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Week 29: WFL

Randy Robison and Tammy Trent

Cynthia Yanof

In the studio

RANDY: Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm Randy Robison. This is Tammy Trent. Her life is a mess. [Laughing]

TAMMY: I did not know you were going to start out like that.

RANDY: No. Okay, so the book—our guest today is Cynthia Yanof and she has a book called *Life is Messy, God is Good*. She also hosts the MESSmerized podcast, which I love that. So thus the mess jokes I said; all right?

TAMMY: Okay.

RANDY: Cynthia, welcome to the program.

CYNTHIA: Thanks for having me. It's good to see y'all.

RANDY: You don't look like a mess today.

CYNTHIA: No, I do and I think we should talk about it straight upfront.

TAMMY: Should we talk about it?

CYNTHIA: There is a situation on my nose that we're going to talk about real fast. Let's just leave it at: mom was right. Like when you were in the eighth grade and she said,

"Listen, if you lay out with tinfoil and Crisco and do all the things to get your beautiful tan, one day it will come back." And today is the day of reckoning, friends. So here we are with a little post-op little spot. And Tammy, being so gracious, thoughtful, and kind, was like I'll get a band-aid and slap one on.

TAMMY: I'm going to be—you don't feel all alone. You are not alone in this battle. I'm right here with you.

CYNTHIA: Life is messy and so are our faces.

TAMMY: Definitely! [Laughing]

CYNTHIA: That's awesome.

TAMMY: I didn't want you to feel all alone in that.

CYNTHIA: Thanks! I appreciate it.

TAMMY: I'm so happy you're here. You are so hilarious. We were just at a women's conference together. I absolutely loved you. Didn't even know you, Cynthia. Then found out that we got to do this show with you. And then your book was sent to me and I dove right in. I want to tell you right out of the box chapter one had me out of the box.

I want to talk to you about that because you talk about the anointing oil. Is that the one where we're talking about your friend, April? It is so, so good. I'm just going to jump right in there and I'm going to let you tell the story because I think it is such a good one about the anointing. It is how I want to live my life, the way you describe everything that happened for April.

CYNTHIA: Oh! Thank you for that. Yeah, I think it is one of those things as a girl who grew up in church and had this long history of knowing what God wants for us, there was

some disconnect in my life like where is my theology going to meet with my reality? Like how does what I believe, what I read, what I hear on Sunday, how does that line up with Tuesday? I just remember listening and learning about anointing. I was like anointing, Old Testament. I'm thinking like a prophet, a priest, a king. Wouldn't it be easier if we knew, like if the Lord was like I'm going to anoint you to be a whatever. I'm anointing you today to do this or that. And that's how it all kind of started. I was going down this rabbit trail. Like what does this look like in my life?

And so fast-forward just a couple years ago, a friend of mine was diagnosed with a brain tumor. She is fine now but she asked me to come to Houston. They were doing a big surgery. So I did. I was going to Houston and when I got there, they said, her husband, he's like, "Our church wants to anoint you with oil." A different anointing. Right? But when you anoint people in the Bible with oil, they're sick people.

So she was like, "What do you think?"

I'm like, "Girl! You've got a brain tumor. Don't turn down people wanting to pray over you! So let's just go with it." So she did that. People came over and they prayed over her. I thought it would be like three dabs of oil and we're done kind of thing. Well, they really—like really anointed her with oil.

So later that night she went to take a shower. And you know how cooking oil is sticky on your hands? So she took a shower and it ended up on the bottom of the shower on her feet. So she was walking around her house that night and everywhere she stepped she left a footprint. And I was kind of joking. I was like, "Girl, don't rob a bank. Like you're easy to track right now."

But I think about this whole idea of anointing and isn't that what it should look like if we're living the anointing God has for us? We're leaving footprints everywhere we go. When we go and do the things God's calling us to do, the hard things, the messy things, very often, we start leaving footprints and things look different when we've been there.

People know that we've been there by virtue of the fact God has been there.

It has been a challenge to me just that visual of listen, I want people to be like listen, God has been there, Cynthia has been there, and it looks different on the other side of that anointing.

TAMMY: I love it. I literally could picture myself walking around with anointing oil all over my feet. But I was like you learned something from that time which you taught me something. I think your whole book is set up like that. You take us through so many reflections, and so many stories, but you bring us back to the Word of God. And I kept learning something for every chapter, every chapter.

