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Week 10: WFL, Last week

Tammy Trent

Hannah Crews

Studio discussion:

TAMMY: Hello, everybody! I'm Tammy Trent. Welcome to *Life Today*. Hannah Crews is a Christian author with a powerful story and a unique gift for helping people find the joy of Jesus in the everyday, messy moments of life. Her devotional *Goodness Gracious: "90 Unfiltered Devotions for This Sometimes-Too-Serious Life."* It's witty, it's relatable, and it's packed with truth that meets you right where you're at.

Hannah, we're so glad that you're here. Welcome to *Life Today*. Thank you for having me. I'm so excited.

HANNAH: Thank you for having me!

TAMMY: I'm so happy to be with you. They told me before you came on the show there's a connection we have. I love this connection.

HANNAH: Yeah. Well, when I found out that you were going to be the host today, a memory came back to my mind that blessed me so much. I've heard your story before but what you don't know is when I was 13 years old, I went on a mission trip to Panama City, Panama with Brio Magazine with Focus On the Family. Yes! I'm sitting there as a 13-year-old. I didn't know anybody and you stand up on stage and you start talking about your story and your testimony of love and loss, and all the things that you had to go through, the grief of it. But yet, I'm watching you; and watching this beautiful lady stand up and tell a testimony like that to a little 13-year-old girl. I'm like, she's an overcomer. If she can overcome something that devastating, I think I can too.

So I was able to be ministered in that way and tell myself those things after listening to your testimony at 13 years old, not knowing all the things that I would go through in my life, and how I would be an overcomer because of the blood of the Lamb and the word of my testimony.

TAMMY: Girl!

HANNAH: You had a lot to do with that! It was so cool.

TAMMY: I love it so much! So you were 13, and like, how old am I now?

HANNAH: It must have been like 22 years ago.

TAMMY: I know. Exactly! What an honor, truly. What an honor for me. What an honor for you that God would choose to use any one of us to bring hope to somebody else. I always look at it that way, to take every opportunity you can to minister, to bring hope because you have no idea the seeds that will be sown in somebody's life. Like, look, I'm seeing the fruit of it today sitting in this chair going, oh, my goodness! Father, thank you that you gave me the strength to also get through a really hard season in my life.

Which brings me to you. You talked about the hard season and not knowing that you would need that kind of testimony in your life as a 13-year-old girl. So for those of us who don't know a lot about Hannah Crews, take us back to maybe your childhood, your journey as a Christian, a young Christian girl, and then maybe to some tough seasons in your life.

HANNAH: The Lord was so faithful in giving me a Christian home, growing up in a Christian home. So that was a huge blessing for me. Grew up in a Christian home, went to a Christian school, and did Christian things. Did all the things that felt like our ducks were in a row as far as childhood goes, which was such a blessing. I'm so grateful to my parents for giving me that foundation so that later on in life I wouldn't turn from that. So I'm so grateful for that.

But as life goes, things get really difficult and things get convoluted and hard. And at 13 years old, I heard your testimony but I had no idea that four years later, I would go through a really difficult time in my life. I had a boyfriend that I was crazy about, but then we broke up because that's what happens whenever you're in high school. It doesn't usually last. So I was devastated. It just broke my heart so much. I was just like, I thought that we'd get married after high school. I lost my mind. And so, it was a very hard time for me.

But what was worse was we talk about wolves in sheep's clothing, but I experienced a wolf in shepherd's clothing with my youth pastor who had me come in and work with him over the summer as I'm going through this emotional, hard, sad thing for me. But he manipulated my emotions and would counsel me in ways that I was like, man, this does not sound like the counsel that I always knew my youth pastor to give me. It started getting a little twisted and perverted. He convinced me that giving him my virginity would be a spiritual healing for the turmoil that I was going through, and trusting him with that would help me get past it.

So looking back I'm like how stupid was I to believe him? But at the same time, I was so desperate to feel better that I was willing to do anything. So, unfortunately, that did happen and it only made things worse. It made me go down a path that I was not raised to do. It was just such a difficult time for me. I never really wanted to talk about it because it was... especially back then, you don't talk about those things because he was involved in the church, he was a powerful man in the community. It was just something people didn't want to touch on. My family kind of knew about it, but it was like, let's get her mentally well to get to college and then we'll just move past this.

