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Week 31: WFL

Randy Robison and Tammy Trent

Joni Eareckson Tada

In the studio

RANDY: Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm Randy Robison. Tammy Trent is with me. Tammy, you just spoke with Joni for the first time, right?

TAMMY: Yeah, like I've met her before, said, "Hi."

RANDY: What do you think?

TAMMY: I have loved her since I was a teenager—have loved her! But now, at this time in my life to get a chance to meet her and talk to her personally, like have that kind of one on one, it is special because she is so special, Randy.

RANDY: She is. And she has blessed so many of our viewers. She is going to bless you today. I'm talking about Joni Eareckson Tada. She has a new book called *The Practice of the Presence of Jesus*: "Daily meditations on the nearness of our Savior." And the depth in this is—it's another level. You read through some of it.

TAMMY: Randy, it is! It's such a beautiful devotion. And honestly, when I was reading it, the depth—that's what I was thinking. I almost had to read them more than once. Sometimes you read a devotion and think, I've got it, great! But there was so much to unpack in every one.

RANDY: And they're short but they are meaningful. So we've got to get to this. I want

you to hear this. Joni, welcome to *LIFE Today*.

JONI: Good to be with you, Randy and you too, Tammy. I'm glad you like the book. What can I say?

RANDY: Now really, we get these books all the time. We look through them for preparation but sometimes you start preparing and you're not prepared. And you go, whoa! Let me read that again. And it starts to minister to you. I'm curious because you're basing a lot of this, or a lot of this was inspired by a guy named Brother Lawrence. I didn't know who that was. Tell our audience who that is and why he inspired you.

JONI: Well, back in the '60s there was a book called *The Practice of the Presence of God* written by a Carmelite monk named Brother Lawrence back in the 1600s who came to Christ and made his way to a French monastery where he was relegated to scrubbing floors, and pots and pans, and latrines. But he invited God to be in the presence of his menial tasks, his day-to-day tasks. When I read that in high school, and we're talking about the 1960s, it really touched me.

Now, I put that book away on my shelf. But during COVID, of course all of us were sequestered so we pulled off of our shelves all the books we wanted to reread and reread that little book. And I thought, aah! This is the way I live my life! Except I practice the presence of *Jesus*.

And so that inspired me to put down on paper the things that I have learned over five and a half decades of living life as a quadriplegic, without use of my hands or my legs. I'm in a wheelchair; you can't see that. I thought it might help other readers engage Christ in the middle of their ordinary tasks. How to practice the presence of Jesus Christ on a day-to-day basis. I mean really, sometimes even moment to moment. And it's been a thrill to write it.

TAMMY: Joni, how do you do that? Like if I was going to talk to a friend that is just

struggling with a lot of things and life is just really hard, and they don't even know how to connect to God in the hard times, what practical thing would you say to someone that says I want to know how to do that but I don't know what it means or how to even step into that.

JONI: Well, it takes a little bit of courage to do it, a little bit of boldness. And Tammy, let me give you an example. This year was a rough year for me. I experienced more than 45 days of hospitalization because of two different bouts with double pneumonia. In fact, if our viewers can hear some gravelly sound in my voice, my lungs are significantly diminished. And so while I was in the hospital, I realized this isn't a detour. This isn't an interruption to my otherwise ordinary day. This is the main road. God wants me here for his mission.

And so, as all of us Christians should do, we look around us and see what is God up to? Who needs a touch of His grace? Who might need encouragement? So Tammy, when hospital aides or cafeteria ladies would bring in the food tray, or when janitors would come in the room, or when um—okay, here's an example. At 4:00 a.m. the people from the blood lab come and they wake you up, turn on the lights, and they draw blood. And as this woman was drawing blood, I looked at her and say, "You know, there is a proverb written about you."

And she looks at me askew. "Yeah! It says in the Bible, Proverbs chapter 14, verse 31 says: 'Blessed is he who is kind to the needy, for he honors God.'"

I said, "Ma'am, you are honoring God right now because I'm pretty needy. And you are blessing me by helping me get better."

And she looked at me, put down her needle and said, "Thank you for that!"

I said, "Well, I love Jesus and I want to bless your day as it gets started at 4:00 a.m."

That's the way to practice the presence of Jesus. As I said earlier, it takes a little bit of courage, it takes some boldness, but you've got to put your spiritual antenna up, open your spiritual eyes, the eyes of your heart, and look around, see who has a need and then just make Christ real to them. I know you'd agree, right?

