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Week 46: Fall Mission Feeding
Matthew Barnett and Cassie Demman

James: It's a joy! Thank you all. Thank you for this opportunity. I'm James Robison; Betty and I welcome you to *LIFE Today*.

Matthew Barnett is here. I want you to look at this. Here is a fella trying to get on one of those big old wheel bicycles but it's got an interesting title. You're really going to like our guests. You're going to like them a lot! Misfits: Find yourself in Jesus and bring welcome and the world along for the ride. Misfits welcome.

Matthew has pastored the Dream Center; it is absolutely phenomenal. He has brought a woman here, a lady that got totally transformed by that work and now works with them. Her name is Cassie Demman. I want you to welcome these two wonderful guests to *LIFE Today*, Matthew Barnett and Cassie. Would you?

-- Cassie Demman.

Good to see you again, buddy.

Good to see you, Cassie.

Well, we can reminisce. We can go back. It's hard to believe that's been 20 years ago. I have nothing but memories about which I rejoice. I know you do because it's been a miracle! It's been a miracle work; hasn't it?

Matthew: It's been 20 years in the inner city of L.A. Pastoring since I was 20. I came because my dad couldn't find a real pastor. He was trying to find a pastor to take over this little church by a liquor store in downtown that nobody could find. And he couldn't find a real one so he asked me to come for three months to help him. So I've

been there for 20 years. Started with a little church building next to a liquor store and now it is a 400,000 square foot hospital where everything that we're doing now was nothing what I thought I would be doing. I showed up and thought I was going to preach the city to revival. I'm a preacher's son and just because I show up everyone is going to come and hear me preach. That didn't happen! People left, and I was left all alone.

James: You had a little church that got smaller.

Matthew: It got smaller and smaller. My dad wrote the book on church growth. I wrote the book on church reduction. I was doing everything wrong. But I took a walk in the park that night and I saw hurting people. God spoke to me. He said, "Die to your dream of being a success and live the rest of your life building the dreams of the broken people you see on this prayer walk in Los Angeles."

Suddenly, the vision took a different form from preaching people to revival to God giving us a 400,000 square foot hospital where hundreds of people are living every single day: Drug addicts, people in recovery, homeless families, trafficking victims, all living in one building whose life is being restored. I like to say it truly is a misfit dream because I was the biggest misfit of all.

People say, "Pastor, you're doing a great job of helping misfits." But I really feel like I'm a bigger misfit. Didn't understand anything about gang culture. Didn't understand anything about relevance.

But one day God spoke to me. He said, "Quit trying to be relevant and start being revolutionary." That changed my life because as long as I was trying to be relevant, I was kind of a cheaper imitation of somebody else.

God said, "I want you to solve problems that can no longer be solved by any other government. Just be there in the community and love people." We began to see a revolutionary work that began to unfold right in front of us.

James: One of the things that I remember so well, Matthew, is we started helping you

remodel the rooms in the hospital -- *LIFE Today*, *LIFE Outreach* -- but we also started feeding.

And interestingly, while you're here at this particular time, we're going to be feeding hundreds of thousands of families and children in Africa who are really hard hit. But we started the feeding and I think one of the things that's amazing, as we're going to talk to your guest, something quite phenomenal not only happened in her life but something incredible has happened relating to feeding.

So you have taken now the church beyond the hospital, you've taken the Angeles Temple over; it is a huge church that God has just blessed you and you're reaching thousands of people for Christ, and thousands of people to preach to, but you're reaching out to people just like the guest you brought with you, like Cassie, who had been one of those misfits and one of those people most people had written off.

We're talking about wanting to feed people, she fits right into that because that's kind of where we started with you, tried to help feed the people that were hungry; and you've never stopped that program, it's expanded. But tell us a little bit about Cassie because I'm interested in hearing about what happened in her life.

Matthew: First of all, it's interesting, James, because you came into our life at a season when nobody believed in the vision of the Dream Center. Many of the pastors said, "Why buy a big old hospital?" They thought it would be the death of us to take that on. And you showed up on the scene and there's old footage of you praying for gang members at that altar, putting your arms around them. You thought the dream was crazy enough for God to just make it happen. You believed in that misfit dream and you were the first one to ever support us financially monthly.