But then I finally divulged the information to my husband years later, and my husband confronted my youth pastor about it. Asked him if this was true. He admitted it, which was all very difficult and traumatizing to have to go through it all over again. But my husband correctly reached out to my youth pastor's church and his school saying, hey, you probably shouldn't have this man on staff or around teenage girls. Then we got slapped with an almost million-dollar lawsuit for speaking out. That was the very thing that I was so concerned about; that's

why I never wanted to say anything. Because you just feel like you're going to get attacked for telling the truth. And that's what happened.

But God is so faithful, and he is so good that despite the trauma that I went through back then, despite having to live through it and go through the courts with it, we were victorious in court because God delights in the truth.

We were able to get out of that and get past that. Now I'm able to boldly talk about what happened, but also say, hey, like, the Lord can get you through the worst of the worst, and he can still bring beauty from ashes. That's where we are today and finding joy despite our circumstances.

TAMMY: Praise God, Hannah! I look at you and I hear the story and I think, do you still battle? Did you deal with shame?

HANNAH: Oh, yes.

TAMMY: How did you work through that?

HANNAH: I think the biggest thing that I dealt with was feeling naïve. How could I be so -- I knew it was wrong. I knew that that wouldn't help me. But yet it was coming from a spiritual leader in my life. So I think that that was probably the thing that I battled with the most. And of course, not saving myself for marriage. Then after that, of course, my mind's like, well, I already gave it up. So, I mean, I'm just going to do whatever with whatever boyfriend. It just grieves me to know that that happened and that was the catalyst of starting me off a pretty rough path for a while.

But God's mercy and grace met me in my apartment years later, where I rededicated my life to the Lord fully and completely. Shortly after that, I met my husband. So it's been a long process whenever you go through sexual abuse or any sort of trauma for people to get through. But I think it's important to know that no matter how devastating or how shameful you feel in going

through something that maybe was not your fault the Lord will do something beautiful with that.

TAMMY: Praise God! It's because of your surrender too. Do you know what I mean? Like you say you finally got to that place of like I can't do this on my own. I am making decision after decision after decision. That is not who I want to be. It's not who God says I am. So you finally got to a place of just absolute surrender. Don't you think that's a hard place to be? I think it's a hard place to be sometimes to finally surrender all and to trust now, Jesus, with the pieces of your life, and to align with obedience, to step out in obedience.

Because what happens when we surrender, in our obedience, blessings begin to come into our lives. It's kind of closely tied, the obedience and blessing. And absolutely showed up in your life. The obedience and the surrender was God now setting you up for your future.

HANNAH: Well, I feel like nowadays, especially, people are so desperate to be happy, to find their happiness to love themselves. While all that is good and wonderful, the only way that we can find true joy is to walk in full obedience with the Lord. That's where joy comes in. We do what he says, and we're doing exactly what he wants us to do in his perfect will for our lives that's where joy comes from.

I love that verse in First Thessalonians where it talks about, "Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, because this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." So that latter part of the verse is really interesting because it says this is God's will for you. People are like, well, what's God's will for my life? I don't know what God's will is for my life. It's actually very simple, and it relieves a lot of pressure from us to realize, oh, his will for my life is all I have to do is rejoice always, pray continually, and give thanks in all circumstances. Oh! Well, okay. As long as I do that, I think I can walk in obedience and have a joyful life, which is exciting.

TAMMY: But how do I rejoice? How do we rejoice when life is so hard? How do we rejoice when we feel hopeless? Okay. It brings me to this question, is happiness the same thing as joy?

So let's talk about that for a second. I think some people get confused thinking, I'm not happy. I don't have any joy. Hannah, I have often said that happiness to me is like a series of happenings in your life where you're happy for one moment, everything's going great. Pull up to Starbucks and you've got a coffee waiting for you, your name is right on it and you're like, yay! The next day you go back and that's no longer yours. Now it says Hannah and now I'm mad. But your circumstances have changed.

