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Week 28

Randy Robison & Blynda Lane

Victoria Arlen

"Peaks And Valleys"

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

ANNOUNCER: Coming up, Victoria Arlen's miraculous healing wasn't the end of her story.

VICTORIA ARLEN: I had been asked this question by my therapist where she was like, "When I say 'fame,' what comes to mind?"

I said, "My trauma just being glorified, and me not being allowed to cry about it or be upset about it or say, 'That was really messed up.'"

ANNOUNCER: Trauma led her to the end of her rope.

VICTORIA: I just had a complete breakdown in the middle of the night and really had every intention to end my life.

ANNOUNCER: Next.

[music]

RANDY ROBISON: Welcome to "Life Today." I'm Randy Robison. Blynda Lane is to my left. How are you?

BLYNDA LANE: I am to your left. I'm right here.

RANDY: And to your left--

BLYNDA: And to my left is Victoria Arlen, which we've already had on the program, and it was so good.

RANDY: So good, an amazing story of healing. And by the way, if you missed that program, you can go to lifetoday.org and hear Victoria's full story of her healing, physical healing that is just, I mean, just wild.

Wonderful accomplishments, and people will recognize you from television, "Dancing with the Stars." I mean, you're a Paralympian. But people would be like, "Why?" because you-- you know, right?

VICTORIA: Yeah, I'm not in a wheelchair anymore.

RANDY: You're not in a wheelchair anymore. So, but after the miracles, struggles.

VICTORIA: Mm. I always say the--what came when I--it was very obvious, like, I always say, I'm like, no one really knows this part of my story.

And I think, you know, overcoming so much at a young age, not being expected to be a "functioning member of society" or recovering, and then doing all of that and then being kind of thrust into the spotlight, there was no time to have a bad day.

There was no time to actually check in and say, "Actually, am I okay?" And I wasn't. I was dealing with debilitating anxiety, I had really horrific depression, but that was all from trauma. That was very much a post-traumatic stress response.

But there was no--people were, you know, making a lot of money off of my story. People were very much, this was the hero, and so, you know, I'm given this cape, but I don't know how to be a hero. I'm just trying to figure out how to be a teenager and then navigate my twenties.

And so, I was almost thrown into this, and then there was no time to have a bad day, you know? There was no spot where I felt like, "Hey, maybe I'm not okay," because it was just go, go, go.

And I think I used a lot of the accomplishments, it was always, I needed to do more for people. People needed more and more and more, which is a thing we all deal with, but there was never a, "You must just need to crash out a little bit."

And then I ended up crashing out and it kind of came in a form of, I just--I couldn't do it anymore, and there had just been a lot going on and a lot of stuff that just wasn't in alignment, and I just had a complete breakdown in the middle of the night and really had every intention to end my life.

And it was a phone call, I was just calling to leave my mom a message. And this was at the height of my career, like there was all these breakthroughs, so I very much looked like I was at a peak, but I was quite literally sinking in the valley.

And my mom picked up the phone on the second to last ring, and that was where I just said, "I can't do this anymore." And she met me where I was and said, "It's okay to not be okay."

And that was like groundbreaking information to me, because no one had given me permission to have a bad day. And then from there, God just showing up and just this incredible healing journey of just actually getting my mental health in check, getting help, going to a trauma specialist, going to a therapist, and then also learning, I don't have to function where I feel like I'm just drowning every single day.

There's a day where I can get out of bed one day and be excited about the sunrise again. And so, I think going through all of that, there was so much more to the story, that that was by far harder than the vegetative state, going through that valley was a valley that I really don't know--because there were so many other things that happened in the midst of all that, too, so I don't know how I'm here. Well, I do know how, but, you know.

BLYNDA: Exactly. Thank you, Jesus. To bring the audience up to speed, you were in a vegetative state, a comatose state from age 11 to 15, and then that put you, because you had to relearn everything, how to speak, how to walk, you were in a wheelchair then for almost ten years, you said.

And then after that, that's when things really turned around for you when you began walking, you were on "Dancing with the Stars," and a Paralympian. So your story of the lowest of the low to the highest of the high, and then you speak about, as you're having it all, you're wanting to end it all.

So there's just a lot of peaks and valleys, a lot of ups and downs. And I think what's important, and what I would love to ask you, is, I don't know if we speak enough about, okay, we just are so excited when somebody gets physical healing, and yet there's so much on the inside with mental health that we don't speak about, we don't even know if we have language to say are you fully healed in your mental health? Is your spirit okay?

