

9/21/2026

Week 39

Randy Robison & Blynda Lane

Tim & Hilary Timmons

"Present In The Struggle"

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

TIM TIMMONS: So they gave me 5 years to live, 25 years ago. Incurable cancer, stage 4. There are still tumors on my liver wearing out my heart today, but this bald dork got to wake up again today, and I think part of our journey is like inviting people into holding the tension of grief.

ANNOUNCER: How God walked Tim and Hilary Timmons through their grief, and how he gave them courage to wake up again, next on "Life Today".

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RANDY ROBISON: Welcome to "Life Today", I'm Randy Robison. Blynda Lane is with me, and we're having a great time already.

BLYNDA LANE: We are having a good time. I didn't realize how fun conversations could be with just complete strangers that become close friends. That's what it kind of sounds like to me.

RANDY: Well, and you know, I kind of felt like I knew our guest, at least Tim, and his wife to a degree, Hilary, because of the movie.

BLYNDA: That's it, see, that's the thing. You think you know them, and then you find out when you show up and you think you're gonna find Milo, and it's--he looks a lot like him though.

RANDY: So yeah, "I Can Only Imagine 2", right?

HILARY TIMMONS: "I Can Only Imagine 2", yes.

RANDY: So Tim and Hilary Timmons, but we're talking about their new book. I wanna show people their book real quick. This is the book, "Waking Up Again".

BLYNDA: You know, this is-- what's amazing, and thank you for joining the show, both of you. Your story is so compelling, and I know that if you-- the movie has already come out, so somebody could have already seen it and known a little bit of your story, but I do want you to unpack it. But one thing about the story that I think was so impactful to me was that you walked through something really hard, and yet never lost gratitude.

And so for me, I wanted to talk a little bit about that, how you can walk through suffering in life, and you don't get a resolve to that, necessarily, so you're gonna have-- yours has been a long suffering, so you've had to choose in your life if you're gonna have gratitude along with that. Can you tell us a little bit about your story and then weave that into it?

TIM: Yeah, I mean, people ask me often, like, "Tell your story," and what people mean is my cancer journey, you know. And cancer is the dumbest story I have. You know, it really is like such a dumb story.

But the journey of walking through, of waking up again today, like, that's something worth telling. And so, as terrible as cancer has been, so they gave me 5 years to live, 25 years ago. Incurable cancer, stage 4.

There are still tumors on my liver wearing out my heart today. But this bald dork got to wake up again today. And there have been some really hard days.

I mean, to say, "Man, you know what, everything's been great," it's just not true. And I think part of our journey, and even the movie and our book is like inviting people into holding the tension of grief, because I mean, Hilary, you can talk about it yourself, but she walked through a whole season of just like wrestling match with God, saying, "Okay, I thought you were gonna heal Tim, but he's--we're about to go into big surgery. Like, this is hard." And yet, what if God's actually real and at work in all things?

So it's holding these two tensions. That's what we're trying to figure out how to do well, and then we get to invite people into that. How has that been?

HILARY: Yeah, difficult. I would say Tim had a real kind of grip on trusting God early on in our diagnosis. I had to wrestle that out, like he said, for a number of years, and I think we all do, to some degree, when you look around at a world where there is so much suffering, and we have to kind of figure out how that fits with a God who is supposed to be loving.

And so, I just had to struggle. I will say, though, Jesus was so present with us in all of the hard that we had to walk out with cancer, that even if the "problem of suffering"-type question was never answered fully for me, his witness was so constant that that was the thing, I could rest into him in the midst of what was hard. And so, through that came the ability to hold the grief and gratitude together.

BLYNDA: It's interesting because, you know, we know the Romans 8:28, "God works all things out for good," and that's a hard Scripture because we would never call cancer good.

But I think what I love about what you're saying is in that, as you're trying to understand, "What do you mean by you work everything out for good when this doesn't feel good?" God, he not only hears you, but I think he loves his kids asking those kind of questions. I think he loved that you wrestled.

I think that he, as a Father--as a mother, I would want my kids to trust me enough that they could bring the hardest part of their thoughts to me, you know? So I know you probably--that even probably took you to a deeper level in your relationship with the Lord.

HILARY: Yes, I do think figuring out that he could hold that, and that I didn't have to just, "Oh, everything's fine and God is good." And I think experiencing a diagnosis like this, you tend to hear a lot of things from well-meaning people in your lives, kind of--

RANDY: Like what?

