

MOTHER'S DAY

Special Guest: Tricia Lott Williford

Craig Smith

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Craig // Good morning. Happy Mother's Day. I love the awkward moment there. Some of you have it in you, thank you. The rest of you are like, I'm supposed to say back whatever the guy up front says, right? But like he's a bald man, and Mother's Day just doesn't seem -- super awkward, right? Now, it is Mother's Day. We are so glad that you are here. How about this, if you are a mom, or you have a mom, okay? How about you give it up for moms. Can we do that?

We want to do something a little different and special to honor and equip moms today. We are going to take a little bit of a break from Daniel, and we are going to push into this whole Mother's Day thing, the call of God on your life to be a mom, and to be a mom, and to be the mom God intends you to be, and so we wanted to kind of push into that because we know three things about being a mom. Number one, we know it's important, and I know we are not really that kind of church, but can I get an amen on that one? Amen.

We know that being a mom is important. Obviously, it's important biologically. None of us would be here without moms, right? Like that's sort of your basic standard, right? But then above and beyond that, we realize it's very spiritually important. In fact, in the Book of Proverbs, these books of wisdom, right? One of the first things that God says is this, he says listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching. Father's instruction and mother's teaching -- they together are a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck, which means that God believes that the role that women play in raising our children up to follow God, to understand who He is and to live on mission with Jesus, they are equal. They are on the same plane, so we understand that being a mom is really important spiritually.

Second thing we know about moms is that you don't have an easy job. Being a mom is not an easy thing, right? You can even say amen to that one if you felt so inclined, moms, right? Yeah, I was thinking about this yesterday, like when I took my kids home from the hospital, like the car I drove them home in had this huge instruction manual. The seat that I put them in, in the car, I had like 17 straps, and I needed the instruction manual just to figure out how to strap these little things in, but the actual child being transported home, the actual child being protected by this incredibly complex car seat, no instruction manual, right? Just like, hey, good luck. Figure this thing out.

And yet, according to scripture, those little people we take home, they are made as the image of God, the very image of God himself. They are made to be God's hands and feet to represent God in creation, and your task as moms is to raise them, to understand who God is and what it means to be on mission with Him. That's not an easy thing they think. Can I get an amen on that one? Third thing that we know about being a mom is that I have no idea what it means to be a good mom, right? I mean I could probably pull some verses together, and I could sort of instruct at you, but the reality is, I think the much better person to speak into being a mom is a mom, and so we are going to do something a little bit different today. We are going to do a little bit of an interview. I want to introduce you to a new friend of mine, Tricia Williford. In fact, if you look at the screen, we'll get a little bit of a sneak peek of her story.

Craig // Tricia, welcome. We are so glad you are able to join us today as we honor our moms and look to encourage and equip them. We are so glad that you are here.

Tricia // Thank you so much.

Craig // Why don't we grab a seat?

Tricia // Yes.

Craig // We are going to kind of do a different thing for us, obviously, we are not working our way through scripture today. We are kind of working our way through real life experience of what God has taught you, both from His Word and through well, walking with Him in some different kinds of circumstances, right?

Tricia // Hmm hmm.

Craig // So, you have this book called "You Can Do This," which has a lot to do with being a mom, and so I assume, correct me if I'm wrong, that

you wrote this because you have the whole mom thing figured out?

Tricia // Absolutely. Just -- done. Got it. We are finished, actually. If you guys want to chat with me about any of your questions, I got 'em down. Just kidding. No, actually, I wrote this book because in my conversations with women, and actually with men as well, one of the things I discovered is that we have this feeling that we can't do this, and we have this feeling that maybe there's something before us, and something in front of us in our path, that is bigger than what we can tackle, and so I wanted to forge a path with the Lord to be able to create this book, and put it in people's hands to be able to say that actually, with the strength that The Lord has given us, we can do what's in front of us.

Craig // So this book, as I read through it, it has a lot to do with confidence. Is confidence something that comes natural to you? Has it always been a part of your life?

