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Week 48

James and Betty Robison

Jefferson Bethke

James: Thank you so much. I'm thrilled to have this opportunity to not only share time with you. I'm James Robison; my wife Betty and I are always glad to share time with you.

But we've got a young man who has just kind of turned the whole nation inside out, so to speak, on a YouTube clip that he did where he basically says, "I don't like religion -- I hate religion but I love Jesus." And it looked like he was standing in front of a church.

As a matter of fact, there is the building. It was actually school that looked like a church. He purposely didn't want to be standing in front of a church because he is not angry at the church but he really is saddened that people will substitute religion for a relationship with a living God and never really know the wonderful Jesus that God the father gave in order that we can be his children.

Jefferson Bethke really communicated. I just loved it. I'm telling you, I liked the guy. I like what he is saying. Boy, I wish I could do quite like that and go on YouTube -- do all that. I wish I could write poetry like that. This is fabulous stuff. I'm trying to be cool. They say, "Hey, you're too old to be cool!" But the point is that I said this is good! And you know it. And this studio is filled with young people and others that recognized it.

He has written a book, *Why is He So Much Better than Trying Harder, Doing More, and Being Good Enough? Why is Jesus So Much Better?* Would you welcome Jefferson Bethke to *LIFE Today*? Jefferson, good to see you buddy!

Jefferson: Thank you!

James: How you been?

Jefferson: Been good! Been good! Last time I was on the show I was an unmarried man so a lot has changed.

James: You're a married man now?

Jefferson: I am! Yeah!

James: Are you happy about it?

Jefferson: Love it!

James: Is she happy about it?

Jefferson: Let's hope so!

James: If she's not, you can go ahead and let us know, we'll pray with you.

This is a great book. I want you to get it. I want you to go on Amazon, Barnes and Noble, wherever you get books, go to the bookstore, run! Sun comes up tomorrow, run to the store and get it. Get one for a friend. Say, "You've got to hear this guy. This is the guy that came on. He didn't like religion, he loves Jesus." And give it to them. He just kind of breaks it out in here. It's "Why I Still Think Jesus Hates Religion, and You Should Too." -- Chapter title! I just flipped her open and this thing jumps all over you.

Jefferson: Of course, you jump to the sharpest title.

James: It must be. It was an accident, I just opened it.

Jefferson: That's good! It's good!

James: What's going on and what do you want people to hear from you right now?

Jefferson: The book is very memoir-driven, it is following my story. I think my story is not unique, which is why I think there is a lot in it in the sense of my generation grew up with this church mentality, this caricature of what we thought Christianity was. So that was me, I grew up and I was the kid who I didn't smoke, I didn't drink, I didn't have sex so I'm better than you.

Now I would never say that; right? But it's the attitude and this spirit, similar to the Pharisees that I had and I know a lot of people do have. And then all of the sudden I go through puberty and I get to high school and girls become a lot more attractive than that. Can I just be honest? Because here's the truth, when you try to white knuckle religion, sooner or later something more attractive will come along. So when it comes along, the white knuckling you give up because this is more attractive. So Jesus needs to be a superior pleasure.

So I threw in the towel and I went down that route as well, more of the prodigal son lifestyle and that took me all the way through college where it put me on my back as well. It just didn't work. It was insufficient. It didn't fulfill me. It felt like it was eroding me, if that makes sense.

So now I have... I'm 21 years old -- 20 years old actually in my freshman dorm and I had lived kind of a religious lifestyle and then I've lived a rebellious lifestyle and it just kind of seemed like this can't be it. There's got to be something more, and it was Jesus at the center of that. Just showing the beauty of institution and rules, which sometimes we distort as religion, and then also showing that he's also a better pleasure, which we distort for rebelliousness. He's just so much better and so much greater like I say in the subtitle. And that's kind of what I wanted to get at with my story.

James: Do you feel like it's going across? Has the response been good positive to what you're saying and sharing?

Jefferson: Yeah, from people who that have read it so far they've been encouraged by

it. It's always a little tough though because it is a very raw book. It is really -- I want it to be raw, I want it to be transparent but with that kind of comes -- then you get those transparent e-mails back. And as a 24 year old guy, sometimes those are difficult but I'm just sometimes so humbled. And man, Jesus is good and he finds us in the brokenness, which is so beautiful.

James: He's real and we've substituted a lot of rotten things for him that never do fulfill. You find now after you've done what you've done, it's been 20-30 million people watched the YouTube and it would be wonderful if that many people bought the book and listened to you.

