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Week 31: WFL

Randy Robison and Tammy Trent

Katherine Wolf

In the studio

RANDY: Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm Randy Robison. Tammy Trent is with me. Tammy, it is great that you get to see our guest today because Katherine Wolf has been with us many times on *Life Today*. And just to give you a little background, when she was 26 back in 2008, she suffered a brainstem stroke that changed her life forever. Since then, she has faced a lot of difficulties. In 2013, she had an unrelated aneurysm and surgery for that. In 2017, she was diagnosed with multiple life-threatening vertebral artery dissections. I don't even know what that means. It doesn't sound good. In 2019, she was diagnosed with an ultra-rare neurovascular disorder.

I say all that just to set up a little bit of the things that she has walked through. Because she has a new book and it is called *Treasures in the Dark*. This is someone who has faced some darkness but she is such a light, Tammy!

TAMMY: Oh, my goodness, Randy. I'm so happy to be here today, just as you said. I've not had the chance to meet her personally but I'm aware of her story. It is one of those stories where you think, how could one person take one more thing and turn it into good? How can you find hope in your suffering? How can you find light in the darkness of your life? And it is just constant, constant, constant. But she is such a light.

RANDY: I'm excited for you to meet her. Would you welcome Katherine? Great to see you!

KATHERINE: It is so good to be here, guys! Thank you for having me.

RANDY: You roll out here in your wheelchair and you're like beaming. When you look at -- you've been through more than most people, fortunately, ever have to go through. Where does this hope and all of your hurting come from?

KATHERINE: My hope was in the Lord. My joy is in the Lord. But I'm so grateful for that joy. But I never want a joyous personality, and just my natural MO to make other people feel like, wait, I don't feel joy and I don't feel that way. When the reality is I do have sorrow and joy existing in the same story. But I've just seen too much of the goodness of God in the land of the living to not be forever overwhelmed by just the greatness of all that is my life and the life to come.

TAMMY: Katherine, many of us that write books, I think we sit down because something is going on in our life usually, there is something that God is doing in our lives that we are walking through, that we want to write about so that we can help other people. So I pick up your book and it says *Treasures in the Dark*. I think, what is going on and what was going on in your life that made you write this book at this moment finding treasures basically in the dark of your life?

KATHERINE: Since the very earliest of days after the stroke, I have so clearly seen that in Isaiah 45:3, the passage from which the title is based, the Lord said, "I will give you hidden treasure in the darkness, riches stored in secret places so that you may know that I am God, the God of Israel, the God who summons us by name."

So I've seen in my life in all the darkness that if you have to go into the deep darkness in your struggling story and we all do, we all go in and out of darkness, you might as well get the treasure. You might as well get the riches that God has for you to get. I like to say if you're going through hell, keep going but go slow enough to get the treasure. Put it in your backpack and keep it for the rest of your life. Let it inform how you live. Like, don't waste the pain. What's it all for if you can't get the treasure?

RANDY: I suspect it is a little easier to say that on a day like today. How are you doing physically?

KATHERINE: You're really sweet. I'm doing great.

RANDY: What about on the days when you're not doing so great?

KATHERINE: Exactly. Can I say the same things? You need to marinate in the darkness and take a minute to process what is happening in your life. The Bible calls us to lament, to recognize the process of taking our broken lives and beginning to put the pieces back together and finding God in the midst of the darkness.

So I'm a big fan of lament and letting that do its work in you, and then carrying that with you. They say, you never move on from what you've been through. That is not a thing. That you can in time move forward, that's a thing. But you carry it with you, you don't move on. So for me, I've learned to kind of live in a cycle of grief, lament, hurt, sadness -- and also, hope and joy and trust and faith. Hope is not a fixed point you reach. That is not a thing. Hope is the living force that propels us forward into the ongoing hope with ongoing hurt happening and ongoing hope happening, and ongoing healing. It is this cycle where we can find a place of hope even within the hurt and begin to heal.