TAMMY: Oh, 100 percent! And I think the confirmation to know that one, we heard from God and we responded to him is when that person says, gosh, I really needed that. Like you have no idea how much I needed that today. Or I was specifically praying for this and you just gave me the answer. Well, we know God gave the answer but I think in my spirit, when I listen and I hear the voice of God and I respond to Holy Spirit's instruction, it does something in my faith as a believer. I think that's what you're saying as well. Like, be bold in it. Be courageous in it. Step out in those moments and keep growing in your faith. Because there is great purpose in it. Not only are you blessing them but God is growing you and blessing your life as well. I love that.

JONI: Absolutely. I don't even think this woman knew Christ. But the fact that I sprinkled a little bit of gospel seed, is a way that we can make unbelievers hungry and thirsty for the living water. Otherwise, they don't even know they're thirsty, they don't even know they're hungry, they don't even know they've got an appetite for God. But as soon as you sprinkle a little bit of gospel seed, a little bit of the Bible with a smile and with sincerity and integrity of heart, I think it impregnates their stoney hearts and gives them an awareness that I'm missing something. I want what this girl has in her life. I call it pea shooter evangelism. It's not yet been the whole gospel, not the four spiritual laws but it is making people hungry for God.

RANDY: I like that. I like that a lot. Instead of let's guilt them into church, let's give them a tasty appetizer so they want more. Right?

JONI: Absolutely!

RANDY: I have to ask you this. And Joni, for people who don't know your story, how

old were you when you had that diving accident that left you paralyzed?

JONI: I was 17 years old, Randy. And I just celebrated my 74th birthday. That's so—

TAMMY: No! No! That's amazing!

JONI: Let me put the math together. That is 56 years in my wheelchair. And Randy, Tammy, I shouldn't be sitting up like this in a wheelchair. I told you guys earlier before we went live, I said, when I got up this morning, first thing, as soon as I sat up in my wheelchair I said to my husband, "This is a miracle. I can't believe I get to sit up in a wheelchair and look at life from a 90-degree head-on angle."

Because friends, I'm so keenly aware that there are so many people who are quadriplegics who are bedridden. They have infections. They can't get up and about. And I happen to be one who can. So even though my hands don't work and my feet don't walk, there are just more important things in life than walking. And one of them is just knowing Christ and making him real throughout your day such as I just described in that hospital.

RANDY: Has he always felt near to you?

JONI: No, of course not. I was so depressed. I was so angry at God. I was so resentful when I was first injured. But finally, after lying in bed in my room for about six weeks, I would tell my mother, close the drapes, turn out the light, shut the door, and just leave me alone. Randy, after a while, I just began to get tired of feeling sorry for myself. You know, woe is me! Poor me! Everything happens to me. I got tired of it.

And so I started listening to a couple of friends who with their bibles would open up to scriptures like okay, First Thessalonians chapter five, verse 18: In everything give thanks. And then Philippians two, verse 14: Do everything without grumbling. Is it possible? Can we really do that? Well, the Bible thinks so. So I realized that I've got to either believe my sad circumstances and my woe-is-me emotions or I'm going to believe God. And

Randy, at some point I just decided to believe God, and start memorizing scripture, start living it out, start believing it, and welcoming Jesus into my everyday moments.

RANDY: There is something else you say about self-pity in your book, and I want to ask you about that because I thought it was powerful. You tell another story, a more recent one where self-pity tried to creep in a little bit and you started, in your words, rehearsing your identity, who you are in Christ. And I thought, wow, what a way to turn things around when we're feeling sorry for ourselves or anxious or a lot of these other things. This idea of rehearsing your identity, to me, is very powerful. Explain that if you would.

JONI: Absolutely! When I get discouraged and down, I rehearse who am, who I am in Christ. Because I don't want to be the Joni I was yesterday—that's the old Joni. I want to be a different Joni today, a fresher Joni, a more alive, spiritually awake Joni. So I rehearse that my conversation is in heaven. My citizenship is in heaven. My name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life. All things work together into a pattern of good for me. And probably the best truth to memorize is that I am without Christ a junkyard-dog-nasty sinner! And it is my sins that impaled the son of God to a tree, ripped him to shreds. So I dare not cling to self-pity, resentment, grudges, whatever—bitterness. I dare not cling to the very things which crucified my Savior.

And besides, Randy and Tammy, I want to live for Christ because I want to enlarge my eternal estate. I mean everything we do down here on earth as Christians either enlarges our eternal estate or it diminishes it. I want to have a big capacity in heaven for joy and worship and service of my Lord Jesus. Every time I trust him, I'm stretching my soul and I am increasing my joy in heaven. I don't want to diminish that; I didn't want to waste that.

