



Season 5 | Episode #13

Larry Randolph

Finding Grace Through Canines for Christ

Crystal Keating:

This is the Joni and Friends Ministry Podcast and I'm your host, Crystal Keating. Each week we're bringing you encouraging conversations about finding hope through hardship and practical ways that you can include people living with disability in your church and community. As you listen, visit joniandfriends.org/podcast to access the resources we mention or to send me a message with your thoughts.

Today on the podcast we're joined by Larry Randolph, the founder of Canines for Christ, and the author of *Finding Grace: The Inspiring True Story of Therapy Dogs Bringing Comfort, Hope, and Love to a Hurting World*. He's here to share how therapy dogs can assist in bringing God's powerful message to people with disabilities and those who are often isolated in care facilities.

In addition to starting a ministry and being an author, Larry is a graduate of the Billy Graham School of Evangelism, serves as a rapid response chaplain, and is a board-certified crisis response specialist. Welcome to the podcast, Larry.

Larry Randolph:

Thank you. My pleasure to be here. Thanks for having me.

Crystal Keating:

Well, I am so excited because this is going to be a fun conversation. People who know me know that I love dogs. I love them, and I especially love labs, which I know you have. And so, I can't wait to talk about everything that God is doing through Canines for Christ. So, Larry, I'd love to hear a little bit of your personal story and how you started Canines for Christ, which is an international, Christian-based, animal-assisted outreach that uses ordinary people, thank God, and their beloved dogs, to share God's message of love, hope, kindness, and compassion to the community. How did this ministry begin?

Larry Randolph:

Well, it's a God story and in August of 2007, I was doing very well in my career. I was a commercial real estate person, and I traveled a lot with my wife. We were empty-nesters, and so it was a good time for me as far as my personal life. And I've done a devotion for years early in the morning and that morning in August of 2007, I was studying a devotion in Proverbs 3:5-7. It's: trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not onto your own understanding, and in all ways, acknowledge him, and he will direct your paths.

Well, little did I know that a few minutes later, that God would be speaking to me through that verse. And that's how God speaks to people, I believe it's through his word. As I was reading that



and I was taking my second cup of coffee, God spoke these very small words to me, "therapy dogs." Okay. Well, at that time I didn't have a dog. I did not have a dog in my life. We had lost two dogs a year before to cancer, and my wife and I just didn't have a dog. So, we were dogless, and here's God speaking the words, "therapy dogs."

And the thoughts started coming into my mind and I believe that he was telling me, and he said this to me in really clear visual. The mind thoughts were, 'trust in me, and you're not going to understand right away, but trust in me and I will direct your paths. And if you don't have a dog, don't worry. We're going to get you a dog. Start this ministry using these therapy dogs to show people that are lonely, that are sick, that are in hospitals, that are police departments, people that are in crisis situations that I love them. And I have the hope and I have compassion, and I have care, and I want to show that to them through these dogs and to be a vessel, the dogs to be a vessel for my love.'

So, wow, that all came in a matter of about ten minutes probably in those thoughts, but that was the start of it. And then as I said, I just told God, "All right, God, I don't have a dog, but I'm going to trust in what you're saying. I'm going to believe in this scripture. Proverbs 3:5-7, that's my go-to scripture today."

And actually, what's happened is his word is complete and is true, and everything that he said to me has fulfilled and is actually multiplied a thousand times, Crystal. We started out, my dear wife and I, we borrowed a dog from my daughter. She had a beautiful golden retriever. The first dog in the ministry was named Cody, and he was not trained. He was just a beautiful golden retriever, and we didn't know what to do. We didn't know how to start the ministry, but we started with one person at a time to visit and now, God has blessed this ministry with, to this date, over 1200 volunteers throughout the world in six foreign countries.

Crystal Keating:
Oh, my goodness.

Larry Randolph:
38 states. We or have somebody around this country and foreign countries visiting every day to reach the people that they see in their communities with God's powerful love and hope using these beautiful animals as just a vessel to open the door to share that message. And it all started without a dog but trusting in the Lord and taking one step forward.

I always tell people that ask me how I started. I said, "Trust him. Take your first step. And that first step of obedience is going to lead to great blessings in your life and the blessings of many others, but you have to take that first step forward and trust."

Crystal Keating:
Well, Larry, I just love that you took God at his word, and even though you didn't understand what he meant, you started taking those first steps and that really is the life of faith. I just love that.

Larry Randolph:
Yes. Take that first step and like I said, God will bless you beyond your wildest dreams. And he did with me. He's done with many other people.