Like, how do we--so after you realized, "I am not okay," and your mom telling you it's okay to not be okay, what was that next step you had to take? Because there was a time when literally taking a step was a victory. Now you're taking another step, but how?

VICTORIA: Well, I think, too, it's recognizing you're in that valley. That's half the battle, I feel like.

And I think, you know, I had been asked this question by my therapist where she was like, "When I say 'fame,' what comes to mind?" I said, "My trauma just being glorified, and me not being allowed to cry about it or be upset about it or say, 'That was really messed up,'" and so, it was this radical acceptance I got to have of, "No, this was really bad what happened to me and I'm allowed to be upset.

I'm allowed to start forgiving. I'm allowed to not be always sitting up there like everything's fine, and I'm allowed to find an actually genuine smile."

And so, I think with all of that, it was realizing, it doesn't matter what you have, it doesn't matter what you've achieved, it doesn't matter what you've overcome. A valley is a valley. We're all finding--we all find ourselves in a valley at some point, and that's not a shameful place.

That's not a shameful place to admit you need a little help, or I always say, I'm like, if you're drowning, who's jumping in the water to remind you you can swim, or remind you that you can keep going?

And so I think for that, it was, you know, my family just jumped in, and they said, "Hey, we got you. Let's figure this out, let's find--" And so I think--but that also came in turn with my spirit, too, because there was a very broken little girl that had never been said, "Hey, we're good. It's gonna be okay."

And so I think for me, it was a lot of that inner work, but it was also seeing how God had showed up, reminding myself of that, but then also understanding God meets us in the valley. God speaks to us the loudest in the valley. And God is like, "I got you. I'm counting every single tear that you cry, and I will show up for you."

And so I think how he showed up when I was getting help with my mental health, but then also my spirit healing, that I actually can enjoy a sunrise, there is--when you're struggling so bad you don't realize that there could be a day where your favorite song comes on and you just wanna have a dance party, or you can sit and watch the sunrise.

And so as I was doing the work and really learning tools, learning to be able to cry and talk about the hard stuff, and then talk to other people about it, too, of, "Hey, but how are you actually doing?" because a lot of times we're not asking that to a lot of the people in our life, because the second time you ask there's usually a different answer.

And so then when I saw that, I just saw how, oh, wow, when you really take care of your spirit, take care of your mind, you can actually see that view.

BLYNDA: That actually--I was gonna say just really quick, Randy, that makes me just wanna say to the viewer, I wanna say, "How are you doing? How are you doing?" There's someone watching today, and no one's ever asked them that question.

And I just want you to know, we have a number at the bottom of the screen that you can call, and we have prayer partners that will join with you, and they'll ask you, "How are you doing? How can we pray for you?" And I just want you to know that God sees you. God knows everything that your heart feels, every need that you have in your life.

And I just want you to know right now that he's present with you, right now. He's there with you. He sees you and he loves you. But don't go alone. Don't do this alone. You can call right now and get prayer for whatever needs you have, because we wanna know that you're doing okay.

RANDY: And so that's--you're so right, and I encourage people to do that as well. But the view--you talk about the sunrise a couple times. The title of the book, "The View is Worth it." Why is it worth it? I get that that the view's pretty, but why is it worth it?

VICTORIA: So I had it on a sticky note for many years, "The toughest climbs have the prettiest views. You just have to keep climbing."

And so I would say that, repeat that to myself, because there is days I woke up and I didn't wanna keep climbing, or it was really challenging. And I think it's one thing to say, "Oh, enjoy the view," or do the--I didn't want it to be something cheesy, but it's worth it because if you've climbed out of a valley, you deserve the view that's waiting on the other side.

And so that's where I wanted to encourage people of, it is worth it. You just have to keep climbing. And also, meet you where you are, and then realize what you're capable of, and that if you're in that tough climb, that view on the other side is going to be so worth it.

And I can say that even just where I'm at in my life, of like, you just realize, wow, you can look back at everything you've overcome or dealt with, and say, "Wow, that was worth it." And you might not always feel that right away, but there are times where I've had it where I think I would just start saying to my family, "The view is worth it." Like, I'm here, and that wasn't the case for several occurrences over the last couple of years.

RANDY: And that's great. But for some people to hear, "You just gotta keep climbing," it's the last thing they want.

