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Week 35

Randy Robison & Blynda Lane

Dave & Ashley Willis

“Better Relationships”

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

DAVE WILLIS: We all can do better, and what better place to focus doing better on than in our relationships? Because, like, really, relationships are what life is about. And thankfully, the Bible gives us such clear principles that all of us can apply to keep getting better at our friendships, our marriages, our parenting. And we tend to overcomplicate it, but really it's not that difficult.

ANNOUNCER: Biblical counselors Dave and Ashley Willis help you better love the people in your life, next.

[music]

RANDY ROBISON: Welcome to "Life Today," I'm Randy Robison. Blynda Lane, how are you doing?

BLYNDA LANE: Good, Randy! I feel like I wanna say something to you.

RANDY: Okay, say something to me.

BLYNDA: Just do better.

RANDY: Do better? In what area? In what area? Just on the show?

BLYNDA: I'm just kidding. No, you do great, you do great, but--

RANDY: Every area?

BLYNDA: Let me say this, I could do better in every area, so I'm assuming you could too.

RANDY: You know where I tend to need the most help? Relationships.

BLYNDA: Yes, that's true.

RANDY: Is it, yeah? Is that true for you too?

BLYNDA: It really is, I mean, because relationships cover a lot of ground. That could be parental, that could be marital, that could be friendship. It covers a lot of ground.

RANDY: A lot of those things. So if you, you know, could do a little better in those areas, you're in the right place today.

BLYNDA: This is why we say this.

RANDY: Yes, okay, so the book "Do Marriage Better" is written by Dave and Ashley Willis who join us today.

BLYNDA: Thank you for joining us today. We're so glad you're with us.

ASHLEY WILLIS: Thank you all so much.

RANDY: And this absolutely, I mean, like, yeah, we can all do better in our marriage, even if it's good. But what I liked about this is, like, these seven simple skills for deeper connection, they are not just marriage things. Like, these work in the workplace and the family, like she said, the family relationship, all these things. How--where should we even start, I know, right?

BLYNDA: Well, this is where we could start, is because, what you said, the seven simple shifts. What I loved about the book was these aren't like huge pendulum swings. You can do some simple changes and get some really great results. So, Dave and Ashley, we're so glad you're with us. Tell us a little bit about why you wrote the book and how you came up with these seven shifts.

DAVE: Well, I think it's like you said, we all can do-- we can do better. And what better place to focus doing better on than in our relationships? Because, like, really, relationships are what life is about. You know, my mom was a hospice nurse, and when I was a kid, I would hang out with people who were at the end of their life, which really changed my worldview. And at the end of people's lives, I'll just give you a headstart, like, what's gonna be important to you at the end of your life?

It's gonna be relationships, you know? It's not your golf score, it's not your net worth, it's none of those things, it's your relationships with God and with people. And so those are the things that we need to focus on doing better, and thankfully, the Bible gives us such clear principles that all of us can apply to keep getting better at our friendships, our marriages, our parenting. And we tend to overcomplicate it, but really it's not that difficult.

RANDY: I like the word "simple" in your subtitle. I'm a simple guy, I appreciate simple things, I can get them done a lot easier. What would be one of the examples of something that we could maybe shift that would shift our relationships in a very positive way?

ASHLEY: Oh, man. Probably my most favorite tip is just having a heart of gratitude, and that is super-simple, like, choosing gratitude, because gratitude is a choice that we have to make daily, though. It's something that you have to wake up every morning, thank God for the day, thank God for the people in your life, but then thank those people in your life.

And we see this in marriage, you know, where people are like, "Well, he should know that I appreciate that," or "She should know that I love her," but it's like, well, go ahead and just tell them. Tell them thank you for the little things and the big things. With our kids, I'm telling you, we have four boys, and I try to go out of my way to thank them for even the smallest task, and I see like a little pep in their step, because all of us wanna experience that gratitude.

But it also, honestly, most importantly, whenever we have gratitude, it does something in our own hearts, and it keeps that soft heart that the Bible talks about, and we need that to have good relationships.

RANDY: I've noticed something about people, and tell me if you've seen this too. Usually when you get into a working relationship or a close, you know, dynamic there, you're gonna find that there's a percentage of them that you don't like, that's problematic.

BLYNDA: Ouch. Ouch, Randy.

RANDY: I'm not talking about you. We'll get to the confrontation.

DAVE: I want a specific percentage here for Blynda.

RANDY: The confrontation part's coming. I was not thinking about you, that's funny you said that. But like, you could almost score people like, "Okay, this person at my church that I'm having to work with is like a 70/30 person, you know, like 70%'s fine, there's that 30%.

