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Week 39: CS&S Last Week

Tammy Trent

Toni Collier #1

Studio discussion:

TAMMY: Hello, everybody! Welcome to Life Today. I'm Tammy Trent, and I'm so glad you could join us again today. Maybe today you're watching and feeling the ache of loneliness. Carrying pain you've tried to keep hidden. Maybe you've been hurt, betrayed, or left wondering if anyone could truly see you, love you, and walk with you in the mess. You've told yourself you're fine, but deep down you're tired of pretending and ready for something real. So can I remind you, God never designed you to carry the weight of your pain alone. He created us for connection, for safe, grace-filled relationships that help us heal and remind us of who we are in him. And even if you've been burned before, he can still bring the right people into your life to help you walk toward freedom.

That's exactly what we're talking about today. My guest, Toni Collier, knows the power of healing in honest community. In her brand-new book, *Don't Try This Alone*, she shares her personal journey through trauma, divorce, church-hurt, and redemption, and the life-giving relationships that help people heal. And it helped her heal. It's a roadmap for anyone who is tired of isolation and ready to experience the beauty of walking with others toward wholeness.

So welcome with me, my new friend, Toni Collier. It's so great to have you here!

TONI: I'm really excited to be on, and I actually do agree with you, we are friends now.

TAMMY: Yes! Totally. It is official.

TONI: It has happened.

TAMMY: And I want them to feel the same thing that I have felt instantly. So I think in order to do that, we need to start up at the top. Let me say it this way: The road you have walked has not been easy. There's a lot there. So can you unpack, like just give us a little bit?

TONI: So I grew up in a blended family in Texas. And I would say the darkness entered my story really early because my mom got very sick when I was just a little girl. My dad was an alcoholic at the time, and God has since redeemed his story and his life in amazing ways -- another episode. I was just this little girl with a mama who was so sick, and so I became a tiny little caregiver. I say darkness entered my story there because when you don't have what you need as a child, secure attachment isn't formed, and you start to look for that validation, that nurturing, that leadership in other places. And for me, I looked in all the places. In boys, in promiscuity, in lust, and addiction, and partying, and all the things.

When I was 16, I was graduating high school and deciding, like, okay, I'm going to go to college, I'm going to clean my life up. Did not. Okay? I went to college, went crazy, ended up getting engaged at 19, which gosh, looking back, I'm like just a little baby. But I got engaged, I got married. And that first marriage was very abusive in so many ways, and I ended up having a daughter in that marriage. I just looked at her and thought, wow, I really do need to find some safety, a safe environment.

God later redeemed my story. I got remarried to a pastor, and I was like, this is it! A Cinderella story, I'm God's favorite, it is what it is. Unfortunately, in September of 2023, I got a call from my now second ex-husband, that he was being extorted, and there was just years of infidelity and hiding it.

So here I am now. Now, I have walked through two divorces and the polar difference, or the defining thing that has been different in those two seasons, is that I healed alone from my first divorce, and made some not-good decisions. And in my second divorce, I have healed with people, and it's been totally different.

TAMMY: A totally different thing, I think, when you have community. Looking back now, that that first divorce that you went through, you said you kind of journeyed it alone, and made some bad choices. What do you think that looked like for you? Looking back now. Where someone might go, gosh, I've been dealing with this by myself, and I see the same patterns.

TONI: So for me, I think in that season, the truth is I didn't have the best friendships to begin with. Okay? And so my circle was kind of saturated with people that weren't living in the way of Jesus who perpetuated some bad behaviors in me. I look back now and it's crazy because I actually think it was a blessing that I needed community during that time, because the difference was I started praying for community after that first divorce. Like, wow, I have no one. I don't have a church community. I don't have anyone to really walk with me through this healing journey. And so it just started like a whole process of healing, of deciding like, I want to be better. I don't want to do this alone. This is not good for me.

And now, I'm happy to say that I've chosen to live a life on the offense and not the defense, so that when pain and tragedy did come, I had a whole army of people behind me ready to tend with me and really help me heal.

TAMMY: Did you feel like you had a lot of work in yourself to be done? Like I need to bury some old to find some new?

