

4/22/24

Week 17: Spring Mission Feeding

Randy Robison and Tammy Trent

Terry Crist

In the studio

RANDY: Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm Randy Robison. Tammy is with me. How are you today?

TAMMY: I'm good today.

RANDY: Do you have anybody in your life that you have a hard time loving? Don't say me! [Laughing]

TAMMY: No! I love you, my brother in Christ. Goodness! That is kind of a loaded question right now. I don't think so. But there are definitely people, I think, that are harder to love in this world than others.

RANDY: Well, gosh yeah. And we're going to talk about that today. Our guest is a gentleman named Terry Crist. He is a co-lead pastor of a church out in Arizona called City of Grace. He has a book called *Loving Samaritans*. If you understand scripture, you understand that is a metaphor there but it goes to the heart of this issue of loving people.

It is easy to love those we love. It is hard to love people that we don't get along with, we don't see eye to eye with. But we're going to learn a little bit about how to do that today. Great to have you on the program, Terry.

TERRY: Thank you, guys. It is a real honor to be with you today. I sent the book to a friend recently and he quickly responded. He said, "I've read a chapter and I don't have a

problem *Loving Samaritans*, I have a problem loving Christians." He was kidding but I know exactly what he was saying there. And yet, the same love that it takes to love people within our families and within our church, within our own tribes is the love that God uses to love the other as well.

TAMMY: Yeah, we talk a lot about, in church, how difficult it is to love people outside of even the way we believe, the way we think, the way we feel. If they think or feel differently, or they see something different than we do, it is like the love just stops there, the kindness stops there. And judgment, we use that word constantly, we hear it constantly. Everybody is judging. And you're judging me.

How do we even—I'm diving right in, pastor. Like how do we love people that don't see things the way we do? That don't believe the way we believe?

TERRY: That's a big question. And I think you're right. I think we more often than not engage in transactional love, quid pro quo love; the kind of love that says I'll do this for you if you do that for me. I think the key fundamentally, at the risk of oversimplification, is in being loved well that we're able to love well.

So I think so many times in life, whether it is in our families, in our churches, neighborhoods, communities, in the world, or people of other faiths, if we don't know that we are unconditionally loved by the God of the universe, if we're not at peace in his love, nourished in his love, then we find it difficult to love others because you can't give away what you don't have. So I think we've got to start with that right there. In being loved well, we love well.

RANDY: When there are people who are doing wrong, that are doing damaging things, we see this in our Rescue LIFE outreach where we're rescuing young, mainly girls, some boys, from sexual abuse. And then we see the traffickers and we go, I'm supposed to love a trafficker? There are some people who are behaving in evil ways. How do we even start to love that person?

TERRY: I think that we have to separate behavior and consequence from unconditional love. Loving people unconditionally doesn't mean that there are no consequences for bad behavior. It simply means we are present to them in a way that allows for transformation in a way that is faithful to the possibility that God can intervene in the hardest of hearts.

I think of Saul of Tarsus who was committed to the eradication of the church. He was bent on killing Christians. That's a picture of somebody that would be hard to love. After Jesus encounters him or he encounters Jesus, he then goes to the house of Ananias. And you can imagine what this little Jewish man must have felt. He now encounters one who is educated, authoritative, and committed to destroying Christians, and he is expected to love him. But again, we can't do that unless the love of God flows through us.

This is what I love about the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman. I love the fact that he is not showing us an example of someone easy to love. He is not showing us the example of loving someone of our same faith or our "in" group of our own tribe. But he is showing us in loving the Samaritan someone who comes from a different background, someone who has a different cultural identity, someone who is of a different political party, all the hot topics, and someone who has a different sexual history. And he has the longest recorded conversation with her in the gospels.

So think about that. We know Jesus had a lot of conversations with a lot of people but he chooses, and John chooses to record this for us because this interaction is a model of loving the other. The Samaritans were the other. And the conversation that Jesus has with her begins a love affair that continues his entire ministry. He shares with her the most provocative topics of the day. Her heart is softened. She isn't repelled. She doesn't reject the message. From there, she then goes to the villagers and says, "Come! I want you to meet a man who has told me everything about me." But apparently, he told her in such a way that it was kind and compassionate and loving and gracious and winsome. Jesus then goes with her back to the village with the villagers.