So what is the joy, then? If they're two different things, we've got to understand the difference. Because there's going to be many things that don't make us happy. Me, the death of my husband, nothing about that made me happy. But could I find joy somehow? Joy in that moment, even in that place, far away in a foreign country, for me, the joy, and I want to get your take on that too, for me, it was the foundation of my life that things are going to shift, things are going to change, but God never changes.

How would you describe that to somebody who says, well, I'm not happy so I don't have joy.

HANNAH: Well, happiness is conditional too. And like you were saying, it's a series of happenings is what happiness is. But happiness is fully dependent on a person or a thing or a circumstance to allow you to feel a sort of happiness but it's temporary. A person is going to let you down. Your circumstances might change. The different things you walk through, it's not going to look the same every single day. So, if you put your trust in all of -- all of your eggs in this one happiness basket, they're all going to break and you're gonna have scrambled eggs, and that's all you're going to have.

But joy is so different, and joy comes from the Lord. Joy is unconditional, joy is everlasting. So that's why I just love the story of David so much. David is so awesome because he went through all these crazy things, ups and downs, yet he would still praise. But then in the next Psalm, he's like, oh Lord, why is this happening to me? Then he's like, oh, but praise you, God.

So I just learned that joy does come from praise. And whenever we're in a constant state of praise, even when we don't feel like it, what if we're just one praise away from a breakthrough?

What if we're just one praise away before finally, the prayer that we've been praying for so long is answered? There's such hope in that. There's so much more hope in a joy that's in Jesus and rooted in Jesus than happiness that can be ripped away at any moment.

TAMMY: Exactly. I think sometimes even in those moments when you don't feel it, when you don't feel like praising, I've been there too. There's times when I've literally had to help my arm, like just hold it up, Tammy. You don't feel it but hold it up.

You know what's amazing? When we take action, when we do that -- and this was early on in my loss -- I remember doing this in a church service and just lifting it and just holding it there. I could feel the tears coming down. Soon after, I let go and I'm like, you're doing it, girl. You're doing it. I think it pushes away the darkness. It pushes away fear. It pushes away the unhappiness and it produces joy. So do you think that our joy then is connected to our purpose?

HANNAH: I think that joy is so deep-rooted in just who Jesus is first. I think that that's what has been so wonderful. Even though I did grow up in a Christian home and I did know all of the things, when I finally started to read the Word of God for myself, instead of looking for myself in the Word and trying to find happiness that way, I finally said, God, I want to find you in the word. I want to understand who you are in the Word.

So when I started to see who God really was, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, the God of David, and yet looking at Jesus's life and reading the word that talks about that, it gives me so much more hope to realize, oh, my goodness! I understand who you are so much more, and that fills me with so much more hope and so much more joy. So whenever you finally understand who God is and who he says you are, then you're able to walk in so much joy than if you were trying to do it on your own.

TAMMY: Absolutely. So for someone that might be struggling, going, okay, girl! I hear what you're saying, but I'm not connecting with it, right? Some people are just there or they're not there. But I think about practically, telling someone that it's not in their DNA, they just -- I've

had so many people ask me too like, how do I find joy? You look like you have joy, Tammy. How do I do it? How do I do it?

So what would you say to the person who would come up to you after an event and say, how do I find joy? How do I practically live joy out? I mean, I hear what you're saying, go to the word. Here's some practical things. But give me something else.

HANNAH: Well, what's funny is everybody's personality is different. Everything that everybody's gone through is very different. There's no right or wrong way to overcome difficult things. There's no right or wrong way to -- there's no timeline for grief. We know this but in my own journey, I realized that I had to do quite a few things. It wasn't just this lightbulb thing that one day I wasn't joyful, and then the next day I was. I was that way for the rest of my life. No, I have really hard days.

TAMMY: Do you? Even now? So you're not always joyful?

HANNAH: No! My goodness, no.

TAMMY: So, you've got to fight for joy. You're working for it. You're fighting for it. You're believing for it. It doesn't just come naturally?

