Bob: Lauren Chandler remembers clearly hearing a message on addictions when, all of a sudden, she realized there was some spiritual work that needed to be done in her life.

Lauren: I sat in and listened to this teaching, at the beginning, where the teacher describes this field that someone wants to plant a garden in; but he has to get rid of all the weeds. He mows over them, but they come back; or he pulls them out, but he doesn’t get the roots and everything. I just started breaking down in tears, like: “That’s me! I know I’ve got weeds! I know I’ve got some disordered desires in my heart—that they’re above the Lord. I’ve got these chains on me that I need Him to pull out because I can’t do it anymore.”

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Wednesday, September 20th. Our host is the President of FamilyLife®, Dennis Rainey; and I’m Bob Lepine. We’ll hear from Lauren Chandler today about her journey from bondage to liberation. It’s a great story. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. I have often quoted our guest’s husband, Matt Chandler. Lauren Chandler joins us again—Lauren, welcome back to FamilyLife Today.

Lauren: Thanks for having me.

Dennis: You’re going to be quoting her after today.

Bob: I probably will—

Lauren: [Laughter] That is right.

Bob: —but I’ve heard your husband say to people in your church that—at your church: “It is okay not to be okay,—

Lauren: Yes.

Bob: —“but it’s not okay to stay there.”
Lauren: —“to stay there”; yes.

Bob: I’ve thought, “That beautifully expresses what ought to be all of our hearts—that in every church: ‘It is okay not to be okay.’

Lauren: That’s right.

Bob: “‘It’s just not okay to stay there.’”

Lauren: Right.

Bob: It’s even okay if the pastor’s wife is one of the people who’s not okay; right?

Lauren: Yes.

Bob: I mean, in some churches, it would not be okay for the pastor’s wife—

Lauren: —to not be okay.

Bob: Right.

Lauren: Right.

Dennis: A lot of churches.

Lauren: A lot—and that is what’s sad—the church should be the one place you should be able to go and not be okay, and that’s okay; you know?

Bob: Yes.

Dennis: Yes; and be like a life jacket—

Lauren: Yes.

Dennis: —a preserver in the midst of the storm.

Lauren: Yes, absolutely; but unfortunately, that’s not a lot of people’s experience.

Bob: Yes.

Dennis: You have written a book called Steadfast Love. Matt Chandler, for those who don’t know, is the pastor of The Village Church in the Dallas/Fort Worth area. Lauren is his wife, his sidekick, his—
Bob: —accomplice. What are you going to—you going to give her all kinds of—
[Laughter]

Lauren: I like that.

Dennis: The mom of their three children and has her own divine commission—

Lauren: Yes.

Dennis: —to be a wife, a mom, and a woman in this culture. That’s a mighty assignment—an important assignment—and a noble one; isn’t it?

Lauren: Absolutely.

Dennis: You tell the story that one time you and your family went to a pizza parlor and found a woman in chains—

Lauren: Yes; yes.

Dennis: —not real chains—but she was in bondage.

Lauren: She was.

Dennis: Share that story.

Lauren: We were driving from Dallas to, actually, Alabama. We were going on a beach vacation with my parents. We stopped at this pizza parlor that was actually in my hometown, because it was on the way. We had just finished dinner. It’s one of those places where you order the pizza and, 45 minutes later, it’s delivered to your table—it takes a long time. I think it was like a Friday night; so it was a really busy night.

We walk out and there’s this woman that comes up to us and she says: “Do you have any money? Do you have any change? Do you have any food? Do you have an extra pizza?” It was a little bit shocking—you know, stunning—we weren’t expecting someone to just walk up—and she was pretty desperate / you could just see it all over her face.

It was my mom and me talking to her. We’re trying to figure out: “What’s going on? How can we help you?” We felt bad because we didn’t have extra pizza. We were kind of trying to get on the road and trying to go to this next town. We knew it was going to take 45 minutes to get a pizza. We didn’t have a lot of cash—I mean, we were like, “I don’t know what to do,” but we want to help her!

My dad walks up; and she immediately puts her hands up and it’s like: “I don’t want any trouble. I just want some food—I’m just hungry.” She pulls out this card and she says,
“I’m on parole.” It’s this card that has her picture on it—that she’s supposed to present to show people: “Hey, I’m a convicted felon. This is who I am.”

