

8/4/2026

Week 32

Randy Robison

Holly Wagner

"Strength To Endure"

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

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RANDY ROBISON: That's crazy.

HOLLY: And then Philip gets diagnosed with cancer, and then one of my best friends at the time just absolutely betrayed me. I mean, this is all within about a four- or five-month period.

ANNOUNCER: In the midst of a crushing season, God helped Holly Wagner overcome deep bitterness and resentment. Her story, next on "Life Today."

[music]

RANDY ROBISON: Welcome to "Life Today," I'm Randy Robison. Blynda's on vacation, she'll be back soon, but I have one of her co-hosts from the show, "Better Together." She's also someone who--her and her husband founded a church out in Los Angeles called Oasis Church several years ago, but we stole her away and brought her here to Texas, and she joins us today.

Many of you know her. Holly Wagner is with me. Holly, how you doing?

HOLLY WAGNER: Well, thanks for having me. Thanks for stealing me today.

RANDY: Absolutely. Well, yeah, and you know, we'll steal you anytime we can get you over here, because you know what I love about--you and your husband have been such faithful ministers to the body, and now that you've sort of expanded some of your scope and helping so many people, I wanted you to come here and kind of tell us, I don't know, what are you seeing in the church in general, maybe younger generations?

Give us a feel for how things are.

HOLLY: I mean, first of all, it was just--it was an honor, right, that God trusted Philip and me to lead a church in Los Angeles, which certainly was a, when we started in the '80s, it was already a post-Christian, if you will, culture and city. And so I'm really honored that God trusted us to do that. And today, you know, well, a few years ago, we handed that over, and it's flourishing and it's doing great, which I think, "Yay God," right? Just to--sometimes the baton exchange can be a little messy, but I'm really grateful just for what God continues to do.

And then, and then just excited about this season. I have the chance to travel and speak around the world and speak in a lot of churches, and then I'm kind of mentoring a bunch of pastors and, you know, women in ministry. And you know, when I started thinking about like what am I seeing, or what do I think is important, right? So I think a lot of times people will look perhaps at my life, or look at just the results of 35 years of pastoring, and they want it.

They want what they see now. But sometimes people aren't willing to work through it, like go through the steps to get there, right? They want it kind of handed to them. And I just don't think God works like that. And so for me, I just see a little bit of a lack of resilience, and so that's partly what I wanna just encourage, I think, is just that stick-to-it-iveness.

RANDY: Yeah, well, and that's one of my questions is, we see, you know, we see some people who fall out or whatever, or they fall into some sin. It's grievous, it's tragic, it's offensive in some cases. How have you guys managed to fight through the various trials and not become disillusioned or deconstructionist or disappoint people?

I mean, I know we do on some level, but there is--you guys have kind of made it through, and that's what we see, and that's what people want. What are some of the things that we--

HOLLY: And Philip and I still love each other, like, most days, most days.

RANDY: Yeah, I get that. We're human, right?

HOLLY: Oh, and I think about, there was a season for us, or for me in particular, that I think was probably the hardest season in my life, and it was certainly the hardest season in ministry. And I never actually wanted to quit until this season. And it was a few years ago, and it started with the death of my dad. And he fell and hit his head, so it was a pretty sudden. And I was very loved by my father, and he cheered every dream I had, funded a lot of them.

I was told "I love you" every day. And I'm aware, honestly, of what a gift that is, to have a dad who loves you, right? What a gift that is. And I know that that's not everyone's experience, and so, grateful for that. And so, I'm trying to just process the loss of my dad,

and then Philip's identity gets stolen, and they kind of hack through his email, through his bank accounts, and basically our savings account was stolen.

And because of how it was done, I mean, the FBI got involved in all of that, but because of how it was done, the bank wasn't liable. And so, you know, I'm trying to take time to grieve the loss of my dad, and then now I have to process this financial loss.

RANDY: Never recovered?

HOLLY: Never recovered.

RANDY: That's crazy.

HOLLY: And then Philip gets diagnosed with cancer. I mean, this is all within about a four- or five-month period.

