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Week 29: WFL

Randy Robison and Tammy Trent

Charaia Rush

In the studio

RANDY: Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm glad you're here. I'm glad Tammy is here with me.

TAMMY: I'm glad I'm here with you.

RANDY: And I'm glad our guest is here. Here's the reality, Tammy. I know you know this, life can be hard.

TAMMY: Very hard.

RANDY: And if we're not careful, just to survive we can do this thing that scripture calls "hardening our hearts." Today's guest says we should not harden our hearts despite the things we go through. I'm excited for you to hear that, especially if you've gone through some tough things or you're going through a difficult season right now, this will encourage you.

Charaia Rush is my guest today. She has a book called *Courageously Soft*. It is available wherever you get books. She relates her own experiences in a way that, again, I know will encourage you.

Charaia, great to have you on *Life Today*.

CHARAIA: Thank you for having me. I'm so happy to be here today.

TAMMY: I just want to say up at the top, she is also my guest today. [Laughing]

RANDY: You know that's a habit from doing interviews by myself online. Our guest today!

TAMMY: Yes, you're welcome and I'm so excited that she is, that I get to be part of this conversation truly because you are incredible. Randy, you're right. Many people struggle with how do I protect my heart. I've just gone through something so tough, so horrific, how do I protect my heart from becoming hard? I've even been there in my loss, trying to protect that, and listen to what the word says, and trying to navigate through that.

Where does that come from? You talk about that a lot in the book that sometimes that hardening starts from some kind of wound. So I want to dig in, if I can, Randy, with you right now and just ask you about your life, your story, your wound. If you've always had a soft heart or if you were told, "Girl, you better toughen up."

CHARAIA: I was told, "Girl, you better toughen up." I remember I would come home and I was the type of kid that was always crying. If someone hurt my feelings, I was always tearing up. I was always crying. I remember my mom sat me down and she was just like, "You've got to toughen up. You can't wear your heart on your sleeve. Your soft heart won't essentially survive in this world." That was the moment where I knew that even though I believed God had wired me with a very specific sensitivity, it wasn't going to survive in the world.

So for me, I found myself constantly trying to fight this sensitivity that I felt was God-given but left me feeling a little bit weak in the world, a little bit vulnerable. So yeah, I definitely was the toughen-up type of mentality.

RANDY: Is it possible—a man should never say this to a woman, by the way, especially, your wife. But is it possible that you can be oversensitive?

CHARAIA: I do think so. I think that there is, especially in our culture, I think right now we are dealing with an oversensitivity. We're dealing with this concept creep where these words that

held a lot of weight are now being thrown around to be applied to everyone. So I do think there is a tendency to lean too far in the other end of the spectrum.

But I do think when it comes to how we perceive God, how we stay in a relationship with people, there is a sensitivity that we do need to protect and preserve towards God and towards others.

TAMMY: Absolutely. You say this in your book, "We let our pain tell us about the character of God. We let our trauma tell us about hope. When we tell ourselves the story that God isn't who he says he is and that our hearts are not safe in his hands, we'll find our reflection about him look more like our pain than in his good character."

Tell me about that personally in your life even.

CHARAIA: I think that one of—there is a quote that says, what we think about God is the most important thing about us. And in that, we have to protect what informs our understanding of God and what informs the character of God. It would be naive to not talk about the ways in which pain and suffering can inform our understanding of God.

For me, I remember I had just landed back in Colorado. I had left my husband. He had basically said he didn't want to be married anymore. We had separated for a year, reconciled, and then it was evident that reconciliation wasn't going to be possible. So I landed back in Colorado and I was just angry. I was so angry with God. I was looking at the scraps of my life and I was just like, you didn't hold up to your end of the bargain, God.

I had spent so much of my life with this idea of God that was informed by a morphed belief of how God interacts with his children. So in my head I was like if I do all the right things, if I save myself for marriage, if I have the purity ring, if I vow this life, if I am the perfect wife then I will have the perfect marriage. So when it all came crashing down, I felt very much like the older brother in the prodigal son who looked to his father and was like, you owe me. Like you said that you were—I did all this. I worked in the field. I toiled. I was a good Christian. I was a good wife.

And my life doesn't look like that.

So I think that was the first time I realized that who I had concluded God to be was not based on what he said about himself, it was based on my life's experiences and my pain and suffering in that moment.

RANDY: So when you talk about a hardening of the heart, I mean, were you fighting the hardening towards God or towards the other people that had hurt you or all of it?

CHARAIA: I think that when we are hurt it is easy to look at God, the one who didn't really hurt us as the source of that hurt. I think that deep down we believe that our pain is a reflection of our failure. So I can look at someone and say, they wounded me and kind of move on and deal with that. But deep down I'm like, God, I feel like this was on you. I feel like this was on you.

