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Week 4

Randy Robison & Tammy Trent

Sharon Hodde Miller

“Freedom From Self”

MALE ANNOUNCER: The following program is sponsored by Friends of Life Outreach International.

ANNOUNCER: Coming up, Sharon Hodde Miller argues that we are never more fragile than when we make ourselves the center of our story.

SHARON HODDE MILLER: This is the second greatest liberation of my life, second only to finding Jesus, because it gave me tools to cope with when I’m feeling that insecurity, when it’s stealing all the joy out of my work, out of things that are good.

I now know what to do with that.

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RANDY ROBISON: Welcome to “Life Today,” I’m Randy Robison.

Tammy Trent is with me.

TAMMY TRENT: Hello.

RANDY ROBISON: We’re glad to see you. I hope you’re doing well.

How are you doing, Tammy?

TAMMY TRENT: I’m good, how are you doing?

RANDY ROBISON: I’m doing good, you know, been having a lot of me time.

TAMMY TRENT: Have you? And how’s that going for you?

RANDY ROBISON: It’s going pretty well, you know, building my audience and my social media profile, really just being the best me.

TAMMY TRENT: Me you can be. You’re doing well with it.

RANDY ROBISON: Yeah, it’s just it’s lacking something.

TAMMY TRENT: Yeah, always, when you turn it on yourself, you’re always gonna lack something, Randy.

RANDY ROBISON: I think you're onto something.

Today's guest is a book called "Gazing at God." It's written by Sharon Hodde Miller.

And she has struggled with some of these things, and she's gonna help share some experiences with you to hopefully prevent you from struggling in these ways.

So, Sharon, great to see you.

SHARON: So good to be with you guys.

RANDY ROBISON: That was a long setup, I know.

I know, but when I was, you know, looking at this, I was like, you know, I do this, and sometimes I justify it.

It's like, you know, we wanna be our best selves, but I don't know, what were you facing when you were like, okay, something's not quite right?

SHARON: Yeah, so a number of years ago I was in ministry doing what I do now.

I was writing, I was traveling and speaking and really loving it, like I—what really called me into ministry was teaching the Bible.

I'm really passionate about it and got a lot of joy from that, but a number of years ago something in me started to shift, and the best way that I can describe it is if you think about faith as a race, it was as if I started looking at the people who were running next to me, and I started to compare myself to them.

And then I started looking at the people who were like a few paces ahead of me and needing affirmation and acknowledgement from them, and if I didn't compare well or if I didn't get that acknowledgement, it was devastating to me.

And I was really honestly embarrassed by this response, because it's ministry, like I shouldn't be comparing, I shouldn't need praise, but I'd become this really insecure person.

And so I really started reading and researching, that's kind of my personality.

I'm like I'm gonna figure this out, I'm gonna crack this code, and so reading books about insecurity and blogs and articles.

And I started opening up the Bible to understand, you know, I just need—the thing that my insecurity needs is to remember how special I am and what God says about me.

And so I did that for probably six months to a year, and then at the end of that journey, I realized that all these messages about insecurity had not helped me at all.

TAMMY TRENT: For six months, you're like nothing.

SHARON: Like, no traction whatsoever, and I think a lot of people can relate to that who struggle with insecurity and comparison and aren't getting any traction.

And so I realized there's something else going on.

There are actually two causes of insecurity, but we only ever talk about one.

And the one that we talk about is low self-esteem, and that is real.

I would define that as not seeing yourself biblically, not seeing yourself truthfully the way that God sees you, and the answer to that is the truth of God's Word.

But there's a second cause of insecurity that we almost never talk about, and that is self-preoccupation, that when we make something about us that is not about us, then all of a sudden that thing becomes a referendum on our value and on our worth.

And when that thing is going well, we feel great, but as soon as it's not, our confidence falls through the floor.

And so I realized for me, that is what had taken all the joy out of ministry for me is I had taken this thing that was meant to be about Jesus, and I had made it about me, and that is why I had become so fragile, so insecure.

