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Week 37: *Christmas Shoes and Smiles*

Randy Robison and Tammy Trent

Cindy Brinker Simmons

In the studio

RANDY: Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I am Randy Robison and Tammy Trent is with me.

TAMMY: Hello!

RANDY: Good to see. I know you know this but we celebrate this. But God is a god, our God who restores the broken. I don't know where you're at today but I know that life can be very difficult—things happen, we make mistakes, other people do things. If you're needing just a reminder that God is a restorer of your soul, this program is going to encourage you. Tammy, you deal with this a lot. You encourage people.

TAMMY: Oh, thank you. I also deal with hardship. I think we all do. That's why I love shows like this today, Randy, because I do think there are a lot of people watching right now that feel like what do I do with my circumstances right now? And how can I find God in the middle of it? How can I live again? How can I breathe again? How can I find life again? I think our guest today is going to help us answer a lot of those questions.

RANDY: Cindy Brinker Simmons is our guest today. She has a book called *Restored*: "Reconnecting life's broken pieces." Welcome to the program.

CINDY: So glad to be with you, Randy and Tammy. A great pleasure.

RANDY: You know it's been 20 years since you were last on the program, you and your husband, Bob. He was fighting a very rare form of cancer. We have a clip we would like to show

you. Would you like to watch that?

CINDY: I would love to watch that. Now I was a little younger. Yes, I'd love to watch. Thank you.

RANDY: Let's take a look at this.

Video begins

JAMES: Do you see, Cindy and Bob, people, and I can't imagine how they would not be, but do you see people being affected by the weight, especially, you might say that Bob, who has had this incredible assault, direct hit, do you see people being affected by the way he's responded?

BOB: Well, it is all about God. It is not about Cindy, Bob, and William. It truly, from the beginning, he moved in such a way to guide us early on to move to treatments that saved my life. And then, he brought people into our lives, people that we've never met. People will write us and say, you've not met us, you don't know us, but what you're going through, here's what it means to us. So we encourage people to choose joy, and then to keep that focus on Jesus. One thing I'd thought about and I'd heard years ago, and probably you had said it—

JAMES: I'm sure if it was profound.

BOB: It is a simple truth. But until you're taken to a point in your life through circumstances when you realize all you have is Jesus then you know all you need is Jesus Christ.

JAMES: Yeah, I'm sure I said that. I know that I have heard that said. And I'm sure I have repeated that because I believe it is so true.

BOB: And when you're on your knees, and we live—people say, what is the biggest change? In 18 months we moved from gulping life to living one moment by one moment by one moment.

End of video

In the studio

RANDY: How does that hit you?

CINDY: Oh! That was my beloved Bob. He had a very rare disease and it took a while to diagnose what it was. And when we finally got the pronouncement from the oncologist, Randy, the oncologist said, "You need to get your life in order, you've got three months to live."

So right after that pronouncement, we walked out of the oncologist's office. We had a little six-year-old boy, William at the time, and Bob said, my beloved Bob said, "Cindy, I don't know if I have three months, I don't know if I have three years, I don't know if I have 30 years, but from this point forward, we are going to give the glory to God and we are going to choose joy. That's what we did. That was our mission statement.

It is amazing, Randy and Tammy, and certainly, Tammy, you've experienced this, that when you're dedicated to Christ, there is a target on your back. Because when you sing from the mountaintops, I know people are watching, but when you're in that dark desert experience walking in the valley of death, grief has all different shapes and sizes. I mean, you don't have to just lose a loved one, you can have a prodigal child, you can have a dog or a cat that's passed or you can just be deeply disappointed and discouraged at where you are in life. So grief covers a lot of ground.

But—but the important thing is when you have Jesus, and as Bob said, that's all you need. His caretakers would come to the hospital knowing Bob's grim prognosis and say, "Mr. Simmons, what is it you have that makes you so joyful?"

And my beloved Bob said, "Oh, it is not what I have. It is who has me."

Because that's reality. Because who has us? It's the Lord.

TAMMY: Man, there are so many life lessons I took away from Bob's life here on earth. There was one thing in one of the chapters that I just wrote down. I love this. And in the middle of the night, Bob had said to you, "We need to be faithful with what God had entrusted us with."

Like God has entrusted us to do something with this pain, with this struggle. To give him glory even in the suffering. Cindy, I know that's hard to do sometimes to give God the glory, to find the treasures in the trials. So how do we help somebody that is just stuck? That feels like how in the world do I find a treasure in the trial that I'm going through? How do I find God? How do we speak to that?

CINDY: What I found is that Bob would say, "Cindy, we should feel so honored and privileged that God realized we were capable of this trial. That God had confidence in us that no matter what we're going through..."

