

10/26/2026

Week 44

Randy Robison & Blynda Lane

William Paul Young

"The Reconciliation Table"

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

ANNOUNCER: Author Paul Young reveals how his tumultuous relationship with his father inspired themes of forgiveness in the sequel to his bestselling novel, "The Shack".

WM. PAUL YOUNG: And then I hear Papa God say, you know, "Paul, your dad hasn't known how to be a father for 60 years. He's not suddenly gonna figure it out.

If it's okay with you, I can be all that to you and more." But there was still something in me that said, "That's not good enough, I want my dad to love me."

ANNOUNCER: Next.

RANDY ROBISON: Welcome to "Life Today", I'm Randy Robison. Great to have you here, great to have my co-host Blynda, how are you doing?

BLYNDA LANE: So happy to be here.

RANDY: I'm excited because today's guest-- it's a long-awaited return to "Life Today".

BLYNDA: It is a long-awaited return to "Life Today", because he was on the show maybe over a decade ago, because you would know his amazing book, "The Shack", with Paul Young.

RANDY: I have one of the first copies of "Return to the Shack" in my hands, which you can get now, but--.

BLYNDA: It was actually really fun to see, Paul saw it for the first time here on the set, it was great.

RANDY: But you guys, some of you guys probably have it by now, but William Paul Young, Paul, welcome back to "Life Today".

PAUL: I am honored to be here.

RANDY: I'm always-- it's always fun to talk. We talked in the green room before, and he's one of the most gracious guys you'll ever meet.

BLYNDA: So humble, such a humble man.

PAUL: Because I know the truth.

BLYNDA: Aw, no.

RANDY: That's actually a powerful statement. So, okay, so, but I wanna hear sort of the inspiration, the story behind the story, but without any spoilers, we won't spoil it for you. What's sort of the storyline to this book?

PAUL: So, basically it's ten years later, and the reason that it even exists is because about ten years ago, I had a friend that said, "You know, there's this guy on death row in Nashville, and he was incredibly overturned by 'The Shack'. So if I buy a copy, would you just sign it and I'll take it in to him?" And I said, "No," I said, "you buy a copy, I'll sign it, but let me deliver it, you get me in."

And that's how I met the first of about 15 guys who've become friends for the last decade. And a couple of years ago, I'm thinking, wait a minute, I have a serial killer in "The Shack", and what if--a lot of books start with "what if," fiction books. What if he ends up on death row, where my friends are?

And what if Mackenzie actually has to meet him for whatever reason, face to face? So it's not just a two-dimensional person, you know, on paper or something. This is the real person who did so much harm.

How would that look, what would forgiveness look now, after ten years? What would justice look now, after all this time? And then what's happened to the family, you know?

Just because Mackenzie had a great experience with God, does that mean everything worked out great? And even by the end of "The Shack", you know, he's still carrying a whole lot of baggage, and so how does that look? What's happened with his family, what's happened with his own sense of relationship with God?

Has it progressed, has it--all of those questions started happening. And so, germination of this book started that way.

RANDY: You don't step back from the difficult questions. It's like you lean into them, a lot of times.

PAUL: Well, they're my questions.

BLYNDA: That's what I love about how you write. Even though the book is fiction, and maybe we don't relate to a serial killer, we do all have an instance in our life where we've been asked the question, "Can you forgive," even if the person never says they're sorry, or sometimes they're not even around. How do you reconcile, when you're writing, you're writing to the person who is reading about something that might not apply to their life, but you know this is a human condition?

RANDY: It was like "The Shack", you know, "The Shack", I think part of the reason that it became such a monster book in the world is it was so human. And we don't need more religious books, we need human books. And especially in the world of fiction, when you write about something like forgiveness, I'm dealing with my own dad, right?

I'm talking about my own dad and my relationship with my dad that was so difficult, and I had found that I didn't actually complete the sense of forgiveness until he turned 80, which was 12 years ago. And I didn't realize that there were still pieces of unforgiveness that had not been dealt with over decades, right? And I'd forgiven him, of course, you know, forgiveness is to set me free.

It's not to set the one who's done the harm free, although there is a sense that that's true. But forgiveness is for the sake of the one who's been harmed, and a lot of us think that we then have to trust the other person that's harmed us, or that they have to change in order for us to forgive them, all of those kinds of things, and that's not true at all. Reconciliation is for the sake of the perpetrator, and it's the rebuilding of trust, but that takes a lot of time and ownership of what they've done, things like that.

So in my relationship with my dad, it was on his 80th birthday, that's why I remember it, and December 10th, which is not a warm spot in British Columbia. And he had, at the party, he had done what he did and he'd blown things up again, and I was really angry. So I went for a walk, didn't even take a coat, and I was probably melting snow as I walked.

