

Week 22

5/27/13

James: Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm James Robison, with our son, Randy. I have told you, if you've been listening, that Betty asked for just some time to be alone, just her and the Lord. It's been a while now since we lost Randy's sister, his baby sister. Boy oh, boy, we love that girl.

Mom said, "I just need a little time where I'm not having to be on television." And I really think sometimes we preachers are not sensitive enough to know we need to give it because I'm thinking about you, people all over the world, thinking about our guest today and people like Heather, who has an incredible story called *Sober Mercies*.

I want you to welcome Heather Kopp.

Heather, we're glad to have you here with us.

Heather: Thank you for having me!

James: Randy has already had an opportunity to visit with you. I asked Randy, if he would, help this week and he's been willing to do that for a couple of weeks, actually.

Randy, you have not only been involved with a lot of writing and you certainly help me a lot, but you are a very gifted writer. You've written a book on happiness, it's just fabulous. But you really were interested in what was going on in Heather's life and had an opportunity to visit with her. You might want to kind of introduce her to our viewers.

Randy: Well, if you don't know who Heather is, Heather has written over two dozen successful non-fiction Christian books, the *Pray in the Bible* series and worked with Bruce Wilkinson on several books, *The Dream Giver*.

But Heather, while writing, found herself -- a Christian writer -- found herself doing what is kind of almost a stereotype in the world, especially fiction writers, secular fiction writers, at least in the movies, battling alcoholism. That's not usual for Christian writers.

[Laughter]

Heather: Well, it's not usual in a lot of people's minds for Christians, period.

Randy: How did you get there?

Heather: Well, I have been a Christian since I was 15. That's what's a little bit different about my story is that I wasn't an alcoholic who then became a Christian and got saved out of my alcoholism. I was a Christian as I became an alcoholic. I didn't start drinking really seriously into I was in my late 20s. I was going through a divorce and began to date who is now my husband, Dave. And it began with just wine at dinner; this is what civilized people do. We have a little wine with dinner. I just immediately took off. I always wanted more than my husband wanted. And he got concerned and would say, "Honey, better watch it." Which I would take great offense over; so I kind of used that to justify trying to hide a little or have it when he didn't know. And it just really grew from there.

I didn't have any understanding of alcoholism. I just thought, well, this is something -- you become an alcoholic if you drink and drink and drink and drink and I can control this. I didn't understand that I was very susceptible because I have a lot of alcoholism in my family. That's kind of how it happened. I didn't understand that when I drank a glass of wine or two, I wanted more.

Alcoholic, what separates them from a non-alcoholic is alcohol... they don't feel satiated or I've had a glass or two and I'm done -- they feel more thirsty. As I was saying to you earlier, it is kind of like somebody who the more they eat the hungrier they get. So I took it under ground. I was embarrassed and I was ashamed, and I had always been taught that if you -- to call it even an addiction is just an excuse. So I didn't know anything about it and I really found myself drinking every single day, having a stash always hid in my closet, and it just got worse and worse and worse. And of course, eventually, my husband understood that I had a problem because --

James: Did it not affect your behavior enough that it was actually noticeable not only to others but even to you? Did you not notice some kind of a change or were you containing it, you thought, so well that it's really not that noticeable?

Heather: No, I knew that it was noticeable but I was always trying to hide it. What I would do is make sure that people saw me have a glass or two of wine to explain, and then they wouldn't know that I'm having three times that locked in my bathroom. So I'm making secret trips to the liquor store in Oregon where we lived at the time for most of my alcoholism, to the grocery store, they sold wine there. But anyway, it

proceeded that way. And then once I was so stuck in it, and I just kept praying and repenting and going forward. I could not figure out why God wouldn't just heal me and deliver me. I'm a Christian, God can do this. I really wanted a miracle. I wanted to wake up one day and have that be the day -- and it never was.

Randy: Why do you think that was? Why do you think God didn't just answer your prayer and heal you?

Heather: That's a really good question. I think for a lot of people that happens. I believe God can deliver us from anything. I think he can heal us from anything. But in my case, I think I had so much pride and shame around it and resistance to anyone knowing. And when I finally did have that breakthrough to where I was sobbing by my bed -- and it was like somebody had died. I was finally on my knees and I had this huge breakthrough because I had been trying to surrender but I couldn't quite get over the line. So when I did have the big breakthrough I thought that meant oh, he's delivered me, magic! I'm not going to drink again. And that afternoon I drank.

And then I realized, oh, the breakthrough was not a miraculous cold turkey deliverance, it was a willingness to tell my husband the truth and to get honest and ask for help, and come into the light and experience the crushing of my pride.

