

## Wrecked Sessions Session 3

A Welcome, again, to the *Wrecked* sessions with Jeff Goins. I'm your host, Andy Traub. And on today's show we're going to talk about why being numb to experiences can be a good thing when those experiences are in a broken world.

So, let's get started by welcoming the author of *Wrecked*, Mr. Jeff Goins. How are you doing, my friend?

J Hey, Andy. Doing well.

A Awesome. Well, we want to welcome to today's show Matthew Paul Turner. He is in Nashville. Matthew, welcome.

M It's good to be here. Thanks for having me.

A Well, we're going to talk about this. It's sort of a confusing idea. But the goal is to help people move beyond the experience. So, maybe can you start, Matthew, by telling us what you do on a day-to-day basis for a living; and, then, maybe how you found yourself in Jeff's book.

M Well, I'm a writer, full-time. That's my – that's my full-time job. But I do, on the side, one of my – one of the things that I get to do is work alongside the nonprofit World Vision, and I take bloggers, well-known or influential social media folks, on trips to visit various countries. We've gone to the Dominican Republic. We've gone to Bolivia, Uganda, and most recently Sri Lanka.

And I take these writers, thinkers, and social media – or social justice advocates on these trips to see the work of World Vision, to see the needs that exist in the country. And, so, it's a – it's a pretty unbelievable experience to introduce a – for a lot of these people for the first time poverty, and hunger, and issues of need in various forms.

A So, that will play well into the experience that you were featured in the book. So, Jeff, do you want to take that part of where Matthew found himself in our – in *Wrecked*?

J Yeah, so, Matthew and I have known each other maybe now for a couple of years. And I – he's an author that I have a lot of respect for and love his writing. I've been following his work for a while. But about a year ago as I was writing the book, he and I got together for coffee. And we just started talking. There was no real agenda. But I was telling him about the book. And he started telling me about these trips that he leads with World Vision. And he was really resonating with it, but there was this – there was this hesitation that he had. He goes, "That's great, but having an experience is not enough." And he was speaking from more experience than I have.

And, so, I'm grateful to have him on the show, because I think he's going to add a layer of understanding to this idea of being *Wrecked*, which is about having a big experience. It's about having a paradigm-shifting experience where your heart gets broken. It's often emotional. But as Matthew and I were talking, he said, "You know, I think you have to be a little bit numb – don't you think you have to be a little bit numb to the emotions of being wrecked in order to do any good?"

And he and I started talking back and forth, and talking about how much does emotion play into this? Because you can get to the point where you're so numb that you're desensitized to the experience in a way that probably isn't good. And on the other hand, you can just be weepy all the time and feeling bad about things, and that's in of itself not really useful. So, all that to say, I'm excited about talking about this idea that just because you feel bad about something, just because you wear a bracelet, or have a T-shirt supporting AIDS, or extreme poverty, or combating against those issues, rather, doesn't mean you're wrecked, doesn't mean you're living the kind of life that you ought to be living. It may just mean that you're a spectator of those issues.

And we have enough of those people. What we want to talk about, what it really means to be wrecked is to be a person of action who is making a difference in the world.

M And I think it starts with allowing that wrecked experience to drive you to do an action, to become engaged into that experience. One of the – the cool thing about my job or part-time job with World Vision is that I'm taking these bloggers, and like I said, like most of them this is the first time they had been out of the country, the first time they're seeing what World Vision does, first time that they're seeing poverty. But they are – and everyone experiences the need that they see very differently.

And I think that for me while all of these experiences, every time I see a child in a dangerous situation, or I meet a child who has HIV, I mean it breaks me apart. But in that moment I'm there to allow – create a safe environment for these bloggers to be wrecked, to become emotional, to let the story of this child that – or this family that we're engaging, let that story sink in.

I think that it's one thing just to let it sink in. And I think it's – you and I – one of the things that you and I talked about, Jeff, is that a lot of times it's that first couple experiences of seeing poverty, or engaging it, that you kind of have this overwhelming – this, "Wow, I had no idea people live like this!"

