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Week 35: Christmas Shoes & Smiles

Tammy Trent

Meshali Mitchell

Studio discussion:

TAMMY: Hello, everybody! Welcome to *Life Today*. I'm Tammy Trent, and I'm so glad you're here. But maybe today you're here watching with a quiet ache in your heart, carrying something broken that you've tried to bury or fix on your own. You've prayed, you've hope, but maybe you feel stuck in the rubble of disappointment, of hurt or unanswered questions. Can I gently remind you of something? God hasn't given up on your story. He's not afraid of the mess. He's not done working. In fact, what feels like the end might actually be the beginning of restoration. Not just a patch job or a quick fix, but something deep like soul level healing, where the broken places don't just get repaired, but they get repurposed for beauty, for freedom, and deeper intimacy with Jesus.

And that's exactly the kind of transformation we're talking about today. My guest, Meshali Mitchell knows that kind of healing firsthand. For years, she's captured stories behind the lens of her camera. But in her new book, *Restored*, she opens up for the first time to her own story. It's raw, it's real, and it's filled with hope for anyone who's ready to stop hiding and start healing, in Jesus name. Welcome, Meshali. I'm so glad you're here.

MESHALI: Thank you so much for having me. I'm so honored to be here and excited to be with you. Thank you so much.

TAMMY: Oh, I love it. We know a lot of the same friends, so it's been fun to have this connection just to actually have for ourselves for the first time. And you're an incredible photographer. Let me just say that. You've shot everybody -- with a camera that is!

MESHALI: You have to clarify that. Yeah.

TAMMY: Exactly! Yes. And I'm so excited to finally meet you. I'm going to start up at the top. And I want to rewind. So take me back, take all of us back to that little girl growing up in a small town of Arkansas.

MESHALI: So I was born and raised in small town Arkansas, in a minister's family. So I was raised in the ways of the Lord. We had a very nontraditional ministry family. We weren't -- I wasn't a pastor's kid, I was an evangelist's kid. So my dad traveled 48 weeks a year my whole life preaching the gospel and still does to this day. He's my favorite evangelist, a great evangelist. So from a ministry home, born and raised. I always say though that, you know, ministry families, that doesn't exempt you from pain.

So I had a great upbringing, good parents, great hometown and all that, but when I was 12, I faced what we call in the book my first cataclysmic crash and had an experience. My first experience with trauma and a wounding that really crushed my spirit. It was the divorce of my parents, but it impacted me in a deep way being the oldest of three in a ministry family. Soon after that, and I'm kind of giving you the CliffsNotes version, I faced some sexual trauma. I always say that those two events in my young life, especially in developmental years, really impacted my soul and crushed my spirit in a deep, impactful way.

So instead of healing, we really didn't have the tools during that time. I didn't really know what to do with my trauma or my pain. Instead of healing, I hid. I began to hide behind a mask of perfectionism, and I really masked my pain in order to survive.

So through my teen years, I was really kind of coping and surviving with this deep internal pain, continuing to serve the Lord but wasn't living the John 10:10 abundant life that Jesus promised us in John 10:10.

TAMMY: You probably didn't know how to really, though. I mean, you're hiding stuff. You don't know who to talk to. You don't have the tools. It's like, how do I even know what abundant life is? I'm just surviving.

MESHALI: That's right, I was surviving. I was so young at the time, too. And, really counseling and all of that was really taboo during my teen years, especially in the church. Thank the Lord, there's a new narrative around mental health and counseling in the church today, and the Lord's doing so much. I've been a beneficiary of that.

But yeah, through my teen years, like I said, I was coping and surviving. Instead of healing and, you know, the Lord was doing a work in me, but I was I was really struggling with, you know, hiding behind perfectionism.

So I went on to Bible school and thought, Bible school may heal me and fix me.

TAMMY: I've been there, been there too.

