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Week 32

Randy Robison

Steve Robinson

"Stress Fractured"

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

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ANNOUNCER: How God lifted Steve Robinson from rock bottom, next on "Life Today."

[music]

RANDY ROBISON: Welcome to "Life Today," I'm Randy Robison. It's great to have you with us today. I do have a question for you, and I get it. Do you ever feel like you're kind of going from crisis to crisis and just kind of trying to manage those and breathe in between? Well, how would you like to get out of that cycle a little bit and learn what Scripture calls resilience?

We're gonna help you with that, and to do that, I brought in someone who knows. My guest today is the author of a book called "Soul Leadership," and it's written by Steve Robinson who is a longtime friend of the ministry. Man, it's good to see you.

STEVE: It's so good to see you, Randy. We've been friends with Life Outreach for, gosh, close to 25 years, your mom, your dad, and you.

And man, we just appreciate you guys.

RANDY: And I appreciate the friendship of you and so many others, and you know, really it's the people-- it's the people that make it, right? So you're one of those good, solid people. I like this book, but I have a question for you, because you start out by talking about trauma and stress and I'm just, I mean, I get it, you know?

I get it, but is it really that widespread?

STEVE: What's interesting is I'm a pastor, and so I have a unique perspective, I think, because not only do we experience trauma and stress, but we also pastor people that do, so I kind of get both sides of it. And what's interesting, I pastor a church called Church of the King in the greater New Orleans area. 2010, Randy, it's February, I walk out to go preach, and I think to myself, "Oh my gosh, this is what happens to people. This is when people kind of lose their mind." I was in acute stress disorder situation.

My brain had been under five years of constant stress, recovering from Hurricane Katrina, losing half of our congregation during that time, a protracted building campaign, talk about stress. So it was five years of cumulative stress and trauma. And I know now what I didn't know then, and I had a breakdown. And really, it was about an 18-month journey, 2-year journey after that, counseling, understanding this whole thing of how stress affects the brain. And what's interesting is, as a pastor, I teach a lot about the mind and renewing the mind, but part of my journey, and really part of my passion for writing "Soul Leadership" is the brain, you know, is an organ, but the mind, it's not an organ.

The brain is a physical organ, it's called corporeal. It has matter, the mind doesn't. And what's interesting is that we have to understand the stress fractures that actually happen in the brain from pressure and stress. It's widespread, widespread.

RANDY: So, you mentioned the church, I forgot to mention, but you've got campuses all the way to South Africa, by the way.

STEVE: We've got--yeah, we had an opportunity last year to start one in Cape Town, Cape Town, South--yeah, so we've got seven campuses, kind of Gulf Coast area.

RANDY: But back to Katrina, I remember Katrina, right? That was a major hurricane that did, I mean, we got a lot of Louisiana people that came to Texas that never left, sorry about that.

STEVE: A lot of our people!

RANDY: So what exactly happened to you guys during that?

STEVE: Yeah, we had--so the weekend before, our church was five years old, weekend before, we had 3200 people coming to church. We're cut in half, and we lived actually on the north shore where our kind of main campus was, and people moved.

And so here's what happens.

RANDY: Did you guys flood?

STEVE: Well, no, we didn't, but we didn't have church for a month, trees everywhere. And what took place for us was I threw myself into relief and recovery. By the way, I wanna say to you guys, Life Outreach really leaned in and helped us during that time. We wanna say thank you for that, and your dad, it's just incredible. And what took place was we lost so many people, but I responded by throwing myself into relief recovery for about a year. I

didn't realize that what was taking place on the inside of me, you're running on adrenaline, you know, you've got all this, you know, cortisol shooting through your body, but your brain is under constant stress during those times, relief and recovery.

So, I really experienced it. And then again, it was the building project, and that kind of cumulate--well, here's what happens to people. When they think of trauma, and this book is about-- it's really about three parts, but it's understanding trauma, recovering from it, and actually growing through it. What happens, Randy, is this, and this is what's really interesting. People, when they think of trauma, trauma is not an event. It's what happens to your brain and your body because of that event or events.

