah. And he said, "I would have to go and I'd have to find some mangos or some avocados. I would find them and I would go to the corner and I'd start selling them. I realized I could sell; sell them for a quarter apiece or four for a dollar or something. Do some kind of deal." He would find a way to do it. With that, he said, "I learned how to do sales through the unfair scenario I went through.

And I wonder how many people watching this right now are going what I'm in right now is not right. I'm angry about it. I'm frustrated about it. Maybe it is the loss of a relationship, a diagnosis that they never expected. They look at that and go, there can't be purpose to it.

The whole purpose of this book is to say there is a purpose to the pain. Sometimes we won't figure it out until we get to heaven one day but I believe you can walk in purpose now.

That's what I do, I showed the life of Joseph. Joseph is one of our favorite characters in the Bible. The Old Testament story of this guy who gets a dream in his heart at 17 years old, gets this desire to do something great, and everything goes wrong. What do you do when everything goes wrong? I mean you've got to think, his family doesn't believe in him, he's sold into slavery, he's working for no pay. He got wrongfully accused by Potiphar's wife; Potiphar in this scenario with his wife, gets thrown into prison. It's unfair, unfair, unfair—and yet, it led to his destiny.

I just wonder how many people it is the pain that you're going through that if you can learn to leverage it will lead you to the destiny God has for you.

RANDY: Yeah, there are some interesting things about Joseph that you talk about that I want to circle back to. But there's also some things you say that I think are important because you talk about victims versus visionaries. A lot of times, we are victimized in life but you suggest in the book that you don't have to live there.

AARON: You don't have to live there. We can make it all about this bad thing that happened to me. Or you can sit there and go, what is it about this bad thing that could be used for a greater purpose?

RANDY: That's big! That's big!

AARON: I think it is huge. You've got to think of the worst trials that are out there that people have gone through. I was a youth pastor for years and I had two different families lose 16-year-olds to cancer. Tragic! You have to think—the worst scenario that anybody can go through. And in those moments, I saw how two different sets of believers made

two different choices. One of them to live so broken in their grief, and as a victim going we'll never move on past this. And years later, probably 15 years past it, I still follow that family and they've never been able to get a vision of how, even in that trial, that God could use it for a greater purpose.

But the other family, I saw them grieve. It's horrible! You never really get past that loss but they learned how to walk, as you said, as a visionary to go, but what could God do to use it? And now that family is serving in youth ministry going even though we don't have our 16-year-old, we're going to invest in other 16-year-olds and we're going to show how to help families during that time.

I thought how beautiful it is to use our pain for a greater purpose. But you've got to see past what you're going through. It is Joseph's story. He had to see past his current scenario and go, I'm trusting that despite what looks like chaos, God's got a plan.

TAMMY: Yes! Yes, he does. I've often said even in my own story, Aaron, like I'm finding the purpose in my pain. But I heard you once say, how do we find—well, how do we find that? How do we find the purpose in our pain, not just focus on the pain?

For me, that's something that I've had to do. It's all been a choice. You're right that 22 years later I can look back too and see God's hand in every season of my life. Now I didn't see it immediately, but I dreamed again just like Joseph. I dreamed again. I finally got to a place in my life where I wanted to dream again so I did. And in that season, I was beginning to see new life coming forth from within me, new things to say, and new ways to minister to somebody. Why? Because I had gone through this and I wanted to use it for God's good.

AARON: I just wonder if there are people watching even right now that you've gone through trauma, you've gone through trials, and you've been so defeated. And the word from God today is dream again. Like, have a moment where you do what Joseph did. When Joseph was discouraged, his brothers said there was no way that's going to happen.

Yet the Bible says—and two verses later, it says, "And Joseph dreamed again."

He got a fresh vision to go, you know what? Despite what anybody else says, here's what God can do. And I'm just believing that God's not done with your life. If you've got a pulse, God's still got a plan. And that he can use us. I'm excited hearing people going through this book, sick people that are in their 60s, 70s, and 80s going, oh! You mean that if God's still got me on the planet there is still a purpose to it. And even the trauma and trials I went through are part of it.

Like I think we've missed this. We think so much that our—we've told people that the way you find out God's plan for your life is you look at your passions and you look at your personality. So what are those things that make you come alive? And then how did God design you? What's that personality?

And then I realized in researching this book, and seeing people throughout the scriptures, seeing your story, seeing our stories, it is not just our passions, it is not just our personality, it is also our pain. That there are platforms that God gives us that are built off of our pain. So you went through that miscarriage and it is devastating. It is horrific. I'm not making light of it. What I'm saying is, is there a platform? There is an influence? Is there a way that God can even use that pain to do what he did with Joseph's life? That at the end of it he said, "What was meant to harm me, God intended for the good, which is the saving of many lives." It is all eventually for his glory.

