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Week 49: Fall Mission Feeding

Rebekah Lyons

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

James: I'm just sitting here holding this book, *Free Fall to Fly*. Interesting title! I'm going to ask how she came up with that; Rebekah Lyons wrote it. Her husband Gabe, we kind of go back to where I was very good friends at Liberty leadership with Dr. Falwell, and of course, the boys, Jonathan and Jerry, Jr. who is the president of now the largest Christian university in the world. We go back and we've been through a lot, watching a lot; and what's happened with Gabe, of God stretching him is a lot like what is happening at Liberty, just the love of God extending his arms out saying we want everybody to know and love the Lord and be a family.

Gabe and Rebekah really are an incredibly gifted young team, couple, but probably Gabe was moving on and Rebekah has got some things going on in her life that could have cost her her life. It was becoming like an existence and she'd seen some things happen with her dad and things that she said this has got me. But she really found a breathtaking journey toward a life of meaning. I'm really anxious for you to hear her story. Would you welcome Rebekah Lyons to *LIFE Today*?

[Applause]

Well, a mother of three, kids moving into their teens. You said your eight year old is already convinced she's a teen already.

Rebekah: My oldest son is 13 and my daughter, she is eight, but yes.

James: She is there already in her mind.

Rebekah: She thinks she is a teenager. She's in charge of the boys.

James: I've got to know about this title, *Free Fall to Fly*.

Rebekah: Sure. Well, you can't fly -- it takes a free fall to teach us how to fly -- that's what I learned. So I looked at New York as I was like standing on the edge of this vast expanse and he's just saying, "Just leap."

I think the question I kept asking at the beginning was, "Well, who will catch me if I fall?" Because risk and the unknown and the fear that that all created, I thought New York was going to be meaning and it turns out I found surrender. I learned that meaning comes after surrender. So I never thought I'd write a book. It really just chronicles the last few years of my life.

I lived in Atlanta and we had our babies there. We lived there for 13 years. We started our non-profit Q Ideas there. Gabe was the antagonist in my life that would just skip out the door and run towards this calling, and I would be cleaning up Cheerios and doing laundry.

My life as a mother really began at 26 when my firstborn son Cade, who is now 13, was born with Down Syndrome. I didn't know until the day he was born. It was six hours after the doctor came in and said, "We see signs of down syndrome in your baby."

He was four and a half pounds at that time. He was full term but basically failure to thrive. He was on a respirator, breathing tube; I didn't even get to hold him. And the next morning I went in and looked at him, and basically he's just wired up and I finally got to just feel him and hold him. And he basically said, "Are you going to love me?" Like his eyes just looked at me like, "Are you going to love me for me? Not for what I can do or what I can accomplish or what milestones I can meet that will make you think you're a good mom?" Because I'd grown up in a performance-based culture

where I was affirmed and felt loved by what I did. My entry to motherhood just taught me something vastly different very quickly.

So that fast-forwarded and then within the next few years, we started Q. I made my way into life as a new mom. I had a job at North Point Community Church; I was running some things but all the therapies for Cade got so much that I came home full-time.

Towards the end of our time in Atlanta, I just felt this sense, this stirring like is there something more, God? Have you called me? You've given me... you've stewarded these children, you have entrusted them to me for the time that I can train them up in the way they should go and you've brought a man into my life that has -- we have got to walk together as a team. But are there certain assignments that are for me alone that you knit? Like are there giftings and wirings you put when you knit me in my mother's womb -- things that make my heart sing -- things that make me come alive? And then also, what kind of journey might that look like?

So right around the same time Gabe felt this pull to come to New York. He taught at a church, Trinity Grace all on cultural renewal. So this was in 2007 and we started Q, and John Tyson had invited him to come. So he spoke that morning on the upper west and in Chelsea. By the end of that night he was like, "Can you imagine living here?"

I said, "No!" Because New York to me was like -- that's where he knelt on bent knee and asked me to marry him on the 102nd floor of the Empire State Building. We had met at Liberty. We were just like... To me New York was like a fantastical city of lights -- not laundry and cleaning and paying bills. I didn't know, do people actually live here and where do they live because I didn't see any kids in Times Square. Then I learned there is a whole residential side of New York that nobody really sees until you go further along into the neighborhoods and you see kids everywhere you go. But so it took three years of me actually wrestling with God to come because it was a surrender of my -- I guess my perceived entitlements of space in the south and a yard and more stuff than we really needed. And then just this fear of losing control of being so small; one in eight million people in the span of 11 miles.

So I get to New York and my life just starts to train wreck. Within four months I started having panic attacks and that would -- so basically, I had them on trains, elevators, subways, and crowds. Have you guys ever been to New York? It's really impossible to avoid these things. And I would have a hard time just getting on a subway for two stops to my kids' school; like they would do something for chapel.