You know, my first experience was in Romania. I went to an orphanage. And it was in that orphanage where I met 150 kids who were put out of their homes, or put out on the street, and picked up by this orphanage. And the orphanage was only allowed to keep them until the age of 13. At the age of 13 many of them became victims of trafficking. And it was a – it was an experience that I literally, I cried – I cried for hours over that. And it certainly affected me.

But if I had that – if I went into every circumstance with those emotions upfront, I'm not sure I'd be able to get to a place where I was actually doing something about them. And maybe that's my personality. I think it might be different for all of us. I don't think we should ever get to a place where those kinds of circumstances don't wreck us. I think it's about letting those emotions drive us to something.

A So, the purpose of it is to be wrecked. Another way to say that is to be moved, to be changed, and maybe change is a better word than moved. Because what you're saying is sometimes in order to change you need to get past the emotions?

M Well, I think that you have to, um [pausing] it just – you can't stay in the emotions. I don't know if you want to – I don't know if the wording is "get past them." I don't – I just don't think you want to stay in the emotions. Because like I think that the emotion is – it's kind of like the – it's for lack of a better idea, it's the honeymoon phase of social justice. Because you come home, and you want to do

this, and you want to do that. And you come home to your family, and you want to help them see how, “Oh, look at these pictures. Look what I experienced. Listen to my stories. I want to change. I want to do this. I think we should, you know, stop shopping at this place, and start doing this kind of thing.”

And it’s this real over kind of overemotional experience. And I think that it’s those situations I think they are very good, and I think they’re necessary at times. However, I think that in order for us to really truly make a difference and see need, and see an issue as something that we can affect, that we can help, that we can solve, or help solve, I think that it has to go beyond all of these personal little things that we, as Americans, sometimes get caught up in.

J Yeah. You know, I think to kind of put a point to it, what Matthew is illustrating here is this idea of commitment. Which I set out to write a book about compassion and making a difference in the world. I ended up writing a book about commitment in the various stages of life, and how we have to – if we’re going to become the people that we’re supposed to become, we have to step into new forms of discomfort that are essentially commitments, new ways to commit to my responsibility to making a difference in the world, and to those less fortunate. Committing to people who need me, like my wife and kid. And even committing to my neighbors in community around me. And all of those situations should be a little bit uncomfortable.

All that to say, I think what Matthew is saying is a lot of people have emotional experiences, especially in our world that is, I think, more aware of the social needs around the world than ever before. When I was in college, which wasn’t too long ago, if you cared about Africa, if you were talking about the Middle East, and it wasn’t in a history, or poli-sci class, you were weird. I mean I remember reading the *New York Times* following a journalist who was talking about the humanitarian crisis, the genocide that was happening in Sudan.

And I cared deeply about this, and nobody else knew about it. Nobody cared. And that bothered me. Nowadays, you can go to any college campus, and you are kind of weird if you don’t know about these things. If you aren’t familiar with the One Campaign, or Product Red, or any of that. And some of this has to do with the fact that these things have become trendy. But the bottom line is, we’re just more aware of the social needs around the world.

So, all that to say, awareness is not action. And just because you read a story, or saw a documentary, and it made you cry, that does not mean that you are socially engaged in the world. And if that makes you feel a little bit bad, maybe that’s OK. Maybe that feeling, that conviction, is supposed to compel you to do something.

So, all that to say, I like what I hear Matthew saying which is, when you really get wrecked, it’s not when your heart breaks. It’s when you decide to do something with that heartbreak. And I think this is true for all things, right? Your demonstration of your love for your wife is not when you say, “I do.” It’s when you keep saying, “I do,” five or 10 years after the honeymoon.

M When I visited the orphanage, I certainly was having – I was feeling emotion. And I could have let those emotions stand out front and be the leader in what it was I was experiencing. I could have wept. I could have just been devastated by all the awful stories that I was seeing around me. But instead I took the moment just to fall deeply into the experience. I – I played games with kids, and we played soccer, and we played, Mother-May-I? And we sang songs. And I sat in the middle of that experience.

And, yes, and while it was emotional, and while I was looking at these kids and thinking, “Oh, my gosh, what – what does their stories mean to God? And what should their stories mean to me?”

