

3/4/24

Week 10: WFL, last week

Randy Robison and Tammy Trent

Lauren and Michael McAfee

In the studio

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

TAMMY: Good to see you.

RANDY: Today's guests have a book called *Beyond Our Control*. Before we talk about the book, I want to tell you about Michael and Lauren McAfee because she is the ministry director at Hobby Lobby. Have you ever heard of that in a secular company?

TAMMY: I have never heard of that. But I loved it when I saw "the ministry director at Hobby Lobby."

RANDY: I don't know what that looks like. So welcome to the program, Michael and Lauren.

LAUREN: Thanks for having us!

RANDY: I've just got to ask you, I recognize Hobby Lobby is a little different but it is in the secular marketplace.

LAUREN: Absolutely.

RANDY: What is a ministry director at Hobby Lobby?

LAUREN: It's a good question. People, a lot of times when they see my title is what does that mean for a company? So Hobby Lobby has a segment of the company that manages philanthropy, basically; philanthropy that happens from the corporate company. And so I get to oversee some of the philanthropy aspect of what the company does. So ministry director is the title that goes with that. But that's what that means.

So it's a lot of fun. Yeah, just get to see neat things happening around the country and our community that Hobby Lobby gets to be a small part of. And it is a blessing.

RANDY: I wish every company had that. This is how we're going to bless people with some of the proceeds of our company.

MICHAEL: Shop at Hobby Lobby!

RANDY: Shop at Hobby Lobby. All right, so *Beyond Our Control*, this is a very personal book for you guys. Give us a little introduction to what we're talking about here.

LAUREN: Yeah. So the title *Beyond Our Control* was born out of just experiences in Michael and my life that we walked through where we were recognizing just how little control we had over the outcomes we were facing. So particularly, we share about walking years and years of infertility. We share the hard aspects of our adoption journeys. We have two beautiful, adopted daughters but there were many years that there was a lot of heartache and waiting, and trying to make things happen and things falling apart in that, as well. Once we adopted one of our daughters, we were a family with her, had her in our home for just six weeks, and then she faced a cancer diagnosis—a shocking cancer diagnosis. So it was a sudden surgery, hospitalizations, chemotherapy, and walking through all of that with our one-and-a-half-year-old at the time. She is doing great now. She's been in remission for four years this month, actually and we praise God for that.

But there were so many pain points in our journey of loss, of longing for good things that weren't coming our way, and for walking through seasons where we were striving to do good things, and striving to make things happen with our own strength and realizing a lot of these things were just completely out of our control. So you wrestle through that and have to remind yourself, we're believers, so trust in the God who has control over all things. He's in control of all things. Yet, he's still allowing these things to happen in your life that are hardships and challenging.

So wrestling through, again, your theology of what you believe about God. If he is in control, he does have control over all things, then is he good? And what does it mean that he's allowing these hard things? What does it mean that we, after years and years of pursuing adoption and having our daughter, were then walking through a cancer diagnosis? That was something that we had to wrestle through just with our faith. So we write about that in the book of helping people by telling some aspects of our story that maybe are unique to us but really could be this theme that I think others can relate to. We all walk in circumstances in life that completely knock us off our feet or are totally out of our control and we have to wrestle with what that means to believe in those hard seasons, those dark points of our story, and our life.

RANDY: I need to ask a man question here.

TAMMY: Yeah, go for it!

RANDY: Because Michael, I've observed that you're a man.

TAMMY: Good observation.

LAUREN: Very intuitive.

RANDY: Are you a man like most men in the sense that when it comes to family things, you want to take care of things? Do you want to fix things? But when things are beyond

our control, that sense of powerlessness, that's difficult for me. Did you struggle with that?

MICHAEL: Absolutely. Well, even beyond family that was part of our journey. We were a very normal average couple and so everything that we sort of felt like we wanted or expected in life, for us we were blessed that it was sort of within our grasp. It felt like it was within our own power. We got married when we were in college and so we worked hard and were able to make marriage happen to my Sunday School sweetheart and make that happen as college students. And then we wanted—you know, got the jobs we wanted and we wanted to write. Things we wanted to do were like you roll your sleeves up and work hard and have a positive attitude and things kind of fall into place.