And life is hard and suffering is a universal experience. Even in First Peter 4:12 it says, "Dear friends, do not be surprised by the painful trials you are going through as if it was a surprise." The Word of God predicts suffering, misery and joy cohabit with each other. So that is an absolute principle that the Bible speaks about that suffering is a universal experience.

But what we do in our suffering, number one is to trust God. And how do you do that? One of the things I have found is that you look at the past, don't forget to remember all that God has done in the past for you. We just have to look at our brief history and see how God has rescued us, has redeemed us, and has restored us from a wreckage called life at times. And the mere fact that you're standing and breathing and have a pulse can be just an amazing testimony to God's outrageous grace and unwavering love.

TAMMY: You can find and see the goodness of God's fingerprints throughout your life.

CINDY: Yes! And he'll do it again and again and again, Tammy.

TAMMY: You have to look. We get so focused on the disappointment of the now, right now

that we can't see the goodness of God. So I love when you say that to just stop for a moment and look at the fingerprint, look at what God has done, being grateful for what he has done. I think it also helps us to take our thoughts and our minds off of right now and what I'm feeling and the disappointment, the hurt, and the failure. It takes my mind off of that and it helps me to put it on other people and what their needs are.

CINDY: Also, God has a plan and a purpose for us that's good. He speaks about that in His Word. Joshua 1:9 says, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord. "Plans to prosper you, and not to harm you. Plans to give you hope and a future." Even when we can't see it, God is working behind the scenes.

You know, when Bob was born, God loved him as much as when he was born as when he breathed his last breath on this earth. There was no discrepancy in God's outrageous love for this precious man who dedicated his life to Christ. No difference! God had a plan and a purpose for Bob Simmons, for Cindy Simmons, for little William Simmons and it was good. He worked behind the scenes because in our crisis, we were a family in crisis, and people saw how we responded to God. It shows when you're in that desert experience that your dedication to Christ, when you're in affliction, when you come across as calm and joyful and at peace, people are watching.

People, to your point, Tammy, they are watching to see again when you sing from the mountaintops, I'm sure people are watching. But when you're in that dark desert experience, people are watching too. That what you've said in the past, that you love God no matter what happens because he can use our testimony. He can use our trials and treasures and he did. Literally, in the three years that Bob and I had our cancer journey, God used us in so many mighty ways, more than perhaps if we had been just whole and healthy. Because people saw our joy. They saw our joy, even through our affliction. Even though cancer is tough, it is difficult, it is disruptive, it is painful, they saw our joy and people came to know Christ because they saw our dedication to Christ.

My son gave me a beautiful definition of joy that I speak to in the book. He said the quote, "Joy

is the cheerful confidence that God always delivers." Joy is the cheerful confidence that God always delivers. He does! I love that. But the question is to all of us, even when we're in those deep desert experiences, do we believe that? God has a plan and a purpose. He delivers and he uses our lives and as Bob says, we should feel so grateful that he has confidence in us that we can be used even when our hearts are crushed or breaking.

RANDY: So both of you have walked a similar journey in what Psalm 23 calls that valley of the shadow of death. I always point out a couple of things, there is no shadow without a light. So there is a light there but it is a valley and it is in a shadow, and it can be a dark place, a place of brokenness. I'm just curious what you would say to someone who is in that valley. We walk through it and I know you have to keep moving. Not just sit and stay there, but to get to that point where someone can say, yeah, I'm choosing joy. Yeah, that trial was a treasure. They sound great but you don't feel it. How do you get to that place where you no longer feel broken and crushed?

CINDY: Well, Randy, many times you can't control your circumstances but you can control your responses to your circumstances. You can choose joy. It is an intentional decision. To your point, Bob and I weren't turning somersaults and excited when he was diagnosed with cancer because we saw our life taking an extremely opposite direction. But when you know that you know that God has your best interest at heart and you know that God loves you with an outrageous grace and an unwavering love, to sacrifice his son Jesus Christ on the cross for you, that gives you a perspective that God adores you. We are the apple of his eye. And that he is doing things behind the scenes if you believe and embrace that God is good and that he loves you, you know that all of this is part of a plan and a purpose that is good. And sometimes, we might not see that result on this side of heaven. And there are many times I've thought, I don't know what the final answer is but I will see it in heaven.

So again, I encourage people who are struggling because I do a lot with children with cancer as well, so I work with parents who have lost children. Number one, again, to remember what God's done for you in the past. So don't forget to remember. He will do that again and again.

Also, grief comes in all shapes and sizes but we have to do something with that grief. What I encourage people to do is put grief into action. We need to rest and recover; just breathe and gather ourselves back because the evil one loves to pounce and salivate over vulnerable people when they are just broken. But it is so important that we become other-focused, not self-focused. That we recognize that life is hard, and we know that, suffering is a universal experience, but when we finally gather ourselves, Randy, we are able to look forward and to look at others, be other-focused than self-focused, and put our grief into action.

