

7/29/2026

Week 31

Randy Robison

Hosanna Wong

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

HOSANNA WONG: Some of us think that we have to get our whole lives together before we can have an encounter with God. We need to have certain rhythms, or we need to have certain margin. The kids need to be a certain age.

We need to have a certain kind of role. We need to know this much backstory about the church. We need to know the Bible this way.

And some of us overcomplicate what it looks like to have a real relationship with God.

ANNOUNCER: Hosanna Wong offers a simpler, uncomplicated picture of following Jesus, next on "Life Today."

[music]

RANDY ROBISON: Welcome to "Life Today." I'm Randy Robison. I'm here by myself. I'll have Blynda back here soon. But I'm glad you're here because I think you're going to enjoy today's program, because we've got a guest who's come back.

She's been on many times with different hosts, and I've got her today, but you'll get to be blessed by her. Hosanna Wong is my guest. She has a new book. It's called "Uncomplicate It".

And you know, that right there is just a bit of an invitation to go, "We can do that," because life gets complicated. So welcome, Hosanna. Good to see you.

HOSANNA: Thank you for having me. I'm thrilled to be here.

RANDY: Yeah, you've been here a few times and it's always been a lot of fun, and it's always been insightful, so I'm glad we get to one-on-one right here, you know. I mean, the ladies are great, but I'm a little selfish at times. So, this is an interesting--just, you know we get a lot of books and a lot of topics, and there's some themes that are recurring, they're important, I love them.

And then "Uncomplicate It," like, what is she talking about? So give us a little bit of an idea of what you're talking about.

HOSANNA: I've found that a lot of us overcomplicate faith. I have found that a lot of people maybe are interested about God, curious about God, maybe we have loved ones who know that we follow Jesus and they wanna know what it would look like for them, or maybe we are in a place where we're just checking out this whole God thing, this whole church thing, wondering if it's for us. And sometimes I think we overcomplicate what it looks like to spend time with God. Sometimes we overcomplicate our lives. Some of us think that we have to get our whole lives together before we can have an encounter with God.

We need to have certain rhythms, or we need to have certain margin. The kids need to be a certain age. We need to have a certain kind of role. We need to know this much backstory about the church. We need to know the Bible this way.

And some of us overcomplicate what it looks like to have a real relationship with God. And I have found that within 16 years of sharing the gospel around the world, how many people are open to God but they think that they have to reach some sort of spiritual standard before they can. And I'm sorry. If you're watching today and anyone has ever overcomplicated faith to you, I'm sorry, and I want to unpack what Jesus actually said and how he actually invites us to have relationship with him.

RANDY: Okay, well, let's simplify. Where do you start? Do you simplify it with the idea of salvation, or do you talk about relationship? Where's sort of your starting point?

HOSANNA: So my real starting point for this book ended up being--it was somewhat of a surprise. I ended up interviewing 1,000 people around the world from different cultures, different backgrounds, and different seasons of life. A high school student about to graduate, or a couple entering their retirement era, or a single mom in her forties, all over the world. And I asked them, "What has stood in the way of you connecting with God?" Because I don't know the answer, I've only ever been Hosanna. I only know my own roadblocks. And through a thousand conversations, I discovered the six same themes, the six same things that people were saying stood in the way between them and God, and here's what the six things were.

One, busyness. Two, distractions. Three, shame. Four, grief. Five, silence, feeling like they couldn't hear from God. And six, expectations, whether that was expectations that they felt from other people, like they had to have a relationship with God this one way or else, or expectations they put on themselves of what they thought their life had to look like to encounter God.

And so, really what I've discovered is, man, these are the six roadblocks that are the most common today, and what is the truth about each of these roadblocks? What would God say about each of these roadblocks, and what does Jesus teach us? And so I've really just started there. How have we overcomplicated?

RANDY: Okay, this is good. This is really good. I've seen all of these things as well. I've experienced some of them.

