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Week 8

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

James: And we've got a guest by the name of Pete Wilson and he is in Nashville at... I believe it is Cross Point. Is that right? Cross Point Church in Nashville. And it's not even ten years old, 5,000 people or more attending, and the pastor is quite young. He is in his 30s; to me it's like a kid.

When you get up to my age, I'm the oldest person I know now. The thing is that he's written a book called *Empty Promises: The truth about you, your desires and the lies you are believing*. And the issue is that he, as a pastor, a minister, a Christian... some pastors and ministers are Christians -- thank God!

[Laughter]

As all of that, he was trapped by what he says were empty promises that actually, he had believed some lies and he believes that many believers have believed lies. I want you to welcome Pete Wilson to LIFE Today.

Pete, good to see you, buddy! Average age of your church? What would you say the average age is?

Pete: I would say the average age is probably late 20s.

James: Late 20s? They all dress like this -- kind of cool?

Pete: They do. Actually, they dress much cooler than I do -- much cooler!

James: I really want you to cut to the chase because this book, I think is spiritual dynamite in so many ways because I think people are trapped. You've really got basically 12 chapters, and you talk about lies that people believe, and really, the bulk of the chapter is before you get on with how you move on to the truth. Could you just tell us what happened with you to inspire you to first teach the content of this book?

And then Thomas Nelson, hearing about it, right there in Nashville, they didn't have far to go to hear about it but they wanted it and they wanted to publish it.

Pete: I think for me it was years ago. I was in India, actually and we were in one of the temples and there were all kinds of different temple worship that was going on, different idols people were worshipping and I remember just sitting back watching that and thinking, how silly it was to me that they would actually believe that somehow their life was going to be better; that they would get pregnant or they would be blessed by worshipping all these different idols.

So we got back on the van, we were going back to where we were staying and I felt like God really prompted me saying, "Pete, you know what is equally as silly? You thinking that if you got a few more people going to your church next year, that you would be happy. Or if you made a little more money next year than this year, that somehow you would finally have peace." I started to realize that I had all kinds of idols in my own life. There were all these things that I was looking to to give me something that only God could give me, and I had begun to trust in all kinds of different things that I never -- I just never thought of them as idols.

If someone had said, "You worship anything other than Jesus?"

I would have been like, "No! Absolutely not! He is the most important thing in the world to me."

Yet, what had happened in my life is I had started looking to all these things that give me something that only he could give me. It really wrecked me on that trip.

James: Name some of them that hit you right up front that you realized, this is in fact what I heard in the spirit, I believe from God, this is one of them.

Pete: The biggest one for me was acceptance. I realized I had looked to the approval of other people to really define my self-worth.

As you know, when you're in ministry, you take a full-time calling to serve God and you combine that with this desire to gather your self-worth externally from the approval of other people. It's a very dangerous combination.

I realize, I can think back to even when I was a kid playing baseball; how when I did something good on the baseball field how my dad would treat me a little bit different

and getting a little bit of that approval from him and a little bit of approval from the crowd. And from a very early age, I learned that if I could get people to like me, if I could get people to approve of me, that's where I found my self-worth and my identity. That just continued on into adulthood and became a very -- really a dangerous addiction, a form of idolatry in my life and in my ministry that I really needed to find freedom from because it was wrecking me. I was miserable because I couldn't -- there was always somebody that wasn't happy with something. They got all my attention, and over time it just wore me out. It really did.

James: How did you get freedom from that?

Pete: I think for me it was realizing that I was never going to be able to find my true self-worth from approval. I was never going to be able to find my self-worth from achievements. It was only going to come from Jesus Christ himself. I realized -- I remember one day I was thinking about all this and I felt like, you know what? The greatest temptation I faced in my life is not from things that are ridiculously evil. The greatest temptation in my life comes from things that are deceptively good, and most of my life I had been focusing on ridiculously evil. Stay away from all these things that are obviously evil. But what had happened is these deceptively good things like ministry, I had taken these good things and allowed these good things to become ultimate things that then became idol things, that then became destructive things in my life. You know what? God gave me a desire for approval. God gave me a desire for achievement, to do something great with my life, to want to make a difference. But I allowed those good things, those God things to become ultimate things, that became idol things, that became destructive things.

