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Week 36

James: Oh, you're so nice! Thank you! You make us feel welcome and we welcome you to *LIFE Today*. I'm James Robison. Betty and I are thrilled to share this time with you.

We want to say to all of our Australian friends and our European friends and to our Canadians friends and the U.S. -- but especially today to our Canadian friends because we've got a Canadian that is so gifted and such a blessing that she has just blessed people all over the world. Her name is Ann Voskamp and she has written a book called *One Thousand Gifts*. It became a New York Times bestseller. And she's holding a nest with two bird eggs in it. I may have to ask her exactly what does that represent?

And then she's got the devotional book, and this is just -- this is new -- this is really good! -- *One Thousand Gifts*. This is absolutely phenomenal.

Would you welcome Ann, and Canadians we're so glad we've got her. We love you! Thank you for loving us and receiving us. Welcome Ann Voskamp to *LIFE Today*.

Ann, we're glad to have you. I want you to look at this. Let everybody see. Here you are from Canada in Texas. Put that boot up here where everybody can see. Absolutely beautiful! Now you wear those in Canada too? Right?

Ann: No, I actually these are much too loud for my personality.

James: So you did this for Texas?

Ann: I only do this for speaking. When I go speaking, these are my speaking boots that I want fire in my bones for Jesus.

[Laughter]

And if you're going to be wearing boots and your knees knocking, you might as well be wearing the right kind of boots. Right? They're actually called grace boots. I'm talking about the message of grace. These are good boots to put on. Actually, we spent when I was about four, four and a half, we lived for six months outside of Amarillo near Hereford, Texas. So this gives me rights to pull on the Texas boots.

James: It definitely does. Really, your journey and the *One Thousand Gifts*, I guess started when you were pretty young with something that happened. I think a lot of people all over the world, many of them because many here in the studio are familiar with what you write because you just have an amazing gift.

My assistant is an editor and a writer, and she was commenting to me today, "You just cannot believe how gifted Ann is -- the word power, the pictures, what you see and what you feel." But you really, I guess, would have to say the very fact that you even write is in itself a miracle and that you would talk about *One Thousand Gifts*. Tell our viewers what that came from.

Ann: My first memory is of my sister at 18 months; she was crushed and killed in our farm driveway. My mom and I were standing outside at the back porch. Mom just had a baby who was three weeks old. We were getting ready to go to the doctor's office for a visit for that baby and a truck didn't see my sister and crushed her.

James: You and your mom.

Ann: Mm-hmn. And mom ran then to get my dad. I remember the police coming. And the truck driver -- mom actually, the truck driver didn't realize... it was a service truck driver who had come to bring product for us there at the farm. We hadn't called him and when he left, he didn't realize he'd run over my sister. My mom had to flag him down and he came into the house and he was crying, waiting for the police to come. He said he hadn't seen her.

As I said in *One Thousand Gifts*, I can't not see her in that moment. They say trauma jolts your memory and for me that is the first memory. So fears really formed me right from the beginning. I had an ulcer by the time I was seven; was cutting myself through my teen years. And by the time I went to university, I was experiencing full blown anxiety attacks and they diagnosed me with agoraphobia. So *One Thousand Gifts* really is my journey; how do you deal with loss? How do you deal with suffering and pain? How do you trust that God is good and that this world is full of glory and his grace when what you've experienced doesn't feel like grace at all? So it really is a wrestle for joy and trusting the character of God.

So in my, I guess that's 2009, a friend had dared me just before Christmas time when that list season, when you're writing out already a million different lists. She dared me, "Could you write down a list of 1,000 things you love?" And as I started to -- it was a

dare. Who is not going to take a dare? So I grabbed a pen and started to write down 1,000 gifts --

James: Was she actually saying this with a hope for healing that she saw?

Ann: She wasn't. It was just a dare -- a whim. I'd been baptized when I was 16, had gone to church every Sunday. I was raised in a non-Christian home but I'd gone to church on my own. I got saved at a Good News Bible Club. But a lot of my thinking and understanding of God was still cerebral. Did I really trust him? Or was an actually living practically, theism, that while I said I trusted God, my life was bound up in fear all the time.