What are you doing as far as -- that would be nice yeah. I probably would write you an appeal letter and say help us in missions. By the way, you're helping in missions and outreach; aren't you? You're really trying your best to get people... don't you have a web site where people can actually go on and help you do some of the things that we're doing?

Jefferson: So one of the chapters in the book is all about the idea that I think American modern evangelicalism has this idea that some things are secular and some things are sacred. Or if you're a pastor or a priest you're varsity, and if you're a Bible study leader it's kind of JV, and then if you're something else you're just not good at all. And with that comes this idea that's just not biblical; right?

So God in the garden pretty much creates us, puts us in the garden and says, "Now make everything else look like this." Meaning make order out of chaos -- you're here to cultivate, you're here to build, you're here to make things flourish. We're image bearers of God to do that, to mirror the creativity.

James: Be fruitful in every area of the planet -- bring forth fruit, create.

Jefferson: It means cultivate, it means build, it means create. So with that in chapter nine I talk about that. And so for me and my friend, we were convicted by that idea and said non profits are great, and we're part of those as well, but let's make a business. So God should be the king of business, he should be the king of food, he

should be the king of music, he should be the king of whatever -- right? So we made a business where we wanted to do business for good. We wanted to show the kingdom in the realm of business.

So what we do, it is a candle company; I know it is a little weird 24 year old male owns a candle company -- I do. But what we do is we just thought it was a beautiful symbol, it's timeless. It kind of is a symbol of prayer, of remembrance; it sits on the table as a reminder. So each candle has a different element of injustice like child trafficking, human trafficking, clean water, education. When you buy a candle in that element it gives a tangible outcome. So if you buy the education candle that pays for school for a day and clean water pays for water for a day.

So that's ClaroCandles.com -- C-L-A-R-O and it means bring light, in Latin, which is ultimately our goal. We just want to bring light; we want to bring the kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven.

James: I pray God multiplies that. There is the web site. I've already told him about someone who knows a whole lot about candles and helping him. They'll want to connect and they happen to live in the Seattle area and I want to see that connection. I want people to literally link up with you and inspire young people everywhere and people to do the very things that you inspire them to do, to love Jesus. Does he remind you of some of our grandchildren, Betty?

Betty: Yeah, he does!

James: What do you feel when you listen to him?

Betty: I'm excited because this is the younger generation. Do you find that the young people are seeing religion the same way that you saw it and are really sick of it? Aren't they looking for realness and people to walk the talk?

Jefferson: Yeah! I think authenticity is the huge thing for us. So we have this character idea of people we see on TV that talk all about -- you guys are great, I'm not talking about you.

[Laughter]

James: Seriously, is there anything different about us? We're not...

Jefferson: No, no. Not at all but what I'm saying is we have this idea of more the televangelist, more than the people that do their -- where all of the sudden two weeks later it's a sex scandal. So it kind of got old, in all honesty, and we kind of got a little disenchanted. And I think with that created this culture of we just really want someone who is honest, who is authentic, who tells it how it is, which is why I love you guys so much. And so that authenticity I think we really desire.

The one thing I'm scared for my generation which I really want to harp on as much as possible is I think we're bringing authenticity to the table, I think we're bringing it back to Jesus, but I also want to make sure we're kicking the church to the curb because the church is his body. We can't live without it.

I think my generation because of Twitter and Facebook and Instagram, we are absolutely terrified of real community. Now biblical definition is you being transparent and honest and vulnerable -- almost like a spiritual nakedness where someone can see all that you are, they know your failures, they know your shortcomings, your hurts, your shame, your guilt and they still want you and they still say, "I love you, I know you." You can't have true love unless you're truly known.

I think my generation, that could be our Achilles heel. Because of Facebook and Twitter we have this edited cropped versions of ourselves online so we're never honest, which means we never get real community and that can be a huge danger, I think.

Betty: So you see that our generation, the older generation has something still to offer to the young generation if we'll realize that it is not about religion?

Jefferson: Yeah! My biggest pet peeve is when the young people are like, "Oh, I hate religion so let's just go hang out with a bunch of 20 year olds." Right? No one knows

anything. No 20 year olds hanging out together are going to know anything; right? Like we need -- let's be honest, like we need you, we need the generational differences. We need the different ethnic differences. That's what it means when it says you're the body of Christ. So when we kind of retreat into our generational differences, I think that's really a disservice to Jesus. And I think we need you guys, we need you pouring into our lives and that's where I think, passing the baton in that way will get us to a good place.

