

Unfavorable Odds

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Episode 22: Getting Up From Being Down

Guest: Dr. S. Todd Townsend
Air Date: April 6, 2020

S. Todd: My upbringing was very difficult. The norm of my experience was regular violence on a daily basis and tension. There were drug trafficking. So there was a seedy quality of people who were always kind of in and out of our home. Tension was normal. So as an only child, pain would be the biggest description of my childhood—confusion, a sense of rejection, and I think a quiet desperation. There's hope but it never quite fulfills itself.

Kim: Tell me more about your stepfather.

S. Todd: I loved him, and I hated him at the same time. Conflict was intense.

Kim: From the FamilyLife podcast network, this is *Unfavorable Odds*. I'm Kim Anthony.

Unfavorable Odds is all about finding hope and help in those seasons of life when things get pretty difficult. Jesus has promised us that whenever we walk through those dark valleys, He will always be with us. We will never have to do it alone. So, on each episode of this podcast, we'll be talking with people who have learned how, in those dark places of life, to draw their strength from Jesus.

Have you ever heard of a victim of circumstance? Well this is exactly what my guest on this episode of *Unfavorable Odds* could have easily become *if* he would have allowed his circumstances to define his future. But he didn't. Instead he rejected the victim mentality and trusted God to make him the man He wanted him to be.

Dr. S. Todd Townsend grew up in the inner city of Philadelphia where he ended up doing what most people do, which is merge into the lifestyle that they see around them. He dealt drugs, stole cars, broke into people's homes and in his own words he was a common thug heading for a life of destruction. Until Jesus intervened.

Dr. Townsend is the senior pastor of The Resurrection Center in Wilmington, Delaware. He's written a book called *Getting Up From Being Down*. It chronicles his personal story, while at the same time, inspiring readers to overcome. Well in my conversation with Dr. Townsend, I learned how he could have easily become just another statistic, but through Christ, he ended up becoming so much more.

As an only child—I was an only child too—who did you go to, to process these things, if anyone?

S. Todd: There was no one. I mean me and my mom talked. Most of our conversations, I think, could be characterized as me trying to comfort her and her trying to handle and manage. Otherwise, there was no adult because this is a secrecy issue. There's no accountability to reach for. It was peers. But unless a peer was going through a similar experience, then it was a useless conversation. So, it's really an isolated kind of reality.

Kim: Now you mention the secrecy of it. Were you told “this stays here,” or was that something you just felt automatically should happen?

S. Todd: I remember occasions when—I would call it a declaration. I would call it a command to the household. This is our business. Nobody ever hears about this. Then if you tell somebody, there'd be consequences kind of thing. And then the rest of it is kind of an environment of isolation and fear.

Kim: Dr. Townsend, you talk about this isolation you felt and it really sparked memories of my own life: being an only child, dealing with the issues that were taking place in my household surrounding my family, and I didn't have anyone to talk with. It was so similar to your situation.

When I wrote my own story *Unfavorable Odds* and family members read it, they were surprised. They thought that I was being untruthful about some of the circumstances that I had experienced because even between my mother and me, we kept so much to ourselves. I was never told to keep it to myself. I guess I thought that this was normal—everybody lived this way. Everybody experienced this. It's—I don't know if the word refreshing is the right word to say, but it's very comforting to hear that you experienced something similar and that I'm not alone.

S. Todd: Yes, and you know I think it's an important point—I don't want to say all only children this is their reality, but I think part of the skill set—and I think it's an inadvertent set of skills you gain—is that you become comfortable with being alone although you never like loneliness. You embrace being alone.

So, having no place to go, your imagination, your soul, your private world becomes this whole—for a lack of better terms never, never land. I think it's a great point because you learn to be isolated. Now there's some pros and cons that come from that. But the secrecy compounds it and turns it into a private nightmare.

Kim: Yes. Take me through your neighborhood. Give me a picture of what it was like to just take a walk through your neighborhood.

S. Todd: Coming out of the house—it's 100 block of Robinson Street so it's typical row homes—cars parked on the adjacent side of the street and before you step down fully,

you take a look both ways. Is there any activity going on? Are there any groups of people? Is there any violence afoot? Are there any thieves or robbers on shift?—anybody up to no good? So that becomes a normal safety precaution.

Then moving down the street—I think for me in a part of growing up alone is I developed systems. I would walk between the cars. I would move to one side of the street then to the other side of the street. So it's almost like being in a movie where you don't want to be a still target and it's a mentality that accompanies it.

And then once we move down the street a few blocks, I moved to Market street where everything exploded. The motorcycle gang was right there. You had a series of bars. There was a party life/a nightlife and you also had daytime drunks and then the hustlers who don't do nine to five in the corporate sector. They do nine to nine on the corner. It's both vibrant, exciting, dangerous, but it's a norm. It's like being a fish in the water and you're so accustomed to the water you don't recognize its presence.

Kim: Tell me about your mother.

S. Todd: Mom—my mom's a champion. She endured everything. Currently, she's a recovering cancer patient. She wrote her book. She had cancer in both breasts, so she wrote her book while she was recovering. She lives with us. We moved her in with us. But prior to that, I remember my mom being a single woman, deeply committed to me. She worked hard. She worked every day because she was the primary bread winner even though her money was taken from her with regularity.

Kim: Let's lean into that. What do you mean her money was taken from her?