So we're gonna try to work through them, see where you're at, but we'll do our best. But let's start with--well, let's go in your order, busyness. I know, I mean, we had four--when I was in my twenties, by the time I hit thirty, we had four kids in five and a half years. My wife and I were busy.

We wanted to go to church, but the church probably really didn't want us showing up with all these kids. It was like, they outnumbered us, you know? But it's real easy to do the kids, the soccer, the hockey, the lacrosse, all the stuff, the work, and just trying to get through life, and to make time for God. How do we simplify that?

HOSANNA: Yeah, I think for all of these, and I'll start here with busyness, I think it's so important that we know, your relationship with Jesus does not have to look like anyone else's relationship with Jesus, and it doesn't have to look like it did years ago. God wants to have a real relationship with the real you in the current season you're in. And some of us might start comparing our relationship with God to other people's relationships with God, thinking we have to do it that way or it has to look like that, but I've found that often we don't compare our lives to other people's lives. Often we compare our lives to a past version of ourselves. "Man, when the kids were this age, when I lived in this city, when I went to this church, had this community, when I had this margin, that was the best time." But the truth is, the best time to have a real relationship with God is right now.

There's something he has for you in this specific season that you don't wanna miss. When it comes to busyness, I found that so many of us have completely separated our God life from our real life. So some of us think, "Oh, my real life is my kids and my parents and my piles of deadlines and my piles of laundry, and then my God life is whenever I can have quiet serene time, just me and God, perfect space, perfect quiet, no distractions." But the truth is that God wants to have a real relationship with you in the middle of your real life. Your God life is your real life. Why do we sometimes see the responsibilities God has given us, the kids and the family and the community he's given us, why do we sometimes see the things God has called us to at odds with obeying and spending time with God?

No, your real life is your God life. So with all God's given you and all he's called you to, spend real time with him in the middle of it. He gave this to you. Be faithful with what he's given you, and spend time with God in the middle of it.

RANDY: Yeah, I love the local church. I've always been a part, still am, and will advocate for that. I think it's necessary.

But the church we were at for 19 years had a sign over the door said, "Church begins when you walk out these doors." And that's what I hear you saying. It's like, okay, don't think, "Well, I don't have time for church, or I wish I did, but I missed it," so God's over there on

Sunday. But where you're at with the kids right now, that's where your relationship with God comes into play.

At work, waiting in line at wherever you're waiting in line, experience God there. So it's not necessarily to get less busy, but to bring God into the busyness, maybe.

HOSANNA: Right, absolutely. I think the enemy of our souls hopes that we see all that God has given us and all that God has called us to at odds with spending time with God, so that we don't talk to God about what we're going through, so that we don't engage with God where we really are. And I think your relationship with God right now in the season you're in might look different than it has in the past, but I think that's better. So community might look different for you right now, at the age the kids are in, with the role you're in, with where your marriage is at.

It might look different, but there's still a way to obey God, to have community, to be in God's Word, to pray. It might just not look the same way it used to, and that's a good thing. For it to be real and authentic, it will likely not look the same way it's looked in the past. But I'm worried that if we keep trying to spend time with God one specific way or else, we're just gonna raise a generation of people who are faking it.

We're just gonna start performing, and start trying to pretend like we have faith, instead of having a real relationship with Jesus. And that's absolutely not what God wants.

RANDY: There was a time where I didn't feel like I actually had friends, I just had parents of my kids' friends. But you know, when you engage with that, good things happen.

HOSANNA: That's your real life.

RANDY: That's your real life.

HOSANNA: And what does it look like to be a godly parent? What does it look like to be a godly spouse? This is what this looks like.

RANDY: So, distractions. Wow, there's lots of flavors of these. What were some of the more common ones that you saw that got in the way?

HOSANNA: The most common one I heard was people saying, "When I sit down to pray, my mind gets distracted. When I sit down to pray, I just keep thinking about these hard conversations I'm gonna have, the to-do list that I have, the projects I have, and I can't focus, and so I try to start again from the top." And then they feel all this guilt and shame when they're not praying the way they think they're supposed to. But what does the perfect prayer sound like to you? What does starting from the top sound like to you?