James: I found years ago that when I came out as a very highly visible evangelist, admitted I was about to be destroyed by lust, and it really shocked a lot of people. I had a very well-known musician sit with me at lunch today and said, "You know what brought me to my knees? Is when I heard you, this highly visible preacher get up and say lust is about to destroy you." And he said, "Man, I caved in. I said, my goodness, somebody is finally getting honest."

I've never been able to see women ugly. I could never get delivered from the beauty of women by suddenly God giving me this vision of them being ugly. Just like I could never not see a chicken fried steak as good and chocolate cake as good. I can't get up and say, "God that's ugly."

God says, "But it can't hurt you so why don't you lay it down and not let it dig your grave with your teeth. Why don't you lay down what's beautiful and put me first and let me be beauty in your life?"

I found young people identify to that. I found everybody identified with that. Is that what you're talking about, about being honest and being vulnerable and really being authentic? Is that what you're saying?

Jefferson: The biggest lie in the church is that if I'm on the stage I have to be the guy that has it altogether. But if you're on the stage that means you're technically the leader, which means you technically should lead by being honest because if that's a true biblical principle then you need to lead by that. So the leader needs to be the one - my friend has a good way of saying it. He goes, "If you want others to bleed, you need to bleed first." Like you've got to go; you've got to be the first one or else you're

not going to create a culture of that. So if you're a pastor not being vulnerable how on earth do you think you're going to create a culture of vulnerability? It starts and ends with the pulpit or whoever is on stage. So I think that's why we gravitate toward that because we say, "He's honest, I can identify. That's me too." It creates a solidarity, which I think we really appreciate.

James: He understands where I am. He understands my struggle. He is dealing with it. He's battling, he's making progress. There's some good things happening. You have experienced a big shock. You found out what about your mother that set you kind of on your head?

Jefferson: So in high school... I was right out of high school, there was another lady that started living with us and my mom just said it was just a friend or she had gone through a divorce or something. I really just thought okay.

Then a couple months in she finally comes and just admits to me that that's her partner. That was difficult for me. I think I was so immature. I wasn't even really a Christian then. I would have claimed it, but I didn't get Jesus. So at that point I was kind of like there's bitterness, there was hatred, I kind of -- that's what led me down that rebellious lifestyle.

But a lot has changed since then and I have a huge heart for reconciliation of different communities in America. I think the way I like to say it is America prides itself on being a pluralistic nation meaning there's a bunch of different voices, religions, etc. Now that's not true. True pluralism is when every voice has a voice in the marketplace and every voice is dialoguing, they're at the table of fellowship together and saying, "Hey, truth is the end goal, let's get going. Let's set our differences aside and let's start pursuing truth." That's pluralism; right?

But we have tribalism. Tribalism is where you just go to your tribe; you retreat and you kind of throw your rocks, if you can reach them as far to the other group and try to stone the other people.

So that's where my heart is because me and my mom, we love each other. We disagree. We would both have different arguments but we disagree but we love each other to death. She has never once called me a bigot; I've never once called her that, whatever. That's why I kind of laugh when I maybe chat about an issue like that and someone says, "Oh, you're such a bigot. You're so intolerant." "Well, the person closest to me doesn't think that so sorry, you're an idiot."

[Laughter]

I don't say it like that, let's be honest -- I don't say it like that. But it's just kind of an issue of like me and my mom, she is the closest one to me, and I hope that we can be a microcosm of the rest of what we want -- the culture we want to create in society.

James: And you love her the way we have to love people that we're convinced are wrong and let's remember how many times we've been wrong and God loved us and he didn't approve of the wrong or the error of our way or the potential, let's say consequences of those choices. You don't approve of where your mother is and her choices; right?

Jefferson: No.

James: But you love her.

Jefferson: Yeah, I love her to death!

James: You don't believe it's in line with what God wants and you believe God can change people and set them in a new direction. He is the only one who can make those changes. And do you agree that those changes are not likely to be made if the people who are trapped in some particular lifestyle or practice don't think you love them when you disapprove of that? They've got to know you care about them and love them or you can't ever help them. Am I right about that?

Jefferson: I think the thing we need to go back to is what did Jesus do to us? Right? Jesus didn't wait for us to clean ourselves up or he didn't wait for X Y and Z to be

aligned. He doesn't even wait for our doctrine to be perfect. He just says, "I love you. I pursue you. I want you."

In fact, Romans 5:8 even makes the argument that while we were... kind of like while we were enemies of him meaning while we were spitting in his face saying "I don't want you," he said, "Nope, I'm going to get you." And that's why I kind of don't really like that Revelation 3:20 verse used for evangelism where they say, "Jesus is knocking at the door." I don't think he is, I think he kicks it in and says, "You're mine." I think that's talking about something different in that context. But I think we need Jesus as our model.