There was one time in the winter I had a Starbucks, and a scarf and a coat, and as the doors are shutting on the train, like a subway, you cannot reopen them but I tried. So I threw everything on the ground and I'm just like clawing it open and people are backing away like she's going to blow!

[Laughter]

I was just like -- it got to where I would just whisper the name of Jesus, just get me to the next stop. I know I'm not going to die but a panic attack feels -- if any of you have had one -- it feels like you're going to die if you don't escape. So that literally went on for about 18 months. And I began to fear that that was my new normal.

Betty: What was Gabe thinking as he watched you going through this?

Rebekah: I think he is thinking, what in the world is happening? It was really beautiful. He was such a steady calm. He would just pray for me and he would listen. I think there was some part of him that said, am I making New York an idol to the point that this is debilitating our family? Because God wouldn't call us somewhere that would then make our family wither or suffer.

So it really got to the second year in where he's like we don't need to stay. This doesn't have to be our thing. I thought this is what we were being led towards but if this is something that's... you're losing your mind in some ways. We'll do whatever we have to do. So just him surrendering that was a huge moment for us because there was a side of me that wanted to kind of blame somebody. So resentment could have easily crept in in that moment saying, well, you're the one that brought us here. Look at me, I can't breathe. I'm having panic attacks. It's your fault!

Betty: But the fact that he would give it all up for you and your health.

Rebekah: Right, because then I wanted to at that point to go, is there something that God is working out in me? That wouldn't have come out -- like when stress or when the city, anything that is stressful in your life, when it squeezes you, what is so deep in there that has no choice but to come out? I don't know that I would have reached the desperation for God in Atlanta or in the south or in the comfort I knew.

I called myself a Christian since I was five; I asked Christ into my life and my heart but I never had known what it meant to just utterly depend on him for survival, for strength; like the middle of the night lament where I'm just crying out. So what happened is September 20th of 2011, after Gabe says, "We can leave, we don't have to stay. Let's make plans to go back next summer."

So we'd already kind of gone down that road of at least talking about it. At the same point I'm meeting with four girls every Tuesday for that whole time and they always would say, "How is your panic?"

And I would always say like, "It's the same." It's like withering; something about relapses, you fear that you'll never change. So that's when despair can creep in. And I had almost lost faith for myself; I just didn't know anything different. And they laid hands and prayed on me. And that night other friends were praying for me.

I remember specifically on September 20th of 2011 waking up at 3 a.m. like I did so many times before, and I couldn't speak because in a panic attack, everything is heightened and you're just like -- and I would just grasp his arm and Gabe just started praying like he always did and finally I found my voice and I said, "Rescue me." I said, "Deliver me. I cannot do this without you." And in a moment my body just broke, literally broke on the bed and stopped. And I just laid there. It was almost like a paralyzation. It was like I was just like this and my eyes are the only thing moving in the dark. And I was like, "Did you see that?"

And Gabe just said, "You stopped."

I grew up fundamental Baptist so I didn't really understand what this meant; was this healing? What does that look like? I'm sorry guys, there was no book, like textbook framework for me. So what happened though is the weeks that followed I began to walk the streets of New York and I began... the scales were lifted from my eyes and I began to see brokenness in people all around me.

And I learned -- I started studying anxiety and depression and I learned that one in four women are on anti-anxiety, anti-depressant medication which is 400 times what it was in 1988. It's a new day. It's an epidemic; 20% of Americans, 47 million people suffer from this, \$47 billion are spent annually on this and it is just increasing. I keep reading articles all the time. I started reading the work of Victor Frankl and he wrote *Man's Search for Meaning*. And he basically talks about -- he is a holocaust survivor and he talks about suffering. He says that his premise is that the root of anxiety is unfulfilled responsibility, which basically means you know you're made for something and you're not doing it.

And for me in my life in that season that I looked to New York to like give me meaning and give me purpose because there was this angst that said, "Did you create me for more? Did you imagine something for my hands? When you knit me in my mother's womb, what did you put in me? What was the D.N.A. What did you imagine when my frame was not hidden from you when I was made in that secret place? What is your intention for me?"

So I really started to unpack the calling, what calling looks like for women. Because I think often women get lost in the roles and we confuse our roles for our calling. Actually, our roles enhance our calling. So I learned that calling is nothing more than when your talents and your burdens collide. So talents are those birthright gifts. Like what did God put in you when he knit you in your mother's womb? What made you come alive when you're eight, nine, and ten that drove your parents crazy? I learned --

I was called "Bekah Book" when I was a kid. I read -- I read everything I could get my hands on. We didn't have a TV until I was like eighth or ninth grade. So my mom is a teacher and I remember in the fourth grade checking out every single Nancy Drew

book; so all 62 I read in one year. So I didn't know until later in life but readers make writers. So I always learned about life through the power of written story. So it made sense that here I am, 33, my mom is like, "Hey, I always thought you'd write."