VICTORIA: That's the thing, yes. So that's why I wrote the book. Kind of a guide.

BLYNDA: But not only just wrote the book, but while you were writing the book, you were having your own issues. I mean, you were having relapses, so it's like we're experiencing these peaks and valleys. Even while you're writing the book, you have a health relapse.

VICTORIA: Well, so I wrote it as a guide where I just wanted this to be a resource. I literally refer to myself as a tour guide, because my friends and family all call me Tors. So I'm like, "Oh, look, I'm your tour guide. We're gonna try to figure out this climb and it's gonna get messy, but hey, we're gonna figure it out."

And so, because I love when people go, like, "Just get out of bed, you can do it," and I'm like, "No, I can't. Like, I am--this is not the day." So that's how I approached it of like, keep climbing, but hey, let's figure it out along the way.

But yeah, to your point there, I've had four relapses in the last three years of the same condition that tried to take me out as a kid, and the worst one being this past December, where within 45 minutes, I couldn't move anything from the neck down. And it was bad. I mean, it was probably the worst it could be. And my spirit, my--everything was just shutting down.

And I remember coming through--after coming through some pretty dark days where we were all looking around like, "I don't know if we're gonna pull through like the other ones," I get home and my dad had gotten my wheelchair out of storage because he was like, you know, you more than likely can't walk again and all this stuff.

And I had just--the final manuscript had been passed in, so I'm holding for dear life on the counter looking at my mom and going, "I'm done with this," and she goes, "What do you mean?" I was like, "I'm done motivating, inspiring." I was like, "It's all crap." And she was like, "Okay."

And I don't speak like that, but I was so broken, and my spirit was so broken, and it was one of those things that I just couldn't go--and I just looked at her and I said, "I wanna cancel the book." And she goes, "Okay, we can't really cancel the book, but like, we can figure it out."

And then she did something really brilliant. She looks at me and she goes, "All right, so what are we gonna do about this?" She's like, "I'm done, you're done." She goes, "Are we Thelma and Louise-ing this?" And I look at her and I was like, "I don't know. I guess so."

And she goes, "Okay, two problems though. I'm just gonna point out two problems. There's not a big enough cliff, and I don't have a Cadillac, so what's our plan B?" And I looked at her. I was like, "We trust God?" And she goes, "Yeah, let's try that."

And then she handed me my manuscript and she was like, "Why don't you read it as a reader and not as a writer? Read it for the person you wrote it for." And I think that was in turn, and the way of us looking at each other and saying, "Okay, we can look at how bad this has been, or we could look at, okay, how is God showing up in this moment?"

I got out of the hospital. I'm standing, on shaky ground, but I'm standing. This book is hopefully going to help a lot of people. And just, how can we grow from this in that sense, too, but it was also using the tools from my book, of my mom essentially saying, "Read it," so that actually was like, okay, there's a reason why I wrote this.

And then even the afterword, too, of just explaining that we're gonna have valleys, even when it appears to be all good.

BLYNDA: Do you fight sometimes having a victim mentality though? Like I feel like I would have a little "woe is me" in this, yeah.

VICTORIA: I think during certain times when I was like in the hospital, I think I just looked at my mom and I was like, "I don't wanna keep ending up like this. I don't--" Your threshold is only so much.

But when I hit that, I changed the channel. I literally do this thing where I would change the channel and I would say, "Okay, but what would a victory voice say?" And a victory voice would say, Well, "God is still the ultimate healer, and God is still directing your story, and

God hasn't let you end in defeat yet, so I don't think he's gonna start now. We've had a good run so far."

And I just started switching--I would just change the channel, because it's easier to have a victim voice. It's easier, because we're human. But like, change the channel, find one good thing, find one thing to be thankful for or grateful for, and that almost changes your viewpoint on it.

So even when that was so bad, as much as I wanted to have the victim voice and sit in my-- have my pity party, you know, I remember just saying, I looked at my mom and I was like, "I can't believe I'm saying this out loud, but look at how God has shown up." And I was looking at her just very like stoically.

And then we kind of said, we were like, "But God." And we kept saying, "But God," and all these doors that he still opened in the midst of us absolutely falling apart.

RANDY: Okay, speaking of view, I have a question about this, because you know, we talk about Lazarus who was raised from the dead. I mean this is a passage in Scripture that it's like, you colored it in Sunday school, right?