The way you talk, makes me laugh through these pages. I'm laughing in my study. But you pour into our lives and I'm so grateful for that. You talk about so much of our messes. How can you tie God's goodness into the messes of our lives?

CYNTHIA: It is hard because we've got to realize, again, as a girl who grew up in church, I decided the God things were the things that went on script. The things that were like this, that is how it is supposed to be. It needs to look this way. It is curated. Those are the God things. And everything else, the mess I wasn't anticipating, I didn't sign up for, those things are not from God. Well, two-thirds of my life are the things that are uncurated that don't look like they're supposed to look.

So that's where I started realizing we've got to find God in the middle of the mess. He's got to be there. He's got to be present in that. So I always go back to this example when we were doing foster care. Our family was called into foster care and we can talk more about that. But it is one of those things that I wasn't really on board. Like I felt like the Lord was saying, y'all need to embark on this little journey. I'm like, Oh! That's for people that are a little more spiritual than us or people like missionaries or homeschool or handbell choir. Like people who do things a little differently than the Yanof family.

And so the Lord kept kind of pursuing that for us. And so we got involved in foster care. The thing about it, walking through that hard place, this is what I learned about anointing but also just the messy is I went into foster care scared. I was scared of what it was going to do to our family, I mean on every level. What would that look like financially, spiritually, and emotionally, on every level with our biological kids? I went into foster care scared. And I came out scared of who we'd be if we hadn't done it.

The Lord changes you. He changes your life when you step into stories you've been trying to avoid and you go to parts of town that you've not been in before. You as a family gather around a crib of a baby you barely know and cry tears asking the Lord to do something mighty for that child. Like you're different on the other side of doing the things God has for you.

I think that's what's so important. For me, I always wanted things to look a certain way. If it wasn't messy then maybe that was from God and I'm getting it right. I realized, listen, yes, in foster care, we ended up adopting. Spoiler alert—we adopted a little one. That's why I have a college kid, a high school kid, and a first-grader everyone. So brace yourself for that. But on the other side of that, yes, did we get an amazing little boy? Yes! But we got God. Like a version of God, I didn't know before. So I always want to encourage people to lean into that.

And with us, one other thing I would say, was it wasn't like when the Lord started calling us into foster care that we were like, oh yeah! We're all in. It was a reluctant yes. Like maybe. I guess, Lord. The Lord will take a reluctant yes and in the midst of that heart and that messy and I'm not sure about this, he shows up. And I'm so grateful for that.

RANDY: You know, just the idea of footprints. My wife, it is not pretty if I leave footprints in our house. Right?

CYNTHIA: Yeah!

RANDY: But when we step out into other people's lives, it can be messy at times. But like you say, that is also, it is leaving a mark that when it is in obedience to God it is a good thing. The fear that we have, especially as Christians, we don't want to make mistakes because we're not supposed to make mistakes because people will notice when we make mistakes and call us "hypocrites." I think that holds us back a lot.

What do you think God sees when we step out and make a mess at times when it is in obedience?

CYNTHIA: I almost wonder if he thinks it is a mess. Like who defines what a mess is? Right? I think there are so many places where, especially, like look in scripture, I look in the places where God says, "I'm going to make you a father to many nations" to a man who they're infertile. Like to me that's real messy. And God's like, that wasn't a mess. Like I had a plan there. I think about Noah who is building an ark when he doesn't know rain. I can't imagine what his wife is doing in this situation. And Noah is like this is a mess. His wife is, surely, this is a mess. God is like, this isn't a mess.

So I think there is this whole reckoning of what is the mess and who gets to decide that? And I think especially in a culture that wants to define mess as certain things, I think the Lord is saying, no, I decide what success and failure is. I decide what is a mess and what's not. Your step is obedience.

So that's been for me, what is the next time obedient step? And let the Lord sort out the rest.

RANDY: That's true.

TAMMY: There is something else that stuck with me as I was reading your book. You talk about long memory. You said that a number of times. It resonated with me because I think even in some of the things I've gone through, the messy seasons in my life, and I'm asking God to get me out of this, and I've had to learn about obedience to go back to the

originator of that mess, Tammy, that you created, to surrender, to obey.