TONI: Well, I think for many of us, we really do want great community. We want them. We want godly friends. We want people that are honest. And we kind of have to be those people, too. So we've got to do our own work first to become the friends that we so deeply want in the first place: to become a safe person, to become a reliable person.

So yes, tons of work. I call it, I ripped off all the Band-Aids. Because that's what I did, right? And that's what we do, is we get all these wounds, we get painful things that happen to us, and we just put a little Band-Aid over it, like, I'm fine. Everything's fine! That Band-Aid is dirty. It is falling off. It is a problem.

TAMMY: It's not fine. It's not fine, and I'm not okay.

TONI: Come on! And we need surgery, not Band-Aids. So I think I went through a season of surgery to become who I deeply wanted in my life. I feel like I'm a great friend. My friends say that I'm a great friend. Okay? I don't want to sound crazy.

TAMMY: So far I love you.

TONI: I feel great about my life: Generous. Kind, patient. Okay?

TAMMY: Exactly, I like our friendship so far.

TONI: Right! But we have to look more like Jesus so that we can attract other people who look like Jesus.

TAMMY: That's right. It's so true. You know, I was researching you before you came onto the show. All good stuff. Lots of podcasts I watched, all good stuff. But I got to this one section that had said you were in the middle of writing a book then you got the call that this was all coming. I loved how you said, this is incredible, when you got that call you were in a hotel room in Nashville, and I'm from Nashville. You're in Nashville and getting ready to do some, I think TV shows. And you were there in that same hotel room with friends that were already good friends, a good influence in your life. I love that setup in your life. Nothing surprises God. He knew it was coming, and so he set you in a place all ready to begin to show you how important community would be in your life. But godly, good sisterhood would be in your life, and you walked out of there. I love that moment where you just said, Do I need to stay? Do I go, do I need to stay? And I think at that time, you were probably in the middle of that book that just changed the trajectory. Because you're like, I can't I can't write this book. So then God birthed something new in you. I think that's like talking about today, Don't do this alone. And it got you to a place of how you needed to build a deep community. So tell me about that and how all of that shifted in you.

TONI: Gosh! I was writing a book on sanctification and moral failures.

TAMMY: You were?

TONI: Yeah! And then my publishers were like, well, considering that you're now ex-husband has gone through a moral failure, we had a church, we planted a church so it was a big deal. Very public, very embarrassing. And because of that, it just wouldn't have been a good idea to put out a book about moral failures. You know what I mean? I don't want to talk about for years. You know? So I was devastated. I mean, you know this, we write content, we pour our hearts into it. It's 60,000 plus words, and here I am facing this reality that -- you can't put that book out. You're going to have to write another one. I was so grateful that I had my friends in that hotel room. I mean, literally, I was filming with a Christian TV network and my good friends who I had been in deep, intentional community with. It's something that we called a confessional community, and we're still in it. We've been in it for four years. It's like a group of seven of us who just decided to go deep and we just confess, and it's as weird and scary as you think it is, but it's holy and beautiful. And two of my friends who I'd already been in that group with for two years was in the same hotel, like hotel as me down the hallway. So I was able to call them, and they knew my pain. They knew my tears already. They knew the grief and how I carried it. One of my friends even ordered me breakfast because she was like, I know when you're stressed out, you don't eat. So here's some blueberry lemon pancakes. I will never forget those blueberry lemon pancakes, okay? And I went to them and started talking about things like, what am I going to do about the book? And what am I going to -- how am I going to do this really well? I remember my friend, Jenny Allen said, "That book that you're writing now, it'll come, but it's not in God's timing. We don't just want God's promises. We want his timing, too." We don't want to do things on our own timetable because we're like, oh, I feel like God's doing this in me.

So it's like, Lord, what do you want to do? And what he wanted to do was have me write this book, *Don't Try This Alone*. He wanted me to show people in real time what it looks like to be a leader and to be on stages and to have, you know, places and spaces of authority, and to still need people.