So you think of a boom, a big situation, an assault, or you're in a wartime situation and we think, "Oh, that--," yeah, but it's also boom, boom, boom, little things. And so what happens, your brain starts actually shifting. Your brain's made up primarily, and it's much more sophisticated, but your prefrontal cortex, that's your thinking brain.

Then you've got your limbic system, which would be considered your emotional brain, and then your brainstem, it connects with your heart rate and rhythms and all that. And so what happens in stress and trauma is your brain actually, watch this, it doesn't separate, but it disintegrates, it restructures. So your thinking brain actually gets pushed down, in which, right here, your limbic part of your brain, it actually gets elevated, and so you begin to, watch this, you begin to feel before you think.

In other words, a traumatized person doesn't think before they feel. They actually feel before they think. And so that's the symptomology, and so that's what was me. You know, hypervigilant, I'm all over the place, persistent anxiety. But it's not just from big things, it's from a lot of cumulative small things. So in 2010 I found myself in a counselor's office, and I really was PTSD from five years of stress and trauma, and I wanna help people with that, and that's what this book's all about. You know, the story in there I use is about Moses.

So the soul leadership cycle, there's three parts of it: trauma, triggers, and terrible habits; the resilience equation, which we're gonna talk about; and then the growth model. So in the Bible I use a character, incredible, colossal figure, Moses. Let's think about Moses for a moment. Number one, Moses is born in trauma. What do I mean by that? Separation. We learn a lot now about attachment theory, right? So he's born into that. Number two, think about what he goes through, and then God sends him back, he's leading these people, they're complaining, they're constantly criticizing him.

They're constantly--you know, there's delayed expectations. He doesn't lead them in. Pressure, pressure, pressure. Watch this, his sister dies, Miriam. Scripture doesn't record that he grieves, he doesn't grieve her death. All of this impact, and then we come to Numbers chapter 20. What happens in Numbers 20? Well, God--the people are thirsty, they want water, so God tells Moses to do something. He tells him to speak to the rock. What does Moses do? He's totally frustrated, wham, and strikes the rock.

You know what God says, he goes, "Moses, I'm gonna let you go up on Mount Nebo and you're gonna look into the Promised Land, but I'm not gonna let you bring them in," why? He was triggered and he reacted. One of the key consequences of somebody that's triggered is they affect their relationships. So you understand, the DSM-5 is kind of the health, you know, mental health profession.

They use criteria and they look at-- So hypervigilance, reactivity, persistent anxiety. Moses reacted, why? Because I believe, and Scripture bears this out, I believe that through constant pressure, constant stress, his brain shifted. Now, if Moses reacted, how much more should we? How much more could we? I wanna get healthy, I wanna get better. So part of understanding your triggers is understanding, if I'm easily triggered, you know what? I may have some trauma that I'm dealing with.

RANDY: Yeah, okay, forgive my ignorance, but you keep using a term, "hypervigilance." What does that translate into?

STEVE: So here's what happens is the emotional part of your brain, it's like a periscope, it goes up, and that amygdala in your limbic system is on fire. So you're scanning for danger. You're in what's called, here it is, fight or flight, right? So your nervous system's jacked up, you're kicking cortisol and adrenaline in your body.

That's what it means to be, quote, "triggered" or activated, right? So your emotional brain, it's like it's on fire. So when you begin to realize, what's wrong interpersonally? Why is it that--you ever had a situation like this, where somebody commits maybe a small thing against you and then you overreact, you know?

You know, and so you're hypervigilant, you're on alert constantly.

RANDY: We would call that person touchy. Is that right?

STEVE: Hypersensitive, touchy, yeah. So you begin to evaluate that.

RANDY: How do we get out of that?

STEVE: Yeah, so two things that I want to talk about. Number one is, my book is all about how to handle crisis. So here's what I believe, and I've written about this in the book, is that you can actually build capacity and resilience on the front end to actually mitigate the impact of psychological trauma. Here's the deal, I live in New Orleans, and I'm gonna get on a plane later and I'm gonna fly back to New Orleans. If there's a thunderstorm over Alexandria, I better hope there's enough fuel on board for them to maybe reroute it to go up maybe towards Memphis and come around.

