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Week 15

Randy Robison

Stephen McWhirter

"Healed And Whole"

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

STEPHEN MCWHIRTER: I would see him physically, violently abuse my mom for most of my childhood.

ANNOUNCER: The trauma of an abusive household hardened Stephen McWhirter to any mention of Jesus.

STEPHEN: At a young age, you know, I just decided, well, if God's real, he's not good, and I don't want anything to do with this Jesus guy.

And so at a very young age, my earthly father and my heavenly Father became the villains in my story.

ANNOUNCER: God broke through pain and radically restored him, next.

[music]

RANDY ROBISON: Welcome to "Life Today," I'm Randy Robinson, and I have a guest for you. Many of you have heard Stephen McWhirter. Over 100 million views just on one song. He's a Dove Award winner, a Grammy nominee, but he has not just a great voice, but a great testimony.

So I'm excited for you to hear that today. It will encourage you wherever you're at. Maybe you have a loved one that is far from God. When Jesus shows up, it changes everything, and you're gonna hear about it.

Stephen, welcome to "Life Today."

STEPHEN: Ah, it's good to be here, man. Thanks for having me.

RANDY: How long have you been--how long since you came out of--

STEPHEN: Stopped doing bad things?

RANDY: Stopped doing, yeah.

STEPHEN: Never, no, I--yeah, it's been over 20 years since I gave my life to Jesus.

RANDY: Did you ever think you'd be the place that you're at on a Christian TV show standing in front of people?

STEPHEN: No, furthest thing from it. I thought I'd be dead or in prison or something like that. That sounds dramatic, but it's totally real.

RANDY: So, take us back, because you grew up a preacher's kid, like me.

STEPHEN: Yeah, I don't know if it's worse or what, but an evangelist's son, so EK, I guess, but you know, my dad was a traveling evangelist, and we would go from church camp to church camp, but the guy that I saw get up and preach on a pulpit was different than the guy I saw behind closed doors.

I would see him physically, violently abuse my mom for most of my childhood, and there was a lot of trauma in that, right? But at a young age, you know, I just decided, well, if God's real, he's not good, and I don't want anything to do with this Jesus guy.

And so at a very young age, my earthly father and my heavenly Father became the villains in my story. And so at 11 years old I started smoking, drinking, marijuana, that kind of stuff. By the time I was 15, it was cocaine, pills, I'm selling drugs, you name it.

By the time I was 17, I was a full-out crystal meth addict, and I was using every day for many years, and throughout this time, I was the guy who hated Christianity, hated Jesus, like would have cussed you out if you mentioned his name around me or tried to knock you out, because I told you, you know, I was a meth addict, so I weighed like 100 pounds, so if I threw my whole body at you, you might have got a paper cut, you know what I'm saying?

But, you know, but God was after me, man. People were praying for me, I mean, really praying for me to come to Jesus.

RANDY: Were you singing during this time?

STEPHEN: I was in metal bands screaming my head off, you know, like that every night, people beating themselves up in front of me, but yeah, I was--music's kind of always been there, you know?

But, yeah, I mean, and these people were praying for me, and I believe, you know, God, like was after me, right?

RANDY: Yeah, well no, yeah, absolutely. I mean, the hound of heaven, right? And that's a beautiful thing, but the trauma there, I mean, I get it.

Fortunately, you know, the guy that everybody's seeing on TV with my dad of the evangelist is the guy you have at home. Now, he's not perfect, and you have to kind of reconcile that, but to put God onto our earthly fathers is a thing that a lot of people do.

In other words, we have an imperfect earthly father, we think God's, in your case, the villain. How did that break in you?

STEPHEN: Yeah, you can't underestimate the significance of a parent's role in your life, right? And many of us do. We see our parents, or we see not just our parents, we see God through these broken people, and we say that's what God's like, but he's the source of goodness, it's not just something he does.

