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Week 43

Randy Robison & Blynda Lane

Mark Batterson

“Courage In A Crazy World”

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

ANNOUNCER: Coming up, how do we best engage the culture around us? Mark Batterson reminds us that it starts with seeing those we disagree with as God's image-bearers.

MARK BATTERSON: I believe that you are the image of God, you are the apple of God's eye. I actually think you're his favorite. Wait, you're his favorite.

Wait, you're his favorite. No, we're all his favorite, but so is the person that you like the least.

ANNOUNCER: Next.

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RANDY ROBISON: Welcome to the circus that we call "Life Today". On the trapeze, I have Blynda Lane over here.

BLYNDA LANE: Whee!

RANDY: I think I'm the clown, maybe, I don't know.

BLYNDA: What do they think when they get that intro, Randy?

RANDY: But we have a ringmaster right here named Mark Batterson.

BLYNDA: Can we please tell the ones watching what we're talking about?

RANDY: Go ahead and explain.

BLYNDA: Okay, the book, Mark, is "Not My Circus", and I love this title because I've had teenagers and I've actually said to them, with their drama that they've brought me, I'm like, "Not my circus, I can't--I can only deal with what I can deal with."

MARK: I love it, I love it. And you know, I think a few people know that phrase, but do you know the origin?

BLYNDA: I probably don't, that's the thing, I really don't.

MARK: So, kind of fun, I mean, it's a Polish proverb. Back when there were traveling circuses, occasionally monkeys would escape and go bananas-- sorry about that. And it became this phrase, "Not my circus, not my monkeys," and essentially when you're saying that, you're saying, "I can't solve your problem for you. I can't manage your mood. I can't meet your expectations. It's not my responsibility."

Now, you can bear other people's burdens, this is not no contact, but it's understanding, what's my responsibility, and what is someone else's responsibility? I will tell you, those three words, it will help you keep your sanity, especially in a cultural moment like this.

BLYNDA: That's what-- related to culture, how do you navigate, what is my responsibility as a believer, as a leader? I don't want to just put my head in the sand, I don't want to-- but I also can't take on every issue or every thought. How do you decide and decipher your responsibility and your contribution to the culture and to the world?

MARK: Yeah, well, I should say this, the entire book is really about Romans 12:2. "Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world," and I'll connect the dots. Paul is writing to believers in Rome, and the largest-- the center of the city was the Circus Maximus, and I think what Paul is saying is, you don't have to cheer what they cheer.

You don't have to fear what they fear. "Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world. Be transformed by the renewing of your mind." So we're in a cultural moment where the world has radically changed in the last 20 years.

How much time do we have today, I mean, right? I mean, just technology, I mean, 20 years ago we didn't have Uber or Instagram. We didn't have Apple Pay because we didn't have iPhones, which meant we didn't have apps, which meant clouds used to be things that rained.

BLYNDA: Can we go back? I like that world you're talking about.

MARK: I mean, cookies were chocolate chip, now they're digital sticky notes. The whole world has changed, but he's the same yesterday, today, and forever. And so the question is, how do we navigate kind of the circus, the three-ring circus of shaming, blaming, and faming, and I tell you what, we feel it in Washington DC.

RANDY: You went and planted a church in Circus Maximus, right? So National Community Church, you guys have been over there 30 years. How do you decide which monkeys are yours?

MARK: Oh my goodness, well, we--I know that we're there for such a time as this, and so let me speak a word of encouragement. Like, I mean, we host the Easter Sunrise at the Lincoln Memorial every year, and we have thousands and thousands of people that come and declare a risen Christ, an empty tomb. And I just want to remind viewers, administrations come and go, the kingdom of God is forever.

In fact, the kingdoms of this world are becoming the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ. So don't lose heart, don't lose hope, don't lose faith in the end of the story. So I want to put that out there, but you know, elections, they matter.

Politics is important, because policy is important, because people are important. So I think these things are important, but I think we're called to seek first the kingdom of God.

I think we're called to fix our eyes on Jesus. And so, I touch on some things that are causing blood pressure to rise.

RANDY: Okay, so wouldn't it be, you know, easier, or I might even make a case for smarter for you, Mark, just to play it safe?

MARK: Yeah, yeah.

RANDY: Is that the right approach?

BLYNDA: Does he look like a guy that thinks that's the right approach? I don't think so.

MARK: Listen, I think that if you start letting peer pressure, popular opinion, and political correctness rule the day, it's a slippery slope. I'll just call those things what--it's the fear of man, and the only cure for the fear of man is the fear of God. And so, I think it's a moment where we've gotta dig deep wells.