I also knew that I was only going to be there for three hours at that point. I needed to let my emotions push me into doing something that mattered in that moment. And those moments, like those stories that I engaged, and that time really ended up making a huge difference in my life. It ended up changing how I see the world, and what I engage, and what I didn’t engage. And all of that.

I think that – I think if you take that story and apply it to just the bigger, the bigger idea – ideas in the world is that when we have a story that affects us in a way that breaks us, that moves us, to feel something, I think that we have to access, “OK, I’m feeling something. Now why?” And, “What can I do to help remedy, help be a part of the remedy?” And I think that – and, again, like Jeff said, I think it does come back to being faithful to a commitment, being faithful to an idea, being faithful to constantly being reminded, and reminding yourself of that wrecked experience, and what that experience pushed you to feel and to think.

Because I think that it’s easy – it’s easy for us to go and, you know, whether you go to the inner city, or you go to your – around the world somewhere, like it’s easy to be emotionally impacted. It’s a completely different thing to actually use that – allow that emotional impact to move you to do something and be faithful to something that results in a change.

J Yeah, so, one question I have for you, Matthew, because this is – the book kind of ends on this idea of once you get wrecked, that doesn’t mean you just sit around for the rest of your life caught up in this emotional heartbreak. And, you know, maybe you’re engaged in these things. And that’s it. Like I believe that you’re wrecked with a responsibility to wreck others, to usher other people, to lead other people into an experience that’s going to shift their paradigm. And here’s somebody who does this on a fairly regular basis, you know, several times a year. You’re facilitating these experiences that are wrecking people, like you said, for the first time.

And I think that there is – you have to – sometimes you have to emotionally remove yourself from the situation because it’s not new to you, and that’s OK. And you kind of have to remain objective to lead or facilitate that experience.

So, my question is, you’re a parent. You’re a leader. You’re influencing people just with your life and your words. How do we, as those of us that are wrecked or about to be wrecked, in understand that there’s a responsibility to wreck others, how do we do what you just describe which is, making a choice to remain present to whatever the reality is around us, while at the same time remaining objective to lead other people in those discoveries?

M Well, I mean, I think that for one thing we have to keep engaging – we have to keep looking back as to the experience. I constantly am kind of retelling the story of the first time I was moved to do something, or I was moved to – had an emotional experience what I saw regarding poverty. But I also think that it’s very easy to get caught back into, you know, just ordinary life letting that experience dwindle in your mind, or like become less and less an effect that you deal with.

For me, I think that it’s I continue telling the story. I continue telling the story to the people who want to hear the story. One thing I’ve learned is that by telling stories of things that I’ve seen all around the world is that you can’t make somebody feel something. Like you – like sometimes it does take either

seeing it for yourself, or you engaging it. It's almost like you – it's the idea that you can't change a person. Like I can tell you – I can tell the same story to one person who is completely engaged in wanting to hear it. And it will have a great impact on them. And, then, I can tell that same story to somebody who is, you know, is interested but not deeply interested. And it has no longstanding effect on them.

But I think for me it's just I want to keep retelling that story. And I think it's one of the things with bloggers is that when they – they can easily become frustrated. Because here they are seeing this, and they knee-deep in this experience, and they're pouring their hearts out into their words, and putting their words out there for their audience to read. And, you know, there are times when their blog posts, or their stories will get very little response.

And I think that – and that – I think that is almost as devastating in some cases as the experiences that they're writing about. And I think it's because you begin to realize how unaffected we, as a culture, have become to the sight of poverty, or the sight of extreme need. You know, like you said, Jeff, it used to be that nobody talked about Africa. Or the only context of poverty was the relief organization that did commercials with Sally Struthers. I mean that was the extent of how we viewed poverty.

Once in a while a Dateline episode might cover it, but it wasn't something that we fully engaged. And it – and I think for me it takes – like even for me, it take – and I actually go and see these things on a regular basis. I have to work toward staying focused and being a part of the remedy of the stories that I want to change. I have to stay engaged in it. It's not something that I can just, you know, be affected once and expect that one time thing to continue this wave of change in my life.