And of course, all those years, I thought the shame would be so unbearable if I ever came out; that kept me hiding. And then as I was saying to Randy earlier, when I did finally -- Dave came home from work the last night and I said, "I know you already know I have a problem, it's way worse than you ever thought. I can never remember what we did the night before." I mean I was having blackouts. I could hardly work toward the end but the relief -- the relief when I came into the light.

James: Being open.

Heather: Oh, my gosh! Getting honest and saying the truth and finally just putting it out there. I had expected unbearable shame; I would die of it. And instead it was just oh, my gosh! -- The relief to be free, to not be hiding and to get help. So I went into treatment and got help.

James: You felt like that was necessary too? It wasn't just a matter of saying, "Okay, I'm open now. I'm being honest." You still needed to go and be treated, so to speak, be reprogrammed?

Heather: When I started calling the insurance company to ask about would they pray

for treatment, they said, "Absolutely, but you have to check in to --," when they found out how much I drank.

James: A treatment center or something --

Heather: A medical detox because it can be dangerous. You can die from just stopping drinking. So yes, I did need to go to treatment. After treatment I continued on in recovery programs.

James: How long has it been now?

Heather: Six years -- six years.

James: Have there been those times when you felt like "I'm going to fall off the wagon" so to speak? Or did you gain a strength or enough of a circle of support around you that you felt like you could handle it? Or if you got to that point, you thought, "Well, I'm getting off the wagon." Somebody was there that you could lean on?

Heather: Yes. I actually had one relapse at six months in the Minneapolis airport. Got in a big fight with my husband Dave and decided I would drink at him because I knew my sobriety meant a great deal to him. So this was how I was going to punish him.

James: It's really been his fault the whole time; right?

Heather: Yes, yes. Surely! Surely! Well, that really, in my mind... So I did have one relapse and it was at that point, actually, I had come into recovery very arrogant. I know the Bible, I know God, and I looked around and thought, maybe I can help some of these people. That was my attitude.

So the humbling had to continue, and I had to actually do the work around recovery, and also made the wonderful discovery that it is not just a matter of stopping drinking and having the same life, because that would have been misery for me. It is stopping drinking and then entering into community, and being able to give away the new dependence I had found on God. I think in retrospect, if God had wham bam healed me way back when I begged, I would have said, "That's awesome! I'm okay now." And I would have walked away. But now I have a daily miracle; every day I depend on God to keep me sober. And it's drawn me so close to God and I love that! And it's way better and I get to help others.

Randy: Let me ask, the people that you were afraid that would shame you, that would tell you that you have a moral failure, how did they react when you came clean?

Heather: Well, you know some of them did sort of communicate that to me that they were embarrassed for me as I would have been. One of the things that helped me actually finally have that breakdown; I think I was finally miserable enough. We get in enough pain we're finally willing to change. But I didn't have any hope that being sober could be fun until I met someone who was in recovery and she was hilarious and funny, and that planted a seed, what if I actually could be happy without this?

James: Is she doing well now?

Heather: Absolutely! And there's a whole other life...

James: Was she already ahead of you and she was an encouragement to you?

Heather: She was way ahead of me. When I found out -- but I was embarrassed for her is my point. I had that judgment. My mindset all along --

James: You were religious sick, and it's really, really horrific how sick religion makes you. Some of the worse addicts are religion addicts and they have absolutely not one aspect of the fruit of the spirit. They don't have any kindness or grace or patience or mercy. They're not forbearing. They're not meek. They're not teachable. They're certainly not humble; if they are, they want you to notice their humility and how humble they are. It's really sad. And you're grinning about it because it is so true.

By the way, we're not trying to shame you if that's what you're addicted on, it is just a sad state. People who are addicted on religion, there is such an arrogance and pompousness about that that you really have to go to the Pharisees in the Bible to see anything comparable to it. And yet we have got churches that are full, sometimes pulpits full of that and it's really, really nonsense. We've got to get delivered from it.

So you saw somebody that was ahead, she became an encouragement. Isn't this more of what the Christian life is supposed to be where you really inspiring each other by the journey and even by the weaknesses and the frailty and the failure, and the fact that we need Jesus to pick us up when we get our eyes off of him and go right down below the water after looking so good on the water? All those things happen. You talk in the book -- I think, didn't another family member, didn't your son have some battle here that got your attention?

Heather: Absolutely. Here I was with all my secret drinking while my boys were in high school and then on into college. And one of my sons, immediately -- by the time he was 15 or 16 began to have drinking issues, began to look very much to me like an alcoholic in the making. And you would think that that would be enough to make me --

James: To have gotten your attention?

Heather: Yes! -- To make me stop to help him. But astonishingly... and I was worried he would die because of his drugs and alcohol and depression. And up into his 20s... we actually did one intervention with him as a family and I did that intervention with my purse stuffed with little mini wines like you get on an airplane; that's the hypocrisy that I lived in. And the more hypocrisy you have, the more shame you have, and you just go deeper and deeper and the self hate is so horrible.

