

Unfavorable Odds

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Episode 15: My Affliction for His Glory

Guest: Daniel Ritchie
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Daniel: What took place in the delivery room when I came into the world was—it was pretty much a surprise. I think leading in, my mom had the same thoughts and dreams a lot of parents are going to have. Like, “I’m going to have this healthy baby boy,” and the dreams of what a future might be.

So as I come into the world, it really honestly was just complete and total shock to everyone in the room. Because I come into this world and I don’t have either one of my arms. Nobody knew that was coming and then to top everything else off, I’m also not breathing, and the doctor can’t pick up any vital signs at all.

So the doctor there, holding me, tries to feel a pulse and he can’t really discern one. So he holds me up to my dad so Dad can see that I don’t have arms and then he asked my dad “Do you want us to let him go?”

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

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

When I share my own personal story about overcoming unfavorable odds, I always make it a point to share that for the first 18 or 19 years of my life I was told I was a mistake. I was treated like a mistake and worse than all of that, I actually believed I was a mistake.

But when Jesus became Lord of my life, I began to read God’s Word and understand and embrace *His* view of me. I came to realize that my life wasn’t a mistake after all.

Well, Daniel Ritchie dealt with a similar belief. But instead of being a result of an unplanned pregnancy like I was, he was planned. But he was born without arms. The title of his book is *My Affliction for His Glory*. The subtitle is *Living Out Your Identity in Christ*. Daniel and I had a conversation recently and one of the things we talked about is how embracing his own identity in Christ helped him to overcome the obstacles he faced.

Daniel: He holds me up to my dad so Dad can see that I don't have arms and then he asked my dad "Do you want us to let him go?" I'm super, super thankful I had a dad that was—He saw through all the fear and the shock and he was like "Man, that's my boy so you do whatever it takes to bring him back." And by God's grace, that's the case. But man those first few minutes of my life were definitely touch and go.

Kim: That's incredible that your father was able to see beyond what could be just a devastating life for a child with no arms. He saw perhaps that you were still God's child and you were his child more so, right?

Daniel: Yes, yes. Absolutely. Absolutely. I think in his eyes almost this instant bond of just like no, that's *my* boy and for a dad who was—I mean my dad is a hyper introvert. He is not one to really engage with others, but I think from that moment him and I we had this bond that was just like—It's hard to put into words. He was just one of those dudes even though he never really expressed much, man, I always knew he was on my side and he was for me. That showed itself really there even in those first few seconds.

Kim: That is amazing. I love that story. Now, tell me what those early years for you were like.

Daniel: I think for me it was just kind of life is normal. I didn't know any better. I think in those early years, I didn't realize I was truly different and even growing up what we would think of as what our kids do.

I have a three-year-old and a seven-year-old. Just as innately as they play with toys and try to eat / try to color with their hands, it was that same sort of innate sense that God had written on my heart. That "Hey, little buddy I didn't give you hands. I gave you feet. I just very naturally would play with Hot Wheels cars or Legos with my toes or try to eat with my feet.

There were certainly times when there was struggle because a lot of the things that I learned to do with my feet were trial and error. So with no one to show me how to do things with my feet, there were a lot of "Okay, let me try it this way and see if it works," and I would fail. I'd try it another way and fail.

So there definitely were times when there was a true road block or when there was a true issue with me trying to figure out how to do things. It really was a struggle and it was frustrating.

My parents, again, like I think with the bonding I had with my dad, he was the one that pushed me and challenged me and mom—My mom was like your sugary sweet southern woman. So she would pick all the pieces back up when I would get frustrated and give up or just get mad. So they really were the perfect dynamic duo that pushed me through in those early years.

Kim: There's this story you tell in your book about how you figured out how to get your hot wheels from one room to another. Do you remember that story?

Daniel: [Laughter] I do. I do. I think one of the things that people with arms take for granted is it isn't so simple for me to carry things. Especially as a kid, I realized for me to pick up anything is literally for me to pick it up in between my big toe and that long toe.

I realized in terms of Hot Wheels cars, man, you can only get so far with two Hot Wheels cars—you know, one in each foot. So I figured out: I can get my Easter basket out of the closet. I can load up as many Hot Wheels cars as I can. I can stick my head through it and wear it around almost like a little necklace. That's how in those early days I learned how to carry a lot of things around the house and get them from point A to point B.

Kim: I love that story. You talk about how you searched around and tried to figure out: Okay, what can I do? So your problem-solving skills are strong.

Daniel: Yes, yes. That really was one of the things that again, I'm super thankful God gave me kind of a quick mind. Just the ability to access and figure out. My parents obviously couldn't show me as a kid how to stick a crayon in between my toes and color.

So what I would do is I would just see how people would do things and I would try to replicate the end result but try to find my own way to that point. So I think God has been sharpening that skill really even since day one.

Kim: I love that. How did people respond to you when you went out in public with your parents?