It ended up being a sweet tender moment with my oldest daughter. She had been saving up for a new saddle. She had this coin jar that she’d saved up—but she was saving up for a new saddle—filled with dollars and coins. We had had this pro-life weekend at church, where they had these baby bottles that you could fill with money or change. So, she took the saddle fund and poured it into this baby bottle. We were going to take it to the church the next weekend, but it happened to be in my car.

Audrey said: “Hold on. I know we have money,” as we were talking to this woman. She goes into the car and she grabs that baby bottle, full of these coins. She gives it to the woman. The woman said: “I can’t take that baby’s bottle! I can’t do that!” We just explained to her that that’s just kind of how grace works—that you don’t get what you deserve / that you are lavished—this love and this provision. I was so proud of Audrey in that moment—for giving up, the first time, the saddle fund to the babies; and then, taking that bottle and thinking, “Oh, this woman could use this.” We got to pray with the woman.

I kept playing that scene over and over again in my head—of her presenting that card to us, like: “Oh, no, no, no—this is who I am. I’m someone who’s been in bondage. I’m someone who has been a felon.” It was like the Lord searing that in my brain—like a lot of us operate that way, where: “This is who I am. I’m in bondage.” How we operate with other people is from this identity of being in bondage to something and not, necessarily, being free in Christ. It started making me think about: “What are some of the chains that I’ve worn in my life?—that maybe didn’t look like that woman,”—I can’t think of her name right now—but: “What are some chains that I’ve worn that have kind of been that card of: ‘This is who I am. I am in my chains.’”

**Dennis:** You’re saying we don’t have to have a picture with us, showing that we’re on parole—

**Lauren:** Right.

**Dennis:** —convicted of being a felon. There are a lot of “religious people”—

**Lauren:** Right.

**Dennis:** —who have images, in chains around them—

**Lauren:** Yes.

**Dennis:** —that have them shackled.
Lauren: Yes! The religious chains are some of the heaviest; you know? We all have different chains that really do bear on our identity—where they mark us. Sometimes, we don’t even know! Chains can look so different. It could be addiction for some people; it could be a hurt that they’ve / some kind of abuse; or just a wound—maybe a relational wound, where they’ve said, “I’m not going to let anybody hurt me anymore.” These things that we become shackled to—that we kind of make this vow and agreement with—that just follows us around the rest of our lives.

For me, my chains were: “I know I’m good enough when…”—then, fill in the blank. For me, it had a lot to do with music. One of them was: “I know I’m good enough if this person will have me sing on her album. I’ll know I’m good enough.” Not everybody gets this opportunity to actually get to that “If…then…” moment; but I got to do that. I got to do what I thought would make me feel “enough.” It didn’t—I still felt that sinking, heavy feeling of my chains—of: “You’re not good enough! Yes; you got to do that but, still, it wasn’t good enough.”

Bob: It’s interesting to hear you talk about your desire to be used / your desire to minister as a chain.

Lauren: Yes.

Bob: Because we should all have that desire to want to be used by God. How did that become a chain for you?

Lauren: Because it was a disordered desire—it was a desire that I felt like I needed to be able to fulfill this calling to be me, where really, the Lord would say, “You just need Me”—period—2 Corinthians 12:9: “My grace is sufficient for you.” I was drawing a lot of my identity from this calling / from this desire to minister.

Bob: Your value and your validation—your worth as a person—

Lauren: Yes; yes.

Bob: —in your mind—was wrapped up—

Lauren: —in what I could do.

Bob: And if you weren’t doing it—

Lauren: “Who was I?” Yes.

Bob: For a lot of people—they may wrestle with some of those things, but it’s manageable.

Lauren: Yes.
Bob: Did that become unmanageable in your life?

Lauren: Yes; it was manageable for a long time; because I could think: “This is a good desire—I want to lead worship. I want to do something that I know the Lord’s called me to do.” I could manage it for a while—and I could explain away the dissatisfaction different ways—until, finally, I was just so tired.

