

5/1/24

Week 18: Spring Mission Feeding
Randy Robison and Tammy Trent
Chonda Pierce

In the studio

TAMMY: Hello everybody. I'm Tammy Trent. Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm hanging out with Randy Robison, and another favorite of ours! She's been coming here for years, Randy!

RANDY: You were at the Christmas banquet last year. She came and entertained. But when she comes, she doesn't just entertain, she ministers.

TAMMY: Absolutely. That's what I love so much about her. We have the privilege of being with one of our favorites today, Chonda Pierce. I'm so happy you're back. I just wanted to say right off the top. I love you. I respect you. I honor you. I have laughed with you for so many years. We've shared the same stage on *Women of Faith* over the years. I would laugh with you there. I would laugh with you from afar.

But it wasn't until I read your new book, *Life is Funny Until It is Not*, that I finally just sat and cried with you, Chonda. You weren't even with me but I felt like you were. I walked through this journey with you as you took me from the beginning to the end of your life. I just kept thinking at the very end, God, thank you, thank you, thank you for not letting go at times when I'm sure Chonda let go herself or wanted to let go. I mean there has been abuse, loss, disappointment, all kinds of things that have come in and out of your life, and you kept fighting for life.

I can't help but think that there are people watching today that have been fighting for life. I have gone through loss, disappointment, and grief, and have wanted to give up, and have asked the same question, God, where are you in the middle of it all?

He is there. And I'm excited to talk to you about that. So together, we can all encourage people to be reminded that no matter what they're going through right now Jesus is in the middle of it with you.

Chonda, glad you're here. Tell me, let's start from the beginning, why this book and why now?

CHONDA: You know, because Tammy, I have lived 32 years—I mean I've done 32 years of stand-up comedy, and it's been fun and wonderful. And each night I will, as Randy says, he's so kind to me. And of course, his family is like my family. And his dad, I share the love for his daddy. He is like my daddy. I didn't want the end of my career to come that I didn't tell the truth, the solid truth about the dark times too. It is easy to stand on the stage and be funny, funny, funny, and then turn that corner really quick and have about 15 minutes left of good ministry and then you say good night.

People don't know the in-between. There is always that joke about your tombstone. There is the day you were born and the day you died, and those in between. People don't know in-between. They know the ups and look what I've survived but they don't know how poorly I did sometimes at surviving it. I think I just needed it to be a what to do and what not to do. And just an honest, honest look.

And the prayer is that people see the survival. People will see it. And that's what you do. Everybody always says, "God is good" and then the congregation says, "All the time." There have been times I've sat in the church and they say, "God is good" and I want to be the one that goes, "Really?" [Laughing]

And the truth of the matter is he is good because he is always there with you. I think about the two, Mary and Martha when Jesus came and their brother had died. They're like, if you'd just been here, he might not have died. They had that accusatory anger. They were so disappointed that he wasn't there on time. The sweet thing is when Mary and Martha ran to him and Martha—it says, Martha stayed inside. She's like, I've just had enough of that. I don't want to see him. He wasn't there for me. Blah-blah-blah.

And yet, Jesus was there. The first thing he wanted to do was go hug her too. I know you're angry. I know you wished I'd been here on time. Just wait, just wait! You're going to be surprised how this ends.

And I'm surprised I'm still here sometimes! [Laughing]

RANDY: Chonda, people know you as someone funny, a comic. Is comedy some mechanism of coping with a lot of the things you've been through?

CHONDA: Yes! Absolutely. You know what a grateful—that's what I'm so grateful for. I had a wonderful counselor tell me one time, have you ever just stopped and thanked God for your job? Because what a healthy outlet—for a while.

Now I remember jokes I used to tell and I knew the condition of my heart when I told them. I was hoping that when I told them, the person that was getting the punch line could hear me. So she would know what she said when I was a kid. And she said, "You're not very P-R-E-T-T-Y." I hope she hears this joke.

And then your healing comes, and then the laughter and the creativity starts kicking in of the right words and the right space so people will laugh at the punch line. The mechanics of it kicks in and you become so grateful to the creator of the universe who even created comedy as a joy function and as a place for medicine. I love that. And I love that he's allowed me to survive a career so long without ruining myself. To continue my job—I love my job. Yeah!