MESHALI: And may heal these internal wounds that I was dealing with privately. So much shame, so much anxiety, so much panic. And the more I hid, the worse those problems got. So I went to Bible school thinking that may fix me. And surprise, surprise, it didn't bring the healing, the deep healing that I needed so desperately. So, like I said, CliffsNotes version is I got to a place. You know, desperation is really a gift. In hindsight, I look back and I was desperate. Pain demands to be felt, and I say I was bleeding out in my life. I got to my mid 20s, I was putting Band-Aids over bullet holes, I say, and, I was bleeding out. And now hindsight is 2020. I look back and that desperation was a mercy, and I began to seek. I came to the end of my rope emotionally.

TAMMY: Still at Bible college?

MESHALI: I had graduated from Bible school, and I was just kind of getting into life. But it was, like I said, those rooms of my heart that had not been dealt with.

TAMMY: How old would you say you were at that point?

MESHALI: I was around 25 when I just got to a place of desperation in my life, emotionally. I so desperately -- I knew what Jesus promised and I believed his word was true, the thief comes to steal, kill, and destroy, John 10:10, but I have come that you might have life. And not just life, but life more abundantly. I think we mystify, in the church today, what abundance is. But Jesus talks there about a soul abundance that he's promised us, despite our external circumstances. So when I laid my head on my pillow at night, that internal narrative from those old wounds would just be, call them tapes in my head, would just play so loud. And like I said, I was bleeding out in relationships and really just my way of thinking, I knew it wasn't healthy. And so, that desperation served me well, and I sought out and for the very first time, I began to seek healing.

So, yeah, my first step in that was finding a great Christian counselor. And I begin that process of healing.

TAMMY: Did you ever find yourself feeling like restoration, healing, working through this is possible for everybody else, but it's not for me? Did you ever struggle with that?

MESHALI: Yeah. Being raised in church and in ministry, I sat in many conferences, many church services where that shame narrative -- you know, I remember looking around at these people that were being delivered and set free and touched by the Lord and the shame narrative, that trauma narrative played so loudly in my head that I believed that restoration was possible for everyone but me. When I was really honest with myself, I felt like my situation was too broken. I was too far gone. Mental illness was too big of a monster. So I believed, instead of the Kingdom narrative over my life, believing in partnering with the truth and the kingdom, I believed for so long these lies that played on a loop over my head.

At that time in my life, I was more partnered with the lies than I was with the Kingdom narrative.

TAMMY: That is key. Everything you just said right there, because it's the truth. So many of us stay partnered with the lie, with something that's not the truth, with the trauma, with the shame and everything that it speaks over our lives. We just stay in that.

So how did you change that narrative, like trauma narrative to the truth narrative?

MESHALI: So I came to a place in my life, mid-twenties, where I began to apply the James five principle: confess your sins to God and confess your faults. There's a horizontal and a vertical -- there's two things going on there, and I begin to confess my faults to someone else, my shortcomings, my struggles. I stopped hiding behind that mask of perfectionism, and I began to be set free. So in my personal story, in mid 20s, I began to seek healing through a great Christian counselor. I began to get plugged in at my local church; really, really plugged in to the local community where I was walking with other strong believers that surrounded me and really knew me. That's a major key too; not just hiding behind the mask of perfectionism or religion or all those things we try to hide behind to make us feel okay but really allowing people into my hurts, my struggles, my shortcomings. That's when the Word of God works. So that's when I began to feel and experience, actually experience healing and this abundant life that Jesus promised.

TAMMY: And real freedom. Don't you think like -- I was raised in the church as well. So I think when we have things, struggles, sin nature, whatever it is, you're like, I'm going to carry this by myself because I don't want anyone else to know I'm not in a good place. Because I should know right from wrong, I should know, in other words, how to go to the Scripture and I should be able to lean on that and know exactly what God's instructions are for me to handle this right now. But I'm not doing that well. But I don't want anybody to know. I think that's even that season of hiding, for me or for you or for anybody watching where you're like, I can handle this alone. I'm too ashamed to tell somebody that I'm struggling today with this. Or even mental health.

MESHALI: Yeah, the monster of shame will keep you so isolated as long as you let it. And so I was on that, in the book, I talk about a hamster wheel of perfectionism and performance. And

so tired. I was so tired. Like I said, that desperation now that I came to that I thought was so awful really served as a mercy. It was God's mercy that drew me in to a real, like you said earlier, a real freedom and a real healing process.