James: He's actually standing there at the door of the church wondering if they'll let him back in. That's the sad picture. He's knocking at the door of the church. Think about that. Is that not sad? Jesus outside knocking on the door, "Can I come in?"

I've got to be honest with you. You know Charles Stanley said, "Why do so many people not like to go to church?"

He asked God and God answered Charles Stanley, "I don't like to go much myself."

[Laughter]

And the problem is, the way we behave in the church is so ungodlike, he doesn't really feel welcome. And thou sayest I'm rich and increase with goods and have need of nothing and knowest not that thou church, retched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. So we really need repentance to starve the church of all things I heard you saying when you said, I don't like religion, I never heard you say I don't like church. I heard you say, "I don't like this pretense that's not real. I like Jesus, I want relationship." You haven't changed in that have you?

Jefferson: No, not at all. The last chapter in the book is called, "Why Jesus Loves the Church and You Should Too." And I wanted to end on that note because I think that is the avenue for reconciliation. The church is plan A -- not the building, the people because the people are an organic ecclesia like it is in Greek, is the agent of

reconciliation in the world and we can't live without it and that's why I wanted to end with that note.

James: Did you guys not see love in him when you saw him on YouTube even though he was talking about what was wrong? Do you see it right here? All of you young people who came tonight and you saw this guy on YouTube and thought, man, I think maybe he is real. Some of you wanted to come in and see him tonight. Do you believe that Jefferson is real? Just let me know. Do you think he is real?

[Cheers & Applause]

You know the last time you came here I looked out at all the young people and others here and said, "Do you know what you want? You want the glory on you that's on him. That you can actually see on YouTube, with a really cool poem that spoke volumes of truth.

But it was something about him that was beyond cool, there was something real." Let's say thank you God. Thank you Jefferson for telling it like it is. Would you say that? Thank you, God! Thank you, Jefferson. Love you, buddy! Now the web site, if they want to go and they want to learn about how they can invest in different areas of ministry and get one of these candles -- they're scented candles; right?

Jefferson: Of course! Yes.

James: Now what's the web site they go to?

Jefferson: So that web site is Claro -- C-L-A-R-O Candles.com.

James: There it is on the screen for them to see.

Jefferson: And then that is just Jeff, my name JeffBethke.com.

James: And they would what? Be able to get the book or be able to see some other things you're doing? Are you going out speaking?

Jefferson: Yeah.

James: If they wanted you to come, could they find out how to ask you, "Will you come to our area or our church and speak?"

Jefferson: Yeah, you go to the web site, there is a speaking tab and it has my schedule and ways to get a hold of me.

James: And don't dare ask him -- are you listening to me? Don't dare ask him, "I guess you sold some books, son. You'll be all right. Maybe you'll sell some books in our church." Give the man a big love offering! Give him a great love offering! Don't tell him, "They'll take care of you down the road, son!" No! You bless him! You bless him! And he'll bless others. Are you listening? So when you write him or call him you tell him, "You come here, son, we're going to bless you."

If they don't, you tell me and I'll talk to them on the air.

Jefferson: I appreciate that!

James: I want you to know, buddy, we do what you like to do and I want our viewers to just -- I want you to look -- try this. God, let me see through the eyes of Jesus. How about try that for a while? Let's do it right now because I'm going to literally set the stage. You've got a chance to look in, see what God sees and feel what God feels and then do what God wants done. And when you start doing that, that's when you're really going to live. I want to give you a chance right now to take one big step forward and change everything for somebody else. Watch.

On the mission field

>> This is Akun. She is four years old and her frail body tells you something is terribly wrong. Her parents have died and her surviving uncle is the only one left to care for her.

Subtitle:

>> She used to be healthy. Her stomach became bloated. She began coughing and has difficulty breathing.

Announcer: But why? Why is this weakened little girl struggling to survive?

Subtitle:

>> So when the child was brought it was having severe malnutrition. In fact, for Akun, it was a lack of food. It was the lack of food.

Announcer: An immune system broken down by malnutrition, broken down by starvation. In a matter of days Akun's body could reach a point of no return. In a downward spiral that could ultimately take her life all from a lack of food -- just food!

Subtitle:

>> I am trying my very best but it's all I can afford. I have no other choice but to survive in the way that we have.

Announcer: Her uncle's best effort may not be enough for Akun but yours would be for both Akun and so many like her.