This book is -- the subtitle is "90 Reflections on Finding Bright Hope Hidden in the Hurting." The notion is I know too much to write a linear devotional book where it is just like we're doing great here. Let's write a devotional about it. This reflection guide, I call it, not a devotional, has 30 entries for the hurting, 30 for the healing, 30 for the hoping and it can kind of be a choose-your-own-adventure thing. You're like maybe one day I'll be full of hurting. But maybe one day I'm healing. And I can sort of take things. I'll stop talking now. Sorry, guys!

RANDY: No, I want you to talk more because I think a lot of people may be in a situation like this and they need to hear this. Because when we have a loss, when we have pain, tragedy, betrayal, all those negative things, we have a tendency, I think sometimes especially in the church, to deny that we're going through it. Or we can kind of go in the other direction and resent that we're going through it and blame others, blame God. You're suggesting that we face it, we

admit it, and sort of openly. Like, let God in on the secret, right?

KATHERINE: Absolutely! Yes!

RANDY: How does that set the stage for healing?

KATHERINE: Oh, my goodness! I'm overcome that you asked me this because I read something the other day that said it isn't about letting go. That's not a thing. It is about letting in. Letting in the sorrow, letting in all of the hardship so you can process it and appropriately grieve the losses. Where was that? It was so good. It was by Katherine Wolf. Just kidding! But I would love to take credit for it but letting go isn't real either any more than moving on is. Those aren't real. It is about processing and then you can move forward. In order to not stay there, you must start there. And that's, I think, the key, to begin to feel. And wrestle God, did you make a mistake with my life where you turned around and missed that my life has blown up, and all the specifics are in this story that I never wanted, including never driving a car again, never walking on my own, living with a paralyzed face, and 10,000 other things?

And yet, Lord, could I begin to identify that maybe you've given me this? Maybe somehow, you've chosen me for this life? Can I redefine and reframe everything to an upside-down kingdom lens? That is our opportunity.

TAMMY: How do people, how did you -- I just look at you and your life speaks for itself. You are an inspiration to so many people. Can I just say that I hate that you've had to suffer so much? I wish life were different for you. I wish life were different for me. I wish life were different for the person watching today that is just overwhelmed and struggling and trying to find treasures in your own dark season.

But Katherine, I wonder like -- the questions that we ask like, the what-ifs. You talk about that and it means a lot to me because I believe you. In order for us to find healing, we've got to start first -- like I had to set healing aside for a second. That will come. I know that it is there. I believe that it is there but I've got to process what I've lost. I've got to process the grief. I've got

to process all the unknowns. I've got to go through that. And as Randy said, allow me to go through this with my community, with my family, with counseling, through pastors, whatever I need, I've got to find a way to navigate through this. Healing is waiting for me on the other side.

But even through that journey as we go through that, trying to process through that, I think all of us have stopped and have said before, what if? What if this could have been different? Why did God allow this to happen in my life? How do you speak to that?

KATHERINE: Oh gosh! You have no idea how much that has haunted me. I have a pinnacle what-if story that I've only started sharing recently. It's in this new book. I haven't talked about it before because I never wanted to shame the doctors who might read this book and know this story. But for some reason, I'm like, nobody knows what hospital, nobody knows the specifics but when I was 19 years old, I went to the doctor because I started getting dizzy and they diagnosed me incorrectly. Without making eye contact and sliding a prescription across the table to me with vertigo medication. Seven years later when my brain exploded, they knew it wasn't that. They knew that had I been given an MRI as a 19-year-old, they would have seen the mass on my brain, and that it would need to be removed.

And then a whole other set of what-ifs comes into play. Would I have operated? What if I hadn't had it removed and moved forward in life with this AVM? Would I have married? Would I have had a baby? What if? What if? What if? We all play this terrible game of the what-ifs in life. I think all of our questions must be in our tragedy. It is what if God spared me from a perfect life? What if God spared me from having no knowledge of what it means to suffer this way while on earth? That's a pretty crazy provocative what-if question. But I think it bears asking. What if all of this and none of this had happened? It is crazy.

RANDY: Do you ever ask, after especially the first stroke, at in point of the things you've gone through, do you ever ask is it possible for me, Katherine to have a good life?

