

Week 50

12/13/11

Betty: Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I feel like you joined us today because you want to be blessed and I know you're going to be! I'm Betty Robison and this is James.

James: Well, we've got a beautiful family here. At least I see the whole family on the cover of this book, *Passion to Action*. I want to tell you something, you're going to -- there is a close-up; you can see the entire family.

Can you imagine a family in Atlanta, everything is just going great, successful, and all of a sudden they just decide to sell everything, get in a small R.V. with all the family -- I mean, folks, look at them, there are four kids... and mom and dad in a small R.V. and just take off across the country to do what?

You say, "Well, they lost their mind. I don't know that I care."

Well, they didn't lose their mind. They got a commission, a mission from God, the *Passion to Action* to literally go on the road, just go out where people are, meet them where they are and love them, and talk about love, the source of love and life. It is absolutely amazing!

Jay and Beth Loecken and their family, we'll let them tell us all the kids' names, and they tell the story in this incredible, inspirational book. Would you welcome Jay and Beth to *LIFE Today*?

Beth, good to see you.

Jay, good to see you!

Jay: Thank you! Great to be here.

James: Which one of you lost your ever loving mind? That's what people had to ask. Who started this?

Jay: I think both of us did. It's interesting because we were living in Atlanta and I was making more money than I'd ever made in the mortgage business. I think God had begun

to do a work and a stirring in my heart even there. I turned 40 years old and I kind of started reflecting on my life going is this all that there is... just making money? We spent a lot of money on our house, new backyard, new furniture, new cars, and at the end of the day we were empty.

We got away -- Beth and I got away for a long weekend and kind of exchanged lives with a couple who lived in Atlanta and started just really praying going, "What should we do?"

I'd been overseas on some mission trips when I was in college; I spent three years in Ireland. It had made a real impact on me so we decided to go overseas to Africa on a short-term mission trip. We actually led the first family missions trip that North Point Community Church in Atlanta had ever done. It was powerful to see people up close and personal who are in poverty and smell the poverty.

But even more importantly, what made the biggest impact on us was the joy and the community that these African people had. It just blew us away. We went over there with the express purpose, we want to serve them and we ended up getting impacted as a result -- which always happens.

So we came back home to our large house and just laid on the front room floor and just began to weep. It was at that moment that we realized how poor we were; that we lacked the same joy and community that the African people had. We knew that we had to act and we had to do something about our faith and what the Bible said.

James: You found those people respond to love too; didn't you? Betty and I have been all over Africa and you're right, there is more community, there is more love, because they're trying to stay alive, they're trying to find life. We can help them find a fuller more meaningful life, we can help them find spiritual life but you've got to pursue life to find it.

Now what I'm hearing you say, you came back here and found that all this stuff is not the essence of life. We've got blessings. Well, we want to go out -- and you took your family, it had to be a shock, and you went out to confront people about life. Am I right about that? And you were passionate about this kind of action. How did you get in this decision? -- Just the same thing happening to you?

Beth: Well, first of all I just have to say thank you so much for what you're doing in Africa because truly that was the catalyst. That was the wake-up call for us because we were living a very blessed life, the American dream. Something many people just spend their entire lives trying to attain yet you get there and it is kind of like Solomon, it's meaningless.

James: Empty -- vanity.

Beth: So we realized God did not bestow blessings upon us just to bless ourselves but to bless others, to make a difference in other people's lives. He didn't give us material wealth, he didn't give us personalities, gifts, skills and abilities just to hoard it, to make ourselves a big life. So I think Africa definitely just what God our attention.

Jay and I had a dream to travel from when we were first married. I had a real difficult upbringing and when I shared my story with him, which I was terrified to do because any time I had done that to relationships in the past they went south because people ran thinking I was a bundle of problems.

James: What had happened?

Beth: My mother committed suicide when I was five -- and sometimes I can share it like it was just yesterday. And my father struggled to raise six kids, I was the youngest. He battled with alcoholism. Because of the absence and the abandonment of that, there were many types of abuses that were inflicted upon me as a young girl. And so that's just this much.

