

Announcer

Welcome to transformed by the word, a podcast about discovering how to live your life with gratifying purpose. God created you for a reason and the Bible contains the keys to unlock your transformed life. Now, here's your host, Debora Barr

Debora 0:26

Thanks for joining me for Episode 24 of Transformed by the Word.

In the previous episode of the podcast, we discussed sharing personal testimonies, and how that breaks the enemy's power over our lives. Particularly if our personal story involves things that cause us pain, or things that we might be ashamed of. Simply bringing into the light the things that we've experienced, breaks the power that those things may have over our lives. Keeping silent or stuffing deep down inside of us the pain, trauma and hurts that we've experienced, holds us back from becoming all that God has created us to be.

Part of our healing comes from exposing our hurts our pains, our embarrassments, instead of burying them kind of like a wound that needs to be opened up and flushed out to purge an infection wounds that we've experienced in our lives due to things that we have done or things that have happened to us. They need to be opened up and dealt with for complete healing. If we keep those hurts, and pains buried, they're buried alive and they continue to affect us both physically and spiritually.

An important part of our healing process is being able to talk about what we've experienced, and how we've been affected by it. And God might just want to use those experiences that you've gone through to bring glory and honor to him as you minister to other people who are experiencing what you have already come through.

Today, I've invited a special guest to the show. Her name is Reverend Linda Thomas. And since 2005, she has been focusing on increasing awareness to the issues surrounding domestic violence. To that end, she started a domestic violence ministry at the First Baptist Church of Glenarden and she testified before the Maryland State Legislature in support of domestic violence legislation. In 2009, two of these important domestic violence bills were signed into law. Her vision to establish a Family Justice Center in Prince George's County, Maryland was realized on June 9, 2016. This Center serves residents of the county who are victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, human trafficking, and elder abuse. It serves as a one stop shop for victim services, including counseling, processing of protective orders, legal assistance, financial assistance, and a variety of other emergency services. In 2007, Linda was appointed as vice chair of the Prince George's County Commission for women. In 2010, she was appointed to Zonta International Prince George's club. Zonta is an international service organization with the mission of advancing the Status of Women world wide.

Stay tuned. We'll be back in just a moment.

MUSIC INTERLUDE

4:45 Debora

Hey, Linda, I am so honored to have you on the show today to share with my listening audience.

Linda

Oh, thank you, Debora. I am just so honored to be here. It's a special day. May the 22nd, I'll tell you more about that in a second. But it's truly a very special day and I'm honored that you would have me.

4:58 Debora

I was thinking about our mission trip to Peru a couple of years ago, and what a blessing that was to serve with you on the mission field and how much fun we had together.

5:08 Linda

Yeah. You're a brave soul. That's all I can say. You kept me calm in the midst of chaos with big bugs and all those other things that will go on around us. So thank you so much for all that you do.

5:24 Debora

Yeah, we definitely had a great time. And it was wonderful serving, serving together in another country.

5:29 Linda

Absolutely. Can't wait to go back.

5:33 Debora

Today we're discussing exposing the pain of things that we've experienced in our lives, for the main purpose of glorifying God and to help other people who might be experiencing something similar. I know you've devoted years of your life to serving people who are experiencing domestic violence. Would you share with our listeners how this has become your special area of ministry?

5:59 Linda

Well yeah, you know, you mentioned a very important word you said, exposing the pain. And to expose really means to uncover. And, and so there is, first of all, there's no healing in silence. And so it becomes critical that as survivors that we get rid of the shame that's associated with this pain and understand that this happened in our lives for purpose. And, and much greater than then we could imagine I listen, I was pink Cadillacs and diamond rings, the last thing I wanted to do was start a domestic violence ministry, but God, you know, people know me as an award-winning entrepreneur, and with over 25 years in the direct selling industry, but it didn't start there.

You know, I came from very humble beginnings, and I grew up in an all-girl family, I was the youngest of three girls, the granddaughter of a preacher. Deb, I studied hard, I was inducted into the National Honor Society and full scholarship to college. And so why was I not smart enough? To see the red flags? My first semester, I made the Dean's list, my second semester, I fell in love, got married, and nine months later delivered my daughter with a black eye.

Why was I not smart enough to see those red flags. So now, I dedicate my life to every year doing a red flag conference that focuses on prevention. So that young men, young girls can know what the red flags

are. And so that's what we do with those conferences. So, again, you know, I became a mom at 19, and a wife at 19, and a mom at 22, a beautiful daughter. And so God can still bring good out of out of negative experiences in our lives.