This person over here is like 95%, and then occasional 5%," and you're like, "I don't like that person." You can choose which to focus on, and I think obviously you get to a certain point where if it's like 40/60, and now you got a confrontation which, you know, a different chapter, but it's easy to go, "You know what? There's that 5% of the time that I have a problem with that person, or there's something they do that--" and without acknowledging the 95%, it seems like--

BLYNDA: Why can't we be better at just letting go some of it?

RANDY: Well, at least start with the gratitude.

ASHLEY: Exactly!

DAVE: For sure, the Bible says, "Take delight in honoring each other," you know? I think if we would just start there of like, leading with honor, believing the best in each other, and

doing what it says in Philippians 4:8, choosing to fix our thoughts on that which is good and pleasing and excellent, worthy of praise, thinking about those things, then all of a sudden like that 5%, it's gonna probably keep shrinking, and if there really is a real issue that needs to be addressed, then the Bible gives us a roadmap for that as well, about confronting it with honesty but speaking the truth in love. The Bible says, "An honest answer is a sign of true friendship." You know, like, when you're honest with somebody, it's really a reflection of the trust you have in each other to say, "Hey, I'm having this issue and I don't want it to just simmer below the surface, let's talk about it." But if you do it with love and you've built up trust and credibility by being an honoring friend or an honoring spouse, they're gonna listen to it with a lot more grace.

ASHLEY: They will, because they'll know you're for them and not against them. And I think we tend to turn off and not listen when we feel like, "Well, they're always critical of me, so they're just coming at me with another criticism. I'm just not gonna listen." But if you're already in the habit of showing gratitude, of showing honor, of being thankful for the little things, when you do have that maybe something, you know, that you do need to address at work or at home, we're gonna be like, "Oh, well, they care about me, so maybe I really do need to lean into this."

BLYNDA: Okay, so I would love to maybe look backwards a little bit. How did you in your marriage get to that place where there, you know, here's these great, you know, communication, finances, health, family burdens, legacy, sex, a few other things. How did you in your marriage say, "Okay, you know what? We're good, but we could do better"?

DAVE: Yeah, well, I think it's just this this mindset of like, this is too important to ever get on cruise control or autopilot, because anything left on autopilot is gonna crash. You know, my dad worked at a car plant growing up, and I got to work there in the summertimes. And it was a Japanese car plant, and the Japanese system was built around one word, and that one word was "kaizen," it's the only Japanese word I know. And it means to continue-- to improve continuously, to never settle for it's good enough, but always look for a way to make it a little bit better.

And I'm like, if we'll do that with building a car, how much more should we have that kaizen mindset with building a marriage, or building a home? Like, this is worth every bit of effort we can give to just keep getting better. And so, we just decided early on, it's like, we're gonna celebrate where we are, but let's keep growing. And we've made a ton of mistakes.

We still make a ton of mistakes. I mean, parenting, marriage. I mean, I left a kid at an interstate gas station and drove off once, totally unintentional. He's fine, by the way.

ASHLEY: He was a middle child, you guys.

RANDY: Hey, that's me. We're the middle children.

ASHLEY: I'm so sorry!

DAVE: But before you get too judgy, Mary and Joseph also did the same thing to Jesus, so like, that's in the Bible. But we joke about it now because it's like, we all make mistakes. But let's have an atmosphere at home where we're gonna keep growing, we're gonna keep encouraging each other, and keep moving forward.

BLYNDA: Talking about the communication part, I'm hearing Todd's voice in my head at the moment saying--

RANDY: Your husband?

BLYNDA: Yeah, that's my husband, saying to me, "You know, Blynda, it's not really what you said. It's how you said it." And--moi? So when we're talking about communicating better, in any relationship, not just marriage, and there's ways we can say what we wanna say that maybe are more effective. You're looking at him like this might be a conversation--

DAVE: This has been a growth area for both of us. I didn't know I had a tone until I got married, but I do.

ASHLEY: He's being gracious. This has been a growth area for me, because I would come to Dave--like, I was convinced, and I blame Hallmark movies, okay? I'm a big fan, but I blame them, because everybody looks perfect, they act perfect, there's a script involved, though, you know, we forget that. But I just thought, you know, this man, the more he loves me and the longer we're married, we won't have to use words, because he's just gonna know. So I would do these weird Jedi mind tricks with him.

DAVE: He's not gonna know unless you tell him. You gotta tell him in real words.