As a result of that, people like Cassie have come forth who went to our drug and alcohol recovery program for one year and then got a pretty interesting challenge. Tell us about that.

Cassie: Well, I was raised in a Christian family but chose to walk away from that and just had about ten years of really bad drug and alcohol addiction to the point where I

was beginning to blackout from taking pills and drinking on top of it. I just didn't know how to stop. So my sister reached out to me that lives in California and invited me to come and visit her. I ended up at one of the services at Angeles Temple and I just felt an overwhelming sense of peace when I was at the church and just really fell in love with the church but didn't know what to do.

So when I went back home my sister ended up sending me an application for the discipleship program. So I made the decision to completely surrender and give it all to God and just see what he could do with my life because I really was at a point in my life where I had no expectations; like I had been working in a factory. I started bartending and I just thought that was my life. It didn't feel like there was anything else I could do with my life but just be an addict and live that way. So when I came to the discipleship program I just completely surrendered and couldn't believe how God blessed me with amazing services that I got to attend every single week, seeing speakers from all over the world just come and just share with us and really build us up. Then I stayed another year and worked with the women.

And at the end of my second year just really didn't have direction again, was just like, God, whatever you want me to do, I'm willing. So that's when I was approached by Pastor Matthew and Caroline to start working in the food truck ministry and it was just completely overwhelming. I thought I conquered some of my fears going through discipleship, coming from a small town to the big city of Los Angeles but to take on that new challenge, I just really was just excited and scared at the same time. But just going out there and being able to see the need in Los Angeles, it is such a large city and the poverty level is extremely high in Los Angeles. The ministry is the people. That's where God works is in the cities and with people.

So just going out there and being a blessing to help those that just need a helping hand, and just being able to go through the line and being able to talk to them and hear some of their stories; just share hope with them and be able to bless them. I get to see some of the same people every single week and really build a relationship. I've seen some people become church members and some people come into the discipleship program and get the help that they need as well. It's really been just a blessing.

From that, I just decided I feel like I need to be more responsible. I feel called to ministry so just recently I started going to Bible school. And now I'm really excited about that. I finally feel like I know what I'm called to do and that's ministry in whatever aspect that looks like.

Betty: As you look back don't you recognize now that what you sensed and felt when you walked into the Dream Center was love and acceptance? That people really genuinely cared about you?

Cassie: Yes!

Matthew: James, when God changes people's lives you don't even recognize them anymore. From someone who came in who was just trying to get off of drugs, to now somebody who is feeding 30,000 people every single week in the city of L.A.

James: Explain that now because you told me privately you suddenly gave her an assignment beyond anything she could fathom. Just let our audience know just exactly what you mean by overseeing the feeding.

Matthew: Because of people like yourself, we have these box trucks that go into the community and they serve 200 families per truck. We're talking about grocery bags for the entire week for families -- like 30,000 people a week. It's our biggest ministry, our largest outreach. She just graduates recovery and we go, "We think you're the one to actually run the biggest food distribution probably in all of Los Angeles."

It was like a misfit dream and a misfit idea. It freaked her out and she was scared but then she prayed about it and then showed up. She said, "That's a guy's ministry, lugging boxes and everything." So we gave her a few big dudes and she went out there and I mean you have to fight to mobilize lines, and it's a battle out there. She stepped up to the challenge.

That's what we're seeing; 70 percent of my staff are graduates of our drug and alcohol rehab program. So in our church we've got ex-pimps, we've got ex-murderers -- and

that's just the pastoral staff.

[Laughter]

That's not including all the other people we got going on.

[Laughter]

But it's a misfit army that I never thought that would rally to me. And again, I want to thank James and Betty, both of you, in life for believing that the vision was crazy enough for God to get involved in.

James: Do you express yourself -- you express your gratitude. He doesn't lack zeal. The thing I want all of you to know is that I was there with him. Right off the bat, somebody's gotten killed in front of that little building he's talking about being his first church. And we went in there, it was kind of like you go where angels fear to tread. It was obvious, my mind is flashing through all the scenes. He took me down a drainage, like a big drainpipe from all these guys hanging out. It was just a little spooky because you think am I going to get out of this thing alive? But I didn't know if he was, I was going back home.