8:02 Debora

Yeah, you said something powerful about being smart enough and why you didn't know that this was going to happen. I think there's a lot of stigma around domestic violence and the people who experienced domestic violence that somehow they bring it on themselves.

8:21 Linda

Absolutely. And if for anybody that's listening today, one of the things that I would really want to reiterate, it's not your fault. It's not your fault. The unfortunate thing is, is because of the accusations and criticisms that slowly eat away at self-esteem that survivors begin to blame themselves for the abuse.

And if I could just say, drive that point home today, that it is not your fault that God has a way but still bringing out that beauty in the midst of those ashes. When I mentioned May the 22nd. This is the day, Reverend Deb. And I think about why you and I were going back and forth on the dates. Can we do it on this date night and then we're on May the 22nd, which is today. 2005 is when I stood in front of the First Baptist Church of Glenarden with our pastor, Pastor Jenkins so grateful for he and First Lady and announced to the congregation and the community. A domestic violence ministry.

9:31 Debora

Wow. I had no idea.

9:34 Linda

So this day it just dawned on us like May 22 May 22. I said in the intro, we started the ministry May 22 2005. And so here we are today. So yeah, I am renewed by grace my sister and you know when you have been renewed when you know you think that we just came out of this women's retreat and I'm telling you I'm renewed by grace renewed by law, my faith is renewed. And when you look at that word renewed, it means to be resumed after an interruption.

And so domestic abuse is doesn't define you. It's something that you that happened that came along in your path that, that again. I love your topic that God can still get the glory out of all of this all things still work together for good to those who love the Lord and all the called according to His purpose.

10:29 Debora

That is so true. Linda, when did you personally begin sharing publicly? What had happened to you? And how do you think that it helps you to share your testimony?

10:42 Linda

Absolutely. Oh, my goodness. Again, we announced in 2005. But Reverend Deb, I have to tell you, I've been sort of speaking out against the atrocity of domestic violence for many years. And when you have been renewed when you have been restored, you are compelled to not look down to not judge to not say Why weren't you smart enough? You know, don't you think you deserve more? Why don't you just

leave, when you have gone through those experiences, you are just compelled to help other people, survivors of domestic abuse and, and he has given me God has given me I'm telling you beauty for my ashes. And, you know, my professional, and my personal experiences that really motivated me to want to help other people, even our company has given over 58 million to domestic violence shelters. And so that is why I do what I do, it's I'm better and not bitter. And when you have come through that, you really want to hang your hat on the education, which is the three components, we educate the congregation, engage the community, and empower the survivor. And so it really is about educating before they get into these abusive relationships.

12:15 Debora

I love that your conferences are called Red Flag conferences, because you identify and help women and men to identify the red flags leading up to domestic violence.

12:28 Linda

Absolutely. And I, you know, I tell you, one of my favorite scriptures is found in Romans 12. It says, be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. And that word transform means, you know, that's the metamorphosis that in the Greek means to, you know, a caterpillar that goes into a beautiful butterfly. And I think that is survivors, if they could understand that, that God has called them to, to a life of joy and a life of peace, that they can just renew their minds, no matter what the experiences have been in their childhood, what they saw growing up, you know, just, you know, the hope. And, you know, the bad conflict resolution that was before them, if they can just renew their minds by the word of God, and know that God has created them to be beautiful creatures, then they can move forward as well.

13:32 Debora

One of the things that I think is amazing about you is you've not only just shared your testimony in this area, and tried to help a few people, but you actually took action in the community. And tell us a little bit about your vision and how the Family Justice Center came about.

13:47 Linda

Yeah, well, I tell you, I wish I could tell you that the cycle of violence ended with me, but the most pivotal and painful part of my experience is when I took my daughter to the Montgomery Family Justice Center, we were not visitors, she was a victim. And the unfortunate thing about and this is why we have to break the silence with domestic abuse. If you don't talk about it, it has a tendency to repeat itself. It's generational.

And even if a mom who is pregnant at the time is going through abuse, you're not going through that alone. There is a hormone that's being released that is passed on to your child. And so we have to do that. So, you know, we went there and I'm telling you Reverend Deb, I walked in the door, she was able to get a restraining order, House of Ruth, housing referral, all in one location. I left out of that building, and I stretched my hands to heaven and I said, Lord, we have to have this in Prince George's County. And that's how that that that birthing of that Prince George's Family Justice Center, the first of the centers in Prince George's County was birth.