ASHLEY: And I didn't, and I would instead, I would use a harsh tone, and I wouldn't use my words, you know, like we tell toddlers, and I would throw these little fits, and I would put him in kind of this little game of like, "If you figure it out, you love me." And he would be like-- like, I'll give an example. He'd be a sweet husband, he'd come to me and he'd be like, "Hey sweetie, I looked at our calendar, you know, it's Thursday, it looks like we don't have anything going on.

The guys were wanting to get together. Do you care if I get with the guys?" And I would just look at him with this horrible stare and I would say--

DAVE: Because she had plans for us that she hadn't said out loud.

ASHLEY: I had not verbalized. But I would literally say, I would not say that, I wouldn't say, "I was hoping to have plans with you," I would just say, "Do what you wanna do."

DAVE: So I would, because I thought that was an invitation.

RANDY: I've fallen in that trap.

DAVE: It was not an invitation, it was a test. But it's so--like, we laugh about it now, and I've had my own versions of that. But a principle we've tried to adopt is that clarity is kindness. So like, when we communicate with clarity, like, "Here's what I'm feeling, here's what I'm hoping. If you wanna do that, that's great.

I'd hoped we could do this on Thursday, and maybe you could get with them another night," but just to communicate with clarity, and it sets up the other person to win. And we, you know, we've worked through that. We're still working through these things. Every couple's a work in progress. Every relationship's a work in progress.

RANDY: But you know, even-- so the clarity thing, because we oftentimes-- words mean different things to different people, they have nuance, right? And so there are actually some practical things that I've learned to do, or others, smarter people, have told me. And one of them is to reflect back what you heard, right? So, and that takes place here at work, that takes place, you know, in the band at church and absolutely with my wife, because my wife will say something and oftentimes we make those assumptions, we all do it, I do it too. "She knows what I mean," or, you know?

And so I'll say, "Okay, let me make sure I got you right here," and if you do it with a kind tone, right? Then you actually--the other person will appreciate it. And you can get the correction or the nuance that you need. That one is really actually very important in every area.

ASHLEY: In every relationship.

RANDY: Yeah, let me ask you this, though, about tone, because I wanna harp on that a bit. Have you ever listened to yourself, recorded yourself, and listened to yourself?

DAVE: Oh yeah, no, we never sound like we think we sound in our head. I'm like, "I was so nice," but then you hear a playback and you're like, "I sounded kind of like a jerk." And so, all of us can stand to just have, I don't know, like that self-reflection, and to try to get to what it says in Ephesians of, "Be kind, compassionate, tenderhearted," make tenderhearted tone, I think, the goal.

RANDY: Or a good friend, because it was a good friend of mine that said, "Dude, you sounded like a jerk to your wife just now," and I thought, "What? I didn't--what? Who, me? Why?" You know, and he was like, "Yeah, yeah, you do." So, yeah, community, I think, is also a huge part.

DAVE: Yeah, having friends who can speak that kind of truth to you, and being that kind of friend.

ASHLEY: Exactly, because they say we become like the five people we hang out with the most. And I think, speaking to that, you know, we need to have those kind of friends, but then we have to take it a step further where we have to take ownership when we've not

gotten it right. And that's what I'm hearing from you is you have to own up to it, because that's the next step. We can have the knowledge, but if we don't go to our spouse and say, "You know what?

I blew it there. I used a really mean tone. That wasn't my intention, but I did it nonetheless, and I love you too much than to let that sit there. Will you forgive me?" And I'm telling you, that goes such a long way in keeping strong relationships.

RANDY: It does. The years of denial didn't work for me. I tried it.

ASHLEY: It didn't work.

BLYNDA: But it is making me think of the person watching right now who is listening and thinking, "I wish I had this tool. I wish I had heard this conversation when I was raising my kids in my family. Now our family is, you know, grown, and we're maybe not as close, and I can't redo, you know, I can't necessarily do family better," which is one of them. But what would you encourage them to say about where they are now and how they can help a fractured family?

DAVE: I think as long as you have breath in your lungs, God still has a plan for you, a redemptive plan, and yeah, none of us can change the past, but the good news about grace is Jesus has already paid the price for every sin, every mistake we'll ever make, whether it was in our parenting, whether it was-- in any relationship. Like, Jesus paid the price for that. And yes, we would love to go back and undo certain things that we've done, all of us.

All of us have sinned. But with whatever time you have left, instead of just sulking about regret and wasting more time, start where you are and say, "Lord, with the time that I have left, help me make the most of it. If it's possible for me to speak some healing into those relationships, give me the courage to do that, to confess that I was wrong, to try to extend an olive branch and to build a bridge and to restart a relationship." If that person is-- they may be dead and gone and on this side of heaven, "I won't be able to tell them face to face that I'm sorry, help me to learn from that and do better in the relationships that I still have." But all of us, man, until we get to heaven, we all have the ability to make progress in our relationships.