James: You're writing about a lot of things I experienced. You told me before we came out here you're 38. I want to say in my 34, 35 years, as I approached 36, and I had been very active from 18 'til that period of time, and nonstop, and very blessed in ministry, I really reached a place of what I call spiritual burnout where I was operating in the gifts of God, seeing the blessings of God but I moved away from an intimate fellowship, love relationship with him. I left first love; I was caught up in all these other loves. And ministry became an idol, success, what people said about me, the fact that we were having such big crowds and so forth, and that we were so much in demand. All these things fed something inside of me that did not satisfy. I actually realized, basically what you're saying, that I had put those ahead of the fellowship and relationship with God. I felt like I was going to crash and burn.

Now I've got to ask you, did you reach a point -- now you're saying you heard something in India -- but did you reach a point where you felt like all the wheels are coming off and you felt like you were just going to collapse and explode -- burn out?

Pete: I did. There is a very specific night, I can remember it exactly where I was. I was in my truck. It was a Saturday night, I'm coming home. I had just performed a wedding and I'm thinking about the next morning services that I've got to do and I'm stressed out about that. I'm sitting -- I was on Hillsboro Road in Nashville, Tennessee in front of Green Hills Mall. I'm sitting there at that red light and I'm just overcome with emotion. I'm so burned out. I'm so tired. I remember praying out loud saying, "God, let me do anything other than what I'm doing. I'll sell cars. I'll do anything. I'm so tired of ministry. I can't keep all these different people happy anymore. I'm exhausted. I'm so burned out."

And I'm sitting here at this red light. I'm crying so hard that I have to take my sunglasses off. And when I take my sunglasses off, inside my sunglasses was an actual scripture, believe it or not. On the side of the glasses, I didn't know this when I bought the sunglasses but they're made by this guy who started a Christian sunglass company. And on the inside of every pair of glasses he puts -- it is a little P-S 18:2. So I'm taking my sunglasses off because I'm crying so hard, and I'm looking at these glasses and I'm like, wow. I've got Christian glasses on! I didn't even realize it. I was like, God's talking to me through my sunglasses.

[Laughter]

And so I had this exact Bible sitting right next to me. So I was like, God is talking to me through my sunglasses. I'd better read it. So I'm just -- just distraught and I open up the scripture right there in my truck. This is what I read in Psalm 18:2. It said: The Lord is my rock and my protection and my savior. My God is my rock, I can run to him for safety. He is my shield and my saving strength, my defender. I felt like God was saying, "Hey Pete, just stop it. Stop chasing after success. Stop chasing after the approval of other people. I'm enough." I felt like he was saying to me, "Hey, you don't want something from me. What you want is me."

I think a lot of us think we want something from God. We don't want something from God, what we want is God. That's what our heart and what our soul is created for. I think that's what I was longing for and I was looking for in success -- I was looking for it in achievement. A lot of other people look for it in beauty, they look for it in money, but I think there's moments like this where God is really speaking to us where he is saying, "Hey, I'm enough! I'm your rock. I'm your defender. Just run to me."

Betty: Anybody -- I mean anybody or anything can be an idol if we put them before God; can't they? The girl might say, "Man, if I just had this guy. That's the perfect guy!" Or the man says, "If I just had this job, boy, I would be successful and I'd do this for God -- and all this." But all God wants is us -- and that's all we need is him.

Pete: And the sooner we realize that, the better off we're going to be. But yet, again, we live in a culture that's told us... we've all grown up seeing the commercials, reading the magazines, telling us, "Hey, if you get this, then you'll be happy." "If you look like this, you'll be happy." "If you get this corner office, you'll be happy." "If you live in this kind of home, you'll be happy." "If you get 2.3 kids, you'll be happy."

[Laughter]

And so we chase after all these things thinking it is going to bring us some kind of happiness but it never does -- it never does.

James: I think people in our churches, really, at least the churches are filled with people, they're filled with empty people a lot of times. It breaks my heart because I've been there. There is no substitute for a relationship with the Lord but we get trapped.

I need to know, how you sharing this affected the people who sit out and listen to you preach? Did they feel like they just had a failing pastor that failed miserably or did they find some source of say, identification with the journey you were on and the pain you were experiencing and you were willing to admit it? What happened to the people who were listening to you?

Pete: I think... first of all I was scared to death to admit these things because again, when you're an approval addict, telling people that you're not perfect and taking yourself off that pedestal is not always the easiest thing to do. But I think there was a real connection with people where people appreciated -- I say sometimes, "Authenticity is the cry of all but it is the game of few." We're all longing for authenticity. We want authenticity but we're all nervous to let go of who we think we should be in order to embrace who God really created us to be, and that's part of my goal in ministry is helping people find freedom to really embrace who God created them to be. So I have to lead the way in that. I had to be honest about the things that I struggle with and the things I've looked to, to try to give me self-worth.

