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Week 29: WFL

Randy Robison

Ben Peterson

In the studio

RANDY: Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm Randy Robison. So good to have you. I like to think of this world as the crossroads between heaven and hell. If you look around, you'll see both. We're here to bring heaven down but a lot of times it feels like you're going through hell. If you're one of those persons today I just want you to know there is hope. You're going to hear the testimony of someone whose hell was called Iraq. Ben Peterson is my guest. Great to see you, man.

BEN: Good to see, man. Thanks for having me on.

RANDY: I appreciate you being here. I teed it up a little bit so that people hopefully would hang on because it is a tough story.

BEN: Yeah.

RANDY: Take us back to what got you in the military in the first place.

BEN: Well, I grew up in a military family where the greatest thing you could do with your life is to serve this nation in combat. Growing up around that, I watched my dad help World War II heroes tell their stories and unearth 50, 60 years of stuff that had never been talked about.

Then of course, like many 9/11 combat vets, when those two planes went into those

towers, it was just like this is something I need to do. When I turned 17, and I joined the military. I had an 18 x-ray slot so that would be to go into the special forces and be a bad dude. Got bullied a lot in high school and had a lot of challenges there. So I wanted to become that kind of person who would never get messed around with again. But then life took me in another turn.

RANDY: So at 17, don't you have to be 18?

BEN: You've got to be 18. So you've got to get your mom and dad to sign. Then I went through the MEP's onboarding where they do all the medical stuff and I failed the color-blind test.

RANDY: The color-blind test?

BEN: So they basically take all these colors and they make numbers out of them and if you're color blind you can't see the numbers. So—

RANDY: Did know you were color blind?

BEN: I had no clue. So I got a three out of 20. And then they said you can't be in the special forces. When you think about it, if they ask you to cut the green wire—

RANDY: Oh, wow! Okay. Well, so you volunteered at a young age to serve our country and then they tell you sorry?

BEN: Yeah! The only job—they offered me two jobs. They said, "You can be an administrative specialist." And then they said, "You can be a chaplain's assistant."

I said, "Well, what's that?"

They said, "You're the bodyguard of the chaplain and then you're his ministry assistant."

That was the first time, Randy, that I felt unique indescribable I've got a call on your life kind of thing.

RANDY: Were you close to God at this point?

BEN: I had just given my life to Christ. The bully of our high school was radically saved by his aunt dragging him to a prayer meeting. This guy goes from a complete terror, like Saul to Paul conversion; turned our high school upside down and he led me to Christ. So that was like a month before this. And then I'm at this—do you basically want to be in the ministry in the military? And that's where I felt God saying, "I've got a calling on your life."

RANDY: So you go in as a chaplain's assistant. What happens then?

BEN: So we deployed to Iraq in 2008, 2009. We were a combat aviation brigade. So we flew medevacs, gunships, and taxicab rides in between bases. So if an infantry unit is out on the ground and they run into something they can't handle, which they typically do, they call in the gunships. If they get hit, they call in medevacs or you've got VIPs that are on their own bases.

So we were supporting the ministry of all the guys who do all that and make all that happen. On the sixth day of our tour, we hadn't even replaced the unit we were there to replace, and one of our Chinook helicopters went down and seven of my guys were killed. And so I was woken up by my chaplain at 3:00 in the morning saying, "We've got a fallen angel. We've got seven KIA." These are guys that we trained with that are fathers, husbands, and brothers. It was devastating.

So we went through that. We did the memorial service the next day. The day after that it was like it never even happened because when you're in a combat zone you have to get right back to work and there is no time to grieve.

RANDY: Well, what did that do to you, though?

BEN: Oh, man. There is a shame that hits you. There is a guilt that hits you that I'm still alive and you have this loss. And then when you don't have time to process or talk about it, and no one wants to talk about it, it just gets shoved down. So I had to learn to just shove things down and keep going.

So a week after that, Ani Seven, who was a day from going home, walked into a port-a-john and blew his head off. So then we did the memorial service for those guys. So literally, within a week doing multiple memorial services, and holding space for that M.P. Unit and supporting them. I was on more the ministry side of things and so it was the fallout of these experiences.

A few months after that we had a suicide bomber that walked into a school that was right outside of our base and blew himself up. So that was a Shiite/Sunni thing between their two religious sects. It had nothing to do with us. But they went in there and did that, and killed several dozen kids and wounded many more.

That local town did not have the capacity to handle a mass casualty of that size. And so a bunch of our base QRF teams went and got those kids that survived, brought them into RN base hospital where I was with my chaplain. I was in the ER. With those kids.