And I like one of your tools that you give for people who can, in any relationship, it's kind of the TKN tool. Can you talk about that?

ASHLEY: Yes, and I wish we came up with this, but we have dear friends that are about ten years ahead of us in marriage and raising their kids, and they have this rule where if it's not true, kind, and necessary, T-K-N, then you don't need to say it. It needs to have all three of those things. So you could say, "Well, wait a minute, it's true and it's kind, but is it really necessary?" And you could say, "Well, no, not really," then don't say it, right, because I think--

RANDY: Who decides that?

ASHLEY: See, that's the kicker too. I would say bring that before the Lord, right? Sometimes we just need to bring it before the Lord.

RANDY: Or at least start there.

ASHLEY: Exactly, and like in my counseling and coaching practice I love telling people to do what I like to call raw journaling, like, get it all out on the paper between you and God, like, write it all out.

BLYNDA: I have done that. It's so therapeutic, it's great.

ASHLEY: It is so therapeutic, because we have to get this stuff out, but we live in a culture that says, "Drop your truth bombs," like, you know, just say it.

RANDY: Be your authentic self.

ASHLEY: Yes!

RANDY: And what if you're authentically a jerk?

ASHLEY: Seriously, like, the Bible says the opposite. The Bible says the words, you know, the tongue has life and death, the power of life and death, so we have to be careful with our words.

But we need to get it out on the paper between us and the Lord, but then look at that and say, "What in here actually needs to be said, and is it true, is it kind, and then necessary?" And until you get those words in such a way that's true, kind, and necessary, don't speak those words, because I'm telling you, we need to be careful with our words. That's how we keep-- that's how we cultivate and that's how we keep healthy relationships.

BLYNDA: If we think about being a bridge-builder, you know, that if--we have to think of the end goal, what's my end goal here? It's to restore something that's broken, it's to have a relationship back in, you know, good standing. If that's the goal then, you know, you're gonna be more selective about what's necessary and not necessary to say.

RANDY: You would think.

BLYNDA: Well, you would hope.

RANDY: Well, we try. But you know what, the simple step is just to even be aware of that, and you know, "Maybe I should think about that before I say it." That's my shortcoming is just there's no time between here and here sometimes, and just taking that pause. There's one other thing I wanna ask you about, though, because you know, the idea of

peacemakers is right out of Scripture, right out of Jesus's mouth, right? We wanna be peacemakers.

But I think in our own minds, and what I've seen in practice and in the world, a lot of times a peacemaker is not the biblical kind of peacemaker. It can either be very controlling, you know? You're gonna just put away anything that's disrupting your peace, or it can be laying down and letting someone totally take advantage of you. How do you define sort of a peacemaker in the biblical sense?

DAVE: Well, I mean, you've done a great deal of research on what peace really means, shalom, you know, what those ancient symbols of shalom mean, which doesn't mean avoiding all conflict, it doesn't mean enabling, it doesn't mean being a doormat. It means literally breaking the authority established by chaos. And you know, when Ashley found that, and just doing a word study of the ancient Hebrew "shalom," it really was-- a light bulb went off for me.

I'm like, yeah, 'cause that's the kind of peace Jesus calls us to, not to be doormats, not to enable bullying, but to have the courage to not allow for chaos in our relationships. And that means sometimes lovingly confronting people, it means sometimes having the humility to bite our own tongue when we'd like to say something that isn't necessarily the healthiest thing. And it's gonna look potentially different in every situation, but in all of them it's gonna be leaning into God and letting him really guide the way.

ASHLEY: That's right, and boundaries. Boundaries are how we love people well. Boundaries are not, you know, holding people at arm's length just to like keep them out of our life. It's really, healthy boundaries help us to love people well. And I think this is very much misunderstood, and it depends on kind of the family system, you know, you came from, because some of us, you know, grew up in very dominant homes where one or both of our parents, you know, had a very dominant personality, and it was like the loudest voice got their way every time. And what tends to happen is we kind of see this perpetuated if we don't really stand for healthy relationships, and that requires healthy boundaries.