My son is four years old. I haven't told him about the extreme poverty that I've seen quite yet. But I plan to. Because I want him to see. He helps us. Like we sponsor several kids through World Vision, and he knows their names, and we told him their stories. But that's it. We haven't gone into the depth of the need yet. But I plan to do that, because I want to – I want him to be – I want him to become not necessarily wrecked at the age of five, but I want him to be aware that people live in need, and people don't have the things that he might have. It's something that I have to be mindful of. It's something I have to intentionally do.

It's funny. Because like the other day we talk about – we talk about his life. He loves toys. And around Christmas he's the classic four-and-a-half –year-old who can't wait for things that he's going to get. But we're always talking – one of the things we do is we select some of his toys to – that he has, or select, go out and buy toys to give to kids who may not have toys, or may not have some of the things that he has. And you can already see as soon as the other night I walked in. I said, "Hey, Buddy, we need to start picking toys. Are we going to give them to kids who don't have toys?"

And, so, it's starting that story, and seeing that seed planted in his life to see that life isn't all about him. And I think while he's only four, I think that a lot of us who are 34, or 44, or 74 need to be reminded of that, too, that – because it's very easy to have an experience, and then let that dwindle.

And I also think you have to – I mean, Jeff, isn't it true that you have to pursue being wrecked?

J Yeah, yeah. I think so. I mean I think—

M Accidents happen once in a while. Don't get me wrong.

J Yeah.

M You walk into something, and it bothers you. But I think you have to pursue it.

J Uh-huh (agreeing). Yeah, I think it's like any – any good thing. You know, it can happen on accident, but it doesn't keep happening on accident, you know? It can happen to you, but if it's going to become a lifestyle, there is a point at which you just are choosing it. And sometimes it may be very emotional. And sometimes it may not be. And it doesn't minimize the importance of that choice.

M I also think that for people who are – who become wrecked, or who become involved, or become emotionally moved by somebody else's experience, I think it's harder for them. Because I think it's easier for that experience to kind of dwindle, or to become less a part of their lives quicker. And I think that it's – I constantly tell people I think it's very important for us to push – put ourselves in situations that are not comfortable. And I think that's very different for all of us.

But there are – I sometimes – and not for selfish reasons. I just – I want to be present. Like you were talking about. I want to be present in a moment when I feel like I'm supposed to be present. Like case in point, I – there's a man who comes to Starbucks, to the Starbucks that I go to almost – he's almost every single day. And he's a homeless man. And he tells the most outrageous stories. And I've sat and listened to those stories. And I don't know what to believe and don't know what not to believe. But there are moments when I literally I say, "OK, God, I feel like I'm supposed to sit and listen and talk and engage him." And there are moments when like I make myself. And I – I wish that was like a natural thing for me at times. But it's not. And, so, I push – put myself in that situation to listen, to hear, to let him be heard. Because that's what he wants. I mean, you know, he wants to matter just like I do.

And maybe that's all I can do to change. I mean, you know, I've given him money before. But as far as like in that moment, maybe that's all I can – I have that power to do. But I want to pursue those moments, because those moments, you know, become – they take on a domino effect that really shift our – the ideals that we pursue, and the things that we are passionate about. At least they do for me.

A You know, one of the things that comes to mind for me is – I'm sort of looking at this from a standing back and saying, "What themes am I hearing as you guys talk?" And one of them is that it's easier to feel emotions than it is to do the work to deal with the actual problem. And, again, neither one of those things are bad, right? It's not bad to feel emotionally torn, emotionally affected by the situation that you see. We should be moved by that. But if that's all we do, then the problem will not get fixed, whatever the problem is.

And whether it's someone needs to be heard, or someone needs money, or someone needs medical supplies, whatever it might be. And I don't think my wife would mind saying this, but it reminds me of marriage in that the emotion wears off. And, then, on some days it just feels like work. But you don't quit because it's work, right? And that doesn't mean you don't love them, because on some days it just feels like, "Well, I'm going to be loyal, because I said I was going to be loyal." Right? Not because I feel like it right now. Or because you're that easy to love.