James: My wife was too. She was definitely born again but filled with fear while she is living with a highly visible evangelist. But it was in many ways destroying her.

Ann: Inside and you can put on the facade that you've got it all together and you're smiling and it's okay but inside you're terrified. And not living like this, with your hands closed tight. And how do you get to the place of I'm going to live openhanded and trust that whatever God gives me, it's good. He's going to use it to shape me to be more like Jesus.

So this dare to write one thousand gifts, it's sort of like walking, taking a step and not really realizing you're walking into a door, in a room that's going to change your life in ways I had never imagined. Because really, writing out one thousand gifts, 1,000 things I love, it really is writing all the ways he loves me. It's writing -- counting all the ways God loves me. And realizing common grace, it was personal. God loved me enough for the sun to rise today. His mercies are new every morning.

James: Did you begin to see it that way after you started writing?

Ann: Probably by the time I got between 70 and 100, all the sudden everything -- it was like waking up. It was slowing down.

Betty: What was taking place too was God was healing your heart, your broken heart.

Ann: Completely! We have six kids, we home school, we're farming; my life is happening fast all of the time. I'm trying to get meals on the table and off the table and kids into books and chores done. But leaving that gratitude journal out on the counter and picking up a pen and writing down: There's sunshine today. There is a blue Jay up in the tree. I was slowing down to see the world was overflowing. God is -- he can't

contain all of his grace. It is overflowing. It started -- I started to see that what was in scripture was happening around me all of the time. It was a personal love relationship. He was pursuing and relentless, this hound of Heaven. And it wasn't about the gifts. You start to see through the gifts to the heart of the giver and that the giver wanted relationship with you.

So the one thousand gifts, I didn't really -- it was a dare I didn't know that it was going to change my life. Perfect love casts out all fear. When I started to write the gifts and see how much he loved me, the fear began to fall away. You can't be terrified at the same time you're giving thanks to him. So it was this opening up of my hand and saying, you know what? My stress was really advertising the unreliability of God and I didn't want to be an advertisement for the unreliability of God.

I'm going back and looking, what is at the center of scripture? Jesus, before he goes to the cross, the last supper. He takes the bread and gives thanks for it. And that word give thanks, it is eucharisteo in the Greek and it envelopes charis: Grace, and chara: Joy. So could I take in the dark moments and count it as grace and give thanks for it there in his joy? The joy was always possible in the moment that I could go ahead and give thanks.

So realizing that eucharisteo always preceded the miracle; that when I gave thanks, I could see that God was enough, that God was going to meet whatever need I had. It's realizing that all things are from him, through him, and to him; everything is being sustained by him all of the time. And waking up to that and slowing down enough to give him thanks, bless the Lord, o my soul. This is the way we get to live, blessing God. The incredible humbling privilege that we could bless God, bring anything into his presence.

Scripture says that in his presence is fullness of joy. So if we're all seeking joy the only way to find that is in his presence. How do you get to his presence? Enter into his courts with thanksgiving. But thanksgiving was the way I came into his presence. Scripture talks about to pray without ceasing. The only way to pray without ceasing is to be giving thanks to him all of the time.

James: Conversing with him -- talking to him all the time.

Ann: Communing with him all of the time.

James: Talking and listening to him. It's a two way.

Betty: When you're doing this you realize that we're always on his mind and in his heart. And he wants to express himself through us.

Ann: Exactly! All the time! Romans 8:32, which has become my life verse: He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also, along with him graciously give us all things? And if he gave us Christ everything else, all the other gifts -- if everything is from him and through him and to him, really, the counting of one thousand gifts is really giving thanks for one, Christ alone. But if he gave us Christ, everything else, he's already earned trust, he's given us Jesus to sustain us.

James: And in Him all the fullness of the godhead dwells bodily where you can see it and you can see the manifestation of his glory everywhere you look. I don't really understand how church folks act like things are so dull. How in the world? It is exciting if you can see it, but you really do have to see it.

You began to write so you're seeing it and what you're doing, and I've got to ask about the devotional. When you're trying to take some of these things, you're taking them in your devotional, you're trying to take people somewhere. What is it that is beginning to happen that happened to you and will happen to people when they begin to see these things and their eyes are opened? How is this helping them because I know this is only reason you went over to the devotional; it's the only reason you have your blog.