The truth is, if you get distracted, if you get distracted while you're praying, I wanna encourage you to pray on what's distracting you. It's a lie that God wants your prayer life to have like a force field around it keeping out everything you're actually feeling or actually

going through. No, instead, pray to God about that hard conversation you're thinking about, that work project that's sneaking up on you, about all these things that you're thinking about. Invite God into what you're really going through, because best-case scenario, God is leading your thoughts there to places he wants you to invite him into, and worst case, it's just your mind going random places, and still God wants to go with you there.

Here's how to overcome the roadblock of distractions: invite God into what's distracting you. And if you're someone who gets distracted a lot, you might notice that you'll start praying all the time.

RANDY: That's good. And you know, the other thing is, we have what we call the Lord's Prayer, the model prayer, where the disciples are like, "Jesus, teach us to pray," and he gives them a framework, and it's beautiful and it's wonderful. It's actually not that long, but sometimes we can't even get through that.

But you also see in Scripture these really short prayers. I think sometimes the most powerful prayers are like, "God, I need help," you know?

HOSANNA: Absolutely.

RANDY: So--and I can get through that one without being distracted. So yeah, there's always something. Okay, grief.

Oh, wow. This is a heavy one. This is a painful one for a lot of people, and it's a place where people--I've seen people get stuck there the rest of their lives.

What do you see?

HOSANNA: Me too. I think so many people think that grief is a roadblock to God because when we lose someone we love, or when there's a broken relationship in our lives, or our life doesn't turn out the way that we thought it was supposed to, we can start to think, "Okay, once I heal from this, then I can encounter God. Once the therapist's bill is fully paid, once I no longer miss my loved one, once I'm no longer mad at God, then I'll talk to God." But the truth is that grief doesn't have to stay a roadblock. It can actually be a shortcut to God's heart. It can actually be a catalyst for deeper connection. When you invite God into your grief, you can have one of the most real and authentic experiences with God that you've ever had in your life.

I know that was true for me. I lost my dad when I was 18 years old, to cancer, and there were enough people in my life who said things like, you know, "Make sure that you pray like this," or "Make sure you use your testimony like this," or "Make sure that you don't disappoint God like this," and I'm 18 and I just lost my dad, and I was so afraid of saying the wrong words to God that I stopped talking to God. I got so scared that I wasn't going to be grieving the right way that I didn't grieve with God when God wanted me to invite him into my grief. And when I did, I got to experience God as a comforter and as a Father in ways I

never had before, and I'm so glad I brought him into my grief. I didn't pray the prettiest prayers. I didn't have the perfect words.

I started praying very ugly prayers. I started telling him how mad I was, and then grief was no longer a roadblock. It was a shortcut. It was the way that he and I became so close, even in the middle of my grief, and that's possible for all of us today.

RANDY: And dovetailing into that, sometimes we feel bad for being mad at God or questioning God, doubting God, and that brings on the next one, which is shame. You know, God's not shocked.

I don't think he's as disappointed in us as we are in ourselves. I think he's ready to just, you know, heal us on the inside, make the broken things whole.

It is a process. What do you see with the shame?

HOSANNA: Yeah, God has more grace for us than we have for us.

RANDY: That's right.

HOSANNA: So sometimes we think, "Man, there's no way that we can get close to God," you know, there's no way that we can bridge the gap in this relationship, and the truth is, there was no way for us to earn God's love, so God sent his son Jesus to come and be with us, to die on a cross for all of our sins. He was buried and he rose again, so that when we put our faith in Jesus, we don't have to believe in ourselves, we just have to believe in Jesus. Do we think Jesus is enough? Do we think Jesus has power?

Do we think Jesus has a close connection to God? When you put your faith in Jesus, everything that's available to Jesus is now available to us. So here's the truth about shame. If you feel shame because of something you did or something that was done to you, if you feel like maybe you did something wrong, confess that to God.

