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Week 30

James: There are things that sometimes catch your attention when you're just watching a news story or you're reading something in the newspaper that really grabs your heart, and our guest today really grabbed my heart with not only what she had been through but with the way she was handling it and the way she tried to help others.

I'm James Robison; my wife Betty and I welcome you to *LIFE Today*. We're talking about something that's very, very serious and that is the pain you feel when you lose a loved one, a child, a family member, and Betty and I know that only too well. As most of you know, as viewers, we lost our daughter, our youngest daughter right after Christmas -- last Christmas. But a lot of children today are taking their own life.

Betty, we wept over and prayed for Rick Warren and Kay Warren when they lost their son to -- as they were so open and honest about, a terrible battle with depression and mental torment that he took his own life.

Well, our guest today, Vanita Halliburton shared her story because some seven years ago or so her son, after a real battle, took his life. And this is a woman who trusted God, just like Betty and I are, and Robin, our daughter, was trusting God and yet she lost the son. I want you to hear her story. And I believe you'll find healing and inspiration. Would you welcome Vanita to *LIFE Today*?

Vanita, I'm glad you're here. I'm glad you're able to smile -- I'm glad you're able to smile. I see -- and we had a meal together here before we came out here -- and I see a peace and a joy knowing what you've been through that can only come from a source far beyond yourself, from God. But you knew God and you loved God and yet something happened that you couldn't fathom happening, and you almost couldn't handle.

I want you to just share with our viewers what God has put on your heart to share that you're actually going around and sharing, as you've done in our own community with our school leaders and students to hear. Tell us your story.

Vanita: Well, first of all I want to say I'm so sorry for your loss. I feel like only another parent who has been through that understands and I know you understand some of, only too well, some of what this feels like. But my faith goes back as far as I can

remember. I trusted Christ as a child and from that moment on I believed utterly in God's goodness, that he would care for me, that he would protect me from harm, that he would take care of me all through my life, and of course that's true. I didn't think that God would keep me from having anything go wrong in my life -- but deep down I think maybe I did think that I would have an easier time because I was God's child, and that I would be cared for in that way -- and that's not true. As surely as we are born into this world, we will all experience loss and pain before we leave it. And sometimes that loss, that pain can test our faith, it can prove our faith, it can shake our faith, it can shatter our faith. I was surprised to find that my faith was shattered in November 2005 when I lost my son to suicide at the age of 19.

I want to tell you just a little bit about Grant because I do think people don't understand mental illness or understand that kind of torment that would actually drive, especially a young person, to such an act. Grant was one of the most outgoing, loving, gifted, artistically and musically, young kid you would ever have known. He was the kind of person that loved everybody and everyone who knew him loved him back.

So it was quite a shock when we learned when he was in 8th grade that he was cutting, which is a form of self injury that is linked to emotional pain, because from the outside he looked like he didn't have a care in the world. So what we know with teenagers and need to know is that what we see on the outside is not always an indication of what's going on inside. He was suffering deeply inside. We got him the help that he needed. He was diagnosed with depression and for the next five years we worked to get him the professional treatment that he needed to overcome his depression. And then --

James: And you were praying the whole time, too. Weren't you? And you were trusting the whole time.

Vanita: The whole five years! I remember... and especially after about five years things got worse. And he came to me one day and said, "I don't feel like I'm going to be able to lead a normal life if I don't get some help." And he checked into the psychiatric unit of a hospital where he stayed for 30 days. That whole five years, and especially that last year, I remember days when almost every day my first waking thought was a prayer and I simply didn't know how to pray except to say, "God, keep Grant in your grip today. Don't let go. Don't let go! Don't let go!" That's all I knew to say.

But I believed that God would take care of this boy, that he would make him well; that he would heal his mental illness and make him whole again. I completely believed it.

So when Grant got out of the hospital, he -- which should have been a time when he was really doing well, two weeks out of hospital, I think his emotional pain was so intense that he thought the only way to end his pain was to end his life, and that's what causes people to give up hope of getting well and feel like that's the only answer to their mental anguish. And on a bright sunny day, he jumped from the roof of a ten story building to his death at age 19.