VICTORIA: Yeah, I did.

RANDY: And you go, "Yeah, but Lazarus died again." The guy had two funerals, right? And when I say that, some people look at me kind of funny like, "Wow, you're a real downer, aren't you?" But I go, "Well--"

You realize that yes, we want--I want--hey, I get sick, I'm praying for healing. My loved ones get sick, I'm praying for healing, I'm taking them to the doctor. Everything, the kitchen sink and all, right, because it's better to be well than to be sick. But at the same time, we're supposed to have an eternal view.

I mean, Paul literally told Timothy, his protege, "Take hold of the eternal life to which you are called," not meaning to commit suicide, but to take hold of what God has already given you. Eternity starts the moment you're born again, take hold of that. Do you have what I would call a little more of an eternal view, even, of this life that helps you get through the valleys?

VICTORIA: Yes, I think it's something--that's a great question. I think for me it's the relationship I have with God, of the faith and that peace that surpasses understanding, that he really does show up and he really does meet you in the wilderness but also cries with you and holds your hand with it too.

So I feel like for me, my eternal view is really just how much God has refused to let me down. And I think I--and how many of my friends and people around me that were on the fence of just realizing, he can just be your friend that's holding your hand through it at all, and how I think that's been my viewpoint of just the fact that, like, you get to just know God.

And look, I don't recommend almost dying to get to know God, but it's something where the gift of seeing the people around me get to know God, but then also myself, even in the wilderness, and even in times where I was just crying out, not feeling like he ever left. Even when I said, "You can go now," like, "I am not this perfect Christian right now," and God leaned in deeper and he leaned in more, and the way he just kept showing up.

So I think my eternal view is the fact that we're never really alone, and even in the valley, God's right there with you, and to know that, and then even at the peak, you're going, "But God," and how God will bring you through a valley only to get you to that peak where you can only thank God, because it makes no sense as to how, but then you can look back at that.

So I think the eternal view is seeing how many times he just shows up and doesn't let you think anything else. Like, he's the one where it's like, "Look, I'm not gonna let you down. I'm gonna bring those orange slices to the practice and be there for you," in a different--you know, obviously. But it's like, he just--he knows what you need. And he hears you. And I think that's my eternal view, is knowing he's never let me down.

BLYNDA: I'm just thinking about--I'm sitting here and I'm like, I just--I'm trying to imagine the person watching today, and the one that might feel hopeless, and the one that might feel like they have hit the valley more times than they care to count. What would you say to the person who's just needing some hope and encouragement to keep going, and for them to know that God is near to them?

VICTORIA: Oh, gosh, you're gonna make me cry. I think what I would say is that there's a reason that right before the sun rises it's the darkest. And usually when you're in that darkest moment is where God's light can shine the brightest.

You just gotta keep holding on for that, and trusting that the storm that you're in won't last forever, and that the most beautiful thing God can do after a storm is give you a rainbow, and that rainbow can come in all shapes and forms.

But even in those tough times, he's never left you, because you're still here. And you still being here has a greater purpose than you can ever imagine, and as someone who has punched their platinum status to rock bottom several times, that he's never let me stay there and he has always shown up and said, "I got you." So he's that hand you just have to reach out for.

RANDY: I really liked that you have encouraged people not just today but throughout, and being open and being honest about the difficulties. In fact, if you want a little more encouragement, I would encourage you to get Victoria Arlen's book "The View is Worth It."

We would love to send it to you today if you'll be like Victoria's mother, who interceded in her dark time and helped to bring her back to a place of wholeness and happiness. And by

that, I mean that there are people right now in a situation where they're wondering, "Am I ever gonna get out of this valley? Is there really a God who cares?"

And you can be that person who intervenes and shows them God's love, not just in word but in deed. So I hope you'll watch this and see if you can be a part today of helping someone in a very difficult time.

[music]

JOHN YEATTS: What if this was the best you had to offer? We can make it sure she has better.

FEMALE: And who's this sitting with you?

[speaking foreign language]

JOHN: In today's world, I still stand shocked and appalled that anyone should have to use this type of water. But the fact is this is where these families get their daily water source, and you and I know that there's no way to drink this water on a consistent basis and not deal with some type of sickness.

This beautiful little girl and her family, if you'll help us, will never have to drink that kind of water again. It'll come out crystal clear and cold, and when a neighbor stops by thirsty, they won't be offering them a cup of death. They'll be able to offer them a cup of cold water in Jesus's name.

