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Week 36: *Christmas Shoes and Smiles*

Tammy Trent

Sarah Bragg

In the studio

TAMMY: Hello everybody! I'm Tammy Trent. Welcome to *LIFE Today*. How are you today? Do you feel like you're in a good place or maybe it is a hard place right now? Does it feel like everyone else's life is moving forward but you're stuck and maybe a little unhappy? If that describes you, I truly hope that today offers some peace and hope to know that it won't always be like this. The rain in any storm has to come to an end. So what do you do with the in-betweens?

Well, my guest today, Sarah Bragg is the author of a great, insightful new book titled, *Is Everyone Happier Than Me?* So I'm glad that you're here. I loved your book. I dove in. I have a lot of questions for you.

So let's start at the top together. You say it was in your 40s that you just found yourself up at night in the middle of the night scrolling through your phone, feeling the unrest, the uncertainty, and all the questions. Like life, what am I doing? What is God doing? Where am I right now? Where is my life going? Tell me about that season of your life. And if it triggered something in your 40s or was it always there?

SARAH: Gosh, I feel like we always go through different seasons like this. If I got curious and looked back, you can see it. Maybe graduating college when you thought you knew what you were going to do, and then you kind of figured something out and you feel lost. Or you're turning 30. Or you became a mom or got married, going into different

seasons. I feel like it can happen. For me, for sure, was in my early 40s and I found myself waking up in the middle of the night, usually like 3:00 a.m. And for some reason that was the best time to do some mental aerobics and worry about things.

I kind of felt like a middle schooler again, in my 40s. I was raising middle schoolers at the time and they're asking questions like who am I? Do I matter? Does anybody like me? Is everybody happier than me? I was like gosh, I'm asking the same questions in my 40s. You've lived a lot of life. I've had a career for an extended amount of time. You've done these things and then you find yourself waking going, what's going on? Now what? I've gotten to this point. This didn't give me what I thought it was going to give me. Now what? Will it always be this way? Just a lot of questions I feel like we ask once we've been around for a little bit.

TAMMY: Gosh, what was that biggest question, do you think at 3:00 in the morning that just kept coming to you, coming to you and you couldn't get past it that felt like a mountain in your life?

SARAH: I feel like the title of the book, *Is Everyone Happier Than Me?* And at the season we had just moved from the Atlanta area to my hometown in Tennessee. We went from city living to country living and everybody would look at us and go, "Are you just so happy?" And I would go, "Yeah. I'm so happy." Where inside I was not. Because of change, again, we're just in a season of life I thought, I would have this figured out by now. Everyone else seems to have it figured out and they all seem happy. Am I not happy? Why am I not happy? So I feel like that was the question that was keeping me up, wondering why everybody else seem to be happy and I'm not.

TAMMY: So for me, reading through your book, the theme that kept coming up for me, page after page, chapter after chapter was connection. You kept talking about connection. I think the root sometimes of unhappiness, unfulfillment is connection. You talk about the three things: Connection, conversation, and curiosity. So tell me how those three words just changed sort of your perspective.

SARAH: For sure, I did a lot of reading when I was searching for that happiness. I thought, maybe I could figure it out if I read enough books. Or like someone has got to have the answer to this, right? But what I kept finding was how much happiness comes down to connection. I can see that for myself. The times when I feel the most connected to other people or the times when I feel connected to myself, I am happier. But the times when I feel that disconnect, that's when I am more unhappy.

So I started turning up the dial of connection in my life. I started making sure I was seeing people in person having real conversations, not just I'm fine! Not that fake surface level but meeting with people that I knew I was safe with to be honest with. I turned that up, that connection up and happiness followed.

I turned up curiosity. That idea well, let me get curious, why am I feeling this way? What's going on underneath it? What has thrust me into this? Asking questions about things helped me find my way forward. Curiosity did go a long way with that. And of course, conversation was a part of that connection piece. I needed to be able to have real conversations with people so they could see the real me instead of just the facade that is easy to portray.

TAMMY: What are some practical things that we can do? I think that we have to do some intentional things. We have to change some things about our lives if we want to change.

