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Week 34

Betty: Thank you so much for joining us on *LIFE Today*! I'm Betty and this is James.

James: I wonder how many of you have ever been hurt in church or whether you feel like you've been hurt by church. I don't know how many in the audience got disappointed in church, somebody hurt you some way. Sometimes it is very difficult to get over.

I know a lot of pastors have been hurt. I know a lot of church folks have been hurt. There were times when I was hurt by church people. And to be very frank with you, the grace and love and forgiveness that God filled me with toward those who falsely represented me or accused me or even attacked me, the love was so great that I actually found myself looking within to see if there was any way that I had inappropriately expressed what was going on in the dynamic of my spiritual journey that could have been so misunderstood that it caused them unnecessary grief. I really did a lot of soul searching myself.

In other words, what I'm saying is I didn't allow the resentment and the hurt to pull me down and keep me from being able to bless others. I think it is very critical that we find that healing from church hurt. And my friend, Stephen Mansfield who is a New York best-selling author, he wrote a great biography on Churchill, *Never Give In!* Never! Never! Never Give In! What a great statesman!

He wrote *The Faith of George W. Bush*, *The Faith of Barack Obama*. He is a very gifted writer. He has written this book, *Healing Your Church Hurt*. What to do when you still love God but you've been wounded in some way by his people. It may be by a preacher or you're a preacher that's been wounded.

Would you welcome Stephen Mansfield to *LIFE Today*?

Stephen, it's good to see you. Really good to have you.

Stephen: Thank you. Great to be with you.

James: Why did you write this? You're a writer; I know you've got a forward by George Barna who does fabulous research, so obviously, you came up with some real

sound conclusions that this is a serious problem. It isn't just something that hit you. What led you to it? Where did it start?

Stephen: Well, I had fairly minor church hurt but it stung so much and it made me so aware of what's going on in the world when it comes to church hurt that it launched me into the book.

I was the pastor of a pretty large church in Nashville, thousands of people. And I'd had a rocky marriage during all the 20 years of my pastoral ministry. For a variety of reasons, when I was out of the country, my wife at the time filed for divorce, came back, I resigned the church to work on the marriage, and things just got mishandled. So it wasn't the typical thing that happens with a senior pastor.

People suspect all kinds of things but it was just a marital problem that needed to be tended and I resigned. Once I resigned things got mishandled and it made it look like things were much worse than they were. I wasn't just leaving to tend to marriage.

When you hear that a senior pastor of a church of 4,000-5,000 has left and there's not much being said about it you assume all the biggies; right? "He's stealing the money." "He's having an affair," something. And none of that was true but the issue was that here I was being spoken of as though something horrible had happened. Here I was being sort of vilified a little bit and mine was fairly minor compared to what most people have.

It was right about that time that you and I met, in fact, because I had just written *The Faith of George W. Bush* that came right on the heels of that experience. I began to travel the country, travel the world speaking and lecturing and so on, and the Lord took me on a tour of church hurt. I would just be sitting on a plane and the guy next to me, somehow, you say, "Hello! How are you doing?" And the next thing I know he is telling me about being hurt. He didn't know anything about who I was, didn't know I'd been a pastor. Didn't know I'd been hurt myself. It happened at the Vatican, it happened amongst the troops in Iraq. Before long, I'm a little dull spiritually, but after a while I began to realize, God is trying to show me something here.

It was not long after that that I spent some time with my friend, George Barna and he had done a survey that indicated that 40% of the people that we call "unchurched" in the America are actually embittered ex-church. So we call them unchurched, we think they're unsaved. In fact, 40% of them have gone to a church, been hurt, and tonight they'll be sitting in a bar or sitting somewhere mad telling their story again tainting

other people and they've been in a downward spiral ever since. I've got to tell you, God put tremendous compassion in my heart for that group.

I didn't want to write the book so much to tell my story, because mine is fairly light and not nearly as bad as what some people endure but I thought, I don't want to write a book on toxic faith or dysfunctional churches, I want to write a book that just really firmly, like a coach, because that's what helped me, I can tell that story when you're ready but what helped me was some people stepping into my life and saying, "Look, you're in trouble. We're going to help you whether you like it or not because you're an idiot, you need help." I wanted to write a book just in that tone to pull people out of this downward moral spiral -- 40%, millions of people, embittered ex-church floating around in our country. I want them back.