The basic response for most people was, "Me too. I struggle with that." It may not be acceptance for them, maybe it was money; maybe it had to do with beauty; maybe it

had to do with some kind of dream that they thought they needed to achieve to finally be somebody. But most people I have found really struggle with empty promises. We all have fallen into this trap.

Gosh, today I was talking on the phone with a professional athlete. He has everything you could imagine. Everyone knows his name. He makes more money than most of us put together, but he's empty. And as we talked on the phone, there is just this emptiness inside of him because he's achieved everything that everyone has told him to achieve and yet he still doesn't know who he is because he doesn't know who is in Christ.

One of the saddest things I've ever seen, we go into this little like mud hut and this family, they have something cooking over the fire. I remember asking the interpreter, "What is that? What do they have?"

And she said, "Those are dirt cookies." They literally take dirt and mix it with some kind of oil -- that's all they have. And she said it has zero nutritional value but it is enough to kind of make their hunger pains go away for a short amount of time.

I'm watching this family interact with each other, and this family was a Christian family, lived in the middle of a slum full of thousands of people who are mostly Hindus -- the only Christian family in this entire slum and they had this sparkle in their eye, they had this peace that as I watched them, it just struck me, how is it that a family eating dirt for dinner has this kind of level of peace? And what I felt the Lord was saying to me is there is zero correlation in life between money and true peace -- zero.

I went home from that trip to a church full of people that make more money than most of them know what to do with and yet they have don't have a lot of peace. They don't have peace in their marriage, they don't have peace with their family, they don't have peace with their children, they don't have peace in their career.

It just struck me -- again, there is no correlation between money and peace -- there is no correlation between all of these empty promises that the world has said chase after and get these things and what Jesus really wants to offer us. It's just been so eye opening for me and I felt such a freedom in my own life to discover finally what it is I'm really looking for.

James: I think that as you listen to what Pete is sharing, I think it is really important,

and you heard me just touch on my own journey, back during the time when I was your age.

By the way, the journey that we're on doesn't just come to a screeching halt until we leave this planet for the life beyond this life; and for those of us who know eternal life, we already have eternal life. So we have that but what about right now? What's going on?

Many of us, as Christians, believe a lie and we experience defeat and it can be reoccurring, it can be habitual, it can be a terrible bondage, it can become like a stronghold. The reason these things happen is we have erroneously substituted something for that relationship. You can go to church and substitute -- a lot of people show up but their light never shines forth because they have literally replaced him with something else that has captured their heart.

I said earlier, even ministry and the blessings of God, and the things that I never had when I was a child, being out there for me to give attention to, to be distracted by, to be enamored with, or even captivated by. And once we're captured by something else, once we're captivated by something else, the Bible says an idol leads us to a place, Pete, I think it is important for people to understand this, that we are sharers with tormenters; Paul said, "-- with demons." Once you are in any kind of idolatry, I don't care if you worship your denomination, you worship your success, you worship what people think of you, you worship your hobbies, you put something between you and God, torment sets in. I don't care how often you show up at church. You can look at people in church; they're not many of them have the peace of God prevailing in their countenance.

Isaiah said, "Your countenance testifies against you." He said that calling the nation to repentance. He said, "Look at you and your countenance testifies something is wrong." Well, this is what happens to so many people.

Here's what Pete wants you to hear. This is why the book will be a blessing to you. We would be happy to send it to you; it's in the bookstores.

Father, I pray for every person watching today who is allowed anything, however good it may seem to be, to come between you and them, to recognize it for what it is, unfulfilling, empty; it is a lie -- yes, an idol. And I pray they'll throw it down, lay it down and reach up to you as you reach out to them; in Jesus' name.

God is reaching out to you right where you are. You want someone to pray with you? You see that number on the screen? It's paid for by love. Somebody loves you. Somebody will pray with you if you want them to.

Pete, one of the things that we do that's as exciting as anything we'll ever do in our lives -- as a matter of fact, God has put this on my heart and I tell all of you this, that before Jesus comes or before I go to be with him, I want to help get clean, non-contaminated drinking water to every person on this planet that doesn't have it, and we've got to do it one well at a time, one place at a time -- but that's in my heart. We want to share Water for Life so we can then tell them about the water of life. We want to show them love and then they'll want to know love because they've seen it.