RANDY: Hmm, you know, Blynda, people always wonder, why would they even drink that water? But as John pointed out, they don't have any other kind of choice.

BLYNDA: When I saw that child drinking the water, and I think it's just, drinking that, we know that as that child drank that, it could be harming them, and it's painful to watch. And then I'm reminded that there's 2 billion people in the world that don't have access to good drinking water. I mean, it's just mind-boggling.

RANDY: It is, but you know, when you see that one child, you go, ah, well, if I could help that one.

BLYNDA: If I could help that one. And I think that helps take it from this big number to what can I do? I can help one.

RANDY: Yeah, and you know what? You can help one today. In fact, a gift of \$48 will basically give clean drinking water to 10 people today, because the average cost of a water well is \$4800, wherever we go, over 20 nations that we work in, and we've been doing this for years.

But we've only done it with your support. That's why we can say, hey, a gift of \$48, you will give clean drinking water for an average of 70 years, we call it Water for Life, to 10 people. A gift of \$144 would serve 30 people. Maybe you can give a gift of \$4800 and provide that well.

That will become a focal point for that village, I can tell you from experience, I've seen this. The average is about 1,000 people that will come to that well. When there's no water to be found, they will get that cup of water in Jesus's name that you provided.

You know, some of you could provide more, and I would just say just do what God puts on your heart. God loves obedience more than sacrifice, but as believers, we are called to be his hands, his feet around the world. We're asking you to reach out right now in love and meet a practical need. Please go online, go to the phone, make the best gift you can.

ANNOUNCER: Every day, far too many lives are lost to waterborne disease, and tragically, children under the age of five are the most vulnerable.

Through Mission Water for Life, you can give desperate mothers hope and precious children a future by helping provide clean, life-giving water before it's too late. Our goal this year is to drill 350 water wells in areas where the need is greatest, but it won't be possible without you.

Today, 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.

In thanks for your gift of any amount, we'll send you "Prayers for My Spiritual Health." This beautifully-crafted prayer book will meet you in the places where anxiety, grief, and spiritual weariness run deep, guiding you through prayers for inner peace, emotional healing, and intimacy with God.

With your gift of \$100 or more, you may request the "Your Life of Prayer" bundle. This collection includes "Prayers for My Spiritual Health," along with "Prayers for My Physical Health" and the "Life Prayer" journal, three companions to help strengthen your walk with Christ.

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 our inspiring bronze sculpture, "The Good Shepherd." Please call, write, or make your gift online today.

BETTY ROBISON: This little child is probably between two and three years old, maybe four. But you know, he may not make it past five, four or five, if he doesn't have the water that he needs.

He has water, but it's contaminated. But you know, we have to give them a choice. They don't have a choice right now. Because they don't have that choice, their bodies are being contaminated with this bad water, and their families are dying.

Our missionaries have been there and seen them in the hospitals. They're there because they haven't had good water. They've had contaminating water, and it's waterborne diseases that will kill them if we don't reach out and help them in time. Please help us do that. Give these children a chance in life. Thank you so much, and God will bless you richly.

RANDY: You can be someone's solution today. Please go online, go to the phone, make the best gift you can.

And today, if you would like to request this book, I think, Blynda, it'll be worth it.

BLYNDA: It will be worth it. It will be, because I think it's just always a good reminder that you're never alone, I think, and it's also a good reminder for believers to know that sometimes it's just hard.

And God's always there, but it doesn't mean life's gonna just be peachy all the time.

RANDY: No, it's still a struggle. Victoria, thank you for sharing.

VICTORIA: Thank you both so much, oh my gosh. I am just honored to be here and honored that God's allowed me to still have the voice I have. So, thank you both very much.

RANDY: If you've missed any of the programs, you can always go to lifetoday.org. We'll see you again next time.

[music]

KATHIE LEE GIFFORD: Hey, everybody. Won't you stand with everyone here at Life Outreach International in their magnificent Water for Life program, helping people all over the world, millions of people, have clean water? That's what Jesus would want us to do.

FEMALE: And I think the big-C Church, capital-C Church, hasn't done a great job at really understanding the Godhead.

ANNOUNCER: Next week.

ANNOUNCER: "Life Today" is made possible by the supporters of Life Outreach International. Your gift will be used exclusively for the exempt purposes of Life.

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