But amazingly, after I got into recovery, my son eight months later moved to Colorado Springs to be near us and got into recovery and he has not had a drink since. He is wonderful! We have our different paths in recovery.

I'm one of those people that recovery, whatever recovery or program works for you is the one you should embrace. So there are a lot of parachurch groups that do so much good like Celebrate Recovery or there is AA, and I think each of us, depending on our background and where we're comfortable need to find our own place in that.

Randy: What do you say to somebody who may have flipped on this show, this channel and they're hearing you talk and they're going, "That's me -- that's me!" What do you tell them?

Heather: I say, "Oh, honey... oh, honey!" Actually, those people I have a blog about Christian faith and recovery and how they overlap.

James: What is it? How do they find it?

Heather: It is called SoberBoots.com -- SoberBoots.com. That comes from the fact that I used to hide my alcohol in my boots in my closet, and now I joke that my boots are now sober, they're not thirsty anymore. And then Dave buys me...

James: So you actually try to help and assist. And if they wanted to get your book in

the bookstores or online, you can get it, but they could also probably go to your web site?

Heather: They can go to SoberBoots.com and there is a lot of blogs there and information.

James: Do you go speak on this subject any? Do you do that or are you mostly in writing?

Heather: I absolutely will be speaking. I'll be speaking more. Most of the speaking I've done up to now is to recovery groups. But with the launch of the book...

James: And if somebody wanted you somewhere, if they went to your web site and communicated, "Here's an occasion that might merit your attention," you would look at it. Right?

Heather: Oh, absolutely!

James: You really talk about the shame. You make it real clear about people not wanting to look like a moral failure. They've been trying to pull themselves up by their own spiritual boot straps, pray harder, repent more fervently, fight temptation until we're blue in the face but our best efforts continue to fail. So a lot of Christians are at that place and there is a shame.

I think sometimes a church does tend to appear to put people down or think low of them, even if they've been divorced, if they've had some kind of big problem that the others don't have or haven't had. They tend to make that person feel like I'm going to be... and you know something else, I believe when we fail in our Christian walk? Because we love God and we really love the people that love us, we love our families, we hate the thought of them being disappointed in us. We don't want to disappoint the people that care about us and believe in us...

Heather: And we want to be a good witness.

James: Exactly, and it is very difficult to admit, "Hey, my feet are of clay. They're dirty bad clay." And we don't want to admit it. I've tried as hard as I can on this program and everywhere I preach to get people to be willing to open up and for people to make it easy for them to open up. See that woman that was laughing and happy? She was making it easier for you on your journey. She wasn't putting you down. You were

seeing yourself in a whole better light and this really needs to be... I think that's really what you point out is that you really do absolutely point the way in the book.

Heather: I hope so. I hope so. I hope that... There is such a stigma around alcoholism. Even in Christianity, I think there is this idea that certain addictions are more acceptable than others. We've actually gotten really good at talking about men and pornography, and that's become a subject that a lot of books have been put out on and the church has come a long way but I think...

James: We need to come a long way in all those areas. So what you're -- in answer to Randy's question, you're telling people to open up and get honest. And you're telling them to be willing to tell somebody and really can they -- is there something you say to help them get past the fear of disappointing everybody?

Heather: What's astonishing is when you are honest with people and you go to people and you lay out your brokenness and your pain, I found so much love and acceptance, way more than I dreamed. And when I began to blog about this subject and come out and say, "I am an alcoholic and I became an alcoholic while I was a Christian."

I got such a flood of people saying, "Thank you for talking about this." And a lot of women saying, "I still can't come out. I lead Bible study." "My husband is a pastor and I'm a secret drinker." There are so many more of us than we realize. So yes, that's my message.

James: I'm praying that God has moved in your heart where you will open up. Here is the book. There is her web site. I encourage you go to there if you're in a battle. Then do you see the telephone number that's there too? There is somebody ready to pray with you that cares about you.

Father, I pray for everyone in a battle right now that they would find someone with whom they could open up; that they could confess to be made whole, not just to feel better. Thank you for Heather, her openness, her healing, the friends that encouraged her, her family, her husband, in Jesus' name.

Heather, thank you. Thank you for letting us share with you.

Heather, you know we as a ministry and as a family, we find incredible joy in relieving others and giving them life. I don't know of anything... and Randy, you've had a big part of going to the ends of the earth, so to speak, with us to reach out to the suffering. We're going to see something right now that's going to bring joy to everybody's heart.

You're going to go -- you talk about experiencing something where you go from "uh-oh" and you want to turn away -- don't! What you want to look away from -- I always say, "Don't look away from it." Point them in the right direction. Look to them and reach out to something you want to pull back from. But I want you to watch what happens when love reaches out. Watch this closely.