But you talk about long memory and when I think about all of that, it's like I can be so stuck on that or that mess or that thing I've created or the thing someone else has created in my own life, you remind us to go back and remember all the goodness of God. Because we'll spend so much time in this that we kind of forget how good God is even in our messes.

CYNTHIA: I think one particular time when that resonated with me is I was waiting on God to answer a question. I mean I legitimately had something I needed God to show up for and I felt like he was silent. You've been there where he is quiet. You're like, what in the world? I believed my entire life and now I feel like you're ghosting me, God. Like where are you?

And so I remember going for a walk in my neighborhood and ending up by this creek with a bridge. I was standing on the bridge and I started tearing up, which is weird in and of itself. I don't like to cry, surely not on a bridge in the middle of my neighborhood. But I was tearing up and I felt like the Lord kind of planted on my spirit like go down by that creek. So I did, and I was like, this is getting weird. As I was down there, I saw all the rocks. I started thinking about the Israelites crossing over, over dry ground, and on the other side, what did they do? They got 12 rocks and they made a makeshift altar.

I felt like the Lord was saying, you need to stack some stones. So I started pulling little rocks from this creek bed. I got one for like a healthy kid. Another one for another healthy kid. I got another one for my husband who got a job we needed. Another rock for when my husband nearly died from encephalitis but the Lord healed him.

I started stacking these stones there. It wasn't stones that kept me from the hardship. It wasn't like oh, thank goodness! Nothing hard happened. It was stones that despite that God was good. I just had the sense that the Lord was saying, listen, I'm not always going to be a remove-the-hardship kind of God but I am a remember-who-I-am kind of God.

And if he is the same yesterday, today, and forever, then if he's faithful in the past, he will be faithful again. Will it look like what we want it to always? No! Will it happen in our timeframe? Surely not. But he does—he doesn't remove the hardship but he does remind us that a long memory of his goodness goes a long way.

I think Max Lucado says that. Always having a long memory of God is the best way to show gratefulness and trust him in the really hard messy places. So that was kind of my moment of building a little altar and having those stones stacked. I now, even in my own life, I like to have stones on my desk. I write dates on them. I also have little reminders on my calendar. Those are kind of my stones of remembrance too that they remind me every year. I have a curly-headed little boy that runs around my house that's eight years old that is like my greatest stone of remembrance from adopting him and just seeing how the Lord is I was faithful. I did something great here. You can trust me.

TAMMY: Yes, where God's faithfulness marked your life. I love it.

RANDY: I think that's where most people find themselves discouraged, disillusioned, whatever negative emotion you want to tag onto it. I think so many times the core issue is they don't feel or believe that God is good. Were there times when you struggled? You mentioned your husband nearly died. Were there times when you were going, is God a good God? Or has that always been an easy go-to for you?

CYNTHIA: That's a great question. I don't think I have the deepest questions about God's goodness and I'm thankful for that. I have moments where I'm like, like all of us, you sit and watch 9/11, or any of these things we've seen and you're like, God, if you're good, show up. Like where are you in that?

I don't know that I've struggled with that as much. But I do know that when I question his timing or his decision-making, I struggle a little bit. I'm like, Lord, you can heal this side of heaven. Like why wouldn't you? Everyone is praying. I'm in a situation right now in my life where we're all praying over an eighth-grade little boy who has cancer and

probably is not going to make it. I'm like, listen, there is an entire school of kids that you can impact. Like, make the difference. Do the thing, Lord.

I question that sometimes, of course, I think all of us do. I go back to remembering, I kind of go back to Job. I love the part of Job where Job comes back and says, "What my ears had heard, now my eyes have seen." I'm reminded so much of what my ears have heard, only did my eyes see it when I went through suffering and I saw God on the other side, and I saw his goodness and his faithfulness.

That's how I want to live. I don't mean to be Pollyanna about it but at the end of the day, I want to be able to walk from the hard and say, listen, I'd only heard of your goodness until now and now I've experienced it and I lived it and I'm different on the other side of it.

RANDY: I think we have to be that firm in God's goodness because it is an anchor. Out of that anchor, we're able to weather many, many storms. In Job, you don't get the answer to all the questions. You don't get the answer to why. Or why not now? And the timing and all that, you get God's presence. Have you experienced God's presence in those moments?