So I'll take a breath here. But here's the bookends that I love. We have Jesus sitting at a well, a place of great pain, Jacobs well had a lot of history, and a lot of painful brokenness occurred at that well. The longest recorded conversation goes to two missing days in Jesus' itinerary. He disappears off the grid into Sychar. We don't know what happened there. I wonder if he heard the story of the Good Samaritan. I wonder what sort of other stories he might have heard. But what we do know is from this moment on, he is all in with the Samaritan people.

Who are the others in our world? Who are the Samaritans in our world? They're the ones we're called to love. Even if they are enemies of God, we still owe the debt of love to them based on what God did for us. We were enemies of God by our own sinful nature and yet God loved us into the kingdom and gave us the wherewithal to love even the hardest to love.

TAMMY: You know what I love also about that, pastor, is that and what I learned also from reading your book was the fact that Jesus, he sat with her, had a conversation with her but he listened to her. Sometimes we don't—we listen to respond rather than just listening to learn. And I think that's so much of what I got out of your book too, the challenge of listening to people. His tone with her, the way he listened to her, the way she began to talk. He was already getting the feel of where she was at and knowing how to respond to her and where the conversation would go.

TERRY: Jesus was a master listener. Throughout the gospels, he was asked something like 112 or 113 questions and he only answered two or three of them, depending upon which translation you read. So it wasn't like he allowed others to control the conversation. He didn't allow the culture to control the narrative. He was firmly in control of the narrative. And as the personification of truth, he was there to be truth—truth embodied before truth presented.

But in these conversations, as you pointed out, he listened deeply. I think this is something that would benefit so many of us today. Benefit families who have just gotten

past listening well. Church communities are profoundly divided. A national civil discourse where we're not listening to each other. We're preparing responses and they result in attacks.

But what if we got back to curiosity? Curiosity doesn't mean agreement. Kindness doesn't mean affirmation. It simply means that I want to know your story. What is it behind what you do? I think that all human behavior is the expression of some deep need, some deep pain, or some deep longing. Sometimes, we just presume to know why people are the way they are. And we have these little formulas, all blank people are blank. And then we fill in the blank. All white people are blank. All black people are blank. All Muslim people are blank. All Jewish people are blank. And we just have these assumptions.

So often those assumptions haven't been formed by conversations. They've been formed by what we have heard about people from other people, who have heard about them from other people. How different could the world be if we just began to listen?

TAMMY: Absolutely!

RANDY: So here's where a lot of people struggle, I know I do. And maybe we do listen, and we hear things that we know are wrong. Jesus certainly encountered this—this idea of coming, as Christ did, fully in grace, fully in truth. I think the difficulty we have sometimes is balancing those two. The grace to listen, the grace to understand, the grace to hear, to not walk in this harsh kind of judgment. But yet, also holding to the truth, not compromising. How do we hold both of those tightly and still navigate some of the differences we have with people?

TERRY: I love your body language right there because I think that's the picture. I've often envisioned truth and grace as being a tightly held rubber band. We all feel the natural tendency to let up on one side or the other. I'm going to let up on the truth side or let up on the grace side. But Jesus shows us the beautiful picture of holding that tension, and how that love fills the tension.

I think we're living in a critical moment in the world today where we see people in large numbers either leaving our churches or rejecting our faith. I think more often than not, guys, it's because of the tone in which we have communicated the gospel, not the content of the gospel.

And listen, I'm a pastor, I'm a practitioner. I understand that inherent within the gospel there is some offense. I get that. Jesus was not milk toast. He wasn't a doormat. He was strong, he was confident, he was clear. But I think more often than not, people reject the gospel based upon the tone in which we deliver it, not the content. And when the gospel is presented with clinched fists, with a pointy finger, with a furrowed brow, with an angry disposition, the world is rebuffed by that.

Jesus never compromised on the truth but he drew people in. He did it through curiosity, through conversations, through acts of compassion, washing feet. It wouldn't be controversial for just a moment. There's been a lot of controversy in our world over the last couple of months over whether Jesus would wash the feet of sinners. I don't know how we get stuck on things like that. I don't know how many feet he washed but we know he washed Judas' feet. And if he washed Judas' feet at the last supper before Judas went out to betray him, why wouldn't he wash the feet of others?