Daniel: It was a mixed bag. People at times would definitely be kind and gracious. I grew up in the South. I grew up in North Carolina and so there is sort of this genial sort of way that you approach other people. I think the times that really do lodge into my brain, especially from those early years, it's the going to the grocery store with mom and people literally stopping in the middle of the aisle to stare at me and watch me walk by. Or watching people mutter under their breath when they see me. It's literally people pointing.

There were times when people would audibly say things like "Oh, he's gross. He's a weirdo." I remember a couple of different occasions we were asked to leave restaurants as a family because I'm sitting up there with my feet up on the table. My parents even tried to explain—like "No, that's the only way he can eat." We were still asked to leave.

So there definitely, I think as I got into the latter part of elementary school, it went from "This is just my normal life." to "Wait, my normal life is not like *anyone* else's." So I did

start to feel different and out of place and I think, maybe, even at times not human. Like I'm not like everyone else. I'm more of a sideshow than anything else.

Kim: I would like to get more into that as far as how it made you feel when people said certain things. When you and your family were asked to leave a restaurant, what did that do to you?

Daniel: I think in my mind I couldn't understand. Like what do they want me to do? I cannot as a kid wrap my brain around the fact that people are going to treat me different for something I can't help and something I can't change. For me, there's no other option other than to just crawl in a hole and never come out, and eventually, that became my response.

Because I think a lot of us when we think of those middle school days, we're just awkward. We're all trying to figure out life and to have that on top of everything else, I genuinely just started to hate going out. I started to hate people, but I wouldn't show it. Because again I didn't want people to judge me.

Like the most important thing in my life at that time was what people thought. That was as good as "Oh, he's an inspiration," or that was as bad as "This kid's a freak." So my life, man, probably from age 10 to age 15 was just this rollercoaster. Which eventually just—I think especially in those mid-teens, I was just miserable. I hated myself. I thought God didn't love me because God didn't make me like everybody else.

Man it was just this laundry list of darkness and frustration and just anger at God / at others. It was probably *the* most miserable time of my life.

Kim: What did your parents do to help you to adjust to being different from everybody else?

Daniel: They tried their best. They tried their best to expose me to other people that maybe, they were different like I was different.

But I mean it was still in my mind I sat there and went "Yes, sure people in wheelchairs like they have other people that know what they are going through. Or blind / deaf people, they have community."

Like in terms of people that are missing both of their arms, there's just not many of us. So as a kid, I just felt like man, people don't understand. They think they know but they don't. That just led to the isolation even more because I felt like I didn't have a people. I felt like I didn't have anybody who could just come to me and go "Man, I know exactly what you're going through." It was tough.

That was the one thing where as much as I grew up being able to watch others and see the end result of what they would do and replicate it, that was the one thing I couldn't

trouble shoot and I couldn't figure out how to adapt to was just man this identity issue that I was going through.

Kim: But at some point, you did have a friend. His name is Andy.

Daniel: Yes.

Kim: Describe what that friendship was like and how Andy impacted your life.

Daniel: Yes. So Andy was a dude that—man, he shows up in those early years. We literally met in kindergarten. Honestly, I remember going “Okay, he’s going to be my friend” because he was literally the biggest kid in the kindergarten class. So I was like “A little armless kid needs a big wingman to keep from getting bullied.” That was one of my thoughts going in. [Laughter]

But he was just a dude that, even in those early years, was just super even keeled / was always just the same kind of guy / took people for who they are. I mean he still does. He’s my best friend. He came to our south—to where I live now, and we hung out for the day. He’s just a solid dude. Especially in those early days, he was like the one friend I could really lean on and count on.

Kim: You did some *crazy* things. [Laughter]

You did some wild things with Andy. Tell me some of the shenanigans you guys were up to.

Daniel: Yes, so I grew up in a town of 600 people in the middle of North Carolina. So there’s not a whole lot to do. When we would hang out, we would make our own fun. He was the guy that taught me how to ice skate which as an armless guy is a little bit of an occupational hazard. [Laughter]

We would play street hockey in his driveway. We would go out in the woods behind his house—build forts / climb trees which again armless people climbing trees doesn’t always work out super well.

We developed a game we called go cart frisbee. He was a bigger dude especially when we were kids. So he could throw a frisbee a country mile. So I would sit in a go cart and he’d throw it. I’d step on the gas and I would catch the frisbee with my teeth while driving a go cart. It was fun.

Kim: Do you think that helped you when it came to redefining your identity as a young person?

Daniel: Yes, I think having that sort of relationship with him and seeing just the ease that was there in terms of looking past who I was and what I looked like. It was super helpful.

I mean, ultimately, the most redefining, identity shaping moment of my life was truly trusting Jesus as my everything when I was 15. That was what shifted everything in terms of: okay, I'm not seeing my life through how other people see it. I'm seeing my life through how God sees it and His intent and His purpose and His craftsmanship and knowing and understanding, I think that up until that point, my whole life I'd spent seeing it as if God loved me, He would have done something different.

If God loved me, He would have come to me on my terms, and to see my life and my salvation through like the person and the work of Jesus, that's what changed everything. Because it was like I wasn't as good as what people said. I was as good as the fact that now through what Christ has done, I'm adopted. I'm loved. I'm sent out. That single handedly redefined everything about me.