SARAH: Yeah. I felt like sort of like a guardrail when it comes to social media. Putting one up and going—because I realized, I feel less than after a lot of scrolling. I was feeling dread. I was feeling angst. I was looking at people. I was like I'm mad at my husband, I'm mad at my dog, I'm mad at everybody after scrolling because—

TAMMY: Because everybody else's dog looks happy.

SARAH: Exactly! They're happy. Their husbands remember everything and did all these things. And their children were perfect! So I had to like—I just need a break; so set a guardrail up. I'm going to take—for me, I took about four months off completely. It was an interesting experiment. How many times did my finger go to that spot on my phone once it wasn't there anymore? It just needed a break. I needed a mental and emotional break from that.

So sometimes, you're right, we just need to set that down or set limits. Give yourself—of course, I'm raising teenage girls right now so we have time limits on their apps, so I just need to put a time limit on myself on this that it will shut off after 30 minutes so I don't just endlessly do this. So I do feel like some guardrails are in place.

And then I just think it goes to what you said about intentionality when it comes to connecting with others in real life. That is something you can do for your online life but you have to be the one to reach out. I think we always want to be the one who someone is reaching out to us. We want to be invited but sometimes we have to be the ones to do the inviting.

TAMMY: We do. I think that's hard. I think about my own personal life and when I went through the loss of my husband, sort of walking through that. I remember coming home from that season and just laying everything down and just asking God to heal my life. I don't even know what this is going to look like but here I am, I'm just going to show up.

I remember getting on the phone and calling a bunch of girlfriends and saying, "Once a month, let's get together. Come to my house. Let me take care of you." Because I was always used to taking care of someone else and now that was gone like that. So let me pour into your life, take care of you, and bring a friend. Even if I don't know them, bring a friend. And there was a bunch of single girls in my home once a month that first year that I began to heal. But I found myself coming back to life again based on connection that God was giving me through these friendships. But I had to ask, Sarah. I had to actually be the one to say this is what I need. I think sometimes we have a hard time

asking—at least I do.

SARAH: It is scary.

TAMMY: It is like vulnerable, laying it all out there. Letting somebody know that we're not in a good place. But we have to if we want to get to a better place of fulfillment. I think finding happiness and joy, I think we have to be vulnerable.

You say in your book that many in midlife are overwhelmed with grief. So I was just chatting about grief. So I want you to explain that a little bit.

SARAH: I think—and I'll say this upfront. I don't do grief well. I don't want to be sad. I just want to acknowledge it and let's move on. Just move on. It's fine. I was sad. I'd thought about it, done. But I think that some of the hardship of this season for me was realizing I had lost some things. Even though it might not have been the death of a person but it was a loss of dreams, the loss of what I thought something could be. Even with that comes grief.

I don't think I had put those words on it until I was sitting with a counselor and I was just rattling off all that had happened over the last couple of years. She was like, "Wow! That is a lot of things to grieve." I was like, "What? What do you mean? Like I should be sad? It's okay to be sad about this?"

So I do think there comes a point in our midlife where we've lived enough to lose some things. Or even when it comes to, I thought I would—my body would look different at 40. I thought I would be the one that wow! She still looks 21! Amazing. She is 45. You're just naturally going to age. There are just things that happen.

So I think there are a lot of things to grieve when we get to this point in life. We have to learn that it is okay to grieve. And what do you need when you're grieving? Like you said, I had to reach out to people. I think that is an important thing to figure out what you

need in that season of grief to help you move through it not to just sit and never walk through it and allow your body to even process through it. We've got to allow ourselves to grieve.

TAMMY: I think there is real wisdom in that. I can only imagine at any age, whether we're in our 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, or 60s, my parents who are in their 70s have had a lot of disappointments in life. There's great wisdom in that to look at, gosh, we've lost a few things. Let me grieve this. Let me mourn this. Let me lament. Let me look at all of this.