All this comes back to what I've referenced earlier, that I heard from your parents and that was the idea of just loving people well. We might be surprised at what God could do if we got back to being a people of love—unconditional love, faithful love.

TAMMY: I think leaning in, listening, and loving. We all want to feel seen. We want to feel valued. We want to feel worthy of even somebody caring about what we're going through. I feel like the world, especially, is so turned off by Christians and believers in the church, especially right now because there seems to be more hate than love, more judgment than grace.

I think your book, to me, meant so much as I was navigating through the different chapters and the truth and tone. I think that was chapter five. There is so much I learned from you, pastor, of even tone. Everything you just said, of leaning in and having a great conversation with someone different from me. And just to say let me learn from you. Let me learn something. Because there is always something for us to learn, to take away from instead of hanging on like this. And I'm not going to let you get past what I believe and what I feel. That doesn't have to change what I believe. Absolutely not! But I can show compassion without compromise in my life.

TERRY: And we can have courageous but not contentious conversations. I think the onus is always on us. So as the people of God, we might tend to say, but what about their response? What about what they're doing to us? What about religious persecution? What about the opposition to our faith? We tend to justify our frustration and anger and harsh presentation of the gospel based upon the fact that other people are behaving the same. But we are the people of God. And we are to show the love of God as the evidence of our faith.

So think about that. Jesus said, "By this will all men know that you are my disciples." Not because you heal the sick and cast out oppressive spirits, although we should do that but because you love people.

So we can have those courageous conversations. I'm not advocating for a reworking of truth. Truth is timeless. Truth is eternal. But truth is embodied and fundamentally, ours is a show-and-tell gospel. So many times the telling part is hard because the showing part is absent. So if I just shout the truth at you that does nothing to break down defenses. But if I ask these questions, what do you believe? Why do you believe them? What do you believe about yourself? Even when it comes to hard issues of the day, I think we need to have the hardest of conversations with tears on our cheeks. If I can't look at the hardest cultural issues of the moment and the people who embody and represent them without tears on my cheeks, then I need to go back and ask the question, how has my heart become hard? How has my spirit become defensive or protective?

I've got to take my ego off the table and realize that it isn't up to me to defend the gospel. God will defend the gospel. It is up to me to live out the gospel, to present the gospel, and that all comes because I've been formed in the way of love. Our gospel is a gospel of love and it moves at the pace of love through the spirit of love. So we need to recover not just the message of Jesus but the tone, and the way in which he preached the message.

In fact, one last thing, Paul in Philippians one said to the church there, he said there are some who preach Christ in contention, and there is little value in that. So even if you shout Jesus in a way that is frustrated, there is little value in that. But the greater value is when we preach the message of Jesus in the spirit of Jesus. And that's what I'm coming back to. How do we get back to the fundamental stuff that has always worked? The way of love.

RANDY: That's so good. There are several other points I want to hit but we are out of time. So I would just say to the audience, if you want this book, it will bless you, *Loving Samaritans* by Terry Crist. We would love to send it to you if you request it today when you join us in just what you were talking about, this is the showing of the gospel. There is a way to show the love of Jesus and you can join us. Watch this and you'll see how.

On the mission field

TAMMY: So I've spent the week in Africa listening to countless stories of desperation and great pain. My name is Tammy.

[Translator repeats]

TAMMY: What is your name?

[Translator repeats]

Open captions

>> Baritoo.

TAMMY: And what is the name of your baby?

Open captions

>> Safara. She is five years old.

TAMMY: I know you have very little food. I'm wondering if you could help me understand what it is that you're able to eat.

Open captions

>> I gather some wild leaves to eat. Sometimes I earn enough money to buy a little sorghum. I try to find food anywhere I can.

TAMMY: I can see—I can see that your daughter is struggling. I can see that she is—it's hard to say that word, hard to say, "wasting away." It's hard to say that but it is true. And it's because she is malnourished, and it is because she has no food. I can't even imagine the pain that you must carry with you as a mother. I'm so sorry! My heart breaks.

I've been given the privilege to come here and spend time with these amazing people that work harder than anybody I know, and struggle more than anybody I've seen. They are just asking for a little help. Would you help today? Would you help save a life?

