The Value of a Strong Family

Guest: Jeremy Camp
From the series: I Still Believe (Day 1 of 3)
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Bob: Singer/songwriter, Jeremy Camp, was a sophomore in high school when something happened that would change the trajectory of his life.

Jeremy: I was sitting there in the cafeteria. I was just playing music soft and quiet and singing songs. The worship leader came up to me from the school and said, “Can you lead one morning for our worship devotions?” I was just terrified. I remember I was shaking so terribly and sweating all over that guitar. But I remember, all of a sudden, at the end of it, I felt the joy of the Lord. I felt His pleasure, just saying, “This is what I’ve called you to do.”

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Tuesday, March 10th. Our hosts are Dave and Ann Wilson; I’m Bob Lepine. You can find us online at FamilyLifeToday.com. We’ll hear from Jeremy Camp today about how he has been very aware of God’s hand guiding every aspect of his life. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us on the Tuesday edition. Who does not love a great love story; right?

Ann: Everybody loves a great love story.

Dave: It’s one of my favorite things to do.

Bob: To what?

Dave: Go to a movie that’s a love story.

Bob: —a love story?

Dave: You always hear of chick flicks? I think they’re great. [Laughter]

Ann: Your heart’s getting softer over the years.

Bob: We’re going to hear a great love story this week. The reason we’re hearing it this week is because there’s a great love story coming to theaters this weekend. It’s a movie called I Still Believe. It’s based on a true story.
About four years ago, I sat down with singer/songwriter Jeremy Camp and got to ask him questions about his life and about his marriage to his wife, Melissa, which is what this movie coming out on Friday is all about. As our listeners are going to hear this week, this is a profound and powerful story. We've had a chance to see the film, which is coming out this weekend; and it's a great movie too.

**Ann:** It's so great.

**Bob:** Yes; this is from the guys who made the movie, *I Can Only Imagine*. They have now made this new movie called *I Still Believe*. There's a trailer on our website on FamilyLifeToday.com.

We're going to dive in. This was an interview in front of a live audience, so you will hear the audience interacting. I started off by asking Jeremy to tell us about the family he grew up in and to tell us about his dad, who had a profound impact on his life.

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**Jeremy:** Yes; he grew up—they used to call him “Bear.” He had really long hair and a huge beard. He was definitely a hippie. He was a drug dealer/alcoholic. Then, one night, literally, the Lord just got his heart. He went to church; he had been drinking. In church that night, the pastor was talking about: “If you want to be delivered from drugs and alcohol…” and started just sharing. He [Bear] and his friend jumped over the pews to get to the front.

He [pastor] said, “If you want to give your life to Christ/if you want to submit your heart”—they jumped over the pews, climbed over people, got to the front of the altar. Literally, he said that, when he said the prayer and said, “God, come into my life and change me,”—he said he sobered up instantly—like sobered up, where he had not been drunk anymore. It's that power of God in his life, saying, “God, deliver me from this”; and He did, instantaneously.

**Bob:** And the preacher told him, “If you really want to experience God, you've got to start living right. That means get married,”—right?

**Jeremy:** Yes, exactly. And he said, “You have to get married”; so they immediately ended up getting married.

**Bob:** He and your mom had been living together—had—your sister was already in the family.

**Jeremy:** Absolutely.

**Bob:** You hadn’t been born yet.
Jeremy: Right.

Bob: But that was a turning point in your dad’s life/in your mom’s life—in your whole family’s trajectory.

Jeremy: Absolutely. At first, my mom was like, “Oh, I’m glad Tom changed his life.” It took her a little bit to realize: “Oh, wait! I’m a sinner too. I need Jesus,”—but it was a funny kind of: “Oh, I’m glad my boyfriend is finally getting his life straight.” Then, she realized she was a sinner and she needed Jesus. From that point on—just submitted their hearts to the Lord.

I believe that young—I grew up knowing the Lord, in a sense—but I don’t think I really had that moment where I surrendered my heart until I was 16 years old. I was at a youth camp. Literally, my life was changed. I remember the pastor was talking about Revelation, and it scared me to death. I remember just going, “Alright, Lord, whatever You want.”

I remember getting to a point, where God really spoke to my heart and said: “You’re walking on the edge of a cliff. You’re about ready to fall off, and you need to run as far away as possible. I want to use you, but get away from that edge that you’re walking on.” I remember, at that point on, I said, “God, I submit my heart to You.” I mean, because it is one thing to say, “I believe in God”; another thing to say, “I make you Lord of my life”; you know?—it’s two different things. I made Him Lord of my life.