RANDY: I want to come and visit the Joni Eareckson Tada ranch. It's going to be like Texas size in heaven.

TAMMY: Me too! Joni, your book means so much to me, this devotion. It's got over 100

different devotions in this book. My eye was drawn, it kept going to this one devotion. And I kept thinking this is crazy. But every time I'd open it up, my eyes kept going to this. But it was 28, goodness and suffering; 27, blessed are those who suffer. I could relate so much just to the word *suffering* I relate to. It's hard. Suffering is hard. Life is hard. We know God is good in it but it is still hard. And there are so many people even watching today that just—they want to practice the presence of God, they want to trust God. They don't want to suffer. I think of your life and I just think of how much suffering, well, beyond what I have gone through becoming widowed. You've gone through so much more than I could ever imagine. And trusting God also is one of those devotions in here that touched me so much and it's like a daily thing for me. That I have to choose to keep trusting God because I don't have all the answers. You talk about that and I love—I wrote this down because it just made sense to me, "The instant you recognize God is a refuge for us, he is a refuge, he is right there and you face nothing alone. Psalms 62:8, Trust him at all times."

Have you found that to be an anchor for you just learning to trust God? Is that a secret that we just need to have in our lives to get through some of the suffering?

JONI: You mentioned a great Bible verse that all of us should memorize. It is so short, Psalm 62, verse eight: Trust in the Lord at all times. Not sometimes, or when it feels easy to trust him, or occasionally trust him. Trust him at all times.

And Tammy, for our friends watching, let me explain how I do this at least. I deal with neuropathic pain and it is excruciating. There is nothing that really touches neuropathic pain. And sometimes, Tammy, at night when I'm in bed, and I can get anxious and fearful and claustrophobic because I'm paralyzed, I can't reposition myself in bed. And I feel pain encroaching and I know it wants to crush me. But immediately, I start talking to my pain because suffering isn't going to go away. It is just there. So I start talking to it and say, "Pain, you're going try to crush me but Second Corinthians chapter four verse eight says, 'Though I am hard pressed on all sides I am not crushed.' You cannot crush me. So pain, I'm going to walk into the middle of you. I'm not going to be afraid of you or be

anxious about you. I'm going to walk into the middle of you as though I were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego walking into the fiery furnace. And I expect to see Jesus in the middle of you, pain.”

And what do you know? As I walked into that pain calmly, breathing slowly, I find that Christ has gone ahead of me into it and he has transformed it into a place of incredibly intimate encounter with him. There's nothing more heavenly than finding Jesus in the middle of your most hellish circumstances. To find Jesus in your hell is so heavenly.

TAMMY: And that's what you're doing in that moment, Joni. You're practicing the presence of God. Calling out on him. But another secret to all of this is scriptural. That's why we always talk about memorizing scripture, know scripture because it is a weapon. It's a weapon against the lies of the enemy in those moments that you feel the darkness coming over you. You've got to know and be fully equipped so you can speak to those things and change that atmosphere rather than an atmosphere changing you.

What an inspiration you are to me to continue to memorize scripture, know the Word of God so that in those moments you can speak them into your life!

JONI: Exactly, Tammy! And another way to do it, to get through suffering is to serve. Look at the Lord Jesus. Here he is impaled on a cross and what is he doing at his point of death? He is serving others. He is serving the thief next to him. He is serving the Roman soldiers by his example. He is serving his mother saying, "John, here is your mother. Mother, here is now the one you're going to be living with from here on out." He is serving even at his point OF greatest suffering.

And so, besides scripture, which is preeminent and supreme, serving others. And Tammy and Randy, I want to do everything I can to squeeze every ounce of effort out of this paralyzed body that I can to serve others. It's why I have this ministry called Joni & Friends where we deliver wheelchairs all over the world. And bibles, we've delivered hundreds of thousands of wheelchairs and Bibles and the gospel. And can I show you

something that I'm really, really excited about?

TAMMY: Yes! Yes!

JONI: This is a wonderful little wheelchair that we developed at Joni & Friends called the Cub wheelchair. It's got detachable, adjustable desk arms, the back elongates, the feet pedals go down. It has chest supports. It has head support. It has a wonderful third wheel that you can attach for rough terrain on rocky paths and dirt villages.

So I'm going to wake up in the morning, Tammy, I want to remember the world's millions of children with disabilities who have nothing. I have everything. But they have nothing. And God calls all of us to get dressed, take a shower, go out the front door, and find somebody who is hurting worse than you are. And serve them. Make their life easier; make their life better.