I continued into a life of sin and self-destructive behavior and it wasn't until 19 years old that God got a hold of my life in a radical way and he said, "I want to use you." But at the time I thought, there is no way God can use me, I'm a mess.

That's why we do share our story in the book because we feel like it is critical to let people know that no matter where you've been, no matter what you've been through, no matter what hang ups or addictions you may still struggle with that God is in the business of restoring broken lives. And not just to restore them but to use them for his glory because people can easily look at us and think, you guys have it all together, you've never experienced hardships. You don't know what it is like.

We go, oh, no! Because I've brought all of those problems into our marriage, not only did I have a difficult life, I brought that into our marriage and we had many struggles and I went through depression and a suicide attempt myself. So it was a difficult, difficult thing.

When Jay and I met and he said, "Let's travel," and we talked about this. He said, "Some day your story is going to impact thousands." And I couldn't see that at the time so when we went to Africa and we came back, we revisited this dream and God had placed this in

us and we knew it was the time, that it was not going to some day when our kids were grown and we retired, it wasn't going to be for pleasures sake or for sightseeing but it was going to have a purpose. And thankfully because our kids were in Africa with us they were experiencing many of the same emotions we were so it was a family decision. Every time we spoke about it, our children were right there in the midst of it. So our oldest who is 17 now was 13 at the time and our kids had a voice. We had to hear their fears and concerns and their opinion. We knew this was going to require a change of lifestyle for them and a sacrifice on their part. It was critical that we were all on board together. So I would say, we were unified in this -- very much so.

James: The whole thing is a miracle; I'm hearing a miracle of God. It's an awesome miracle! So you've got the whole family in a small R.V. and you hit the road. Now just exactly what difference or impact did you think you were going to make?

Jay: Well, in the beginning it was simple. We just wanted to go out and serve. We would read the book of James and go, "Okay, the way I'm living my life right now does not match up with scripture."

It is interesting, one of the guys that we met -- that I met actually before we went to Africa, his name is Seven, just the number seven. He's a rough looking guy. He has a foo man chu mustache, shaved head, spent seven years in prison. When he got out of prison, God called him to go under the bridges and rescue people under the bridges. He looked at me at this three-day spiritual retreat and said, "Son, you're coming under the bridges with me one day."

I looked at him and I was like, "Yes, Seven. I'll go under the bridges with you." And of course, I had no intention to do that but I was afraid of him.

[Laughter]

So we went. When we came back his words rang in my ear. I'm like we need to go under the bridges! I had no clue that 20 minutes from where we lived there was homeless people living under a bridge who needed God's love displayed to them in tangible ways.

What we really have found is that it's important that when we go out and display God's love that paves the way for relationship and then the relationship paves the way for the gospel.

I think sometimes we've gotten it backwards where we try to pound people over the head with the gospel but what they simply need is just to show God's love to them. So that's

what we did, is just simple, just go out and serve. And had no idea that it would turn into a non profit, that we would write a book, that there would be a small group study -- none of that! It was just simply to serve. Then we realized that we were not just supposed to serve as a family but we were to inspire others and then help mobilize people into service.

Betty: You started just right where you live, right where you were.

Jay: No, we decided to go. We decided just to --

Beth: I see her question though. Right when we got back from Africa we did, we started in our own neighborhood, basically and that's what continued to stir the pot for us to go. Going overseas, and we are an advocate of that, that that's just powerful, it's life-changing, but there is also needs right here where we're at.

James: Well, you became missionaries here. Like you said, you saw, actually, a little bit more expression of life in many ways in Africa in all the hardships that you were seeing in the let's say the midst of what we would call abundance. Abundance shouldn't be the problem but it becomes a problem because it becomes the all-consuming, all-controlling factor rather than something that we enjoy and we're able to bless others with. I need to know --

By the way, I want to just say this, there's a web site. They are inspiring other people to take the same kind of journey and they really want to establish a center where they train others, not stop doing what they're doing, but show you how you can do it. So there's the web site. If you want to communicate with them, you may see something in this couple you say, you know what? That needs to be multiplied, I want to feed it.