I didn't stop there, because I understand that, you know, unless laws have passed, it's a it's a cycle that that unfortunately for women, we know that men are survivors as well. But, you know, we have to let our voices be heard and Annapolis. And so I went to Annapolis, testified before the Maryland State Legislature on domestic violence bills and for the first time in 11 years, God had it so that I met with the chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, and he passed a very important bill, which means that whenever survivors are a call is made, that the abusers have to relinquish their firearm. You know, I was not there, you know, not just my testimony. But I had a First Baptist Church Glenarden member sitting beside me that had one of three bullets that were put in her by her dad. And so it was a moving testimony. And I'm so grateful that God gives us that opportunity that he uses us not in spite of all stars, but because of our scars.

16:23 Debora

What would you say to someone who might be angry at God? Right now? Is there listening? angry at him for allowing them to experience the pain and suffering? Like, like what you experienced?

16:35 Linda

Yeah, you know, when I hear suffering, and I see the suffering in our world today, revenue, I'm always reminded of the story of Job. You know, the Bible says the Job was perfect and upright. And one who feared God, but look what happened in his life. The death, you know, domestic violence, can be the death of a relationship, the death of a marriage, Job lost everything, the death of his children, his wealth and domestic violence will put you in situations where you lose the wealth. And so, God, you know, I look at that, and I say, wow, you know, the battle was really not between Job and the devil.

The battle was between God and the devil. God knew that Job could go through this experience, not park the car, not hang out, not put the victim sign around his neck for the rest of his life. He knew that he could go through that experience, and God will still get the glory, you'll get the glory. You know, I'm reminded even of the story of Naomi, and Ruth, you know, she lost she another death, she the death of her husband, the death of her two sons. And when she returned to the land, you know, people said, Oh, it's Naomi. And she said, Don't call me Naomi. Call me Mara, which meant bitter. So God is calling us not to be bitter, but to be better. And that we can go through this by His grace. Because when we're weak, that's when we're strong. And okay, I'm getting excited.

18:26 Debora

Linda, tell me, how do you think your life would be different? If you did not overcome this and expose this pain and begin to serve others in this area? What do you think would be different about your life today?

18:40 Linda

I truly believe that God created us to solve a problem in the earth. I believe that our purpose is to solve a problem in the earth. Rick Warren wrote a book, The Purpose Driven Life and he said, the purpose of our life is far greater than our own personal fulfillment, your peace of mind, or even your happiness. If you want to know why you were placed on this planet, you must begin with God. You were born by his purpose. And for his purpose. God knew that he could trust me to go through this experience, and not again, judge others, but to reach down and pull another brother, another sister. Oh, I love that.

19:35 Debora

You mentioned that book. You I'm sure you don't know this, but the Purpose Driven Life. That particular book is what led me to Christ. When I was going to a church, I really didn't know anything about surrendering my heart to Jesus and the church was doing a 40 days of purpose. Doing a study out of that book, and it was through that book that I surrendered my heart to Jesus and everything about my life changed. And, you know, everything about my life is also wrapped up in the purpose that God had called me to in every single purpose. Every single person has a purpose in life. They just have to surrender to that and do what God's called you and created you to do and to be.

20:20 Linda

Absolutely. And again, some of it, you know, a lot of times it's birthed out of pain, right? We can't relate to those who are going through, but I can't tell you how to be made whole with I've never been broken.

20:33 Debora

That's right. That's right. That's so good. If someone is listening to this message today, and they're currently experiencing domestic violence, what practical steps should they take? What can they do?

20:49 Linda

Well, practically if you're in a domestic violence relationship, please, get help. Get help. Secondly, you're not alone. It's okay to ask for help. You're not alone. One in three women. According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, one in three women, one in seven men have experience this. So you're not alone. It's not your fault. Can I just say that one more time, it's not your fault.

Also, if you're looking for legal services, if you need the how to get a protective order, if you're looking for housing referral, dial 301-780-8008. It is a one stop shop for domestic violence survivors. They're there to help you even during the pandemic, they did not stop even even our support groups that we do every first Saturday of the month, we pivoted immediately, in the month of March, when they shut everything down. We did not shut down. And so if you need the spiritual support, you know where you have other people who have gone through your experiences, please reach out to us at DVFCGlenarden.org.

And so, I really want to reiterate the fact in Psalm 139. It says that it reminds us that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. And when you look at that word, fearfully, it's translated in the Hebrew, it means with great reverence, heartfelt interest, and respect. That God cares that much about you that he made you fearfully and wonderfully and wonderfully translated, made unique and set apart. And so I want to just really, for every survivor that may be listening, please know that God loves you. The Bible says, I know the thoughts that I think to watch you says the Lord, you know, thoughts of good and not evil, domestic abuse is evil.