HANNAH: No! Not at all. It's almost like I have to study it too. I have to study what joy might look like in my life. Yes, that goes with the word. That goes with reading devotionals. But there was a time in my life when I needed counseling. I needed godly counsel. I needed to surround myself with godly women who would speak life into me. So there's just so many outside things that we can do. But I know that joy is possible for every single person regardless of personality, regardless of circumstance, because the Bible says so. And because the Word of God says that, it's the truth. So all of us have the opportunity to walk in joy. But yeah, there might have to be some steps we have to take to get there.

TAMMY: I love how you said you have to study it. So, I want to talk about your book. That's why we're here. I love this! I love it so much. It's a great devotional. *Goodness Gracious*. You've got "90 Unfiltered Devotions for This Sometimes Too Serious Life." Just love the title! Sometimes I look at a book and I don't know if anybody else is like this, but I go through the contents first. I look at the titles. Sometimes I'm like, oh, I want to read this one. It says, "Choose Joy." Girl, please! Tell me about that. You have so many, Hannah, so many great stories in this devotion. So many funny, funny, funny stories. But, tell us if you can remember that one, even just where you start. Girl, please.

HANNAH: Well, there was a time in my life when that quote of "Choose Joy" was so gagworthy to me. Because it was like what? Do you just pick it like a booger? I mean, what is that? That's ridiculous! I'm not feeling joyful right now. But then I'd go back and I look and yes, that time of my life where that phrase was so gagworthy was a time in my life where I was struggling. I was going through stuff mentally, and emotionally. Life was not good. And honestly, I probably wasn't living in the perfect will of God either. So there's really no possible way to be in a total state of joy in walking in joy whenever we're not walking with the Lord.

So I remembered that. When I started reading the word and and looking at what the Bible says about joy and how it is a fruit of the spirit, and to embrace that in our everyday life, then something that used to be so gagworthy to me became noteworthy. So we do have to choose it, sometimes when we don't feel like it. Just like we have to choose to wake up every day when we're exhausted and read the Word of God. It is a choice.

So lots of times we have to do things that we're not comfortable with and it's difficult. And sometimes, it requires a lot of self-reflection and asking the Lord to uproot things within me that don't belong. I know that there's a block that I'm hitting right here when it comes to me wanting to experience joy. But Lord, if it's something within my character or within my heart that doesn't belong, go ahead and do some pruning. And when the Lord prunes, he cuts and it hurts like pruning is not fun. But then it breeds beautiful fruit in the process of it.

TAMMY: I love that perspective! We have run out of time. Can you believe it? I could sit with you forever and just have a great conversation. I'm so grateful for this, the stage, is having great conversations with what feels like friends. There are so many, we didn't even get to them. But that's the beauty -- it's in the book. So they can get the book, the devotion and you will absolutely love it. I'm so glad that we were able to touch on just a few of those things today because God wants you to live a joy-filled life.

But there are some people in the world right now who are struggling to find joy. They're really suffering and they're having a hard time. The beautiful thing is that I think if we make a choice and a decision today to come alongside them, we might be able to offer them just a little bit more hope and a little bit more joy. Watch this and I'll show you how.

Transition Roll-in:

ANNOUNCER: Earth is often referred to as the blue planet due to its vast oceans that cover over two-thirds of the globe. Yet, only three percent of the entire earth's water is considered fresh. The scarcity of fresh water is one of the main reasons that women and children in remote areas are forced to collect water from unsafe sources.

JOHN: I'm here in South Sudan where we just got through speaking with a mother named Mary. Mary came from a very distant village to here because of this water source. She considered this a good water source because, in her village, she had no water. What Mary doesn't realize is that this water that is here is actually toxic to her children. And she's lost two children from waterborne illness now. As heartbreaking as it is, this water is better than no water. But this water will kill them. With your help, we can make a difference.

With your help with Water for LIFE, we can assure this village, and villages like what Mary came from, will not have to worry about waterborne illness. They can have fresh clean water through Water for LIFE.