RANDY: What did you see?

BEN: It was like time stood still. You're just going there. You kind of know what you're getting yourself into. But when I saw a little girl with half her face missing—and it was pretty surreal, man. Like she was standing there in the midst of all this chaos, holding, I think it was her older sister's hand, and there was a little boy near her, and she just had half her face missing. She was just standing there completely calm waiting to be helped. I remember just sitting there and staring at her. Man, it cut my soul. That was probably one

of the worst things I've ever seen.

RANDY: So here's the question because I talked about heaven and hell, we've got it all here. You were, at least in theory, a representative of heaven in a military situation. But here you are, I mean looking at the results of hell devastating people. What does that do to your faith? What does that do to your emotions?

BEN: So many of the issues that we have with veterans and PTSD and things like that can come down to basically two areas, trauma that you've experienced before going into combat and then isolation and removing yourself from the tribe post combat. So when it comes to your average military person, about 60 percent of those who join the military, Randy, have a past of physical or sexual abuse. I grew up in a home that was pretty emotionally insane. I had some sexual abuse that happened when I was a little boy, not from my family, but at a daycare. And my dad had a mental breakdown when I was 17. He had all kinds of mental—he had obsessive-compulsive disorder. So I came into the military already with a very emotionally unhealthy way to process what was going on inside of me.

So then you go to combat and then you get out of the military. The thing about the military is it is—the closest thing to America that you're going to find as a tribe. Our culture is more individualized than any other nation in the world. So when you pull a veteran out of a true tribe where you eat, and you sleep, and you live and you breathe together, and you put them in America, that's part of the reason that we have the trials that we have.

So after I came home from combat, I began having nightmares and tremors in the middle of the night that I was murdering children. It was horrific. I never pulled the trigger my entire year in combat. We were out on countless missions but I just wasn't in any of those scenarios. And yet, I'm still dealing with some pretty traumatic PTSD.

I was young in my faith. I had been recently saved. Hadn't kind of found my true footing.

So I was just like, man, God hates me. Look at the family I grew up in, look at the situation I grew up in, and I just didn't know how to navigate it.

RANDY: Did you respond in any right ways early on to cope?

BEN: Yeah, those first few months came down to drinking and going to bars.

RANDY: How did that work out for you?

BEN: It didn't last long. I think that's where I think all of us, we kind of have a Jesus tank in our souls and if you walk away from it, that tank just starts to go down. I definitely hit that point and I remember I was out until a bar closed one night and I really had reached the end of myself. I got home at 3:00 in the morning and I was considering taking my life. I had a handgun.

I did not want to die, I just didn't know how to keep going. I was in so much pain. I called a mentor of mine at 3:00 in the morning, Randy, and he picked up the phone and I was just choking out tears. I'm just saying, "Why is this happening to me? What is going on?"

He began to talk to me about the disciples and about how, when they lost Jesus, they felt the same way. They didn't understand why he had to die. He told them countless times but they didn't get it. They wanted a warrior, a hero, a David-like king to come and set Israel free. But that is not what he did. He came and he laid his life down and he died for the sins of man.

And Scott said, "After Jesus died the disciples were just in the upper room broken." He said, "That's where you are. You're in a place where you don't understand why you're going through what you're going through. But beneath that pain, beneath everything you're going through is the greatest victory the world could ever know because that was Jesus dying for the sins of man. Then the disciples realized that when Jesus resurrected from the dead and they went and they changed the world. And 12 people now resort to

2.6087314 billion people today that now follow Jesus.

So then that's what God did with me. Met me in my brokenness, met me in that moment. I decided, you know what? I'm going to follow Christ and I'm going to dedicate my life to him. And he's using me to go on and touch a lot of people and use my story to bring a lot of healing.

RANDY: Well, and I want to talk about that but I've got to say really quickly if you're watching and you're at that point of hopelessness, you're in that upper room of brokenness, there is someone who will talk to you right now. We have a prayer line that is available for you. You can be military, or civilian, it doesn't matter because the heartache is the same, the hell is the same, but Jesus is the same. He wants to rescue you from that desperation that you're in. So call somebody right now. Call that prayer line and someone will just believe with you, encourage you, and pray with you. Because of what Ben went through, the difficulty that he's been through and he's seen, that desperation, that rock bottom, when he made that turn to Christ, that's when it turned around. You're going to hear a little bit about what he's doing today.