Tricia // It has not always been a part of my life. I was raised by two parents who were awesome in every way, and they believed that it was very important that one of the most important skills they could give their children was confidence, and so they were very intentional about that, and so I grew into my confidence, and I found it, and I had established this lifestyle as an adult that I wanted, and I was married, and I had these two boys, and we had the minivan, and we were in suburbia, and it was everything that I thought confidence buys you, and then everything changed really fast. It was two days before Christmas, and my husband got very, very sick. He was sick for just 12 hours, and he died in my arms. The doctors thought he had the flu, and they sent us home from the hospital, and they said he won't die from this. He's going to feel like he's going to die from this, and then he did.

The flu was a misdiagnosis. He was 35 and healthy, and suddenly gone, and I was 31 years old, and I was a widowed single mom to two little, tiny boys aged three and five years old and not yet in kindergarten. And the bottom fell out of my world, and with it fell all of my confidence as well, and I did not know how I was going to do this. I did not know how I was going to continue on this path that I had begun. I didn't know how I was going to finish this life without the man I had committed to doing it with. And I did not know how I was going to raise these two little boys to become young men who were confident and leaders in their community. I had no idea, and I had to find my confidence.

Craig // Yeah, life has a way of siphoning your confidence off, right? And it's something that we -- we begin to deal with from a very early age. Confidence is not something you are just born with, and it's there. Life is constantly siphoning it off, and we have to figure out how it is in Christ that we are refilling that. You had this moment where life went, hey, I'm just going to take whole bucketfuls of your confidence. But as I read this book, one of the things that became clear to me was that God had begun to prepare you for that by teaching you some lessons about what happens when life siphons your confidence off, and how to begin that process of restoring it again, and that happened from a very young age, so one of my favorite parts of this book was a story that you told about a teacher who actually seemed almost intentionally to be siphoning off your confidence. You had a great name for her. What did you call her?

Tricia // Mrs. Wretched.

[Laughter]

Craig // Why don't you tell us a little bit about Mrs. Wretched and what that taught you about confidence?

Tricia // Mrs. Wretched was my fourth-grade teacher, and she was the first bully of my life. In that summer between third and fourth grade, I transitioned from this small private Christian school to this giant public school, and I felt like my parents had thrown me to the wolves. And I went into school on that first day, and I was really hoping that she was going to smile and be kind and delighted to see me, and she was none of those things. I finished that first-time day of school, and I came home and I said, I'm not going back, and my mom said, oh, yes, you are. And I said, she hates me. And she said, no, she doesn't hate you. Teachers do not hate their students. You have just had a rough start, so here's what we are going to do. You and I will have a special game we are going to play. Every day you are going to go in there and you have two jobs you are going to do in that fourth-grade classroom.

The first one is, you are going to smile first. You always be the one to be smiling. And I said, she never smiles. And my mom said, and that is a horrible way for her to go through life, but it has nothing to do with how you will go through life, so you go in there every day and you be the first one to smile, and the other job you have every day is to say something kind to her. I was like -- I am not at all sure about this. She said, no, it's okay. We've got this. We'll practice it. Every morning we'll practice something you can say to her. You can say, I love your hair today, Mrs. Wretched. I love your blouse today, Mrs. Wretched. And I said can I tell her how her arm does that thing when she writes on the board? That wiggle Jell-O thing? She said, let's leave that one at home. So, I began my journey of going to school every day, and I smiled every morning, and I said something kind to Mrs. Wretched every day. And she never threw me a bone, and when it came time for parent-teacher conferences, my parents went into the conference, and my mom said, you know, Mrs. Wretched, funny thing, my daughter seems to think that you don't like her.