TAMMY: What would be one of the greatest life lessons that you think you've learned that you could tell me? Tammy, don't do this. Avoid this. This is what I did. If I had changed this maybe I wouldn't have walked down that road.

CHONDA: I think if I had—if I had learned to trust quicker and faster. Because Tammy, you know even in my days at *Women of Faith*, when people pat you on the back, I didn't trust it. I'm

like they're friendly to me but they're going to hurt me. To believe that not everybody is out to hurt you; I believe if I had believed that quicker.

It is like when James Robison calls me on my cellphone, I take it because I know he is never going to hurt me. There is a man that stood up and I can trust his integrity. When people like that came along in my life, it was a game changer. Because God knows I needed people with flesh on; not just the Holy Spirit but I needed people in the flesh that I could look in the eye and know I could trust them with my life.

I didn't have that for a long, long time. I had a wonderful loving husband and he had his ups and his downs and his demons, but I could trust him with my life. And then when he was gone, I just—I have a problem trusting men anyway, so I don't trust. You might get burned. You just might get burned. That little voice might have been right, they're going to hurt you. But it is still better to try; to try to find a friend, try to believe a friend. When Tammy Trent sits on the screen and says to you that she's proud of you and that she loves you, I fight to believe that. And I do. And it's taken a long time to believe it.

TAMMY: I'm so glad because that's part of the hurdle I think is just as you said, both of us believing. I have my own set of trust issues, girl when it comes to dating. I certainly have my own. I wonder where does that come from for you? Why do you think even now in this season of your life, why are you having a struggle with trusting men?

CHONDA: Probably from childhood, watching a very unfaithful father. He would take me with him when he would go meet his friends. Called it "visitation." But that's a problem. I've worked through that a lot in therapy.

I think I was on the verge of really trying to enjoy the obstacle of dating and the online. I used to say it was going to be the best material of my career, and then it just turned a corner and got really, really sad. And then I had a horrible encounter back in 2016. I was sexually abused by a man. The police had to come, I had to do the rape kit. It was just so disgusting. That will turn you off from ever meeting a stranger online, ever, ever again. Do you know what I mean? And

yet, that's been many years ago, and healing comes with a block of time. And at times, somebody will be nice and say, "Hey! Would you like to have lunch?" And I'll go, "No." And if they're persistent, I'll finally eat lunch with them. [Laughing]

But the truth of the matter is you finally get a certain age and you know this, I don't have to have a man. And I don't mean that in some feminist way. I am not at all a feminist. I don't have to have a man. I would like to have a man in my life, a companion, a leader. I long for a spiritual leader in my life but I don't have to have it. Now I've learned that the Heavenly Father can be a father and a husband and a friend and a companion. It is how much of him you want.

TAMMY: Yes!

CHONDA: And that's me. I decided I wanted all of that in Jesus. I wanted all of that but it took me a while. I had to begin to trust him as a daddy. I began to trust him as a pal. But then, to begin to trust God as your husband and your leader and your companion, that is a whole different level and I love it.

RANDY: I think that that's one of the most damaging things that men can do, especially to women. Because it's really easy, it is easy for everyone. There are people watching right now that struggle with this but we project our human experiences, especially with a father onto God who refers to himself in the Bible as a father. Some of the things you talk about in your book are really hard. Your dad, what was his diagnosis?

CHONDA: He was diagnosed bipolar is the popular term. Back in the day, it was manic depressive, borderline schizophrenic. It is his high that would get outrageous where he would feel narcissistic and he wants what he wants.

In mental illness, what happens is there are these blockers that don't even allow you to reason. And so that's why it is important. Mental health is so important because you can call it sin, the world, a demon. You can call it a medical condition. But if this organ isn't operating right, then it is going to affect everything—your heart rate, how you feel about yourself. When this organ isn't

functioning, you can't even hardly hear those words that you've got to be the leader of the family. It's hard. Yeah!

RANDY: The question is how did you get to the point where you could see God for who he is, and say he is a good God when you had such a dysfunctional father in your own life?

CHONDA: I think that's the beauty of it. I don't want to turn this into a James Robison love fest but it is what it is. I was well into my job for many years with this problem hanging in my head about the fatherhood of God. I was the breadwinner of my home. I was dragging my kids to church when my husband wouldn't, kind of woman.