And then it was shocking when for us the thing that was beyond our control that was so obvious to us was children. We just expected that you are able to have children when you expect children to come. When that wasn't happening, we first started with adoption. We were first going through the adoption path and journey, and things kept going from slow down to shut down, and door after door closed. We were waiting, hoping to get matched for over six years while we were just waiting. We went from one country to the next, pursuing international adoption for a number of reasons, and just felt like all our friends and other people in our lives that things were falling into place for them. So you begin to look at yourself going, Lord, why not us? Why are things not falling into place? Again, doing everything in our power thinking that it was going to come about. Then finally when we experienced that joy of bringing home our daughter Zion, and then six weeks in finding this cancer diagnosis out of the blue, out of nowhere. No one saw it coming, incidental find.

Just feeling like once again you're plunged into this area of going, Lord, I thought we had already done our time of waiting and heartache, and things like that, as we were longing for children in the first place. Now, not only do we have that story but we have this unexpected, unknown route of cancer; having no clue what that would mean for us.

The thing I remember is walking our daughter in the hospital, holding her as an 18-month-old or 20-month-old, I guess at the time, down to surgery and just feeling completely powerless. I can do nothing. I'm not a doctor. I have no medical background. I can do nothing to take this tumor out of her. And that old phrase of I have no idea, I don't know what tomorrow holds but I know who holds tomorrow. And know that God, even though I don't feel it, like I have to trust him, I have to trust these doctors because I'm powerless to do anything to change her circumstance. So that was our journey with her.

TAMMY: Can I ask you about—I love reading this in your book—can I ask you to tell me about Ezra?

LAUREN: Yeah. Yeah! It was shortly after our daughter Zion, who walked through the cancer, once she was in remission, we were talking about just kind of what we were feeling led to, and it was to walk into adoption again. So we pursued an international adoption with our daughter Zion, and then we pursued a domestic adoption in the state where we live. I filled out the paperwork and we were pretty quickly matched. And so we got a call that there was a baby boy born and the birth mom had chosen us to parent. So we went to the hospital; we met her, and we met this child, Ezra, who became our son.

So we took him home from the hospital and just had—yeah! Just this sweet now family of four that we were having our son and our daughter. And we were moving forward with the adoption process, it was a private adoption, and the agency was walking us through the process of that when we eventually found out that it was going to be a bit of a unique situation in how the adoption had to go to a different type of court and there was going to be a trial. And so we were just told to wait—wait until a judge can review this case and wait until you find out kind of the fate of our family.

And because it was during COVID, courts were backed up. So this wasn't just what affected us, this affected everyone that was dealing with the court system. People just had to have their lives on pause, and their lives on hold. And so we had our son in our home for 12 months before they finally heard his case. And through some very unusual

decisions that happened in our case, we ended up having to say goodbye to our son, in a matter of two hours, and we haven't seen or heard from him since.

So we had this child, we had a son and it was our daughter's brother. She didn't know any difference. So the hardest thing was explaining to our three-year-old at the time that she had to say goodbye forever to her brother, which is not something any child should have to walk. And we all thought we would be a family forever for most of that time he was in our home.

And so that sudden loss was—definitely the grief, the experience and loss, for any loss is challenging. It was a unique loss in that it wasn't to death. And so I found it was hard to even explain sometimes what that felt like. For us, he was our son, we loved him. And if anyone has been through the adoption process you know that that child is your child. And so we had this season just of having to process the reality that we didn't have this son that we thought we were going to have forever.

And again, having to turn to the Lord and say, God, you orchestrated all of this. You knew when we took him into our home and our lives, you knew that this would not be a forever thing. We didn't know but God knew. Yet, you still, this is the path you had for us.

And so in our lack of knowing why and understanding why that would happen, we choose to trust in God who is good and who has his glory and our good in mind through the pain points that we walk through. We don't know why, we don't understand that, and we—but a lot of times on this side of heaven we won't ever know why we walk through some of the things we do but God is still good and we still trust him.

TAMMY: Lauren, there are so many people that are on a path they didn't expect. I've been on that path. Do you believe that God works all things out for his good or don't you? I think you guys probably left that courthouse, I can only imagine and just thought, God, I didn't see this coming. I didn't expect this. Now what do I do with this? How do I trust

you when everything changes and I don't see it coming? How can I trust that your hand is in this?

How do you encourage somebody today that maybe isn't on the ground surrendering all that just says I'm done! I'm just mad.