At that point on, when I went back, God said, “Don’t go to the school that you went to; go to a private school, and just get away from the environment for a while.” From that point on, God definitely started directing me toward music; I started writing songs. I ended up going to a Bible college. I knew I wanted to study God’s Word. I think having that foundation in God’s Word—it’s so key; it’s living and it’s active.

I was sitting there in the cafeteria. I was just kind of playing music soft and quiet and singing songs. The worship leader came up to me from the school and said, “Can you lead one morning for our worship devotions?” I was just terrified, because it wasn’t really what—I mean, I loved music and I played kind of a little bit in a local band before I went—

Bob: Yes, we skipped over the whole Temple Rising phase.

Jeremy: Oh, man!

Bob: Yes; in fact, you have your guitar with you; don’t you?

Jeremy: I do actually.
Bob: Can we bring Jeremy’s guitar up here? [Applause]

Jeremy: Temple Rising.

Bob: Yes!

Jeremy: I can’t believe you’re making me do this; this is so embarrassing. So, when I was probably—I was 16—me and my local friends, who also were serving the Lord, said “Hey, let’s start a band”; “Why not?” I started playing when I was 14. It wasn’t the main thing, because football was still my main thing. I told my dad, “Teach me a few cords”; so he taught me a few cords.

My first song I wrote with this band—that we called Temple Rising; we had multiple names, by the way—that was just one of them. [Laughter] I can’t believe you brought that up. That’s hilarious that you remember that. [Laughter]

I wrote a song—see, now, I don’t know if you guys know. There’s an old band, and their name is Poison; okay?

Bob: Yes!

Jeremy: So there is a song called Every Rose Has Its Thorn. Do you remember that?

Bob: Yes, sure.

Jeremy: I decided to write my first song and didn’t realize, [until] later, that it pretty much had the same exact melody.

Bob: —just ripping them off completely.

Jeremy: Yes, exactly! [Laughter] Let’s see if I can remember this; do you remember any of it? I’ll sing a part of it.

Bob: Yes; play it a little.

Jeremy: This is so embarrassing. If I can remember this—it’s been a while since I’ve played it. Okay; alright. [Laughter] I’m sorry—all of this lull time.

I was looking in the mirror, and I saw a figure there whose life was all bent out of shape and in total despair.

I took my stepping ways from You. I really don’t know what to do. You’ve got to set me free. Lord, You’ve got to set me free.

Yes, there it is!
You've got to set me free. Lord, You've got to set me free—free from sin.

**Bob:** Yes! [Applause]

**Jeremy:** You see what I'm saying? How embarrassing; I just played for you the first song I ever wrote right there. That's the first one I ever wrote.

[Studio]

**Bob:** We're listening to a conversation with Jeremy Camp that was recorded about four years ago. I got to that point, and I was thinking of you; because you used to write bad songs like that, too; right?

**Dave:** Well, my songs are bad. [Laughter] Jeremy Camp's songs are good—even that one was pretty cute.

**Ann:** He's got a great voice, too; doesn't he?

**Dave:** Oh, boy.

**Bob:** And just a delightful guy. We were talking with him about his life story. He had written a book called *I Still Believe*, and now that is being made into a movie that is coming out this weekend. We continued the conversation, and he said, really, a turning point in his life was when his parents made a sacrifice to give him a gift that was a life-changing gift.

[Previous *FamilyLife Today* Broadcast]

**Jeremy:** My dad had a guitar, but I didn’t have one when I went to Bible college. Every time I’d lead worship, I’d ask my friends if I could borrow a guitar: “Hey, can I borrow your guitar?” I had someone ask me to play on a Sunday morning in church when I was in Southern California at that time, so I borrowed a guitar.

One Christmas, I went home. I woke up in the morning—and I wasn’t even thinking about this at all—and I saw this massive box. They are like: “Merry Christmas!” “Okay.” I start opening it up. Now, my dream guitar—not just a guitar—my dream guitar was a Taylor guitar. I remember that I opened this thing up, and it was a *Taylor guitar*. I was blown away. And they just told me—they said: “We see what God is doing with you,”—I’m getting the chills—"We see what God is doing with you, and He’s using you in music. We want to be a part of that and support you."