So you're going to go through trials and you're going to go through hard times, so why not figure out how to use it for God's glory?

RANDY: There is something else you said that I never heard before. And we'll go ahead and stick with the alliteration here. Because a lot of times, we see the unfair thing as our prison, which it was for Joseph, literally. But it was also preparation. I didn't know this about the Egyptian prison system. Tell us about that.

AARON: So if you don't know Joseph's story it is wild. Joseph goes from—he gets a dream, nobody believes in it. He gets rejected, he gets sold into slavery, and he is in Potiphar's house working for nothing. It is all unfair! And then he gets thrown into prison for doing the right thing. Which is shocking. Most people would have said, okay, you do the right thing, you stand for integrity, then you get promoted. He didn't. He was thrown into prison for ten years.

Scholars say out of the 13 years of Joseph's story we see from the dream to him running Egypt, there are 13 years, and there are 10 years of him in prison. Ten years is a long time to be in prison. So I started doing research. God, why would you have put Joseph in prison for ten years? So I started investigating, what was prison 4,000 years ago? It is not like prison today. Prison today is punishment; 4,000 years ago, prison was a reprogramming.

What they thought was that if you steal, then you don't know what it means to be a good Egyptian. So we're going to put you in a scenario where we're going to bring educators around you to teach you and reprogram you on what Egyptians do. Because as Egyptians, we don't steal. So that's what they would do to their prisoners—the people that are in their prisons.

So what do we do about it? Joseph is a guy who is from hundreds of miles away. He gets a dream of him ruling and reigning. He doesn't know the language, he doesn't know the culture, he doesn't know the customs, and God puts him in prison. He puts him in school. It is remarkable! And not just any! He puts him where the best educators would have gone because that's where Pharaoh's prisoners would have gone. Pharaoh's officials went.

So he's in this for ten years. You would think after ten years Joseph would graduate with a doctorate degree on what it means to be an Egyptian. He thought it was wasted. It was not wasted. Nothing is wasted with God. In those seasons that we're behind the scenes and we feel like nobody sees me, nobody recognizes me, God's working behind the scenes.

Do you remember years ago when you would go and you would take pictures on those little cameras and you'd have to go and get the film developed? Now, I know there is a whole audience that has no clue what this means. But back in my day, we'd have had to get the film developed. You'd go to your local drugstore and they would take the film, and they'd take the camera, you can't just open up the camera in the light because it would destroy it. Remember? They would have to take it into a dark room. And what I saw was that it is always beautiful pictures that are developed in the dark rooms.

It's the same with your life. The most beautiful things that God's going to do in your life are usually in the dark seasons of life. He develops us in those dark times. So that when he does promote us, when he does give you that spouse that you're praying for, when he does give you those kids that you want so bad, when he does give you that church that you feel called to pastor, when you get there then you're ready for what he has. We all love the promotion, but we're not on board with the preparation. And Joseph had to go through the preparation first.

Haven't we all seen this in our lives? I look at my life and I go, oh! Looking back, God was preparing me. Can I give a crazy story? This is a crazy thing. I did an internship. Before I graduated, I wanted to be a missionary, wanted to preach all over the world. So I went to this church up in Portland, Oregon that was known for mission work. I said I'm going to go and learn from them because a year later, I'm going to graduate and I want to go around the world.

So I go to Portland, Oregon. I sit down with the pastor and he goes, "Great! We're glad you're going to intern with us. We're going to put you in the kids' department."

I said, "No. I don't want anything to do with children, anything to do with children's ministry." I'm 20 years old, I know what's best. I said, "I'm training to be an evangelist, to preach around the world. Train me to preach."

He said, "No. I'm going to put you for the next six weeks with our kids' ministry. We're going to be putting on a V.B.S. and you need to learn it. I was so angry. I remember sitting with that children's pastor for hours. He had terrible coffee breath, as I just listened to him talk about his passion for kids, and I couldn't stand it. For six weeks we worked on this vacation Bible School. All these kids, 300-something kids came in. I remember I built a volcano through paper mâché. All summer long, I'm wasting my life building this volcano. We do this big V.B.S., put it on. I think, pointless time.

A year later, I already gave you this story, remember? The guy comes up to me and says, "There is an opportunity for you to go overseas." Do you know what the job was? It was on a volcanic island in the Indian Ocean. This small island is called Sri Lanka. And my job was to help pastor and minister to 5,000 kids that were affected by the tsunami.

I get on the plane and I recognize God prepared me a year ago in the darkness of this little church in Oregon for what he had prepared for me in the future. I didn't recognize it. It was unfair! But then I had an advantage. Now I'm running 5,000 kids on this island. I go, I know what I'm doing. I've put on a V.B.S. before!