Crystal Keating:

He truly did. Well, Larry, it's so amazing how God created animals, specifically dogs, to have such a positive impact on people struggling with physical, emotional, and mental challenges. What are some of the benefits that you've seen dogs bring in a situation? They are such great ministry partners, aren't they?

Larry Randolph:

They are, and they bring a number of benefits to people that are going through difficult situations, physically, spiritually, emotionally. And when you bring a dog into the life of somebody it lifts their spirits and it just lessens their depression, whatever mood they're in, it lowers their anxiety. When they're up about something or they're tense, the dog can just calm them down in a great sense of way, and it reduces their loneliness and communication. They can talk to the dog and the dog may respond. He'll probably respond with maybe a look or a bite or, I don't know what they'll do, a lick. But they'll be there and... reduces boredom and also provides that comfort that they need, and the visit also decreases the feeling of isolation and alienation. It lowers blood pressure, it improves the cardiovascular health, and it releases these endorphins, this oxytocin that has a calming effect on human beings.

And when you combine all those benefits, with the presence of Christ offered with kindness and compassion, love and hope, from the volunteers that we have, the results are powerful, and we give God all the glory for that.

Crystal Keating:

Amen. And I can see how when you have someone in distress, if you can bring a sense of calmness and peacefulness as you're sharing the message of Christ, I wonder if they can even hear it differently and be more attentive and just hear it in a better light. I mean, God can do anything, right, despite our anxieties and our frustrations, but I would think there'd be a little bit more receptivity, right?

Larry Randolph:

Yes. When the dog comes in and is in front of the person or with them, there's a great respect for attention. And they listen to the volunteer. They kind of want them to communicate a message to them. It's a ministry and they know that this is a ministry.

Special needs or wherever we go, it doesn't matter if it's in any population group. As we go in there and everybody sees what we are, the vest of the dog says, "Canines for Christ." The shirts we wear or the cards that we present, people know this is a Christian ministry and they're looking for spiritual direction; they're looking for hope. They're looking for kindness and love, and they wait for that. They respond to it, and it's joyful.

It's changed the lives, as I said, of not only the people we see, but also the people that go, the volunteers. All of us, myself included, want to love and serve God in this way, and the joy that we get out of doing that to make the life better for somebody, just for a moment. It really is just such a warm feeling and just brings such comfort and joy to everybody in this ministry.

Crystal Keating:



Oh, I can imagine. I would love to do something like this. I need to get a dog. That's what I need to do.

Larry Randolph:
That's true. Yes, that may help.

Crystal Keating:
That's how I start. First, get a dog.

Larry Randolph:
There you go. There you go. Pray about it and get a dog. That's right.

Crystal Keating:
Yeah, that's good.

So, Larry, tell us where Canines for Christ often go. Where do you visit and to whom do you minister?

Larry Randolph:
We visit anywhere that there's a need to share the message of Christ, and places such as hospitals, 911 call centers, we do a tremendous amount of ministry with the special needs and the disabled community, court systems, we go into the courts with therapy dogs to basically hold the leash and hands of the client that's going before the judge to calm them down, to relax them in the midst of their court sessions.

We go to nursing homes to visit with the elderly and the sick. We go to police departments to visit with the police, that are in tremendous stress for what they do on a daily basis. Schools, we have a reading program called Study Buddies, which we read to students through the dog's beautiful nose and eyes.

We go to hospice centers, cancer centers. We have gotten involved greatly over the last several years and unfortunately, but it's a tremendous need, it's crisis response to shootings and natural disasters. And that has been a ministry that has been propelled by recent shootings and things that have happened in our country.

So, we go anywhere, and the ministry is really to let Christ's love shine through us and our canines as his ambassadors, as we bring the light of Christ into the darkness. And thousands of people, thousands and maybe millions, have been touched with this message.

Crystal Keating:
Well, on the note of the horrible shootings that have happened, Larry, your team of compassionate chaplains went to the site where the tragic shooting occurred last year at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas. And I was blown away. This unforgettable incident took the life of nineteen students and two teachers while seventeen others were injured and survived. Describe what it was like for Canines for Christ to be there and the kind of care that was extended during a time of absolute shock and grief. How did God use these therapy dogs to help children and families of Uvalde cope with such unimaginable tragedy?



Larry Randolph:

Well, in May 24th, 2022 a little over a year ago, the terrible shooting occurred and immediately when this happened, our San Antonio office, which is run by one of our board members and our chaplain, Jill Powell, a very godly spiritual woman, and an amazing mobilizer, mobilized sixteen Canines for Christ teams to immediately go to Uvalde. That's a ninety-minute drive from San Antonio. But these teams couldn't wait to respond to bring their dogs down there and to be deployed towards reaching these people with God's love and hope.