By the way, if they want to find your blog, where do they go?

Ann: They can go to AnnVoskamp.com will get you to the blog.

James: And they can kind of communicate?

Ann: And if you go to the Facebook page we are actually -- actually, at the Facebook page we actually have a daily joy dare. So we prompt you to say, look for three gifts -- these three gifts today because some people, once you start, for me personally, once I started I couldn't stop. You start to see his glory everywhere. You're writing it down on little scraps of paper -- I had multiple journals everywhere.

But other people really struggle. They say, "Give me a prompt. Help me to look for something. What am I supposed to be seeing today?" So we give them three prompts every day. Which has been great to see families say, "Around the table, we used to have fighting and bickering around our dinner table but now we sit down and say, 'So, did you find the three gifts we were looking for today? How did your joy dare go?'"

So it is opening, taking kids that are constantly ungrateful, it's our default. It's all of our defaults, we're born sinful; right? So go ahead and cultivate an attitude of gratitude in our families, as a whole family. So the joy dare is there on the Facebook page; families going ahead and writing out their one thousand gifts together. We have letters from people in Australia, they plastered their walls and their families are writing out one thousand gifts together.

James: I want to just say to everybody here in the U.S. and in Australia, look, you've received this couple, this U.S. couple up in Canada, you've just been so loving to us. I want to say to all the people in the U.S. receive this Canadian girl with all your heart, and then she's got on some Texas-like boots. But receive her and open your hearts and your homes to her -- and in Australia, and in Europe.

And let's go -- you have -- is it on your web site? I know it is in the bookstores but you have, because my assistant showed it to me today because I love to see the beautiful things God's created. I'm a photographer of -- I really think you were remarkable, all the things you see. You take pictures of things you see and you put these beautiful pictures with the little devotionals... what's that called?

Ann: Well, we have out of *One Thousand Gifts* people wanted to see, because the blog has photographs every day. I'm taking pictures and writing out our story constantly on the blog. So people said, "Could we have the pictures from the blog interwoven with *One Thousand Gifts*?" So it's called selections from *One Thousand Gifts*.

James: It's beautiful! It's really well done.

Ann: It was just -- I'm not a professional photographer by any means but I really believe that taking a camera is the way you frame up your life. You're going to subtract out things and focus. It's whatever is pure, whatever good, whatever is lovely -- looking for light in the glory of God. And looking at "ugly things," (in quotations,) but from a different angle, that can be a beautiful thing.

So it is very -- for me -- it is my quiet time with the Lord too and it is shifting my perspective that joy is a function of gratitude and gratitude is a function of perspective. So if you can shift the way you're seeing things and how you're seeing things, you can get to a grateful place, which will get you to a joyful place. So for me, I'm just having fun with light and I don't know what I'm doing!

James: Do you like the way she expresses herself? I love it! Does the bird and the eggs have any --

Ann: Well, actually, in Selections, the other little gift book, it's the little girl holding. We wanted actually -- I told Zondervan, by the time we got to the devotional, which is the third book, I wanted the bird to be flying off a hand. But Zondervan couldn't find -

James: Here the egg, the bird...

Ann: Exactly! Zondervan couldn't find that so actually Levi, which is I was going to say which number he is and make sure I get it right, he's number four. Levi brought a little bird in and said, "Momma, I found a little bird outside." I said, "Just a moment. If we got -- do you think we could get that bird to fly off a hand?"

[Laughter]

So we had a -- actually, the pork chops were on for lunch and we burnt the pork chops hoping... trying to take a picture of this bird fly off her hand, which it wouldn't do. So we sent it to Zondervan and said, "This is the idea."

And Zondervan said, "It's perfect! Let's use this!"

So but going to the devotional is to take you deeper after *One Thousand Gifts*. How do I live this out? So it slows you down to anti-anxiety grace, amazing grace. So it is day-by-day, how do I live out grace? And at the back, to have a place to write out your one thousand gifts. So it is about picking up a pen.

Martin Luther said Satan hates the use of pens. Satan doesn't want you to slow down. Satan doesn't want you proclaim the goodness of God. Satan does not want you to see that God loves you. When you pick up the pen, you're doing business with the word again. So if you can slow down enough to say, "Satan, I am going to pick up a pen. And I am going to count my blessing one by one, and proclaim the goodness of God in a world that would like to think it is Pollyanna to give thanks."