We've got to be anchored to the Word of God. So in a moment where evidently love is love, I don't even know what that means. That's circular reasoning, it doesn't mean anything.

No, God is love, and so we don't get to write the rules, we don't get to redefine-- these things are not socially constructed, they're divine design. And so I think we're worried about getting canceled while first-century Christians were getting crucified. So there's a little reality check in there that we need some holy courage, some spiritual discernment, and some amazing grace, and that really is the heart of what this book is about because a lot of people are--wow, the funniest image, you know out in front of car dealerships, the flailing--?

I mean, a lot of people feel that way right now. I mean, a lot of people watching are like, "I don't even know how to respond to--." I mean, Chesterton said that when common sense is uncommon, society is in decay.

Well, we're way past that. So I think speaking into this moment from Scripture and then making sure that we're building our foundation on Scripture is so important right now.

BLYNDA: Tell me about holy courage. How do you cultivate holy courage?

MARK: Well, C.S. Lewis said that courage is not just one of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at its testing point. In fact, he said, "Pilate was merciful until it became risky." Then he washed his hands, because he wasn't willing to risk his political power, he wasn't willing to risk his reputation.

So I think the rarest kind of courage is moral courage. It's the courage to, in a culture where it's wrong to say something is wrong, "I think that's wrong." Isaiah said the day would come when we call good evil and evil good.

We're in that moment. So I think part of courage is just speaking the truth in love. Not compromising conviction, but not compromising compassion either, and, I'm not sure how else to say this, with a smile on our faces and with love in our heart.

Love is not agreeing with what everyone believes. Love is not approving of what everyone does.

That world doesn't exist. But we can do it in a winsome way, in a way that honors Jesus, who is the very definition of grace and truth.

BLYNDA: You know, when you think--I was gonna say, when you think about the Scripture that you talked about, "We renew our mind," you know, "We don't conform to the pattern of the world, we renew our mind," and it says, "So then you can test and approve what the pleasing and perfect will of God is." So when we're walking in life and we're like, "God, what is your will and what is"-- well, he gives us that roadmap. First we have to-- we can't conform to the pattern of the world, we have to renew our mind, and then we can test and approve his perfect and pleasing and great will.

So it's an interesting thing about how he gives us that encouragement. "You wanna know my will? Okay, let's renew our mind. Let's not think like the world thinks."

MARK: Yep, yep.

RANDY: So when we're dealing with situations, not always on the national level like you're talking about, but just like in our own homes, you know, in our own workplace, schools, wherever, sometimes--I mean, I can scripturally back up the idea, when God told the Israelites that, "I'll fight your battles for you, while you remain silent," okay? But then I can go to Paul, who said, "I'm not ashamed to proclaim the gospel," right?

How do we know when to speak, when to shut up, when to intervene, when to say, "Not my circus"? How do we know which way to go, because the Scripture applies to everything, but it's not formulaic?

MARK: Yeah, Spirit-filled, Spirit-led, it's the only way. We need the help of the Holy Spirit to guide us, help us, but then I think there are some principles like, okay, so we're right on Capitol Hill. We reach across aisles, we have a hundred nations represented, I mean, as an eclectic gathering of people.

But we have kind of four principles of peacemaking that give us a little bit of a framework. Ask anything, listen well, disagree freely, love regardless.

BLYNDA: Say those one more time.

MARK: Yeah, ask anything, listen well, disagree freely, and love regardless. And I think those four things kind of help us navigate the tensions. Culture touts tolerance, but it's as disingenuous as Judas.

I mean, if you dare disagree, if you dare disagree, you get canceled so quickly. Biblical tolerance, and there is such a thing, Ephesians 4, is giving other people the same measure of free will that God gave me. And there's a lot of freedom there, because a person convinced against their will is of the same opinion still.

I think some of us are just so focused on trying to win an argument, instead of maybe trying to win friends and influence people, and so you can speak truth, but you can do it in a graceful way. And so, Jesus, you know, it says "full of grace and truth". Grace means, "I'll love you no matter what."

Truth means, "I'll be honest with you no matter what." So here's kind of my take, and we make one of two mistakes. Grace without truth is weak sauce.

Truth without grace is hot sauce. But grace and truth is the secret sauce. So I'm trying to encourage people, you don't have to compromise conviction or compassion.

You don't have to compromise grace or truth. In fact, Jesus is the perfect combination of those two things.

RANDY: I have to quote A.R. Bernard right here, because he said something to me years ago that has stuck, and it's along those lines. He says, "Grace gets us into the sinner's world. Truth gets them out."

MARK: Oh my. That's so good.

RANDY: Isn't that?

MARK: Yeah.