23:36 Debora

That number you provided, is that just for the local area? Or is that a national number?

23:42 Linda

The National number is one 800 -799-SAFE, s a f e, and I think it's 7233. But it's safe. That's the 24-hour hotline, that will connect you no matter where you are to a domestic violence, shelter, and domestic violence help. And they will even count counsel, you minister to you on the on the call. So that that's a 24-hour hotline that really does work. That 301-780-8008 is for Prince George's County. However, if you call them and you're in Montgomery county, or Charles county, they will refer you to someone in that area as well.

24:33 Debora

Okay, wonderful. We'll put these resources on my website as well. Want to make sure that people have access to that information. Is there anything else that you would like to share with our listeners as we get close to wrapping up?

24:50 Linda

You know, when Jesus walked the face of the earth, in Luke and also in Isaiah chapter 61, verse three it says that the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, he declared, to console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the all of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, that they may be called the trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified.

And so I want to just again, reiterate the fact that God already knew that this would happen in your life. We know that he's not the author of the evil, we know that through bad choices, or not seeing those red flags ahead of time that we get into relationships. But what I love about God, is his GPS system, God's positioning system, instead of a, what's it called Global Positioning? It's God's positioning, he will allow for you turns, he will take what was meant to destroy you, and give you beauty for those ashes.

26:13 Debora

Yeah, that's fantastic. Before I let you go, I would ask that you would pray for those listeners today that are on the line people that may be personally experiencing domestic violence, if you would pray for them.

26:31 Linda

Let's pray. Oh, God, we love you. And we thank you for this special time. God, we can't see the listeners, but you can. And so Lord, I pray for every woman, every man, every little girl, every little boy, who oftentimes have been molested as children and silenced as adults. God that you will heal, everywhere that they hurt. Your word reminds us that you're near to the brokenhearted and that you save those who have a broken spirit.

So Father, I pray by your Divine Presence, that you will right now touch every survivor that may be listening, who's lost hope? Who believes that there's no way out? God, I pray that you will use this platform use this information to change their lives. God, I pray that you will send labourers in their path. godly women and men who was sold out for the kingdom, to bring them to a support group, bring them to an annual conference. And God that they will get the help that they need. We come against through the blood of Christ, the spirit of shame, the spirit of silence, then what happens in this house stays in this house God unveil somebody, to someone, a neighbor or a friend, someone that's going through today. And God we know that all things will work together for good to those that love you, and all the called

according to your purpose. Come comfort, heal and restore as only you can. It is in the name of Jesus that I give you glory. amen, and amen.

28:49 Debora

Amen.

Don't go away. We'll be right back after this short break.

MUSIC INTERLUDE

29:34 Debora

We just heard from Linda Thomas, an advocate for people experiencing domestic violence. She shared with us a phone number, a national hotline where you can get help if you are experiencing domestic violence in the United States. That number is one 800-799-SAFE or 800-799-7233 all of the resources that Linda mentioned are available on my website as extra information for this 24th podcast episode.

Go to TBTWPodcast.com and look for the extras for Episode 24. Linda shared how God has called her to use what she has experienced a dark time in her life, to help others. God might be inviting you to share something that you've experienced. Now, it might not be domestic violence, it might be something else that you have overcome. And if you begin to share about it, you might encourage others who are experiencing the same thing. Your Life has a purpose.

Make sure you're fulfilling the purpose that God has for you. His first concern for you is whether or not you've surrendered your heart to Him. If you've never surrendered your life to Jesus, you can do that right now. It is by faith that we believe that Jesus died on the cross for our sins. And if you're ready to place your trust in the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and receive the forgiveness of your sins. You can pray this prayer with me right now.

God, I confess that I'm a sinner, and I need Jesus in my life. I repent of my sins and I turn toward you. I believe that Jesus died on the cross for my sins. He was buried and he rose from the dead. And I accept this by faith and invite Jesus to be Lord of my life, to reign and to rule in my heart. Thank you for forgiving me and saving me. Amen.

Now if you just made a decision for Christ, I want to hear from you. Please visit my website, TBTWPodcast.com and click the link to let me know about your decision for Christ.

My prayer for you today is that you will expose any areas of deep seated pain in your life to the light of God's Word. And seek a trusted person that you can share your pain with to begin the process of healing.

Stay tuned for our next episode of transformed by the word where we will discuss praising the Lord in all things.

Announcer 32:47

Thank you for listening to transformed by the word with your host Debora Barr, be sure to subscribe to our podcast on iTunes or Google Play and connect with us at TBTWPodcast.com. Until next time, be blessed.