HILARY: Oh my goodness.

RANDY: What's the best thing and the worst thing you've heard during this time?

HILARY: We've had some good ones.

TIM: I don't know if we can share them. Yeah, I mean, just, gosh, the amount of people that--you know. I mean, just as you guys know well, if somebody just passes away, what does somebody say?

"God needed another fisherman up there." It's like, I don't know, I don't know if that's how he works. And if he does, I've got bigger questions. And I was just gonna say that at the end of that passage of Romans 8, I mean, you know, we take that one part, but the next whole section is that this stuff is actually making us into people that look like Jesus.

Like, that being the good. And I think part of our journey with this cancer stuff, and life is just hard in and of itself, like we're all going through-- whoever's watching this is going through something. If not, wait a week, it's coming, you know?

And hopefully the more that we're just saying, "Okay, Jesus, we're not gonna work for you, we're just gonna join you today in the midst of our grief," and also say, "God, you're at work in all things," if we can hold this, I think we're starting to look more like Jesus, not like, "Man, we got our cool quiet times down and we're," you know, but like, I think we're actually looking more like Jesus, and that's, like, way more fun. I think we're being made to look more like Jesus through the suffering. I think joy grows in the valleys.

RANDY: So you grew up-- did you grow up in the church?

TIM: I did.

RANDY: I thought you did. And did you grow up in the church?

Okay, here's my question. Were there things that you had to unlearn from, you know, there's just kind of the culture that we tend to have in American church culture, when you went through these difficult things, and maybe what are some of the things that stand out that you go, "Okay, I didn't really understand that" or "I misunderstood that," and what you're talking about, the reality is so much better?

HILARY: I think one would be, I grew up with the idea that if you pray in faith, you will be healed, period. And God does heal. In our case, Tim still has active cancer in his liver, and so our, you know, we didn't get the miraculous healing I think we trusted for early on.

TIM: And we have a lot of friends who are not here that have more faith than we could ever have.

HILARY: Yeah, so I think the unlearning there is let's not hang that healing on how much faith I have. Like, God does-- we don't always understand what God does and what he says yes to and what is left unanswered, and so I think it's an opportunity to trust him and to lean deeper into what has then your goodness looked like. That's been one thing for me, for sure.

BLYNDA: Not to even bring in the the title of the song that the movie was about, but it is that idea. Who we have the faith in is that even if he doesn't, we still trust him.

That's where the faith comes in. It's not in the outcomes, it's in the who.

HILARY: And that was really part of the beauty of that song, "Even If", is that I did a whole word study on biblical hope, and I'd always thought hope was what God can do for me. Like, "I hope he's gonna do this, I hope he will heal this, I hope he helps our kid out with this, X, Y, Z," which is all great, and we get to pray for those things. But if my hope relies-- is relying on him doing those things, then when my daughter prays that her dreams, her nightmares would get better, and every night she has to keep praying, they don't go away, at some point she's like, "He's not listening." Or we say, what if the bigger story is God's at work in all things, and he's walking with us in the midst of this?

He is our hope, even in the middle of those nightmares. He's our hope, even in the middle of cancer. So I think that is one of those learnings, that hope is such a more beautiful word because it's just Jesus alone is my hope.

RANDY: Yeah, our good friend Dudley Hall, who really walked with us through the loss of my dad, you know, the week before he passed away, he asked the question of our family, "Do you trust God to heal him?" And we're all like, "Absolutely." That's what we were praying for, you know, every day. And he said, "Do you trust God if this is his time and God takes him home?"

HILARY: Oh, such a good question.

RANDY: It resets the way you think about trust, eternity, God, goodness.

TIM: Yes, totally.

RANDY: And we had to say a hard yes. But I find, when I've gone through difficult seasons like this, especially the loss, I've had to have an eternal perspective. I'm guessing you guys stepped into that a long time ago.

TIM: Yeah, I mean, I love that, that is so good. I think one of the things that I'm relearning, I say at the end of our book that I'm using less words ending in "ed"-- "I've learned, I've figured"-- but I'm using more words ending in "ing". "I'm learning," like, I'm in the process.

And even of the idea of eternity has already begun. Like, that when Jesus is at hand, like it's right here, right now, it's available. Like, the kingdom of God is alive and well and available.