And so, both "Free of Me" and "Gazing at God," which is the follow-up devotional, are about that journey of not just diagnosing this problem in ourselves, but the journey to freedom from self.

TAMMY TRENT: Wow, how did you work your way through that?

Took you six months the first time, but when you—it sounds like you got to the root of something?

SHARON: Yeah.

TAMMY TRENT: And was that root, that whole preoccupation?

SHARON: Yes, absolutely.

And one of the stories in scripture that helped me to see what was going on and what I needed personally was actually looking at, as I told you, what I did first was open up scripture and ask what does the Bible say about me?

And I thought this is going to be the thing that resolves my insecurity.

But the second go around, I approached scripture and asked a very different question, which was when people in the Bible brought their insecurities to God, when they brought their senses of inadequacy to God, what did he actually say to them?

And that is not what I expected.

A really great example is Moses, where he's coming to God.

God has just called him to go to Pharaoh to say set my people free.

Moses objects and says, “I’m not the guy for this job, I’m not good at speaking, you should have picked somebody else.”

And you would expect in sort of our like self-help culture that God would have said, “Moses, you’ve got this, like, you’re my guy.

Like, you were raised in a palace, you were groomed to be a leader, like of all the people I could have chosen, you are the best choice in all of Israel.”

But instead, God looks at Moses, and he says, “Moses, who gave human beings their mouths?

Was it not I, the Lord?”

And I really love in her book “Women of the Word,” Jen Wilkin, she describes this scene as God changing the subject off of Moses’s inability and onto God’s ability.

And reminding him that that when you make yourself the center of the story, when you think you’re the hero, when you think that your family or your job or whatever it is, that it rises and falls on you, it is overwhelming, it is too much.

And to remember the good news is you are not the center, that it’s not about you, and that’s incredibly freeing to remember.

And so for me, that almost laid kind of a blueprint of the way that I need to address this insecurity in myself is to—going to the title of this devotional—to raise my gaze.

That I’d made my gaze way too small, I’d made my purpose way too small, and I needed to correct it and to remember, no, I am created to love God and to love others and that there’s actually freedom in those commands.

RANDY ROBISON: Yeah, I’m guessing there’s a reason that you didn’t call your book “Glancing at God,” right?

Because sometimes we get in these situations we’re like, oh no, what?

Okay, okay, now I’m back to my life.

How important is the consistency of this key to maintaining that posture?

SHARON: So, another Bible story—

I’m just gonna talk about the Bible today.

You guys good with that?

TAMMY TRENT: Let’s do it, I’m good with it.

SHARON: So, another Bible story that really captures the heart of this devotional and what set me free in a lot of ways is the story of Peter walking on water.

So we have this story where Peter, he steps out of the boat, he steps into the waves with Jesus, but then at one point, what does he do?

He lowers his gaze, and he looks at the storm, and as soon as he focuses on this storm around him, he begins to sink.

It's not until he raises his gaze and locks eyes with Jesus that he remembers that he is secure.

And this is a metaphor for so many aspects of the Christian life.

This is what we do every Sunday.

You know, when you go into church and you worship, you are remembering that what is the truest truth of my life is not the storm around me, it is God, the character of God.

But it also points to that freedom and that security that is available to us, but it has to do with how we steward our attention.

And we can focus on the storms, whether it's a storm outside of you, or for many of us it's a storm inside of you.

But the answer, the rescue awaiting us is if we raise our gaze to look at him.

TAMMY TRENT: I love that, honestly, it put me right in a place where I could totally identify exactly what you said.

I think many people are in places right now where life is hard, everything's going on around us, things are pulling at us, things are taking from us, and so our attention is always on that.

And how do I make this better, and God, how do you?

But you're just you're in this task, you're in this moment.

And when you talked about Peter, it's like that totally makes sense for the the way I handle things too.

Rather than I'm not as quick to gaze.

SHARON: And I am thinking that you're the one that has to fix it, that's the weight.

That's not the easy yoke of Jesus of thinking it is on me, you know, to fix this problem at work, to be this perfect parent.