And I felt that sense of presence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit walking with me, and none of us were talking for a while. And then I hear Papa God say, "You know, Paul, your dad hasn't known how to be a father for 60 years, he's not suddenly gonna figure it out." And I'm like, "Yeah, I know that, I get that."

And then I hear, "If it's okay with you, I can be all that to you and more." And you'd think that that would be a great response, and I'd go like, "Oh, good, thank you," but it wasn't, because there was still something in me that said, "That's not good enough. I want my dad to love me.

I want him to be proud of me." And I realized something in that moment. One was, I had carried expectations that my dad change, and that was linked to my capacity to forgive him, and that I needed to let him go of all my expectations.

And expectations are just disappointments waiting to happen, and he constantly disappointed me. That's because I put the mines in the minefield and then led him on, seeing if he'd step on them, and sure enough, he did. I allowed my father to become something greater than my dad, and that was to become a human being, you know, because dad is a subset of being human, and not the other way around.

And when I did that, suddenly his story mattered, suddenly what he was saying mattered, suddenly listening to him mattered. And so that, looking back, was when the forgiveness was complete. I let him go of my expectations.

And a couple of months before he died, and we started to have like actual conversations on the phone. He'd only called me three times in my life for tragedies. One when my brother, who was 18, was killed.

One, this was a "tragedy" in the church I grew up in, and that was my sister got pregnant out of wedlock. But then Jennifer, that daughter that she gave birth to, was killed the day after her fifth birthday. So, and every time I got a phone call from my dad saying, "There's something I need to tell you."

And so our conversations started getting longer, I still made the phone calls, but it was fine. And we were talking for about two minutes on this one call, like a month and a half before he passed, and he says, "Paul, there's something I need to tell you." And I get a little bit of a jolt, and I said, "Dad, okay, I'm listening."

He said, "No, you really listen. You need to listen to what I have to say to you." I'm going like, "Dad, I'm listening."

"No, you really need to hear me." "Okay, Dad, what?" "I need you to hear me tell you that I'm really, really, really proud of you."

I'm proud of the man you are, I'm proud of the husband you are, I'm proud of the way you've touched the world, the father you are, and I really, really love you." Now, if I had carried expectations waiting for that to happen, my response would have been, "Well, it's about time." But I had no expectations, and there's just like, boom.

When you learn to live without expectations, everything becomes a gift. And now I was surrounded by gifts, the conversations, hearing him, and these words that he said to me. And that's forgiveness, and I buried a lot of that inside "Return".

"Return" is a--well, in some senses it's a 20 years more mature book, 'cause I'm 20 years more mature, hopefully. And I've got friends who said that they like it more, but I always tell them, "It's because you read 'The Shack', you know, it creates a frame of reference for you, context." The Shack was a solo, you know, it was all centered on one person, Mackenzie.

And "Return to the Shack" is a choir. The characters are much more expansive.

Nan, Mackenzie's wife, plays a very central role. It's much more developed, so there's a sense of community and choir to the story.

RANDY: You said something a minute ago that I gotta ask about, you referenced a man you met on death row, but then you said "friends on death row". What is going on there, you have friends on death row?

PAUL: Yeah, when I took him the book and we were sitting in a 15x12 room, he's been there a long time, he's now been there 45 years, I think. And so he had a lot of privileges, so we could hug and he could show me what he's working on. But every once in a while, he would just reach over and touch my shoulder and start to cry.

And he would say, "I can't believe you're here. I can't believe you're here."

And I'd say, "Terry, I can't believe I'm here either," so. But that started this relationship, you know, they call me and I've been-- every time I'm in Nashville, I go to the prison.

BLYNDA: It's really sweet because in the book I feel like there is a theme of what it means to belong.

PAUL: There is, instead of just fitting in.

BLYNDA: Fitting in, and that's what I hear you saying is, by you visiting them and becoming friends with them, you gave them a sense of belonging in a place where they wouldn't.

PAUL: But you need to understand, these guys already have a sense of belonging. That community is their family, and they're some of the freest people I've ever known. One of the guys, Harold, I was there two weeks before he was scheduled to be executed.

And he walks in the room and he looks around and he goes, "Paul, all this concrete and all this steel has nothing to say about human freedom. That's what happens in the human heart."

BLYNDA: Wow, that's great.

PAUL: And you know, they're very clear about their love for Jesus, very clear about their care for each other. These guys built the reconciliation table. It's actually in their library, arts and crafts kind of place, and it seats 10 or 12 people, and the agreement on death row is if any of the inmates have a problem with each other, they'll meet at the reconciliation table and deal with their issue until it's resolved.