Joy, peace, in the midst of our crap and hard stuff, it is available right here, right now. In the middle of your grief, joy in the kingdom and the eternity is available here, heaven here, now. And I think for us, we're going, like, "Waking Up Again", how do we invite each other to, like, wake up and join Jesus in eternity, starting today?

Like, it just doesn't have to be, "Well, when I'm in the by-and-by," like, it has begun, and we get to actually live in the reality of the actual good news. "Jesus died on the cross, it's so beautiful, so great. Thank you, Jesus, for your grace." But if it just stops there, I don't know if it's the whole story.

I think I grew up with that, that being the story, like, get people into heaven. But I think that's just-- I've said this many times, it's like the wood of the cross is almost like the wood on the door into the wardrobe into Narnia. It's like just the entrance into, like, so much more.

Jesus, thank you for what you did on the cross. Now he's like, "Come on through.

There's so much more." So I'm--well, thank you for even sharing that about your dad, and so sorry. And in the midst of this, sorry and not sorry, because we're also being made to look more like Jesus.

RANDY: Yeah, yeah, I mean, "mission accomplished" is the way I feel about, you know, your walk on earth. I've got a scripture for you that'll prove what you're saying.

Paul says to Timothy, "Take hold of the eternal life to which you are called," and he's not-- that's not a suicide verse, right? That's saying no, the eternal life, it's here, it's now.

TIM: I love that.

RANDY: Okay, I gotta ask, and people that have seen the movie, again, and I thought the movie was great, so I'm all about the movie. Show me your right wrist. There it is, okay.

Can you let them get a good shot of that? That has significance.

Now, if someone hadn't seen the film, what is that? What does that mean to you, and why do you do it?

TIM: Yeah, I started this about 15 years ago. I've worked for God most of my life. I've been a varsity American Christian most of my life.

Like, try to be better than me, and it'd be hard to be better than me. And yet I at some point was so soul-tired, and I'm like, this is-- I'm pushing this Jesus thing and, like, the fruit of the Spirit and you know, I'm exhausted, my soul is exhausted. And cancer had been in my body and learning so much with that, yet I just was like, "There's gotta be more to this Jesus thing than just being an awesome varsity American Christian." And so I remember quitting working for God, saying, "I'm done, I'm done working for you."

I will never work for you again. It sucked the life out of me. But I'm gonna join you every day that you wake me up again.

If you wake me up today, I will write this on my wrist." The X used to stand for the Christ, years ago. And so I just, it was my own little personal invitation to every day that I got to wake up and be like, "Jesus, you woke me up, thank you. I shouldn't be here, but you woke me up."

How do I join you as a dad or a husband, or when somebody cuts me off on the road and I wanna tell them that they're awesome and number one, or whatever like that?" Like, I get to join Jesus there. He woke me up and I get to pray blessing for that person, or I get to curse them. And so I'm just trying to figure out, how do I join Jesus more intentionally every single morning that he wakes me up?

And the movie focuses more on, you know, my cancer journey and waking up at that point. But for me the bigger story is like, I just get to join him again.

Like, he's at work in all things. What if the King of the kingdom knows what's best for his kingdom, and I get to join him in it?

RANDY: Is that working for you?

TIM: It is.

BLYNDA: Maybe we should all do it. That's a good reminder. Well, you know, you have a chapter in here where it talks about attention, and what I think is so interesting is some of living that way just is always being intentional to turn your attention to what God is doing.

Having eyes to see, ears to hear, your neighbors around you, the children around you, the people in your home, like, how can I turn my attention? And I think you even say in there is, "What has my attention has my worship," you know, and I think--so, how does that help you, and what would you say to those that are watching, to just have that reminder every day to turn their attention to what God's doing?

TIM: Yeah, I'll just give a quick little pitch. So we started this thing called 10,000 Minutes, years ago. There are 10,080 minutes in a week, you're welcome.

Eighty of those minutes are spent in some church gathering if you do that, which is awesome. But there are 10,000 other minutes until we gather again, and I'm awesome in those 80, like, varsity in those 80 minutes. Hands up the whole thing, but get me in the 10,000 minutes, and that's, I think, when the stuff hits the fan.