S. Todd: Well, because my stepfather was an abuser, the money she brought in served his purposes not necessarily the purposes of the home. She would earn money under the understanding that you bring me my money. It almost sounds like a pimp. But regardless of that she went to work regularly every day, climbed the corporate ladder, wore sunglasses to work because of the black eye or the bruises, makeup, different types of attire / scarves to wrap around—things of that nature—to present stylish. In reality, torment.

But I see my mom as a champion because she came through all that and she ultimately wound up becoming a missionary. We own a bookstore. She sold Christian books. Now she's written her own book and she leads groups. So, the end result contrast the former reality.

Kim: Right. You and your mother have been through a lot. Tell me more about your stepfather and his presence in your life.

S. Todd: You know it's a conflict. I wrote about it in the book. He's the only male role model that's present. So being the man that he was then, very violent / very aggressive,

known in the community, kind of a brawler—had the reputation for taking people out, knocking people down, transferring substances into the community. So that's him. That's his reputation. He's known for the bravado / the strength—typical angry black man with power / with community influence. That power then was very negative but again, that's the umbrella I grew up under.

So, for me a dream time because I loved him, and I hated him at the *same* time. The conflict was intense. But my hopes would be like a Saturday morning—the way I would define a good time would be a Saturday morning watching say Jerry Lewis and Dean Martin. He'd be sleep. I'd be woke. I'd define that as intimate time.

Kim: So, he was with you but that negativity that he brought along with his personality / his persona was not affecting you at that moment when he was asleep.

S. Todd: Well, I think the psychological process is to suppress the painful reality and reach for the dream, and the dream was a father/son healthy relationship. Him sleep after a hangover; me woke watching the three stooges allowed my imagination to create a false reality.

Kim: Wow. You mentioned that in your childhood fun was always tied to some type of punishment. As if it was illegal to have any fun. What did you mean by that?

S. Todd: Well because of an environment where—and kids are growing up in that today and people who live under the tension of frustrated parents who project their anger and their pain onto their kids. A person who is committed to bitterness, frustration and anger is at war with any type of legitimate fun or happiness. You take the child who has this innocent capacity to just enjoy life—you know you put a child in the corner with two boxes and the imagination goes crazy.

Kim: Especially an only child. [Laughter]

S. Todd: Especially an only child. What happens is the expression of joy counters the oppression and so the oppression or the oppressor I think responds much like a taskmaster with a whip. "Get back to work. Get back to being miserable. Get back." I think that becomes a norm in what was my experience. But now as a pastor and experienced person, I know that's the norm in many people's lives.

Kim: What type of choices did you start to make as you got older?

S. Todd: Well I made bad choices straight out. The streets became my alternate family. My friends or I would even say the people I was attracted to. Let's divide it into three categories. Let's say young teenagers attract to academics, athletics, or trouble. [Laughter]

I was very intelligent, but it wasn't cool with the crowd I wanted to be with, so you dumb down. Even though I could pass the tests, I wouldn't because I didn't want to be labeled / stereotyped as the teacher's pet type of thing. I didn't go with academics. Athletically, I think the discipline of that lifestyle and the accountability to the coach / to the deadlines didn't appeal to me.

Because I was angry. I was too angry to submit to a structured formula. But the bad guys—cutting school, being dangerous, starting fights and conflicts—that attracted me because that's the atmosphere I grew up in. So as a teenager, I went straight hard and fast into the trouble.

Kim: Do you think it was watching your stepfather that helped shape the choices you made? Were you trying to be like him?—trying to have a reputation that was as strong as his in the community? Even though it may have been a negative type of situation?

S. Todd: Yes. Let's take two extremes and they're both caught in the same bottle. The bottle being my life. Here's two extremes. One, there's an anger, a frustration, a hatred without Christianity / without a prayer life. But I pray "Lord, take him," right? You want him gone. You concentrate on that person *so much* because of your pain and desire for them to be gone.

The flip side is there's a need to have a father and that person fills that place. So, there's a love. In both cases, you're focused on the individual. All of your emotion, whether negative or positive, is trapped in this focus. He becomes the role model even though it's not the one I want.

Kim: Right.

S. Todd: One of the great things that happened when I got saved and learned how to disconnect myself was that if you're so angry with a person—kids say it. Kids say for years: "I'm not going to be like my mom. I'm not going to be like my dad," and they're so committed to that thought that they spend all of their time thinking about the person that they're not going to be like.

Kim: That's true.

S. Todd: Inevitably, they become that because they're giving all their attention to it. So, in my case on both lanes—the one where I dreaded him and the one where I admired him—both of those drove me to become him.

Kim: What was going on internally as you're making these choices?

S. Todd: Wow. I think the pages of time turn like a flash at that stage. Teenagers are driven by their impulses and the crowd and the trends. I think that became my drug of choice. My circle was the body of people who were reputable for fighting and getting in

trouble. Or you really had a good rep if you did trouble and successfully escaped it. That's what went through my mind: "I've got acceptance. I have a place I belong. I have a company of people I identify with and they support me."

If you're a heavy drinker and you say, "I want to stop drinking." Then you say "Okay. Let me have this conversation. I need some accountability." Then you go to another heavy drinker and you say "Well, listen, I want to stop drinking." They say "Yeah, I want to stop drinking too." Well you're probably going to say, "Let's go get a drink and talk this over." [Laughter]

The system self-defeats. But that's what it was. It was a community of people. A place I belonged and felt comfortable. Although the deeds we accomplished were similar to the behavior of my father.