TAMMY: So how do we get to a healthy, safe community? Because I've been on the platform, too, just as you have, and you'll have people coming up to you afterwards saying, I want friends. I don't know how to make friends. I don't know how to find a community. There's some practical things, and then there's some very strong spiritual things. So how do they find -- some are struggling with finding a good community in their life. What's practical for them?

TONI: Okay. So I think first and foremost, you've got to start praying for friends, which sounds so elementary. Okay? Like, what am I going to do? Go to God and be like, Hey, can you send me a friend to play with? Like, it feels so weird. And it's the way of Jesus. So how much more would he want us to come to him to pray for community when we saw Jesus build a community of 12? And he didn't even need them. I mean, he's the all-knowing, all-powerful, and divine-in-all-of-his-ways God in human form. He said, I'm going to pick 12 to help me do this, not because I need them, but because I need to stress the importance of fulfilling our purpose in Christ with other people.

So I think for many of us, we have to start by actually praying.

TAMMY: Like intentional prayers, and be specific, like, God, I am praying for a friend right now that brings joy into my life because I am struggling. I'm struggling with depression, with anxiety, so I need joy. I do not want to be attracted to the same person that's going to keep me there. Someone that will help me, that will always point me to Jesus, that will challenge me when I'm doing or feeling stuck, or doing things I shouldn't do that would challenge me. So God, I'm praying very specific. Write it down. Make your vision board. What do you want God to do in your life? What is the desire of your heart?

TONI: And we do that with every other area of our life, our dreams, our job, our children. And for some reason, friendship gets the short end of the stick. It's weird! And so we have to get intentional about that.

And I also think we have to start praying about our current friendships. For me, in my season, there were friendships that I needed to transition out. People were taking up space in my most intimate areas that shouldn't have been there. And so what does it look like to transition people well? I mean, even Jesus had circles. His most intimate circle, him and the Lord? He brought three close, Peter, James and John, the other disciples and the women, the 72. I mean, we can look in the Bible and see how Jesus operated. And the three that he brought close, he brought real close into the garden of Gethsemane, his most intimate moment.

What does it look like for us to take a little look at the people that are around us now, and maybe have some hard conversations about transition, to make space for the people that God's trying to send?

TAMMY: That is so good, Toni. When you say that, when you say three, I just instantly think I have three. I've got a lot of great friends, but my mom, my sister, and my best friend, those three girls know everything about my life, the good, the bad, the super ugly. The grace that they've extended to me, the love, walking out life with me. Thank you, Jesus, for community. I know the importance of it, and I know how it can be very dangerous to isolate and to be without it.

But what about -- let's talk about what forgiveness looks like for you, okay? Because we touched on the whole broken marriage in two. Was that easy for you? Or was forgiveness a bit of a process?

TONI: You know, God is just funny. You know what I mean? I, one of the second calls that I made when I just got the news about my ex-husband was to Lisa Terkeurst, and she beautifully and gracefully helped me walk through that season in so many ways. I remember going to her retreat, "Good Boundaries and Goodbyes," and I read that book. I was like, yeah, the boundaries and goodbyes. And then I slid over that book and I was, like, forgiving what you can't forget. I don't want to do that book. I don't know. And the truth is, I wasn't ready. And I started forgiving what you can't forget yesterday -- again yesterday.

So it's interesting that you say that because at the end of the day, God's coming after everything. He wants to redeem every crevice and he's not leaving the scraps. And so, yes, the Lord has redeemed my career in ways, and I'm grateful for that. The Lord has given me and my kids a beautiful home to live in. The Lord has built beautiful community in my life. But there's a little scrap. There's a scrap of unforgiveness and he's coming for it. I would not be a leader worth following, an integral leader if I did not pursue forgiveness.

And so, no, it has not been easy, and I'm not leaving any scraps either. So I'm going after forgiveness because it is not at all -- forgiveness, what I'm learning, is not at all about two people. It's about me setting my heart free to love again, to trust again, and to accept freely the forgiveness that Jesus has given me. And I can't take that if I'm not willing to give it.