What I found is that grief is not a new emotion nor is activism a new phenomenon, but when you merge the two, healing begins to take place. So volunteer at a charity. Involve yourself with a nonprofit. Look at helping others or being a mentor to others who are going through a hard time. Champion a cause. Be other-focused and not self-focused.

TAMMY: Find a community. Do not be isolated. Get involved. I think that's one of the things I did immediately was surrounded myself with a group of girls that would walk with me. Because I knew when I got to the other side of healing that I would also need them there. So I began to establish that space, that community so I was not isolated. I think that's where it is very dangerous because we start to dig that hole. We go deeper and deeper and don't know how to get out.

What I love about your book, *Restored* is the way you tell stories and the way you lead us straight to the heart of Jesus. You surround us with scripture, but practical, practical ways to find healing, to find joy, to regain new purpose and new vision in our lives. Many people go through hardships and trials. You've been through them since you were a little girl, losing your mom at a young age, such a heartbreaking story. So you are no—this isn't new. You're no stranger to pain and trials.

I love that God has used that to pour into this book and to pour into our lives. I believe that if anybody is watching and you feel stuck, you feel hopeless, you feel you're without purpose, you have no vision, you feel like you're dying inside, you have no community, and you feel isolated, God says this is not all for you. He has so much more. A program like today was meant for you

to lean in for a listen and to know that God sees you and hears you. He wants to equip you. Not just that he sees you and hears you and that's it. There is so much more beyond that. I see you. So he's going to take action, he's committed to you. No matter where you're at in life today, God has so much for you. This isn't the rest of your story. There is so much more than just today. I think there is so much in this book about that, Randy, that will help people.

RANDY: It will. And we'll tell you how you can get that in just a second. But if you are someone who is going through a difficult time and you want to talk to someone, there is a prayer line we have; people that will listen and will pray with you. Don't suffer alone. Cindy says that God has a restoration plan.

Cindy, I think one of the biggest lies of the enemy is people see a program like this and they go, well, that's great! God did it for them. But I'm unique in that I don't think he is going to do it for me. What do you say to that person who needs to hear God is consistent, he will restore, he will redeem? What encouragement would you give them?

CINDY: We cannot do life alone. It will not go well for us, Tammy or Randy if we do life alone. Yes, to answer your question, anchored in the very word *restored* is return, renew, and repair. That's what God does in us. He calls us to return to him. Because this is a sinful dark world. He calls us to engage with him. He calls us to communicate with him. He calls us to be honest and to have an authentic relationship with him.

So the idea is you trust God, you speak to him. In my book, I talk about how God answers prayers in four ways. The first is no, not yet. No, you're not quite prepared for it. You're not quite equipped for it. Be patient! I want something great for you. The second is no, I love you too much. Oh no, Cindy, what you've asked me in your prayers is so much less than what I have for you. I have such abundance and what you've asked is so much less than what I have for you. The third is, and this is part of the answer to that question. Yes, I thought you would never ask. I want you to share what's on your heart. It's not like God doesn't know but he wants us to talk to him, to commune with him. He is our Father. What creates this heartbreak or that chasm between him and you? And the final thing is yes, and here's more. That's the victory. And that's the God that

we trust in. That's our God. That God doesn't change. And that God says, "I'm with you forever. I will never forsake you, I will never leave you."

I think a lot of times, people think that God is a capricious God. When bad things happen, where is God? Well God is right there, he is carrying you. Again, God loves you, and has a plan and purpose for you, and it can be where you are is his very plan. Because you are exactly, right now, I would say to your viewers, they are exactly where God intends them to be right now. And God is working a good work that they might not be able to see but when they get out on the other side—and how many times have we said or heard people say, that was hard because life is hard but I would do it all over again because of what I've learned. It's like an onion, the things were peeled away that created relationships that I broke. I said things and did things that were wrong. But through literally, this fire, this refining, this restoration, God peeled away all that and what came out on the other side was beauty. So people love it.

RANDY: Hard to see when you're going through it. I get that. But that's what God does. You need to hear that today.

Listen, if you want Cindy's book, *Restored*, we will send it to you when you do what also she says which is to reach out and help someone else in need. Because Tammy, we see a great need and we see a great opportunity, and we want you to be a part. Watch this and you'll see how.

On the mission field

ANNOUNCER: This season *LIFE Outreach* wants to continue spreading joy and smiles around the world. We do this in very special ways. We provide shoes for children's feet and corrective surgery for those who suffer from a cleft palate or cleft lip condition. Not only is receiving shoes fun for the children but it is a blessing for the mission team.