Now, there are no words, let me, just make this clear, there's no words to speak in a tragedy like this which is why a dog is able to offer the purest and most honest kind of condolences. Because what we do is we minister with God's presence. When you're dealing with a tragedy like this, what do you say? I mean, what do you say to the parents of a child that has just died? It's just, the sadness and the darkness was so prevalent.

But the dog, when we brought a dog, the therapy dog in, and the parents or the siblings of the child would run up and just love on that dog and circle him with this tremendous feeling of just, crying, but joy because they have a dog in their midst that they could just respond to and kind of nurtured and without speaking. It was a beautiful way of ministering.

We did much prayer. We prayed with so many people, but we did it in a reverent manner. Not forcing prayer, but just letting people come to us and letting the tears flow and letting the dogs be there just to be on the sidewalk, be in the funeral homes, be near the school where people could just come up to the animals and our volunteers could just offer the presence of God's love.

There's a beautiful testimony. I'd like to read you part of it if you don't mind.

Crystal Keating:
Please do.

Larry Randolph:

And it's from Chaplain Jill, and it's, she titled it on our website, "[Sending Angels with Wet Noses and Wagging Tails](#)."

"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away," Revelation 21:4.

On Tuesday, May 24th, the atmosphere changed when evil rang out and proclaimed twenty-one lives.

A community shattered and lives forever changed.

These faithful people, these volunteers, were called alongside their dogs, and they responded and proclaimed evil will not win today.

They put on their red shirts and their dogs' red vests, with a message of love and hope, not knowing what to do.



Covered in prayer, these angels went into a space and brought comfort and peace, even a few smiles, to lift the heaviness of the day.

They continue to answer, to serve, since that dreadful day, feeling God called them to use them even in a very small way.

Whether sitting beside a counselor, a child, a police officer, a funeral director, a family, or community on the street, whether words were exchanged or not, or silence was kept, God was there.

One thing remains, the angels with wet noses and wagging tails still proclaim of a God that brings unwavering compassion and love, even through the pain.

Through the eyes of these angels, they can sense the pain and lean in to offer comfort without shame, sharing a piece of what heaven may look like when there is no longer pain.

God is working and moving through each of these Canines for Christ teams, carrying a message of love, hope, and compassion to community in desperate need.

Crystal Keating:
That's incredible.

Larry Randolph:
And I'm sorry, I've been there. I've been to Uvalde. Brings back a lot of memories.

Crystal Keating:
Yeah, and as you said, words are insufficient in those moments of extreme grief.

Larry Randolph:
We're still there. You know, we didn't leave. This may have been a year ago, but our teams are still there. Consistently, we didn't leave people. A lot of media, they left, they went for a day, and you know, did their news reports and then they were gone.

We have never left them. We have teams there all the time, going to the schools, going to the places that we can minister to people and bring God's light into the darkness and just to show them that we do care.

It's changed the lives so many of our volunteers, we've reached a point where we had like thirty teams down there at one particular time, off and on. And so, that message has shown through that God's light truly can shine through evil. And he does.

Crystal Keating:
Well, and isn't that like God to continue to pursue, to comfort, to give grace to minister? I mean, dogs have been called man's best friend. Right? Companions who are often faithful to the end and never stop loving the people around them. You know, you talked about how these dogs and their loving owners have ministered to these broken families. Let's talk a little bit about offering comfort to people with disabilities and people who've experienced tremendous trauma or who

are suffering with chronic illness. What are some situations where it's just brought so much light and life to people with disabilities especially?

Larry Randolph:

Well, first of all, the dogs have a powerful way of communicating with people. And I think that the initial reaction to a dog is just the physical appearance. You know, most dogs are attractive physically and have beautiful eyes and have that wet nose and soulful eyes and their wagging tail. And that's a beautiful way of just visually communicating with a disabled person or somebody that's in need of a message from us.

Then they provide what we call unconditional love that's not judgmental. Dogs don't judge people. They love human beings, and that shows through with the initial visit, the initial greet and meet is what we call it. And the dog has a way of just opening a pathway to allow us, allow the volunteers to share God's message of hope and love.

They're the icebreakers. They break the ice so that we can talk to them. Most people are awkward to talk to a stranger, but they'll talk to the dog first. And once they can greet and meet the dog, then the volunteer can engage in a line of communication and, you know, tell people that God loves you today, no matter what you're going through, never give up hope. He's with you through your struggles. And it's kind words, kind gestures, and that brings comfort and joy and really peace in people's lives.