When Moses goes up in the mountain, he says, "Show me your glory." Of all that God could have said, he said, "I'll let all my goodness go before you." If you've ever wanted something good in your life, you've wanted God and didn't know it, it's him, he's the source.

I didn't know that then, I didn't even believe it. I thought that I should want what God wants for my life because it's good for him, but it's a bummer for me, right? So I should want it, but I didn't understand that he's the source.

RANDY: What changed it?

STEPHEN: Well, you know, as I said, people were praying for me, and somebody came and gave me this book called "The Case for Christ" by Lee Strobel. Lee wrote that great book that's about, you know, evidence for the resurrection of Jesus.

Now, having told you how much I hated Jesus, and if anybody out there watching knows what I'm talking about, that person that you look at him, you go if there was ever an enemy of the cross, it's that guy, that was me. So this is the most miraculous part of the story, because when they offered me the book, I didn't like cause an episode and kick him out of my house. I was like, cool, whatever, give me this stupid book, and threw it in this room.

Fast forward, 3 o'clock in the morning, nobody's playing music softly in the corner, making everything I say sound more spiritual, you know? But it's the kindness of a very real God. I mean, I had drugs on the side table next to me. It is seemingly the most impossible place for somebody to get saved, might even be offensive to some.

But in this room I knew God was there. Like, I knew he was in the room, and I just remember being like, God, I wanna give you my life, I wanna quit all this addiction, all this darkness, all this anger, all this depression. I've known for so long, God, I want to, but there's no way, I can't do it.

And you have to understand at this point I've been in addiction for almost, you know, 12 years, over 11 years. I couldn't imagine who I was without this, you know? This world that I've built around myself. So when I said God I want to, but I can't, I meant it, and he knew it, and in a thought more powerful than words, I knew the Holy Spirit was speaking something

into me that changed me for the rest of my life, and it was this, "Stephen, you won't do it, I'll do it."

And I didn't know it then, I know it now, this is Ephesians 2:8, you're saved by grace, this isn't something you can boast about, it's a work of God, he does it. Now, there's something we can do. John 6:29 says the only work the Father asks of you, this is Jesus saying this, the only work the Father asks of you is to believe.

RANDY: Believe, that's right.

STEPHEN: And in that moment, that's what I did. I mean, I took God at his word, I believed him like I believe I'm breathing air right now, Randy, you know? And I fell on my knees, and I gave my life to Jesus, and I went from addiction to redemption, from meth addict to worship leader, from death to life, ugly crown on the floor, boogers coming out of my nose, and I just--the rest is history.

I literally went from this moment in this room where I quit everything overnight, which people hear that, and they say you can't, you don't--I've had some people say you can't say that. Oh, I can't lie either, this is what happened, but I will say this, be encouraged.

If you're seeing this, and you're somebody who's struggling in addiction or whatever it is, if it takes you 6 times, 11 times, whatever it is, and you fall at the feet of Jesus, and you mean it, he's gonna use your story to draw people to him, because if you read the Gospels, Jesus never healed anyone the same way twice. Every story has a purpose, so be encouraged by that.

RANDY: And, you know, I've seen with whether it's healing from trauma or freedom from drug addiction, all the things that we struggle with, I've seen the instantaneous, and I've also seen that long walk like the Israelites took from their deliverance from slavery in Egypt, to get to the promised land they had to go through a desert, and it's because God had to teach them, so it doesn't--

STEPHEN: I may have quit drugs overnight, but there was still plenty of other messed-up things to deal with me for years to come, but you know, probably the craziest thing is this. You give your life to Jesus, right? It's like a pebble in the ocean in that moment that begins to ripple out and becomes like a tsunami of grace and restoration hitting parts of your life you would have never imagined.

I knew that God was calling me in this moment to forgive my father. Now, at this moment, my dad hadn't physically like abused my mom or anything like that for over almost, you know, 10 years, 11 years, that did not matter to me. I honestly wish my mom would've left my dad, which you'll see in this book, right?