Or, you know, we maybe grew up in homes where there was a lot of passivity, and it was like, "Oh, I don't wanna ever talk about anything because peace is just avoiding conflict," you know? And that doesn't lead anywhere either, because really, dominance and passivity are both sins, right? And so, in order for us to have healthy relationships, we don't need to let either, you know, take the reins. We need to have healthy relationships where we all have a voice, we can listen to each other, we can speak to each other with love, right? And really pursue peace and say is there anything in our lives that is really stealing from our peace, right? Because God is the authority over everything.

It's not the loudest person, right? It's God. And so we need to stand up for peace and be peacemakers as far as it depends on us. And we believe that it's really standing on God's Word and really not allowing for chaos to rule over us, whatever that looks like, if it's a toxic relationship or whatever that is.

RANDY: Yeah, I really think you're tapping into the heart of it there with the idea of chaos and order. I mean, that was-- the universe was set into place when God spoke and God breathed, pneuma, into the chaos and created order. And that's what I see what you guys are doing with all these simple shifts, is you're saying, "Okay, let's let God breathe into our chaos and let him reset the order," because then you find shalom, the peace.

And that is, I think that's really core to Christianity and faith and all that we kind of talk around and build on and expand on, I get that, but that's critical. So, yeah, you wanna do life better, you wanna do marriage better, you can get "Do Marriage Better." In fact, let me tell you a little bit of chaos that's going on right now that you can help bring order to. It's a situation where people don't have clean drinking water, and it's impacting children the hardest.

Watch this, and then I wanna invite you into setting God's order into place by meeting basic needs in the name of Jesus. Watch this and you'll see how.

FEMALE ANNOUNCER: Millions of children around the world do not have access to safe, clean drinking water. As a result, they have no choice but to collect contaminated water from sources like this. Many times, water from these sources is full of disease and bacteria that can cause serious sickness or even death, especially in younger children.

[speaking foreign language]

ANNOUNCER: These children represent millions of others around the world whose lives are in danger every day they drink contaminated water. We can give them a better choice. Working together, we can drill new water wells that provide safe, clean drinking water to thousands of people who live nearby. Please, help us today.

RANDY: As you can see, the lack of clean drinking water is sort of a-- it's a global problem. They tell us there's approximately 2 billion people, and it's the children that are hit the hardest.

BLYNDA: Sometimes we get paralyzed and don't do anything because we know we can't solve the whole problem, but we can solve one of the problems. We can help, and give them a better choice, and it made me start thinking, how many choices do we have in a day of what we wanna drink? Not just water, but sodas and all these kind of things.

And they don't have-- the choice they have right now is one choice, and that's to drink contaminated water. And what we do, the work that we do, gives them another, better choice.

RANDY: All of us together. You see, an average cost of a well when we look across the 20 nations where we hope to drill 350 wells this year, that's our goal, and I believe we'll reach it with your help. The average cost of the well is \$4800, and that means drilling all the way down to where we can get the pure water. It means encasing it, covering it so nothing

blows in, no animals get in, and then putting a pump on top of that well where a man, a woman, a child can come get clean drinking water. You make that possible.

If you say, "You know what? I could provide \$4800 for a well." We had a friend recently provide 10 wells. God bless you for what you can do. Maybe you can come and say, "I would like to give water for life to 30 people." That's what \$144 will do. That well will last an average of 70 years, so whatever you give, you will be giving essentially water for life.

This is the last week this campaign is on the air, so we do need to hear from you today. Please go online, go to the phone, make the best gift you can, and know. Know this: you will be impacting someone with God's love. You will likely be giving that child a chance at a better life, and together we do it in the name of Jesus, so do it today.

MALE 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." This is the last week. Please call, write, or make your gift online.

RANDY: I do hope you're going online or going to the phone right now. This is the last week we'll be on the air talking about this. But as we talked about order and chaos, you really will be bringing order in the name of Jesus to people's health. And it's a wonderful thing, so please. And there's a book and a website and a podcast, a lot of resources for people who need to go deeper.

BLYNDA: "Do Marriage Better," but we wanna remind you it's do life better, do relationships better. This book will help you in so many ways. And Dave and Ashley, thank you so much. Where can they find you if they wanna know more about you?

ASHLEY: Of course, we would love that. Just go to daveandashley.com, or if you want to know more about how to do marriage and do life better, listen to us on our "Naked

Marriage" podcast wherever you get your podcasts. And you can get "Do Marriage Better" on Amazon.

RANDY: Yep, half the audience is going, "What did they just name that podcast?" Go to the website and you'll see, and come back to "Life Today," and you'll hopefully get more encouragement. We'll see you again next time.

[music]

ED NEWTON: Stop living your life to prove your critics wrong. Start living your life to prove your Creator is right.

ANNOUNCER: Discovering your true identity.

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