TAMMY: So tell me, let's move from all of that and what God was doing in your life through counseling and in setting it all out there, and community was walking with you, healing was coming, freedom was tasting like it had never felt before, and then God, as you were thinking about a home and I want to buy my home, and maybe a first home as a single girl, like what does that look like? And you got a call one day and someone tells you, you've got to check out this, what was it, a gorgeous brand-new built home? Oh, no! Oh, no! Tell us about that.

MESHALI: No, quite the opposite. Yeah, I was in search of my first home in 2018, and a friend of mine who's a believer that went to church with me, was a realtor. I began to talk to her about it. And so we began the search for this home that I was looking for. And I had my sights set, I'll say on something a lot newer and move-in ready and shinier but God had another plan he had in Ephesians 3:20 that he was pulling off, and I had no idea. My friend led me to this old 1800s farmhouse that she wanted me to look at. And at first I thought, oh, no, I don't have time for this. This is way beyond what I could ever accomplish or do. But, she calls me, I was on a photography job in Nashville, and says, "Michelle, I really want you to take a look at this house. My heart feels drawn to it for you. And I don't know why. Just take a look." So we FaceTimed and she shows me through FaceTime, this 1800s farmhouse that needed to be loved back to life. It had been owned by this precious family; had owned it and loved it, and it had gone down over the years and needed somebody to come in and restore it room by room, piece by piece. So I, purchased the house. I'm not a risk taker, but I made the jump. I purchased the home and began to -- I never knew it would become anything. Never knew at the time it would be a book. I just felt drawn, felt compelled to purchase this old house that so many people had passed on. But when I saw it, it was like I saw what could be and should be. I say, just like the Holy Spirit sees us, he sees beyond what we are into what we could be and should be. I saw that. I'll never be able to explain it because even now, I look back at pictures and I think, what was I thinking? It was almost like I had Holy Spirit blinders on or something, and purchased the home. I always say, I wish it could have been an HGTV moment, move that bus. Everything

overnight was restored. But that wasn't the house's story and that hasn't been my story. So I begin to go in and I began to gut each room, room by room, piece by piece, going in and, making all things new at the house. So, yes, that's been the journey of the house restoration.

TAMMY: Tell me about one of your greatest discoveries. And here's the thing. Going back, like you had no idea what God was up to in 2018, but I love that he's never lost. I love that he always has a plan. And it's always different than what we think. It usually is. I mean, I might have pieces of it, but it ends up, the end result, the destiny is always different and it's always better than I ever imagined. So 2018, you buy this house but God was up to something, right? He knew. He placed you in this house for a specific reason and a purpose because he wasn't done with you yet. And I think all of our lives, we're on a journey processing constantly. And he knew that there was still more work to be done in your life piece by piece, room by room, layer by layer. So tell me one of the greatest moments, maybe, that you might have had while you were restoring this 140-some-year-old home, back to life again that had purpose and it had value and it had worse. Did God have a moment or -- did you have an encounter where you're like, oh! That right there.

MESHALI: There's been so many moments, Tammy. I call them in the book, I call them God winks of just confirmations of hey, I'm in this. On days you feel alone, I'm in this. So one of the biggest stories that I love to tell that really has resonated with listeners, and when I'm on podcasts and all that, is that about the third or fourth day into the first week that I own the home, I walked in one day and we've been doing so much work. I mean, there had been so many projects going on, and there was a contractor that called my name from the back bathroom. And, he said, "Meshali, can you come back here and take a look at this?" I could hear his voice, "I want you to come back and look and tell me where you want to go from here." So I walk back to the bathroom, and in the book I call this "Layers of Life." But he had peeled back this old 1800s farmhouse bathroom. All the layers, all the walls, all the sheetrock, all the layers. He pulled it all the way back and he said, "I've ripped everything back to the studs." And I could hear his voice, but it was almost like -- it was almost like a movie. Like his voice was becoming muffled and it was like, the Lord and I we're standing in the bathroom. And I look around and it's the wallpaper, the same exact wallpaper in this current house as the

home that I grew up in that I've shared that held a lot of hurtful memories for me and some really deep trauma, specifically, the bathroom in ways. And so, in that moment, I'm standing there looking, these memories are flashing right before my eyes and in my heart. And the Lord spoke to me, not an audible voice, but in my spirit. I felt this unction, I was there with you then, I'm here with you now, and I'm making all things new. I'm restoring your life.