End of video

In the studio

TAMMY: Whoo! I sat with so many families in Ethiopia not very long ago. So the impact it had on my heart is still right at the surface. It always will be. I remember that day really well, sitting with her and her precious little girl, who not only did I feel was

wasting away, I was so fearful that she was on the brink of death. She was so tiny and frail and had other medical conditions that you could see. And I couldn't help but think it had everything to do with the lack of food. And her little body fighting for life every single minute. Not just every day, but every minute.

I could not be here with you today if I didn't offer you an opportunity to help this precious family, and so many others that I had a chance to spend time with, offer you and give you an opportunity to come alongside us as a ministry. Because our heart is to change, to help, to bring hope, is to bring Jesus in any way we can. And right now, it is dire, it is urgent, and what the need is Jesus and it is food.

So would you consider—would you consider giving something today to that family and so many more? We are out feeding 350,000 children every day and we want to do more. So for \$30, you could help us feed three children for the next three months. For \$50, we could feed five children. For \$100, we could feed ten children. For \$1,000, we could feed 100 children for the next three months. Would you please consider coming alongside us?

Randy, it is so critical right now.

RANDY: I know, Tammy, and that was very hard to watch. That little girl *is* wasting away. We've seen it over the years. We've seen the classic signs of malnutrition. I've prayed for a malnourished child and that child died that night. It is very difficult. We live in such a bubble of privilege here in the West. And I think it is the abundance that God wants for all of us. We can't forget those who are in desperate need.

Tammy, you're 100 percent right. I couldn't sit here and show those pictures and talk about it if I didn't know that what we do through Mission Feeding works. We can turn it around and we can turn it around fast. But we have to do it now. If we don't do it right now, we will be filling graves. I know that is harsh but it is the reality—I've seen it. I've seen it in person.

The situation in Ethiopia is bad right now. They desperately need Mission Feeding. So I know it is heavy. I know we're coming to you with a real sense of urgency because that's what we're facing, that's what they're facing. But we need to hear from everyone right now.

Please go to the phone, go online. Make the best gift you can.

Begin video clip

ANNOUNCER: Right now across the continent of Africa, children are suffering facing severe malnutrition and even death. Severe drought and famine, including in crisis areas like Ethiopia, means we must replenish food supplies immediately to keep feeding 350,000 children and help reach more people in desperate need.

Through *LIFE's* Mission Feeding outreach your gift of love can be an answer to prayer for a hurting and hungry child in their time of need. Call now with your lifesaving gift of \$30, \$50, or \$100 to help feed and care for three, five, or ten children for three full months. With your gift of any amount, we'll send *The Blessing of Taking Communion*. In this book, discover how the sacred ordinance of communion helps to feed your soul and reminds you of the transformative power of receiving the Lord's Supper.

With your gift of \$100 or more, you may request the LIFE Legacy Journal. This beautiful journal and pen will help you write your personal story and share the experiences that made you who you are. One day, the generations that follow will be able to look back and learn from the legacy you've left behind.

Finally, with your gift of \$1,000 or more to help feed and care for 100 children, be sure to request our inspiring bronze sculpture, "A Cup of Water." Please call, write, or make your gift online today.

End of video

In the studio

TAMMY: I honestly hope that you are in a position where you can actually help us today. What an incredible opportunity we have been given by God to help these precious people. And with any gift that you're able to give today, we want to make sure we send you Terry's book, *Loving Samaritans*. It's such a great book! Honest, loving, and hopeful.

RANDY: I love it. Terry, I have to ask you about this one idea because I think it is very important as we go about talking to people we disagree with, we don't see eye to eye. It is this idea of being an ambassador of reconciliation. Briefly, what does that mean?

TERRY: I was captivated years ago by the idea that when Paul describes being an ambassador of reconciliation, he talks first of all about the ministry of reconciliation before the message. So I don't think the order is incidental. We are to live out an embodied faith which then gains passport into the lives of people so we can share the message of faith.

We've got to play the long game. And I would say for parents and even grandparents, I've got it real hard for grandparents who might be looking at their kids and grandkids, play the long game. Just make room at your table, Grandma. Just make room on your couch, Grandpa. Keep loving them. Give them some grace. Sometimes, the greatest of conversions occur after lengthy conversations over the period of many years. We don't know when a heart is going to be converted but we can set up the long game so that we are present when conversion occurs.

RANDY: I love it! Thank you so much. Be sure to request Terry's book. You will see it will bless you. Join us again next time here on *Life Today*.