RANDY: Oh my goodness.

HOLLY: And so then he gets diagnosed with cancer and, you know, it's brutal. The cancer itself is brutal, but the treatment is also really brutal. And so, because of the treatment, then his immune system was severely compromised. And his treatment was kind of in his head, and so it affected just his thinking and processing, and then he ended up getting shingles, like the worst case they'd seen, and he couldn't really function for five or six months. And so that was pretty brutal. And then my daughter, again, in this same series, my daughter just makes a really horrible, heartbreaking decision. And so, and I'm, you know, I'm trying to lead at church, because we have a church and I have thousands of eyes looking at me, so I'm trying to lead at church, I'm trying to be a wife and support my husband. I'm still trying to grieve the loss of my dad, right? Take those moments. And then trying to figure out the financial piece, I'm trying to figure it all out and then be a mother and, you know, help with that.

And again, I'm trying to lead a church. And there were some people that should have had my back, you know, and instead just, you know, ended up stabbing me in the back, and then--people to whom I'd shown a lot of grace, right, in their life, and then I didn't get that back. And then one of my best friends at the time just absolutely betrayed me, and so I was just in the middle of so much pain and heartbreak, and I remember sitting on my couch, and I didn't wanna talk to people, I didn't wanna see people. And the thing is I'm an extrovert. Like, I'm the biggest extrovert in the room. This was not me. I mean, for some people that would be their temperament, right? But it was not me. And so I just, you know, found myself withdrawing, not wanting to talk to people, and I was getting very cynical, you know, about people, about church, and I didn't just have like a root of bitterness, the Bible calls it. I had a whole flaming tree happening, right?

It was just bitter. And so, my husband comes into the kitchen, and he brings this jar, and he sets it in the kitchen and he says, "Every day, we're gonna write something we're grateful

for and we're gonna put it in that jar." See, he's the Christian in our marriage. Every marriage should have one. Anyway, he's it. So he said, "We're gonna write something we're grateful for," and I remember looking at him going, "You go ahead on then. No thank you." And then he bought the colorful little Post-it notes, thinking that's gonna make it more fun for me, right? And so I remember walking down the next morning, and I know he's gonna look. And I'm looking at that stupid jar, and I got nothing. I'm just angry, right? I'm frustrated and angry and-- And so I stand there and eventually I go, huh.

[sighs]

HOLLY: Coffee. Aren't you grateful for coffee?

RANDY: I--hey, you know. I think sometimes it's the little things that get you through.

HOLLY: Yes, so I think--so for about four days I would come to look at that jar, and the next day it was like, "Coffee." So I'm pretty sure for four days it was coffee. And then one day I, you know, looked up and saw sunshine, as if that's unusual in Southern California. And so I was like, "Okay, sunshine." And then a few days later, it was my family and my home, and eventually things started to break.

And I think that was probably the key for me. And you know, a lot of times we get--Psalm 77 says, "I complained and my spirit was overwhelmed." And so maybe, Holly, the reason you were feeling so overwhelmed was because you were spending so much time complaining, and we know that complaining doesn't change anything, it just spreads discontent, right?

And so I was so busy complaining. So it shifted for me when we started that practice of finding something to be grateful for.

RANDY: Gratitude.

HOLLY: Yeah, gratitude. It was the key for me. And I know that sounds so simple, but I mean, this was, you know, a few years ago, but even more recently there's been all this study in neuroscience that talks about what gratitude does in rewiring.

It creates these neurosynapses, new ones, so it rewires your brain. So gratitude is--it's powerful. And I think the thing I learned is that it was a choice.

RANDY: It is a choice. It is a choice. At the same time, so you listed a whole bunch of things, a lot of things that a lot of people may be going through, someone's going through difficulty with a family member or betrayal, or maybe even, you know, loss.

HOLLY: A diagnosis.