James: So what is your main message, Stephen, to them?

I just referenced that people had leveled some pretty harsh statements about me and my journey because God stretched me beyond the secure boundaries of my own, let's say denominational framework, to just really reach out beyond to everyone. It really -- it was like I'd suddenly become the major compromiser. I'm loving people and spending time with people right now that many Christians are really giving it to me. How could you spend time with someone that maybe is of another faith or maybe they don't even believe right, they believe very wrong about some things; how is it that you can love them?

Jesus said, "Love your neighbor -- love God, love your neighbor." He also said, "Love your friends." He even said, "Love and forgive those who speak evil of you." I really found that in doing that, not only do I find that people will listen to me who we've been trained to dislike and they've been taught that we're their enemy, it opens up the door to hear me and oftentimes opens their heart. It seems both of us grow and we begin to move back toward the standard of truth and love and life.

Do you point out to people who have been hurt the importance of them being able to somehow forgive those who mistreated them? How do you --?

Stephen: I don't put forgiveness on the front end because I don't want them to move too quickly to forgiveness. I know that sounds odd, I want them to think about what they've experienced a little bit.

Part of the reason the church hurts hurt so much is that we think the church is heaven - we expect it to be like heaven. We forget that man's fallen, that man is glorious and

wonderful and made in the image of God and man is also sinful, and sometimes evil, and sometimes have the character of demons. And if you're going to be in the church, if you're going to be in the world you're going to deal with human hurt. The Bible says you must go through many troubles to enter the kingdom. All who live godly shall suffer persecution. These are promises that we don't put in our promise boxes or write on our refrigerators but they are true.

The fact is we just need to recognize that to live in this world means to be hurt. If a young man was sitting right there and he says, "I want to be James Robison." I would say to him, "Great! You need to learn how to pray. You need to learn how to preach. You need to learn how to run an organization. But let me tell you something, people are going to oppose you. People you think should be with you are going to oppose you. They're going to hurt you, they're going to talk about you; that's what it means to be in the world."

So it's not that I want to make people cynical, I want them to lighten up and not think that the bashing that they've taken from Christians is some kind of unique conspiracy against them. It's what it means to live in a fallen world. People don't become angels when they go to church, they just bring their stuff to church to let Jesus heal; they've still got their stuff. Right? They've got more stuff because they're aware of their stuff.

So I want people -- I begin by telling some stories about folks in history like George Whitfield, and Jonathan Edwards and a lot of well-known folks, even Bono today, some other folks who confess Christ. Listen, this is what they've all experienced. So if I can get them to start by understanding that there's evil in the world; going to church is not going to church with perfect people. There's going to be hurtful things and it may not have been about you, we at least get a start. Then I start moving them toward forgiveness.

But the thing I want them to do next is to think about what they experienced. What did your critics say that might be of value? What did you -- when you got hurt, what did you reach for? Did you go for the booze or the porn or the nine bags of Oreos? What was it you reached for? I think all that is important.

For example, I was the leader of a pretty large church. I'd been in leadership for about 25 years at the time it happened but somebody said something to me and Lord knows they did not say it to help me be a better leader. But they said, "I have never felt important in your presence." Well, I want to motivate people to change the world so if somebody is not feeling important in my presence I'm doing something wrong. Well, this guy was not trying to help me.

But later, as I thought about what my critics had said, it was sort like E. Stanley Jones said, "Let your critics be the unpaid guardians of your soul." So I wanted to learn from that experience, I wanted to incorporate that as wisdom for my leadership.

So my point is rather than rushing people to forgiveness where they just put it behind them and move on, let's take a moment, think about what's happened, think about what you did. Did you overstay your welcome? Why did you get hurt? Anything you did that maybe we can deal with? We don't want to live in Groundhog Day just moving from church to church getting hurt again and again and again. Let's ask ourselves how this happened. Then finally, we arrive at forgiveness. But I kind of hold them off it a little bit.

Betty: What are some of the things that people are hurt over? Some of them pretty serious probably.