So for me, that journey was really a hardness towards God. I didn't want to be close to him. I didn't want to hear what he had to say about forgiveness. I didn't want to hear what he had to say about hope. I just was like, I'm just going to get through this. I'll see you in heaven. And however I end up there is how I end up there, but you and I, I don't want really anything to do with you. So it was really contending with that softness towards the Lord more than anything. And that's what the enemy is after.

TAMMY: Charaia, I think that's why I love this book so much because I think everything that you just said, there are so many people that are in those places in their life because life disappointed, expectations were not met. God didn't come through the way they thought he would. They prayed a certain prayer. They did all the things. And so the one person we run to that is our fixer, we say why didn't you fix this? And now I'm mad. Now I'm out. Now I don't believe. Now I don't trust. I don't need anybody.

I think many of us have been in those scenarios, said those very same things. But what I love about your book is you walk us through the honesty of that, which you don't leave us there. You take us on the other side. So let's look at what hope really means. Let's look at what suffering

really means. Let's find the truth of God's word in our suffering. Talk to me about suffering a little.

CHARAIA: In the book I really focus on Job. I grew up hearing the story of Job but I grew up hearing the very kind of Hollywood version, I like to say. We know Job is tested, he lost everything, and then we hear like he suffered and then he got it all back and everything is great. I think that that's how a lot of us relate to the story of Job or have an understanding of the story of Job.

But as I started studying, I was really fascinated with the fact that Job spent 40 chapters almost asking God, why is this happening to me? I have lived a righteous life. I am suffering in a way that honestly, shouldn't be based on the life that I've lived. His friends are telling him clearly, you've sinned; clearly, you've done something if your life is looking like this. God does show up but he doesn't show up with the why. I think when we are suffering, I know for me, I was so obsessed with why am I going through this? What is the reason behind it?

God, in his gentleness and his kindness very gently redirected me that I'm not going to find a way to the strength through my suffering with an answer as to why I'm suffering. The way through my suffering is with an understanding of *who* he is. When we are aching for a why which is a very human ache. It is very natural to want to know why we're going through the things we're going through. The good news is that God shows up with himself.

TAMMY: I love that. We might not get the answer but we get God. Love that! What a different perspective.

RANDY: The presence. That's the hard lesson to learn sometimes. It is interesting when we read in Job and he is asking all the why questions, and God says, like where were you when I created heaven and earth? In human terms that almost sounds arrogant and sort of insulting. But I think when you look at it from God's perspective, what God is saying is look, Job, you're really not going to fully understand even if I explained it to you. It wouldn't make sense to you in the moment at the time. But the comfort of his presence, when that is sufficient, enables you to get

through it. That is a hard one for me, because I'm a why kind of guy.

How did you move from okay, I'm going to let the why stay in your hands, God and I'm going to rest in your presence and let that be enough. Because it is a hard transition for a lot of people.

CHARAIA: It is. It is a hard transition. Honestly, it was a surrendering, a choice that I knew God would give me the grace to continue to make and continue to surrender to him. I'm a justice person. So if it's wrong it's wrong and I need to know the wrong was wrong! So I was very much struggling because I didn't get the apology I felt like I deserved. I didn't get the answers. I didn't get what I felt like I deserved.

I remember going to God with my fist in the air just like, make it make sense. I'm not going to continue to serve you even if you don't make this make sense. That's just real. I know a lot of us are afraid to offer that type of honesty but at the same time I know there are a lot of us that go to church Sunday after Sunday with this belief about God like I'm keeping you at arm's length.

So for me, it was really doing the thing I felt least inclined to do which is inch closer and closer to Jesus. And as I got to know who he was, as I was close to him as he was like I'm not going to necessarily tell you why but I'm going to walk with you, I'm going to love you, it was easier to surrender that need to know why. But it did take some wrestling, definitely.

RANDY: That's fair.

TAMMY: It is fair. So tell me what a soft heart isn't. Because there's also people that say look, I don't want to have a soft heart. It's the one thing that's protected me my whole life from people that have hurt me, abandoned me, taken from me. If I step into this soft heart idea, I'm going to feel like a pushover. So how do you speak to someone, and even give them permission? Like look, you've got to fight for this in your life and it doesn't mean that you're a pushover. Like you say, I've heard in interviews, "It doesn't mean you're a punk." [Laughing] I love when you say that.

CHARAIA: Having a soft heart, I'm soft but I ain't no punk. So that is something I tell my kids too. We stick up for what is right. It is a mixture of a soft heart and a strong back. That is the way we, as believers, are supposed to walk through this world. That softness is not a softness that lends us to abuse or mistreatment. It's not a softness that doesn't have boundaries and allows us to be stepped all over. It is not a softness that is just nice to people for the sake of being nice and allows mistreatment and thinks that that's holiness.