Now the one thing I would not touch with a ten-foot pole was violence to women. I'll never do that. That is so ingrained in my spirit as an absolute violation of everything that I—You know seeing that, experiencing that—

Kim: —with your own mother.

S. Todd: —with my mom / with my eyes. Being there after he left, with her bleeding and curled up in a corner, crying, and pleading with me. Never—you'd never treat a woman like that. Those moments still live in my heart.

Kim: That has to be heartbreaking for a child to see the woman he admires so much—the woman that he is maybe trying to protect, encourage, support go through something like that.

S. Todd: Yes. I mean Mom is golden. Motherhood is God's design and moms are larger than life your whole life, and a great mom which mine was because she negotiated abuse while climbing the ladder of success. I made a video—I actually wrote a song about my mom and I got her in the video. It's a really great song. It's called *Momma*.

Kim: I want to check that out.

S. Todd: Yes, it's on YouTube.

Kim: I'll look that up for sure. If I remember correctly, you talked about hopelessness. Describe what it's like to view life through the lens of hopelessness.

S. Todd: Wow. It's a good question. The lenses of hopelessness are dark. They're limited. 20/20 vision is the joy of the scope. If you stand at the Grand Canyon, you can see the beauty that is distant, and you can see the immediate beauty that is next to you and you can transition between both extremes at any moment. I think hopelessness blinds that perspective and it limits you to your immediate emotion / your immediate

sense of failure, loss, frustration, pain, and so looking at life through those lenses causes you to believe there's nothing to expect.

Kim: Right.

S. Todd: So okay, well let's eat, drink, and whatever for tomorrow we die. Which eclipses all possibilities of development: intellectual, emotional, professional because you think everybody *is as your experience*. I call it a roach box mentality in the book. I know that's kind of a coarse caricature but the idea of being trapped in a small container in the dark with no exit—like prison or isolation.

Hopelessness, it evaporates your power. It sucks you dry emotionally / mentally. Hopelessness I think is a key tool for the adversary because it robs a person of their juice, their energy, a *desire* to accomplish anything.

Kim: If you're wearing those dark lenses of hopelessness, why should I go to school and study? Why should I even dream about achieving or doing something beyond what I'm seeing in front of my eyes?

S. Todd: Exactly. And if you answer that question with "I shouldn't" then you're self-defeating at a level. That becomes almost epidemic. It can become cultural. It can become socially normal. If I have that level of self-hatred, you can't take hatred and turn it off and on like a faucet. You can't play with it like a toy.

Eventually, it becomes a raging river and self-hatred at that level of yourself transfers into social interaction. Anybody that looks like you, acts like you, smells like you, or triggers a memory of yourself provokes that treatment toward them. Even though it's undeserved.

Kim: Wow! So is that why sometimes in environments like the one you grew up in or I grew up in you will have people who when they see you succeeding at something, they will immediately tear you down. They will immediately put you in your place and tell you what you shouldn't be doing or what you can't be doing.

S. Todd: Yes. You know that's part of the getting up that excites me because I have tasted it. I have tasted both sides. I know what it is like to not be able to believe something better can happen. Not only to me but anybody else. As a matter of fact, you get jealous that it happened to somebody else if you don't have the capacity to hope for yourself.

There's a passage in the Scripture where God says to Adam: "Where are you?" and Adam says "Well I was hiding because I was afraid because I'm naked," and God says, "Who told you you were naked?" I'm like Wow! That's what happens when I'm afraid that I'm going to be exposed. I hide.

We hide behind so many things, and what the ability to hope does: it brings you out of your hiding place and it opens up new possibilities. Growing up hopeless, I can't forget it. I remember and it keeps me so balanced. It establishes equilibrium in my confident, anointed, favored, blessed life. So that it's hard to go get arrogant because I'm very clear on how far He brought me and if it had not been for the Lord, I would not have hope.

Kim: Let me ask you. Does that old way of thinking ever creep back into your thoughts? Maybe if you're setting out on a new adventure—something you haven't done before—something that God has placed on your heart but is truly too difficult to do on your own without God's help. Have you ever had that sense of ooh, I'm not sure—that sense of doubt that may stem from those times of hopelessness long ago?

S. Todd: Yes, definitely. I think it creeps up in different ways at different times. I think sometimes it revs the engine to a very high RPM and it's very hard. It's a very difficult engagement. Like Paul says I was oppressed, depressed, suppressed to the point that I had the sentence of death inside of myself. But I'd been trusting in the Lord.

I love that verse because his declaration is that after being oppressed, depressed, suppressed—which mean that there are stronger things holding you down—that I come to the conclusion I sentence myself to death. I become my own judge and jury. I have to go beyond that. I can't listen to that voice. I can't lean to my own understanding at that point and so I defer and trust God. Because that voice comes back at different levels.

As you grow, I believe in small victories because small victories give an appetite for medium sized victories. After you accomplish enough medium sized victories you get bold enough to leap for a large victory and if you dare begin to taste large victories—But at each of those levels that old voice comes back and tries to assert new authority. So that fight I think is ongoing.