And what we began to do is just have these practices, like, with 10,000 Minutes it's--we do blogs and a bunch of things, but--podcasts--but what we wanted to say is, "Jesus, you have my attention today." So even at home or wherever you are, that you would just prac-- I mean, hopefully you're breathing, 'cause if you're not, call 911. But like, we're all breathing, and a breathing prayer is just simply saying, "Jesus, you have my attention." Somebody cuts me off, "Jesus, you have my attention." Somebody gets a cancer diagnosis, "Jesus, you have my attention." We get in an argument, "Jesus, you have my attention." It has changed my life.

And so I love getting to invite people into this just simple practice of saying, "Jesus, you have our attention," and what could happen in our country, on our street, in our neighborhood, in our world, if more Jesus people just say, "Jesus, you have my attention." Not politics or whatever, these things, you, Jesus, have my attention. Let's go, revolution.

RANDY: I'm curious your perspective, Hilary. How would you compare, you know, varsity Christian Tim working for Jesus to Tim who just tries to have his attention focused on Jesus every day in every situation?

HILARY: Yeah, I would say he's been a man that has truly sought God's heart since I've known him. It's what drew me to him when we were dating. But yeah, the shift is big in that I think those early years of our marriage, we did youth ministry together and then we were on the staff of a large church, and I think some of that kind of working for God came out of a place of just being a part of a big thing that required a lot of energy, and like, a lot of work toward putting something on, and that can sometimes lose-- our hearts for Jesus can get lost in some of that.

So, I would say we wanted to kind of intentionally make that shift, because we had kind of gotten lost in all of that. And I mean--

RANDY: Just let me ask you this, just because what I've seen is as we mature, which is what you're talking about ultimately, what Blynda referred to, the fruit of the Spirit. Fruit, in my younger years, was something I tried to make more of on my own, and felt like if I didn't, I was a failure as a Christian. And when I see this posture that you guys have taken, you can't stop the fruit.

HILARY: Right.

RANDY: Do you see that natural fruit-bearing coming out?

HILARY: That's a great way to say it. And I do think coming through an experience with cancer where it's like you get really focused in on what matters, and Jesus coming alongside us in those years shifted automatically for us as we allowed that suffering to work in us, shifted toward just Jesus, like, working that fruit out in us.

BLYNDA: You told a story at the end of the book about your trip to Nicaragua and how being with those children changed your whole perspective, and we get to be a part of that too, and once you experience somebody in such need, it does change how you recognize your--

RANDY: It does, and I think it also, you know, a part of the maturity and conforming to the image of Christ is wanting to help others in their need. And you know, it doesn't have to look the way it's framed up, it's just like, just go be Jesus to somebody, right? Just gentleness, kindness, and those kinds of things, and I love the posture of that.

I want people to get the book just so they can walk alongside you a little bit and see the joy that comes out of that, because that's a byproduct of the Spirit living in us, or fruit of the Spirit, is joy. And so actually, you know, I've got a way that we can send this.

Obviously you can get "Waking Up Again" wherever you get books, but we would love to send it to you today if you will be an expression of Christ, specifically, you know, to some children who are in need. So take a second to watch this, and we'll tell you how you can wake up a little bit today as you experience God through you and to others.

RANDY: As we travel around the world, one thing we've noticed is the condition of the feet of so many children. We see children all over the world running around barefoot in some terrible conditions, and it's not just unsightly, it's unhealthy and potentially deadly. As we give shoes, which is a wonderful Christmas gift, keep in mind that we are actually giving them a chance for better health, potentially even saving lives.

We are protecting them from some really debilitating diseases, things like hookworm, several things that can happen in their feet. These protect them, so it's double. It's a gift to give them something they don't have, and it's something to protect their health.

Just like the smiles, when we go in and correct a cleft palate, we're not just giving them a cosmetic change, we're actually improving their health. Everything that we do is to improve the health of others, physically and spiritually. So join with us as we celebrate the birth of our Savior at Christmas, and we give Christmas Shoes and Smiles.

RANDY: Hey, little buddy, let's see if we can get this round. How does this fit?

[children cheering]

RANDY: I wanna see more dancing after Christmas this year. I love it when the children celebrate. But we can only do it with your help.

That's why I want you to go online or go to the phone, please today, make the best gift you can. Let me give you an idea. \$36, that simple gift today would help provide 10 pairs of shoes.