KATHERINE: Oh, gosh, yes! You know what's so crazy? I've kind of done a deep dive into the whole notion of the good life. First of all, *the good life*. For instance, the word *good* and the

notion of Psalm 84:11, like "No good thing does he withhold from those walking uprightly with him." How can that be true when our lives have been ravaged? How can good things only be here? God withholds no good thing. Well, perhaps it is because, as a theologian from the 1600s, Sir Richard Baker says, it is because the good things are not things at all. The good things of God are peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Spirit, the fruition of his presence in this life, and the assurance of his face in the next. These things are the truly good things of God that can never be taken, and they are nothing the physical world could ever touch.

And that is a word for your listeners going through the ringer. Like good things are not absent from you, friends. They are in your story because they can never be taken from you. They are inside of you when you know Jesus.

But the other answer to your question that is so important to say is that pre-stroke I thought I had *the good life*. Even if I never thought that that way or articulated it that way, I was living the hashtag blessed life, pre-stroke. Wasn't I? And yet, so clearly, we see in the beatitudes and throughout the Bible, the blessed life is the life poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are the meek. How do we make sense of that in the context of the charmed before the stroke life? How do you reconcile that with the gospel?

So what is *the good life*? Well, pretty clearly our faith tells us it is not what we think it is in 2024 in our modern world.

TAMMY: Are you living the good life?

KATHERINE: Absolutely! The short answer is absolutely! I'm living the dream. And guess what? I get to decide how I feel about my story and nobody else does. It is so powerful. We cannot control what happens to us in life. Control is an illusion. But what we can control completely and totally is how we respond to what has happened. How we move forward, how we narrate it to our children, how we process it, and see the goodness of God in the story.

RANDY: One thing that your life demonstrates is the choice that we all have, but we see clearly

with you, we can focus on what we can't do or we can focus on what we can do. What difference has it made for you to focus more on what you can do than on the things you can't?

KATHERINE: One hundred percent. I'm not crying about what I can't do. I can't do a whole lot. I have a hand that doesn't work. I mean I can't drive a car. I'm deaf in one ear. I have a lot I can't do. But the list is way too long of all the amazing things that I can do. And thank you, Lord, I'm in touch with the fact that it is not about my capabilities. It is not about what I can do that ultimately matters, it is who I am.

Actually, to my precious children, that is what matters. Mothering is not with the hands but with the heart. The things that my kids and my people, my family friends are getting from who I am is the glorious breathtaking inheritance I'm giving to my kids that has nothing to do with my abilities at all.

TAMMY: I think, also, a follow-up question to that that I've had to ask myself as well, and I'm sure Katherine you have as well, and maybe any of us that can be in those places of just like suffering, and just what do I do with this? I think I've had to ask myself many times also, what do I have rather than what don't I have? And even like your life, Katherine, you could probably list all the things that you don't have but if you focus on that, we will miss right now in this moment what you do have in your life. And to focus on that. God has given you this life. You have your children, you get to mother them and love them. They get to have their mama. You're married, you get to have your husband. He gets to have you. There is so much that you've lost but there is so much that you still have. So our focus should be on that, otherwise, we would be so distracted with the disappointments and the expectations that are not met in our life that we will miss out on all the great things that God has for us right now.

KATHERINE: Absolutely! I like to say that what we must do is expect more of God and less of this world. That's really where the joy is. I'm not living for this world anyway so I'm going to expect more of God and let him overwhelm me. And that's how -- when we do the opposite and we expect more of this world and less of God we are crushed. The space between is where it doesn't go well. But when I do this, it is going awesome. Psalm 16:6 is true, "The boundaries

have fallen in pleasant places." This right here is a glorious inheritance.

RANDY: Katherine truly is a treasure and some serious darkness. Listen, I don't know what you're going through, but if you want someone to pray with you, if you'll pick up that phone, we've got someone available all the time that will encourage you, that will pray with you, that will help you find that treasure in your darkness. So call that number right now.