And she said, oh, well. I like all of my students. I just do not smile, so when I smile they know that they have done something absolutely

extraordinary. Can we just agree, if you are a person who doesn't smile, don't become a teacher of small children? Smiling is the most basic gift that you can give to humanity. If you are a not smiler, I'm not sure what you should do, but teaching fourth grade is a bad idea. So, my mom came home and she said, honey, good news and bad news. The bad news first, she doesn't like you. The good news, though, is she doesn't like anybody, so it's not your fault. It's not your fault, and we can't fix her, so we are going to work on us. Let's stick with it. Stay the course. Say something kind to her every day and be the first one to smile. Every time she looks at you, be smiling, so I did it. I stayed the course, and on the very last day of school my mom came for the spelling bee. Fellow spellers, I'm sure you are wanting to know, I went down on the word mistletoe. It's just important to be able to say that.

My mom came for the spelling bee, and Mrs. Wretched said to her, you know what? I have to tell you, you have the sweetest daughter. She has smiled every day, and she always has something kind to say to me. My mom was like, no kidding? Huh. My mom and I had this moment, and she looked at me, and we made eye contact. It was her way, she said to me right there in that moment, you did it, kiddo. You did it. And shame on Mrs. Wretched for making me be the adult in that situation, and shame on her for making a nine-year-old set the emotional barometer for the environment that we would share together, but she did, and I did, and what I learned in the course of that year is the two keys of confidence, that when you are the one who smiles first, and when you say something kind to someone else, they think you like them, even if you don't. But when they think that you like them, they like you back, and when you know that people like you, your confidence begins to grow, and it's a beautiful cycle that I learned at nine that I'm still practicing on a daily basis.

Craig // So, let's push into that a little bit. You are 31 and the bottom falls out of your world, and all of our confidence is siphoned off, but God had been preparing you for that. It wasn't a surprise to God, as much as we would struggle with the idea that God knew it was coming but He had already begun to prepare you. So, you look back on your experience with Mrs. Wretched and some other experiences that you share in this book. What did God teach you about confidence that you were able to cling to when the bottom fell out of your world?

Tricia // I learned that confidence is something that you can cultivate, and it's like a muscle that you can stretch, just like anything else that you learn and teach yourself to do. Just like any other muscle, when you start to lift something that's heavy, and you practice lifting that, it starts to feel easier, but the truth is, it's not any easier, you just got stronger, and that's how confidence works also. When you begin to do the hard thing in front of you, and the hard thing after that, and you do just one thing at a time, it starts to feel a little bit easier, but it didn't get easier. You got stronger, and you got more confident and you can build that muscle by doing the next thing in front of you.

Craig // So, it seems to me that confidence is something that our culture really comes against, in all people. It's Mother's Day, so we are kind of pushing into that. Talk to us a little bit about how our culture has women's confidence in the crosshairs today.

Tricia // Absolutely. Well, in the process of writing this book, I did some research to be able to talk and learn about the difference in confidence in men and confidence in women, and one of the things that I learned is that men are actually genetically wired to embrace their confidence with greater comfort than women do, and the reason for that is men are hunter gatherers. We expect them to come in as warriors and own the space. We expect them to come in and know how to lead, and we don't necessarily expect that from women. In fact, if a woman comes in and owns the space or expects to lead or comes in and says, you know what? I think actually, I can do this. There will be someone else in the room, likely another woman who will say, really? Let's see how this goes, and so we have been trained from a very early age to be silent, and to keep ourselves small as possible, quiet as possible and pretty as possible, and sometimes that's not what life calls for you to do.

And I think that this is happening, as you said, it's in the crosshairs, specifically because of social media, and now other people's lives follow us into our homes, so that when we are sitting at home in the midst of dishes and laundry and unmade beds and a dinner plan that, let's be honest, is probably going to be cereal, and then we open the phone to scroll through and see what's happening on Facebook and Instagram and we find that there are people that have their lives completely together. They are completely polished. They have made a picture-worthy -- they have made a dinner worthy of taking a photo of. And we can begin to tell ourselves that we are the only ones that don't have it together, and it simply is not true. It simply isn't.

Craig // It's interesting. I don't know if it's genetic or something in our wiring that makes women struggle a little bit more with confidence, but I think we -- we don't help, right? There are all kinds of things that we do, sometimes inadvertently. I was thinking as we were talking that even the nicknames that we have for little kids, right? Little boys, we call them, hey, champ how you doing? That's a confidence booster, right? You can do it. You're a champion. Little girls, hey, pumpkin. How are you? You are a champion. You are a gourd. It's simplistic, but it's interesting that we use those kinds of things, and I wonder if that doesn't exacerbate the problem a little bit?