You know there's no way to explain the heartache, the unfathomable pain that you feel as a parent, but as a Christian, I was not prepared for the other thing that I felt and that was I felt betrayed. I felt that God had completely betrayed me. And I felt that I'd lost my faith; that everything that I had believed my whole life might not be right. And I was shocked that I felt that. My pain, I didn't know what to do with it. I felt kind of ashamed that I had that pain, that I felt so angry at God over this situation.

So I poured out what I was feeling on the pages of a journal, which I kept for several years. And I have trouble expressing exactly what that felt like but I thought I would read you just one paragraph out of the journal that I kept during that time. This was a year and a half --

James: By the way, Betty is doing the very same thing and I think it is remarkable. I can't even describe, someday we'll share at the appropriate time what she's writing. It is beyond her, and it is a part of the healing process for her.

Vanita: It really is -- it really is. It was just... if you have that pain, you have to put it somewhere. So this was a year and a half after Grant had died and this was the place that I was in: "I have lost so much more than my precious son, I have lost my foundation, I have lost my faith in God. That is a hard thing to say. The God I was raised to believe in, the benevolent one who protects and blesses those who love and serve him, the God who promised, "ask and you shall receive," I don't even know what that means now. It's not that I thought God would spare me from trouble or sadness in life, but oh, my God, my God, I put every ounce of trust I had in him. I prayed and pleaded with him to take care of my son. I believed that he would. I still cannot pray. How do people survive? How do they survive? My son, my father, I miss you both."

So during this terrible time, I missed my faith. I missed my son so terribly but I missed my relationship with God. And James, when I was in your waiting room a while ago, I noticed a verse that is in an open book there that's from Psalms 103, and you might have to help me with it. But it is "As a father -- as a father has compassion for his children, so does our father have compassion for those who fear him." And this is the journey that God led me on.

And that was all the time that I was so angry at God that I could not even speak to God, he did not let go of me and I did not know it at the time but I do now. But just as we do when a small child is upset and hurt and crying, we instinctively pull them to us and we hold them close. And we whisper soothing things to them until they are able to be quiet and calm. That's what God was doing to me. I didn't know it at the time.

James: Now tell me, how are you?

Vanita: It started the day after the funeral, Grant's father and his sister and I were sitting in his bedroom because we didn't know where else to be. We were just broken. And we came across this tiny little diary that Grant had written when he was 12 years old. We opened it and we began to read. He talked about -- he described his life as a 12 year old. He talked about his salvation. He talked about how much he loved God and Jesus. And what a gift that was to us but there was God holding me close and giving me assurance and he was whispering to me, "He's safe now. He's home with me. He's with me."

Just as a father comforts a child in that way -- and there were so many extraordinary times like that as I look back, and as I read back through my journal and the things I wrote that happened, now I see so clearly the path.

Another time I was sitting in a Bible study and a lady who was sitting next to me that I had never seen before, we were all sharing life verses that were important to us. This woman had a lot of difficulty moving. Her daughter was sitting next to her and turning the pages of her Bible for her. And when it got to her turn, her daughter said, "Mom, do you have a verse that you would like to share?" And this woman took every bit of her strength to take in a breath and she could barely whisper through nearly paralyzed lips, "Be still and know that I am God." I think God was speaking to me in that moment, it so impacted me. And I thought, God is saying to me, "I am the Lord your God. I am the master of life and death, and I am in control of all things. Be still and know that I am God."

James: And you have found a peace that I heard coming from your testimony and read, and you're importing that peace to others. Don't you see it when you go out and you share? It is there. Do you have any way now, a web site or anything you're doing to try to minister to people? Could you tell us what that would be?

Vanita: Sure. Our foundation is called the Grant Halliburton Foundation after my son. And we go out and we try to teach families and young people how to recognize the

signs of psychological distress or suicidal crisis in another person and how to connect them with help so that other people will have a better chance, a better outcome from that.