A lot of times, the Lord will either let us hit bottom or He’ll give us exactly what we want. Sometimes, He gives us exactly what we want; and we see it’s not enough. I feel like that is what happened to me—He was like: “Oh, you want this? Okay; I’m going to give it to you, but you’re going to see it is not nearly as fulfilling as you think it’s going to be.”

Bob: At the church, where your husband’s the pastor—at The Village Church in Flower Mound, Texas—you have recovery groups—

Lauren: Yes.

Bob: —people who get together, who are wrestling with addictive behaviors. For the most part, it is people who have been addicted to drugs or alcohol or porn or things that are—are destructive and obvious.

Lauren: Yes; right.

Bob: You showed up there one night.

Lauren: I did! The Lord gave me what I thought I wanted / that would be fulfilling, and it wasn’t. I equate it to—you know, on a very small scale—to maybe how someone who has anorexia nervosa sees herself, maybe, in a mirror—and where everybody sees thin and, you know, wasting away—that person might see, “This could look a little bit different.”

I felt like that’s who I—that’s what I was doing—is I was looking in the mirror; and I was like, “Uh, but this could change.” Everybody else thought: “What is wrong with you?! You’re you and that doesn’t need to change. If anything, it just needs to get healthier.” So, I knew something was wrong.

At that time, it was Celebrate Recovery at our church. Matt was promoting it from the stage, saying: “Hey! We’ve got this ministry called Celebrate Recovery. I want to encourage you guys to check it out.” So, that Thursday night, he was going to be there and meet people that were coming to that ministry.

Earlier that week, I had had a come-to-Jesus moment with my small group. We were going through a Beth Moore Bible study together. There was a moment, where Beth is teaching on the video—and I remember her say, “I don’t normally do this,”—but she
almost had kind of an altar call on the video. She said, “Some of you are like the Israelites about to cross over into the Promised Land.” It’s that point, where the Israelites are about to cross over. The Lord instructs them to take a stone of remembrance and to have a memorial to say, “This is what God did for us.”

She said: “Some of you are in the middle of that dry river bed. You’ve got your stone, and you’re looking back at the wilderness, longingly; because you know—even though it could mean chains / even though it could mean wandering—you, at least, know what to expect. Then, others of you—you’re also looking toward the Promised Land, which you know / you’ve heard is flowing with milk and honey—is the promise, but it’s the unknown—so, you’re paralyzed in this dry river bed. She said, “Some of you just need to grab your rock and move on.”

I don’t know what it was—but it was like the Lord saying: “That’s you, Lauren! This thing—these chains that are weighing you down—you need to grab your rock and you need to move on.” Just kind of this decision to not go back to this self-pity / go back to this: “God, why don’t You give me what I want?” / “I’m not good enough,”—but just to recognize: “I’m not okay, and I need help.”

That’s where I said: “Okay; Lord, what does moving on look like for me?” That’s when Celebrate Recovery came later that week. There was a teaching, at the beginning, where the teacher describes this field that someone wants to plant a garden in; but he has to get rid of all the weeds. He mows over them, but they come back; or he pulls them out, but he doesn’t get the roots and everything—just this idea of: “Some of you have been mowing over the weeds. Some of you have been trying to pull the weeds, but you are just not strong enough.”

I just started breaking down in tears, like: “That’s me! I know I’ve got weeds! I know I’ve got some disordered desires in my heart—that they’re above the Lord. I’ve got these chains on me that I need Him to pull out, because I can’t do it anymore.”

Bob: I want to go back for just a minute. When you went to your husband and said, “I think maybe I need to go to Celebrate Recovery.”

Lauren: He said, “Sure!” [Laughter] He knew me!

Bob: Was there any concern about image?

Lauren: No.

Bob: Pastor’s wife in the front row at Celebrate Recovery?

Lauren: In my heart, there were, but not for him.
Bob: Not with him.

Lauren: No; because he lived with me. He heard my crazy. He was very encouraging. If anything, I was the one.

At the end of Celebrate Recovery, after the teaching, they have a response time—

Bob: Yes.

Lauren: —where you can go up, and you can receive a chip—it’s a chip of surrender. They offer the chip of surrender, and I just sit there; because I’m like: “I am the pastor’s wife! I should not be getting up. I’ve got to have it all together.” That time passes, and they offer these other chips of sobriety. Finally, at the very end, they offer the surrender chip one more time.