Stephen: That's a great question! I had -- and let me just say right up front that I take the issue of the hurt seriously, no matter how light it looks to me because they are hurt and therefore the damage is being done, the bitterness is working in their soul. But you can imagine, I've heard everything from, "I was democrat going to a republican church." "I was a republican going to a democrat church." Or "The pastor slept with my family member." All the big horrible ones all the way down to "The worship team wore jeans and I don't think they should have." "They painted the parking lot. I didn't want them to." That kind of thing. "They moved the pews out and put in chairs." "The youth ministry took over our church." Things that you're going, Well, okay. Important but you know what?" "They took down the cross and put up a TV screen." I understand it is a symbolic thing but I talked to people who are ready to just go get a gun and deal with somebody over things like that.

So what I learned was there's the hurt that is big and understandable, and then there's what I might call the assumed hurt, taking up an offense. I'm mad because somebody mistreated you. It didn't happen to me -- I'm just mad. But the fact that I'm angry, bitter, distancing myself from God, no longer attending church -- I say in the book that you can't love Jesus and mistreat his bride. We would like to, if you're going to come into my house and watching football on my TV, soaking up my air-conditioning, and eating my food and mistreat my wife -- that's just not going to happen. So we can't really say we're loving Jesus if we hate his bride.

A lot of people out there, because of offenses, they hate the bride of Christ and we can't do that. So the short answer to your question is every kind of reason in the world and

some I would call not important, others very important, criminal almost. But the issue really is, what's the imprint left on the soul? If a guy is sitting at a bar tonight, on his fifth whisky, mad and telling the bartender how horrible the church is and it was about painting the parking lot, well, it still has had an effect on him. My approach to him is not to say, "This isn't important." My point is to say, "You're bitter, you're angry, you grieve the Holy Spirit, you're cut off from God, let me coach you back to some wholeness here." That's my whole point.

Betty: Do you think some people look for something to be angry or hurt about so it gives them an excuse for their lifestyle or what's going on?

Stephen: Absolutely. I think we have experiences in life that become offense magnets and they just draw them. I use the illustration of people putting on Velcro clothes. Man, if you are wearing a suit of Velcro you will attract stuff. People go into a church and if they're in a certain condition of heart, if they really don't want to deal with what the Holy Spirit is pressing into their life or whatever, who knows, maybe their wife made them go or something. Oh, you can find every reason in the world, the pastor has a facial tick when he preaches; like I have weird mannerisms when I preach. Or the... who knows? "The usher didn't say, 'Hi!'" You know what I'm saying where there are three mentions of money and not just one; all the things in the world that folks can be mad about.

I know one guy who went to four different churches and the sermons, the key scripture at all four sermons was the same scripture. Now you know the Holy Spirit is following you from church to church to church when it is the same scripture every time. He didn't get it. He would get mad; think they were talking about him at some pastor's meeting in town. Pastors don't even talk to each other.

[Laughter]

So that shows you how much he knew. But the point is -- the point is, absolutely, people go in church and they start looking. Well, it's a room full of sinners. My goodness, it is a room full of strange people. I've had because I've been working with people in this regard, I've had people say to me, "Man, the church is full of weird people." Well, let's go down to McDonald's. Let's go down to the Y --

James: Go to the state fair.

Stephen: Oh, my goodness! Let's go to Wal-Mart at about 10:00 at night or at midnight or whatever and let's --.

James: Or a ball game or sporting event.

Stephen: We're just -- sin has made us all a little weird. Come on! I've just got to learn to love you in your weirdness and you've got to love me in my weirdness. And if you're mad all the time and not wanting to have anybody weird in your life you'll be living on a mountain somewhere in a cabin by yourself, and that's the way a lot of people will go to church. You will find something to be offended about.

James: When we opened the program I was talking about knowing that people had said things that could hurt. If we look back at what I said at the very beginning that the first thing I did, and I really appreciate the direction you took because I'm looking back because I knew God gave me so much love for these people, and so much forgiveness but where I started and what I actually said was, I first looked at myself and said, "Am I saying something in a way that is not being understood or maybe I'm expressing myself in a way that is offensive? And so I first examined myself and I really think that would be a good place for all the people who have been hurt to start because there are people everywhere who can hurt us.

