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Week 37: *Christmas Shoes and Smiles*

Randy Robison and Tammy Trent

Kerrie Oles #1

**In the studio**

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

**TAMMY:** Hello!

**RANDY:** And Tammy, we talk to a lot of people here who go through really awful things. I mean, terrible things. And yet, you look at them and you go, okay, there is joy, there is peace, there is purpose. How did they get it? Well, we know how. But we want you today to experience that. It is the word of our testimony. It is what God does in our lives. And we have someone who really, by all accounts could be shipwrecked in life.

**TAMMY:** Absolutely! I think she felt even like that, like a mess, kind of lost. My identity, who am I? You listen to a bunch of different people your whole life telling you who you are. You start to believe certain things and then get to a place of like who am I? What do I do? And how do I untangle the place that I'm at because I don't want to be here anymore?

**RANDY:** Yet she is here today encouraging you. She has a book where she tells much of her story. The book is called *For Real*. It is written by Kerrie Oles and she joins us. Kerrie, you and I talked online a few weeks ago. I was like, man, people need to hear from her. Thank you for coming and sharing today.

**TAMMY:** I absolutely love her. I listened to that interview.

**RANDY:** You saw the interview?

**TAMMY:** Yes! I saw the interview and I fell in love with Kerrie.

**KERRIE:** Stop! I love y'all. Well, I'm taking Tammy with me now.

**RANDY:** Some people haven't heard your story. It is rough. I think it is good to recount as much as you can; some of the painful parts just so people can see where God has brought you. So take us back wherever you want.

**KERRIE:** Well, I think my first real memories on planet Earth were being sexually abused. That's like your first recollection of memories. And even with that, I still felt like my family was normal. We have a version of normal that we think is normal when in reality, if we asked everyone it would be different. But I had three older brothers and everything seemed great until I was around 11 and my brother was killed by a drunk driver on Christmas. I can remember standing at the door just begging him not to go to the movies with his friend. But he did. And that night he was killed on the highway.

**RANDY:** That was your oldest brother?

**KERRIE:** That was my oldest brother.

**RANDY:** How did that hit your family?

**KERRIE:** Oh well, because we didn't have a church community, we didn't know the Lord, I think we all just started dealing with trauma in our own ways and it just split our family in two. My middle brother became so involved with drugs and crime. To date, he's been in prison nine times. He says prison is where he feels most comfortable. I think it is because he wanted to be the one that died; they were all so close. My youngest brother

joined a cult shortly after that. He's been absent from the family for over—he doesn't know me, my family, anything.

What that left is just a traumatized girl. When everyone around us starts to disappear and everything we know starts to disappear so do we. So I just became a very recluse sort of person. My family moved to the middle of the woods. When I say, "my family," just my mom and my dad and me. I think they were trying to outrun their trauma as if we could do that.

Before I knew it, after high school, I had this void in my life so huge from just neglect. Listen. They did the best they could but because we were all absent of the one thing we need to handle grief, which is a personal relationship with Jesus, they did the best they could. But the best they could was neglectful of me. It kind of left me believing a lie that I was unworthy to be loved. So I went out and tried to fill that void. And by the age of 26, I was married and divorced twice with very abusive men. But by the time I started being physically abused, I had already been sexually and mentally abused. I just felt like that was the progression of my life. Like that's the story I was worth.

My life was spinning out of control. I was involved with drugs and bad men. When I met my husband, who I'm married to now, he did something no other person has ever done. I met him by accident at a barbecue. "Accident," I'm not sure but I met him at a barbecue. He said, "I'd like to take you out but you are messed up."

I was like, "That's an understatement."

He invited me to church and I remember thinking, what? And that was at a time in my life when I contemplated suicide a lot. I had no one to love me so what was it worth? I think a lot of us don't rise to the story we think is possible for us. We fall to the story we think we're worth. And that's where I was. I didn't think I was worth a good story.

But my boyfriend, the guy who was asking me out was cute so I wanted to go. And so I

went to church with him. And that was my first experience with like a big church and a pastor. I walked into that church and I remember thinking, oh these people! They're going to know all about my story. I don't even know if there is a screening process. Because if so, they're probably not going to let me in. That day, I met the lover of my soul and the love of my life. We've been married for 25 years now.

**RANDY:** What was it though that was something the pastor said, something you felt? Because you say the lover of your soul, and I know you meant your husband but the real lover of your soul—

**KERRIE:** The real lover of my soul was Jesus. But the pastor started saying things like, "Do you want to want to know peace? Do you want to know love?" I remember thinking, those are two things—I just remember peace and love very intuitively, like very strongly at that moment. I just remember thinking, I've never felt peaceful and loved since I was probably 11 years old, and even before that, it was a warped way of being loved.