What happens is, when life reroutes us and we go through crisis, we have a challenge with a child, we go through a health challenge, a work challenge, the question is, do we have enough fuel on board, watch this, to not run out of gas midstream? That's really resilience, resilience is your ability to absorb crisis and respond back. So I write in the book about five resilience-building strategies. Number one, I talk about relationships. The number one

predictor, Randy, of people that succeed in life through adversity, stress, and crisis are those that have a strong social network.

So it's not just trauma, it's unprocessed trauma, and one of the things that a strong friendship network does is it allows you to process the pain and trauma in your life.

RANDY: That's true, yeah. It's gotta be a good network though.

Not just any network.

STEVE: Look, absolutely, let me say it this way, a healthy social network, right, of life-giving-- Number two, I talk about health habits. I think as Christians, and I'm a pastor, right? I teach the Bible every week, I teach the books of the Bible, I teach-- but I do believe that we've underestimated the integration of spirit, soul, and body. What happens is I write in that book about your nutrition, I talk about sleep, the great cognitive reset.

I talk about exercise, how it helps your brain health, and what that does is it prepares your body for stress. So I talk about relationships, I talk about physical health, I talk about spiritual habits. Daniel in the Bible prayed three times a day. I think that built spiritual resilience on the inside of him. I talk about emotional health and mental health. So here's what I believe, Randy. I believe that as Christians, that we can build resilience on the front end.

I call it pre-crisis, why? And life's gonna--Jesus said it this way, "In this world, you're gonna have tribulation." You can fill in the word this way, "You're gonna have crisis." The question is, do you have enough fuel on board to handle the crisis? And so we teach resilience-building strategies in that book to mitigate psychological trauma.

RANDY: Yeah, I would simply say when you say that, like, how do I get enough fuel? Like, so what are some of the fuel sources?

STEVE: Yeah, so relationships, health practices, I talk about mental health practices, I talk about emotional health. Here's the deal, we're always giving out. The question is, are we replenishing, through solitude, through journaling, through gratitude walks?

So I talk about in the book about how to build emotional capacity, mental health capacity.

RANDY: What works best for you?

STEVE: You know what works best? I'm learning to be quiet. Yeah, morning times are important for me. I've got about a 30 minute to an hour zone in there in the morning. Journaling has helped me, where I have a gratitude journal where I'm thanking God.

It releases healthy serotonin in the brain. Studies prove that, I've got that in the book. Time alone, where it's specific, where I'm connecting with God, I'm writing. All of this quiets my soul, and it's actually building capacity.

RANDY: So let me ask you specifically about that, because you do talk about all these things that you mentioned, and there are health-related, there are spiritual disciplines, they're all good things that we kind of think we know we should do.

But building a new habit can be difficult for people. I mean, I've been through it, right?

STEVE: We've all been there.

RANDY: I know, I think we all have, so no casting stones here. But what I have noticed is back when I dropped a whole bunch of weight, right? I started jogging, and I mean, I didn't get far at first, and I didn't wanna go the next day. But I committed in a way that I'd never committed before in my life, and every day I got a little further, and I would literally-- I was starting in the same place, so I could tell, "Okay, I made it that far," you know, and then that far.

And then the soreness started going away, and I dropped the weight, was doing great, and then something would come up in life. And if I went a few days without getting that physical activity I had developed a habit of, I started to not feel good. And I thought, "Man, when I started this, I hated it. Now I love it." Do you find with these, whether it's changing your diet or getting up early in the morning or committing to Scripture, whatever that practice is, do you find that it's a little difficult at first, it's more like discipline, but then it becomes such an integral part that you don't want to go without it?