End of clip

In the studio

James: I see you, honey! I want to put the arms of a loving father around that little girl the uncle is caring for. And we can because there are missionaries in place with a broken heart, a heavy heart and they really want to give that little girl who represents, and sometimes the number causes you to lose sight of the preciousness of one individual life, but there are 420,000 right now that are already in settings where we found them, and we're trying to do what we want to do for her and that's establish a feeding center, and restore their health, give them the nutrition, which is mixed in a nutritious porridge-based mix and take care of them and literally give them a bowl to replace cans or plastic bags that they bring to get something to eat. We want to give them a heat-resistant bowl that you the viewer said, "Give them a bowl so they don't burn their little hands." So you've done that.

And now then we are giving what this bronze illustrates. Here is an older brother feeding a malnourished brother. We call it "Brotherly Love" but he's feeding out of a

bowl that somebody like you gave with food in it that someone like you gave and he's taking care of his little brother.

And amazingly, Betty, the older, stronger children feed the little ones, and they're weak -- and we feed all of them. And when I say "we" do you understand that "we" encompasses a whole host of people around the world? You and I do our part gladly and we've been doing it now for nearly 25 years faithfully, from the moment we found not only the hungry and the thirsty but we found the mission workers who had given their lives to give them life. And the missionary said, "Go back and tell so we can stay here and help and point them to God." So they show them love, they share love, they give them life and they tell them about the love of God.

In our mission feeding programs a couple times a year we ask you to help us. A gift \$30 or \$50 or \$100 we can feed three, five, or ten children for the next several months. But now, Betty, we've got a miracle. Some of our friends who love what we're doing, they're excited about it, they said, "We'll match what you give right now." So if you want help save the lives of ten kids with a \$100 gift, you're actually going to save the lives of 20 kids. Think about that! What you do right now... and no gift is too small. You say, well, give \$30 for three kids, that's big to those three kids and their family -- but now it's going to become six kids. \$50 is not five kids right now because of the friends who match your gift it's ten kids. You give \$1,000 it's not 100 children we're able to feed but 200.

We have some spiritual gifts for you to feed you spiritual nourishment by Christine Caine and the books she's written to bless you. So would you go to the phone, take your bankcard, use it like a check, or go online LifeToday.org and make the gift God put on your heart? I pray you'll do it right now. I'm asking you now. Don't just sit there and say, "Oh, I hope somebody does it." You be the answer to that hope. You be the answer to the heart cry, you be the answer to the prayer, you be the answer to the need. You can be the answer for someone... or many. Help as many as you can right now. Make that call. Make that gift.

Begin video clip

Announcer: In remote and impoverished areas of Africa, families are suffering, facing death by starvation, and those hit the hardest are their children.

Life's Mission Feeding program is there able to feed and care for over 400,000 children in crisis areas of Angola, Mozambique, and Sudan. But our food reserves are gone and we desperately need your support to replenish our supplies at more than 800 feeding centers immediately. As an answer to prayer, a group of LIFE's friends have set a \$550,000 end-of-year matching challenge for Mission Feeding. This means your gift today can have a double impact!

\$30 to help three children will be doubled to impact six children! \$50 to help feed five children will be doubled to help save ten children. And \$100 for 10 children will be doubled to help feed and minister to 20 children.

With your gift of any amount we'll send you Christine Caine's powerful new teaching series *Moving Past Your Past*, on audio CD along with her book, *Can I Have and Do It All Please?*

With your double impact gift of \$100 to help save the lives of 20 children you may request both the audio and video series. And as a bonus, we'll send you Christine's latest book release, *Undaunted*.

Finally, please consider a double impact gift of \$1,000 to help save the lives of 200 children. And you may request our 50th anniversary bronze sculpture, "Brotherly Love." Please call, write, or make your gift online today.

End of clip

In the studio

James: From the very depth of our heart, Betty and I say thank you. We say thanks to our friends that matched your gift. Thank you for giving! I hope you gave and will ask for "Brotherly Love" because you're expressing the love of God, enabling brothers to help their little brothers, and families to help their children, and give life.

If you're going to get what you ask for with Christine Caine's teaching, but if you'd like to have Jefferson's book, *Jesus, religion*, it's so much better -- Jesus, we'll be glad to send it to you. You can go buy it. I really encourage you to go to the bookstore and buy several copies and give them to your friends. But we'll be glad to send it to you if you just say, "I want to help you take care of those kids and I'd like to have that book too." We'll send it to you.

Join Betty and me in saying thanks to Jefferson.

We love you, buddy! Appreciate you big time! Come back any time you want to. You want to do a new YouTube video here? Well go for it!

Thank all of you. Thanks so much for your help.