It wasn't until the Lord allowed the scales to come off slowly and see what fatherhood is supposed to look like. Now I'm sure James Robison probably wasn't the greatest father on the whole planet but to me, I began to see it was the possibility. There was the possibility of what fatherhood is supposed to look like.

And being a public person, and Tammy can probably agree with this, all the sudden the Lord is placing you in places to make people laugh, or to sing, or to entertain, or to host, and all the sudden you get to rub elbows with people that are authentic. I met Max Lucado. I met Billy Graham. I met authentic men that were so—they had no idea what the real thing was going on with me in getting to know them and meet them. And praise God that they—I always say praise God they didn't know the responsibility they had right then at the moment. Praise God they came through. They didn't disappoint. They didn't let me down. Billy Graham still is the dude. So I loved that.

I hate that it's—I'm not a shrink, I'm a comedian, so I don't know why it took so long but I know that that's what helped.

TAMMY: I love it! I love it. And I absolutely can relate to that. My parents, I come from a broken home, and then my stepfather wasn't—it wasn't the greatest situation. So I definitely was one of those too that I longed for a daddy in my life every single day, that was faithful, and that

was consistent, that told me I was a princess, that I could be anything.

So what a gift to both of us that God would bring us different fatherly figures that loved us well and continue to love us well. My dad is a big part of my life today. Praise God for that and loves me well. So I'm blessed and I'm so grateful that you've had it too.

Chonda, there is a quote that is in your book. Maybe faith isn't about what you get. Maybe it is about who you become. Maybe it is not about believing your circumstances will change, maybe it is about believing in God even if they never do. God is a faithful God.

CHONDA: He is a faithful God. People always ask me, "How did you do it?" I don't really know. I can't tell you step by step how to get through each and every one of these things. Somehow, I am blessed with this unapologetic courage to hope. That was kind of what I said in the very last of the book. I just refuse to let the devil take me down. He's tried. He's gotten hold of me way too many times but I refuse to go away into the dark without loving God.

I relate a little bit to Job, but I love Job because he never stopped loving God. I will never stop loving him. I'll never stop believing that it's true that Jesus was the son of God. I will never stop believing! It is in that courage to never stop, all of a sudden, the days pass and you get through that and the days are good and life is funny again. And then sometimes, it might not be but I'll start again.

RANDY: Chonda, we so much appreciate you sharing and being so open. If you're watching right now and you're in a dark place, maybe you've been hurt by a father or a husband who just was not godly, maybe *is not* godly. I'm so sorry for what you're going through if you're struggling with that.

We have a prayer line. We have people that will just take a moment to listen to you and pray with you. So if you pick up that phone and call that number, somebody who loves Jesus will agree with you in prayer and just shine a little light into the darkness that you're going through. So please do that.

Listen, if you want Chonda's book, we are going to offer it today for those who help with our mission outreach. I hope you will do that. But it is with any gift towards the mission outreach, which basically is saying if you need the book we want to get you the book. We want to bless you. We want to encourage you with the things that Chonda has gone through. We're just scratching the surface. At the end of the day, we want you to be able to say I've been through a lot but God is good.

Will you take a moment and look at this opportunity to help someone else who is in pain right now? And we'll tell you how you can be a part of shining God's light into their life.

On the mission field

ISAK: So Tammy, we're coming into this village. I've actually never been to this village before. Our advance team has been here.

Open captions

>> Crisis in Ethiopia. Drought and conflict put millions in need.

ISAK: We've heard that there's over 190,000 people in this area that are chronically food insecure. There's been six years of drought here.

Open captions

>> Ethiopia starvation. Fear of famine grows.

ISAK: So families have told us they've totally run out of food. They've even eaten the seed that they had. So even if rain was to come sufficient to be able to farm, there is no way they could even plant because they've eaten their seed to try to survive.

This really is a crisis situation. It is a case of us having to respond immediately with emergency food, bringing it in, and being able to save lives, particularly of young children. It is the little

children like this that are the ones that are the most vulnerable.

TAMMY: Isak, I think about that little guy right now and what his life might be like every day. We're talking about these kids starving to death because they don't have food. It rips me up because some of these things I have not heard, and I know our viewers might not have even heard some of these stories, some of the statistics, and truly, the reality of life and death.