Kim: How would you counsel someone in ministry who is working with a child who experienced some of the things that you've experienced and is really in a sense of hopelessness? Because I've talked to some people who work with children in that environment, and some of them feel like there's nothing I can do to help this child see the possibilities. They're stuck and they're just like I've tried everything. What do you tell them?

S. Todd: Well I think that recognizing that there's a large percentage of life experience in the child that is shrouded, covered, saturated in I'll say black tar. For that child to climb out, it's not a quote a verse, come to the group, two weeks later go to bed a blunder, wake up a wonder. No! I think it's a journey.

I think it's a process of being willing to stick in with the child. The Parakletos, the Holy Spirit—that's the Greek term. It means one called alongside of. So, journey with that

person and be patient because you've got to sow the seeds to new life. But nobody plants seeds, and gets it harvested the next two days. Stay with them for the process.

Kim: You write in your book that victimization empowered an attitude in you of self-defense and blame shifting. How did this play out in your life?

S. Todd: Well I think if you do a really good job of identifying yourself as an official, formal, well deserved victim, then now everybody owes me something. I've been a victim. I didn't ask to be a victim. Everybody owes me something. What that does is it creates a sense of privilege that is unfounded, that is undeserved, but yet demanded in your psyche.

You've got an attitude with people when they don't immediately recognize that you *deserve*—you should put me in the front of the line if you knew what I went through. I think in maturation you begin to realize everybody's going through something. So there has to be a gradual counter to that philosophy but victimization—people specialize and can specialize in officially victimizing themselves.

Kim: Yes.

S. Todd: And if you buy into that, you can justify that God doesn't care; God's dead; God's not around. You can justify that everybody owes me something and I don't *have* to be kind. I don't have to be cordial. I don't have to be nice.

Kim: Right.

S. Todd: I don't have to abide by boundaries or limits or responsible behavior because *I am a victim* and that's really what you're shouting. "Can you guys see I'm a victim?" I think you have to overcome it gradually and recognize one of the greatest problems of being a victim is that you become a victimizer without recognizing it.

Kim: Wow. Will you give an example of that?

S. Todd: Yes. As a victim, in my case, I got into criminal activity. How do you justify criminal activity? How do you justify taking somebody else's hard-earned substance or material? Well you justify that because—and you'll hear it maybe in a movie or in somebody's conversation—"You guys, your insurance company will take care of that." I'm going to steal it. Let me out the door. Your insurance company is going to take care of it so it's not a loss for you. I'm now feeling *right* as a victim to take or victimize or abuse somebody else and that's dangerous.

Kim: While you were doing all those things—stealing, victimizing others—did you have any thoughts or belief in God?

S. Todd: No, no. There was no premise for that in my life. There was no background in church. There were no Bible conversations. There was an occasional evangelist on tv, but he was a part of the power structure and he's a part of the system. He's not sympathetic or she's not sympathetic to me and not to mention, I probably never watched for more than five minutes.

So no, saturated with a desperate appetite to survive and earn money without having engaged in formal training, or a conscious, intelligent, intentional pursuit of responsible positions in life. There's an absence of God. There's an absence of talking of God and so the behavior is what we would term secular or carnal.

Kim: Okay.

S. Todd: And you know carnal and secular behavior justifies itself.

Kim: Well, when did your life change?

S. Todd: I began to realize something was wrong. You know you had these like the prodigal son he came to his self. We know that verse and that's how we know it. He came to his self. But he probably said something like "What is wrong with you man?" He comes to this place in life where he doesn't have resources. He's wasting money. He's hanging with the wrong people. He left this wonderful context.

In my case, I didn't have a wonderful context to start with, but I was 22/23 when I got saved. Actually, 23 and had an apartment—had a 9-5 job but I was still doing ridiculously foolish things. But I think frustration started kicking in.

I started asking questions: "What's wrong with you man? Why can't you cry? Why are you so defensive? Why will you not let anybody close?" Like a relationship. Oh no, that was never going to happen. Because my definition of a relationship was a fight / violence. So, no I can't let you in. I like you. I like the way you look. I like the way you talk. But nope! I can't let you in.

I think that's a lot of emotional baggage and work and it began to bear on me, and I started asking "okay, is there an alternative? What could be different?"

That began I think a process for me because I stopped some things. I stopped hanging with a few people intentionally. I stopped with the women. I just stopped. I remember meeting a woman and she was quite aggressive, and she was beautiful and basically the formula on the street is you go with the flow.

I remember saying "Nah, I'm good. I'm going home." And my boys were like "What's wrong with you man?" I said "Nothing's wrong with me. I'm just going home." Now the next day or two days I actually said to myself "What's wrong with you? What's going on?" [Laughter]

Kim: You were acting out of character.

S. Todd: Yes; definitely. I think that began to process and then I went to church. Church changed everything. I gave my life to Christ on a Sunday. That week I began going to Bible studies. The church said something about Wednesday; I went to Wednesday night Bible study. The pastor on Wednesday said “Alright, I want the guys to remember there’s a Thursday night,” so I went to Thursday night Bible study.

Somebody at the Thursday night Bible study told me there’s a Bible Institute at the church called Buhleh. So I said, “When is that?” They said, “Monday and Tuesday,” so I went on Monday and Tuesday. And while I was there, I found out the pastor taught on Friday.

So those men, they were having a conversation and one man raised his hand he said “I need help. I really don’t know how to love my wife right and I realize that I need to change,” and he started crying and I froze.