RANDY: And so the way you frame it in here is discernment, you know, to know how to approach people, when to speak, when to be very direct, when to win the friends, right? And all those things are scriptural, but the application of them requires led by the Spirit.

BLYNDA: And you also say that much of what we fear about that is fake. You know, like, explain that because when you're saying that and I'm thinking, "Yeah, that takes, though, like, so much courage to not care how they respond when you do that," you know? Like, I can't fear how they're gonna respond.

MARK: And that's because we live for the applause of people instead of the applause of nail-scarred hands. At the end of the day, like, read the Bible cover to cover, there's one incontrovertible, inevitable conclusion you come to. God is God, and we're not.

And so, in a moment where we wanna redefine or we wanna make the rules, it's epistemological hubris. It's eating from the tree of knowledge. It's building the Tower of Babel all over again.

And so, I think we need the humility to discern that good, pleasing, and perfect will, which is not always easy. But one thing I've learned is that if I accommodate what the Bible doesn't validate, it doesn't convert people. We think that somehow by kind of moving the boundary stones, that somehow that's nice or loving.

You're robbing people of the opportunity to repent. And so at the end of the day, the ground is level at the foot of the cross. I'm a sinner in need of a savior.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn said, "The line dividing good and evil runs through every human heart." And so what I have to do is determine, am I willing to confess my sin and find that forgiveness, and then not compromise that as it relates to other people? So this is--and the stakes are really high right now, tensions are pretty high right now, but the truth is, it's no more difficult now than it was in the first century Rome.

RANDY: Harder back then, I would argue. Well, I was gonna ask about the grace which you end the book with.

And grace is one of those words that's been watered down by the world, and even the church at times. How do you frame the proper kind of grace that'll allow us to deal with our chaotic world?

MARK: Yeah, well, I mean, I think grace is getting what you don't deserve. It's like these blessings that, "Lord, how--what, what?" Like, "I didn't do anything to deserve this."

So the grace, it's the unmerited favor of God. The only way you qualify for grace is by not qualifying, and we have a hard time with that because we wanna earn it, we wanna deserve it. But a guy named Jerry Bridges said that you're never so bad that you're beyond the reach of God's grace.

You're never so good that you're beyond the need of God's grace. Every day is a day of relating to God on the basis of grace alone. And then, and then mercy would be not getting what we deserve, and his mercies are new every morning.

And so I think it's kind of a two-sided-- two-sided coin. And then, but then the question is, like, do we have a theology of dignity? The image of God in me greets the image of God in you.

Are we treating people the way that-- so here's what I believe. I believe that you are the image of God, you are the apple of God's eye. I actually think you're his favorite.

Wait, you're his favorite. Wait, you're his favorite. No, we're all his favorite, but so is the person that you like the least.

And so while culture is politicizing, polarizing, demonizing, and dehumanizing, no, no, no, no, we aren't allowed to do that. We're called to love our enemies, pray for those who persecute us, bless those who curse us, turn the other cheek, go the extra mile, and give the shirt off of our back.

But when you do that, Lesslie Newbigin said, "Live your life in such a way that it provokes questions for which the gospel is the answer." So when you do that, it raises eyebrows and it raises questions in this cultural moment.

MARK: Yes, and you know, we see this around here where you've got someone who doesn't deserve something, but us, our mission partners, we give them something freely, no strings attached, and it raises that question. And the answer is Christ, and I love it. Okay, this is so good.

All right, not my circus, but my book. I'm just saying, hang on to that one, okay? And I would like for it to be your book as well.

In fact, we'd love to send you if you will request it, "Not My Circus", when you extend some grace to someone, when you go into a world we're about to show you where there is pain, there is need, there is a serious hole that only God can fill. But you can bring God to them when you partner with us. Watch this story, and just pause and just ask, "Lord," what he would have you do, and if he prompts you to be involved in this, come join us in Rescue Life.

ANNOUNCER: In the world of forced commercial sexual exploitation, women and girls account for 99% of all victims.

RITA: *[speaking foreign language]*

ANNOUNCER: Rita's nightmare began when an older lady befriended her and offered her some tea at a restaurant. She locked up Rita for three days and then forced her into a taxi, and eventually ended up across the border in another country.

RITA: *[speaking foreign language]*

ANNOUNCER: This is where Rita's life turned into a living hell, as she was forced to use her body to make money for sex traffickers. During the years of her captivity, Rita was drugged, beaten, tortured to the point of losing all hope.

RITA: *[speaking foreign language]*

ANNOUNCER: Rita eventually was able to escape with the help of a man with a motorbike. She made her way back across the border and was intercepted by our mission partners.