I was like, "I've never heard this before! This would have been very helpful at Liberty when I was picking a major!" So even just waking to that gifting of writing but that wasn't enough; I think there's another part of calling that we often miss. It's one thing to awaken to what it is that you're wired for, what you're suited for, what you're gifted at. The part that people aren't really prepared for is the burden. So calling is when your talents and your burdens collide. Burden is informed by the story you've lived, the journey you've walked, the life you've walked, the family you've been born into, the things that have broken your heart. Burden is what keeps you up at night. Burden is what makes you weep.

And when you start deploying the giftings that God's knit in you for the things that make you weep, therein lies the calling. And I believe that calling is for everyone, male and female. I believe that if we are just sitting at his feet and we say, "God, what is it that you're doing? Where is your hand moving in the world and just put me to work. Just give me your marching orders. You know what part of the body I'm supposed to be so show me what that is and make the need great right in front of me so that I can just be fully present with whatever it is that you've put right there." So that's kind of what I'm doing.

I think burden for me is mental illness. It is something we're all seeing. Burden for me is women waking to the giftings God is putting in their heart and to see that calling is beautiful. And in order to have a calling you must have a caller.

It's not something -- we're not trying to make a name for ourselves. This isn't like a big indulgent conversation. No, this is an act of obedience to say, "You are the Father on the throne. I am your inheritance; I'm your heir. You have set me free; I want to walk in fullness of life in whatever you put in front of me." I think that brings him glory.

James: My secretary, my assistant Carol is a great editor, great writer, reader herself. She said that your book carried her. So obviously, you found something. Do you think

the viewers, if they'd read the story, do you think what you -- there is just the flow of God coming out of you. This is supernatural what is happening. But do you feel like they'll start tracking with what God led you to supernaturally put down?

Rebekah: It was such a cathartic process. It was so painful. I wept writing the whole thing because it was like I really understood God's love and intention. And the beauty of this is God is that creative, his imagination is that vast, so that we don't have to copy or compete or compare. We all have our own journeys. We have our own stories, our own lives we've walked and we have our own wiring. And don't we just celebrate in the fact that God knit us with such intention, that he has such purpose and plans for us? I don't want anyone to look like me. That would be annoying. That would be -- having two Rebekahs walking around would be obnoxious -- let's be honest!

[Laughter]

But I think God is saying, "No, you are all my people. You are my holy people who I love. You are the salt of the earth, the light of the world, a city on the hill that cannot be hidden. I need all of you. You are it. I need all of you!"

Betty: It's right where they are. In other words, you don't have to quit doing what God has put you, you're a mother, you're a homemaker, but that calling can still be effective where you are.

James: The Good Samaritan went right on back to work. He didn't buy a tent and start a healing ministry. Okay, he went back to work but he still cared. This whole -- she's still mothering -- she didn't give up the kids.

Now I'm a writer, I don't have kids anymore. It's really so much bigger. You've got to know -- you have to understand how absolutely important you are to expressing the heart and life of God. I pray you see that.

You can get the book in the bookstores and online. I'll send it to you today -- we'll send it to you. Rebekah, we've really loved putting God's arms around hurting people.

That's what our viewers enable us to do. I want to show you how you can do it. Would you just like to say thanks to God and thanks to Rebekah?

And Gabe, since you're not here, she's better than you. We've got to turn this girl loose; we, the family. Really and truly, this river has got to flow. We don't know how exactly but we've got to see how because this woman is really special. It's really magnificent.

And Gabe, thanks because you're really an instrument. I love you, buddy! And proud of you -- and so proud of this beautiful -- Jesus in this beautiful girl and you. May God bless you in Q and all you do. And may God heal his family, like I told you earlier, the most perfect father has the most dysfunctional family. Something has got to get fixed and this is part of the fixing process.

Now look, I promise you, it excites Jesus to say to his father, "Dad, we're going to put your arms around a lot of people." That's what you're going to do right now. I want you to watch closely. I tell you, you're the one that touches; like Rebekah was touched, you can touch these -- these hurts and heal them.

On the mission field

Announcer: Right now Angola is experiencing one of the worst droughts in years, destroying crops and impacting the lives of nearly two million people. As a result, over 100,000 children under the age of five are suffering with severe malnutrition. One of those children is named Elaina; she is almost two years old but she only weighs 18 pounds. Elaina's mother, Rosalina came to a malnutrition clinic desperate for her daughter to be healed.

Open captions:

>> I used to give Elaina my milk. She started getting sick when I ran out. Elaina cries when she's hungry but I have nothing to give her. I am very worried that she is still losing weight.