We do -- we do what we do to bless you and we also ask you to bless others. We can do both today. There are some people in great need. Some people are in some serious darkness and we can reach out and be that treasure to them. When you participate in this opportunity, if you request Katherine's book, *Treasure in the Dark*, we would love to send it to you to encourage you. But most of all, we want you to be a part of encouraging others. Watch this and see how.

On the mission field

ANNOUNCER: For the people of Liberia, each day is a struggle due to the lack of clean drinking water. With limited options, the people are forced to drink water that can bring illness or even death. Yet, there is no other choice but to drink it and live or sometimes die with the outcome. Melvin Tawn is a father all too well acquainted with the very real consequences of drinking unclean water.

Open captions

>> One day I went to work at a local farm. I left my 12-year-old son, Qwaza, at home. While I was gone, he drank our water and began vomiting and having severe diarrhea. By the time I arrived back home, he was already dead. He was a very lovely boy who loved to play soccer.

JOHN: Being here in Liberia and listening to Melvin's story, he had dreams and hopes for his son. And to go away to work and come home to a son that's gone and knowing that it was because of the water that he had drank; that there was no other option. It leaves me with, Lord, how can we help?

ANNOUNCER: Together we can be the answer to Melvin's hopes and prayers. Join us in giving Water for LIFE.

End of video

In the studio

TAMMY: I've gone on so many of these trips and I've always been in that same place that John was at, leaving me in a place of what can I do to help? I sit here with you today again and I say, God, what can I do to help today? What do these people need today?

I can't imagine how that father must have felt just going away for a few hours and coming back and your son is dead -- because of water -- because of what he drank in that small window of time that changed everything for that family.

What can I do to help? What can you do to help? What can we do to help? Is there even a solution? Is there anything we can do? Yes! Yes, there is. We know a way. We have been doing it for years. We can go in there right now and drill them a well that will last them for 70 years of their life. Water for LIFE! We can bring this to them. We can bring them hope, we can bring them life, we can bring them Jesus. And I love that he has given us this opportunity to step in and to be the difference, to make a difference.

So if God has blessed you today, I'm going to challenge you, challenge you, to be that answer today for this family and so many other families around the world right now. Randy, it is something we get to do together and I know that it changes lives -- so many lives!

RANDY: It does, and it is so simple. That story right there that we saw as a father, hurts. I have four children and I can't imagine. You wonder, if you're watching, it is hard to comprehend sometimes the way many people in this world have to live. They drink -- they drink whatever water they have because it is all that they have. And they may be fine for years in the case of that one boy who ended up dying. But like that, life is fragile. Something can turn and life is gone.

We have the answer. The answer is, as Tammy said, drilling a well. Going down deep enough, deeper than they can dig with their own hands, and getting at that clean water. An average well costs \$4800. That's based on the 350 wells we drill across 20 nations. If you can drill one you can prevent others from dying, many others in fact.

On average, a well will serve about a thousand people, which is phenomenal. That is a thousand stories that we won't have to tell of loss. Many of you can give \$144 that will provide clean drinking water for 30 people for basically a lifetime, on average, 70 years. Maybe you can give \$48. It may not sound like a lot but it is huge because \$48 will give clean drinking water to ten people.

I only wish that we could have given that man's son clean drinking water before it was too late. There are many others that need us to do something now. Will you go online, go to the phone, make the best gift you can? Let's tell a story of life -- no more stories of death.

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 make a difference. You can make such an impact in someone's life. You can be the treasure in their dark to borrow the title of Katherine's book. If you request this today when you go online, go to the phone, and make the best gift you can, we would love to send it to you. What a blessing, Tammy.

TAMMY: It is a total blessing. I believe this book will help a lot of people, Randy. Not just through Katherine but the Lord will help you uncover some great treasures in your life where you feel so dark and you don't know how to get out. Let us help you. Let the Lord help you with that.

Katherine, I love you. I adore you. I'm standing with you, my sister in Christ. Thank you so much for being here today and for pouring your life out into so many people. Just so love you.

KATHERINE: What a blessing. I'm so honored to be here. Thank you for having me.

TAMMY: We're so glad. And thank you for being with us. We'll see you next time on *Life Today*.