There's a very successful man in the Denver area, this is where they want to start it, named Phil Anschutz. This would be a great thing for you to get involved with. It really is. You're the one that says, pass it on. You know foundation for a better life. Here's a better life! So I really recommend this to you.

Hello, Phil, how are you doing?

[Laughter]

I really recommend it. And seriously, because you're an awesome man but this is something -- there may be someone else who says, "I only have a little." But you may want to help them do it or you may want to be involved. I want to know because we were

cutting images in of the family out moving about and meeting people, tell me about some of the experiences that were meaningful to you so that now for several years you and the children could keep going because you could see some benefit to the people you're talking to. Tell us what's going on.

Jay: So many! So many!

James: I know you've got a whole book on it. By the way, you can read about the "so many" but tell us about some of those instances that meant a lot to you.

Jay: One guy that made a profound impact on me, we went under the bridges. It was a rainy day. My son Noah was with me. He was five at the time. We looked up, there he was. He looked like something out of the Pirates of the Caribbean. He had slicked back hair, he had missing teeth, he had a beer that was about that big in his hand. He was drunk. We just began to talk and love on him and handed him a lunch. And as we began to communicate, he looked at me and I'll never forget his words. He looked me right in the eyes and he said, "Show me what you say." I just sat there. I was taken back by it. I was like --

James: Show me what?

Jay: "Show me what you say." I was like wow, profound words from a drunk guy under the bridge. He was calling me into action. I walked away from that experience thinking --

James: Love not in word only but in deed.

Jay: I wondered how many people had said a lot of things to him that had never followed through with that.

James: How did you interpret that? What were you going to do?

Jay: I mean he was really calling us to action. We hadn't decided to go full-time at that point. We were under the bridges that day and so it was like wow, we need to do this. We need to demonstrate our faith through action.

Then of course, there has been so many amazing people who are on the front lines of ministry who serve day in and day out tirelessly without any recognition. One guy in particular, his name is Gerald Martinez. He lived in the foothills of Albuquerque, had a successful sign business, made half a million dollars a year and he and his family felt

called to go into what is called "the war zone of Albuquerque." We're talking prostitution, drugs, gunshots. He got chased with cinder blocks, two-by-fours with nails in them, beat over the head. He made a decision.

James: That's exciting! A lot of people want to go into the ministry.

[Laughter]

I can just see them running. Where do I sign up? You're really inspiring a lot of people.

Jay: Exactly! But he and his family were called to live in that community and be incarnational in their life and they wanted to love on these people. It was so cool to walk down the streets with him and see that he is not only the pastor of Vineyard Church there, he has become the pastor of the community. They've seen the crime rate come down 50% in the time that they've been there.

James: Tell us about what has happened to you as a family when you go out and just encounter people that are shocked that you're there.

Beth: Well, I think there are definitely some walls up when there is people who are broken and hurting and they see a family come in. It's usually the kids that disarm them. It is usually when -- we are huge advocates of people bringing their children and doing this as a family because our kids really -- none of us go with ulterior motives but I think they know instinctively that children are there purely for love. They're not doing this for what it looks like for the TV camera or anything else, they do it purely out of love. So that really disarms them because I think there is a trust barrier. Because they maybe have seen people say a lot of things, like Jay said, and not follow through or they've been promised something or they've been shoved the gospel down their throat so they're not sure they want to trust you right away. But we have seen that the walls come down.

James: So you go into a situation that just looks like there is need and you begin to talk to them about God loving them.

Jay: Yeah, we typically try to partner with churches. We believe that the church is the tool that God uses to reach people. So we don't want to recreate the wheel. We want to help be a conduit to bring people into situations and non profits that are already doing good work and then help bring resources and volunteers into what they already have going on.

James: What I see you doing that I think is so important is you're going out and really

revealing the power of love, identifying need, and inspiring people in the community to say, "How do we connect with it? How can we make a difference?"

But you're also because see you immediately started talking about where someone was doing it effectively and now you're passing that on. That's basically what you've also written about in the book. Here's something that works. Here's the love that empowers it. Here's the love that undergirds it.

