

9/28/2026

Week 40

Tammy Trent

Toni Collier

"We Need Friends"

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

TONI COLLIER: So here I am now. I've walked through two divorces, and the polar difference, or the defining thing that has been different in those two seasons, is that I healed alone from my first divorce and made some not good decisions, and in my second divorce I've healed with people, and it's been totally different.

ANNOUNCER: When Toni Collier's world came crashing down, she leaned on her community to help pick up the pieces. "Don't Try This Alone", next on "Life Today".

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TAMMY TRENT: Hello everybody, welcome to "Life Today". I'm Tammy Trent, and I'm so glad you could join us again today. Maybe today you're watching and feeling the ache of loneliness, carrying pain you've tried to keep hidden.

Maybe you've been hurt, betrayed, or left wondering if anyone could truly see you, love you, and walk with you in the mess. You've told yourself you're fine, but deep down you're tired of pretending and ready for something real. So can I remind you, God never designed you to carry the weight of your pain alone.

He created us for connection, for safe, grace-filled relationships that help us heal and remind us of who we are in him. And even if you've been burned before, he can still bring the right people into your life to help you walk toward freedom. That's exactly what we're talking about today.

My guest Toni Collier knows the power of healing in honest community. In her brand new book, "Don't Try This Alone", she shares her personal journey through trauma, divorce, church hurt, and redemption, and the life-giving relationships that help people heal, and it helped her heal. It's a road map for anyone who's tired of isolation and ready to experience the beauty of walking with others toward wholeness.

So welcome with me my new friend, Toni Collier. It's so great to have you here!

TONI: I'm really excited to be on, and I actually do agree with you, we are friends now.

TAMMY: Yes, totally, it's official, it is official. And I want them to feel the same that I have felt instantly. So I think in order to do that, we need to start up at the top.

Let me say it this way: the road you have walked has not been easy, right? There's a lot there, so can you unpack, like, just give us a little bit?

TONI: So I grew up in a blended family in Texas, and I would say that darkness entered my story really early because my mom got very sick when I was just a little girl. My dad was an alcoholic at the time, and God has since redeemed his story and his life in amazing ways, another episode. And I was just this little girl with a mama who was so sick, and so I became a tiny little caregiver.

And I think--I say darkness entered my story there because when you don't have what you need as a child, secure attachment isn't formed, and you start to look for that validation, that nurturing, that leadership in other places, and for me, I looked in all the places, in boys and promiscuity and lust and addiction and partying, and all the things. And then when I was 16, I was graduating high school and deciding like, "Okay, I'm gonna go to college, I'm gonna clean my life up," did not, okay? Went to college, went crazy, ended up getting engaged at 19, which, gosh, looking back, I'm like, just a little baby.

And I--but I got engaged, I got married, and that first marriage was very abusive in so many ways. And I ended up having a daughter in that marriage and just looked at her and thought, "Wow, I really do need to find some safety, a safe environment." God later redeemed my story, I got remarried to a pastor and I was like, "This is it, Cinderella story, I'm God's favorite, it is what it is."

And unfortunately in September of 2023 I got a call from my now second ex-husband that he was being extorted, and there was just years of infidelity and hiding it and--. So here I am now. Now have walked through two divorces, and the polar difference, or the defining thing that has been different in those two seasons, is that I healed alone from my first divorce and made some not good decisions, and in my second divorce, I've healed with people, and it's been totally different.

TAMMY: A totally different thing, I think, when you have community. Looking back now at that first divorce that you went through where you said you kind of journeyed it alone and made some bad choices, what do you think that looked like for you, looking back now, where someone might go, "Gosh, I've been dealing with this by myself and I see the same patterns"?

TONI: So for me I think in that season, the truth is I didn't have the best friendships to begin with, okay? Okay, and so my circle was kind of saturated with people that weren't living in

the way of Jesus, that, you know, perpetuated some bad behaviors in me. And you know, I look back now and it's crazy because I actually think it was a blessing that I needed community during that time, because the difference was, I started praying for community after that first divorce, like, "Wow, I have no one."