There is a chemical that's released in a person, it's an endorphin and it's called oxytocin, and it creates a calming effect in a person. It relaxes them. As a person that has, you know, maybe some anxiety from their needs or from their physical disabilities, or they're angry, or they're worried about something, the moment that the dog can come in their world, that changes. It changes them completely. Their countenance is changed.

A facility that we visit often, in this area, it's a special needs community. And when we first started visiting there the countenance of the people was low. Their level of joy was not very good.

When we started coming there with what we call dog church and visiting with the special needs that completely changed. The joy that they now and have been for years, when we come in with the joy. It just rocks the whole building. The laughter, the praise music, it just changes everybody. And it's made them so much more happier to have these dogs in their midst and it can change the countenance of somebody, it can change the lives of people. And it does.

Crystal Keating:

It does. You know, you have this [great clip](#) from Fox News on your website that I recommend everybody go check out. But one of the stories is how, I think it might have been at Dog Church, where the volunteers and the dogs came, and for some of the children who hadn't said a word or spoken all day, the moment the dogs enter, oh, they become very lively, and they start talking and they start communicating. Is that really what happened?

Larry Randolph:

Yes. There's one story there that really comes to mind is this gentleman, his name is Ed, and he's passed away now. But he was in his forties and nonverbal and we would bring the dogs in, and



Ed was scared of dogs. We brought him into his classroom, and he talked back and, you know, he didn't want anything to do with him at first, but you know, as we kept coming back, all of a sudden one day we saw Ed and he was sitting on the floor in the hallway, and he was motioning to the dog to come up to him. So, I let my dog go up and just like, you know, gradually walk up to Ed.

I was afraid of what was going to happen. So, in that man, his laughter and his joy, once he got to touch that dog and pet that dog and wrap his arms around the dog as he was sitting on the floor, it just spilled all over into the whole building. He was just in such joyful manner. And he didn't want to let the dog go. He was holding onto that leash, and he just didn't want him to go.

And every time we would come back, he would be waiting in the hallway, sitting on the floor waiting for us to come with that dog. And it changed his whole demeanor and it just made so much joy for everybody.

Crystal Keating:

Well, and when you're standing up there with your Bible open, and you're ministering to anyone who will listen, either in the care facility or in a group home, or in a community where people with disabilities live, you are mixing the message of Christ with action. And Joni always calls it adorning the Gospel with good works, right?

Larry Randolph:

Yes.

Crystal Keating:

I love that. Tell us a little bit more about like what you're sharing from the scriptures while these dogs are, you know, nuzzling people with their wet noses and wagging their tails and just loving on them.

Larry Randolph:

Well, we call these dogs, Jesus with fur. And that's a funny thing, right? But that actually was when we first started the ministry and I wanted to get confirmation that we were doing this right. So, I went to my pastor and, you know, we started talking about the ministry and the concept of it and so forth, and he said, "Oh, why don't we think about calling these Jesus in fur."

I said, "That's it right there." So, but that kind of says a little bit about what we do. The dogs are unconditional in their love, just like Christ did for us. And we demonstrate that and tell that to these people, the special needs, and really to anybody.

But, you know, our message has always been John 3:16. You know, we preach the salvation message. We give out and have a special card that the volunteer has with a picture of the dog on it and their identification. And then on the back of the card is how to make Heaven your home. And it's John 3:16. That's the twenty-five words in the Bible that really describe, you know, the salvation message.

And then we have the prayer, the sinner's prayer. And that is what we instill in people as often as we can in the aspect of where we are. So, it's a constant non-threatening way of getting into people's spiritual life and share that message with them.

Crystal Keating:

Well, Larry, you seem like a man who really walks with the Lord and trusts the Lord, and you talked about praying before you started this ministry. How does prayer impact your ministry, and do you have any advice for people who struggle to make prayer a consistent part of their lives?

Larry Randolph:

Years ago, I had always prayed, but I never had a consistent time. Or I would pray, you know, a little bit here and there like a lot of people do. But I started praying early in the morning, and I believe a person should get into a routine or set a pattern in their life and I think the best time is early in the morning when your mind is fresh and clear. You don't have the day's issues to worry about right away and to give God ten or fifteen minutes or as long as you can to pray and journal it.

I believe in prayer journals. I've got fifteen years of prayer journals. Starting this book, *Finding Grace*, was one way that I went back and gave the stories that we have and wrote every story in the journal, and I prayed about them. And I can go back now and see how those prayers were answered.

And God answers prayers. He answers every prayer. Sometimes you don't remember exactly what you wrote or what your prayer was, but if you go back and you can read about it ten years from now and say, 'Well God, you did answer that prayer just like I asked,' and it's a powerful way.