All throughout those other chips—the one month, two months, a year / all that—I was just regretting that I had not gotten up. I was like: “Are you kidding me? You’re so sick and tired of this! Why did you just not get up?” So, when they offered it the second time, I was up there—I was the first one up there.

I remember—just getting up from my / the pew, I felt lighter. I knew that this was what I was supposed to be doing, and I was so relieved. I think the relief came in just recognizing that I wasn’t okay—that: “Something is wrong—that I do have chains on me / these chains of performance, and perfectionism, and approval that I could not shed on my own.”

Just getting up there and confessing that I wasn’t okay was a huge weight off—I cried. I got all the way back to my seat and one of the verses that the Lord had just kind of plastered over my mind and my heart was 2 Corinthians 12:9, “For My grace is sufficient for you for My power is made perfect in weakness.” I flipped that poker chip over in my hand and it said, “My grace is sufficient for you.” [Laughter] That was the beginning of incredible freedom in my life.

Dennis: Lauren, don’t you think, within the Christian community, that one of the biggest ones—you’ve touched on it numerous times as you shared your story—is looking to others for approval?

Lauren: Oh, yes!

Dennis: It’s a chain that I think, not only backfires on us, but it keeps outsiders from coming in—

Lauren: Yes!
**Dennis:** —and also dumping their chains as well. We’ve got all kinds of broken people in our culture, who don’t want to come to church because they sense they’re a bunch of pious people who “have it all together”; and no one does have it all together.

**Lauren:** No; right. And you really can’t have meaningful relationships with people; because if you’re always looking to them for approval, you’re using them / you’re essentially using other people. You cannot ever truly enjoy—in the way that God created us to enjoy relationship with another person—because you’re using them / for them to tell you that you’re okay.

**Bob:** But most people aren’t going to think of a desire to be a better person—that was your desire—it was a warped desire because you wanted to be perfect—you had a standard that’s unachievable.

**Lauren:** Yes.

**Bob:** Most people don’t think of that as a disordered desire, or as an addictive behavior, or something you need to go to a recovery group for. How had that become dangerous to you and people around you?

**Lauren:** I think we all have essentially the same problem—is that we want to do life on our own terms, and we want to be our own god. That’s basically what it is: “I want to be god, and I want control of my life. I don’t want to need You, God.”

We just manage it in different ways: some of us, it’s addiction to a substance, where we want to feel a certain way or we don’t want to feel a certain way. An addiction to a relationship—where we’ve got to have that person feel this way about us, or we have to have that person in our life—it all works out differently. Or it’s: “We’ve got to be perfect, because we don’t need Him.”

**Bob:** If that’s the chain: “I’ve got to be perfect.”

**Lauren:** Yes.

**Bob:** What’s a husband going to feel if he’s married to a wife who’s got that chain? What are the kids going to feel if their mommy’s got that chain? What kind of environment does that create in a home that starts to spill out and affect the lives of others?

**Lauren:** I’m sure no one’s going to feel “enough.” It’s going to be a lot of criticism / there’s not going to be a lot of grace there.

**Bob:** “I’ve got to be perfect; and you do too.”

**Lauren:** Yes!
Bob: That’s what you’re hearing in your mind and saying to your husband and your kids?

Lauren: Yes; or I think mine was a little different in that: “I’ve got to be perfect. I’ve got to be the perfect mom. I’ve got to manage you so much so that you’re behavior shows that I’m perfect.”

Bob: Yes.

Lauren: Maybe it’s not really that I want perfection from them. I want to be such a perfect mom, or such a perfect wife, that whatever your life reflects back to me is who I am—if that makes sense.

Bob: Yes.

Dennis: You’re talking about one of the most powerful tools God uses to convict us of our own selfishness—

Lauren: Yes!

Dennis: —brokenness and sinfulness—children! [Laughter]

Lauren: Yes!

Dennis: I mean, I’ve made this statement multiple times—Barbara and I thought God gave us six kids to raise them. He actually is finishing the process right now—of us having tried to raise them and us seeing our own brokenness in our kids—

Lauren: Absolutely.