That's 10 children that would receive a gift that they will enjoy, treasure, and could impact their health. You can provide 20 pairs of shoes for a gift of \$72, and \$180 will provide 50 pairs of shoes. Maybe you wanna provide a surgery for cleft lip, cleft palate, and enable a child to smile this year.

A gift of \$1000 would provide two surgeries. So whatever you can do, I just want us all to come together and make this Christmas so special. And Blynda, I know you've been out there, you've seen the children dancing and laughing and enjoying the gifts, but this is such a huge opportunity to share God's love with people, I don't want anyone to miss it.

BLYNDA: It is, I mean, it's literally from the feet all the way up to the head, we can do it. I mean, you can take care of so many things by giving your gift, and it does, it changes their life. It doesn't just create comfort, it actually-- it can heal them, can keep them from disease.

RANDY: Yeah, and we don't realize it, we don't think about it, but a common thing over there is hookworm, in a lot of Third World countries, in fact, is hookworm, which comes in through the feet. And so, yes, the protection of that durable shoe is a health benefit, but above all, I view all that we do here, and you know, a Christ-mas outreach, a Christ outreach. Yes, we're sharing something in the physical, but more importantly, we're sharing something in the spiritual, and that is God's love.

That is doing it in the name of Jesus Christ. So I hope everyone will join us today.

BLYNDA: What a great Christmas gift.

RANDY: What a gift. You can be that gift.

ANNOUNCER: Poverty is a killer, and because of it, children needlessly suffer, not only from a lack of food and clean water, but also from things we often take for granted, such as a healthy smile or a simple pair of shoes. Far too many children living in extreme poverty have never owned a new pair of shoes, and while that may seem minor, walking with bare feet puts them at risk of painful infections, injury, and life-threatening diseases. But this Christmas, you can bring hope and healing.

Your gift today will help provide new shoes for 150,000 children in time for the holidays, and for some children, a beautiful new smile. Your gift of \$36 will help provide shoes for 10 children. \$72 will help provide for 20, \$180 will help provide shoes for 50, and a gift of \$500 will help provide a cleft surgery, restoring a child's smile for a lifetime.

As a thank-you for your gift, please request the first-time-ever dual-color crystal shoe ornament with beautiful green and red accents. With your gift of \$100 or more, you may request this keepsake box set, featuring five of Life's colorful crystal shoe ornaments.

Finally, please consider a gift of \$1000 or more to help provide over 275 pairs of shoes, or corrective smile surgeries for two children, and you may request the beautiful bronze sculpture, "The Good Shepherd". Please call, write, or make your gift online today.

TAMMY TRENT: I love this moment, I love it. No child should ever have to play around, walk around, without a pair of shoes, something that is good for them, something that will protect them. Not just their feet, but their entire life.

This is where they play, this is where they walk, this is where they live. There's nails, there's metal, and when you live in these places, it's not like you can rush to a clinic right away. Their medical care is not like mine.

So what a privilege it is to come in here and give them something that I know will keep them safe. So as you are prayerfully considering giving, please remember that we also have a ministry where we are changing the smiles of little ones as well who have been born with cleft lip or cleft palate, so don't forget that today, Christmas Shoes and Smiles. Thank you so much for your giving.

It all matters. Go online or call that number today and give the best gift you can.

RANDY: We'd love to hear from you. I do hope you're going online, going on the phone, make the best gift you can.

I do want to tell you something. By the way, if you do request "Waking Up Again", we'll love to send that to you, but we've got some songs that I'd love for people to hear.

BLYNDA: He's not just a songwriter, he is a singer.

RANDY: Very good singer. So where are those? So our socials, lifetoday.org website.

You can go out there and just search for Tim Timmons "Life Today", you'll hear it. But man, most of all, thanks for just kind of coming and hanging out with us and sharing your life with us.

TIM: Great to meet you guys.

HILARY: Yeah, thank you.

BLYNDA: Yes, you guys are just the real deal.

TIM: From strangers to friends.

RANDY: Strangers no more!

TIM: That's how we do it.

BLYNDA: Yes, that's how we do it here on "Life Today".

RANDY: You guys, don't be a stranger. We'd love for you to come back. We'll see you again next time here on "Life Today".

♪♪♪♪♪♪♪♪♪♪♪♪♪♪♪

TAMMY: Where are you, God, in this, in this moment, in the hurt, in the heartache, in the disappointment?

ANNOUNCER: Tomorrow.

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