Announcer: Elaina's skin disease can be a fatal symptom of malnutrition, when a child is not getting enough food the lack of protein results in large painful lesions all

over the body. If treated early enough the skin lesions can be healed but the long term effects of malnutrition will be with a child for the rest of their lives. The cure for malnutrition is simply food. A daily bowl of food will keep children out of the malnutrition clinics and give them the life they deserve. That's the miracle of mission fielding.

End of clip

In the studio

James: When I look at those... what I saw for so many years, skin ulcers, and realize that all we had to do to correct it was to give them something to eat. You're thinking about give these kids a chance; they don't define chance as an entertainment center or park. These kids have more fun with a rock than our kids can have with a game box or some video game.

One of our best friends just came back from Africa and he went to where we've been feeding and where we've been saving kids for 25 years, and some of the older people are now grown tell us about how a lot of them went through college now and they're teachers themselves. But they had a bunch of these kids, Betty and they were kicking around a plastic bag they aired up, they didn't have anything to play with, and they had brought a soccer ball and they threw it out. He said, "I saw several hundred kids go crazy that they could kick a ball." He said, "I've never seen -- I've never seen kids so happy!"

So when we show you these desperate kids, and these mothers, and these kids are fighting just for a breath and we talk about hope, we're not talking about giving them an iPhone, we're talking about giving them life and showing them love. And yes, it is in my heart to see the whole continent of Africa changed and the resources there developed for the world but the great resources are the people. So I'm asking you, please, save those kids' lives: Give them food, be an answer to the mother's prayer, be the healing hands of Jesus and give them something to eat. And give them what to them is the greatest joy of all -- that they might have a family and a baby to love, because that's their biggest joy.

So I want you to dial the number, take your bankcard and use it like a check and make the biggest gift you can. We've got 100,000 kids right now that are facing death in Angola, the very place where you saw those malnutrition clinics. But I'm talking about out in the bush where the crops have failed.

We need a miracle. I'm praying God will raise up 1,000 people to give \$1,000 because with a \$1,000 we can feed a hundred kids, save their lives and we've got 100,000 that are desperate right now because of a drought. We've got 400,000 that we've located that we're feeding and we need to continue that to turn it around.

And so what I'm asking you to do now is I'm asking you to respond to the love of God but I'm asking you to take advantage of the love of God expressed through some of our friends who know the need is so great in drought-stricken Angola and other places, and the children are dying because they didn't have a food line and the missionaries have found a place to feed them to stop this process but we need the food.

And some of our wonderful friends said, "Well, we'll give a matching gift of one and a half million dollars! That's how desperate it is and we'll do it. But we want to ask everyone who is watching to give the largest gift they can. We'll match it."

Father, I pray everybody watching will reach out and be the hands of Jesus today. I'm asking you to touch their hearts God so they express your heart; in Jesus' name.

Dial that number. If you get a busy, you be determined, I'm getting through because I'm going to do what God told me to do; I'm going to see those children have hope, and you make the gift.

Or you can go to LifeToday.org and make the gift God put on your heart. We've got some gifts to bless you because we love to bless you, spiritually to feed you, and so we'll say thank you. But boy you're going to be the miracle some mother's praying for,

some child, some young person, some family needs. Thanks for making the call. Thanks for right now doing it and going online. Bless you for it!

Begin video clip

Announcer: In remote and impoverished areas of Africa, families are suffering, facing death by starvation, and those hit the children 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. With all of our previous reserves gone, and Angola facing its worst drought and food shortage in 20 years, we need to immediately replenish our funding and supplies for our feeding programs.

As an answer to prayer, a group of *LIFE's* friends have set a \$1.5 million matching gift challenge for Mission Feeding. This means your gift today can have a double impact! \$30 to help feed three children will be doubled to impact six children. \$50 to help feed five children will be doubled to help save 10 children. \$100 for 10 children will be doubled to help feed 20 children. And \$300 for 30 children will be doubled to help feed and minister to 60 children!

With your gift of any amount we'll send you *All Things New*, a daily devotional with an inspirational music CD. With your double impact gift of \$100 or more, please request the N.I.V. larger print reference Bible.

Finally, please consider a double impact gift of \$1,000 and request our commemorative glass sculpture, "The Blessing."

Please call, write, or go online today and make your gift of life to help feed and care for hungry children.

End of clip

In the studio:

James: I pray with all my heart that you'll be the blessing. We want to say thank you. Send the gift to help us feed 100 kids or however many you can. But we need a lot of

help. We'll send you this book, *Free Fall to Fly*. I'll tell you what, I believe God's all over it. I thank you for listening. Aren't you glad you did?

Would you like to say thanks to Rebekah?

Rebekah, I love you!

Thank you! We saw Jesus flowing like a river. Really did! Just a river -- a river of love. God wants to flow that river of love and life through you. Love you!