Rita did not want to return to what she described as "a home with no love", so our mission partners gave her a place to stay at the Life Center. There, she learned sewing skills, and started a new life on her own.

RITA: *[speaking foreign language]*

RANDY: You know, Blynda, it almost doesn't even feel like that could be real.

BLYNDA: It's like, is that a dramatization, you know, because it's so painful and it's so dark.

RANDY: I would maybe even question, if I hadn't been to places like this. And we say Southeast Asia, have you noticed that? Because we're not being specific.

That's for the security and the safety of our workers there as well as the girls, because it really is that bad. I have sat with families whose daughters, sisters have disappeared with promises of a job over the border or similar stories. It's very real, hard to really comprehend, but it's there and it's pervasive.

Okay, what do we do about it? That's what we're talking about today, because the good news is, your gift towards Rescue Life, which is our program simply to reach children before they are abducted, or to rescue them while they're in captivity, and then to restore them to give them a hope, a future, a skill, the gospel, that's Rescue Life to us, and it's only possible because of you. Your gift of $128 today will help reach, rescue, or restore one child.

That's the average cost of the programs in various parts of the world, not just what you saw today. But your gift of $1280 would reach, rescue, or restore 10 children.

And you know, Blynda, the only way, and I've said it many times, the only way I could even face this is with the hope that Christ gives us and that our viewers support this outreach. We know we can stop this.

BLYNDA: I see these images and I have daughters, and so I see those images and I think, "Oh my goodness, we have to do what we can to save the one." And you saw at the end of the video, and she was happy, and she had skills that she was learning. Like, her story is so beautiful, and that can be so many stories.

RANDY: It is, it is, and that's the beauty of what we do, but it's not an overnight thing, it's a process. It takes time, and it takes your support.

That's why we hope to hear from you today. Please call, go online, make the best gift you can.

FEMALE ANNOUNCER: Every day, innocent children are being trapped in the wicked web of human trafficking. Instead of dreaming about a future, they are sold into a nightmare of sexual slavery. But you can join the fight against this evil.

Through Mission Rescue Life, you can reach at-risk children before traffickers do, rescue those already enslaved, and restore young lives with hope for the future. A gift today of $128 will reach, rescue, or restore a precious child and change their life forever. Gifts of $64 or $32 will be combined with support from others to help deliver one more child from the shame and pain of sex trafficking.

With a gift of any amount, we will send you James Robison's final book, "A Life Proclaiming Freedom", as a thank-you for your support. Discover James's personal journey from bondage to freedom, share in his calling to bind up the brokenhearted, and learn how to experience your personal freedom so that you can bring healing to the hurting world around you. With your gift of $128 or more, you will receive the "Life Proclaiming Freedom" bundle, which includes James's book, a special edition collection of the Gospels, and the beautiful Life planner.

Finally, your gift of $1280 can help save 10 children from the horrors of human trafficking. With this special gift, you may request the inspiring bronze sculpture, "The Good Shepherd". Please call, write, or make your gift online today.

JOHN YEATTS: Behind me is the facade of evil, all the lights, loud music, people that are smiling. But you step in behind these doors, and these little girls aren't smiling anymore.

There's horrors that go on in these streets that are unimaginable, but we have an opportunity to be able to change, to bring a real change to the lives of individuals that are caught in human trafficking. Boy, we need your help, whatever you can do right now, I'm asking you, give the very best gift you can, whether you go online or by phone, please call us, let us know it's coming, but we need your help to bring hope and healing to the girls' lives that are caught behind the doors of all these bright lights.

RANDY: Please go online, go to the phone, make the best gift you can, because it will make such a beautiful difference in someone's life. And today, if you would request "Not My Circus" by Mark Batterson, I mean, I think people will enjoy it.

BLYNDA: I could listen--I could listen to you all day, you're just so full of wisdom. And so I know you have a lot of other books too, so where could they go to find everything you've written?

MARK: markbatterson.com, free samples and some books there, so we'd love to connect online.

RANDY: That'd be great, go grow with Mark, and come back and grow with us. We'll see you again next time here on "Life Today".

BLYNDA: See you soon.

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ANNOUNCER: At Life Outreach, we believe in making a lasting impact on your life and the lives of others. Through Life Planning Services, we offer estate planning and giving solutions that provide tax advantages, income, and the satisfaction of supporting a cause close to your heart.

With options like bequests, charitable gift annuities, and IRA rollovers, you can chart a purposeful path, creating a legacy of love and hope for future generations. Call or visit Life Planning Services today.

MALE ANNOUNCER: Academy Award nominee Gary Sinise opens up about his son's cancer diagnosis and the strength he showed in his final days, next week.

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