LAUREN: We've certainly been in those places. I think of two stories in scripture in that we see God bring people through really painful hardships. The obvious one is Job who obviously lost so much, and through it all remained faithful. And the other one I think of is Joseph, who went through so much. He was abandoned by his brothers, he was sold into slavery, he was falsely accused, and imprisoned—all these things. Both of these characters, these real people, went through hardship.

I have always liked Joseph's story because you can see, at the end you see why God brought him through all this. And he got to have that "aha" moment all those years later saying, oh, God was doing this. Now I'm able to save my family during this famine because of the position that it put him in. Whereas, in Job's story there is no moment in his life, yes, he has things that are restored but that doesn't take away the losses that he had. He obviously still always would miss the children he lost even though he had more children later.

But he never got to see the hindsight of like oh! That is why God did that. And so in our own lives, we might not get that opportunity to see like oh, here's what God was doing this side of heaven. But we can see how God for generations for millennia has used the book of Job to minister to his people—to us, to many people for generations. So God has used that for his good and his glory even though Job himself never got to see—he didn't get to fast-forward and see, oh! In 2,000 years from now, people are still going to be reading my story and seeing the goodness and providence of God. So we have hindsight on Job's story.

So we never know what that might look like but we trust that God is good and is using all

these things for his glory.

MICHAEL: And even if it didn't, like in our story, even if it didn't serve anyone else, the way he's used it in our own lives. So anyone that is having a similar kind of experience, for me, as I prayed in those days and just felt like the wind was knocked out of me. Like Lord, this is my son. This is not just a situation where oh, if it ends up and works out Ezra stays. For a year, like I'd put my heart and soul every day, when I put him down for a nap I'd go, he sleeps in a room upstairs and I would go one step at a time, both feet on a stair and just pray, Lord, let me keep him. Let me be his dad forever.

So in losing him, you feel that pain of like God, this was my son whom I have loved and now I've lost him. Like he's gone. Do you understand what that's like to be separated? I felt like the Lord in his kindness was like, I know exactly. I know exactly what this pain is like. But that's the beauty of the truthfulness of the Christian message is that we have a God that is familiar with, that allows himself to enter into our suffering in Christ. And that God himself gave Christ up for us all. So what better person to turn to than a father that is familiar with the loss of a son?

RANDY: Oh, that's powerful. In those situations where we count it all joy, and you go, hard time chalking that one up! When things go from beyond our control to seemingly completely out of control. But in that process, there is hope. There is a peace that passes understanding. There are all these things. But there's also endurance, there's perseverance. And I know you guys are still in the middle of this but is there anything that you've learned about perseverance that you might relay to someone who is watching right now who is like, I'm in that place right now, that would encourage them to persevere?

MICHAEL: Yes! James 1:2-4 is dear to both of us. It says, "Consider it pure joy when you face trials, and challenges of various kinds because the testing of your faith develops perseverance. And perseverance must finish its work so you may become mature and complete, lacking in nothing."

And so, as we walked this road, I mean this was an aspect of us feeling like life was beyond our control, it was not like waking up every day and like, all right, this is a great opportunity to develop perseverance. It was, okay, we are taking a week off of work. We are alternating times watching our daughter so the other can go into the other room and just weep. Like all these things. We were processing with her, too, of like the loss that she was suddenly experiencing. We had to sit down and try to explain to her on a three-year-old, four-year-old level. And so that journey of just like turning to the Lord even when we don't feel like it, of showing up at church even when it didn't feel like getting there and singing the songs with the group and going down front and praying, getting on our knees, having community around us. That was critical to do the things we knew we were supposed to do. We were doing the things that would ultimately restore and refresh our soul even when we weren't feeling it in the day because it was putting us in an environment where the Lord could do the work even when there wasn't an immediate emotional payoff.

RANDY: That's good. That's good! If you're watching right now and you need someone to pray with you because you're just trying to persevere, which some days just looks like breathing and getting out of bed, I get it. I think all of us get that here. We have those seasons.

There's a phone number you can call someone who will lift you up to our Heavenly Father in prayer, waiting on the other end of that line. At the same time, I know one of the best things we can do when we're in that difficult situation is to look beyond ourselves and say, God, how can we represent you to someone else in their pain? You can do that. Let me show you how. Watch this and you'll see how you can, regardless of where you're at, you can be a blessing to someone else.