For instance, all these people you're talking about who are doing various ministry or even yourselves now because you no longer have the business or the job, you've got to be supported by love. People who love you going out and loving the helpless and the overlooked, they've got to enable you.

To me, I see you inspiring people that life is bigger than possessions, that when we possess life we want to release it in whatever way we can and everybody doesn't have to do what you do but everybody has got an assignment. Some people's assignment may be to enable you to effectively do what you do or enable some of these people you see. And then you may be used to inspire people to find their place. I sense that's really what you want to do. Am I right about that?

Jay: Absolutely. It's funny, my brother Brian says that one person's dream is another person's nightmare.

[Laughter]

Sometimes I've wondered that as we've been on the road. We believe that God calls each of us to something unique, that he gives us unique skills, passions, talents, desires and to use that to bless other people.

James: Is the purpose of your book to show people ways that they can make a difference if they don't let the world hold them, that they go out into the world to pierce the darkness?

Jay: The book is really our story; it is kind of our journey. We share ten *Passion to Action* challenges in there that really are designed to help people to think deeper about their lives. And then we share some of our back story. Then we've written a small group study that's really designed to help empower people.

James: Yeah, and that's where you've got the little CD and also a workbook. So you're trying to equip people to go out and be the church rather than just go to church, go out

and be expressions of the life of Christ rather than just going in and listening to messages about it.

Beth: And to serve with dignity so that it doesn't create dependency, that's one thing we've learned along the way that serving with dignity and finding out the skills and abilities of the people you serve, having them join you so that it raises their dignity. It's not one directional, it is not the haves serving the have not's.

James: That's well stated.

Jay: I used to say I want to give people in need a hand up and not a hand out but now I say it is about joining hands with the people that we serve and serving with them.

James: That's great!

Do you appreciate what God's doing in this incredible family, this beautiful couple? I am impressed with Jesus.

Let me make something very clear. I think it is really important, the closer you get to God and this is something I had to learn, in some ways the hard way, the closer you get to God, the more you know his heart, the more that's in his heart will be in your heart.

But everything in God's heart is not our part. See, I used to try to do everything in his heart and I nearly killed myself. I didn't even have time for my family. Did I? I really didn't even have time for God after a while; I'm too busy doing what was in his heart, doing the work of God rather than the will of God.

What you need to understand, when you hear a story like this, it should inspire you to find your part in God's heart, their part in his heart is not necessarily your part. Your part in God's heart might be helping them do their part -- helping us do our part because we're called to help many people do what God's called them to do and inspire others. Be sure you understand this.

But when you find your part in God's heart and there is no greater on earth than servant, you serve others. The moment I met this couple, I said I want to help you do what God wants you to do. That's why I put the web site, its back up there again. You say, "I want to know more about it. I may want to help them. I may want to do what they're doing or inspire others." There is the connection point.

You've talked about Africa an awful lot. We spent a lot of time in Africa and we've been able to help people all over that continent. And right now, this is the last week of something if you've watched us you're familiar with, that's mission feeding saving thousands of lives one life at a time; one person like you helping put arms of love around as many as possible. Watch closely.

(Singing)

James: My precious wife, Betty, prayed so many years ago, almost 20 years ago when she saw the food run out and the children crawling down into the barrels and trying to scrape food and saw the panic and desperation. She prayed and she looked out at you and said, "Would you please pray something with us? Pray that the lines to feed these children will always be longer than the line coming to get the food."

Betty, for so many years, I've got to be honest with you, only in the last months and I know there is economic instability and uncertainty, I understand that and I pray for those of you who are looking for opportunity and God is the one that will open the way and God has promised to bless those who are generous, supernaturally, miraculously and he does. But it is only in recent days now, Betty, that we've actually run out of food.

There is two reasons, one: the support is not quite as strong as it has been and must be. And the other thing is the needs are great just like what's taken place in Somalia where they're telling us a half million could die in the next months and it is very dangerous. And the missionaries are telling us they want to have real strong support to continue to go into areas like that, and what we've been doing in Sudan and in the hard-hit areas of Angola and other parts of Africa.