It's you stay committed because you made a commitment versus, "Oh, it feels like I'm making so much change." Because, Jeff, we talked about with other guests on other episodes when you don't see

any change, and it is messy, and – or you don't see any – nothing is finished. Right? You didn't go, "Wow, they were hungry, and we gave them food!" It was more like, "They couldn't hardly talk," right?

M Uh-huh (agreeing). And I think for me the – the people who are doing the biggest things to make change for other people around the world, whatever that change may be, are – I – they're usually not overemotional people. They are usually very down-to-earth, engaged, thoughtful, and pursuing something. Now, they are passionate people. So, they are on that level they are emotional. But they're not crying every chance they get. Or they're not weeping up every time they meet somebody new who is in this – a very awful situation. They are thinking about the process and have a goal in mind, and making – making steps toward using that one experience that did change them, that keeps pushing them to do what they're doing.

J Yeah.

A So, Jeff, I want to throw it back to you for some closing thoughts on, what do we do with the emotions? What role do emotions play, and not just experiencing but, then, processing and, then, coming out the other side of resolving and making change in our lives?

Is there a path that we should expect when it comes to dealing with the emotions of being wrecked?

J Yeah. So, I think emotions are basically a byproduct. And I think a healthy way of looking at emotions is they may come. They may not come. I think sometimes that depends on your personality as Matthew pointed out. Some of the most compassionate people in the world that I know that are committed to causes of justice, and humanitarian work, and making a difference world through relief of poverty and suffering, they're not – like they're not very weepy. You know, they're not very emotional people. They're not closed off and stoic people necessarily.

And I think we all know, or know of, people who are doing good work, social-service-type work, and that can be maybe they're teaching, you know, which is just a hard profession, underpaid. You're planting a lot of seeds only to see a few of them actually grow. Or maybe somebody works for a nonprofit, or a church, or whatever. We all know people in those settings that are clearly exhausted and bitter.

And that is the extreme that you don't want. You don't want to be so emotionally detached that you're ambivalent. And I like what Carrie Miller, one of the people that I interview for the book said, who lives in Uganda and sees human atrocities every single day, just sees human rights violated every single day. And I asked her after talking with Matthew, "Are you numb? Are you desensitized to the things that you see, and is that good?"

Because she was talking about it so plainly. She wasn't crying. She said, "I didn't cry about this. I don't cry as much as I used to." And, so, what she said was, "No, I'm not desensitized. Because that means I don't feel something. And when I look at this, I feel something. I think this is wrong. I don't break down and cry. I'm not hysterical like I may have been 10 years ago when I started down this path, but I feel something. And that feeling causes me to act." And, then, she added to that, and she said, "But what I would say is this, I'm no longer surprised by what I see."

And, so, I think there is room for us to no longer be shocked, you know, and crying every time we see some terrible thing. And at the same time, not be surprised by the fact that, yes, there are people in this world who are out to take away other people's basic human rights. There is evil and suffering, and pain, in this life. And those things should bother us. And that should cause us to act and respond to those needs.

Now, does that mean that we feel – does that mean that we have big emotional feelings? Maybe. Maybe not. I think of it practically like working out or something. Sometimes when you work out you feel tired. Sometimes your muscles ache. Sometimes you feel that great adrenaline high. Regardless, you're doing work that is going to cause a positive result. You're going to build muscle.

I think compassion is a little bit like that. Sometimes it hurts. Sometimes we cry. Sometimes it feels great. Sometimes we're like, "Man, this is awesome. I've never felt so alive, because finally my life is not about me." I think regardless, a commitment to do the work, much like a commitment to marriage, or a spouse, or a friend, or whatever, sometimes when you show up, those feelings, that good feeling isn't there. But when you show up to do the work, it comes.

And, so, I think regardless of the extremity of feelings, I think a healthy commitment to doing the work, and acknowledging the feelings when they come, but at the same time not requiring them in order to do what we're called to do is a good way to move forward.

A      Awesome. Thanks for that Jeff. Matthew, thanks for your time today. And we appreciate—

M      My pleasure.

A      —you joining us. And, Jeff, as always, thank you for your time.

J      Yeah, thank you guys. It was a great conversation.