Kim: In Psalm 139, David says "I'm fearfully and wonderfully made." Now some people might have a problem applying that verse to anyone who doesn't look or function like what they believe is normal. But you confidently talk about this verse in regard to the blind beggar in scripture, and you also confidently talk about this verse applying to yourself. How did you get to that place?

Daniel: I mean it definitely took a while because I think yes, sure in those early years of just like my Christian walk, it's like Okay, I know God made me this way.

But the question still lingered: Why? Like God, why would you do this? God, why does it have to be in this package and this sort of frustration that I'm having to deal with?

What I started to see, and especially in that blind beggar in John 9, Jesus and the disciples, they see this guy and the disciples asked "Jesus, Rabbi, who sinned that this man was born this way?" And Jesus says, "Well he was born this way so that the works of God can be displayed in his life."

I think to see the fact that later on in John 9 Jesus goes on to heal this guy. But Jesus very clearly says "I made him blind so that the works of God can be displayed in his life." Not I'm going to heal him so that the works of God can be displayed in his life. It's like even in his difference or even as Paul says in Corinthians, "It's in our weakness that God's strength and power is made perfect."

So for me to see God's purpose in and through how He's made me, and ultimately, in just displaying His strength / His glory, that's when things started to change. Instead of seeing my armlessness as true weakness to see my armlessness as a strength of mine and really, even as a tool that I can use to display His glory and strength to the watching world.

Kim: Even with this new view of yourself, did you ever have any fears that you still had to overcome?

Daniel: Yes, I mean especially as I got older, and when I say older—into my 20's thinking "Who wants to marry this? Who wants to marry an armless guy? Or especially an armless pastor?"

Not only do you get the fishbowl of my life in terms of going out in public and getting stared at. But then there's the fishbowl of being a pastor's wife. Like who wants to do that? I had fears of: what about my kids? Like is this genetic? Am I going to have kids who are going to be born without their arms and face the same identity issues that I face?

Okay, even if I do have kids with arms, what are they going to think about their dad that can't even play catch in the backyard or the dad that scoop them up in their arms? There were still so many things where it's just like I know my personal worth and value. I think just trying to understand corporately like how that played out in some of my most important relationships, that's where the fear really started to come in even after having my personal identity reshaped through Christ.

Kim: How did you overcome those fears?

Daniel: Well, I think in terms of the fear of not having anybody marry me—like when I first met my wife, we were serving in camp ministry in college. I remember meeting her and really early on like—So many people when they first meet me, they're like that is so amazing. He does everything with his feet. She met me and was like what else is he going to do? Like she was not impressed.

I remember looking at this girl going "Alright, I can dig that!" Like she saw right through the exterior and through all the surfacy stuff and just saw me for who I was. I think to know that there's people that can see through the most noticeable thing about me, I think that was the thing that gave me hope.

It's like alright God in His grace can even provide this worldview lens to other people where they can see through so many of the things that others can get hung up on and just focus on who I am in terms of how God's made me.

Kim: I want to take you back to when you really started to embrace that you were made in the image of God—fearfully and wonderfully made. What does being made in the image of God mean?—Not only for you, but for all of us?

Daniel: It's the fact that when we see back in Genesis, chapter one, we see this conversation among the Trinity where they basically say "Let us make man in our image."

And really all of scripture following is just the story that God has made each and every one of us to reflect His glory and His grace in all the earth. And to know that like being made in His image has absolutely nothing to do with what's on the exterior.

Because we can look around this planet and there's all sorts of skin tones and shapes and sizes and heights and weights and talents and gifts and abilities. But the beautiful thing about being made in the image of God is it is our wonderful opportunity that we have to relate to Him as adopted children. Like to be grafted into His family through what Jesus has done.

I think to know that sort of relationship, that's the likeness / that's the relational likeness that no other creature on this planet has. Like no other crawling creeping thing can relate to God like we can. That's the sort of likeness that we look to. Not on the surface, but in terms of what goes on on the inside. Especially in terms of being a rescued and redeemed son or daughter of God. But then also to see the fact that now that we have this grace, we go, and we display.

Just like we see in Romans 1, that God displays His character through the things that He's made. So for us, by being made by Him, we just go, and we display by trusting and resting in Him. So that's that likeness. That's what not only knowing that we're made but living like we know that He's made us for this time and for this purpose.

Kim: Living like we know that we were made for this time and for His purpose. As you were talking, I began to get these flashes of parents—mothers and fathers—who have children who were born with disabilities who aren't able to grasp what you just said. They're not seeing that their own children are still made in the image of God. What do you say to that parent?

Daniel: I think it's to weep with them. To know and understand it's like yes, sure I have the opportunity to sit here and talk about all these remarkable things that God has done. But it's still realizing that my parents sat in the midst of five years of me being in darkness and isolation, bitterness and frustration, and hatred.

All of these years that God has shown Himself as good and gracious in redeeming my weakness, it doesn't cancel out just those five horrific years. Or even, I think for my parents, those first 15 years, everything was a struggle: getting me into school, getting me a driver's license, figuring out how can this kid function as an independent adult? There was just nothing easy.