But she didn't for whatever reason, and if you're not safe, get safe if anybody's hearing this, I don't condone it, but she stayed with him, and I knew I needed to forgive him. I went to forgive my dad. It was not a--it's not a moment you'd put in a movie, okay? 'Cause I was--it

was super-awkward. I was just like, hey dad, we gotta talk, I forgive you for all the things. He looks at me like a deer in headlights, and it's like, okay, thanks, and I leave the room. It was just totally awkward. There's no beam of light or a bird on my shoulder. It was just weird, right?

And fast forward, I knew God had done something, though, beyond what I experienced that moment. My fiancée, which is my wife now, said, "Hey, I want your dad to baptize us." And I'm like, I hate this idea, okay. On our way to get baptized, my wife and I got in the biggest screaming, cussing match ever on our way to get baptized. We knew God was up to something. We go, my dad baptizes us. My mom tells me later that my dad wept all night, because he was thinking can God actually restore what I've broken?

Fast forward a little bit more, my fiancée, about to be my wife, wants my dad to perform our wedding ceremony. I'm starting to think this marriage is not gonna work out, Randy. Anyways, my dad does it. Now, at this point, at the point of this interview with you right now, my dad's been passed from cancer, gosh, 12 years ago or something, and I sat in the hospital room with him as--the hospice, and he's in a coma.

You know that point where people--if you know anybody that's ever gone through this, they're in the state of a coma for some time, and the nurses and the doctors will tell you, hey, tell them it's okay to let go, and they usually will pass not too long after that. It's a really difficult moment. We've been doing this with my dad for a week or so, and I was the only person in the room with him at one moment, and I see him struggling to breathe, and I think about when Peter comes to Jesus, and he says how many times should I forgive someone who's done something wrong?

Is it seven times? That seems like a lot. Jesus is like, no, 7 times 77, you just do it, you don't stop, you let it be complete, and you let it keep going. So, I leaned into my dad one last time as he's in a coma, with tears in my eyes for real, I just said, "Dad, I love you, and I forgive you, really," and he breathed his last breath in that moment and left this--soul left his body.

And in that moment I knew that God was like--the most Jesus-like thing you and I can do on this side of eternity is to forgive. It doesn't mean we condone things, but it means we take a debt, a legitimate debt that somebody owes us, and we rip it up. That doesn't always mean you're gonna be in a relationship with that person. That doesn't mean you have to keep doing life with them, but the most like Jesus you can be is to actually forgive.

RANDY: Yeah, well, that's the greatest miracle that we have that Jesus performed, because sin is what keeps us separated from God, and when Jesus came in and said that he had the power to forgive our sins, that's how we're--we are radically restored to God. So, yeah, absolutely.

I wanna show people your book real quick, because I didn't mention it at the top, "Radically Restored." This is Stephen's story. You can pick it up wherever you get books. I love the foreword, it's by Lee Strobel, great guy, right?

STEPHEN: I read Lee's book, man. I gotta tell you, imagine going back 20 years to the guy in that room, 3 o'clock in the morning, and being like, hey--like God's like, "Hey, 20 years or more from now you're gonna write a book, and the guy whose book you're reading will write the foreword, and I'm gonna use your story to reach more people." This is the kingdom.

RANDY: Okay, now God's using your music to reach a lot of people, and there's one song in particular that has really made an impact, "Come Jesus Come." I would love to send you over to our other set and let us hear that song, can we do that?

STEPHEN: Sure.

RANDY: All right, this is "Come Jesus Come" by Stephen McWhirter.