But if you're at that point, you've got to reach out. Reach out to someone else, reach out to Christ above all, and you can have that new start and that hope and that purpose and that peace. So do that right now.

Now, Ben, since that time, you really, I say purpose, peace, hope, is that true for you?

BEN: Yes, sir, absolutely.

RANDY: What are you doing now?

BEN: So in 2016, I founded Engage Your Destiny. We set out and like how can we engage with our military, our veterans, and their families and lead them into a life of destiny. Our real battle cry is to see a world without military suicide. We have many

issues with our veterans and their families but you know, we have gotten into the niche of focusing on our active-duty military.

And so we've really found that how we're going to eliminate suicide in our active-duty military which we're working towards every day is to use two main tools in working with active soldiers that are deploying and are the defenders of freedom.

The first is emotional health. So as I said before, about 60 percent of those who join the military have a past of physical or sexual abuse. We're in a very challenging time in our nation where only 71—71 percent of Gen Z is qualified to join the military, can physically or emotionally, or mentally join our armed forces? It is a huge problem.

So with all of that, about half of Gen Z as well grows up without a father figure in the home—the highest amount in history. So we have a lot of young people coming into the military that have a lot of significant challenges that they're bringing into the military.

On top of that, the cellphone has slowed down emotional development for 18-year-olds by about two to three years due to a lack of social engagement. So your average 18-year-old is about a 15 or 16-year-old based on if you don't develop the muscle you can't deadlift. So it is the same thing with the emotions. That's where we work with soldiers on active duty based on their emotional intelligence, helping them navigate even the practical tools and how they can navigate their emotions in a healthy way, and make better decisions.

It is also, the research has been unbelievable around mental health when it comes to spirituality. The science has shown that military or veterans who have an active faith life are seven times less likely to commit suicide. The research of Dr. Lisa Miller out of Columbia has found that the cortical thickness between the right and left brain and the ability to process emotions is 80 percent thicker in military or veterans with an active spiritual life.

So that's where we train soldiers in helping them engage and find their path to spirituality. But then we also have free will events on base where we put up fliers and we have Chick-fil-a and bring in artists and bands and things like that. We're building an incredible ministry on bases for soldiers to engage their faith in a totally free will voluntary way.

So we really do both and play in both spaces and hold that space well and honored. That's where we're working towards through emotional intelligence and faith to see a world without military suicide.

RANDY: I love that. I applaud that. Thank you for doing that. We love and respect all those who serve our country. If you're one of them or your family member is one of them, we thank you for your service.

It is interesting that what you're applying, you're talking about emotional health and the spiritual component. That's universally true, and that was true for you, and that's true for anybody wherever you're at. What would you say to someone who whether they're military or not, might be struggling saying, yeah, I'm in a bad place. I don't know how to process things and my emotional health is—whatever. And they haven't necessarily turned to Christ. Is that the only way or there may be—you know? [Laughing]

BEN: This is a very powerful question because it is what Christ does to the soul of a man, how Jesus transformed your life but then also the tools that were given through giving our life to Christ that is a part of the journey to heal. So for me, I gave my life to Jesus. He is the way, the truth, the life. No man can come to the Father except through him. He will bring heaven to your hell. All day long he will fight for you. He is the warrior of our souls. So many people, if you're watching this and you're going through hell in your soul, you don't need to be told you're going through hell in your soul, you're experiencing it. And by encountering Jesus he is the one who takes the hell that's in your soul and he brings heaven into it and life. Right? That's unequivocally the answer.

But then also, on top of that, there is a journey where there's wisdom in a multitude of counselors and community. After I got married, I had to go on a real journey. Marriage will bring out some of the best and the worst in you if you know what I mean. I'll tell you what, that first year of marriage was tough, and facing my selfishness. I remember my wife and I, we got into counseling pretty early on in our marriage realizing you know what? Let's get ahead of this. We're having trouble with communication. There was a lot of trauma coming up of stuff I'd never dealt with.

So that's where I really want to encourage in this day-to-day, don't just isolate yourself and your faith away from processing in community with people the things you've gone through in a healthy way. Does that make sense?

RANDY: Absolutely.

BEN: I'll beat that drum all day long. I used to be the guy out on the streets winning people to Christ, praying for the sick, all those kinds of things and I still live by that lifestyle. But I'm also like man, I need to sit down with someone and process the things in my mind that I don't want to share with other people, the darkness that comes out, and that we need to face in all of us. And work through in our minds and our hearts so we can be whole. Salvation means wholeness. It is the process of being whole in the things of God and in our minds and our hearts.