Betty, I don't want us to run out. I want to be able to say to the missionaries, you're going to have enough. You're going to have more than enough. That's my prayer.

Betty: That's still my prayer. It continues to be. When you're there and you see these children, they stand in line for hours upon hours waiting, the hope -- they've been offered hope that there is going to be some nourishment there. We're going to put some soup in their bowl and they're not going to go away hungry, James. But when you do run out, to see that one that's next in line, the look in their eyes, the distraught, like where's mine? What happened? And they crawl down into the barrels trying to get the last little scoop up with their little tiny fingers and the barrels are hot, James, because we have to keep it

heated up so that it will be good nourishment for them. It breaks your heart. I don't want that to happen again. I know you don't either. I hope you will join with us and let's keep the barrels full so their little bowls can stay full.

James: When you have had no hope and all of the sudden you see hope, and then right at the last moment, like Betty said, it disappears, it's not only difficult for that child, it tears at the heart of the missionaries, and it tears at our heart because we're doing our best.

This is the last week and we need an outpouring of love that is expressed in action. We need your help to meet those needs and there is a joy in doing it. And the joy of the Lord is our strength. God gives us strength. When we bless others, we're blessed in doing it, and he blesses those who bless others -- there is no question.

Would you this last week please dial that number? Take your bankcard, please do it now, make the largest gift you can. A \$100 gift enables us to feed ten children for the next months. \$50, we can feed five. \$30, we can feed three.

We're offering the bronze and this is the last time it will be offered to those of you who will help us care for 100 children and feed them and meet their needs.

We have the book that Beth has written, her awesome teachings. We have *The 90-Day Bible*. We want to be a blessing to you. Call right now. If you write a check, make it to *LIFE*, but call us and tell us you're mailing it. Or you can go online, LifeToday.org and make that special gift. Please do it. If you get a busy, be determined. Dial until you get through because we do need your help.

Begin video clip

Announcer: At this very moment a child is drawing her last breath struggling to stay alive due to a lack of food. Sadly, this impoverished child is not alone and without our help, many like her throughout Africa face death as well.

Today you can make a difference. You can save a life! *LIFE*'s mission feeding teams are in place right now ready to answer the hunger cries of hundreds of thousands of suffering children in remote areas of Africa.

With previous food reserves gone and parts of Africa facing its worst famine and food shortage in more than two decades, we desperately need to replenish our supplies for the feeding programs immediately! Your lifesaving gift of \$30, \$50, or \$100 will help feed and care for three, five, or ten children for three full months.

With your gift we'll send you Beth Moore's book, *The Life that Overcomes*. This Life Outreach exclusive featuring a collection of messages from Beth's heart will inspire you to live an overcoming life each day!

With your gift of \$100 or more to help feed ten children you may also request our new 90-day Bible designed to help you read through the scriptures in just 90 days.

Finally, as a special challenge please prayerfully consider a gift of \$1,000 or more to help feed and save the lives of 100 children. And you may also request the beautiful "Heart of the Father" bronze sculpture.

This is the last week! Please call, write, or make your gift online today at LifeToday.org.
End of clip

In the studio:

James: It's really important for Betty and I to let you know this is the last week. We really do need your help. Please do all you can. If there is any way you can help us feed 100 children for the next months do it. Help us feed ten. But remember, don't look lightly if you say, "James, I can't do much." \$30 means an awful lot to three children.

We're sending you Beth Moore's book and *The 90-Day Bible*. We'll also send, if you'd like to have it, *Passion to Action*. You have no idea what you may be inspired to do. This beautiful family that you see, they've got passion for action. God's will, we want that for you.

Join us in saying thanks so much to this incredible couple. God bless you both. Just keep lifting Him up. Thank all of you so much for your help. Thank you for your friendship. Thanks for joining hands with us.

Beth: On the other side of a perfect storm the serpent is all bite and no venom.

Announcer: Wrecked but not ruined -- tomorrow!