So for parents that are listening and they look at their child with autism / their child that doesn't have fully functioning legs / their child that has speech difficulties-learning difficulties, I think the beautiful thing in all of this is that at the end of the day, bare minimum,—our beautiful kids that we have—they display God's glory and grace to us. At the very least, those kids are there to sanctify us.

When we think of that picture in Romans chapter five—that when we were completely weak to remedy our situation in terms of being sinful people in view of the holy and all powerful and sovereign God—that He sends His Son in our mess to fix what we couldn't fix and to do what we couldn't do.

The picture that we see I think in parenthood—especially with kids with disabilities / kids that can't fend for themselves—we see the picture of what God does for us. He does the things that helpless humanity could never do. But God in His grace steps in and He does.

So maybe for the parents that are listening here and that are struggling—just by parenting, you're the living breathing picture of the gospel itself. I know sometimes that doesn't make the pain go away and the frustration go away. But there is purpose, there is grace, and there even is the gospel on display as you interact and love and serve your child.

Kim: In the midst of your answer to my last question, you mentioned the word hatred. Who did you have hatred for?

Daniel: Generally, everyone. I really got to the point especially as a teenager where I assumed that people just couldn't look past the exterior. Because the one thing I hated about myself was being armless, and the one thing people always noticed about me was being armless. So it's like the most pronounced thing about who I was was the first impression everyone ever got.

So to me it was just like I hate people because they can't see me for me. They just see me as a sideshow or as a circus act. I just generally hated people. But I think that in ways that only God can do. Not only does God as He rescues and redeems me, changes my perspective of people.

Because once I saw the transformation in my own heart / once I saw my identity being shaped and rested on who Jesus was, now I've gone completely from being bitter and angry and hateful to other people. Now I'm like man God has done so much in my life, I want to tell this to other people. I want other people to have the same hope that I have.

So not only has God changed my hard heart into a compassionate one but then, as only God can do, in the next year, when I was 16 years old, God calls me into ministry. I'm going I just got over hating people and you want me to spend time with crowds of people proclaiming the gospel. Like this is God's complete and perfect sense of well, alright buddy, you've got to trust me.

Even now like I am a completely natural introvert. I would rather be in a dark room reading a book than in a crowd speaking and preaching. But that's what God has called me to and I'm thankful—I mean even after all these years speaking and preaching, I'm still completely dependent because it is not my sweet spot by any means.

Kim: Hey Daniel, I can relate. I am an introvert. [Laughter] I would love to be in a room by myself reading a book also, but yet, God has called me to ministry. Isn't it interesting how sometimes He calls us to do those things that we are so uncomfortable with that we *have* to trust in Him?

Daniel: Yes. I had gone through a lot of things in my mind like God I'll serve you in a ton of different ways, but in my eyes vocational ministry was never it. Like getting up in a crowd full of people and speaking, that was never it.

But I think, again, faith without fully resting in God and His power, truly, it's not even faith in the first place. When I was like a baby Christian, Philippians 4:13 it was like that huge verse, and it was a motivational verse more than anything. But then, what I started to see in terms of studying that scripture, you see at the very end of Philippians 4. It's like the God of the universe, He gives us all of these things including His strength. Not for our good but for His *glory* and to realize that He's holding me up with His righteous right hand so I can go and tell.

I think the thing where my comfort started getting pushed to the side is, I'm not here for me anyways. I'm here by His grace, for His plan, and for His Kingdom. I can't make it about my excuses and my preferences in the first place. That really changed all the whimpering and whining that I wanted to make, especially about Him calling me to go.

Kim: But so many of us think it is about us. It is about our comfort. It is about what we want to do. How did you get to that place?

Daniel: Well I think in my own heart, that was a winnowing and a molding that happened from day one. Because for me there wasn't much comfort in those early years all the way up until now. I didn't fall into that comfort trap very much.

But what I did find in my own heart is I spent an entire lifetime not making excuses in terms of doing things with my feet. But the one thing I would make excuses about was my faith.

My parents made it a cuss word in our house for me to say, "I can't." The moment God calls me into ministry was the moment I said "God, I can't. God, this is too uncomfortable. God, what if it costs me relationships? God, what if it cost me people saying things?"

Because again my greatest idol in my life up until that point was what people thought of me. The one altar I had to go right back to in this sacrifice going into ministry was what people thought of me because at the end of the day if I serve and proclaim the gospel in view of what people think about me first is the moment I start to hedge and cut off parts of the gospel that still need to be there.

I think it was realizing if I truly say God is all powerful and God is good is to trust Him with everything and not just the comfortable and easy parts of our lives.

Kim: That's good. Now you have a lot of opportunities to share your faith. Probably, maybe more opportunities than most of us. You can go to a coffee shop and immediately have an opportunity to impact the life of someone for the kingdom. Tell me more about that.

Daniel: Yes, there's not really much private time in my life once I step out of my house because I mean it's like—and I understand. Like I put myself in people's shoes. If you're sitting there in a coffee shop and there's an armless guy sitting there drinking iced coffee with his feet, you're going to stop and stare.