So this is what I do with these little wheelchairs. The team at Joni & Friends and I deliver thousands of them all around the world. And we give the gospel because hey, what good is it if we make somebody comfortable in a wheelchair but they don't know Jesus Christ; right?

TAMMY: Exactly right!

RANDY: I love it. I love the heart of that. And if you want to help with that, please do. But we'd also like to send you Joni's book today when you support another outreach. A lot of great outreaches; you just do what God puts on your heart. But there are opportunities all around us. We want to show you one today where you can serve and you can reach someone with the love of Christ. Watch this.

On the mission field

ANNOUNCER: Water is essential for life. But when there's no choice other than

drinking contaminated water, lives are put at risk. It is a known fact that 800 children under the age of five die every day from diseases linked to unsafe drinking water, poor sanitation, or poor hygiene.

RANDY: As you can see, it is very busy here right now. Everybody is coming down. There are jugs lined up everywhere. They're getting water. You'll see them sweep, sometimes, the water with these big cans trying to clear off the surface. But the reality is they can't clear away what's underneath.

This happens every day not just in this place but in places around the world. And though it looks like we have a beautiful lake of water behind us, the reality is, it's contaminated water. Children are dying right here in this village because this water, which is their only water supply, carries diseases and waterborne illnesses. You wonder why they're doing it? It is their only choice. If they had a choice to drink water that was clean, uncontaminated, that wouldn't potentially make them sick or kill them, they would make the choice to drink the clean water.

Help us give as much clean drinking water to as many people as we can, as many beautiful children. When we give them the choice of clean water, we give them life.

[Cheers & Applause]

In the studio

RANDY: I love seeing them dancing under that rig. We had just drilled a well in that one village at the end. But in the earlier spot, Tammy, it is crazy because we drove kind of down the side of the mountain and you could see this beautiful, looked like a beautiful lake. But the closer and closer we got, the more we saw, man, this is not good. In fact, what's here will kill them. In so many cases, we found out by talking to mothers that they had lost many, many children. So you go, okay, even in the places where we think they have drinking water, what do we do?

Well, the answer is Water for LIFE. It's drinking water that is not contaminated by going down into God's earth and pulling up what he has given and blessing people with it. Here's the breakdown, just so you know what it looks like. As we go into about 20 nations around the world, and we help to reach our goal of 350 wells this year, maybe exceed it, I'm praying, the breakdown is that the average well costs \$4800. There is some variation in there depending on the terrain, depending on how remote it is, depending on how far we have to drill down into the earth. But the average cost for the program is \$4800. That means \$4800 will provide on average one well which on average will serve about a thousand people for about 70 years. Now for most people that's a lifetime. That's why we say it is Water for LIFE.

Now many of you are not in a position to be able to provide one well, but you can join others. Your gift of \$144 today will help give Water for LIFE to 30 people. Most of you will give \$48 to help provide Water for LIFE for ten people. Here's what you need to know. Every single child, even the men and the women that are there at that contaminated water source, they're at risk. They need an answer to a prayer and you are that answer. And that's why, Tammy, I think it is critical that we do just what we can. When we all work together, we can change it.

TAMMY: Randy, I couldn't have said it any better than that. You laid it out. We always lay it out. Here it is. We present it to you and tell you this is the need and this is what we need, and how we need to help meet this need for these people—that will change everything for them. I love how you talked about the celebration and the dancing. I've been there in Burundi as well and I've danced with the people. But it would be incredible to go back into that village and put a well in for those incredible families, for those children, and to dance with them. That's what my goal is. That's what my hope is. That's what my dream is. That's what my prayer is. And I'm asking you, we're asking you today, would you come alongside us? Would you come alongside us today and let's get it done? Go online, make that call, give the best gift you can today, and let's make a difference in the lives of so many people all around the world.

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 really can make a difference together. I hope you'll go online or go to the phone; make the best gift you can. If you want Joni's book, it is called *The Practice of the*

Presence of Jesus. And I promise, it will bless you. Just request that today. But thank you most of all for helping.

Joni, boy, what an honor to be able to serve God by serving others.

JONI: Oh, absolutely! It is what God tells us to do. In First Peter chapter four, beginning with the tenth verse: Each of you should take the gift that God has given you and use it in his service. So there you go! Wake up tomorrow morning, go out the front door and serve.

TAMMY: You have been a great teacher of serving others. Oh, my goodness! No matter what our circumstances are, there's always a moment that we can love, that we can be kind, that we can serve somebody for the love of Jesus. Just showing them the love of Jesus.

I love you, Joni. I'm so grateful to have this time with you. What an honor it's been. Thank you for watching. We pray it's been a blessing in your life as well. We'll see you next time on *Life Today*.