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Week ten: WFL last week

James and Betty Robison

Christina Meredith

James: Thank you very much. It is always a joy for Betty and me to share with you. I'm James Robison.

We have a beautiful girl that probably had about as serious abuse as you can ever imagine anyone going through. I lived a very tough childhood but I didn't experience the kind of abuse by any stretch that she did. And there were plenty of holes and let's say damages in the heart of a kid who just tried to make the best of it. And so grateful God picked me up out of the pit of hopelessness and despair and really set my feet on a solid rock which you were a big part of helping to refocus my whole life because of the beauty in you and the precious purity that was there.

This young lady has written a book. She is in the army. But what a journey. Think about the title of this book because she actually started writing it when she was journaling in an area of indescribable pain and abuse. She didn't know that's what she was doing but she was doing what we call journaling. She calls it *Cinder Girl*. Cinderella, *Cinder Girl*; if ever there's been one, it is this young lady, Christina Meredith. This is a phenomenal story that will lift your spirits and captivate you to be captivated by the one, the only one who could make us feel like who we were designed and destined to be.

I want you to welcome Christina Meredith to *LIFE Today*. Christina, we're glad to have you -- really, really glad to have you. I want you to just take off with the *Cinder Girl*. By the way, who came up with that title?

Christina: Me, naturally.

[Laughter]

James: You actually did?

Christina: I did! Yes, sir, I did.

James: Were you thinking of the Cinderella story and how many similarities there were to the fact that you were overlooked and abused in many ways?

Christina: Oh yes. I think one of the chapters is called "Laundry Lady" and it is because at a very young age my mother stopped using my name and gave me the name laundry lady. That was my chore in the house.

James: How old were you?

Christina: Seven.

James: And you had how many siblings? How many were in the family?

Christina: At that time there were five of us but at the end there was a total of eight.

James: And some of these were step family members?

Christina: No. My biological mother and father were married for 15 years. My father was a good man, bless his heart, got dealt a bad hand. But yeah, they had eight of us.

James: How did you get that laundry lady title?

Christina: The only thing that the therapists and psychologists have said because I've done quite a bit of trauma therapy, which has made me whole and who I am, they say that

because I looked like her; I was the only light skin, light hair in the family. My father is dark skinned, Italian and all my siblings were dark skinned, dark hair like my father. But when I came out, I was this blue-eyed, blond-hair gal. My mother grew up in abuse, the cycle of poverty and abuse is a real thing. I think when she saw me, it triggered her past pain. At least that's how I see it.

James: So she made you do all the laundry?

Christina: More than laundry, sir. I was the ostracized one in charge of chores and all the laundry; and the chores got harder and more demanding as I got older. But yeah, laundry.

Betty: You took on all the house chores then?

Christina: Yes, ma'am. So when I aged out of foster care at 18 and was living in my car, I knew I was going to write a book and I just wrote down *Cinder Girl* because I just remember for years I didn't hear my name. For years I heard "laundry lady" and other obscene names that you can read about in the book but I won't say.

James: What were the abuses you went through as a girl? You do cover them in the book but go over some of them with our viewers because some will be able to identify and it is amazing that you can even endure them and get through them.

Christina: I went through a lot of physical abuse, a lot of emotional and psychological abuse. I started being sexually abused and raped at nine and that went on for many years. I think the most traumatic part of that sexual abuse is when I tried to tell my mother and I got punished instead. I think that was very hard for me and it took me many years to really get over that.

James: She didn't believe your story? She didn't take your side. She did not defend you. She actually accused you so to speak? Did you already feel some guilt from it, as though

you were responsible in some way?

Christina: Of course! What child doesn't feel shame? You know what's happening is horrible and wrong but what do you do when you're being forced and pinned down? Like you have no recourse as a child, especially when a grown man is -- there is nothing you can do. So I went through a lot of years feeling shame but the Lord redeemed me of all of that. I have no shame!

James: What happened to you when you said you, in the book you talk about being alone after having been really raped at that moment, and you were alone and some kind of encounter that there's no question in your mind it was God?

Christina: After being abused I went down to the laundry room to do my chores before my mother got home. I was in such despair.

James: How old were you now?

Christina: Nine. And I remember feeling a different kind of broken than I'd felt before, almost hollow. Out of nowhere I felt this peace surround me and this love enrapture me. I knew it was the Lord. I don't know how but I did. It felt like in that moment of my deepest brokenness and my most -- you know, nothing ravages you more than sexual abuse. It robs you of everything. I remember feeling like he took my heart out of my chest and put it inside of a glass case to keep safe. As I got older and I did more healing and I spent more time with him, in my mid-20s, he gave my heart back to me and it was fully intact: No bitterness, no unforgiveness, no hardness.