Tricia // I think it can absolutely exacerbate the problem. Because we send messages to each other all the time verbally and nonverbally, and there is certainly nothing wrong with calling your daughter princess. There's nothing wrong with treating her like a princess because certainly, we are all daughters of the King, and we need to be reminded of that. However, in our culture, princesses are little girls who grow up needing someone else to save the day, and very often the stories we know, the princess is not the hero of her own story. She comes alongside a man who has a better plan. How wonderful would it be for us to say to little girls, good morning, smart girl? Good morning courageous one. I cannot wait to see how brave you will be today. Show me everything you've got. What if we said that instead. Imagine what could happen?

Craig // It seems like one of the ways that our culture really has women's confidence in the crosshairs is a body image thing. Sure, you touched on that with Instagram, but you know, it's an image sort of a thing, right, and body image is a big part of that. Talk to us a little bit about where our culture is when it comes to body image, and how that affects women?

Tricia // Well, it affects women because it's a message that we are receiving from a very early age before we even have the filter to say, that might not be accurate. Little girls are receiving messages from media and from television and from commercials for products for girls 12 to 14 years old are marketed to girls that are 6 to 8 to 10 years old, and so the messages are going younger and younger and younger before little girls have the ability to say, oh, that might be air brushed. That might not be a real person. That might not be what this really looks like. And so for us to be able to say to children, to young ladies, to young men and young women and really people of all ages, to take a look at that image and say, what are they trying to tell us that isn't true? And what are they trying to tell us is most important? They are trying to tell us that the most important thing about a woman's body is that it should be flawless and thin and without wrinkles and without any gray hair, and the truth is that if she has no gray hair, then that means she's never loved anyone enough to worry really hard about them.

And if she doesn't have any wrinkles and she doesn't have any stretch marks, then that means she hasn't been stretched so far that she thought she might break in half because what I believe, and what I want other women to believe also, is that a woman's body tells a story. It's a canvass that tells a story, and if your story is that you have never missed a day at the gym, I'm not that interested. I want to know what you are good at. I want to know what you think about. I want to know what you bring to the table. I want you to bring all of the colors that are in your crayon box because when we color with all of the colors that we have, everybody shows up, and everybody shines, and so I would love for us to be able to set those images aside and say, what do you bring? What do you bring to the table? Tell me what you are good at, and to teach people to have the confidence to be able to say, you know what? I think I can do this. I think I can give it a try. Here's what I bring.

Craig // Tricia, would you speak into my life and into the lives of the men here. We are fathers. We are husbands. We have these women in our lives. As men, what do we need to know, and how can we help build confidence in the women that God has put in our sphere of influence?

Tricia // I love that question. I will not presume to tell the men what to do, but I will speak on behalf of some of the women, and maybe all of them, to say that every woman that I have ever talked to seems to want two things. We have two things in common. We want to feel beautiful, and we want to feel secure. Amen, ladies? We want those two things. We want to feel beautiful, and we want to feel secure, and that can look at feel different for each woman, so ask her. What makes you feel beautiful? What makes you feel secure? And then if you are feeling especially bold, ask her, what do I do that makes you feel not that beautiful? What do I do that makes you feel insecure? What would you like me to keep doing, and what would you like me to stop doing to help you feel beautiful and secure?

Craig // Those are great questions. Thank you.

Tricia // Mm hmm.

Craig // Let's push into a little bit more of your story. You are 31, and suddenly, you don't have your husband, but you have two small boys aged three and five, and obviously, the beginning of that journey was probably infused with a tremendous amount of fear, but as I read through your book, at a certain point, you got to the place where you were moving forward in spite of the fear, but that created new fear. You have all of these plates spinning. All of these things that you are doing, and you began to struggle with the fear that something may come in out of left field, and it's going to start causing me to drop these plates, and that could be a paralyzing thing. How did God lead you past that fear?