I’m like: who talks like that? We don’t talk like that on the corner. Nobody admits to that level of weakness. Nobody admits to needing that kind of help and certainly no man cries. You know basically the street terminology is man you better get your woman in order. Nobody comes in talking about: how do I learn how to love my wife? So that shook me.

Then another individual brought up: “I’m mismanaging my money. Can you help me? Can you guys give me some advice?” So again, we’ve got this theme of humility, but the response was wonderful.

Another fellow raises his hand and says “Man, I’ll be glad to help you with that. Here’s three principles I’d say to the group.” Then they would connect and there’s a relationship and there’s a kind of exchange—strength / wisdom is replacing foolishness. It’s like “wow!”

That affected me because I didn’t think that existed and we go back to those glasses. I was looking through hopeless glasses and finding myself in that place felt like being privileged to have exposure to something that I didn’t even think existed on the earth.

Kim: Wow. So, as you watched these men and you heard them talk about wanting to love their wives / wanting to do things differently, did you think about your stepfather and wonder: “okay, what is this? Why is my stepfather so different than these men or why are these men so different from my stepfather?”

S. Todd: Yes. I think that that was immediately clear to me and what was immediately obvious was that these men voiced and demonstrated some kind of commitment to Jesus. That was totally absent. That was never evidenced / visible or anything like that. The contrast was immediately clear. There’s something about this Jesus talk /

something about this relationship they have with Jesus that makes them the polar opposite.

That's what caught my attention and I remember I felt an unction—I don't know if it was the second Bible study or maybe the first one, but I felt an unction to stand up and say something. So I did. I stood up like to testify and I said, "I don't know what's going on in this room, but I haven't felt this good or refreshed without reefer / without a drink in my whole life." I sat down, and I was out of breath.

Kim: Wow!

S. Todd: When I think back on it, I'm like "Well what was the out of breath thing, Lord?" But it was an emotional fight. It was a declaration that I needed to make. I needed to hear myself say it. I needed to say it in front of people. Because it was the trigger of—I guess the embrace of the change and the desire to make the change. I didn't know then I would become a public speaker either. But I think that was the first spark.

Kim: I think it is so powerful as I listen to your story how these men, they probably had no idea what type of life you came from but all they were doing was humbly asking for help for what they were going through. They probably had no idea the impact that their genuine heart expression would have on you.

S. Todd: Well to this day. I was recently at my home church for an event and so I get to see people I haven't seen for years and they're so excited. They're like "Man, we could see as you were growing God was doing something in your life," but they're just very excited and overwhelmed by what God did.

I think that you're absolutely right. I don't think they were there with the intention of having a moving, life-shaking impact on one of the guys that was visiting. They were just being authentic selves and humbled before the Lord. But that affected me and that has become the formula. I believe God uses His Word; He uses His people; and He uses His Spirit and the quality of interaction with God's people.

So that's one of my driving forces. One of the verses says a pastor should be given to hospitality. I think that everybody should be made comfortable, as comfortable as possible, and I have that expectation of my congregation / of my family because we don't know where a person is coming from and we can't figure it out.

But what we can do is deliberately create an environment much like a hotel that bends over backwards so that from the time you walk in the door 'til the time you walk out, you have an experience in terms of hospitality that is second to none. I think that that's part of the driving force there because those individuals changed my life just by the welcome environment.

Kim: Yes. Shortly after you visited church you started to get very involved. You talked about how you went to just about every Bible study and opportunity there was to learn more about Christ and the Bible, and then you began to sense a call on your life into ministry. What were the circumstances surrounding that?

S. Todd: I started studying the Bible. I read through the Bible. My first year of salvation I read through the whole Bible and the scriptures confronted me directly. Prior to reading the scripture I thought I was deep and when you think you're deep you say stuff like: does a tree make a sound in the wilderness when nobody's there? Then you turn it into a big philosophical epic something.

The scriptures countered that with answers to "Why I sin? Why do I think so corruptly?" You know the imagination of man was only evil continually. This is in Genesis chapter six. So this is God's commentary. So my son, don't run with those who are swift to shed blood and do harm to innocent people.

I'm like "Wow! That's who I hung with. That's me and my crew and this is in the scripture?" And you know love your wife as Christ loved the church. "Oh, being a husband is about being a sacrifice and not an abuser."

The scriptures began to counter line by line and as that happened, I began to articulate those philosophies wherever I was. I began to articulate what I learned or what I thought about the scriptures. Unknown to me, God was shaping a public calling, but my pastor saw it and other people saw it. They would say "Say that Reverend. Say that." "No, no, no. I'm not no reverend. I'm just testifying." [Laughter]

I would get invitations and people would ask me to come speak to their kids or come to the picnic and speak to our youth group or come here and say something at the funeral, and I got there and it had Reverend on the program. I was like "Hey, scratch this off. Take that off." I went back to the church and said "Pastor, they keep calling me Reverend." He said, "That's cool as long as you don't." I said "Well I don't. I don't even want them to call me Reverend." He said "Son, God will give evidence. The people knew from Dan to Beersheba that Samuel was a prophet. The people knew that David was anointed by God even when David wasn't in his full expression. It's better that they're calling you what you are because they're seeing evidence."

That kind of helped me begin to embrace what is really a responsibility. When people run from their calling, they're not running from the doing, they're running from the weight of the calling. That began the process of me speaking and what was overwhelming was people began to respond.