I don't have a church community, I don't have anyone to really walk with me through this healing journey. And so it just started like a whole process of healing, of deciding, like, I wanna be better, I don't wanna do this alone, this is not good for me. And now I'm happy to say that I've chosen to live a life on the offense and not the defense, so that when pain and tragedy did come, I had a whole army of people behind me ready to tend with me and really help me heal.

TAMMY: Did you feel like you had a lot of work in yourself to be done? Like, "I need to bury some old to find some new"?

TONI: Well, I think for many of us we really do want great community. Like, we want them, we want godly friends, we want people that are honest, and we kind of have to be those people too. And so we gotta do our own work first to become the friends that we so deeply want in the first place, to become a safe person, to become a reliable person.

So yes, tons of work. I call it, I ripped off all the band-aids, because that's what I did, right?

And that's what we do, is we get all these wounds, we get painful things that happen to us, and we just put a little band-aid over it like, "I'm fine, everything's fine." That band-aid is dirty, it is falling off, it is a problem.

TAMMY: It's not fine. It's not fine and I'm not okay.

TONI: Come on, and we need surgery, not band-aids. And so I think I went through a season of surgery to become who I deeply wanted in my life.

And I feel like I'm a great friend, my friends say that I'm a great friend, okay? I don't wanna sound crazy.

TAMMY: So far I love you.

TONI: I feel really great about my life: generous, kind, patient, okay?

TAMMY: Exactly, I like our friendship so far.

TONI: Right, but we have to look more like Jesus so that we can attract other people who look like Jesus.

TAMMY: That's right, it's so true, and you know, I was researching you before you came onto the show. All good stuff, lots of podcasts I watched, all good stuff. But I got to this one

section that had said you were in the middle of writing a book, then you got the call that this was all coming.

I loved how you said-- this is incredible-- when you got that call, you were in a hotel room in Nashville, and I'm from Nashville. You're in Nashville, getting ready to do some, I think, TV shows, and you were there in that same hotel room with friends, that were already good friends, good influence in your life. I love that set-up in your life.

Nothing surprises God, he knew it was coming, and so he sets you in a place already to begin to show you how important community would be in your life, that godly, good sisterhood would be in your life, and you walked out of there. And I love that moment where you just said, "Do I need to stay? Do I go, do I need to stay?"

And I think at that time you were probably in the middle of that book that just changed the trajectory because you're like, "I can't write this book," right? So then God birthed something new in you, and I think that's, like talking about today, don't do this alone, and it got you to a place of how you needed to build a deep community. So tell me about that and how all of that shifted in you.

TONI: Gosh, I was writing a book on sanctification and moral failures, and then--.

TAMMY: You were?

TONI: Yeah. And then my publishers were like, "Well, considering that your now ex-husband has gone through a moral failure." We had a church, we planted a church, so it was a big deal, very public, very embarrassing, and because of that, it just wouldn't have been a good idea to put out a book about moral failures, you know what I'm saying?

I don't wanna talk about that for years, you know? And so, I was devastated, I mean, you know this. We write content, we pour our hearts into it, it's 60,000+ words, and here I am facing this reality that, "You can't put that book out, you're gonna have to write another one."

And I was so grateful that I had my friends in that hotel room, I mean, literally. I was filming with a Christian TV network, and my good friends who I'd been in deep, intentional community with, it's something that we call the confessional community, and we're still in it, we've been in it for four years. It's like a group of seven of us who just decide to go deep, and we just confess, and it's as weird and scary as you think it is, but it's holy and beautiful.

And two of my friends who I'd already been in that group with for two years was in the same hotel as me, down the hallway. So I was able to call them and they knew my pain, they knew my tears already, they knew the grief and how I carried it. One of my friends even ordered me breakfast because she was like, "I know when you're stressed out you don't eat, so here's some blueberry lemon pancakes," I will never forget those blueberry lemon pancakes, okay?

And I went to them and started talking about things like what am I gonna do about the book, and what am I gonna-- how am I gonna do this really well, and I remember my friend Jennie Allen said, "That book that you're writing now, it'll come, but it's not in God's timing." And we don't just want God's promises, we want his timing too. We don't want to do things on our own timetable because we're like, "Oh, I feel like God's doing this to me," so it's like, "Lord, what do you wanna do?"

And what he wanted to do was have me write this book, "Don't Try This Alone". He wanted me to show people in real time what it looks like to be a leader and to be on stages and to have, you know, places and spaces of authority, and to still need people.