Tricia // Well, I have this great analogy I actually learned from Pastor T.D. Jakes. I had attended the Global Leadership Summit, which is actually not a conference that's designed for widowed, single moms. It's actually for leaders of organizations and churches, and I attended because I'm a conference junky, and I love learning, and I thought there's got to be something here for me today. There must be something I can take away, and sure enough, he talked about how he has many plates spinning, and at the end of any given day someone is going to be let down. Whether it's his wife or his children or his teammates or his ministry, someone at the end of the day is going to feel like he disappointed them. He said, it's inevitable. I'm going to drop a plate. The key is to never drop the same plate two days in a row, so at the end of the day he takes this inventory to say who did I disappoint today? That's the first thing I will chase after tomorrow.

And there was so much freedom in that for me to realize, okay. It's expected and inevitable that I'm going to make some mistakes, but I just won't make the same one two days in a row. Lots of freedom there.

Craig // So, confidence -- it's not supposed to come from us feeling like we are great. We have it all together. We are perfect. Ultimately, it's rooted in Christ. It's rooted in the realization that we are not enough, but we know the one who is, and I think sometimes when people find themselves in one of those difficult places where they have to lean into Jesus, their relationship with him deepens. Not just their confidence, but their relationship. Can you tell us what you learned about your relationship with Jesus in the midst of that really hard time?

Tricia // Oh, yes. Well, when my husband died, I did not know how to talk to God, because the sovereignty card is a really tough one to hold. To know that The Lord had taken him away from me with the knowledge that this was going to be how it would go, I remember saying, why did you think this was a good idea? I don't know how to do this. I don't know what I'm supposed to do. I understand that he's with you, and he's safe and I will see him again because of my salvation, but how am I supposed to do tomorrow? How am I supposed to do this? And I did not know how to have a conversation with someone that I didn't feel that I could trust, and I realized that the beginning of that conversation sometimes starts with, Lord I really want to trust you. So for the first two years, I packed up my journal and my Bible and I went to Starbucks every morning, and in that season when I didn't know what to say to the Lord, I just began to copy the Book of Psalms. I started at Psalm one, and I wrote it into my journal and I moved forward, and I worked through all of those.

The reason is because I didn't know what to say, and so instead I leaned on the words of David and all of his Psalm writing friends, and one of the things that I learned in studying that book and copying it into my journal is that all of the emotions are covered in the Book of Psalms. Every single emotion from this is the day that the Lord hath made, and I will be rejoice and be glad in it all the way to one Psalm in particular, Psalm 88 has no joy in it. None. He doesn't even finish with, but the Lord will be my strength. He doesn't finish it with that. The whole Psalm is filled with, my bones are rotting. I'm turning into dust. I would rather die, and it finishes with that. I took so much comfort in that because what I realized is, every emotion is okay before a Holy God who created our hearts. He didn't need me to pretend that it was okay. He didn't need me to pretend that I was happy. He didn't even need me to pretend that I could trust Him. He needed my honesty. He needed me to say, Lord, I want to, but I do not understand this story that You are writing.

And when I did that, when I met Him at that table morning after morning, and as I began to find my words again, I discovered that the intimacy with Jesus Christ is a very real thing, and when we offer him ourselves, when we offer Him our sadness, He gives us Himself. And the suffering we experience He always matches with His comfort. He always does. When I hand Him my suffering, He hands me His comfort. And I learned that. I also learned that worrying is a very scary thing to do. Suffering is not scary. Suffering is living in the moment that you are in. Suffering is seeing this moment and saying, I just have to do this next thing. Worry takes me out of this moment and says, but what am I going to do when I have to do this one? What am I going to do when we are a hundred yards down the road from where we are now? How am I going to do that? Whenever I got out of this moment and into that moment of worry, that's when fear set in, but as long as I stayed right here, right in this moment where the Lord is and where His grace is, He always gave me enough for that moment. Always.