“We took out a loan,”—I said/I asked them how they: “How did you guys do this?” “We took out a loan,”—they had to take out a loan in order for me to get this guitar. 
You know, one thing that I remember very, very clearly—and I do it with my children as well—is my mom and dad are always saying, “We’re proud of you,” and “We believe in what God is doing with you,” and “God has plans for you—special plans for you. Don’t sell yourself short. Continue to serve Him, and continue to give Him everything.” It was that constant encouragement that God had greater things in store. With my kids, even, for instance, even with music, we say, “Do you guys want to do this?” They wanted to do it; so then we give them the opportunity, saying, “We believe in what you’re going to do.”

I think you can’t say, “I’m going to give you the best.” Even with sports—a lot of people want their kids to play sports—“I’m going to give you the best of everything,” and automatically you think that that’s going to take them to the next level or put them in the best classes. It has to be something, where you encourage them, and you believe in them, and you pray for them, and you continue to guide them and show them that the only way you can do this is doing it unto the Lord. My parents always said, “Do what you do as unto the Lord.”

**Bob:** You were in a Bible college in Southern California—got involved with the Harvest Crusades—

**Jeremy:** Yes.

**Bob:** —up there.

**Jeremy:** Yes.

**Bob:** In fact, it was through the Harvest Crusades that you got connected with Kry and started working with them—working the merch tables for them.

**Jeremy:** Absolutely.

**Bob:** And wasn’t one of those guys, who said, “Come on up on stage and do a song”? 

**Jeremy:** Yes, absolutely, Jean-Luc—he believed in me. I mean, he really just said: “Listen, I see the gifting. I see your heart. Hey, why don’t you come on stage, and why don’t you play a couple songs with us?” I learned a couple of songs; I’d be on stage.

One time, I remember him saying, “Hey, why don’t you just come out and play a song before we come on?” He just kind of poured—he mentored me. I tell you what—I realize he taught me what it meant to have a Paul and a Timothy. You know what that means?

**Bob:** Yes.
Jeremy: So, having a Paul and a Timothy—you have a Paul in your life, who you look up to, and you say, “I need a mentor,”—someone needs a mentor in your life. You have to have somebody that you mentor and that you pour into. And for me, he was my Paul, and I was his Timothy. He poured into me and taught me so much about the importance of that. He was a big reason, you guys, why I think I’m here today. It was God using him, but I’m so grateful to him.

Bob: Go back—kind of take us back—recreate the moment for us; can you?—if you’re up there for the first time in front of a crowd.

Jeremy: Oh, man! I remember being so nervous and sweaty. My palms were sweating. [Laughter] Yes, it was the first time; and I remember I was shaking so terribly and sweating all over that guitar; but I remember, all of a sudden, at the very end of it, I felt the joy of the Lord. I felt like His pleasure, just saying, “This is what I’ve called you to do.”

So, first, the terrifying: “What am I doing?!?” and people looking at me and “I don’t want to mess this song up.” I got done and I went, “Wow, Lord; I felt Your joy and Your pleasure.”

Bob: So, play a little of Get Away; can you?

Jeremy: Oh, man! I don’t know if I can. [Strumming] [Laughter] It’s been so long; I mean, this has been how many years? [Laughter] Oh, man!—got to get away—it was—hold on! Man, you put me on the spot, here, trying to remember this.

Bob: I know. I just keep thinking of Lenny Kravitz, [singing] “I want to get away.” But it’s not that. [Laughter]

Jeremy: Oh, yes, it is. That’s about right; isn’t it? It’s almost right. [Laughter]

Bob: It’s got a feel.

Jeremy: “Get away. Get away. Get away. I want to get away,”—something like that; that’s what it was—something like that: “Get away. Get away. Get away. I want to get away.” There you go. [Laughter]

[Studio]

Bob: That, again, is Jeremy Camp from an interview that we did four years ago with him. In the movie, I Still Believe, his relationship with Jean-Luc, the guy from the Kry, is central to the story.

Dave: It’s really good.
Bob: They went on to be, really, lifelong friends, but he had a profound mark on his life.

Of course, we said the movie is a love story. While his family and his background factors into it, the movie really takes off when Jeremy meets, at Bible college, the woman, who he will eventually marry, Melissa.

[Previous *FamilyLife Today* Broadcast]

Bob: You and a buddy—while you were living in Southern California, you had this friend; and he had this girl that he liked. You started hanging around with your friend and his girlfriend.

Jeremy: —his friend that was a girl.

Bob: Not his girlfriend.

Jeremy: Let me clarify that. [Laughter]

Bob: Explain this whole dynamic of what was going on.

Jeremy: I remember my friend goes: “Hey, you’ve got to meet this girl; her name’s Melissa. She loves Jesus; she goes to my Bible study. I’d love for you to meet her. Can you lead worship at my Bible study?” “Yes, absolutely.” I remember I got there and I met Melissa. I was like, “She’s a beautiful girl,”—didn’t really think much of it at first.