Dennis: —and going back to God and saying: “Would you take us and use us for Your purposes? Help us to put our faith in the right place.”

Lauren: Yes.

Dennis: That’s what your book is all about—Steadfast Love—putting your faith in the right place. It’s got an anchor on the cover. If our listeners haven’t read Psalm 107—it begins with a powerful statement, and it ends with one. I’ll read you the first verse and the last verse: “Oh give thanks to the LORD, for He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever!” And then it concludes—43 verses later—with this: “Whoever is wise, let him attend to these things; let them consider the steadfast love of the LORD.” I think God’s trying to get our attention. [Laughter]

Lauren: I think so!
Dennis: The steadfast love of the LORD is where you find the stability and security.

Bob: Are you still doing battle, in your own soul, with a desire to want to be perfect?

Lauren: If definitely raises its ugly head, every now and then; but it doesn’t hold its power like it did. Although I still wrestle, I’ve gotten a lot of victory over it.

Bob: Where has that come from? What is it that you’re telling yourself that’s true?—that is causing that perfection monster to get back in his cage?

Lauren: Yes; that I’m so dearly loved by a good God.

Dennis: If I had known you when you were carrying the chains, I wouldn’t have been able to have spotted you carrying those chains; would I?

Lauren: No.

Dennis: But inside—what were you feeling? Was it just a tension / a weight?

Lauren: Yes; it was a heaviness. It was just almost like a black hole of: “Please tell me I’m enough! Please tell me that I’m worth something.” That’s what it felt like—was just this black-hole heaviness, just sucking everything in.

Dennis: If that’s the listener—what he or she needs to do right now—is find the steadfast love of the Lord and begin to experience it. I’ve got to believe, Bob, that a book like what Lauren has written will be a great benefit.

Thanks for joining us on the broadcast. Hope you’ll come back again—

Lauren: Thank you.

Dennis: —and take us back to the Anchor as well.

Lauren: Alright.

Bob: Yes; this is a book that I think will help a lot of listeners refocus their hearts and minds on where our focus ought to be—on the Anchor of our soul. It’s called Steadfast Love: The Response of God to the Cries of our Heart. You can order the book from us, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com; or you can call 1-800-FL-TODAY. Again, the website is FamilyLifeToday.com. Our number is 1-800-358-6329—1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then the word, “TODAY.” Ask about the book, Steadfast Love, from Lauren Chandler when you get in touch with us.
You know, when we have conversations like this, our hope / our goal is that we will connect with listeners at significant and strategic points in their own lives, where something they hear—a conversation on FamilyLife Today—can be used by God in their lives to bring about a paradigm shift—a realignment or a rearranging of their lives. Our goal, here, at FamilyLife is to see every home become a godly home. We want to effectively develop godly marriages and families; because we believe godly marriages and families can change the world, one home at a time.

We’re grateful for those of you who partner with us in helping get this message into the ears, and the hearts, and the hands of more people—not only in our country—but around the world. Thank you for extending the reach of FamilyLife Today. When you donate to support this ministry, your donations go directly to providing practical biblical help and hope for marriages and families. We’re grateful for the partnership with those of you who do support the ministry.

We would love to send you a thank-you gift this month when you’re able to help with a donation of any amount—it is Dennis Rainey’s brand-new book—it’s called Choosing a Life That Matters. It’s about the core issues that all of us have to come to grips with if we’re going to have a strong marriage / a strong family. There are some foundational spiritual principles that we’ve got to grapple with and really come to grips with in our own lives. We’d love to send you a copy of Choosing a Life That Matters from Dennis Rainey. You can make a donation of any amount, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com; or call 1-800-FL-TODAY to donate. Or you can mail your donation to FamilyLife Today at PO Box 7111, Little Rock, AR; and our zip code is 72223.

Now, tomorrow, we want to talk about: “What is the essence of womanhood?” When God created men and women, He created us different—that’s more than just biology. We’ll talk about what the differences are tomorrow. I hope you can tune in for that.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, along with our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our host, Dennis Rainey, I’m Bob Lepine. We will see back next time for another edition of FamilyLife Today.

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