I don't know where you're at in life today, I don't know what your circumstance might be today as you're watching this, but I can almost bet you that it might be just a little bit better than the lives of these precious people here in this village right now.

If you are in a position to give to this outreach I would respond. If God is laying it on your heart, then I would respond and do whatever you can do. I know that when we come together as God's family, I totally believe, and those aren't just words, but I believe when we come together, we can make an enormous impact. And I want to make an impact in the lives of every one of these children. Let's do it today.

End of video

In the studio

TAMMY: I was just in Ethiopia. That footage is very raw, and it is very recent. The impression that those people left on my life and my heart is eternal. The baby that you saw was in a malnutrition clinic, and she was dying. I think that was the hardest day of the entire trip for me. They're all shockingly hard and heartbreaking. But to sit and stand over a baby that was fighting for her life, dying before my eyes, and realizing that it was about food. The fact that she lacked food. Her family lacked food. These children were all lacking food.

Randy, it was devastating for me. I had to walk out of that room. I sobbed and sobbed because I didn't want them to have to live like that. I kept asking God, what can I do? What can I do, God, today because they might not have tomorrow?

RANDY: I know. I have been in a clinic in Angola, actually where I prayed for a little girl. I believe—I know God can heal miraculously but she died that night and that's a hard thing. And you ask, what do we do? We do what we can do. Poverty is not a problem that is going to go away overnight. It is a generational thing. That's why we feed 350,000 children every day already.

We only do that through the support of viewers just like you. So those of you of that given, thank you. You have saved so many lives. But when we look, we see the situation in Ethiopia right now, and I won't explain it all right now but I was accidentally in Ethiopia last year. I wasn't supposed to be there and got diverted there. And God touched my heart and said, there is something special here. I didn't understand it. We had no plans to go there at the time. But then Isak went in.

Look, we've got teams on the ground. We have people ready to serve—literally to serve. We just need your support. And this is what it looks like. \$30 will help feed three children for the next three months. Now if you do the math on that, you go, that is remarkably little. Well, it is because we have many things in place. We just need to sort of cross the finish line. So your gift of \$50 will help feed five children for the next three months. \$100 will help feed ten children. \$1,000 will actually feed 100 children for the next three months.

We want to expand into this area in Ethiopia where I'm telling you, there is something special. God wants us to be there. God wants us to touch those people. There are deep roots in the Bible. But we need to do it together. We're his hands and his feet, Tammy. It's when we come together and we do something that people see God's love in action.

TAMMY: Yes. The need is very real and we also have a way to help these people. We know how to do it. There are crazy headlines all around the world right now. One that sticks out to me so much was the B.B.C. that said, "Ethiopia Starving in Silence." They need us right now. It is dire. It is urgent. They cannot wait another day.

So if God is laying it on your heart right now, I would ask you to respond right now. Do not

hesitate. Make that call. Go online and give the very best gift you can.

RANDY: And you know what?

TAMMY: Yes? Tell me!

RANDY: I want them, when they get the food to know this was given by the people of God. So let's come together. Let's give them the gospel in word and deed. Go online, go to the phone, and 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

RANDY: You can see how urgent the situation is. I pray you'll do something and do it today. Do it now. Go online, go to the phone, and make the best gift you can. If you want Chonda's book, we would love to send it to you. Just request it with that gift.

Chonda, thank you again. I have one more question because there are some heavy things in this that you go into, but yet you say that this is everybody's story. What do you mean by that?

CHONDA: I think everybody carries something inside. We're in a fallen world so I don't trust perfect people because I've really never met one. Do you know what I mean? And so everybody carries some aspect of hurt or pain, whether it was a childhood pain or struggle or self-image. All of those things, somebody carries that. If we can step outside of ourselves and our own pain, one of the greatest things that brings healing is forgetting yourself and stepping outside of it to begin to help somebody else.

I think that's one of the incredible things about what you guys do; allow people to send water to broken people. Because that in itself will begin to heal us. We step out of our own pain and involve ourselves in someone else's.

TAMMY: Amen. My goodness! I love you. I appreciate you so much. What a great day it's been with you! Remember, Jesus wants to help you and me and all of us to begin to step out and receive all that he has for us—a great, abundant, fulfilled life. Praying that over your life today. Thanks for watching! We'll see you next time on *Life Today*.