And eventually quite a few people will work up the nerve and they'll come, and they'll literally sit down at my table. "Hey man, what happened?" I think people are naturally curious. Like how did you get this way? I think a lot of people will say to me "Why are you so happy?" Because I think in worldly terms a guy who doesn't have two arms should be a miserable kid that's holed up in his house not wanting anything to do with anyone.

So it's like in those moments, I get to tell people about how God has reshaped my life and my hope and my purpose and my salvation and all of that because of how He's made me.

I think that the why I asked for all of those years: God, why did you make me this way? In those moments it's really clear. God made me this way because what other guy in ministry has people coming up to him, outside of the walls of the church, asking him for the gospel hope that he has?

I didn't see it as a gift for a long time but now to realize that God in His grace just allows me the opportunity to tell people about His hope because they're asking me. I realize that's a gift that not many people have.

Kim: Is it true that there are times when you are ministering to people and you don't even say a word?

Daniel: Oh, absolutely. Oftentimes because I've got two little kids and when I was writing my first book I would have to get out and go to a coffee shop or something so I could have a little bit more quiet.

I was sitting there, and I was typing, and I was sipping on my coffee and this guy he sits down one of those Starbucks coffee sleeves. I guess you people with hands, so your hands don't get hot when you're holding your coffee. He just slaps it down on my table and he leaves. I was like he just put his trash on my table. Like I was mad. I went to pick it up and throw it away and it falls open and the guy had written this whole note on the

inside of the coffee sleeve. He was just talking about how he had had this terrible day. He had had an argument with his wife. He had a strained relationship with his brother. He was like Man, just watching you live everyday life without asking for help / without being ticked off, it really made an impact.

Thank you. I literally did not say a word to this man, and he said something like that's something only God can do—to take a broken vessel like this and use it for his glory. There are just times I can't even put into words how He can use a kid like me that grew up in the middle of nowhere to display His glory and grace to the watching world.

Kim: And there are people who would not otherwise hear the gospel. Because of your circumstances their hearts are softened. God uses it and what if you weren't saved at birth? What if those doctors didn't bring you back to life?

Daniel: Yes, I mean to think that there's a lot of corners in this world—We see in Iceland / we see in some of those Nordic countries that they boast in near 100% abortion rate on kids with Downs Syndrome.

You see people all the time that it's like in leading up to giving birth, they find out their kid has some sort of disability and the medical community will almost always give a next to negative prognosis. This is going to be nothing but frustration and hardship and trial on you. You shouldn't even deal with this. You shouldn't want to raise this child.

But not just in my story but as I travel the country and speak and meet all of these parents of kids with all sorts of disabilities, every single parent will say man it was worth it. It was worth the hard nights and weeks and years because my kid's beautiful. I love my kid.

Some of them will tell about how God has used their child's disability in the lives of others. But almost every single one of them, it's how God has used their child's disability in their own life to refine and to sanctify. So I think of oftentimes when we're pursuing comfort more than being refined, I think by our hardships like it talks about in 1 Peter, we really do miss the opportunity to bring praise and glory and honor to Christ just through that refining fire.

Kim: You know when I was pregnant with my second child, my husband and my 18-month-old son both came down with the chicken pox. I went to the doctor and her advice to me was to abort my child. She said because the chicken pox virus was in the home, there's a high percentage / a high chance that my child would be born with a disability.

Daniel: Wow.

Kim: I could not believe it. I could not believe it. Of course, I declined her suggestion and I chose to have my baby and he was born healthy. He just turned 22 last week.

Daniel: That's amazing.

Kim: But it just boggles my mind how easily these doctors will say / will tell a young woman to abort her baby.

Daniel: Well, I think that especially in this prolife / prochoice sort of debate, when your greatest value in the world is comfort, you will do almost anything to pursue it. I think that in that doctor's question: Do you want us to let him go?

Behind it was truly just this kid isn't going to live an American dream life. He's not going to get married and have the 2.3 kids and the two-story house with the picket fence. Like he's not going to be able to chase any of those dreams so why bother?

I think that the trap we can fall in, even as the church, when comfort is king, we've missed the point of taking up our cross, denying our self, and following Him. It's whatever inconvenience, whatever pain, whatever frustration may come and He's worth it. He's bigger *than* it. I'm not defined by my pain. I'm refined by it.

The same in my story. I'm not defined by my armlessness. My God has used it to show me more of Him. God has used it to show more of the world His comfort and His strength. So even in our inconvenience and our frustration, God displays Himself and the most important thing, especially as we look at the lives of kids in the womb, they're not an inconvenience. They're the craftsmanship of God and for us to say they're not worth it, is for us to look at them as mere conveniences and inconveniences and not as the handiwork of God.

Kim: There was something you wrote in your book that made me just kind of cringe a little bit. I thought oh, oh. I want to read it to you. It was just a very short sentence. You wrote "Suffering is the brand of the believer." What do you mean by that?