TAMMY: So how do we get to a healthy, safe community? Because I've been on the platform too, just as you have and you'll have people coming up to you afterwards also saying, "I want friends, I don't know how to make friends, I don't know how to find a community."

There's some practical things, and then there's some very strong spiritual things. So how do they find, if somebody's struggling with finding a good community to surround their life, what's practical for them?

TONI: Okay, so I think first and foremost you've got to start praying for friends, which sounds so elementary, okay? Like, what am I gonna do, go to God and be like, "Hey, can you send me a friend to play with"? Like, it feels so weird, and it's the way of Jesus.

I mean, so how much more would he want us to come to him to pray for community when we saw Jesus build a community of 12, and he didn't even need them? I mean, he's the all-knowing, all-powerful, and divine in all of his ways God, in human form, and he said, "I'm gonna pick 12 to help me do this, not because I need them, but because I need to stress the importance of fulfilling our purpose in Christ with other people." And so I think for many of us we have to start by like, actually praying.

TAMMY: Like, intentional prayers, and I think specific, like, "God, I am praying for a friend right now that brings joy into my life, because I am struggling. I am struggling with depression, with anxiety, so I need joy. I do not want to be attracted to the same person that's gonna keep me there, someone that will help me, that will always point me to Jesus, that would challenge me when I'm doing or feeling stuck or doing things I shouldn't do, that would challenge me, so God, I'm praying," very specific.

Write it down, make your vision board. What do you want God to do in your life? What is the desire of your heart?

TONI: And we do that with every other area of our life, our dreams, our job, our children, and for some reason, friendship gets the short end of the stick. It's weird, and so we have to get intentional about that. And I also think we have to start praying about our current friendships.

For me, in my season, there were friendships that I needed to transition out. People were taking up space in my most intimate areas that shouldn't have been there, and so, what does it look like to transition people well? I mean, even Jesus had circles, his most intimate circle, him and the Lord.

He brought three close, Peter, James, and John. The other disciples and the women, the 72, I mean, we can look in the Bible and see how Jesus operated.

And the three that he brought close, he brought real close into the Garden of Gethsemane, his most intimate moment. What does it look like for us to take a little look at the people that are around us now and maybe have some hard conversations about transition, to make space for the people that God's trying to send?

TAMMY: That is so good, Toni, when you say that, when you say three, I just instantly think, I have three. I've got a lot of great friends, but my mom, my sister, and my best friend, those three girls know everything about my life, the good, the bad, the super ugly, the grace that they've extended to me, the love, walking out life with me. Thank you, Jesus, for community.

I know the importance of it, and I know how it can be very dangerous to isolate and to be without it. But what about--let's talk about what forgiveness looked like for you, okay, because we touched on the whole broken--.

TONI: No, I don't wanna talk about that--I'm just kidding.

TAMMY: I know, because was that easy for you, or was forgiveness a bit of a process?

TONI: You know, God is just funny, you know what I mean? One of the second calls that I made when I just got the news about my ex-husband was to Lysa TerKeurst, and she beautifully and gracefully helped me walk through that season in so many ways. And I remember going to her retreat, Good Boundaries and Goodbyes, and I read that book and I was like, "Yeah, good boundaries and goodbyes!"

And then I slid over that book, and I was like, "Forgiving What You Can't Forget", I don't wanna do that book, I don't--nope. And the truth is, I wasn't ready, and I started "Forgiving What You Can't Forget" yesterday, again.

TAMMY: Really?

TONI: Yesterday. So it's interesting that you say that, because at the end of the day, God's coming after everything. He wants to redeem every crevice, and he's not leaving the scraps.

And so yes, the Lord has redeemed my career in ways, and I'm grateful for that, the Lord has given me and my kids a beautiful home to live in. The Lord has built beautiful

community in my life. But there's a little scrap, there's a scrap of unforgiveness, and he's coming for it.

And I would not be a leader worth following, an integral leader, if I did not pursue forgiveness. And so no, it has not been easy, and I'm not leaving any scraps either, so I'm going after forgiveness, because it is not at all-- forgiveness, what I'm learning, is not at all about two people, it's about me setting my heart free to love again, to trust again, and to accept freely the forgiveness that Jesus has given me, and I can't take that if I'm not willing to give it.