And so I stood there, 2018, you know, hammer in hand. I'm looking around and it's like I'm a little girl, but I'm an adult woman all in one moment. The Holy Spirit is so powerful that he knows our past, present, our future all at the same time. And he was speaking to my heart, deep healing, deep healing. And so I stood there, and was reminded that the Lord is restoration. When I look at the word *restored*, I see restory-ed. That's what I felt in that moment was, I'm giving you a kingdom narrative. I'm giving you a new story, not the trauma narrative that you've believed over your life, but partner with my kingdom narrative. I'm making all things new, Meshali.

So in that moment, we put new sheetrock around -- even that physical act for me, putting sheetrock in the bathroom and painting it a beautiful alabaster white, it was a God wink, for sure, and a moment that I'll never forget.

TAMMY: You know what I can't help but to think? Is that that home, God knowing the big picture, that home has been prepared for you. Was prepared for you through the prayers, through the saints that lived in it before. Now you are going through these layers of your life, and you, I believe, are now preparing that home for somebody else. The walls have been changed, they've been prayed over. Healing has come, freedom has come, restoration has taken place. And when God sees that your time, your assignment is over and you move on to the next season of your life, that home will now become a setup for the next person that walks in and needs to know instantly the presence of God, instantly, the freedom of Jesus, instantly his restoration that can only come in that place in those rooms, because they've been covered by the blood of Jesus from day one. That's a healing home.

MESHALI: I love that so much! A healing home. I love that so much.

TAMMY: It's a healing home and you've been a part of it. And look, I'm so glad you're here. What a great conversation. I wish we had more time. There are people that I've got to spend time with not too long ago that needed a lot of healing in their life. We're talking today about restoration and transformations. I want you to see something that's going to be hard to see but the beauty of it is what has come from the gifts of people that have helped transform the life of this little girl and has restored her back to wholeness. What she feels, where she wants to live, the abundant life she feels, the wholeness in her life.

So take a moment and watch this with me, and then we'll come out on the other side and we'll wrap it up.

Transition roll-in: [Victorina update]

On the mission field

JOHN: So we are here in Angola on the way to a village where Victorina has had a life transformation through Christmas Smiles. We're talking about a beautiful little girl who was born with such a tragic cleft palate, one of the worst I'd ever seen, that's been a two-year endeavor that has been with many ups and downs. She was so malnourished. She had wounds on her body that were so infected. She literally spent three months in the hospital before she could have her surgery.

ASHTON: I just remember thinking, Lord, if this is your will, you have to make it happen because there were so many barriers. God was just faithful and I'm excited to see how she looks today.

JOHN: The first time I saw Victorina, I saw her off in the distance on this huge granite boulder with her and two women pounding out what little bit of cornmeal that they had to make a meal. When I got up here my heart just sank for her. We left, we went back to the village that night where we were camping, and after a long exchange of the kids it was time to go to bed, and Ashton gets up and she walks over and she put her hands on

Victorina's cheeks. Ashton was trying to lovingly tell her how beautiful she was. Victorina ran off crying, devastated. Why? Because she wanted to dwell in the shadow. She wanted to be hidden. She didn't want to be seen. She was ashamed.

She was literally in a prison of despair that so broke Ashton's heart that she spent the rest of the night crying in our tent. She asked me, she said, "Dad, isn't there anything we can do for Victorina?"