TAMMY: We have had an incredible year at *LIFE Outreach*. We have done Mission Feeding, we have drilled water wells, and today, we're putting shoes on little children's feet. I'm so excited

about it! John?

JOHN: I'm so excited, Tammy. It's been a special day. What is wonderful is for those children that have a little bit of trouble with their smile, we have a very special gift too.

TAMMY: Yes, we do!

ANNOUNCER: Did you ever think a trip to a hospital would bring a smile to a child's face? It has for these children because each of them has received corrective surgery for various debilitating neurological conditions. Daniel will now live a life free from spina bifida. As for Shalom, her life has been saved from an oftentimes deadly condition called hydrocephalus commonly known as water on the brain.

As this Christmas season approaches, we want to continue to bless children around the world by providing them with a new pair of shoes and corrective surgeries that give them a chance for healthy and fulfilling lives.

End of video

In the studio

TAMMY: This is truly my favorite time of the year to be able to bring joy to these children. Every time I go on one of these trips like I was just in Central America, when I get to hang out with these children and they're sitting all around me. We're trying to find the right shoe that fits just perfectly. There is so much joy, Randy, when you put it on their little feet and they go running off. Sometimes you don't realize that without shoes, what danger lurks around these children every minute of the day because they're out playing in the worst conditions, sometimes, that I've ever seen. And I've seen some pretty severe injuries. So the simplicity of giving a new pair of shoes to these children seems simple but it is so exciting and fun!

RANDY: It is. And that's why people, our viewers, love doing this. You're right! There is a health benefit to having your feet protected. So yes, you are giving them a gift but you're also

giving them a gift of better health. That's why we like to talk about the shoes and the smiles. You've seen the before and after photos of these children with cleft palate surgeries.

TAMMY: Randy, sometimes it is hard to see. I know sometimes people watch and they think, oh I can't watch it. But can you imagine being the little child having to live with that every day?

RANDY: Well, it affects everything. It affects breathing. It affects eating. And of course, they literally can't smile. But when you reach out and you give a gift of love, you enable that child to smile. And some of the images of these children smiling, it is just—it is so heartwarming. I want them to experience it even more.

And then this year, with the surgical center, the new wing in Uganda, where some of the worst cases from around the region come. We're asking those of you who can give an extra gift of \$1,000 or more to contribute to that new surgical center, saving lives, literally saving lives at no cost to the families who need it desperately.

What a blessing you can be. So listen. Maybe it is the shoes you want to focus on. Maybe it is the smiles. Whatever you can do, let me give you a quick breakdown. A gift of \$36 will provide shoes for ten children. A gift of \$72 today will provide shoes for 20 children. A gift of \$180 will provide those shoes for 50 children. And of course, \$500, is the average cost of a corrective surgery. \$1,000, many of you can give more than that this Christmas for the surgical center.

Whatever you can do, we pray that you will be a blessing. As God gave to us this Christmas, we want to give to others in Christ's name this Christmas. So please go to the phone, go online, and make the best gift you can.

Begin video

ANNOUNCER: For almost two decades *LIFE's Christmas Shoes and Smiles* has continued to provide shoes for impoverished children throughout the world, as well as corrective surgeries for

children with cleft palate disorders. By responding today, you can help provide new shoes for 150,000 children in time for the holidays, and for some children a beautiful new smile. Your gift of \$36 will help provide shoes for ten children. \$72 will help provide shoes for 20. \$180 will help provide shoes for 50. And a gift of \$500 will help provide a corrective smile surgery.

This year we have an incredible opportunity to help construct a new surgical center that will provide lifesaving surgeries to children suffering serious neurological conditions. This \$1.2 million project is up and above *LIFE's* normal budget but because of one generous friend for *LIFE*, only \$500,000 is needed.

As a thank you for your gift of support to this life-saving outreach, be sure to request the blue crystal shoe ornament, a treasure to display each Christmas. With your gift of \$100 or more, you may request this keepsake boxed set featuring four crystal shoe ornaments.

Finally, please consider an extra gift of \$1,000 or more to help construct *LIFE's* new surgical center. And with this gift, you may request this beautiful bronze sculpture, "A Cup of Water."

Please call, write, or make your gift online today!

End of video

In the studio

RANDY: I hope you will help us make this Christmas special for so many people. And not just Christmas but wow, what a gift that continues to work throughout the year.

By the way, if you want Cindy's book, *Restored*, just request it when you support the wonderful outreach. I've been so blessed today.

TAMMY: I have too. I'm going to say it again and again and again, you are a blessing to my soul and my spirit. I have loved watching your faith walk. You and Bob, I can't wait to meet him.

Can't wait to meet your mom. Thank you for pouring into so many people's lives for so many years. And this book is a blessing. We love you. Grateful that you're here. Grateful that you are here. We'll see you next time on *Life Today!*