CYNTHIA: Oh, my goodness! Yes! Right? I think that's the only reason we're all still standing. Thankfully, on the other side of it, you can be like okay, God, you were there. In his presence, you expected a lot of times to feel a certain way. It's going to show up in this way, in healing, in answered prayer. It shows up through people, I think of Tammy's story. But it shows up through people at the right moment. It shows—there are so many different ways that God's presence and his goodness show up. Reading His Word, people around you that in the right moment have the right thing. There are so many different ways that it shows up.

RANDY: Nature. Your stones are in the creek. I think we have to willingly ignore his presence in many ways to deny it. I'm not going to get it all but if I can say, God, I know

you were there every step of the way, which anchors that goodness and enables me to walk through a lot of messes, even ones I create myself sometimes.

TAMMY: Glad you admit you have some too.

CYNTHIA: If I can add one thing onto that. I love it when Jesus tells the story about the two houses that are built, one on sand, and one on rock. From what we can tell, identical houses, and people building them have the same intention, they need a place to call home, some shelter. But the storms come and the storm reveals the foundation.

I think that's what is so critical. We have got to be about our foundation. My husband and I, live in Texas so we get to redo our foundation once in a while and it is like three Disney trips worth of money to do that, but at the end of the day we can have pretty hardwood floors and nice window treatments, we can have all those things but if our foundation isn't solid what do we have?

I think that's what's so critical. We have to be in the business of doing the foundational things, spending time in scripture, and surrounding ourselves by people that are pointing us back to the Lord. Doing these foundational things that nobody is going to come by and be like *atta boy!* Or no one is going to be like *great job, Cynthia!*

RANDY: What happens though is we want to put in the new windows and the new paint on the walls. And when our foundation is not solid, guess what? It cracks, it falls apart; literally. But spiritually, too. I think a lot of times we work on the cosmetics and it cracks every single time. But you're so right.

CYNTHIA: Just reminders to myself, that those foundational things matter especially when the storms are going to come, when the mess gets hard, when life is not going as planned, the foundation matters. So now is the time to work on those foundational things. Scripture is loaded with it. There are things we can do now to prepare for tomorrow.

TAMMY: I was going to say that. Work on the now before the storm comes. Build your foundation. I love it too.

RANDY: Tammy, you know something else that is foundational is this idea of remembering the poor. Scripture tells us to take care of the widows and the orphans. Don't forget the poor. This is foundational. You know what? If you're in a situation where you're like man, I'm in a rough spot. Maybe spiritually, you're feeling empty, and poor. We do want to reach out to you. We have a telephone number. You can go right now and someone will be there on the other end of that line to pray with you and to encourage you. So we always want to let you know, we are here for you. And God, his presence, it's with you right now whether you realize it or not. But he wants to use other people to encourage you and to draw you closer to him.

Another way to remember the poor and those in need and really to express God's presence in someone's life is to reach out to those who are in desperate need, and they need to see something. They need to see the hands and feet of Jesus. You can be that. Watch this and you'll see how.

On the mission field

ANNOUNCER: Right now, people around the world are suffering the effects of a deadly poison. And there is little they can do to avoid it.

Open captions

>> My name is Beatrice, and I am from Glalay, New Town. I have been very sick with diarrhea and lost a lot of blood. My grandsons all have a problem with the drinking water. One of them was so severe, we took him to the hospital. The doctor said our drinking water was the source of our problems. I knew that sometimes his face could be puffed up.

ANNOUNCER: The deadly poison of unsafe water takes a toll on every victim it touches. In the most tragic cases, the poison takes that which cannot be given back.

Open captions

>> We lost our mother because of unclean water. She died with a swollen stomach. Since my mom's death, we've had such tragedy in our family. Our life is not good. Even my siblings are getting diarrhea from drinking the unclean water.

BETTY: As I'm here with this little child, as precious as he is, he is probably between two and three years old, maybe four, but you know he may not make it past five, four, or five if he doesn't have the water he needs. He has water but it is contaminated. And so many more people like him all around the world, they need our help. Children like this, we want to see them grow up and have a chance in life. Let God touch your heart and let's help these precious children.

End of video

In the studio

RANDY: It's been about 25 years now that we've been reaching around the world through the Water for LIFE program. I thank God for the foundation that my parents have laid here at *LIFE Outreach International*. But it has only been possible because of viewers just like you responding to the need like you just saw out of compassion and love and supporting this outreach.