TAMMY: I can totally resonate with that, and I think a lot of people can. When God is leaning in and Holy Spirit is speaking to us to say, this is what I need you to do, we have to listen. We can't do it alone, I think, just like you have walked through different seasons where you sat alone trying to do it alone.

But I think what happens, what's dangerous in those seasons, even when I've tried to do grief alone at different times, is that when my healing doesn't come, when the forgiveness doesn't come on, when the freedom doesn't come, now I blame God because you didn't fix this for me. But I'm not doing everything I need to do. I'm not listening to counsel, instruction, wisdom; great people in my life. I'm trying to do it on my own and the way I think it should be done. My will be done, not thine will be done. And then we blame God for everything.

TONI: And it's because we're not picking up his burdens or his yoke, we're picking up ours. The Bible literally specifically says, like his -- the yoke is easy and the burden is light. Like this idea that it has to be God's way, though. like the only reason why God's will is lighter for us, is easier for us, is because it's his way, and his design and his way says we don't do this alone. He created us to be connected. Moses had an Aaron, and Aaron lifted his arms up. Ruth had a Naomi, and Naomi had a Ruth. Job had three of his friends that sat with him for seven days in silence and let him suffer and cry, and just was with him. The way of God is with his people.

So it would be great if maybe you tried his way first before you start blaming him because you're trying your way.

TAMMY: Exactly. Okay, I'm holding *Don't Try This Alone*: How to build deep community when you want to hide from your pain. Who's the book for, Toni? Like, ultimately, at the end of the day, when we sit down and we write books, we're thinking of everything we can to pour into this book. And we're thinking about the person that's going to pick this up. And when they turn to that last page, this is what our prayer is, this is what our hope is, this is how we want to pour into somebody's life. What was your hope? What was your prayer for them?

TONI: I think it's for the person that is afraid to trust again. I mean, it's for everyone. Let's be honest, we are a connected creation. The design says that we need to get good at this, a good, godly community. And the whole time I was writing, I just -- I thought about myself and what I needed in that season, and I was having so many struggles with asking for help, being so weak and fragile that I really couldn't, I didn't have another choice but to ask for help. I think it's for the person that's like, I don't want to ask for help because it takes something from my worth in my mind. I don't want to ask for help because I've been hurt so many times. I've been let down so many times. I'm alone. I don't want to open myself up for the introverts out there. Stop using that as an excuse. But for the introverts that are like, I just can't.

I just think it's the power of the Holy Spirit that leads us into being brave enough to build a good community.

TAMMY: A hundred percent. I'm just going to take these couple few chapters: You don't -- you don't feel seen, soothed, safe or secure. Somebody is feeling like that today? Your shame keeps you isolated. You're afraid to even be found. You've been hurt by the response of those close to you. You struggle to believe that God never leaves you.

If that's you today, I'm telling you, I just read you the first six chapters of a book, and it goes beyond that to then you're feeling that you can name that in your life, but then how can you

grow from that? How can you find God's strength in that? How can you grow and build community? I believe there are some incredible answers in this book for you today. And if today you're struggling with that, you're sitting there and you're like, I need somebody to come alongside me. Can my community start right now? It can! Go online, call that number that you see, and let us stand with you today. Let us be the first step of community in your life to pray over your life and believe with you on that vision board for whatever you wrote down, that God will begin to bring new -- like a new atmosphere in your life that could change everything for you. I'm believing for that.

So call us and let us pray with you. And I want to get you Toni's book. I want to get you Toni's book because I believe this is another tool, along with prayer and believing. Take up these books that will begin to speak into your life, where you'll have the tools to dig and to find some answers that are scripturally based, that are surrounded with the truth of God's Word for your life. He wants good things for you!

And he wants great things for so many other people that I get to meet all over the world. For the past 16 years traveling with Life Outreach, I have seen some incredible, incredible moments where I have sat, and I've been able to see the burden being lifted from the lives of these people, especially these children. I was just recently in Central America, and I want to take you back with me and show you this right now.