They would cry. They would come up. I teach Bible study on baptism. A couple would come up afterwards and say, "Well Bro. Stacy, what do you think we should do about our marriage problems?" I was like "I don't know. I was just teaching this verse right here on baptism."

And so afterwards, the Spirit of the Lord was like “listen, when somebody asks you something—because I speak louder than you and I’m doing more talking than you’re doing—if you don’t know the answer, tell them ‘I’ll tell you what. Let me go back and study it in the scriptures,’ or refer them to somebody because the gift of God does more work than you’re aware of.” So that was an important lesson for me. That was an important lesson.

Kim: What type of people did God bring into your life who really helped make a difference in your walk with God?

S. Todd: A key person was Pop Carrington. I wrote about him in the book. Pop Carrington was a loving man—him and his wife, Bertha. He took me under his wing. Pop Carrington was very influential, very loved, very effective in the city. He visited everybody that was sick. He went to home shelters. He fed people. He intervened and he took me under his wing and began to take me with him to serve communion, to visit the hospital, to visit the community center, and I would watch him work. I’d watch him engage people. He never rejected anybody. He loved everybody.

Then he would say “Okay, now, I want to take you. This time I’m going to step back and you’re going to do the communion or you’re going to lead in the song or you’re going to speak to this group.” I said “What? No,” and he said “No, no, no.” Because I felt like—I was so excited about being saved, I didn’t want to mess it up. Like “if we go to the community center, somebody might be there that I had a fight with, and I don’t want to mess up Jesus’ name.” [Laughter]

He said “Well here’s what you’re going to do. You’re going to testify how Jesus changed you and then they’ll understand.” I said “Okay, that *sounds* good.” It wasn’t until I tried it and those type of things happened.

One of the ministers took me unto the street corner and he said we’re going to pass out tracks and we’re going to use the microphone. They went through the city, got the corner, took care of all the legal aspects and we had that spot for two hours. I’m thinking my job is going to be to pass out tracks. Eventually, he hands me the bullhorn and says, “I want you to share your testimony.” I’m like “No,” and he’s insistent.

Kim: What was that like for you? These are the same streets—

S. Todd: These are the same streets.

Kim: —you were doing the opposite of what Christ would want you to do and then not only are you taken there to witness / to share Christ, you can’t do it quietly. You have a bullhorn. [Laughter]

S. Todd: Yes, yes. Definitely not a secret. I don't know if there's room for 007 Christians.

Kim: Secret agent.

S. Todd: Yes, secret agent. In my case there's a public calling that's evolving and I'm figuring that out. But what that's like is a great definition of what Christianity is like.

Diamonds initiate in the rough and they're a rock down in the deep dark place. They have to be dug out and when you dig it out it's just a dark rock. There's nothing glamorous about it. But then an expert brings it into the laboratory and begins to chip and cut and as those chips and cuts take place there are facets that begin to manifest.

I think that's what God was doing. Once he gave me the bullhorn, I was nervous at first but then he had to stop me to get it back because I had so much testimony to give. I think that's the diamond coming back to the place it was taken out of saying "Hey guys, what He did for me, He can do for you."

One of the most moving times was a funeral. One of my closest friends, his mom which is like my mom passed away. You know what I mean. We were that close. My mom was his mom. His mom's my mom. He's like "I want you to do the funeral." I'm like "What? No, I just want to come and grieve." He's like "No."

They had all recognized something was going on in my life even though they stayed away from me. They called me a holy roller. But when things go wrong, they called on me. I came and did the funeral, long story short. One of the pastors advised me on what to do. I didn't have a license. I wasn't licensed to preach at this time.

At that funeral, I'm in a room with 150 old friends and they know me from when. Here I am leading the funeral and I have to minister the Word. It's amazing. God insulated me. I felt an insulation so that I could accomplish what I was supposed to do. Afterwards at the end, I gave an invitation at the funeral. Twenty people got saved.

Kim: Oh, my goodness.

S. Todd: Their point was if God can do this for you, He can do it for me. And then after the funeral as we were getting into the cars it was like the insulation fell off and I began to weep and cry. They said "Don't cry now. You've been strong." I said "No, no, no. Listen, I've been strong because the grace of God empowered me to do a task but now, I'm still the guy who's grieving over her loss. So, let me cry."

That was one of the moments when I realized how important it is to be able to go back to where you came from and be a servant or a testimony to the people that God saved you from among.

Kim: One of those people that God sent you during that time was a woman named Cleo. Tell me about her. How did you meet? How did she impact your life during those years?

S. Todd: Cleo is my fine, foxy, fabulous wife. We just celebrated 30 years in September of last year and we're getting ready to perform in February the Song of Solomon. I'm Solomon and she's the Shulamite and we're going to do a dramatic performance.

But Cleo, we met at church and I remember two things. One night I was walking her home. One of the things God did was He defined for me church with Paul. Timothy, treat the older men as fathers. Don't rebuke them but entreat them as a father. The older women as mothers. The younger women as sisters with all purity and the younger men as brothers.

Well that defined what I came to realize would be my definition from a pastoral perspective. Treat the men as fathers. Respect them even though they're older than you. Some of them may even have an issue with your age; respect them. The women—respect them. The women sisters with all purity. That helped me understand how to treat the women.