And that's a really great example of just practical ways that now I speak this to different seasons of life.

I say to parents, for example, who are feeling like I feel this pressure that I need to be the perfect parent.

And we don't think of that as self-focus, we don't think of that as self-preoccupation, but you're narrating that situation in a way that you're trying to be the hero of your family.

And what I often remind, especially women, this is—I hear this all the time from women.

I always remind them, your kids already have a perfect parent, it is not you.

Your job is very simple, which is just to point to him, and that is such a relief, because that allows you to be exactly human-sized.

TAMMY TRENT: That's right.

RANDY ROBISON: Can I argue with you for a second?

SHARON: Go for it.

RANDY ROBISON: Because I know some people out there watching are thinking this, so this is not my argument.

This is just sort of the counter—because we hear this in culture, we hear this in the church.

I mean, self-help, well, shouldn't I take responsibility for myself?

That's the way it should be, right?

And also, I mean, don't I really have to take care of myself before I can take care of a child or another one?

Don't I have to love myself before I can love anyone else?

SHARON: We are to love and to steward all of creation, and that includes ourselves.

We are to love anything that God loves, and that includes ourselves.

And so one thing that I think will surprise a lot of people about this devotional is how much time I give to the self, to understanding what is going on, because also one of the reasons people do struggle with self-preoccupation, it's not always pride, it's not always vanity, sometimes it is pain.

Pain is what is pulling your focus inward, and so to just tell people stop focusing on yourself, you need to focus on God but to not address what's going on in a person's interior world, you're skipping a step.

Now, one thing that is really different, I'll say, about this devotional compared with kind of the self-help culture, I believe that self-help culture, self-esteem culture, that developed to address a very real problem.

I think that we are coming out of previous generations where you were taught to just sort of bury your feelings, bury your pain, don't show what you're really going through.

That isn't healthy.

I think self-esteem culture came along as sort of a correction to that, but where this book is going to differ from self-help, self-esteem culture is that it keeps going.

I think self-esteem culture basically says the highest good is for you to love yourself.

It's almost like this alternative gospel, that what will set you free is knowing how special you are.

And as Christians, we would say on the one hand you've got it partly right, that the self is good, that God loves you, you should take care of yourself.

We affirm all of that, but that isn't your created purpose, that isn't why you exist, that's just one step on the way of living for this purpose beyond yourself.

RANDY ROBISON: That's good.

TAMMY TRENT: I love that, yeah, when I think about your story sitting across from you right now and all that you've walked through, and I think about where your life is right now, where God has you in a pastoral role, a teaching role.

When we sit down to write books, it comes from a place of, I think for me, a personal place of experience and what we're going through.

Because God's taken us through something that now we can pour into this book and overflow and hope that it brings breakthrough freedom in somebody else's life.

SHARON: I have experienced breakthrough.

The thing that I tell people, I think it's even in the dedication to that book, is that this is the second greatest liberation of my life, second only to finding Jesus.

Because it gave me tools to cope with when I'm feeling that insecurity, when it's stealing all the joy out of my work, out of things that are good.

I now know what to do with that.

For example, I'm no longer afraid of my insecurity.

I think that our culture says if you feel insecure, then you need to fight it, that it is always rooted in a lie, and that it is always only bad, and there's a lot of truth to that.

But one thing that I have learned is to get curious about my insecurity, because whenever I'm feeling insecure, and even insecurity, it doesn't always manifest as comparison, sometimes it's just this frantic anxiety, this urgency that I've got to fix this, I've gotta make it, you know, it's this image management.

Whatever it is, whenever I feel insecure, now I ask the question, you know, I must be feeling insecure because I am standing on something insecure, because Jesus doesn't shake.

And so if there's some part of my identity, some part of my hope, some part of my peace that is standing on anything other than Jesus, no wonder I feel insecure.

But I will never get that information about myself if I think I'm just believing a lie, I just need to speak truth out of this, I just need to reject it.

I've learned to kind of listen to it, like what is this information teaching me about myself?