So I just ran to the altar. I didn't know what it was about. I didn't know what was going to happen after I did it, but I was like yes, I want that.

**TAMMY:** Absolutely. It sounds like that was a huge turning point in your life.

**KERRIE:** It was a huge turning point. Meeting Jesus was the best thing that ever happened to me. However, trauma still talks about when you meet Jesus.

**TAMMY:** That's right! How did you get to a place of realizing that I have to deal with that because it is affecting everything in my life?

**KERRIE:** Well, it was when we were married about five years and I was malfunctioning. I was thinking all of a sudden now I'm this good Christian woman. I had to be just like the Proverbs 31 woman that they taught me about in Bible study. I was like how do I get to be that? [Laughing] Like I'm going to go out and chop wood or knit. I'm

not sure. But I was trying to do all the perfect things that I thought being a Christian was. It just wasn't working. It was making me angrier. It was making me malfunction more.

**RANDY:** Did you feel like a failure?

**KERRIE:** Yes! It was making me deflect onto my husband when he would do something wrong. I would think, why is he doing that when I was doing it too? And so you just drag all that stuff with you. You drag your trauma with you. You give it a place to land until you want to look at it and open that box and go, you know, there is some stuff I need to look at. That's where I was. I started going to some freedom classes and some counseling. That's when I realized oh, I had real stuff inside that I needed to deal with.

I think in today's world, more than ever, people are dealing with mental health. I think we were so obsessed, at least the church time I'd been in, that we needed to be these spiritual giants. But unless we couple that with emotional wellness, then all we know is a good version of some words. We've got to understand that emotional and mental health matter. I think sometimes, we think as a Christian, we've got to curate those emotions so that we don't have any.

**RANDY:** And a lot of times, I know the temptation, especially with abuse, that's awful. But the pain of the loss, the fracturing of the family, the failed marriages, there are a lot of things going on there. But as a Christian, you almost don't want to admit failure sometimes. But I think the harder thing is just confronting that pain because it drags up a lot that you'd rather forget.

So how do you go about it in a healthy way to confront those issues that if you don't, you're just—you're going to keep dragging? They're going to keep dragging you down.

**KERRIE:** Absolutely. I think you have to learn to turn the trauma into truth. So what that means would be, I would always think to myself, this is where your story is the ceiling. You've got a nice man but anything else, you're probably not going to be worth it.

So I had to do a lot of story work and go back to the time when I was wounded as a child. Like I had to forgive the person who sexually abused me. I had to then, I know it sounds crazy but I had to forgive all my family members for leaving me, either emotionally or physically. I had to recognize that there were things and decisions that I made when I was out of control so that I could now understand how to take those lies that made me out of control and learn the truth about them so that I could begin to think differently about who I am to God, who I am in this current situation, and how I can think about me.

**RANDY:** Can I ask about the forgiveness part? Because that is easier said than done, especially when you're talking abuse. But also, when you're talking about maybe your parents thought they did everything right or don't realize—did you go to these people? Or is this a thing that you did on your own? What does that look like?

**KERRIE:** Well, to the man who killed my brother that night, who drank too much, and hit my brother's body while he was putting gas in his car, I had to write him a letter. I looked him up on Google, found him, mailed him a letter, and said, you have no idea who I am but this is what I need to do. I don't expect to hear from you but I have to do this exercise for me. Because that forgiveness was choking the life out of Kerrie. Because if my husband would do one thing wrong it was hard for me to forgive him because I didn't know how to forgive anyone. So I wrote him a letter.

My dad was still alive and I just wrote my dad a three-page letter, front and back, and I listed out all my sins. All my sins that I thought of being a terrible daughter that he probably thought. And I gave it to him. He was actually on his hospice bed at the time. I said, listen, Dad, I always thought that you were a terrible dad. Now I understand, you lost three sons. I had a part to play in malfunctioning as well. At some point as an adult, I made decisions out of pain that I regret and you've probably looked at and thought, well, now I've lost my three sons, and my daughter is a wreck. So I wanted you to know that I'm letting you off the hook. You are not a terrible dad. We just had a terrible thing happen to us and none of us knew how to rightfully deal with trauma.