James: And you've spoken at Southlake and they expected about 100 and they had 1,000 come. The web site is there on the screen. I would say several things, feel free to give to that foundation. Say, "You know what? I love what she's doing. It could save children's lives. It might save our grandchildren or our children." And also, to perhaps communicate with Vanita to see, would you like to come and speak to our school leaders and to parents and the parent/teacher association meetings or wherever to help us know? Because we've got in our own Dallas/Fort Worth area, suicide among teenagers is a big issue. It is a big issue!

And it is not always because someone had all these problems, like Dr. Warren's son had, Rick Warren and his wife, or that Vanita had. Sometimes it's just they don't seem to have any friends at school or they're not dressed like the other kids. They don't have the same family or home setting. And you can help offset that, which is what her foundation is seeking to do.

Let me tell you what I really feel right now. I just feel so impressed to do this. Right now there are people all over the world, your heart's broken and maybe you didn't get to sit in a prayer group and maybe you didn't, like the Warren's, have a church family, or like Betty and James do, have people all over the world praying for us. So you feel like, "I'm alone in my pain." No, you're not! You're not alone in your pain. I need you to hear that. I need you to hear it now.

And I need you to know that wherever you are, maybe you feel like the most lonely person on the planet, the most overlooked but I promise you, what Vanita just said is what God wants for you right now. He wants to put his huge arms of love and pull you up to the biggest heart in the universe, his heart and he wants to hold your broken heart; and close to his heart, you will find rest and healing. And that's what he wants for you. Let him do it! Just yield to him now. Just tell him, "God, father, be the father that I need. Hold my hurt -- hold my heart -- heal my heart!" Tell him that you know he loves you. He does! And trust him, right where you are.

Father, in the name of the Lord Jesus, I pray you'll show people all over this world who feel so overlooked that you see them and you care and you want to hold them. I pray they'll know that; in Jesus' name.

There is a telephone number there on the screen and if you want someone who will care, pray with you, you call that number. It is paid for by love. It is an 800 number. Betty and I, we can't pay that phone bill. We would probably try to if we didn't have anybody that did -- just like we try to drill a water well. Every time we drill water wells, we try to drill one. We pray, God, let us drill another one -- because we care. So the number's paid for by love.

You call and say, "I want somebody to agree with me in the prayer I just prayed." And a lot of people call because they're lonely.

Vanita, I want to thank you for sharing.

Would you say thanks to Vanita for sharing her journey and her story?

You have a beautiful touch of God on your life, a glow of God, his grace and his glory. He's holding you real close.

Vanita: I found that it is in our brokenness... John Ortberg said in one of his books, "God never wastes a hurt." And in our brokenness God can find the pieces to put together and make something that he intended us to be and that's what we all do.

James: That's what he wants to do with everybody, even the people who feel like they have such a broken heart out here.

I want to show you something. Right down here is a water bottle. We have a cup of water, Jesus said, "If you give one in my name you won't lose your reward." I don't know what all he had in mind with that reward but here's a water bottle that our missionary worker dipped water up in her bottle that this little girl was drinking that represented thousands and thousands of little children that don't have any kind of water but this is filthy. And we want to give this little girl, her family and friends, a water well so they won't have to drink this anymore. And you can give a cup of water, perhaps a well of water in Jesus' name. I want you to watch this.

On the mission field

Tammy: This heat -- this oppressive heat! It drains you of energy just like it robs this ground of water. What's left is often a death sentence.

These women, girls, so young... I watch them again and again drawing from their only source within miles. Twelve year old Tulsi, what a precious girl born into such adversity, into impossible circumstances beyond her control.

We all have a role to play and I feel especially burdened by mine because as I look around at these scenes before me I'm so conflicted with how to adequately bring their stories to life, their struggle for the most basic of necessities. For if I can't help you see it, feel it, how can your heart know how to respond? A death sentence, that's what I'm holding in my hand.

Dear God, you came to make all things new. Beauty for ashes; a new heart from death to life. Father, please, I know you see her. Bring Tulsi life giving water. Take away this death sentence.