Get real with God about it. He would love to forgive you and set you free. So the answer to shame is not, "Nothing's wrong with you, you've never done anything wrong." The answer is, well, let's get real about what you have done wrong, and let's give it to God and allow him to forgive you, invite his grace into your life, receive his forgiveness, and then stop walking held back by guilt and shame that Jesus already came to set you free from. Shame is a roadblock, but it doesn't have to be, because from the beginning of time, all God has done is try to make a way to be close to us again.

RANDY: God has gone so far to be close to us. He announced, "Emmanuel, God with us." We just need to get past those roadblocks--not get past, just put them aside and let God be God, you know?

Let him restore these things. Okay, silence, what does that mean?

HOSANNA: It means some people feel like they can't connect with God because they can't hear from God. So they say, "God, give me direction," and then they don't feel direction.

"God, tell me what college to go to," and it's not clear what college to go to. And I just want to encourage anyone who feels like they can't hear from God, the best way to hear God's voice is to spend your life around God's voice, spend your life in God's Word, spend your life knowing his character, the life he calls you to live, what it looks like to live like Jesus.

Spend your life with God's voice, and it'll be easier to tell the difference between what is of God and what is not of God. So many of us want God just to tell us something in a moment's notice when we haven't spent our life with God's voice already.

RANDY: I think we complicate that too.

HOSANNA: We overcomplicate that.

RANDY: I think when you look in Scripture, there's clear things that are not God's will. We call them sin. And there are a few things where it says, "For this is the will of God," but I think there's like five of them or so. And so, like, learn those and stay in those.

Avoid those sins over here. And I think God's like, you're like, "What college do should I go?" He's like, "Where do you wanna go? I'm with you wherever you go," you know? And I think he gives us a a lot of free will within those boundaries of, you know, stay away from the sin and make sure to include the things that are clearly his will.

So make it simple, right? Don't let it be a roadblock. All right, last one, expectations. And this one, what do you do with the roadblock of expectations?

HOSANNA: I think expectations kind of encapsulates all these roadblocks. So many of us are carrying expectations for our lives that do not come from God. We think we have to achieve some spiritual status, get our whole lives together, or live a very specific way before we can encounter God. But you know, Jesus came into a world where the religious people had greatly overcomplicated having a relationship with God. They said, "You have to do it this way," these very specific ways on very specific days.

They even made their faces look more humble and distressed when they were fasting. I mean, they overcomplicated connection with God, and Jesus came to uncomplicate it. He said, "Just put your faith in me." And then Jesus died, he was buried, and rose again and said, "Put your faith in me. You're gonna have a new life. You're gonna have eternal life with God.

And now continue to live the way that I've lived. Continue to be close to me." But so many of us have overcomplicated what Jesus came to uncomplicate. Release the expectations that don't come from God, and live the full life God has actually called you to live.

RANDY: Having been in many different denominations personally, and been around, so much of that is style. And I have no problem with style, and there are things that people connect with that others don't connect with, whether it's certain types of music or liturgy or things like that, certain types of buildings. I get all that. I think that's fine.

It's beauty when it's in its proper place. But when it gets in the way and you think, "I can't connect with God unless I'm in this kind of place or do it this kind of way," that's the pit that I see falling into. You know, I love it, because in the midst of all these rules and regulations and styles and all these requirements, Jesus drops in, and when you get that thief on the cross, and all he says is that short prayer of, "Lord, remember me," and Jesus is like, "You're with me. You're in me," is what he was saying, right?

"Because you believe, you are now in me, you get the benefits of me." He didn't have time to go through baptism or confirmation, or write out his statement of faith, or none of that. And so, yeah, it's a lot easier than we make it to be sometimes. Okay, if we uncomplicate it, is life more fun?

HOSANNA: Yes, it's more joyful, it's more peaceful, and it's closer to what God intended for us. The Word of God says in Ephesians 1:4 that God intended to have a relationship with us before he made any other plans for this world. God wanted to be in a close relationship with you before he made any other plans.