But I'd say that's my recommendation to anybody is write it down. God loves prayers to be written down. He loves that. So, I recommend that to anybody.

Crystal Keating:

I agree. I think the Lord often wants us to remember all that he has done, and the scriptures are full of suggestions if not commands.

Remember what God has done. Remember the mighty works he has done. Look back over the past to bolster our faith now, especially when we are having a harder time seeing him.

Larry Randolph:

Yes. Yes, that's correct.

Crystal Keating:

I think that's a great idea. I love that.

Well, Larry, you're talking about the book *Finding Grace*, and these are stories of, you know, these wonderful therapy dogs.

So, if someone's listening today and feels like, man, I think I want to become part of this ministry, maybe I even want to be a chaplain with Canines for Christ. What should someone do when people are considering training a therapy dog? How do they begin?



Larry Randolph:

Well, for therapy dog for our ministry needs to be certified through the American Kennel Club therapy dog certification called the Canine Good Citizens certification. Now, what that is that's a sociability certification that consists of ten specific tests for the dog to pass, and it's designed to weed out any dog that has any aggressive tendencies that's not friendly, that cannot be petted or loved on or, you know, is uncooperative.

And so, the dogs that passed the test, and there are many, of course, we have over 1200 now, they are certified as therapy dogs under that guideline, through the American Kennel Club, which is the largest kennel club in the world and has a great credibility. So, that's the first thing to do.

The second thing that they would need as far as joining our ministry is to read the Statement of Faith, which is on our website that instills what our beliefs are, which is straight out from the Bible and that's what we believe. And once they do that, and then they want to pray about being a volunteer in this ministry, it's very easy to do. Then we can go through the process of getting them started, completing the application, and getting them involved in their community to go out with others or go out by themselves to share God's message to people that they know, in the nursing homes, the hospitals, the hospice centers, or anywhere they can.

There's tremendous need. The problem is that you know, the laborers are few and the need is great. And we say that all the time because we get requests every day from places all over the country that need more. They need therapy dogs. They need Christian groups to come in to share the message of God's love to their elderly residents or their rehab patients or people that are really, really lonely. So, we need more people, that's for sure.

Crystal Keating:

Well, and if you're listening today and you think, I would like to do this. I'd like to learn more. Go to the website, k9forchrist.org

Larry Randolph:

Yes. K9forchrist.org. And then go to the volunteer link and it'll show you what to do there.

Crystal Keating:

Well, Larry, in your book, you explore the impact of small acts of kindness, and I'd just love to hear if you have some advice for people who are looking for small ways to be God's light in their communities, especially to communities with people with disabilities.

Larry Randolph:

Sure. I have a great way and I've told this to many people. Just think about times that you've gone to a restaurant and a server has come up to you and you know, you're giving your order and they take the order, and they leave and bring it back to you and you never have an engagement with them.

Why not tell them that you're a Christian and that you're going to pray for your meal? And may I pray for you? Is there anything that you would like for me to pray for?

Crystal Keating:

I love that.

Larry Randolph:

And I can tell you I've done it hundreds of times and rarely will any of the servers say no. They'll say, thank you, most of them will say, "Thank you for wanting to pray for me. I'm in school. I need, you know, better grades, or my mother's sick, or I'm going through this or that."

And that's an act of kindness because when you pray for somebody, that's a kind gesture and that's a wonderful way of reaching out. And you don't have to be embarrassed by it because that's God telling you to do that. Ask those persons, that server, how you can pray for them. And it's a simple prayer. You just ask God what their needs are. So, I would say that.

The other thing is, you know, when you go to the grocery store, for example, and you're in the checkout line, just tell the people there, tell the checkout, "Thank you for serving me today. Thank you for checking me out today. You did a great job." Because they get, you know...

Crystal Keating:

They get a lot of complaints, probably.

Larry Randolph:

A lot of complaints. But why can't you say something nice to them? And be nice to them and just to, "Thank you. You did a great job on bagging my groceries today." I mean, that's easy to say, but it makes a difference. And so little things like that, just have joy in your heart. You know and show Jesus to other people. Because most people, they may not see Jesus in their days, but they can see Jesus through you in the way you act, in the way that you respond to people. And if you do it, it can make a difference in somebody's life.

Crystal Keating:

Those are some tangible ways that we can bring comfort and encouragement and build people up and care for them. In our normal, everyday life. I love that. Larry is the author of *Finding Grace: The Inspiring True Story of Therapy Dogs, Bringing Comfort, Hope, and Love to a Hurting World*.

Thank you so much for joining us on the podcast today, and God bless the ministry of Canines for Christ.

Larry Randolph:

Thank you very much. Thank you for having me.

Crystal Keating:

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