It began a journey that took hundreds of people, hundreds of hours, and multiple trips to make happen. And now, it has been a day of celebration. It has been a day of miracles. It has been a day of wonder and laughter. Here's a little girl who just two years ago had no friends. And as I'm watching her today in class and she's raising her hand and answering the questions the teacher in her multiplication, she goes along and she introduces each one of her friends to me by name, playing their dance game or kicking the soccer ball.

Victorina has moved from a prison to an open land of possibilities simply through your generosity and your kindness and your compassion through *Christmas Shoes and Smiles*. Victorina is an example of thousands of children around the world that we can help this year with a simple surgery. There are so many ways that we can bring smiles to families' lives through giving to Christmas smiles.

End of video

Studio appeal:

TAMMY: I am so invested in that story. Oh, my goodness, what an incredible journey! The life of one little girl named Victorina. And to now see her restoration that came from this one surgery, it's almost hard to put it into words.

What we just watched together, what we just witnessed, was a total miracle. Victorina has truly been set free. You could see it. Her smile tells a story of what love can do, what hope can do, what you can do. Ultimately, God the Father sees her. He has never taken his eyes off of her.

And he sent John and he sent Ashton, and he's sent you. Your prayers, the gifts, the compassion of people just like you has changed her world forever. Victorina's story is a living testimony of what happens when people come together and say, yes, I want to help. Count me in. And now we have the opportunity to say yes again, because there are so many children around the world right now hiding in the shadows, waiting for help, waiting for healing, waiting for someone to see them.

You might not realize this because I didn't. But something as small as a cleft palate can mean life or death for these children if it's left untreated. So this is what your giving will do today. It costs us just \$500 to help provide corrective surgery for a child, and provide them with a brand new smile. Would you consider giving that today? Would you consider giving \$1,000 to provide surgery for two children? This time of year, we're also seeking to provide shoes for 150,000 children. That's incredible! Who have never owned a new pair of shoes. Can you imagine that? But we want to get it to them in time for Christmas. So your gift today of \$36 will help provide ten children with their very first pair of shoes, \$72 will provide for 20, and \$180 will help us secure and ship Christmas shoes for 50 children in time for the holidays.

I want to invite you right now to say yes with me. Come on, we can do this. Please don't hesitate. If you're feeling led to give, go online, give us a call right now, because these children simply cannot wait another day. You may not meet them face-to-face today, but you will know in this moment you helped change a life.

CS&S Cause 2025:

***ANNOUNCER:** Poverty is a killer, and because of it, children needlessly suffer not only from lack of food and clean water, but also from a lack of things we take for granted, such as a healthy smile or a protective pair of shoes.*

Far too many children living in extreme poverty have never owned a pair of shoes. And while that may seem minor, walking with bare feet puts them at risk of painful infections, injury, and life-threatening diseases.

But this Christmas, you can bring hope and healing. Your gift today will 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 for 20, \$180 will help provide shoes for 50, and a gift of \$500 will help provide a cleft surgery, restoring a child's smile forever.

As a thank you for your gift of support, be sure to request the beautifully crafted yellow crystal shoe ornament, a treasure to display each Christmas. With your gift of \$100 or more, you may request this keepsake set featuring four of LIFE's colorful crystal shoe ornaments. Finally, please consider a gift of \$1,000 or more to help provide over 275 pairs of shoes or two children with corrective smile surgeries, and you may request the beautiful bronze sculpture, "Lion of Judah."

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

Studio good-bye:

TAMMY: I hope you're going online and giving the best gift that you can give today. Please know it changes so many lives forever. And I want to be a part of that kind of change. So just do whatever you can do.

And let me just say, Meshali, I'm so glad you were here. I've loved meeting you. I've loved this time. It was so short.

MESHALI: It's so mutual. It's my honor.

TAMMY: Tell me where can people find you, and the book?

MESHALI: They can find me at Meshali.co, and then all social media platforms. It's just @Meshali, M-e-s-h-a-l-i. The book is available where all books are sold. Thank you so much.

TAMMY: It's gorgeous. I'm so proud of you. What a great journey for your life. I'm so proud of you doing incredible things for the Kingdom of God. Thank you for being here. Thank you for being here. We'll see you next time on *Life Today*.