RANDY: Diagnosis, I mean, so you kind of hit a lot of things. But whatever people are going through, how do we maintain the gratitude and it not be almost naive? Like, all your

problems are still there, all your challenges, you know, are still there. You're still having to cope with the things and grieve and counsel and try to work and do all that.

So you know, a little gratitude here and there, I mean, is that--I don't know, are you kidding yourself, or did you see something--I mean, what happened? Did God come alongside you?

HOLLY: So it just began to change something in me. Because you're right, it didn't change the circumstances, right? And when Paul writes to us and he says to give thanks in all circumstances, he's not saying for them, right? Because I wasn't thankful for any of those circumstances. But in the middle of them, could I find something to be grateful for? The little things. And I think that was the first step for me in building a mindset of resilience, of being able to stand.

And I feel like, and maybe you see this as well, I don't know, you have young people in your world, and so, I feel like what's missing a little bit today is just that ability to stand, to weather the storms that come our way, right? We want the results of having stood, but we don't--we find it hard to stand. And I just think for me when I, you know, I'm working with pastors and couples and young leaders, you know, you gotta stand through some stuff.

And, you know, we want to--we like to be with Jesus in the victorious times, but we're all supposed to identify with the sufferings, too, a little bit, right? And so being able to stand and weather some of those storms is crucial.

RANDY: I think it's Paul, there's a phrase in the Scripture that says, "Having done all, stand." And you know, I mean, we get in situa--I mean, I'm going through a lot right now where it's like I'm just trying to do everything I can do to get through some tough situations, and yet you feel like, I don't know what else to do.

And so what you're saying is, you know what, just stand. So here's the question, and I think it's in the context we need to see in that Scripture is, what are we standing on? What did you find yourself standing on when you said "I'm gonna stand despite all the difficulties I'm going through"?

HOLLY: Yeah, I think for--okay, for me, I mean, that's a really good question. So, I had to stand on the truth of who God is, not so much the experience I might be having, but it's what I know about God, that he is good, that he is faithful, that he loves me. So that's the truth. The facts were a little messy, but the truth is that's who God is.

And so I had to stand on that, and I had to get a picture of the life ahead, right, to keep--like, hope is a real thing, right? And without hope, we're all gonna collapse a little bit. It's essential. They say, you know, that people can live 40 days without food. Well, some people, not me, but-- And then maybe eight days without--or four days without water and eight minutes without air, but one second without hope, something like that.

And so, that's true. And so I had to find some place to put my hope, right? And so, putting my hope on the truth of who God is, that he is good, that he loves me.

RANDY: He wants--he has good plans for you. And so--and it doesn't feel like it when you're going through it.

HOLLY: No, no, I was mad!

RANDY: Right, and that gets us back to another passage where Paul says to count it all joy when you face these various trials, knowing that they produce endurance, the resilience, that we say we want until we have to fight for it. And I still struggle with that one, because I'm like, "This situation's a mess.

The situation's painful." I mean, I'm not questioning God's goodness, but it's like, God, can we just please get through this? And so it's hard to go, "Ah, I'm gonna count it all joy," you know? It almost feels phony at times, if I can be honest.

HOLLY: Yes, yes, I mean, you know, James wrote that. He said, "Count it all joy when you encounter trials of many kinds, knowing that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work, so then you'll be mature and complete, not lacking anything." So when I think about that, I realize that maturity, which is the goal for you and me, right, the maturity is the goal for all of us, as Christians, right?

Maturity doesn't come from how old we are. It doesn't come from how much we know. According to that verse, it comes from what we're willing to persevere through. So what am I willing to persevere through? What am I willing to stand strong, you know, in the midst of? And so, you're doing it now. I have had to do that. And so I just feel like I just, you know, have this plea for a generation who wants the results of a lifetime of honoring God, but they want it now.

And it's like, no, you gotta stand through some things.

RANDY: Yeah, you do.

HOLLY: We do have an enemy, he's real, and you have to sometimes, you know, put that armor on and stand.