I walk in the churches and I go to so many. Fifty years of ministry, you've been to a lot of churches and I've been probably in as many and preached to as many people as anybody on the planet. But what I do is I go in and I really find myself concerned about the people that are hurt. I find myself concerned about the people who are hurting people and I just care. All of the sudden, it is like your whole worldview changes to where you just love everybody because I just find so many people that I know disagree with me and I disagree with them and certainly, I must be right and they must be wrong. But the point is, if I'm ever going to do anything to correct anything that is wrong and make it right, I've got to have a discernment of love and care that says, "I don't know where you've been but I care about where you've been and where you are. Let's go somewhere together that's positive."

I hear this is what you're saying because I know you Stephen, I've watching you on your journey, I've watched you grow, I've watched you care about people of a different stripe or a different belief and you want to bring out the best. You want to be a bridge builder. To me, that's the testimony of somebody that's being healed from hurt and you're taking the journey you're inviting people on.

Stephen: That's why I want these people back. I want this 40% of the unchurched out there back because you know how it is. When somebody is rebuilt, when they're healed and brought back, you know from your background in sports, when you have a

broken bone and it heals, it is stronger where it's healed than it was before. So these people, they've got talents, they've got abilities, and they will have a patience and a tempered nature and a character that we need.

We're a little bit strange. We talk about let's go out and get the great unwashed. Let's go reach the lost. Let's go reach people in the bars, people having trouble. Then we've got troubled people in church and then we're mad at them. It's our ministry to get mad at folks. So I want these people healed up and back, not just because, hey, we've got to get them back in the same church and they've got to reconcile -- that's not the point. The point is that these people are called and they're gifted. The reality is most of the people we're trying to reach today have got some church offense.

I'm asking George Barna to think about this. Not only do we have 40% of that unchurched population that have been to church and have been hurt, we've got people who have never set foot inside a church, turn on this show, turn on who knows whoever is on TV, Charles Stanley or anybody and just get mad at who knows what? The fact that I'm saying what I'm saying right now. Well, now we've got another 20% or 30% who are mad that will never darken the door of a church. So most of them are mad at some religious figure of some kind, somewhere, or Christian figure. Gosh, I want them back. I want them healed. I want them restored. I don't want them drinking themselves into oblivion. I want them with us.

James: We've got to get healed in this area and that really is what Stephen is talking about. I highly recommend the book. Do you appreciate what he's shared and the insights Stephen has shared?

You're a great writer and you've communicated a great truth.

By the way, I just say to you, if you'd like to have the book, maybe you experienced some of the hurt and you don't like living in that hurt and you'd like to have some inspiration and insight, we'll be glad to send it to you. Would you consider this? Would you help us do something very, very important?

As important as anything we do to demonstrate the love of God, the compassion of Christ, and the fact that we care and that love can make all the difference in your world? I want you to watch this. I can't describe how this moved me. Watch closely.

On the mission field:

Pich: My son, Chaktra, is sick because he drank dirty water. I am so very afraid he will die like his sister Meum. When Meum turned three, she drank dirty water and got sick. She suffered a lot of stomach pain and diarrhea until she died.

I am asking every mother to help save my baby. Please help give us clean water.

End of clip

In the studio:

James: Betty and I watched a mother named Pich lose one of her little babies, her children and now she had another one she didn't know if she was going to lose him. When Betty and I saw it, we said we're going to drill a well for her village. We're going to pay the whole well for that village.

It is \$4800; that's the average cost. We started asking God years ago, probably 20 years ago, wells for \$3600 at that time. I don't know how long they'll stay \$4800 but that's still the average now. With the rising petroleum costs, I don't know how long it will stay. But we said, "Lord, we would like to drill a well."

We asked God -- I can't tell you how he blessed us, just the blessing of doing it. It wouldn't have mattered what we had to do to do it but the way He blesses to enable us to keep doing it and now that, and I've got to be honest, Betty, I almost find myself saying, "Boy, I just want to do another one right now." But here's what I feel I'm supposed to say, I think there is somebody watching who said, "I can cover that village and maybe one next to it." Or some of you say, "I think that mother is representing a lot of villages."

See we've already targeted 350; I wish it would be 550. I pray today, "God, before I die, as long as I'm on this earth, would you let me live to see that I can help inspire fresh clean water to every village and every person on this planet?" That's a dream -- that's a desire -- I believe it is God's desire.