On the mission field:

Announcer: When we met Jacob and his grandmother a year and a half ago, our hearts sank. What his frail body would have to overcome seemed almost insurmountable. His story represented the plight of so many here in Africa.

When we shared it, you responded. We knew your response had saved thousands of lives. But when our team returned to find Jacob, we still couldn't help but fear the worst. We drove anxiously through the village in search of him and what we found blew us away. Were it not for recognizing his grandmother Marie, we wouldn't have believed it was him -- a little boy running, playing, laughing. Your response had miraculously delivered Jacob this new chance at life. Even Marie had long forgotten how truly close Jacob was to death until we showed her his story.

Open captions: I am very happy. I am not sad anymore. I was sad when Jacob was sick. My heart is full of happiness because of Jacob.

Announcer: Jacob is the proof that mission feeding truly can take a child who looks like this and turn him into this. Your response was the difference.

Now, if Jacob was the only one, we could say our work here is done but you and I both know it is not. Like Jacob, these children need your help. Let's give these children the same chance at life you gave Jacob.

End of video clip

In the studio:

James: You know right there in that same place our mission workers held little children that were like Jacob and they didn't make it. It breaks our heart. But Jacob -- and I think it is real important for you to know this -- Jacob's story -- and Randy, you know this is true because you've seen it -- what happened to Jacob represents millions -- I said millions of little children like that who were going to die. They were dying miserably, painfully, and Randy, now they're smiling, now they're playing.

Randy: We could not do what we do if it were not for the stories of little boys like Jacob. It is hard -- as hard as it is to watch these images on TV, it's harder to go there and walk among these people, these children who are starving and dying and then fly back to the states and have a nice meal with your family. That tears at you.

But we know that we are seeing stories over and over of little boys like Jacob who are given that chance, given a bowl of soup. They respond and they have life. That shot of him throwing up the ball in the air, just playing like a little kid should, that's why we do what we do but we can't do it without you.

James: A lot of things that we take for granted, like Randy says we come back and eat. I don't feel guilty about eating, by the way, I don't feel guilty about having the water. I feel concerned about people who don't have the food or don't have the water; and guess what? I don't just have concern, sit around saying, "I wish something would be done." I do something about it. And I cannot give water to everybody and I cannot give food to everybody but I can give food to some.

This is where mission feeding was so beautiful. Think about the beauty of this. \$30 -- you think where you could spend \$30, \$50, or \$100 will give three, five, or ten children food for months -- for months! And now we've got a matching gift and what you give right now online or by dialing that number and taking your bankcard or writing a check, whatever you give will be matched, it will be doubled. A \$100 gift jumps to \$200, 10 children being helped jumps to 20. If there is any way you could help us care for 100 children with a \$1,000 gift, it immediately enables us to care for 200.

Would you reach out and touch someone with love right now and dial that number? Would you do it? Or would you go online and make your gift there? Whatever you're doing, if you write a check made to *LIFE*, do call us, tell us what you're sending. Would you do that? It is so important that we let the missionaries know help is on the way, and your help because of love will be doubled.

Thank you for making that gift! Thank you for making that life-giving call so that we can see Jacob's story repeated over and over and over because of the love you share. Thank you so much for doing it.

Begin video clip:

Announcer: At this very moment children are drawing what could be their last breath, struggling to stay alive due to severe hunger. You can help stop the cycle of death. You can help save a child's life. In addition to the 400,000 children already in

our feeding program throughout Africa, we must immediately provide for an additional 25,000 children in the hardest hit areas of drought.

As an answer to prayer, a group of *LIFE's* friends have set a \$500,000 matching challenge for Mission Feeding. This means your gift today can have a double impact. \$30 to help feed three children can be doubled to impact six children! \$50 to help feed five children can be doubled to help save 10 children! And \$100 for 10 children can be doubled to help feed and introduce Jesus to 20 children!

As a thank you, we would like to send you *A Good Word for a Great Day*, a 365-day devotional providing a word of inspiration and promise for each new day.

With your double impact gift of \$100 to help save the lives of 20 children, you may request *The Family Reading Bible* to help engage your children and grandchildren in God's Word.

Finally, please consider a double impact gift of \$1,000 to help save the lives of 200 children, and you may also request the 50th anniversary commemorative bronze, "Brotherly Love."

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

End of clip

In the studio

James: Randy and I together thank you so much for your help. Thanks for praying for our family. Thanks for praying for Betty. I want to say thanks to Heather for this book.

And I want to thank you for your testimony. I thank you for your openness and I believe a lot of people are going to find the help they've been looking for, and sometimes ashamed even to open up. God bless you so much.

And we thank you from the bottom of our hearts for your help and for sharing love.