I'll never forget. I thought he would read the letter, and I thought he would say I told you about number seven. But instead, he folded up the letter and he took my hand. And I knew at 36 years old, my dad never held my hand, but he took my hand and said, "I've always loved you, daughter." I'll never forget, it was the first time I think I felt my father's love but I knew it came from my Father's love.

**TAMMY:** I don't even—I'm sorry. Got to take a moment with that. That's incredible. I love that. I love that God gave you that gift, that moment with your dad.

I was going to ask you what response he gave you. I wanted to say in his response to you, has that helped you in responding and healing throughout your life?

**KERRIE:** That was, as you called it a minute ago, that was another turning point in my life. I realized that I meet a lot of girls, especially in the line of work that I do, we always point to our dad, that he didn't give us very much self-worth. Now I teach them, let's look at the part we played. Let's have a different perspective of yeah, my dad did terrible things. He did neglect me but it was my way of viewing it as well. Because I knew in that moment that he actually did always love me. He just didn't have the tools and didn't know how to show it.

**TAMMY:** Can I talk about the power of a full-circle moment? Because you alluded to that. Talked about the girls that you minister to. I love how—we always say this, God wastes nothing. But he doesn't, especially if we work with him.

**KERRIE:** Yes!

**TAMMY:** Can you tell us a little bit about that, a place you never wanted to go but God took you back?

**KERRIE:** So I grew up on Sundays going to prisons, different ones to visit my brother. I hated Sundays. That's why I hated church. I'd always see it was family day and I would

think, uhh! Family day? It is family day at the prison. I'd go get searched from the ages of 12 to 17, in every prison.

So, I made a vow when I became a speaker and an author that I would speak at all kinds of places. I'll go to all the pretty little platforms and the women's conferences but I will never speak in prison. And I got a call to speak in prison. I said, "I'm so sorry but I don't speak in prison." I'll never forget, the lady on the other end of the phone, she had the audacity, with great conviction of the Holy Spirit, she said, "Really? With your story? I would have thought that's exactly where you would speak."

I was like, "Oh! We don't know each other that well!"

She was so right because I went. And the day I went to my very first prison, I drove up in the parking lot all alone and I thought to myself, you have got to be kidding me. It was the very first prison my brother had ever been in. I said Lord, why would you do this? And he said the greatest sentence. He said, "Sometimes you've got to go back to the place where the pain originated and get that healed to move on to your purpose."

**TAMMY:** Oh, my goodness!

**RANDY:** I know you talk about this and I know you've helped a lot of people. Can you do another program where you walk through that healing process with people?

**KERRIE:** Yes! Absolutely!

**RANDY:** You don't want to miss that. I have to ask one more question. Actually, two, quickly. Did you ever hear from the gentleman, the drunk driver?

**KERRIE:** No, I didn't.

**RANDY:** And then what did you do to confront your abuser or did you? Or was that just



a personal exercise?

**KERRIE:** You know that was a personal exercise within me. He had already—he had passed away at an early death and so I had to just do that with a counselor.

**RANDY:** I ask that because anyone who is in that situation is like—those examples, not hearing anything back, having the full circle moment, and then just having to do it within yourself, it's all acceptable. Yes? It's all good?

**KERRIE:** It's all acceptable, and it all frees up a bit of the trauma story and turns it into a truth story.

**RANDY:** I know some people need to hear that. So whatever you need to do to confront. It is all good and it is all good in God's hands.

If you want to talk to somebody about that right now, we have a telephone number, we'll put it on the screen, there is somebody who will pray with you, someone who will listen to you, and maybe start that process. So pick up the phone. We care about you and your needs. We care about anyone who is dealing with trauma.

Tammy, I know you know there are people around the world dealing with different levels of trauma. And the outreaches of LIFE, we're able to do some great things. We have an opportunity right now.

**TAMMY:** We have a great opportunity. Take a minute and watch this.

### **On the mission field**

**ANNOUNCER:** Christmas is just around the corner. And at *Life Today*, it is time for *Christmas Shoes and Smiles!* Along with new pairs of shoes, we're giving Christmas smiles to special children born with physical challenges through gifts of transformative

life-changing surgery. And while we celebrate each gift's laughter and joy, we honor the silent struggles that inspire them.

### **Open Captions**

>> I gave birth to Ana Petwa. Then she started having some problems. This person told me, "Do you know that your baby's head is growing?"

Then I reacted badly. I came back home. I was crying. I shed my tears. Then I said, "Why me?"