TAMMY: I can totally resonate with that, and I think a lot of people can. When God is leaning in and the Holy Spirit is speaking to us to say, "This is what I need you to do," we have to listen, we can't do it alone. I think, just like you have walked through different seasons where you sat alone, trying to do it alone, but I think what happens, what's dangerous in those seasons, even when I've tried to do grief alone, different times, is that when my healing doesn't come, when the forgiveness doesn't come, when the freedom doesn't come, now I blame God, because, "You didn't fix this for me."

But I'm not doing everything I need to do. I'm not listening to counsel, instruction, wisdom, great people in my life, I'm trying to do it on my own, and the way I think it should be done, my will be done, not thine will be done, and then we blame God for everything.

TONI: And it's because we're not picking up his burdens or his yoke, we're picking up ours. And the Bible literally specifically says, like, "The yoke is easy and the burden is light," like, this idea that it has to be God's way, though. Like, the only reason why God's will is lighter for us, is easier for us, is because it's his way and his design, and his way says, "We don't do this alone."

He created us to be connected. Moses had an Aaron, and Aaron lifted his arms up. Ruth had a Naomi, and Naomi had a Ruth.

Like, Job had three of his friends that sat with him for seven days in silence and let him suffer and cry and just was with him. The way of God is with his people, so it would be great if maybe you tried his way first before you start blaming him because you're trying your way.

TAMMY: Exactly, okay. I'm holding "Don't Try This Alone: How to Build Deep Community When You Want to Hide from Your Pain". Who's the book for, Toni?

Like, ultimately at the end of the day, when we sit down and we write books, right, we're thinking of everything we can to pour into this book, and we're thinking about the person that's gonna pick this up. And when they turn to that last page, this is what our prayer is, this is what our hope is, this is how we wanna pour into somebody's life. What was your hope, what was your prayer for them?

TONI: I think it's for the person that is afraid to trust again. I mean, it's for everyone, let's be honest. We're a connected creation, the design says that we need to get good at this, a good, godly community.

And the whole time I was writing I just, like, I thought about myself and what I needed in that season, and I was having so many struggles with asking for help, being so weak and fragile that I really couldn't-- I didn't have another choice but to ask for help. And I think it's for the person that's like, "I don't want to ask for help because it takes something from my worth in my mind." "I don't wanna ask for help because I've been hurt so many times, I've been let down so many times."

"I'm alone, I don't wanna open myself up." For the introverts out there, stop using that as an excuse. But for the introverts that are like, "But I just can't," man, I just think it's the power of the Holy Spirit that leads us into being brave enough to build a good community.

TAMMY: A hundred percent, I'm just gonna tell-- these couple few chapters. "You don't-- you don't feel seen, soothed, safe, or secure." Somebody's feeling like that today.

"Your shame keeps you isolated. You're afraid to even be found. You've been hurt by the response of those close to you.

You struggle to believe that God never leaves you." If that's you today, I'm telling you, I just read you the first six chapters of her book, and it goes beyond that to then if you're feeling that you can name that in your life, but then, how can you grow from that? How can you find God's strength in that?

How can you grow and build community? I believe there are some incredible answers in this book for you today and if today you're struggling with that, you're sitting there and you're just like, "I just--I need somebody to come alongside me, can my community start right now?" It can, go online, call that number that you see, and let us stand with you today.

Let us be the first step of community in your life to pray over your life and believe with you on that vision board for whatever you wrote down, that God will begin to bring new--like, a new atmosphere in your life that could change everything for you. I'm believing for that, so call us and let us pray with you. And I wanna get you Toni's book, I wanna get you Toni's book, because I believe this is another tool, along with prayer and believing, pick up these books that will begin to speak into your life, where you'll have the tools to dig and to find some answers that are scripturally-based, that are surrounded with the truth of God's Word for your life.

He wants good things for you, and he wants great things for so many other people that I get to meet all over the world for the past 16 years traveling with Life Outreach. I have seen some incredible, incredible moments where I have sat and I've been able to see the burden being lifted from the lives of these people, especially these children. I was just recently in Central America, and I wanna take you back with me and show you this right now.