Craig // I'm going to make a guess here, and that is there's a bunch of women in the room that hear your story, hear what you went through, and they think, okay, you're impressive. It's impressive that you got through that, but I could never do that. What would you say to that woman thinking that right now?

Tricia // Well, first I would say, I hope that you don't have to, and I would say that even after having gone through that darkest valley that lasted for years, I still feel that fear sometimes. It still creeps in again. I was very blessed to be married for a second time two years ago. My new husband and I are enjoying the greatest miracle of our lives, which is life together, and I feel like I'm the happiest I have ever been. Because you know how sometimes if you have had a headache that lasts for a few days and suddenly your headache is gone and you feel like you are on top of the world and you are like, I'm awesome.

It was so hard for so long, and now I have a companion, and now I have this best friend whose come along side me to help me raise my children, and it fields so good after it being so hard for so long, and so there's part of me waiting for that shoe to fall. There's part of me that's waiting for the diagnosis of a catastrophe or something that's going to come in from left field, and so there's part of me that thinks, what if I have to do that again? What if something happens to one of my children? What if something happens and it's worse than it was before, and then I remind myself that suffering is not scary. Worrying is, and I don't want to go through any of that ever again, and I don't want that for you either, but if that happens, I know my Lord is faithful. I know that my God is good, and He walked with me and carried me through that valley that lasted for two years. The first year was for my head to start to make sense of just the black and white dates on the calendar of learning how to navigate this path on my own.

The second year was for my heart to start to bring in some of the color of my life again, to start to feel again, and to see what this was actually going to be like, and the Lord was with me through every single moment of that, and so when I start to feel afraid, and if you are feeling afraid right now thinking oh, but I couldn't -- I would remind you, I couldn't either, but the Lord could, and we cannot believe that He will not give us more than we can handle. He will, but He will never give us more than He can handle. He is in it. He's in it.

Craig // Thank you.

Tricia // Thank you.

Craig // I realize that being a mom is difficult. Just being a woman is difficult. Being a human being is difficult, right? But we all have our unique areas of difficulty, and over the last few weeks, one of the lessons we have seen consistently in the Book of Daniel we are going through is that God rebukes arrogance, which might seem like an inappropriate transition at this point but stick with me for a second. God rebukes arrogance, and it's really easy to begin to field like arrogance is pride. That's not me, right? Really, what you are dealing with is insecurity. One of the

things we realized last week working through God's Word is that, arrogance isn't pride. Arrogance is just an obsession with self, and what it does, it takes our eyes off mission and what God's called us to do, and pride is one road that can get us there, but the road that most of us walk to obsession with self is insecurity, because it gets our eyes on all of the ways that we can't, and we are not enough and we couldn't possibly, but what you are saying is that we have to get our eyes off of that. Whether we are a mom or dad or whatever we happen to be, we can't allow insecurity to say, I can't, when in fact God has said, yes, you can, with me. I would love if you would bless us. Would you pray over the women in the room, but also the men, would you pray for God to root out that insecurity so we can keep our eyes on Him and on the mission He's called us to, however difficult that road might be. Would you do that for us?

Tricia // I would love to. God, you are so kind. You are so kind, and You are so faithful, and You are holding the sun and the sky today as a reminder that You are in charge, and that You are capable of things that we can't even begin to think about. Lord, I thank you on this Mother's Day, that You let us be part of Your miracle. You could have chosen to create every human being on Your own without any help from us, but You let moms and dads be part of Your miracle, and I thank you for that, Lord. God, I am reminded that You are The Lord who said, let there be light, and You have placed that light within each one of us, and we are fragile jars of clay that are easily broken, and easily distracted and easily insecure, but Lord, I pray that You will root that out and the light that shines in each one of us will be a reminder and proof that the strength and the glory and the power is all yours. Thank you, Lord Jesus. May we put our hope in You. May we be reminded that You have not failed us yet, that we don't need to have confidence in ourselves, but only in who You are and who You promise to be. You are a good and faithful God, and I praise You, Lord. Thank you, Jesus. Amen.

Craig // Amen.