RANDY: So true. It is a process and it is a journey. So wherever you're at on the journey, be encouraged, just keep going in the right direction.

Listen, if you want to know more about Ben and his ministry, it is called Engage Your Destiny; also the name of Ben's book which is available wherever you get books. You'll find out more about his testimony as well as what God is using him to do in the lives of others right now.

By the way, one of the secrets on this journey to wholeness is being involved in the lives

of others. When someone is going through hell, they need a little heaven. You can be that heaven today for someone. Watch this and you'll understand.

On the mission field

JOHN: I'm here with Joetta in Liberia. We've been listening to her story. She's been married 24 years. She loves God. And yet, she is a mother like so many of you watching understands and has experienced the grief of the loss of a child.

TRANSLATOR: We drink from water that is unsafe, and it has caused the death of my child. My son was only 13 years old when he died. He was very smart and he loved playing sports. One day he woke up and complained about bad stomach pain and that the water he drank was hurting his stomach. He said he couldn't stay home from school that day because he had a test and team practice later on.

Then that afternoon, I saw a group of students walking to my house and they were carrying my son. I said, "What's going on?" My son was very weak from vomiting and diarrhea. And soon after that, he stopped breathing.

I beg you, please, please help us get clean water in our village.

JOHN: I think of a mother who would sit on a porch and wait for her son to come home from school. My heart just aches today for Joetta. We don't know what is going to happen for the rest of the kids here unless we can somehow bring Water for LIFE here. I believe that God has given us the technology and the resources and the compassion to do whatever it takes to bring those rigs to villages like this here in Liberia and all over the world.

It is impossible for these families to fix this on their own. It is impossible. We need your help. We need your help right now.

End of video

In the studio

RANDY: A lot of people watch that and they say, "Why would they drink that water?" Well, they don't have a choice. You might say, "Well, why don't they boil the water they do have?" I don't know if you noticed, but most of them are carrying plastic. Some of them do try to boil or filter but I don't know if you've ever tried that, it is very, very difficult. Some of you might think, well, why don't they just dig deeper? You can't. The reality is you can't dig deep enough with a shovel or with your hands to get to the clean water.

So my question would be why don't we help them? We have the ability. We have the trucks that we can roll into places like that and drill deep enough to get fresh clean water—problem solved. I know this because we've done it over the years. It's been like 25 years now since we've been doing this. We've drilled over 8,000 wells. You may think, well, okay. Sounds like you're doing pretty good.

We've proven that when you partner with us and the people in the mission field, we can turn a situation around. It's a big problem but it is a simple solution and the answer is you.

Here's the breakdown on the financial side just so you know, \$48 will basically give ten people Water for LIFE, about 70 years. We're basing that on the average cost of a well being \$4800, and it is serving on average about a thousand people in a village and the surrounding villages. They'll walk for miles to come get clean water. Believe me. \$144 will basically provide that water, that clean life-giving water for 30 people.

We put it in those terms just so you can get an idea of the power of your finances when put to good use in a way that is proven. Let me make this point very clear because there are a lot of good people doing a lot of good work. I applaud anyone out there providing clean water to people in need.

But when we go into a village, we don't just give them drinking water, we give them the water of life. We demonstrate the gospel in word and deed. We give them clean water so that their body can be healthy. We preach Jesus Christ so that their spirit can live forever.

So I'm asking you today, will you join us in this very effective, very simple, very easy-to-do outreach? Go give clean drinking water to people who are dying from dirty water. You can do that today. Go online, go to the phone, and make the best gift you can. And together, let's give more people 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: You really can be an answer to prayer today. I hope you'll go online or go to the phone and make the best gift you can.

Ben, man, I appreciate your testimony. What do you want people to walk away with when they see what you're doing, maybe pick up your book?

BEN: I wrote *Engage Your Destiny* as the practical ways that you can live out your God-given purpose. I think we're living in a day and age where we need to simplify and get back to the basics where there is so much noise. So with the book, we get into the hard topics of suicide, of sexual abuse, trauma, how to heal from those things, and how to overcome from those things. But then also the practical ways that you can figure out what has God called me to do and exercises and prayers to work through those. We want to see more Christians, more people filled with God's Spirit living their life of purpose. And so I just encourage everyone, man, to go get this book. It is really going to bless you.

RANDY: I appreciate you guys being here. If you want more blessing and more encouragement, go to LifeToday.org. We've got Ben there and lots of other great people who can encourage you in your walk. We'll see you again next time here on *Life Today*.