It is a softness that is sensitive to the Holy Spirit. It is sensitive to what he wants to do when we walk into rooms. It is sensitive to when he is like, oof! You probably need to forgive. I know you don't want to but you probably need to forgive. It is sensitive to when God kind of pricks and says, hey, that little part of your heart, that is still a little hard there? I want that. It is that type of sensitivity that we have with the Lord that actually empowers us to walk in the world with a strong back, with a thick spine, with thick skin, to say, you know what? I love you but I'm not going to allow you to mistreat me. That's because of the sensitivity that I have to the Spirit of God.

TAMMY: Yes! Charaia, I love in your book, you share so many great stories, there are so many, so many great reflections. There's one as God was beginning to soften your heart. So it didn't happen overnight—it didn't happen overnight for you. It was a process.

I believe the one story where you walked into church and just were sitting there and someone kind of put her hand on your—and it wasn't even, like you say, I just had this moment of I'm now soft! But it began a journey for you.

Tell me if you remember that reflection. It meant a lot reading that. I was like ooh, I think a lot of people could see themselves in this moment.

CHARAIA: I am someone who loves big extravagant expressions. So sometimes I'm like God, I need you to come and show up for me and I want you in this big extravagant way. Like I want to hear your audible voice when I'm in worship. Or I want to feel your presence and streaming with tears.

In that season of my life when I was back here, God showed up in the touch, in that gentle touch. He showed up in the hug. I think that God has a way of softening us through the very people that may have hardened us. That was what started it for me. It was like yes, my heart is hardened because I've been hurt by a person. But God continued to soften my heart through people and reminding me that if you harden yourself to me and to others, you're going to miss out on this. You're going to miss out on the ability to receive me through the very simple and mundane things. So that's kind of what started it for me.

RANDY: The last thing I'd like to ask you because there is a scripture that says, "Guard your heart." How do we properly guard our hearts while being soft-hearted?

CHARAIA: I'm a huge proponent of boundaries. I love the verse in Psalm where it says, "I've put boundary lines in pleasant places." Just this idea of kind of tending, treating our hearts, putting a little fence around them. I think the difference between protecting our hearts and guarding our hearts and hardening our heart is that when we harden our hearts, we're kind of taking our heart from the palm of God's hand and saying, I don't trust you to keep my heart anymore. I'm going to do it on my own. And that can lead to I'm not going to forgive. I'm going to continue to be cynical. I'm going to use these kinds of mechanisms to protect my heart.

When we guard our hearts, we are able to walk in the fruits of the spirit and we allow those things to keep our hearts soft and to keep our hearts guarded. That discernment and wisdom and peace, those are things that can guard our hearts and keep it soft at the same time.

RANDY: That is so encouraging. If you take anything away from today's program, just take away the truth that God's presence in your life, it is enough. It may not answer all the questions but it will heal and it will keep your heart soft in a proper way.

Tammy, right now, I know there are people who have questions of why. And it is tough, man!

TAMMY: It's really hard. We've been there. Charaia, you've got that story of loss, I have a story

of loss, Randy, you do too. Probably everyone in this room and watching today, we all have something that we've lost. We all have some expectation that wasn't met. So we're going to either stay in the why, why, why our whole life or we're going to say, God, I'm going to trust you, Jesus that one day I'll have the answer to these things. But if I spend so much time here, I'm going to miss out. I'm going to miss out on all the incredible things that you have planned for my life. So I don't want to miss out. We don't want you to miss out at all.

I think that's the beauty of what we get to do, Randy when we sit with incredible authors like Charaia, we have something to pour into your life today. We want you to grow. We want you to thrive. We don't want you to feel stuck in your circumstances today. God has so much more for you.

And just as he does for us in this moment, I believe there are people in the world right now that feel stuck also in their circumstances right now and they need hope, they need help, and as God has given us a soft heart, we get to step into that with them today. Take a minute and watch this.

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: You really can be God's presence in someone's life. I hope you'll join us. Call, go online, make the best gift you can. We can share God's love and life with them when you join

with us.

Tammy, this has just been an encouraging program with Charaia; just her witness, it is just beautiful.

TAMMY: I love you. I really do. I met you just before we started the show and I feel so connected to you. I'm just grateful. I told you this, I'm grateful that you fought the fight, that you're here today, that God is doing great things in your life. And now the overflow, we get to benefit from it. God bless you, Charaia!

And God bless you today. I hope you feel the benefits of that in your life today. We'll see you next time on *Life Today*.