Daniel: I mean I think if you were just to take Hebrews 11—what we call the hall of fame of faith. All of these people that God used for His glory in *grand* ways. Every single one of them had some sort of almost back breaking hardship.

From David losing a child to Moses growing up adopted and then out in the desert. He said he couldn't speak well, whatever that was, all the way up to—we think of guys like Job / the apostle Paul. I think the reason why we identify with them so much is their suffering.

But all through scripture the promise is and especially we see it when Jesus says if they hated me, they're going to hate you. If the son of God had a less than stellar name among the world—like when we think of the Pharisees and the Sadducees—how they hated Him / how they were threatened by Him. If the Son of God was beaten and murdered, why do I as a follower of Him expect anything else? When Jesus is called to take up our cross and deny ourselves, that picture like we think of the cross in 21st

century America. We think of the cross as the thing that is above our baptismal in our churches.

The Jewish readers and the crowds that hear Jesus say that—like Jesus saying take up your execution stake—they're drawing pictures of these guys suffering and bleeding and suffocating on top of Golgotha. That's the pictures Jesus draws in terms of following Him. It's like if you want to follow me, you put it all on the line. Your life, your good name, your comfort, whatever it is, you lay it all down when you take me as Lord and Savior.

Like you're in the South, we want Jesus as Savior—like Christianity is so cultural down here—but nobody wants Him as Lord. Like nobody wants Jesus to call the shots and to have ownership over all that we are, but that's exactly what it means to take him as Lord. Either we take Him as Lord, or we don't take Him at all. Suffering or no suffering.

Kim: Okay. I get it. [Laughter]

But I will tell you it makes me think a lot about life and I won't get into those details of the thoughts that went through my mind because I don't know that I can fully process it in just a few moments. But it really makes me look back at my own life and the different things that I face—that different parts of suffering in my own life or watching a child go through something, those types of things and what you said was really encouraging.

Daniel: Thank you. Thank you.

Kim: Now you mentioned a woman named Heather whom you married. Tell me a little bit about your family.

Daniel: Oh, man. I married up for sure. I mean my first impression of my wife is look at that tall blonde girl. Like I immediately felt out of my league. When we met, it was not fireworks. We met and we didn't talk for like two weeks. But just built this slow relationship. We met in May of 2005 and we were engaged in October without ever having went on a date. I would hang out with her at her folk's house.

Kim: You must have a smooth game. [Laughter]

Daniel: No! No, no. She was the one with the smooth game because I'd go over to her mom's house and her mom would make me home-made ice cream every time I went over. I was like "Girl, your mom is trying to win me over more than you."

But it was just—and I think especially for both of us—when we first met, we were working in ministry with next to no sleep. You're seeing people at their worst. I see this girl who just constantly served and loved and came around some of these teenage girls that would come through the camp that were just—they were broken. She did not shy

away from trying to love and serve those kids. That just absolutely made me fall in love with her. Because I was like here's a girl that gets it.

At the end of the day, this is what God has put us here on this earth. I was like what better best friend and wife to have. Because at this point, I know I'm going into ministry and I'm like what a better right hand than a woman who suffers well and loves well. That was probably one of the biggest things that made me fall in love with her was just her gospel-centered heart. I mean I fell in love. Next week we celebrate 13 years together as a married couple.

Kim: Congratulations!

Daniel: Thank you. Thank you. I know we were saying it just might take. [Laughter] We might be in this for the long haul now.

God has graciously given us two kids. A seven-year-old boy named Teague and a three-year-old girl named Elliott. By God's grace they look like their very beautiful momma. They're the gifts that I think in those early days of me asking why. They're the gifts I never thought I'd have. To think now how God has shown me so much of Himself.

When we talk about Ephesians 5, like in my relationship with Heather, I'm living out the gospel between Christ and his church. As a parent, I'm mirroring the adoption as sons that we see in Romans 8. There have just been so many things where even in the gifts, God has been molding and shaping. It has just been spiritually amazing but then, too, they're the best parts of my day. They're the best parts of my life and I absolutely love the people that God has put under my roof that I get to share this crazy life with.

Kim: Daniel, I have to ask you this. How did you change your children's diapers?

Daniel: Okay, so it's definitely not as easy as everybody else. But I'll take a little changing pad and sit it on the ground. Put my kiddo down on the ground and just by me sitting down with them on the floor, use both feet and get that diaper opened up and get them all cleaned up and strap that diaper back on using both toes.

So it can be a little bit of a pain not having thumbs and wrists to use in the whole situation but there's a way. There's a way to reproduce that end result and I think in the end get a good clean diaper on with no bumps in the road, I guess.

Kim: Well, speaking of bumps in the road, in your book you talk about a time when your wife left you home with your son alone. [Laughter] You had a pretty interesting experience changing his diaper.

Daniel: Oh man, that was like a horror movie. My son, Teague, he is a big boy. He's a big chunky boy. I get the diaper busted open. It was a stinky diaper. Right as I get ready to get my feet in there and start wiping him off with a wet wipe, he unleashes the biggest

sneeze I've ever heard in my life. His tush slaps the top of both of my feet and so I'm doomed. It's like imagine for you guys you're getting poop on both hands and both feet at the same time. I can't touch anything. I can't walk. I'm like "Oh, what am I going to do?"