STEVE: Yeah, I think once you make a decision, we have agency, I talk about that. But you have a will, we have agency, we have the ability to choose. And what's so cool is when you begin to integrate and put it all together, you understand what's called neurochemical rewards. So your brain--so for example, exercise. So if exercise is, "I want to be in shape," well, how about this? When you see exercise that's attached to mental health, that's neurochemical rewards, that serotonin is increased in your brain and it's replenished through exercise.

So, and again, I want to say this as a pastor, a Christian, I think we separate spirit, soul, and body so much. And so what I begin to see is when I go work out--so I was gonna say another practice. Working out, it helps me mentally. I talk about one of the trauma therapies that you'll hear a lot, and I'm not a therapist, I'm a pastor, but I'm trauma-informed by my study. And I'll say this, one of the things that people talk about in trauma therapy is what's called EMDR, and really that's bilateral stimulation.

You know what that is? That's walking. God has given us--exercise is a God-given trauma therapy to help reintegrate the brain.

RANDY: One thing I do wanna make sure we hit, because you know, what you're talking about, a lot of people just don't wanna hear it, or they think, "I don't know if I can do it." You talk about growing, you know, and that's really what it is, and growth is not instant, and we like instant. But you talk about growing forward.

I just wanna leave people with-- I don't want them to think that this is overwhelming, right? You know, if they get the book, it'll walk them through a lot of these steps. But what is the bigger picture goal that you're trying to get people to move in a healthier direction in every way?

STEVE: So three parts, soul leadership cycle. Number one, trauma triggers and terrible habits, understanding stress in the brain. I've got a diagram in there to be able to--a criteria. Two, building resilience, five strategies to build spiritual, emotional, mental health, resilience strategies, and then the growth model.

It's interesting about the cross, when I was doing my last part of this, I began to think about the cross at a whole 'nother level. He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement for our peace was upon him. And I began to understand something about God's presence.

When it says, "He carried away our sorrows," the word in Hebrew carried is sabal, sorrows is mak'ob. Did you know this, Randy, that the cross of Jesus Christ doesn't just forgive us of our sin, but it also goes straight to the core of healing our psychological trauma?

RANDY: I believe it.

STEVE: So when you're in the presence of God, why is it that people cry when they're in the presence of God? I'll tell you why, God's unlocking their limbic system. In your amygdala is where all that pain and the emotional trauma is stored, God's healing people. That's why in their worship, in a church service, that's why the presence of God is so critical. So here's about growth. My daughter broke her arm a number of years ago, I went to the orthopedic surgeon. I said, "Man, tell me about it."

He goes, "I'll tell you what happens." He goes, "When your arm breaks, temporarily it calcifies, it gets a little bit stronger, but then it goes back to baseline." Psychological trauma, there's a term called post-traumatic growth. Post-traumatic growth is similar to physical trauma, but it's a little bit different. Temporarily, physically, it strengthens, then it goes back to baseline. Psychological trauma, when you process pain in the light of God's Word, in a community of saved brothers and sisters in Christ, in a small group, and I'm an advocate for counseling with good Christ-centered counselors, can I tell you something?

You not only return to baseline, Randy, you actually can move beyond previous functioning. In other words, you can become a wiser, more compassionate, more empathetic, stronger human being, a better dad, a better mom. Isn't that powerful? In other words, God can redeem the pain.

RANDY: Yeah, well, you're saying the science and God align completely on this.

STEVE: It integrates, it integrates. Think of Joseph, think of, you know, what turned out. It was negative, but it turned out for my good. I talk about Peter in there. Think about how many people, if we process pain properly, it becomes purposeful. So a couple of years ago

I spoke at a leadership conference, and I thought to myself, 13 years before, I was crying at the pulpit.

And 13 years later, I had shaky hands in 2010, but I went through it, and look, I'm still in process, we all are. But I tell people, here it is, God doesn't waste your wounds. They can become a point of wisdom. Pain processed properly becomes purposeful. That's a message of hope to people, that all the pain in your life, all the trauma, let me tell you something, you're not damaged goods forever.