What do you feel when you see that?

Betty: Just as I listened to her and her plea was, "Mothers... other mothers, help me help my baby." She's lost one child. Children are so dear to the heart of mothers. We feel their pain. And I can't even imagine, James, as she had to watch her baby die like that simply because they had dirty water. Now she's got her other child she's afraid for. She doesn't want to lose this baby.

We can help. We can reach out and make that difference. James, I know my heart is with yours, I want to help this mother but there are so many more mothers that need our help with their children. Please help us drill the water wells!

James: The thing is that the way we meet the need is each one of us do what we can. Not everyone can drill a well. If you can, I believe you will.

Dial the number, take your bankcard, use it like a check and say, "Here's the well." Or write a check, make it to *LIFE*, call us and tell us it's in the mail. Go online, *LifeToday.org* and say, "Here it is. Boy, I rejoice, I can do it!"

Remember this, sometimes you say, "I can't do that." Well, what can you do? Could you give \$1200 and pray three people join you or \$2400 and pray one person joins? Or could you give \$48 during this last week to complete the targeted 350 wells? Could you say, "I'll give \$48 and give ten people water?" -- Ten children like she was referring to? \$48 will do that. \$144 will give 30 people water. Would you do that? Please? Right now, I know you're praying but would you put feet to the prayers and would you be an answer to her prayer and her heart cry? Would you dial the number please or gone online and make the gift?

We have some gifts to send you to say thank you. Please make that gift. Father, you move and as you move on the hearts of the viewers and the listeners, help them to simply obey your loving voice and your direction in Jesus' name. He always blesses us when we bless others. Thank you for making the call. Should you get a busy, that's a good sign, that means somebody else is trying to get through too. You be determined, you call until you get through. Thank you for making the gift.

Begin video clip:

Announcer: Every day millions of children are forced to make a dreadful choice, drink filthy polluted water filled with deadly disease or die from thirst. No child should ever be faced with this decision!

The good news is there is a solution! *Mission: Water For Life* is one of the most exciting and viable demonstrations of God's love in the world today. Suffering can end because clean water changes everything! With your gift today, we can establish and drill 350 new water wells for remote villages in 12 different nations. Your gift of \$24 will help provide clean water for five people! A gift of \$48 will help provide for 10 people. \$72 will impact 15 people. And \$144 will help provide fresh, clean, disease-free water for 30 people for a lifetime!

With your gift be sure to request *Arise*, a beautiful new daily devotional featuring words of encouragement from inspiring women who have shared their faith on *LIFE Today*. With your gift of \$100 or more, you may request the *Arise* audio visual devotional featuring 40 days of inspiration from *LIFE Today's* favorite women guests.

Please prayerfully consider a gift of \$1200 to help provide water for 250 people or a gift of \$4800 to help sponsor a complete well. And be sure to request the 2012 commemorative bronze sculpture, "The Lion and the Lamb."

This is the last week. Call, write, or make your gift online today!

End of clip

In the studio:

James: I want to thank you so much for your help. I want to mention something. I believe God has blessed America for a reason. We wrote the foundational principles that we must return to with understanding in the book, *Indivisible*. It is now available in paperback so you could perhaps get copies for friends. We're also sending with it, the Christian vote pin, two of them.

By the way, the Abraham Lincoln quote in reference to God and prayer, and false assumptions -- absolutely incredible! We're sending this just to say thank you.

And if you want to go online to *LifeToday.org* and just say, "You know what I'd like to have those vote pins because I want to encourage Christians to pray and vote and participate, and I'd like to have *Indivisible*."

Remember also, if you say, "I want to get Stephen's book, *Healing Your Church Hurt*." Well, we'll send it to you today. If you ask for it, say, "I'd like to have it and I'm helping you provide that water."

Join Betty and me here in the audience say thanks again to Stephen Mansfield.

Thank you, Stephen! Always a Joy to see you. I appreciate you very much! Very much!

Thank all of you so much for watching. And again, thank you for your support and your prayers. Let's pray for our country!

Announcer: Faith, family, and freedom are under attack. James Robison and Jay Richards encourage a divided America to stand together before it's too late. *Indivisible* - now available in paperback at online and retail bookstores.