I can love fully like I had never hurt. I think that is the miracle for me because I do a lot of ministry with foster care kids, and a lot of abused kids, and young women and young men, and bitterness is a real thing, especially when you've been robbed of your dignity and your innocence. It will rot you like a cancer -- sexual abuse really will. So I think the Lord just preserved me, bless him, so I could love others.

Betty: What happened? You said when you were 18 you were on your own and you were living in your car. What happened from there?

Christina: So after I aged out and was living in my car, I worked three jobs and read my Bible every day and argued with the Lord, how could this be? And finally, eventually got my own place. After a few years of being steady in my own apartment, I moved out to California and got discovered by a pageant recruiter, which is crazy. If you know me, I'm a tomboy. I am in the army. So when he discovered me I laughed at him and just assumed he was looking for a date or something. I kind of blew it off.

Then I went home and I looked it up and I read about it and I was like, okay, Lord, I can see what you're doing here. Because I had remembered when I lived in my car, I wrote out all the dreams I had and one of them was launching a nonprofit for foster care, writing a book, traveling the country and speaking and sharing my story to offer hope and healing with those who have been hurt and broken and abused. And that platform allowed me to do it.

James: So you actually entered a beauty pageant and became Miss California. How old were you then?

Christina: Twenty-six.

James: And so that seems like a long stretch from where you were. Did you feel like that might have been the flip side to the more positive part of Cinderella?

Christina: When I -- and I talk about this in my book -- when they said my name over the loud speakers, I didn't weep when they were putting the crown on my head or giving me the flowers. I wept because I heard my name. And I went so many years without hearing my name. And the Lord in that moment vindicated me and brought healing and restoration. Everything that the locusts had eaten, he had given back to me because the

world knew my name now -- my real name. It's just his kindness.

James: You are now in the military. How in the world did you get into the army?

Christina: Well, the only...

James: If you're going from Miss California to the army --

Christina: I want to tell you, there is a theme throughout the book and you'll read it. When I was in high school the only stability I had was R.O.T.C. Even though I was in and out of different homes, it was a hard time for me, I had R.O.T.C. and gave it everything I had. Every morning at 5:30 for seal team practice, all the way until 6:00 p.m. after drill practice.

James: You took it serious.

Christina: Yes, sir. It's all I had. The mass chief, first sergeant and captain, and gunning, all the men who were my fathers and brought me lunch every day because they knew I was hungry and really took care of me, I knew that I wanted to be an officer in the United States military. I worked for that for four years and I talk about this. I ended up not getting the R.O.T.C. scholarship because my grades were mediocre. I was doing a lot of other things but learning and writing and doing things wasn't that which is why it is a miracle that I actually wrote a book. But I never gave up on that dream.

So even though I didn't get the R.O.T.C. scholarship my senior year, I just trusted the Lord that at the right time he was going to allow me to have that. So three and a half years ago, after things calmed down, with traveling with Miss California and speaking, traveling and speaking and working on my foundation, I was like, okay, this is the time. So I enlisted and now I'm turning my enlistment into a commission and I'll be commissioned in December.

James: Wow! Isn't that great?

[Applause]

Christina: Now that was 15-16 years, 15 years for my dream. But again, with hard work and no quitting and the faith of a mustard seed, you can accomplish anything. I talk about that -- never quitting!

James: And you're going to marry somebody in the army?

Christina: Well, that's what I'm told.

[Laughter]

James: And you're just good with that, and excited about that?

Christina: Oh yeah! I love that man.

James: Then what do you think is going to happen?

Christina: Well, I'm already working on my second book so hopefully another book tour. Continue working on my foundation, the Christina Meredith foundation. So we, my foundation is a ten-year plan and in its infancy now. I continue to speak on advocacy and awareness for foster care reformation. And so I travel to D.C. and I speak to prominent people who handle the foster care legislation and mental health policies and appropriations to change, in its entirety, the foster care system because it is failing this country. It is an absolute sin. It is a crisis.

James: There is no real help. I've said this many times. If you get my communication through letters or you hear what we're saying, you do not really do good effective assistance without a compassion connection. And with the compassion connection there

has to be the impartation of an understanding of responsibility and accountability. Would you agree with that?

Here you were going through hell and yet you were developing some things that had to be developed in the midst of unbelievable circumstances.

I would say that the same thing happened to me going through hell. I lived in a horrible situation all the way through my -- most all of my childhood. And yet it was amazing the things that I saw that mattered, and mattered for the rest of anybody's life if you ever see things right. And of course, God changed everything and gave us a supernatural enabling that helps us go on which he offers to every one of you.