I treated her as a sister, and I was walking her home and her boyfriend at the time shows up. He pulls up and so I'm like "Okay, well look—" and she's like "No, don't move." Oh, so I'm like "oh, okay, somethings wrong here." So, I stand and I literally stood over against the wall and made a gesture like I had a weapon because it was that kind of tension.

Kim: Okay.

S. Todd: He looked at that, said a few words to her and then he pulled off. So that engaged a conversation for me. "Okay, so what's going on? Do I need to be concerned?"

Because she was one of our members / one of the sisters at the church and her brother was my friend. That initiated a conversation with us. Next thing I know, she's letting me know she's not with him no more and we go on this date.

I take her on this picnic. We don't have no money. I got to mind you at this time I don't have no money because I'm obeying the law. I'm teaching Sunday school and I'm broke. I know she loved me for who I am. [Laughter]

We go on this picnic. We take a bus and go to New Jersey. She has a picnic basket. We have a couple of books / the Bible and we sit under a tree. We eat and we talk, and we read a couple of passages to one another and it turns out that I'm really impressed with her and then she's got this black dress on. She's beautiful. They have this wall ball

thing at the park. It's like tennis for one person where there's a wall, and the tennis net is drawn onto the wall so one person could play.

Kim: Okay.

S. Todd: I pick up a tennis ball and I start playing wall ball. My expectation is she's going to watch and she's going to comment. She steps into the game and starts playing wall ball with this black dress on. I'm like "What?! Wait a minute. You're fine. You're fun and you're energetic." So that was it. That was it. That was it. We took the bus back home and I asked Cleo. I said "Cleo, what do you want with me?" She said "Honestly, I'm going to be your wife." I thought "Okay. Okay." I wasn't asking for all of that, but she dropped a bomb like that. She was absolutely right.

Two years later, we were married, and we just had such fun. It was easy. We could talk to one another. Cleo is deeply spiritual / deeply connected to God. I tell men all the time: let God bring your Eve to you. I tell women the same thing: don't wake Adam up too fast because you may want to spend the rest of your time putting him back to sleep. [Laughter] Let God wake him up.

But long story short, we've had three children. Our children now have grandchildren. We've traveled the world together. We've served together. We came up with a philosophy early on when we were dating: the two shall become one. That's right out of the scriptures. But for us it didn't mean you work your job; I'll work my job and then we come back, and we only have a few hours in the evening to eat / you know sleep. Let's build a life together where we journey together. And that's what we've done. We got our PhD together. We lead the church together. We raised our kids together. We both teach physical fitness together.

Kim: And you both drive motorcycles; is that right?

S. Todd: Yes. So, me, Cleo, Todd, and Elaina. Tiffany's the youngest but all five of us make up a family. Four of us have motorcycle licenses. [Laughter]

Kim: Wow! It's a family affair.

S. Todd: Yes.

Kim: I love that. What has God taught you about dealing with pain and shame?

S. Todd: Pain and shame. I think first of all, they're real. Don't run from them. Don't act like they don't exist. I think that pain is different in its characteristic from shame. Pain has beneficial properties. We have a touch receptor in our body. You get close to heat that receptor generates in the pain, translates a message to your head. Your head translates a message back to your hand: move!

Pain which is necessary in life—Christ on the cross is a great example of pain with a purpose. I don't think pain is avoidable. I think we must learn to relegate and delegate what we want to do with pain. How do I want to use my pain? I don't think anybody can escape it. I think it's all forms of pain.

Shame on the other hand—I think shame and guilt are a team that work for the adversary. I'll give you a perfect example. Guilt shame is different than conviction. If you come to a red light or let's say you're driving, and the light turns yellow—that means caution. So everything internally should shift.

You begin to readjust your position, how you manage your body, how you control the car, and your position in society. That yellow light turns to a red light which full stop, but the yellow prepared you for that. Once you're finished stopping, the light turns green and you simply go. I think that's conviction.

Conviction gets your attention / causes you to stop a behavior for the benefit of the intersection. And then, the light turns green and you go. Guilt on the other hand rides you. Shame rides you and debilitates you throughout the whole ride to cause you to stop / to simply misfire / to simply malfunction. I think that pain is more productive. It can be more productive, I should say, than shame.

Kim: Okay. In your book you talk a lot about our need to get up—our need to get up. Do you believe we can deceive ourselves into thinking we've gotten up but in reality, we are basically still living in subjection to our circumstances or our pain?

S. Todd: I think yes. I think there are particularly in a generation that has deferred the imagination or the sense of responsibility to technology. People assume they have real relationships through technology. People assume that they are more successful than they are with time management because they're successful at beating a video game or you know [Laughter] So I think it's very possible to convince yourself that you've gotten up in an area that you haven't.

Kim: If you're in a situation like that, how do you figure out that you really haven't gotten up? You're just coping.

S. Todd: I think accountability. Honest relationship like a friend sticks closer than a brother. The wounds of a friend are faithful. The kisses of an enemy are deceitful. A friend is not the person that watches you go off a cliff and doesn't say anything because they don't want to hurt your feelings. That's an enemy. A friend will wound you to help you.

Let's take American Idol. What makes American Idol such a fun show is partially the auditions. Because you get to see these people who are convinced they can sing.

Kim: Right.

S. Todd: And the reason people love Simon is because Simon says, “No you can’t.” I think we need that person in our life to help us find that balance when we would deceive ourselves.