I start leading worship. I remember very clearly—it was the first time meeting her—I’m singing worship, and my eyes are closed. I look up; I remember her—I mean, this is right in the middle of the schoolyard, and people are walking by—she is on her knees and raising both her hands up, worshipping the Lord. I had never seen someone, especially out in public, just singing her heart out and raising up her hands. It shocked me for a second.

I remember we got done with worship, and I was kind of intrigued. I’m like, “Whoa; this girl loves Jesus.” She was 20 years old. I could tell that she didn’t care about anybody else around her; she was literally in the presence of God. Afterwards, I was like, “Hey, nice to meet you.”

My friend is like, “She’s great.” I’m like, “Yes, totally great.” [Laughter] I found out that she didn’t actually like him—that he liked her. I was like, “Oh, man, I don’t want to…”—we just naturally, every time we’d hang out, you could tell something was there—I remember I called her; I said, “Listen. I don’t want to be weird here, but do you like Jason?” She was like, “No, he’s a good friend, but not in that way.” I’m like, “We have something; right?” [Laughter] I’m weird; I just went for it—like: “You’re amazing.”
Bob: Wait, wait, wait; when you said, “We have something; right?”—did she say, “Right”?

Jeremy: Yes; she said, “Yes.”

Bob: Okay; alright.

Jeremy: I very quickly fell in love with this girl—I mean, very quickly. I remember going, “I have to tell her that I love her.” This is a little down the road—I walk up to her—it had been two weeks; that’s the perfect time, you know. [Laughter] It’s a lot of time, you know. I remember I went up to her, sweaty palms and all—I always have sweaty palms; I’m weird that way—sweaty palms and all, I say, “Melissa, I know I’m saying this early, but I feel so strongly—I love you.” She goes, “Hmmm. I can’t say that right now.” I was devastated to say the least.

Bob: When she says, “I can’t say that right now,” what does that do to your relationship with her?

Jeremy: Honestly, I was a little taken aback; I go, “Okay.” It was a little rocky for awhile. I remember our friends; because my friend was saying, “I can’t believe you took her from our friend.” I was going: “I didn’t. That’s not really what happened. Trust me.” I remember we ended up breaking up. I was devastated; I was broken up—I knew she was the one.

I got a phone call—this was probably about a month later: “They found something in Melissa’s stomach. You might want to check it out; they don’t know if it is cancer.” It ended up not being cancer. We were like, “Okay; cool.” I went to see her: “Are you okay?” At that point, we were broken up. I’d started getting over it. I’d started writing songs; I started recording my first demo/real legit demo—and pushed it [relationship] aside—it had probably been five months. I saw her a couple times, but I was moving on.

Bob: You were over her.

Jeremy: Oh, yes; I was over—I was moving on. That was tough; because it was a tough time, but I felt like my heart was healing. Then I got a phone call again. My friend said, “Hey, Melissa’s in the hospital again, and they found out this time that it is cancer.” Of course, automatically, my heart is breaking for her.

I go down, and I walk into the hospital room. I looked at her; and you guys, it was unbelievable. I looked at her, and she was smiling—I mean, this joy on her face. I remember thinking, “Why is she so happy?” “How are you doing?” She looked at me and goes: “You know, I’m doing okay.” She was like, “I realize—and God just kind of showed me: if I die from this cancer—but if one person gives their life to Jesus—it’s worth it.”
Bob: Wow!

Jeremy: I'll never forget that statement. It's something that I'll still, to this day, always remember; because she realized that her life—or her death, whatever it may be—that if one person—because she was going to heaven, so she was okay. She goes, “I just want my life to make a difference; and if one person gives their life to Jesus, then it’s worth it.” That transformed my heart—to this day, still transforms my heart; because it’s something I have to ask myself.

I walked out of there and I said, “Alright, Lord, if she tells me she loves me, then I’ll marry her.” I remember saying that, going, “What was that all about?” Because, remember, I’d already told her I loved her—remember.

Bob: Yes.

Jeremy: She called me about a week later, and I remember my parents were in town. She said, “Hey, can I talk to you?” She was at home, and she just went through her first round of chemotherapy. I told my parents, “She’s going to tell me she loves me.” It was the craziest thing; but I still was going, “No.” But the comment—I said that.