But the deal is, we went in there and just said we want to love them. Here's what we need you to hear. It isn't just this big compassionate James and Betty. We do have a tender heart because God reached us in need and he wants to reach others through us but we're so limited. He's thanking me but what he really wants the message to be is he is thanking you. Yes, we noticed but you enabled. You made it possible.

So for all of you, thank you. Again, when we talk about doing something that needs to be done, we can care, we can pray but we have little to share in light of the size of the need. So our viewers made it possible. You have been so expressive and just for all of you to know, your church has many times sent to various outreaches that we're involved in to say, "We want to help you do that."

Cassie, you'll have not only experienced a miracle, you become a miracle. I can tell you're excited about what you're doing. What do you want people to hear who are watching?

And you also, Matthew, where they feel like "we're misfit, we don't matter much." What do you want them to hear? What do you want everybody to know about what God can do with anybody if they would just be available?

Cassie: I think when you feel like you have no expectations for life like I did and just had no direction, when you give it all to God, you'll be amazed at how big God is. It is him working through you. I feel like so many times I felt like, I can't do anything, I'm not educated. I don't feel like I have a gifting in any area. But really, when you wait in your life in God works through you, you see like just the miracle that it really is to just be surrendered and completely willing to allow God to use you. You know he'll equip you after he calls you.

James: What do you want people to hear from the book when they read it?

Matthew: When I wrote that book, it's really been a work of my life. And I began to see people who -- people say, "That person can never be used of God," rising up to do great things. I look at the journey of not being able to understand anything about L.A. and just showing up and loving people and realizing that even though I couldn't understand the plight and the problems because I wasn't raised amongst a fatherless generation so I thought that was a barrier. How can I ever reach people when I had a great father who are fatherless?

And I had all these limitations about all the things I couldn't do because I wasn't from the streets, I wasn't from the neighborhood. And then began to understand that again, you can't fight love, you can't fight consistency, and whoever stays the longest in the community will win the battle of influence. And that just wasn't my story, it became so many people's story who are misfits. The very thing they felt eliminated them from ministry became the very thing that made them qualified for ministry.

So I want people to feel qualified because of their limitations rather than destroyed by feeling like they can never measure up. So God has always used people that were misfits to do his will because they were probably more moldable, teachable, and ready to be used and adaptable to change. That's kind of been the story of my life and other people who have taken this journey, individuals in everyday life who began to understand that they were not disqualified because they didn't fit in or they didn't understand something. It was the very thing that God could use when it was given to him.

James: Do you ever feel like, honey that you didn't have much to offer. I know you had such devotion as being mom and wife but did you ever feel like that was the extent of it?

Betty: Well, as a Christian too, you get used to what you do every day and you think that's your story right there. But God is saying, "Let me take you out of that comfort zone. I have so much more for you. I have so many more blessings for you. I want your life to be an example to those that have no hope, that feel like God hasn't got anything for them, that they don't feel important, they don't feel relevant to what God might want to do in their lives."

So that's what it was for me. God saying, "You can do all things through Christ. You just present yourself available" and then just like you said, you present yourself to God available and then he'll show you the gifts that he has for you and inspire you and lead you and give you the strength to do it.

James: As you were sharing that, I thought about the times that you've spoken to somebody maybe when you were shopping and you see someone and your heart is moved. I'm impressed to say to all of you, the book is available in the bookstores or online. We'd be happy to send it to you to help you if you feel like there's something here that you want. We ask you to help us feed a hungry child.

But here's what I want to say. Let me just carry something over to our viewing audience. If you would try this and I think both of you could say probably this is basically what you're observing happening in your own life. If you would ask the

Lord, you'd be surprised how he'll help you do what he especially what he knows is right for you to do, and what he actually wants you to do. Ask him, the Lord, to let you see through his eyes as he sees, and just live with eyes wide open. It will actually help in your work. It will actually help you straighten things up around the house. It will help you do a lot of little things that you didn't notice if you just open your eyes.

But really, open your spiritual eyes and look at people; and maybe it is a clerk, maybe it is somebody checking you out. Maybe it is somebody that assists you or maybe it is somebody who could be assisting but they just look like maybe they're distracted, to just go over to them and say, "Is there any way I can pray for you? I happen to be a Christian, and boy, I've seen God answer so many prayers. I just wondered if there is anything..."