So I literally nudge my son a toy over to him and I'm like "Can you stay here for like two minutes? I shuffle on my butt all the way into the kitchen. Find a way to get up on the counter and not mess everything up. I washed my feet and I was so terrified that my son was in the other room painting our walls with his tush.

I run back in there and he hadn't moved. He was right where I left him. I'm like "Thank you, Lord" and managed to get him all cleaned up. [Laughter] It definitely—Being a daddy, it's stressful. That's for sure.

Kim: When you got married to Heather, where did you put your wedding ring?

Daniel: Oh man, that's a great question. So we had all sorts of ideas leading in. We could do a toe ring but I'm barefoot all the time. I don't think that's going to work. We thought about doing a ring on a chain around my neck. But I was like there will be times when people won't see that. So I got my left ear the top cartilage pierced and so I put my wedding ring up there. So that way it's always on display and gives me a little bit of street cred maybe.

Kim: There you go. [Laughter]

Daniel: So yes. That's what we did.

Kim: Did you and Heather talk about any adjustments that she would need to get used to having a long-term relationship with you?

Daniel: She's a quick girl. I think she realized real fast going out in public with this guy isn't quite like going out with every other guy. Truly that was the only adjustment. Because like I talked about, she's kind of tough.

So it was just like she didn't let me play the armless card. We had kids and she was like well, you better learn how to change diapers with your feet. Or you better learn how to feed the kids or to make dinner. So there was just kind of this expectation with her. It's like you're not getting away with anything with me. I know how you roll.

So there wasn't much of an adjustment for her in terms of physical life because I do everything with my feet. I'm a terrible basketball player but everything else I can do.

So it was just more the emotional weight of baby we never get a private moment. Like we're going to go out on a date and everybody's going to stare at us. So that was the

one thing she had to get used to. I think it came pretty quick. She was like well this is the man I married so this comes with a package. So she adjusted super quickly.

Kim: How have your children adjusted to that public life?

Daniel: Man, they love it. They're like little hams. They like attention. They both love it. My three-year-old, she is the stereotypical picture of girl, we've got to teach you stranger danger. She's going around all the time like "Hi! I'm Elliott. What's your name?" I'm like "Girl, get away. You don't know them."

My son's going into second grade. So there's definitely times like last year I'm taking him into school and so many times his friends will look and be like "Dude, your dad doesn't have arms. Why doesn't your dad have arms?" For him, he's just like "That's the way God made him." It's really matter of fact.

I'm sure just like as I got older and became more aware this is not typical, I'm sure that will be the case for them. They'll start to realize oh my dad really is different. In their eyes maybe that will start to become a bad thing. But right now, they have just a full-on embrace. This is who my dad is and it's not a thing to them.

I'm super thankful they're not super bothered by it. They know that sure dad can't go in the backyard and play catch like playing baseball but hey dad can throw me up in the air with his feet and catch me so that's pretty cool, too. It's a give and take with them. So I think they even realize that.

Kim: So they haven't had to hear any harsh comments or any insensitive comments?

Daniel: No, because especially in situations where I feel like it's starting to turn south really fast, I'll kind of try to shield them. Or both my wife and I are out, I'll kind of be like alright baby, you take them for a second. Daddy's going to go have a chat.

I try to shield them from the nasty stuff as best I can. I think like a lot of us adults would try to shield kids from more adult and not such family friendly things. But they really haven't seen too many things that would make them cringe or make them mad.

Kim: I guess once you overcame all that you went through when you were younger, I just automatically made this assumption that people no longer approach you with insensitive comments. I guess I'm wrong.

Daniel: Oh yes. We're on a kind of like a family road trip seeing family and friends for like this whole week that we haven't seen in a while. We were at Chick-fil-A a couple of days ago and I'm sitting there, kind of holding the table while my wife gets the food. This guy as he's walking out, he just sees me and he's like "Man, that's super gross. Get your feet off the table," and then just walks out. I'm like seriously.

I was checking out of a restaurant. It was last month. It was on my birthday. I go to pick up my birthday dinner because my wife was super sick. So I was like I'll just get something to go and we'll just eat at the house. I go to pay and the dude's like no don't touch the credit card machine. We don't want your dirty feet on the counter.

I'm like What? While I'm sitting there, he sticks the credit card into the machine and does the little thing. As I'm sitting there waiting on the food, he takes a little sanitary wipe wiping down the whole counter after I had used it. I was like okay I'm gross. I see how it is. So it's like even as a grown man people don't have much of a filter.

So I still get treated pretty rudely on a consistent basis. To me now that's neither here nor there for me. At the end of the day, I know what God says of me and about me and promises to those who trust in Him. I just know they need that same hope and promise that Jesus offers and proclaims just as much as I do. So it just reminds me of why I do what I do.

Kim: You believe you were born to celebrate God's grace. What does celebrating God's grace look like for you?