I walked in, and she was laying down. She goes: “I just really wanted you to be here to tell you. I’ve been praying for you for a long time,”—even though we were kind of broken up—she goes, “I didn’t realize why you were on my heart and I was praying for you.” She goes, “But I realize now,” She goes, “It wasn’t time before because God had to prepare my heart and ready my heart for this cancer I was about to go through.” She goes, “But I want you to know that I love you.”

There I was, and I didn’t know what to say. I did tell her this; which was—I go, “I can’t say anything.” It wasn’t because of what she had said, prior. It was more the reality of what I said to the Lord, too. It was a challenge to me, saying, “Are you really going to follow through with this?” Because when she said, “I love you,” I went, “I need a few days.” She goes, “You don’t ever have to even tell me,”—that’s what she said—“I don’t want anything from that. I just want you to know that, because I do.”

I went away. I literally just prayed and fasted. I came back, and I remember seeing her. She was having a hard day, and she was starting to lose her hair from the chemo. She wasn’t saying much, though; she wasn’t opening up a lot. I go, “Listen, Melissa, if we’re going to get married, you have to tell me what’s going on—share your feelings.” [Laughter] We looked at each other, and we both started crying. I was like, “Yes, we should get married.” She was like, “Absolutely.”

[Studio]

Bob: Well, again, we’ve been listening to excerpts from an interview that we did about four years ago with Jeremy Camp, whose story is being told in a movie called I Still
*Believe* that releases in theaters on Friday. We’re excited about the movie. We’re excited about the movie, because it’s a great film; but the power of this movie is in what it says about love and about marriage and about where Jesus fits into that. You talk about a couple who understood what “vertical” means in marriage—they understood it; didn’t they?

**Dave:** Yes, I would say that scene in the movie that we just heard Jeremy talk about is *so touching*. If you don’t know the story, you don’t see this coming, because it’s so sacrificial; it’s so selfless—that it’s such a beautiful picture of the love of God.

**Ann:** It also is a great reminder that God hears our prayers. They may not always go the way we want; but He hears, and He answers us, and He encourages us when we’re most in need. It’s a beautiful picture of that as well.

**Bob:** As I said, there’s a trailer on our website at FamilyLifeToday.com if you want a preview of the movie that’s going to be in theaters this weekend. Go to our website; you can watch it there. We also have the book that Jeremy has written called *I Still Believe*, his story about his marriage to Melissa and how God brought beauty from the ashes of that relationship.

Go to FamilyLifeToday.com to order the book, *I Still Believe*, or to watch the trailer for the movie that’s going to be in theaters this weekend. Again, our website is FamilyLifeToday.com. You can also order the book by calling 1-800-FL-TODAY—1-800-358-6329—that’s 1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then, the word, “TODAY.”

As we hear Jeremy’s story this week, we are reminded that we have hope in this life because of what Christ has done for us—because of the resurrection of Christ—because of Easter. Easter is about four weeks away at this point. Those of you who are parents or grandparents, if you are looking for a way to help your children or grandchildren better understand the Easter story, FamilyLife® has a tool we’ve used for years to help introduce children to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. It’s a tool called Resurrection Eggs®—a dozen plastic eggs with symbols inside that starts with a donkey and takes you all the way to an empty tomb. The story of Jesus’s final week on Earth is told through these 12 resurrection eggs.

We’d love to send you a set of these eggs. In fact, we’re sending them out this week as a way of saying, “Thank you,” to those of you who believe in the vision of FamilyLife and want to see this daily program continue on your local station; you want to see us continue to reach more people, more regularly, with practical biblical help and hope—encouragement for your marriage and your family.

When you call to make a donation today or go online to donate, you can request a set of Resurrection Eggs. They’re our gift to you when you support this ministry. Again, donate, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com; or call 1-800-FL-TODAY to donate by phone. Ask for your set of Resurrection Eggs when you get in touch with us.
Now, tomorrow, Jeremy Camp takes us to the story of his marriage to his college sweetheart, Melissa, and about the unexpected journey that God had for them. We’ll hear that tomorrow. I hope you can be with us for that.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, along with our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our hosts, Dave and Ann Wilson, I’m Bob Lepine. We will see you back next time for another edition of FamilyLife Today.

*FamilyLife Today* is a production of FamilyLife of Little Rock, Arkansas; a Cru® Ministry. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow.

Song:  *Set Me Free*
Artist:  Jeremy Camp [Performed Live on Program]
Album:  [First song written by Jeremy Camp]

©Song:  *Get Away*
Artist:  Jeremy Camp [Performed Live on Program]
Album:  *Let Me Say* (p) 2000 by The Kry on Freedom Records

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