But then also, I think the power of looking at, okay, what do I have? Sarah, I have learned that I cannot spend all my time on what I don't have and the disappointments in life. I've got to also—I can grieve that but then somehow did you get to a place of shifting from that to go, what then do I have in life and how can I celebrate this?

SARAH: I do feel like gratitude is the gateway to joy. And so, one of my daughters is struggling with anxiety right now. That was the first thing that I talked with her about. I went and got her a journal. She's not a journaler, but I was like, I want every day, just what made you smile today. Just what made you smile? I think that it starts and it seems so—that's just too simple to be true. It feels so small.

But I do think that gratitude, when I started focusing on what made me smile, what is good, just noticing that it goes so far. It is what we need to be able to—yeah, I've lost these things or this isn't what I hoped it would be but also, this is good.

TAMMY: I think that's so, so important. I think it puts it in perspective; the gratitude, for sure. You talk about purpose a lot in your book, which I thought was really interesting and so true. Because I think so many people can focus so much on the purpose, the end goal, and this and it has got to be grandiose. It's got to be massive and if it is not, then how disappointing. Then I wasn't enough. Then I missed God's call on my life or I didn't hear the purpose.

But is there something that needs to shift and change with the way that we pursue purpose in our lives and see it as something different? That even the little matters as much as the big.

SARAH: I feel like I'm 45. I was raised on that like passion and purity—not purity but passion and purpose. You've got to have this grand thing. Maybe it is very American. Big—you've got to be big! And I remember being a 20-year-old trying to—someone saying, "What is your purpose in life?" I was like, I've got to figure it out at 20? So the purpose of what? I was just overwhelmed. So much pressure.

Then when you get to the point where you're like, maybe I'm not doing that anymore that I thought was my purpose. What does that mean? Does that mean I'm not living on purpose anymore? So for me, a big shift helped me in just changing the word from purpose to matter. Like you matter in small ways. You can matter in small ways. You can be a stay-at-home mom and matter because you're taking care of all of these things. You can go to this job and maybe you're like, I'm just an assistant. But you matter. This wouldn't get done if you weren't here. That is mattering. And so boiling it down to something so small has been helpful for me in the season where I'm driving my kids from all these, point A to B, a million times. But it just feels so small but they matter. The fact that I do it means I matter.

So it has been really helpful for me to boil it down to something small like that and see that even the small ways we matter are important, not just the grand. I heard it from Elizabeth Gilbert, the author, and she told this story. It was one of those moments that it clicked for me and I saw it differently. She told the story of when she was walking along the street and a guy was working on the top of a building, not like a tall building but he was on a ladder. She said, "I walked by and the ladder was a little bit wobbly." She's like, "I just got nervous that something was going to happen to him. Like what if this ladder just fell?" She's like, "So I just held the ladder." She said, "He never looked down to see that I was holding the ladder." She said, "I stood there for like 20 minutes, just held the ladder, and then he started to come down and I walked away." She's like, "Maybe I

existed on this planet to make sure that he didn't fall. Maybe a purpose is as small as that little thing, nobody else saw it but I mattered to him at that moment.

I think it is. It can be the smallest little thing but when we shift it from it has to be big and grand and really on this scale, when we shift it to how do you matter in something small, I think it can take a whole lot of pressure off of us.

TAMMY: A 100 percent, I agree. So for the person picking up your book, what do you hope they get when they turn to the last page?

SARAH: I hope they feel like they're not alone. That someone saw them. Because it is really easy, it is kind of what we said in the beginning, to feel unseen. Especially, when we live so much of our lives online. Or we live so much of our lives never really having real conversations but it is hard to feel known and seen. I hope that they get to the end of the book and go, oh I'm not the only crazy one. Or I'm not the only one who has dealt with this. That she sees me, she's got it. You don't have to figure it out. But we can take little steps and we can try different things. That happiness is possible but it comes down to connection. So I hope at the end of the book they go, how can I build more connection into my life? Whether that's with other people, with myself, or with God. How can I build that into my life so I can find a little more happiness?

TAMMY: Do you feel like you're finding happiness?