So know that you have not been set up for failure. You've been set up for success. You've been wonderfully and uniquely made to enjoy God, to receive his peace, to receive his joy, in the exact season you're in.

You can uncomplicate it.

RANDY: I love it, I love it. And you know what? I think living out the gospel can be pretty simple, and one of the simplest ways to do it is, as they talked about in Scriptures, which is remember the poor, to reach out to those who are hurting, to help the ones who are in distress.

It's real simple, but it's really important. We want you to be a part of helping those who are in distress today, and we're gonna show you how to do it. And when you do, by the way, you can request Hosanna's book "Uncomplicate It".

We'd love to send it to you today when you help us with this very simple but powerful outreach.

[music]

JOHN YEATTS: Can you imagine being the mom who has to make the first chore of her day coming to draw water from a water source like this? I'm standing in a pile of cow dung, and every time it rains, that cow dung is washed right down into this pond where these poor

people have to drink. Think about it. "Mama," or "Grandma, I'm thirsty," and you know that the water you're going to give them is coming from the water behind me.

But the reality is, for so many people around the world, and so many people just like this grandmother you just saw that I've been speaking to all day, that is the only choice they have. It's not because she wants to use this water, it's because it's the only water they have. So friends, I'm asking you to join with me, join with James and Betty, join with Randy, join with all of our mission partners around the world, and let's do what the Father has asked us to do. Let's wrap his arms around those that are the least of these.

Let's care for those who have no other way. And together, we can bring Water for Life to this village and 350 more villages just like it this year.

RANDY: You know, I've been to villages very similar to the one that John was standing in there, to water sources very similar to that one as well, and you know, when you see it, yeah, you get an idea that that water doesn't look good, but when you're there, you smell it. You can actually feel the oiliness in the water from all the impurities. It's really bad. And yeah, you do, you go, "Why would you drink this?" And as John said, there's no other alternative. You saw--perhaps you caught the that mother pouring some water into a large, I don't know if that's a clay pot, some kind of holding pot. They'll do that to try to let the impurities settle, and skim off the top. But there's only so much you can do when you don't have the resources. So why do you drink it? You don't have any other choice. That's where we come in.

That's where you come in. We give them the choice, you and I together. Why wouldn't we drill another well in a village like that, so that children don't die at an early age? We can do it. Together, we can accomplish this. We've done it for many years, but as John said at the beginning, when you look at the numbers, we're not gonna run out of places to drill clean water wells anytime soon. Here's the breakdown. On average, when we drill the 350 wells in a year across 20 different nations, the average cost is about \$4800. Some of you can provide a well. I have some friends I was talking to recently, they were in a position, they provided ten wells at once.

Now, I know not all of us can do that, but we can come together. \$48 will basically serve 10 people water for life. \$144 will serve 30 people water for life. And we say that because when we drill a water well, we get all the way down to the pure water, and we build it right. It's encased, it's covered, there's a pump. Pollutants don't blow in. It truly is a water source that gives clean drinking water, living water to people. And as always, the gospel is a part of what we do, because this is sharing God's love in word and in deed. Will you pick up the phone, go online, however you're most comfortable, make the best gift you can? Please join us as we demonstrate God's love as we give people Water for Life.

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.

RANDY: We can do this, we can impact lives, but we have to do it together. I really hope you'll join us. It's such a blessing to be God's hands and feet, as Scripture says, so please go online, go to the phone, make the best gift you can.

Do request Hosanna's--you're really gonna enjoy it. And by the way, there's a whole section we didn't even get to on what she calls praise personalities. Hosanna, can we do another program?

This topic lights me up, so can you hang out?

HOSANNA: I would love to. It's gonna be really fun.

RANDY: All right, so she'll be back. You come back. I wanna see you again next time here on "Life Today." If you miss any of the programs, you can always go to lifetoday.org. We'll see you again next time.

[music]

HOSANNA: I want to help set you free from the idea that your worship has to only look one way or else.

ANNOUNCER: Exploring different modes of worship, tomorrow.

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