I want you to watch this because we're going to join together and we're going to be an answer to people's heart cry and need. Watch closely. I think you'll want to meet this need.

James: And there really is... and it's so simple, it's as simple as not just a cup of water because there is no way, Betty, that Jesus would say, if you will give just a cup of dirty contaminated, diseased-ridden water in my name, there is no way.

He was saying what we have here, in our blessed nation, and in the advanced countries, non-contaminated water, and it is a big concern to us. Those precious children and those parents and grandparents and people you looked at, were thinking about children that had died drinking water, disease-ridden water. We can change that this year with God's help.

And, Betty, this is a big -- I'd say it's a step of faith but it's listening not only to the missionaries but I believe to God. The missionaries have shown us 500 areas where there is water that we can get if we just drill, in 12 nations, and it will change everything. We want to give them Water for Life -- yes, we will tell them about the water of life.

I want to tell you something, until you demonstrate the power of love, and God's love, people aren't nearly as prone or anxious to listen to it. We need to show them the love of God. Betty, I believe every viewer watching can help us drill a well. Do something to help us drill these 500 wells.

Betty: Me too, James. As a mother, when I watched the mothers weeping because either their child is dying or they have just died, James, that breaks my heart. The simple solution is that we drill these water wells so that they don't have to watch their babies die because of the contaminated water.

James: Well, I've been praying that every viewer of Life Today all over the world -- and I want to say to all of you in the Canadian provinces, all of you in the United Kingdom, all of you in Australia, all of you in the United States, I've been praying that God would put it on the heart of every person who can to find a way to drill a well during the course of this year; \$4800 -- that may be for some -- you say, "Boy, that's quite a stretch!" God can do it. We see children get it on their heart and they do it. They find ways to raise the money.

But here's what I know, and Betty, this is the key, everybody does what they can, and this is important -- \$48 towards a \$4800 well will give ten people water, basically, the rest of their lives; \$144 will give 30 people water the rest of their life. There is a level at which you could participate. If you can give \$4800, I believe you'll do it. I believe there are children that are thinking right now, how can I do it? They're going to find ways to do it. There are couples, there are companies, there are churches, there are prayer groups and there are individuals who will say, "I'm going to do it."

But at whatever level you can participate, it is important to those ten, if you give \$48 -- if you can give a portion of a well, \$2400 and pray, "God, let somebody join me," another \$2400, we've got a well -- give the \$1200 -- whatever you can do, we're asking you to make that gift.

We have some gifts to bless you, to encourage you, and to inspire you, but you're giving the greatest gift, you're giving the gift of life. Call the number. Use your bankcard like a check or if you write a check, call us and tell us what you're sending in the mail; would you? Or you can go online at LifeToday.org and make the gift right now. Please do it.

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 500 new water wells for remote villages in over 12 different nations. Your gift of \$24 will help provide clean water for five people. A gift of \$48 will help provide for ten 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 Beth Moore's "*Blessed Mornings & Restful Nights*," a beautiful new daily devotional to begin and end your day in God's presence.

With your gift of \$100 or more, you may request *Morning and Evening: I will Praise You*, a two CD collection of 20 instrumental hymns and the companion book that shares the stories behind each hymn.

Also, 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 limited edition 50th anniversary bronze sculpture, *Living Water* by artist Robert Summers.

Please call, write, or make your secure gift online today!

End of clip

In the studio:

James: Betty and I just want to say thank you for your gift. I do want to mention that the 50th anniversary Robert Summers' bronze, *Living Water*, this is a special edition celebrating our 50 years of marriage. Isn't that a miracle? Miracles still happen. This girl stayed with me all this time. You say, "That's a miracle!" And also, 50 years of ministry.

But we're sending that for those of you who will give a gift of \$1200 or more or a well; Beth Moore's book, and the hymns and the beautiful CD with the instrumentals. If you'd like to have Pete Wilson's book today, you say, "I'm interested in what he shared. I'd like to have what he wrote." We would gladly say thanks if you make a gift to help us with the wells.

Would you join Betty and me in saying thank you to Pete for being a real blessing?

Thank you! God bless your church.

Thank all of you very, very much for watching and giving us a chance to not only share our hearts but we believe the heart of God and hopefully, bless yours.