Studio appeal:

TAMMY: You've just seen the heartbreaking reality of what so many families are facing. Millions of people in remote areas just like South Sudan have no access to clean water. They're forced to collect water from unsafe sources every single day. And while it may look safe, it's just not. It's filled with contamination and deadly waterborne illness. I can't even imagine losing a child because of the water they drink.

But for these families, that's their story. And we hear story after story of heartbreaking loss, just like this one from Mary, who lost her two precious children because of the water that she gave them, and it was toxic. It's devastating. It's not just Mary, it's countless others. I can't imagine the pain that that must bring to these mothers.

But here's the good news! We can do something about it. We can go into these villages, just like Mary's, and drill them a well, a water well that will last for a lifetime, about 70 years on average. That one act of love and kindness can change everything. When you remove fear, fear of sickness, and fear of death, life begins to thrive.

Hope takes root. So today I'm asking, just like John did, could you spare a little something to help these precious people who are hanging on by a thread? Your gift will literally give them water for life. And I'm telling you, it will answer so many prayers that they have. How do I know it? Because I've sat with many of these families myself, just like John. When they pray, they pray for God's provision.

So today, we can be his hands, we can be his feet, we can be his heart as we step in to help provide that water. Here's how that breaks down. Each well on average costs \$4,800 to drill, and that well will provide fresh, clean water for up to a thousand people for a lifetime. That means your gift of \$48 will provide water for ten people, 144 will provide water for 30, and for \$4,800, that will provide life-saving water for an entire village. It will completely transform their lives. I know there's so many needs in the world right now. I know it, and it can feel overwhelming to know exactly where to give.

But I want you to know that after working for this ministry for over 18 years, I have seen firsthand that they do what they say they're going to do, and their promise is good. It's sealed. Together, we can help save lives and bring hope all around the world to desperate people in need right now. I promise you, lives will be changed, and villages will thrive again. They will all be given a better chance at life just because of clean water.

This is our last week of our *Water for Life* emphasis. So would you go online, and give us a call today? Give whatever you can give. Whatever gift you can give to give to this mission, *Water for Life*. And when you do, we'd love to send you Hannah Crews's devotional, *Goodness Gracious*. Just let us know you'd like it and we'll get it right out to you.

2025 WFL Cause spot:

Announcer: Every day, thousands of lives are lost to waterborne disease, and nearly half of those are children under the age of five. Through Mission: Water for LIFE you can give mothers hope and children a future as we provide clean, life-giving water for thousands of children and their families before it's 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 Dr. Don Colbert's new book *Spiritual Health Zone*. Discover the key to living in divine health as you find a roadmap to adding joy, peace, and years to your life.*

With your gift of \$100 or more, you may request the "He Restores My Soul" candle set. This decorative candle and match set will inspire you to remember the restoring presence of Jesus, the true light of the world.

Finally, please consider a gift of \$1200 to help provide water for 250 people for a gift of \$4800 to help sponsor a complete well, and request our new bronze sculpture, "Lion of Judah" inspired by Revelation 5:5.

This is the last week! Please call, write, or make your gift online!

Studio good-bye:

TAMMY: Hope you're going online and giving the best gift that you possibly could give today. You must know it's going to make an enormous difference. For whatever gift that you can give, I want to send you Hannah's new devotional, *Goodness Gracious*. I know it will mean a lot to you. You will love it. It will make you laugh.

And remember, this is the last week that we're doing *Water for Life*, so make sure to give whatever you can do, and let's make a huge difference right now.

Hannah, I have loved this time together. It went so fast. It was so fast! Please come back! Please come back. Where can people find you?

HANNAH: They can find me on Instagram. So you can go to Instagram and find me at HannahCrews.blog on Instagram. I have a website, HannahCrewsblog.com. Yeah! I love to connect with people on the internet. It's so much fun.

TAMMY: It is fun, I love it! Listen, our joy doesn't come from perfect circumstances. It comes from a perfect Savior. Life's journey won't be without its challenges, but through it all, God is with us, using whatever it takes to bring us healing, even through humor. He longs to lift us out of the ashes.

So today, embrace the joy that's available to you even in the midst of life's messiest moments. God bless you and we'll see you next time on *Life Today*.