And so it doesn't mean that I never struggle with insecurity anymore.

Now I just know what to do with it.

TAMMY TRENT: Recognizing it, knowing what to do with it immediately.

RANDY ROBISON: Have you ever stood right where the waves come up on the sand, you know?

If you stand in the same place, you start to feel the sand eroding under your feet, and it's like you wonder why you're off balance.

Well, because you're standing on sand.

I really like that, there's a lot of good truth in here.

Okay, I have more questions, but we don't have time to answer all of them.

So, can we offer your book to our viewers who will help us out today?

Because I think it'd really be helpful.

SHARON: I would love that.

TAMMY TRENT: It's a beautiful 40-day journey to greater freedom from self.

RANDY ROBISON: Yes, and it is a journey, because this is something we have to work on, but it is liberating too.

All right, I would like you to request that book, but I would like you to do actually a little bit more than that.

I'd like you to look at a situation and try to see where God is in it, and really more importantly, how God can make you a part of the narrative of helping somebody.

Because that's--when I look at scripture, and I'm motivated by scripture, it's to help other people.

And so I think this is an expression of our faith, so watch this, and you'll see how you can be a part.

ANNOUNCER: When water like this is your only choice, you drink it.

Otherwise, in three to five days without water, you can die due to dehydration.

Delfina, now 58 years of age, has fought this battle her whole life, needing to give her children water to live, but having no other choice but to collect it from unsafe sources like this.

The result, most of her children died from fever, vomiting, and diarrhea brought on by waterborne diseases.

Now as a grandmother, her life of sorrow continues with the recent death of her granddaughter.

ISAK PRETORIUS: I asked her how it feels when she thinks of the children that she's lost, and she just weeps as she remembers and then shares the pain and the struggle of seeing her children go through that.

Of losing her children, the pain and the struggle that she's experienced as a mother, not being able to give her children clean water, water that doesn't kill you.

Yet when asked what she would say to those who could make it possible, and her response was that she would plead with us to be able to do that.

But she said, "Not just for me, not just for my children, for all the mothers here, for all the children, for our whole community, because they're all suffering the same."

Like me, you can't imagine losing just one of your children, let alone multiple children.

I can't imagine the heartbreak and the anguish of experiencing that.

Well, I'm asking you from that heart to join hearts with us and partner with us to make sure that we can bring fresh, clean, life-giving water, not the water of death, but the water of life to this mother, to her children and grandchildren.

To the other mothers in this community that she literally speaks on their behalf, to the other precious children, the ones who are still here but are still suffering.

RANDY ROBISON: I know it's hard to watch that.

You know what you didn't see?

You didn't see a child drinking the dirty water.

We've got plenty of shots of that, we can show you that, but you know what people always say when we do that?

They say why do we let them—why don't you stop them?

You gotta stop them, don't let them drink that water.

And we say, well, but that's what they drink every day.

And I've actually been there, and I've watched a child scoop some really awful water and put it up here, and I've thought no, no, no, no, no, no, you know?

But it's not enough to just say don't drink the water.

You have to give them a choice.

That's what we're asking you today, to give them a choice.

When it rains, they may have fresh water they can collect for a while, but it gets dry.

There's no water except what they can walk to, what they can find, what they can scrape up with their bare hands, and it is not good.

We have to give them a choice.

You can give that mother and grandmother and so many others like her the choice of clean drinking water.

Partner with us right now, \$48 will basically help 10 people have water for the rest of their lives, \$144 will give that same clean drinking water to another 30 people.

And that's because an average well costs about \$4800 when you average it across the program, 350 wells in 20 nations.

We can't do that without you.

We can't give that child the choice without your support.

And Tammy, I know you know the reality is that if they don't have a choice, they will drink what water they have, and it's heartbreaking.

TAMMY TRENT: It is, you know what strikes me, Randy, about that story?

What hits me is watching that mother, that grandmother, working so hard, and we've seen it.