But when you neglect to give thanks you only deepen the wounds of this world. So it is picking up that pen but it's almost -- it's like picking up a sword and doing business. And it's like unlocking a key and entering into God's presence. So yeah, to pick up a pen --

Betty: Well, and Satan hates it too because he knows if you do that, because I've been journaling since... we lost our daughter recently, and I've just been journaling and through that, no one else may ever see it but what it is doing for me and my relationship with God, and the healing that comes just from pouring out my heart through the pen, just as you said. And Satan knows that because he doesn't want that healing to come. He wants you to stay alone and afraid.

Ann: And rushing on to the next thing; looking for healing in other places. But picking up the pen is slowing down and it is pouring your heart out to Jesus and let Jesus meet you and do his healing work.

James: And that's what the devotional book, *One Thousand Gifts* will help you do. I hope you will go get the books; it's in the bookstores. You won't regret it. You will be so very, very grateful that you did.

I'll tell you what we'll do. We will send you the devotional book today if you'll help us give shoes to little children. And we'll just send it to you. But I want you to go online, there's her web site. Just see what she's doing. Go to the blog and learn. Betty referenced, I was going to say about this writing she is doing is quite remarkable and it is what's come out of pain.

But with me, I prayed with a pastor before I came here today, his wife just died. He said, "Well, you've been on your journey of loss a little longer than I have."

I said, "Well, let me just share this with you. I can only see Robin alive. I see life everywhere she moved."

A pastor friend who knew her when she was a teenager and watched her life, he said, "She was oxygen sent down from Heaven to earth by God." And everywhere I look, I see God's footprints, everything she touched.

So we have to move there and then we can see the beauty of the Lord. I pray that for you.

Do you know that Betty and I are here in your home, I believe and we hope, as a love gift from God to you to share people like Ann? The Lord showed me as a communicator to millions of people that he didn't want attention focused on somebody but his body and him in his body and we begin to bring his beauty in people from all over the world. And we're seeing the family of God be healed because

we're getting to know one another and in knowing one another we know him better. We love him and love our neighbor, we can certainly learn to love our family. And that's what we're seeing.

Would you say thanks to Ann for being with us? What a blessing.

[Applause]

I want to show you one of the most powerful -- and you're going to love this, Ann.

Ann: Well, the thing is, *One Thousand Gifts* is about becoming the gift back. The greatest blessing is to become the blessing. So go ahead!

James: It really is. I want you to watch -- I want you to watch. Think about this, I want you to watch what giving shoes to little children did to one of the most special girls I have ever seen. I think this is going to inspire you as much as anything you have perhaps ever seen. Watch closely.

Begin video clip

>> Over the years Monica has always been in Special Ed. She's always... her speech has always improved because there was a time when she was very young we didn't even know if she would ever say her name. We didn't know if she'd ever learn to write her name. This is who Monica has always been since she was a small child. This is just the first time we stepped out and let her be herself.

She has watched *LIFE Today* over and over again but for some reason when she saw this mission project, she was really captivated.

>> She told me, "Pastor David, I want to do this for the children." And she was just bubbling over with excitement, with joy. The morning that Monica got up on the stage and asked the church family for help was just an awesome feeling for me. And believe it or not, she stood in front of this entire church of 300 people and made that same plea to help the children have shoes.

>> For Monica it was never about how much money she had raised. I don't think she understood that part. She wanted to know how many children were getting shoes.

>> And it was amazing the response. Every Sunday, she would stand in our commons area with her basket and people would come by and just fill it up. And believe you me, Monica embodies that kingdom of God. She made this church come alive for missions.

>> She had collected a total of \$6,000.

>> Yeah, I did!

>> You did!

>> Uh-huh!

>> Through all this I now realize that she has been able to express herself using her own voice and her own words; not just to one person, but now all around the world.

Did I ever think -- did I ever think that she would be able to do this? No! But God did. He knew! She been passionate about it and she has done it and she has changed so many children's lives just because of her passion and her love to help someone else. And I just think that it is important that everyone knows that we all have a purpose. And no matter her mental ability or education or anything, we all have a call and we all have something that we can do.