And if they can't do it themselves, they will bring in one of the other guys like a Terry or a Kevin Burns, and help them walk their way through it. And I'm thinking like, "Boy, I know a lot of families that could use a reconciliation table, a lot of churches," you know. And Terry says to me one day, he says, "You know, Paul, we're all on death row."

You know, it's just a matter of time. You know, if they kill this body, they won't be killing the 18-year-old, high and on drugs, who committed the murder, because he died a long time ago."

And he's talking about his identification with Jesus and all of that, and so these are pretty amazing human beings. And when my friend went in there, he was in a bad spot when he went in there to "minister to them", and they overturned his life in the best possible way.

RANDY: What does that say to you about God's love, God's redemption, his desire for his creation?

PAUL: Yeah, it says to me that there's nobody who is irredeemable, and it says that these men already know the sense of the presence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in them and in their world. You know, I've had a lot of connection now with guys on death row, and I have never met one who wanted to be a killer. I've never met one who wanted to be a person who lies.

All of them, at the deepest core of their being, want to be good, want to be kind, and they are. There's been huge transformation in their lives, because they're not going anywhere, and they're waiting to die. But like KB said to me one time, "You can either wait to die or learn to live," you know, and that's what they're doing.

So, it tells me this: At the deepest places of a human soul is the image of God, being made in the image and the likeness of God, that's what comes up. The only time I found somebody who thought that they were someone who wanted to do damage was someone who was mentally insane to the place that they could not connect the dots and were incapable of reaching down into the deep places of their soul, so yeah.

RANDY: I want to pause for just a second and say, if you're watching this program and you feel like you're not connected, that you, somewhere deep in your soul, you want redemption, you want forgiveness, you want to be a different person, that's called being spiritually reborn. Being born again is the term Jesus used. And if you don't know where to go with that, there's a phone number on the screen right now that you can call and someone will talk with you, will pray with you, because the wonderful things you're hearing about people on death row, the worst of our society, that transformation begins by being born again.

In fact, Jesus said, "You must be born again." So if that happens to be you, I would urge you to pick up that phone, and you can start a transformation greater than you can even imagine, and experience some of the things that Paul talks about and that "The Shack" talks about. So do that, don't wait, do it now.

I wanna ask you one thing before we let you go. You've got a Bible sitting over there that has some significance, I'd love for you to show that to the audience.

PAUL: Here it is, right? And on the back it has my name on it. Oscar, one of the guys who's my friend, he handcrafts, right?

So he's taught the guys on death row how to do handcraft leatherwork and some other arts and crafts stuff, and I didn't know he made this until it showed up in the mail, but it's got the cross on this side, which is the symbol of God's overwhelming forgiveness for the entire cosmos. You know, "For God was in Christ reconciling the cosmos to himself and not counting their sins against them," that's in the New Testament. I got this two weeks before Oscar was executed, so we think it's the last thing that he ever made and gave as a gift to anybody.

BLYNDA: It's so detailed and beautiful.

PAUL: Yeah, so it's a very precious thing to me, and it's also very grievous, you know? It's a heartbreak for me at the same time as I just love these men. And they know my family, they call me and I've talked to their families.

I've even talked to some of the victims, which, the guys are very clear, they would like to see better victims' rights, and they're clear about what they've done. The part in "The Shack" that overturned Terry's life so much was in the cave scene with Sophia, where Sophia says, "Mack, you get on the judgment seat because you've been sitting there your whole life basically." And Terry said, suddenly he realized that he'd been sitting in the judgment seat himself of those pedophiles.

"At least I didn't do what they did." And so he was taking a superior position in his own mind. And he said that chapter just tore him up, opened up a door to his relationship with Jesus that had not been there before, so.

BLYNDA: And you know, also I wanted to add one thing about the "Return" book that I think hits on that, is there was a part, I don't want to give too much away, but it's where Mack is having to make a big decision about if he will go and be reconnected, and he says the line: "How can I say no? How can I say yes?" And I feel like for any believer, there's gonna be parts of our life that are really hard, that the Lord might ask of us, and we would say to the Lord, "Well, of course, Lord, how can I say no?"

But Lord, how can I say yes?" And only by God's strength can he help us to not say no to what God might be calling us to do, but then also find the courage to say yes to that very hard thing that they're being asked of.

PAUL: Really good, one of my favorite quotes from "The Return" is this woman, Loretta, and she owns this little restaurant, cafe restaurant in Nashville, and there's a conversation that takes place. And Mack and Nan are very grateful for something, and she goes, "Well, isn't this what it's about?"

You never know the whole story, so why not love all the time?" And I love that, "You never know the whole story, so why not love all the time?"