Kim: You’re so right. Every time I see that show and I see those early auditions I’m thinking Does this person not have any friends that will speak truth to them about this?

S. Todd: Exactly; exactly.

Kim: In your book you write that you believe that we can get mileage out of our trials based on how we interpret it. Explain what you mean by that.

S. Todd: I think a good biblical parallel is Joseph. I love the model that Joseph gives because he has a dream. Then he’s victimized as an innocent. He’s falsely accused. He’s thrown into a pit. He’s left for dead. His brothers lie to his father. Then Joseph is taken out of the pit and taken to Potiphar’s house and he becomes functional and he’s successful at Potiphar’s house. Then he’s falsely accused at Potiphar’s house—winds up in a prison then the palace.

There’s a theme there. What makes Joseph hold on? It’s because he has his dream. He refuses to let go of the dream. I think that this journey that we’re on requires us to cling to getting up. Getting up every day.

You got to get up after you succeed. You got to get up after you fall. You got to get up after the failure. I think that Joseph is a great model because he held to his dream no matter what. Receive the dream in his youth; manifest the dream in his maturity as a man. I think that spectrum is part of the process of becoming what you thought you couldn’t become.

Kim: So you say in order for us to overcome those challenges we need to hold on to our dream but I want to ask you about those who maybe still have on those shades of hopelessness / those lenses they’re looking through and they can’t even bring themselves to dream. How does a person get up after they’ve suffered great trauma and great pain? What are some practical things they can do?

S. Todd: Again, I want to defer to people. I think that it’s important to seek out communities, people, relationships that are the solution to your frustrations. I know that’s scary sometimes. I went parachuting—me and my son went skydiving. He wants to do it as a norm. I said “Okay, I’ll visit this with you from time to time.” It felt good that we connected with professional skydivers. [Laughter] So they created the sense of security while I took the risk. We did it in tandem. But they walk you through it.

I think many times when you’ve lost your dream—the absence of trustworthy people or context—it compounds the hopelessness, or the futility and those glasses stay on. But I

need somebody who comes up to me and says “Listen, let me take these glasses off because you can’t really see out of them—

Kim: Right.

S. Todd: —and let me show you.” I know that because that’s what my role has become. We both do it gently, but we do it definitely.

Kim: That’s good. That’s good. As I think about your personal story and mine, the scripture comes to mind: 1 Corinthians 1 verses 26-28. I’m going to read that. It says

“Brothers, consider the time of your calling, not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong; He chose the lowly and despised things of the world, and the things that are not to nullify the things that are so that no one may boast in his presence.”

S. Todd: You know it’s a very powerful paradox in that verse. He chose the foolish to outsmart the wise. He chooses the weak to overpower the strong. He chooses the low things to ascend above the high things. What that verse does is Christ presents himself in a manger. He’s King of kings, Lord of lords all glorious and yet his birth takes place where the lowest level of society is accessible to him.

I think if we accept that “I am weak, I am broken, I did mess up.” I did a tv interview in Milwaukee and they asked me a similar question and my answer was: “Yes, I did the things you said I did but I’m not who you say I am and that’s because even though I was nothing or foolish or the least, He takes that which is nothing and turns it into something and it’s a transfer of hope that changes everything.”

Kim: I recently directed an outreach for 60 single moms from under resourced communities in Chicago. Now these were women who are hurting / struggling to overcome the challenges of poverty, depression, addiction, abuse, and some of them feel like the world is against them and there is absolutely no hope for a better life.

But in listening to Dr. Townsend’s story, I think it’s proof that there is hope—that when Christ intervenes, He is able to transform our lives. But you know what? So many of us we’re trapped by our circumstances and sometimes we believe that we’re not enough. We’re not smart enough or talented enough.

But if we’re just able to get to know the God who created us / the one who knows our purpose, and if we could just embrace our unique gifts and talents and step out in faith beyond any limited expectations, then I believe with all my heart that God will use us in ways we never thought possible.

Most of us will likely have to go through some difficult things at one time or another. But God has a purpose for all of it. He will even use those tough times to bring us into a place of hope. Romans 5 says “and we exult in hope of the glory of God. And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”

In his book, *Getting Up From Being Down*, Dr. Townsend shows us how we can successfully walk through some of the challenges we face. He helps us to understand why we sometimes do the things we do and believe the things we believe. He demonstrates how to move from a cycle of defeat to ongoing victory through Christ.

If you want to find out more about Dr. Townsend or his book, check out today’s show notes. And if you enjoyed today’s conversation, I hope you’ll consider subscribing to the podcast. You can search for *Unfavorable Odds* on Apple podcasts, or Stitcher or wherever you go for podcasts. By the way, we’d love to get your feedback, and if you have some nice things to say, positive reviews are greatly appreciated.

And if I can ask you a big favor. Help us spread the word about our podcast. Maybe think about one or two people you think might enjoy or benefit from listening and pass on the information for *Unfavorable Odds*. I’d greatly appreciate it.

Next time on *Unfavorable Odds*.

Vicki: My mom was a beautiful woman. She was a *high* perfectionist and that was very difficult. She had me weigh myself every morning and report to her what it said, and if it wasn’t what she wanted me to weigh, I was grounded.

Kim: That’s Vicki Rose, next time.

I’m Kim Anthony. Thanks for listening to this episode of *Unfavorable Odds*.

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