Tammy, you've been to these places. It breaks my heart to see a mother losing a child or a sibling, the children losing siblings, and wondering, am I next?

TAMMY: Exactly. I can't imagine that kind of weight that you would carry, Randy. The thing that got me watching that piece too was that their children were dying, siblings were dying, and even parents were dying from drinking this water. And that the doctor said, "The source of your problem is the water."

For me, if I knew the source of my problem today that was causing me harm or maybe bringing death to my body, I would know how to fix it. I would have a solution. I would

have a way. But these people do not have any other option. So just as I watched that piece and the doctor saying the water is the problem. The next moment you see the little baby drinking the water. You want to say why then? Why are they drinking the water?

The problem is it is their only option. So if they drink it, it brings death. But if they don't drink it, it also brings death. What kind of solution is that, Randy? There is no real solution unless God sets up appointments for his people like us to go in there and do something about it if we have the ability. I feel like we've been given this opportunity today to change it for these people.

RANDY: We can. I think that's the core question is since you can do something about it, will you? Let me tell you, those people over there, they do everything they can to get clean water. But it takes a rig rolling into a village and drilling deep enough to get to the uncontaminated water. Then building that pump, that well that will last on average 70 years.

That's why we're able to come to you. We've got the people in place, and we've got the equipment in place, it is just a matter of moving it and keeping it going. It breaks down to basically \$4800 for an average well. Different places they travel, different depths they have to drill, but on average through the program, \$4800. Some of you could just give a well like that. And that's the question today, will you do what you can?

I know all of you can't do that. But \$144 right now will basically provide Water for LIFE for about 70 years for 30 people given the average number of people that come to these wells when they go into a village. It becomes a real focal point. A gift of \$48 will provide clean water for ten people.

So will you do whatever you can, whatever God puts on your heart to reach into places just like you just saw and say, you know what? I'm going to do something and I'm going to do it out of love. And for us, it is the love of Christ that motivates us. But a lot of people do help us. So whatever you see in the need there, be the solution. Be the hands

and feet of Jesus. And Tammy, you know this will change their lives forever.

TAMMY: We've seen it. We know it works. So go online, make that call today, and let's make a difference in the lives of these people right now for the rest of their lives. Let's bring them Water for LIFE!

Video begins

ANNOUNCER: Every day thousands of lives are lost to a waterborne disease, and nearly half of those are children under the age of five. Through Mission: Water for LIFE, now in its 25th year, you could give mothers hope and children a future as we provide clean life-giving water for thousands of children and their families before it is 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 help provide for ten. And \$144 will help provide life-giving water for 30 people for a lifetime.

With a gift of any amount, we'll send you the "God's Word for My Day" devotional set. These four seasonal devotionals each contain a daily reading, an encouraging verse, and a thought to ponder for each day of the year.

With your gift of \$100 or more, you may request the "His Word is Life" tumbler set. These two 20-ounce stainless steel tumblers each inscribed with a scripture will inspire you throughout the day and help keep your drinks well-insulated while at home or on the go.

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 beautiful bronze sculpture, "A Cup of Water."

Please call, write, or make your gift online.

End of video

In the studio

RANDY: We can do this with your support. The amount that you help is the amount that we'll turn around and help others. So please go online, go to the phone, and make the best gift you can. I've just been blessed by this, Tammy. How about you?

TAMMY: I've loved it! You're my favorite in all the land. I'm telling you, we are soul sisters now. I absolutely love you. I'm going to wear this all the way home to Nashville tonight.

CYNTHIA: Yeah. It fits you.

RANDY: I'm going to hold you to that.

CYNTHIA: Well, I love being here with y'all. Y'all are so much fun. I love that I got to meet you. I got to see you twice in a month.

TAMMY: I know, I love it. You are a gift. This book is a gift. If you are struggling right now with feeling like you're in the middle of a mess and you just sort of wonder where is God, I want to stand with you right now. We want to stand with you and remind you that God is in the middle of this with you right now. There is not one thing he's overlooked. He's walking this out. He's breathing in your direction. Be in the now. Have the long-term memory. Know that God has never failed you. Even if life has, he never has and he's going to be there for you and see you through to the very end.

We love you. We appreciate you. And we're praying for you. We'll see you next time on *Life Today*.