SARAH: I am. I feel like—and again, I had to shift it and go, I'm not going to be in this perpetual state of happiness. But I do find it on a daily basis in that gratitude, in those small moments of mattering. I do find it in that.

TAMMY: It makes me happy to hear that. I keep sharing that ride with you over here just hearing about your life and where you're at. And my heart leans in in such a way to say, man, Sarah, stay in it. Obviously, what does it even mean? I think it is just choosing to believe that God has got something great for you even when things feel like they've

been taken from our lives. Do I believe God is still good? Do I believe that God still sees, that he still cares, that he still hears my prayer even when I feel like there is so much silence in my life? Is God still there?

You've got a lot of different moving pieces and parts in your life right now and I know you've got some great dreams. My hope for you as a new sister, and as a new friend would be that you would see great fulfillment in your life whether now, whether later. This season if we're in a hard one right now, it won't last forever. For me, for you. I believe that God has good things for us. So stay in that. Stay in the trusting. Stay in the knowing and believing for your life. And I will believe that for you as well. I just really appreciate you today.

I know that as I travel the world, I've seen a lot of unhappy people as well who are suffering, who are really struggling. And I've also seen a lot of joy and I've also seen a lot of happiness. I've seen a little bit of both. But my favorite is when I get to go to places and see the joy on the faces of children. So I want you to take a minute and watch this special time that I got to have in Central America.

On the mission field

TAMMY: These are tough conditions. These people are living in absolute poverty. I'm sure it is hard to provide for your family. I don't know what they have. I don't know what their need is. But I love that I don't have to figure it out. God just sends us. He sends us and he says, show up!

That's what I do love about *LIFE Outreach*. For the many years that I've traveled with them around the world, wherever we see a need we just jump in. Whatever it looks like, we're thinking of kingdom-minded things. We're thinking of saving a life but saving their very life, their soul! That to me, is the gospel; what it's all about, spreading the love of Jesus Christ and sharing the good news of Jesus.

James and Betty started *Christmas Shoes and Smiles* years ago. I think their heart was absolutely about showing the love of God, especially to these children all around the world. It is so so wonderful! The joy they feel getting something brand-new!

Gosh, it just could change everything for you. Oh, my goodness, baby, you need—you need these shoes!

These shoes will protect their feet, keep them from danger, and keep them from infection, from injury, from hookworm that could ultimately lead to death. This is an important need right now all around the world.

So if you've given before, thank you so much. If you've never had a chance to give to this ministry, this part of it, *Christmas Shoes and Smiles* then I would encourage you to give the best gift that you could possibly give. We want to keep putting shoes on children all around the world. We want to do it all. It's been a great year. It's been an incredible year of ministry, whether it's been water, whether it's been food, or whether it's been shoes. Right here we are so blessed to do kingdom things. Together, we are changing the lives of people all around the world. We couldn't do it without you. We love you. We appreciate you. Thank you so much!

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In the studio

TAMMY: I hope you're going online and giving the best gift you can possibly give. What an incredible opportunity we've truly been given to jump all in and make a difference in the lives of so many people around the world right now today.

Sarah, thank you for being here today. Thank you for writing this book, *Is Everyone Happier Than Me?* It's so practical. A lot of guidance, a lot of wisdom. So thank you for pouring into our lives out of a place where you've been kind of questioning a lot of things

yourself. It's been so great to talk to you.

Listen. As we wrap up, I want to remind you that if you're struggling to find happiness then you're not alone. It is so important to reach out and connect with somebody today. So please do that. You can also call that number on your screen and we'd be so happy to pray with you. Remember God cares deeply about your happiness and your joy. He is with you in your struggles and wants to bring you through this truly to the other side of fulfillment and happiness and purpose. Whether big or small, it all matters because you matter.

One of the scriptures that encourages me is John 15:11: I've told you this, so that my joy may be in you and that your joy in me might be complete.

God's desire isn't just for happiness but he wants complete fulfillment in our lives. He wants us to reach that place and his love and care for you is boundless. So I hope today was good for you. Be encouraged. God bless you and we'll see you next time on *Life Today*.