RANDY: Well, if you don't want to read "The Shack" by now and then "Return to the Shack", then I don't know what to tell you, other than go get the book wherever you get books. It's available right now, and it will make you think. I would like to turn your attention right now to something that is expressing God's love, his will for redemption, for restoration, a rescue from darkness, and that is what we call Rescue Life, and we've been talking about it on the air here for a few weeks.

This is the last week we will be talking about it, but I want you to take a look at this because this is not fiction, this is fact, and we can reach out. We can reach out and say, "Jesus loves you." "God will restore you."

But we need you to be a part of it. Watch this.

SHEILA WALSH: This is the hardest trip that I've been on with Life. This situation in Southeast Asia is getting so much darker.

We have been out in the streets at night and we've seen these little girls being forced into sex trafficking. And yet, to balance that, I have seen real hope.

ANNOUNCER: Human trafficking is one of the darkest evils in this world. The depravity it takes to kidnap, to sell, and to rape a child is matched only by the virtue and strength needed to oppose it. Fighting such systemic evil requires a prayerful strategy.

Our teams on the ground work alongside local law enforcement to rescue girls who have been trafficked into the sex slave trade, by conducting raids and arresting the criminals involved. Survivors of sex trafficking have often spent years in captivity, and their minds and personalities have been altered. To restore these girls, we provide them with shelter and offer them the hope and healing only found in Christ's love.

It's been said an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Sheila: As I watched these kids today, I thought, this actually could be the most important day in their life.

This could be the day that they'll learn what human trafficking is all about. This is the day that they get equipped to know what to look out for, what to say no to.

ANNOUNCER: In another part of the world, there's a girl entirely unaware she's about to be kidnapped and sold. But if we can reach her before the predators, we'll save her from a horrific future and completely shut the traffickers down. Reach, rescue, restore.

More than words, this is a fight against hell itself. Sheila: God is moving in the darkness and saving lives, one life at a time.

Please keep helping us. It's changing the world.

RANDY: You can reach that one life today. The average cost of the program, when we look around the world and all the places we work, is \$128 to reach, rescue, or restore one life. You can do that, maybe you can do that for 10, with a gift of \$1280.

Whatever you can do, we need to hear from you today. This is the last week we'll be on the air talking about this, but the work continues because the need is always there. Will you be a part of reaching, of rescuing, of restoring?

What an amazing privilege we have to be able to do that for people and to do it in the name of Jesus. I hope you'll go online, go to the phone, make the best gift you can. Blynda, when I look at that situation, it's hard to watch.

BLYNDA: It's so hard, it's pure evil.

RANDY: It is, but you know what, like it says, the evil, we can rise above that level because we know our God is able.

BLYNDA: He's able, and when you watch a story like that and you think, the reason we're showing that is because of people like you, our friends at "Life Today" that have said, "There's evil in the world, but I'm going to do my part to dispel it, I'm gonna do my part to get rid of it," and we thank you for that because there really are children who are being reached, who are being rescued, and who are being restored because you've said yes.

RANDY: Yes, so we need to hear from everyone, because this is the expression of God's love in our world today, the word and the deed that is the mission of all of us, I believe, as believers. The Word is Jesus, the deed is what we do through Rescue Life.

So won't you come be a part of this? I hope you will, and I hope you'll do it right now.

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".

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

ANDREA CROSS: As we partner with Life Outreach International, we are making a difference in the lives of children. It's people like you who, with unwavering support, dedication, and generosity, have been the driving force behind every rescue, every smile restored, and every life transformed. We know there is still so much work to be done, but your contribution has made it possible for us to stand up against child trafficking and for these children to be pulled from the darkness into the light.

Every smile, every step forward, every dream reignited, these are all a testament to the incredible impact that your support has on these young lives. I personally want to extend my deepest gratitude for everyone who has made a difference in a child's life already. With your continued support, we will help to create a world where no-one is subjected to the horrors of child trafficking, a world where love, compassion, and justice prevail.

By working together, we can reach every person and rescue every child. Thank you so much.

RANDY: We do need to hear from you today, this is the last week we will be on the air talking about this, but you can make a difference right now. So please, go online, go to the phone, make the best gift you can. And Blynda, wow, what a conversation, I wish we could sit here longer.

BLYNDA: Me too, thank you, Paul, so much, for coming and talking about "Return to the Shack", and thank you for returning to Life. We really appreciate having you on the show.

PAUL: Back to Life!

BLYNDA: And thank you for joining us today on "Life Today", we can't wait to see you again.

RANDY: Bye-bye.

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MALE ANNOUNCER: Are you wondering what God has planned next for your life? Doug Wekenman helps answer that question tomorrow.

ANNOUNCER: "Life Today" is made possible by the supporters of Life Outreach International. Your gift will be used exclusively for the exempt purposes of Life. The ministry features specific outreaches as examples of the programs it supports and conducts.

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