End of clip

In the studio

James: Tammy was there because of the prayers and concern of missionaries who planted their lives in the midst of pain. Here is that bottle. It was Tammy's water bottle. Here is that beautiful little girl's picture. Here is the water that Tammy got. It is filthy. I wouldn't give it to a pet -- to an animal. We don't have to in advanced countries; we can get clean water. You can even go buy bottled water in any store in the country if you're not satisfied with the tap water, which is so far beyond anything people know.

She was crying out in behalf of a little girl that represented thousands of children in the villages, and their family, of 500 areas that we've targeted in 12 countries where missionaries, with a heart like Tammy expressed, have directed our steps to say, "Would you please give these precious people Jesus died for, and we want to tell them about the love of God but we'd rather demonstrate it too; would you do it?" And we come to the viewers of *LIFE Today*, the missionaries know that, they come to us because they believe that together we have the heart of God to help the hurting and the suffering.

Betty, they're convinced the viewers of *LIFE Today* will help. And I believe they will.

Betty: I do too, James. I look at this and I see not only her picture but I see the pictures of child after child because there are so many of them that have this same need as she does. And James, yes, God does care about every one of them. He loves the little

children but he wants to use us, his children to reach out to these children that are in need, and we can do that. That's our responsibility as his children to love and to reach out and to respond when there's a need.

James: I think it is a joyful responsibility to respond. Do you know what our staff and workers told us when they gave us this bottle? They said, "Be very careful not to get it on your hands. That is the water; it will make you sick." Isn't that something? "It will make you sick."

Well, I'm grateful that our own staff would care enough to say, "Be careful with that. It is contaminated!" What about those precious children? See, we really do care about them. I believe you care about them.

Here's what I want to ask you to do. Help us drill those wells -- 500 wells, that's the most we've ever taken on in faith and it is because of the prayers of the missionaries who direct our vision, our sight. Here's the place; would you drill a well? Would you drill part of a well? Would you give toward a well? \$48 will give ten people water the rest of their life. A gift that just keeps on giving. Would you take your bankcard or write a check, make it to *LIFE* and call us and tell us you're mailing it? Or go online, LifeToday.org and make that gift? \$144, 30 people have water.

Many of our viewers, including children -- it's amazing what they do when they set their sights on it, give entire wells. There are couples that do it, individuals, small businesses that do it and church groups and prayer groups but also children. If you could possibly drill a well, please do it. We're going to need some people to drill a well, \$4800 or give \$2400 and pray, "God, help someone match this." If you can give \$1200, pray for three people to join you and we've got another well. It's going to take all of us together doing what we can, doing our part expressing God's heart, extending his hands of love.

Would you do it? Would you give a cup of water in Jesus' name? -- Or a well of water? Please dial that number or go online. We have some gifts to send you to say thank you and to bless you as you bless others. Thank you for making that call. Please don't be distracted. If you get a busy, be determined and call until you get through. Thank you for doing 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 *Majesty*, an inspirational new, fully illustrated book that will help you discover the promises behind the many names of God.

With your gift of \$100 or more, be sure to also request "The Names of God" pen set custom crafted with the various names of God and the gifts of the spirit.

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*."

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

End of clip

In the studio

James: I want to say a deep thanks to you for helping us with the wells. This is "Living Water." A little boy with a manual pump, one he can do by hand. Energy sources are lacking in the areas we drill the wells so we'll get a well for everybody they can access. We'll send one to say thanks for drilling a well or giving a large gift towards that. But every gift is so important because we're giving the gift of life.

And Vanita, I want to say thanks to you again for sharing life today with us because you've been through an indescribable painful experience but the glow and glory of God is on you and I want to thank you for sharing.

There's her web site again if you want to know what she is doing to try to help people who are really fighting the battle of their feelings of even depression. Would you join us in saying thanks to Vanita again?

You really blessed us big time. We really want to thank you and we pray God will bless you.

Thank all of you for helping us! Thank you for helping us share life, give water. You're a blessing!