RANDY: And if you don't stand, you're just gonna fall. That's the reality. Okay, there's some people watching right now, and you may be going through some things and you're like, you know, "I hear them talking about that, and great for her that she's through it, but I'm in it, and I don't know what to do." I hope the word "hope" reaches you today, but we have some people that will actually pray with you, because I know it's important to Holly that community is a part of the resilience and the endurance and the getting through things and knowing that God is still good.

If you want someone just to take a moment to pray with you, call that number on the screen. We really want to stand with you. We can't do it for you, but we can offer encouragement to give you the courage to go through what you're facing, because I get it. It's tough at times. There's one last important thing, and I know the answer, because I know you, and I know God.

HOLLY: I've known you a long time.

RANDY: Well, no, it's just, I know your faith. And when we're going through these things and we know God's there, you know, we read his Word, but we're not always feeling this, necessarily. Where were you in relation to God walking with you?

Because he promises that he will. We don't always feel like it or we wonder at times, and that's okay. Looking back on that, where was God through all that?

HOLLY: Right there, you know? It's just like--I'm really glad you brought that up, a couple of things, that community is key. So we're not designed to go through life alone, and whether we're single or married, that's not the point. It's like building a community of faith around you. Ecclesiastes says that, you know, two are better than one, right?

And so, to have a community around you is important, so. And then recognizing that he's with us, you know, just like when the disciples that were in that boat and it was shaking, he was with them. He was with them. And so I think that's the reminder. And I had to say it out loud to myself a few times, you know, in the middle of that storm, just that he's here, and he's with me, and he sees me.

And he's actually already on the other side of this. He's in my tomorrow, right? I didn't feel it at that moment, but he's already there.

RANDY: Yeah, yeah, and he takes you through it. Thank you for your encouragement.

HOLLY: Oh, well, thanks for having me.

RANDY: I wanna let people know about situations that we're dealing with where people are going through difficult times, very difficult times, and they need, sometimes, a reminder that God's with them. You can be that reminder.

Holly, I know this is a close thing to your family, you know. We work in different arenas sometimes, but we're all working on the same goal for the same gospel purpose. The water well outreach. You guys love this.

HOLLY: Yeah, we do. I think just realizing the multiple hundreds of millions of people that don't have access to clean water, and that it's the first step out of poverty. When a water project is put either at a school, which is a great place because then the girls will stay in school, right?

Or it's put at a church, because then the community church gets to build it. But wherever that water well is put, that actually is the first step toward breaking the cycle of poverty amongst a group of people, so it is huge. It's like, well, building hospitals is great, and it is, but if they don't have water, that's not gonna function.

So the root of this whole thing is water, so I'm so excited that you guys continue to make this really a mission.

RANDY: Absolutely, but it only works when you join us. And yes, the water well outreach does break the cycles of poverty and disease, but it also is our opportunity to share the good news of Jesus Christ with people. So I hope you'll watch this and consider being a part of this today.

[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 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.

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.

RANDY: I do hope you will go online or go to the phone, make the best gift you can. We can come alongside some people who need to hear from others and need to see God's love in action. And God is with you wherever you're at. Holly, I appreciate your encouragement today, and opening up and sharing.

HOLLY: Yeah, thanks for having me, and you know, I just wanna--a lot of times people ask us what God's will is for my life, like what's the next step. As a pastor, that's probably the question I got asked the most. "What's his purpose for me?" And you know, Paul writes that--he writes, "In all circumstances, give thanks, for this is God's will for you." And so, oftentimes the first step in discovering the will of God is giving thanks, so gratitude is so powerful.

And so that's what I wanna just leave as the thought, that no matter what we're dealing with, no matter what confusion we might be in the middle of--

RANDY: I love it, I love it. And you know what? You can start that today. So we leave you with gratitude. We're thankful you're with us.

HOLLY: Yes we are.

RANDY: And we hope to see you next time here on "Life Today."

[music]

FEMALE: I would walk into my Sunday school class I was teaching or on Wednesday nights, and I would pretend that everything was okay, because I thought that's what a good Christian should look like.

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. The ministry features specific outreaches as examples of the programs it supports and conducts.

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