"Oh, I'm damaged," no, no, no. By the blood of Christ you can be cleansed, you can be healed, you can be restored, you can build capacity, and you can become a stronger human being on the other side.

RANDY: You've seen it in others?

STEVE: Oh, absolutely.

RANDY: You've done it yourself?

STEVE: Yes sir.

RANDY: And we believe it because it's in Scripture, but it's nice when you see it happening. Okay, if you're intrigued by this, again, you can pick up "Soul Leadership" just to help guide you through this, and you know what?

We would love to send this to you today if you will help us reach out to someone who is in crisis. And I also wanna ask you to consider helping so many others just like her, watch this.

ANNOUNCER: Small communities are often built around water sources. But for Un Rong, a mother of three, her village is serviced by a well of sorrows.

[speaking foreign language]

ANNOUNCER: Un Rong's weekly struggle often becomes secondary to the needs of her children. They, too, become sick due to the contaminated water.

She takes them on her bicycle for a two-hour journey to reach the nearest medical clinic.

ANNOUNCER: She always promises to pay them back, continuing an ongoing cycle of dependence and debt. Like any mother, Un Rong has dreams for her children. Although she herself cannot read or write, it is the longing of her heart for her children to do so.

But far too often, their schooling is cut short.

ANNOUNCER: Un Rong and her children, like so many others across Cambodia, do all they can to survive each day, but in the end, it is the compassion of others that can make real change in their lives.

[music]

RANDY: You know, in places around the world where there is that abject poverty, it's hard to understand how difficult circumstances are for them. I've seen it in many places, and so I have a little bit of an understanding, but I wanna let you know that you may think that a gift today, your support for Water for Life, would be small. But in a place that's so desperate, your simple act of compassion, of love, of sacrifice, it makes a huge impact, and when you do that over and over, as Water for Life does, you start to change villages. And when you start to change villages, you change countries, you change cultures. You go from a culture of death to a culture of life. And I've been in this position long enough now to be able to actually see that in places. It only happens because of people who aren't just viewers, they are participants in this huge blessing.

Our goal this year is another 350 wells. My heart would be for way more than that, but we do set that goal. We can reach that goal with your support. We'll be in about 20 nations this year, and the idea is that we go in and we drill a water well. A typical one costs about \$4800, because we go through layers and layers sometimes, depending on where we're at, of rock or sand, whatever. We get down to the clean water, that's the critical part, and then, we draw that water up, we build a well that's gonna last about 70 years on average. We put an encasement over it so it doesn't get contaminated. We put that pump there so that people can easily get the water out. We let them know that viewers like you sent us there to bless them because of our love that Christ gives us. So here's what I would like to ask you to do today.

If you could help give 10 people clean drinking water for life with a gift of \$48, it really will make a huge difference. A gift of \$144 would serve 30 people clean water for life. Some of you might be able to drill a well, or come together with two or three others. Your gift today goes so far, I want you to see that. It changes lives, it gives people new hope and new life. And it's interesting, that mother said she wants it for her friends and for her village. You change not just the life of a mother or her children, you change villages. Will you do that today? Will you go online or go to the phone, however you prefer, make the best gift you can, and know that this day is the day that you will give a new opportunity to someone in desperate need?

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: I do hope you'll go online or go to the phone, make the best gift you can. We really can impact the lives of people for the better, spiritually, physically, every way, like we've talked about today, but we can only do it with your support.

If you would like to request "Soul Leadership," we'd love to send it to you. Steve, I'd like to say thank you for what you're sharing, and not just with us but with everyone that you touch.

STEVE: Well, we're an honor to be here, and we're so grateful for Life Outreach, grateful for the vision of your mom and dad and you guys, and what you're doing helping people. And I think it's so just appropriate, Randy, because the reality is you're helping people spiritually, but you're helping them physically.

And God cares about the whole person, and that's what our passion is, to help people spiritually, emotionally, mentally, so thank you guys for what you do at Life.

RANDY: Well, and I appreciate you, and again, we only can do it because of viewers like you, so please come back. We'd love to see you next time here on "Life Today."

[music]

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