**ANNOUNCER:** "Do you know your baby's head is growing?" Something no mother ever wants to hear. What Falistas would learn is that her daughter had a neurological condition called hydrocephalus or water on the brain. You see, inside everyone's head is fluid that protects our brains but the bodies of children with hydrocephalus cannot reabsorb and drain this fluid naturally from their heads. Worse yet, when left untreated the results of hydrocephalus are often lethal.

### **Open Captions**

>> I didn't know then about CURE. I wish I knew. I would have hurried with her. But I didn't know anything.

>> The people at Falistas' church had told her that she needed to see a doctor. When she got to CURE, they were able to diagnose Ana Petwa and treat her. Falistas told me that without CURE she would be lost. And I wonder how many other mothers around the world are feeling that right now.

**ANNOUNCER:** CURE International is *LIFE's* mission partner in Uganda. It was their skilled surgeons who corrected Ana Petwa's deadly condition. Even as you watch this, a new surgical center is under construction to expand CURE's capacity to treat children in desperate need. Its completion now depends on the same giving spirit that made Ana Petwa's healing a reality.

## **End of video**

### **In the studio**

**RANDY:** That's hard to watch at times but wow, what an opportunity to literally save lives. That's not the only miracle that they're going to see. We have a miracle right now because that surgical center costs \$1.2 million. But a friend, a partner of LIFE has already given \$700,000 for that. So it is up to us to cover the other half million and that's why we're coming to you. We're saying, what an opportunity.

We're going to bless so many children with these shoes this year. We're going to bless many more with the smiles, the cleft palate surgeries, the cleft lip, and cleft palate. But there are many whose lives will depend on getting that surgical center up and running. The parents can't afford the kind of treatment they need. You know how difficult it can be to get good health coverage, even here in the West. Over there it is impossible in many situations—except for God, and except for you.

So we want you to partner with us this Christmas the best you can. Maybe you buy yourself something a little less so you can bless someone else. It will be so meaningful. Though you may not see all the fruit of it, God knows, the one who sent his Son this Christmas to be a blessing so that we could live. It is in his name that we're going to be a blessing so that others can live. We want you to be a part of it.

Tammy, I know you've been to these places. You've seen the pain, you've seen the heartache, and you've seen the opportunity that's before us. It is such a beautiful opportunity.

**TAMMY:** It really is. And the thing is we're not asking you to carry the load by yourself. If we all come together, Randy, and just even do a little bit, if that's all you can do, it's a lot. You have to see that as an enormous gift that you're giving. If 25,000 people came together and gave \$25, could you imagine what we could do with that and how we can

knock that out? Now some can do more. Praise God for the place that you're in, a season you're in where God is blessing, where now you can bless others. I'm telling you, it will make a difference. Please hear our hearts on this. Please know that this is life-changing and life-giving. We have access to this here where we live, but they don't there. We could change it for them today.

So I'm going to ask you to prayerfully consider right now if God is speaking to you, do not hesitate. Respond right now. Let's knock this out now. Let's keep pouring the mortar. Let's put up the walls. Let's do whatever we have to do to save another life today.

**RANDY:** That's right. No matter what you can do, it will make a difference. Let me give you a quick rundown. \$36 will provide shoes for ten children. \$180 will provide shoes for 50 children. Now the average cost of the cleft palate and cleft lip surgery is about \$500. So a gift today would go towards one of those. And we're asking for a gift of \$1,000 or more. Some of you can give two, three, four, whatever God's enabled you to do. We just ask you to stop and say, Lord, what would you have me do? And then just do it. It is not for us, it's for those children who desperately need that human touch that we believe is a touch from God. That cure, the name of our partners, for those who will possibly die without our help. So go online, go to the phone, 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 go online or go to the phone. Make the best gift you can. We're going to make this Christmas so special with your help for so many children. Obviously, the ones who receive that life-altering, perhaps lifesaving surgery. You're going to bless them in such a huge way! So we're excited about that. And we're excited about Kerrie coming back for another program.

**TAMMY:** Yes! It's so good. You have so much to say. I hope we go a little bit deeper into the topic of healing because I think a lot of people need it. Kerrie, where can people find you? Find your books, find all your resources? Book you for the next prison conference.

**KERRIE:** No! I'm just teasing. They can book me or look up any of my books or

products or anything at [UnlockedMinistries.com](https://UnlockedMinistries.com).

**RANDY:** [UnlockedMinistries.com](https://UnlockedMinistries.com). Now you can go there and I would but you've got to come back. We're going to help walk you through trauma in the next program with Kerrie. Appreciate you being here. We'll see you again next time!