[music]

♪ Sometimes I fall ♪
♪ To my knees and pray ♪
♪ Come Jesus come ♪
♪ Let today be the day ♪
♪ Sometime I feel ♪
♪ Like I'm gonna break ♪
♪ But I'm holding on ♪
♪ To a hope that won't fade ♪
♪ Come Jesus come ♪
♪ We've been waiting so long ♪
♪ For the day You return ♪
♪ To heal every hurt ♪
♪ And right every wrong ♪
♪ We need you right now ♪
♪ Come and turn this around ♪
♪ Deep down I know ♪
♪ This world isn't home ♪
♪ Come Jesus come ♪
♪ Come Jesus come ♪
♪ One day He'll come ♪
♪ And we'll stand face to face ♪
♪ Come and lay it all down ♪
♪ 'Cause it might be today ♪
♪ The time is right now ♪
♪ There's no need to wait ♪
♪ Your past will be washed ♪

♪By rivers of grace ♪
♪Come Jesus Come ♪
♪We've been waiting so long ♪
♪For the day You return ♪
♪To heal every hurt ♪
♪And right every wrong ♪
♪We need you right now ♪
♪Come and turn this around ♪
♪Deep down I know ♪
♪This world isn't home ♪
♪Come Jesus come ♪
♪Come Jesus come ♪
♪Come Jesus come ♪
♪Come Jesus come ♪♪

[music]

RANDY: Wow, Stephen, man, where'd that come from?

STEPHEN: My wife and I literally sat in our basement in 2020 weeping and reading Revelation, the last chapter. That was during the pandemic, so maybe we were like this feels like the end time, let's cram for the test, right? But we were in Revelation 22, verse 20, where Jesus says, "Behold, I'm coming soon."

And then right after it says come Lord Jesus, and we were worshiping and just weeping, and we were singing what was the first verse of that song and all this stuff, and we were learning what it means to like really long for Jesus to return, like to love people better here and now towards that day, to build things that matter more here and now towards that day.

And we ended up finishing the song off with some really good friends of ours, Hank Bentley, Bryan Fowler. That was 6 years ago, right? At the time I was with a record label, and I brought them a song, and I was like, "Man, I feel like God's breathing on this." And they're like, "Nah, we'll pass." And they actually dropped me from my deal. We will not mention who they were. They dropped me from my deal like a couple of weeks later.

I'm like, "Okay, Jesus, I just-- I guess this is just you and me," right? And so that's what I did, singing to Jesus. But we were putting like, you know, clips on TikTok and Instagram and all these things, and at one point, like 4 years later after me just not giving up on what God wanted to do with the song, and I mean I sent it to radio people, all kinds of-- crickets, nothing, and just some acoustic version of me singing goes viral, and next thing you know we're starting to get like 100 million views of this song, it's crazy.

And so it was really a longing for Jesus to return.

RANDY: Interesting, you know, and here's the beauty of it. Jesus, when he left, he sent the Holy Spirit to be with you, so the Holy Spirit's with you. If you want someone to pray with you, we've got people who would love to just pray with you, but God is with you, he hasn't left you.

He'll never leave you or forsake you. That's the beauty of what Jesus has done for us. But again, that phone number right there, if you just wanna talk to somebody, pick that up.

But I wanna show you an opportunity to be the expression of God in this world to help heal every hurt. You can do that today. By following Christ's example, reaching out and saying to someone that we care and we're gonna put our faith into action, watch this and you'll see how.

[music]

[speaking foreign language]

ANNOUNCER: Every day thousands of children are born with or grow up with physical conditions that are entirely correctable. For families, the impact is profound. Simple activities become discouraging, hope feels distant, but the solution is not unknown. Corrective surgeries can restore function, dignity, and hope.

PETER KYALO: CURE does a lot of things, and one of them is really to touch people's lives, both spiritually, physically, just the ability to give people hope, the ability to be able to come to CURE, and the first thing that we do is actually invite you in, give you a hug, say that we love you, and we do this because, actually, Christ asks us to do this.