Nothing is wasted with God. Everything you're going through right now if you'll learn in those seasons to ask the question—I always ask God two questions: What are you trying to teach me? And who are you trying to connect me with? When you're in a dark season, those are the two questions to ask. What are you trying to teach me? Because there is something inside of us he is trying to teach us. He's always trying to develop us internally before he uses us externally.

And who is he trying to connect us with? The kingdom of God is built relationally. And you have no clue. Just like Joseph's story, remember ten years? He had to learn something and then he had to get connected with Pharaoh's officials. Both of them wouldn't have happened if he didn't go to prison.

RANDY: Boy, that's encouraging! It's a powerful truth, encouraging and you know

what? We have a situation right now where we look at it and go, why is this going on? It is hugely unfair to these people that are suffering. I think it is a lot of what Aaron's talking about. I think the reason is so we can rise up and be the people that God has called us to be since the foundation of the earth, especially when Jesus walked when he said, "Don't forget the poor."

Watch this and you'll see how you have been prepared to be the church.

On the mission field

ANNOUNCER: Clean water is essential for life, but if you don't have access to clean water, you are left with water that has potential of stealing your life. Mothers worldwide continue to struggle with the fact that they have no choice but to drink contaminated water.

Open captions

MARTHE: I am fearful because we still drink the same water. The remaining children might die if we do not get clean water.

JOHN: There have been many women in this village at the same time that have lost children. And as I am sitting here and I'm listening to Francine tell a story of how, as of right now, she lives with a constant fear; and yet I know she is a Christian and it is not God's will for her to live in fear. That's so evident that it's not God's will. The scriptures tell us he hasn't given us a spirit of fear.

But if you're in a situation like this, where water is so scarce, and whatever water you're getting is—you know it's contaminated, no matter how strong a faith you have, there is something in the background that taunts you that your next child is going to die.

You can make a difference. Your gift will change their children's future. I'm asking you from the bottom of my heart, please join with us, join with Water for LIFE. As the

Missions director of Life Outreach International, I commit to you, we will be faithful with whatever gift you give. That is my personal promise. It is the promise of James and Betty. You can count on that. We will be faithful with what you give.

End of video

In the studio

TAMMY: You can definitely count on that. It is a promise. I've been working with this beautiful ministry for over 15 years on the mission field and I can tell you truthfully that it is a promise and it is something that we will see through to the very end. We won't stop. We won't give up until we can reach as many people as possible with this life-giving water.

Fear. It's heavy. It is a really heavy burden to bury and to carry. There are many things in my life that strike me with fear but water have never been one of them. When we go over to these countries, that's the very thing we see on all of these mothers especially. It's heavy. The fear is deep. We try to pray over it and against it and push it away. The reality is it's just there. Because the reality is that everywhere they look is bad, contaminated water.

I'm asking you to come alongside us today. I know you hear us talk about this a lot but we're going to keep talking about it because we know there is a solution. And together, we can help these families. We can help lift that burden of fear off of them to give them something to be happy about, to dance about, to be joyful about. We want to give them life – life-giving water that will change everything for them.

Our goal is 350 wells in 20 nations. Do you know what it takes? \$48 will give water to ten people for the rest of their lives. \$144 will give water to 30. For \$4800, we can go in and drill a complete well that would change the lives of a thousand—at least a thousand people in those villages for the rest of their lives. I don't know about you but if you ask me to be a part of something where I can give this one time and it could change somebody's life forever, then that's something, Randy, that I want to be a part of. And I

know many of us have come together to be a part of something like that.

RANDY: Yeah, the whole reason you do what you do with us and the whole reason we've done this at *LIFE Outreach International* for all these years, with this program life and the guests we saw on *Life Today*, we want to bring you the water of life, the message of Jesus Christ. We want you to walk away refreshed and feeling more encouraged and more alive to go out and be who God has created you to be.

At the same time, we want to meet the practical needs of that person that needs physical, literal water. This is the gospel in word, in deed, and that's why we hope that today's program impacts your soul and blesses your life.

And then I pray that as Tammy asked, you'll come alongside us and bless someone else's life. So please, go to the phone, go online. Make the best gift you can. Let's drill another well and another well and another well to reach another soul. Do it today.

Begin Video

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: I hope you will go online or go to the phone. Make the best gift you can. When you do that today, if you request Aaron's book, *The Unfair Advantage*, Tammy, I know it will bless people.

TAMMY: It totally will. Like all of my questions, Randy, like he answered all of them. I didn't even have to say a word today. But that's how amazing you are. You have so much to say. Talk about stewardship really quick.

AARON: You know, Joseph is at a place where it seems like there is no purpose in it. He is working at Potiphar's house and yet he gave his best in that moment. And because he gave his best, even when he didn't see the result, God blessed him. His timing is good. Trusting God is trusting his timing. Embrace his timing.

RANDY: That is good. You can take that with you. Be blessed today. And come back next time on *Life Today*.