Transition Roll-in: [Still Spreading Joy]

ANNOUNCER: *This season, Life Outreach wants to continue spreading joy and smiles around the world. We do this in very special ways. We provide shoes for children's feet and corrective surgery for those who suffer from a cleft palate or cleft lip condition. Not only is receiving shoes fun for the children, but it is a blessing for the mission team.*

TAMMY: We have had an incredible year at Life Outreach. We have done mission feeding, we have drilled water wells, and today, we are putting shoes on little children's feet. I'm so excited about it, John.

JOHN: I am so excited, too, and it's been a special day. What is wonderful is for those children that have a little bit of trouble with their smile, we have a very special gift, too.

TAMMY: Yes, we do.

ANNOUNCER: *Did you ever think a trip to the hospital would bring a smile to a child's face? It has for these children because each of them has received corrective surgery for a cleft lip or cleft palate condition. This surgery will allow Seni the chance to smile like his twin brother. Ferdy, the youngest of four, has endured school bullies making fun of her condition, but now looks forward to showing off her new smile.*

As this Christmas season approaches, we want to continue to bless children around the world by providing them with a new pair of shoes and corrective surgeries that give them a chance for healthy and fulfilling lives.

Studio appeal:

TAMMY: Oh, I absolutely love it! I'm sitting here watching that appeal. Like yes! It's so amazing! This is truly one of my very favorite times of the year here at Life Today, Christmas Shoes and Smiles. There's just nothing like it. And as you can see, it's always one of our favorite trips because there's so much joy wrapped around it.

You saw those beautiful faces getting shoes and maybe, like me, you were smiling right along with them. I'll never forget being in Central America with our team, slipping little shoes on children's feet. The joy on their faces, it's pure, contagious happiness. They stand taller, they run faster, and they play without fear because their feet are finally protected from glass, nails, sharp

rocks, hookworm, and from dangerous infections that could literally take their lives. That's why the gift of shoes is such an act of love.

For many, it's their first pair of brand-new shoes. Shoes that didn't belong to someone else first. Their very own! And in some places I've been, many have never owned a pair of shoes at all. Could you even imagine that? It's significant. It's simple and it makes them feel loved, seen, and valued. Being there in those moments with those children is something I'll always remember.

And then there's the miracle of a new smile. You saw the difference it makes. And for only \$500, many children who have been teased, bullied, even told they were cursed for life because of a cleft lip or cleft palate are now receiving surgeries that changed everything physically and emotionally. Suddenly, they can smile with confidence, they can eat without pain, and dream about a brighter future. What an incredible gift!

Friends, this is it. This is our last week of this campaign. We've set a goal to give away 150,000 pairs of shoes and provide as many life-changing corrective surgeries as possible. But we cannot do this without you. And here's how you can help. \$36 will give shoes to ten children. \$72 provides for 20 children. And \$180 blesses 50 children with shoes. And \$1,000 will put shoes on 275 children, or provide two life-changing surgeries.

So please go online or give us a call right now and let us know you're able to partner with us. Because when you do, you'll help protect the little feet and restore beautiful smiles and remind children all around the world that they are deeply loved. And what a better time than right now, when the need is real and when the joy is waiting on the other side of that gift. And please know that every gift matters because every child matters.

Let's finish strong. Let's meet the goal together. Let's make this the best Christmas these children have ever had!

CS&S last week Cause 2025:

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."

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

Studio goodbye:

TAMMY: I hope you're going online and giving the best gift that you can give today. Please know it will make such a big difference. And for whatever gift you can give today, I want to send you Toni's book. You're going to love it. You're going to want to read it, I promise you that. And also remember, this is the last week of this campaign. So please give us a call right now.

But Toni, I am so glad you were here. This was so fun. Will you stay for another show?

TONI: I will! It's a party!

TAMMY: Yeah, it is a party. Anything you want to leave us with today?

TONI: Here's what I want to say to someone that's watching. You can do this. It's not going to be easy. It's not linear. Healing never is. But you were designed to do this with God's people, and he knows that. So he is making plans for you to be with his people. Believe it and receive that today.

TAMMY: Amen, amen, amen! Receive it today. We love you. We love you. Thanks for watching. We'll see you next time on Life Today. Bye-bye!