>> Please help the children.

End of clip

In the studio

James: Oh, boy! And Monica has given 1600 pairs of shoes! And that is -- does that not bless you when you see that love? That just is overwhelming.

Monica, thank you, sweetheart! I know you're watching. And it really blesses me and Betty to know that we, along with our wonderful guests, can inspire people to do what we call "extend the hands of Jesus and put God's arms around a hurting world."

Jesus said, "Suffer the little children to come into me and forbid them not." I can imagine how pleased Jesus is with what Monica did. I want to ask you, I don't know that you can give 1600 pairs of shoes but she did and nobody thought she could.

Whatever you can do, you do, she did. We can give ten pairs of shoes for \$36. \$144 we can give 40 children a pair of shoes.

And we are praying many of you will not only help us give shoes but you will help give smiles for Christmas. There will be smiles because of shoes but there are some children who can't smile. Their little faces are so disfigured from cleft palate or other deformities of their little facial features that we can do surgeries; and the average cost, because there are medical doctors that work with us, is \$500; \$1,000 will give two children smiles. Perhaps you'd do that and give some shoes too.

We're sending the beautiful bronze "Christian" which is a bronze of a little boy that literally lived in the sewers of Romania. And we moved in years ago right after the revolution and began giving these children a home. We built homes for them and we gave them a future and Christian was one of them. One of them our oldest daughter actually held him like the missionary that's pictured in the bronze.

But we're also sending something that we think is quite beautiful. As a matter of fact, it was so popular last year that we went and made another and decided we would just simply give it to everybody who gave any gift, if you just give one pair of shoes, they're \$3.60 a pair.

We would encourage you, let's give ten pair if you can. But whatever you can do, it's big to those children. And we're asking you, please, go to the phone, dial that number. If you need prayer, you can always call and we'll gladly pray with you. Our prayer partners love you and care about you, that's why they're there.

Would you call today and say, "I want to give shoes" just like the beautiful girl that you saw so amazingly express with such joy the love of God? If you can give smiles, do that. Take your bankcard, use it like a check. You can go online, by the way, LifeToday.org, make the gift God put on your heart. We'll be looking to find out if you too were moved, inspired by Monica to do what she did for the glory of our wonderful God and to bless these precious children. Thank you so much for making that call. Thank you for making the gift.

Begin video clip

Announcer: Poverty is a killer and because of it, children needlessly suffer not only from a lack of food and clean water but also from a lack of things we take for granted such as a healthy smile or a simple pair of shoes. For most of these children, they've never owned a new pair of shoes. And while that may seem minor in the light of all their needs, walking with bare feet puts them at risk of life-threatening infections that could lead to crippling consequences, disease, and even death.

By responding today you can help *LIFE* immediately secure and begin shipping Christmas shoes to 200,000 children around the world just in time for the holidays. Your gift of \$36 will help provide ten pairs of shoes. A gift of \$72 will help provide 20 pairs. And a gift of \$144 will help provide 40 pairs of Christmas shoes for children in need.

In appreciation of your gift, be sure to request our 2013 Christmas shoe ornament. This beautifully crafted antiques ornament is a unique reminder of your gift for Christmas shoes, a treasure to place on your tree each holiday season.

Finally, please consider a gift of \$1,000 or more to help provide over 275 pairs of shoes or two children with corrective cleft palate surgeries. And you may request the limited edition 50th anniversary bronze sculpture, "Christian" by renowned artist Robert Summers.

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

End of clip

In the studio

James: And I do want to remind you today and I think this is very significant, not only are you going to get that beautiful little shoe, that Christmas ornament, but you'll also, if you'd like to have it, *One Thousand Gifts*, this devotional book by Ann Voskamp, you're going to be blessed by it as we've been blessed by her. And you're going to fly like that little bird. I have an idea we're going to see that in another book.

Would you join Betty and me and let's say a big thank you to Ann.

Thank you, Ann. Thanks to your family and bless them. Bless you!

Thank you so much for blessing us and encouraging us -- 50 years of ministry, 50 years of marriage! You had a lot to do with it -- your prayers! Thank you!