Now then you have a foundation. We put the title of it up on the screen. People can go there and check it out. Your book is in the bookstores. You can get it online. You'll be blessed to get it and read it. You'll be blessed to share it with people who are going through challenges or who want to help people who are going through challenges.

Now you also have something else you're thinking about doing. I want you to go ahead and tell our viewers. Are you thinking about running for office some day?

[Laughter]

Christina: Well, yes, sir, I am. That's part of the master plan. And anyone can tell you that I have a 5, 10, 15, 20, 25-year plan and we're here at ten so keep an eye out. So you actually might run for some elected office in the next couple of years? And you would be running where? In California?

Christina: No! I'm moving to Texas in the fall.

James: You're trying to get close to the Promised Land?

[Laughter]

Christina: Yes, sir. I sure am.

James: Excuse me, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico.

Christina: Yeah, so I'll move here in the fall, and the intent, Lord willing, is to run here. I really believe that I was created for that.

James: Well, I met your future father-in-law and he looks like a man seeking God. He looked like he was so proud of you and his son. I've got to say it again, the real heroes... and by the way, all of our military and armed force people would not tell you they are the greatest examples of Christian -- beautiful Christianity on display. They probably don't always do what they should on their leaves. Their language, their drill sergeant sometimes probably talks like a football coach that you cheer when you're winning a game.

But here's the deal. Jesus said greater love hath no man than this, than they lay down their life for their friends. Many of our military not only lay down their life for their friends, they actually die also for their enemy's freedom. It is amazing what our people do. I wish I could hug every armed service member. I'm not a big hugger. I always found it easier to hug a girl than to hug a guy. But I could hug some of you big ol' guys and push you back and tell you, "You're my hero. You're much of a man." And I pray that God speaks to you in every area of your life, just like I pray that for everyone watching us right now.

I want every one of you to know how much God loves you. He loves this little Christina through all the hell she went through, loved James through hell. Betty had a pretty good home life and boy, she got beautiful sisters and a brother that all love God. It is kind of a remarkable thing to see. When she found me, she found somebody who had nothing. But the grace of God built our relationship and our lives and he'll do the same with you. He loves you so much.

By the way, you need somebody to pray for you or with you? You see that prayer line there that's always there? We want to get God's arms around you and your broken heart. We want to see your heart healed.

Father, I pray that for everybody watching because people have been touched by her story. I just pray you'll touch hearts and heal hearts right now, and comfort people the way you comforted her when she saw you take her heart and put it in a little glass case to let her know you had her heart. Lord, I pray people watching will realize how much you love them today; in Jesus' name.

You need someone to pray with you, don't hesitate to call. Would you like to join me and Betty in telling Christina how much we appreciate her? You are just an absolute tremendous blessing. I'm going to be praying with you about your goals. So you stay in touch because I do pray for people in authority and those who want to be in authority.

Our viewers are the most, I think, greatest prayer warriors and you can count on them to be praying for you. They're not going to forget you.

Christina: I need all the prayer -- all the time!

James: Let me just tell you right now that we're in the last week of our let's say early-in-the-year emphasis on the hundreds of water wells that we drill every year, and you the viewer tell us how much you enjoy this. I want you to look in and listen closely. Just listen to the heart that you're going to hear expressed. Listen to the need and the opportunity to be someone's miracle answer to prayer. I think you're going to want to do it. I want you watch closely but prayerfully and ask God to direct how you become a miracle.

On the mission field

Tammy: When you lose someone you love unexpectedly, it can feel like your whole world is falling apart. It's almost too much to bear. If you know my story, you know I lost my husband in 2001 to a tragic scuba diving accident. I'd give just about anything to go back in time and stop that from happening. While I know God has never abandoned me, I've learned some memories stay with you for the rest of your life.

Recently, in east Africa, I got to visit people with some very fresh memories, people who lost loved ones of their own. In a way I feel connected to them. My husband died in the water and her husband died because of water and the lack of good clean water. Because the water they need to drink every day in order to live was killing them. Water that looks like this -- and this. Water that looks like this.

These precious people don't have a choice in the water they drink. Right now it is this or it is nothing. But you and I have a choice, a life and death choice. Not life and death for us but for them.

So will you please choose to partner with *LIFE Outreach* today? Will you help give Water for LIFE so that we can give them water like this?

[Children laughing]

End of clip

In the studio

James: What goes on, Betty in your heart when you watch all the different scenes that we just looked at there? And you've been there in person and you see the heartbreak and you see the love. We know Tammy's loss, her lose her husband in water because of water, he drowned. And then these others are losing their loved ones because of contaminated water, not a good source. What goes on as a mother?