On the mission field

RANDY: In so many places around the world, we see people that don't have water—any water to drink. If they do, they're scraping it from the worst places possible. But in some

places, like where I'm at right now in Burundi, there seems to be an abundance of water. But the water is not safe.

Open captions

>> My baby's name was Stella. She died earlier this year. Her whole body was swollen and when I got her to the hospital she died. She was vomiting and had diarrhea. Adults suffer from this but the kids suffer so much more than us.

RANDY: It was this water source where she would come and get the water every day in these jugs and take it back to her children. And it is this water source that took Stella's life.

Open captions

>> It is very difficult to think about her. It is very painful for me. I wonder why I am still here. I wish I could die and join her.

RANDY: I don't want Jacqueline to go through this again. She has other children. She's doing all that she can. Are we doing all that we can? We can change this. We have the power. It is within our power to give them clean drinking water so that she doesn't get to the point where she wants to die.

That's why it is critical that we do something right now. You and I can do something. We can come in and we can put in a well in this village and they will have clean water. There are so many other villages just like this. So many other mothers that are experiencing the same pain that Jacqueline is feeling.

We want you to join us in reaching around the world to places like this and giving them clean, pure, drinking water. Will you do that? Will you give life? Will you give Water for LIFE? When you do, you will be changing the lives of mothers like Jacqueline all over the world. Do it today.

End of video

In the studio

RANDY: One interesting thing about this situation with contaminated water, is that you see adults drinking this water all around. You wonder why they would do that. The ones that are drinking it as adults survived childhood because contaminated water comes in, especially when an infant goes from nursing to drinking the water, and then as they're growing—so it is the young children that are hit the hardest. That's why the mothers suffer so much.

Going into a village like that and so many others across the world and simply drilling a well to get deep enough to the water that is uncontaminated, and then building it in such a way that it will last for an average of 70 years, which is what we do, that's why we call it "Water for LIFE," we change that village, and the villages around it. We give those children who are at the most risk a chance, a much greater chance at life.

The thing that separates us from a lot of organizations that do wonderful, charitable work is we do this for one reason, because of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Because the gospel is an outreach to those who are needy, those who are hurting. Because the Bible says, "Do not forget the poor." That's what we ask you to enter into with us—reaching out with the love of Christ in word and deed.

This is what it looks like for this particular campaign, and this is the last week we'll be talking about it on the air, it will be ongoing, so we always need your support. Your gift of \$48 today will basically provide water for ten people for 70 years—for a lifetime. A gift of \$144 will provide that same fresh clean drinking water for 30 people. A gift of \$4800 provides on average a well.

We need to know this now, we need to know this today because we have people down the line in these different places, missionaries, rig workers, pastors, in some places, and we

need to tell them, okay, line these villages up. We're coming in. We're giving them Water for LIFE.

So please, we want you to go to the phone or go online right now. Don't delay. Make the best gift you can because you can enter into their world of suffering and give them some relief, give them the gospel. Tammy, you know what it does. This is such a beautiful ministry of hope.

TAMMY: It is, Randy. I appreciate your heart so much for those people of Burundi and that peace, it's just—I know I've been there. When you're actually with the people on the ground, it's so emotional. It is hard to hold it in sometimes. I couldn't do what I do, I know you couldn't do what you do either when we travel to these countries if we didn't know that there was a sure solution. There is a solution and we know how to get there and we know how to bring them water with your help.

So let's do it today. Let's make a difference. Let's bring water—Water for LIFE!

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.

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

End of video

In the studio

RANDY: Please do go online or go to the phones if you'd rather but make the best gift you can. This is the last week we'll be talking about this during this campaign on the broadcast show. But your gift will keep on giving and giving and giving.

And Tammy, wow! You guys, it's been such a blessing. Thank you for coming out and sharing. I know it touched Tammy, you could see it in the program.

TAMMY: Oh, my goodness, it did! It really did. I feel the pain, I feel the hurt, and I also know the joy that you can find in the middle of just tough seasons. So gosh, thanks for being here. Thanks for writing this book. It's so special. It's going to mean a lot to a lot of people.

Again, if you're struggling today with any of this, please make that call. We do want to pray with you. We love you and we care about you. Thanks for watching. We'll see you next time on *Life Today*.