ANNOUNCER: This season, Life Outreach wants to continue spreading joy and smiles around the world. We do this in very special ways.

We provide shoes for children's feet and corrective surgery for those who suffer from a cleft palate or cleft lip condition. Not only is receiving shoes fun for the children, but it is a blessing for the mission team.

TAMMY: We have had an incredible year at Life Outreach. We have done mission feeding, we have drilled water wells, and today we are putting shoes on little children's feet. I'm so excited about it, John.

JOHN YEATTS: I am so excited too, it has been a special day, and what is wonderful is for those children that have a little bit of trouble with their smile, we have a very special gift too.

TAMMY: Yes, we do.

ANNOUNCER: Did you ever think a trip to the hospital would bring a smile to a child's face? It has for these children, because each of them has received corrective surgery for a cleft lip or cleft palate condition. This surgery will allow Senai the chance to smile like his twin brother.

Ferdie, the youngest of four, has endured school bullies making fun of her condition, but now looks forward to showing off her new smile. As this Christmas season approaches, we want to continue to bless children around the world by providing them with a new pair of shoes and corrective surgeries that give them a chance for healthy and fulfilling lives.

TAMMY: Oh, I absolutely love it. I'm sitting here watching that appeal like, yes, it's so amazing! This is truly one of my very favorite times of the year here at "Life Today", Christmas Shoes and Smiles, there's just nothing like it.

And as you can see, it's always one of our favorite trips because there's so much joy wrapped around it. You saw those beautiful faces getting shoes, and maybe, like me, you were smiling right along with them. I'll never forget being in Central America with our team, slipping little shoes on children's feet.

The joy on their faces, it's pure contagious happiness. They stand taller, they run faster, and they play without fear because their feet are finally protected from glass, nails, sharp rocks, hookworm, and from dangerous infections that could literally take their lives. That's why the gift of shoes is such an act of love.

For many, it's their first pair of brand new shoes, shoes that didn't belong to someone else first, their very own. And in some places I've been, many have never owned a pair of shoes at all, could you even imagine that? It's significant, it's simple, and it makes them feel loved, seen, and valued.

Being there in those moments with those children is something I'll always remember. And then there's the miracle of a new smile. You saw the difference it makes, and for only \$500.

Many children who've been teased, bullied, even told they were cursed for life because of a cleft lip or cleft palate are now receiving surgeries that change everything, physically and emotionally. Suddenly they can smile with confidence, they can eat without pain, and dream about a brighter future. What an incredible gift.

Friends, this is it. This is our last week of this campaign. We've set a goal to give away 150,000 pairs of shoes and provide as many life-changing corrective surgeries as possible, but we cannot do this without you.

And here's how you can help. \$36 will give shoes to 10 children. \$72 provides for 20 children, and \$180 blesses 50 children with shoes. And \$1000 will put shoes on 275 children or provide 2 life-changing surgeries. So please, go online or give us a call right now and let us know you're able to partner with us, because when you do, you'll help protect the little feet and restore beautiful smiles, and remind children all around the world that they are deeply loved.

And what a better time than right now, when the need is real and when the joy is waiting on the other side of that gift. And please know that every gift matters because every child matters. Let's finish strong, let's meet the goal together, let's make this the best Christmas these children have ever had.

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 duo-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 2 children, and you may request the beautiful bronze sculpture, "The Good Shepherd".

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

TAMMY: I hope you're going online and giving the best gift that you can give today. Please know it will make such a big difference. And for whatever gift you can give today, I wanna send you Toni's book.

You're gonna love it, you're gonna wanna read it, I promise you that. And also remember this is the last week of this campaign, so please, give us a call right now.

But Toni, I am so glad you were here, this was so fun. Anything you wanna leave us with today?

TONI: Here's what I wanna say to someone that's watching. You can do this, it's not gonna be easy, it's not linear, healing never is.

But you were designed to do this with God's people, and he knows that, so he is making plans for you to be with his people. Believe it and receive that today.

TAMMY: Amen, amen, amen, receive it today. We love you, we love you. Thanks for watching, we'll see you next time on "Life Today", bye bye.

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JEFF WICKWIRE: Don't force yourself to get over it until you're over it.

ANNOUNCER: Grieving well, tomorrow.

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