Every time we go, we see it, they work so hard, they will walk miles and miles and miles to get to their only water source that we know when we're there is contaminated.

It's filled with waterborne illness, it is killing many of the children in those communities and villages, but it's their only choice.

So we watch them work so hard and dip into that water and carry buckets and buckets.

And they will go up a hill for miles, right?

It's like we can't even believe they're getting up that hill, because many times we can't even get up there.

And putting it on their head or their shoulders and carrying it.

And I just think when I'm watching that, in the distance as they're walking away, thinking there is no life in that, there is no hope in that.

And if we could do something today to change that community, why would we not do it?

We are telling you the story of urgency right now, and it demands our attention.

We should never, ever, if we are fully aware of what's going on, we should never allow or sit back another moment for that grandmother to have to carry that kind of death on the top of her head or on the back of her shoulders to take it to a child.

Hoping that they will live another day if they drink it, but if they don't, they won't.

So the reality is if your heart is touched by it as much as mine is, every time I watch one of those stories, would you please, would you please come alongside us today?

Whatever gift you can give, you must know it's not too small, I promise you.

Would you pick up the phone, go online, make a call, pledge, pledge of hope for these families that desperately need it right now.

Let's bring them water for life.

ANNOUNCER: Every day thousands of lives are lost to waterborne disease, and nearly half of those are children under the age of five.

Through Mission Water for Life, you can give mothers hope and children a future as we provide clean, fresh drinking water free from the fear of death.

With your gift today, you can help drill and establish 350 water wells this year.

Your gift of \$24 will help provide clean water for 5 children, a gift of \$48 will help provide for 10, and \$144 will help provide life-giving water for 30 people for a lifetime.

With a gift of any amount, we'll send you "Discovering the Joy of Reading God's Word."

Whether you've read the Bible for years or are just beginning, this book invites you to experience Scripture in a fresh, more intimate way.

With your gift of \$100 or more, you may request "A Life of Compassion" coffee table book.

Capturing Life Outreach's heart for the world, each page pairs timeless Bible verses with vivid mission field photography, making God's Word visible in action.

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 request Life's beautiful 2026 bronze sculpture, "The Good Shepherd."

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

RANDY ROBISON: You really can make a difference, and we can't do it without you.

So please, I hope you're going online, go to the phone, make the best gift you can.

You'll be expressing God's love and helping to save a life.

And Tammy, I know it's a big blessing.

TAMMY TRENT: Yeah, we wanna get you this book for any amount that you're able to give today to give this incredible mission, Water for Life.

We will send you this book, just make sure to request it.

And let me just say this, if there's somebody right now that's been watching and just struggling because you have felt insecure your whole life, you've not felt like you're enough.

You've felt like you do not measure up, that you're not like the others, that you're disqualified, and that God would never want to use you because you are not enough.

Let me tell you today I believe that you are.

You are more than enough because of who Jesus is in your life, not just who you are in yourself, but because of him.

He says you are enough.

So if you need someone to come alongside you just to pray through some of that, to break some of that focus where the enemy wants to keep you always focused on yourself.

And I'm telling you when we do that, it is filled with disappointment, unmet expectations, unanswered prayers, all the things, because it's all the focus on us.

And if you need to break that in your life even a little bit today, chisel a little bit more, call us.

We wanna stand with you alongside you and pray for that, that you would begin to turn your gaze on God and your focus on Jesus.

Because when you do that, all things will begin to align more perfectly in your life.

Call that number right now, and we'll pray with you.

Thank you for being here, Sharon.

I have loved this time with you.

"Gazing at God," what a great book, sister, and I'm so thankful for the walk that you're walking and the way that you pour into the lives of so many people.

SHARON: Thank you so much.

It's been great being with y'all.

TAMMY TRENT: It's great to have you here, and it's great to always have you here, and we'll see you next time on "Life Today," bye-bye.

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FAITH WOMACK: The more I do, like, little word studies or study this person or this place, the more I fall in love with the story of redemption.

ANNOUNCER: Faith Womack helps us have "No More Boring Bible Study."

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