Daniel: Oh man. I think it's to not only see just the beauty of the big things in our life. Like when I think of the beauty of my salvation or the beauty of the wife that God has given me or the kids that God has given me.

I think to even just celebrate grace in the small things. Because if we're not careful, especially in trial and tribulation, the only thing that we're going to focus on in our pain and in our hurt is the pain itself. If you think of a horse with blinders on it, the only thing that horse can see is right in front of it. Pain does the same thing to us. Oftentimes the only thing we can see is our pain and our tribulation.

But if we're faithful to even, and I know it's not manly, but to journal. To be able to sit down in those moments when maybe I have an encouraging conversation with a random person or with a coworker.

Maybe it is God provides—monetarily provides for your family in just a completely unexpected way. If, man, you just have a great night out with your wife. Maybe you were going for a simple date and it was just such a sweet time and you laughed, and you had in depth conversation. Like those are all things for my wife and I, we call them measures of grace.

Where it's just like God shows himself as good and as loving. Like we see in James: every good and perfect gift comes from him. I think it's to be faithful to remember every good and perfect gift for those times when life doesn't seem very good and the world doesn't seem very loving that we have this laundry list and evidences of God's grace in our life.

So we don't have to sit here and go well God all I see is this pain. All I see is this trial and this darkness and this frustration when maybe all we have to do is take a step back and go I can also see how God has given me so many things by His grace that I don't deserve. So to be able to count grace in our own life is a discipline for those of us who trust in Him. We need to be more faithful to do for those times when it doesn't seem like He's very loving or good.

Kim: You are speaking to me because just yesterday, or the day before, I was on social media—I don't go on very often, but I was on and I just happened to look through some things. For some reason, I all of a sudden felt less than. I started feeling like everybody else's life is so much better than mine. They're accomplishing so much more. They're so much happier. The Lord led me to start writing down things that I was thankful for.

Basically what you were saying. Writing down those things where he has displayed his grace in my life. I was literally on the plane writing down this list of all the things that God had blessed me with and done in my life and it really started to change my mindset. So thank you for sharing that because there may be other people who need to hear that / who need to model and embrace God's grace in a way that they haven't before.

Daniel: Yes, that's right. That's right.

Kim: Now at the end of your book, you share a prayer. Tell me the reason for writing a prayer to the people who read your book.

Daniel: Yes. I wrote the book not as a "hey look at how awesome and inspirational I am." Because my life can't change your life. It can maybe give a little fuel to the fire / a little nudge. But I can't rescue, redeem, give purpose, change hearts, anything.

So to end the book with that prayer, it's the ultimate expression for us to trust that God, I know you're good. God, I know you have purpose. God, I'm going to make my life about that purpose with every breath, with every moment, with every step, it is aimed at Your glory and Your kingdom and what You've called me to do—whatever that is.

So that's why I wanted to end it with a prayer. It's not for people to close the book and go "That was so inspirational. That was so cool."

I want people to almost come away with a so what. It's like as I close the book it's so how do I go and take the life that He's given me and make much of Him with it? At the end of the day, that's my goal with the book. I mean even in the title, My Affliction for His Glory. Even in our affliction and our hurt, how do we take that and how do we us that for his glory?

So my challenge to anybody listening today is God didn't give you excuses. God has given you grace and power and opportunity. So what do we do with that? It's just my

simple prayer that as people step out into their lives, that whatever they're gifted with that it is aimed at God and His glory and that alone.

Kim: One of the things that stood out to me in my conversation with Daniel, is just how generous he is with those that are curious about his life. I mean he allows them to interrupt him while he's having his personal time in a coffee shop. I don't know if I would have it in me to do the same. But I want to.

So what that makes me want to do is to be more willing to adjust my plans. And maybe I could structure my life with more margin so that if God ever schedules a divine appointment for me to engage with someone so that I can show the love of Jesus, I can have the sensitivity to the Spirit of God and the freedom to obey the Spirit.

Another thing that stood out is how he saw his armlessness as a unique and perfect design of God. Now this challenges me to rethink the idea of what *perfect* really is. Is it that which measures up to the standards of man or is it simply that which God designs to fit into his perfect plan? I think the latter.

And if we are using our own standards to determine who is worthy to participate in God's plan, how many of us are missing out on being a part of displaying God's glory to the world because we have disqualified ourselves due to something in our lives that we deem imperfect, not good enough, or a mistake.

I challenge you as I challenge myself to stop making excuses for not doing the things God desires us to do. Let's stop blaming others and let's stop blaming our circumstances. Daniel Ritchie stopped making excuses and if he can do it, we can do it, too.

Thanks for listening. If you'd like more information about Daniel or his book, check out our show notes on the *Unfavorable Odds* page at FamilyLife.com/podcasts.

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Next time on *Unfavorable Odds*, Clementine Bihiga joins me, and we talk about how she was born in Rwanda, survived the genocide there, and immigrated into the US. Her life is marked by tragedy, yet she has this infectious laugh that can only come from knowing a God who sees her pain and is able to give her hope.

Clementine Bihiga, next time.

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

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