Betty: It really is heartbreaking to hear the cries of a mother. She weeps for her lost precious little child. Some of them lose more than one, more than two and on down the line up. But their hearts are broken because they love their children just like we love our children. They know what's killing them but they don't have any way to change that.

But then when you see these precious children laughing and putting their hands and catching that fresh clean water that's going to bring life to them, can you imagine the joy in the mother's hearts when they see their children taking that nice clean water that's going to be good for them and keep them alive for a long time? What they're hearts must feel like, how joyful they must feel that now we have hope. Now my children have hope for life.

James: It's always a joy to them whenever our mission team goes and whether we've brought a well in recently or they know the people who gave them the well are coming back to see them, and they get to play in the water. They don't normally in most places get to play in it.

Let me tell you what the creative missionaries and workers do because we're also feeding at schools to get the kids to be at school, we helped inspire school feedings all over the world and that's something we're grateful for that the world food program even picked up on that concept and began to do it. But what we do is we put a merry go round that is a pump and those kids don't even realize it but they're going on the merry go round they're pumping up to a holding tank or reservoir that then enables us to get water out from not just one well source but several places. The missionaries and creative thinkers are so incredible all over the mission field world and that mission world.

And here's the thing I want you to understand. All those things that happen, all those miracles are because you enabled a vision to become reality. You enabled love to have effect because those full of love weren't empty-handed and they couldn't just make wishful promises, they delivered, you delivered.

Would you right now help us drill another 200 wells as we go toward that 400 that we've been trying to drill every year now? Would you this last week, would you please go and get your bankcard and help us drill another \$4800 well? There are some viewers who can, "I can give a well. Thank God! I'll do it." Some people make it their goal to do it.

But could you give toward that? Most of the money comes from \$48 gifts and the \$48 gifts gives ten people water the rest of their life; \$144 gives 30 people. So there is a level at which everyone can participate.

We're giving you some inspirational thank you gifts to say thank you for doing this. We want to bless you. The beautiful bronze that we give for \$1200 gifts says, "In the arms of the shepherd." You're actually putting the shepherd's arms around these people. You're actually giving them still water, clean water. You're giving them a future.

Would you go get that bankcard and use it like a check? Go online or dial that number and make the gift God impresses you to make. This is the last week now of this emphasis.

Father, help every person who can to please make the gift you put on their heart and know they're giving life; in Jesus' name.

Thank you so much for calling that number. Thanks for going online. Thanks for sharing life. That's what you're doing.

Begin video clip

Announcer: Today, a mother living in extreme poverty will do the unthinkable -- give her children dirty, diseased-filled water that she knows could kill them. With no other choice what's a mother to do?

With your help, clean water is on the way. Mission Water for LIFE provides a way for parents to save the lives of their children, to offer them a bright future free from the fear

of death. With your gift today, you can help drill and establish the first 200 water wells of the year. Your gift of \$24 will help provide clean water for five children, a gift of \$48 will help provide for 10, \$72 will provide for 15, and \$144 will help provide life-giving water for 30 people for a lifetime.

With your gift, we'll send you the *Praying Grace* 55-day devotional. This new devotional will help you renew your mind to the realities of God's grace and help you pray powerful grace-based prayers for each day.

With your gift of \$100 or more, request the "Praying Grace" tumbler. This reusable 16-ounce container is constructed with insulated stainless steel, perfect for hot or cold beverages.

Finally, please consider a gift of \$1200 to help provide water for 250 people, or a gift of \$4800 to help sponsor a complete well and you may request the beautiful, new commemorative bronze sculpture, "Safe in the Shepherd's Arms."

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

End of clip

On the Mission Field

Ralph: We don't want any more children to die so unnecessarily because the solution to contaminated water is a cup of clean water. How do we give these children a cup of clean water? By coming in here in this village and drilling a deep well that will give them beautiful clean water that will last a lifetime.

And then also, they will eventually learn the beautiful story of the water of life. So thank you for giving. Your gift will not only help their lives today but help them for a lifetime and through all eternity.

Group of Children: Thank you for clean water!

[Cheers & Applause]

End of segment

In the studio

James: Well, Betty and I just say thank you so much. Boy, what a blessing you are to so many. Christina's book, *Cinder Girl*, what a story! If you'd like to have it, you say, "James, I think there's some things there for me or for somebody I love and I'm going to help you give water. Would you send me Christina's book?" We surely will. Join us again saying thanks to Christina for being with us.

Christina: God bless you. Thank you.

James: Bless you in your journey. Thank all of you for being here. Thank you for watching. Thank you so much for helping us love the overlooked and the least of these. Thanks!