ANNOUNCER: Our medical mission partners who perform these life-changing surgeries face a critical challenge, the urgent need to expand their surgical facilities so that children requiring corrective care are not forced to wait. That is why Life Outreach International needs your help, so that together we can provide the resources necessary for this expansion and ensure that no child in need of surgery is ever turned away.

RANDY: I want you to take a look again at those two children, because what you saw at the end there was before and after. When you look at the before, you see how difficult it is for those children. I don't know how they're walking, but they get around. But you know what? It's difficult.

When you see those after pictures, the children running, that is such a beautiful picture of what's happening right now with our partners there in Zimbabwe at that hospital. But listen, they need more space, they need more surgical rooms so that they can accommodate more children. Those doctors are so dedicated. Those brothers and sisters in Christ with you and I who are followers of Jesus, the first thing they do with a child who's coming in for surgery is they pray with them, they share God's love in word and deed, and that's why I so love this outreach.

That is the calling of Life Outreach International, the word and the deed. We pray, we give them the medical attention that they need. I love those doctors who say we are tools in God's hands, and you know what? Their skill, their time, their expertise, they give freely. Those children, the families of those children, they don't pay a thing for those surgeries. Their lives are changed because of the love of God and the support of people just like you.

But right now they are not able to have the full impact that they could have, and that's why we're coming to you today. We want you to be a part of a \$600,000 project, because that's what it'll take to renovate this hospital so that they can accommodate more children. They come from all over. Zimbabwe is situated in southern Africa, right in the middle. It has the potential to be a place of even greater impact if we can complete this project.

We're calling it the Hope for Children project, because that's exactly what it is. That's what I'm asking you to give today. Will you go online, go to the phone, make the best gift you can? We have some gifts we'd love to put in your hands if you'd request it, but I want you to be a part of giving hope to so many children that desperately need it.

It's somewhat simple for you and I, those doctors are doing the hard part. We just need to come together right now quickly and say yes, we will reach that goal. I'd love to reach it before the end of the television campaign. Some of you can really help knock that out, but I pray that you would just say a quick prayer and do as God leads you. You can give hope, you can give a new opportunity at life for so many children. Will you do it right now? We really need to hear from you. Go online, go to the phone, make the best gift that you can.

ANNOUNCER: Many children in Africa are born with severe deformities or suffer life-altering injuries, conditions like club feet, windswept legs, and untreated fractures force them to live in pain because help is out of reach. But you can offer healing today.

Our mission partner in Zimbabwe runs a children's hospital now at capacity and in urgent need of renovation and expansion. With a \$600,000 goal and only a short period of time to raise the necessary funds, your best gift today helps children receive the surgical care they need at no cost to the families. Together we can heal precious lives and reveal the love of Jesus.

With a gift of any amount, we'll send you the "Global Impact of Life" Journal, featuring inspiring photos from Life's outreaches. This beautiful journal is a reminder that your prayers and partnership are making a global difference. With your gift of \$126 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 \$1,026 to help with the expansion of operating rooms so children are no longer turned away and request Life's beautiful bronze sculpture, The Good Shepherd. Please call, write, or make your gift online today.

RANDY: I do hope you're going online, get on the phone, make the best gift you can, we need to get this done. It will bless many people, and it'll only happen because of you.

Stephen, man, thanks for spending a little time with us, sharing your voice with us.

STEPHEN: Thanks.

RANDY: If somebody wants to check out the book, kind of see what you're about, what's a good website for you?

STEPHEN: Go to radicallyrestoredbook.com. That'll get you to all things me.

RANDY: Yeah, all all good things, man, thank you. Hey, I appreciate you guys being here as well. Come back, we've got more encouragement for you on "Life Today."

[music]

ANNOUNCER: Stay connected with "Life Today" through your favorite social media. Get access to exclusive content and news with the "Life Today" social media experience.

BENNY TATE: You just start serving, because always remember, if serving is beneath you, leading will always be above you.

ANNOUNCER: Rethinking leadership, tomorrow.

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