You'd be amazed -- now be sensitive, be watching, you watch a lot of them fold up right there and say, "I can't believe you noticed. Oh, I really need this."

You'll make a connection that will oftentimes lead that person not just to your church but to Christ when they see love. Does that make sense?

Matthew: That makes so much sense!

James: Because I think you are watching those people that you're feeding, you're really watching them. Would you all say thanks to Cassie? And would you say thanks to Matthew? I really -- and I want all of you at home to really pause and think about what I was saying, about just live with your eyes wide open. Lord Jesus, let me see what you see. Let me say what you might say.

And if you yield this life and let his life flow through you, it will become like a river of living water. I'm going to show our viewers, and show you and our guests here, I want you to just look in and I want you to listen to one of the most truly special women on the planet, Tammy Trent. I think you remember she is a great musician, a great singer. She lost her husband; hadn't been married for long. He was a swimmer and of all things he drowned. No reason for it. It made no sense. She's just continued on magnifying the Lord. She's become one of our mission arms. Listen to Jesus talking

through Tammy about people that you and I -- now think about this -- with our eyes wide open, we can love. Watch and listen.

On the mission field

Tammy: The things that I've seen, the things that I've gotten to experience have been emotional. There's been some good days and there's been some bad days.

My favorite days are when I get to go into a village and serve the children, especially when I get to sit down and feed them a bowl of food that they get every day. What an incredible moment that really is knowing that in that place and in that moment, I'm privileged to be a part of bringing them life through a bowl of food.

Then you get in the car the next day and you travel hours to get to a clinic like this only to sit in a place like this and to watch this precious little girl fight for her life because she doesn't have that one bowl of food every day. Her body is shutting down. She is dying. I wonder how long she has to live. I think if she was in a village where there was a feeding program set up, how her life would be so very different.

I've seen the power in just one bowl of food. Something so incredibly simple that brings life to so many hundreds of thousands of children!

It's hard to watch any child die knowing that there's something we can do to help prevent that death!

End of clip

In the studio

James: Tammy, thank you! There's no way that I can convey to you the depth of concern that I have that God would enable me to be able to put on your heart what's on God's heart, what's on the mother's heart that that's their baby. I don't know if your mind and your eyes went quick enough to look at that little line that if they could just have a feeding line, maybe they wouldn't be here -- and they wouldn't be! We want to just freeze frame there.

I want you to look at the little boy at the front.

I don't know your name little fella but I love you!

And then the little one peeking around, and then back in the back the pretty little faces, and others peeking. Somebody's child. It's somebody... it's somebody that God loves! Wow! As much as we love our children, and we have. We lost a child we never thought we would. But you shouldn't have to lose a child to know how precious they are.

I want to ask you to do something just incredible today. I want you to reach out and put God's arms of love around somebody's child. I want you to keep children from getting where that little child that Tammy was looking at with such love. And I love you Tammy for your love. I'm going to ask you today to reach out. And if you had a broken heart, you call, we pray every day. But would you reach out today and dial the number and say, "I'm going to feed as many kids as I'm able to. I'm going to save those little babies. Those little kids that are in that line, I'm going to be sure when they get up there they'll have a bowl – it won't be empty. You won't run out of food in that center because I want to pay for it."

For \$30, \$50, or \$100 is all it takes to feed three, five, or ten kids. That's not much! \$33 kids, \$55, \$110, God give us a lot of people who will say, "I'll feed 100! I'll give \$1,000 or more." I don't know where you are or what you can do but I found that people who watch and they kind of look through the eyes of Jesus, they begin to put the hands of Jesus out. I'm asking you today, we've got a tremendous crisis where the drought-stricken areas of Angola, just little kids dying hungry! Can you imagine that?

These are really poor people. Please dial the number. Take your bankcard, make the largest gift you can make or write a check to *LIFE*. But call us and tell us what you're sending. We've got to know. We've got to tell the missionaries, "It's coming. Open that center there. The money will be there. We'll pay for the food."

If you want to go online at LifeToday.org we've got some beautiful gifts we want to send you; an inspirational devotional guide from our guests on *Life Today*, the most beautiful large-print Bible. I told them I only want the larger print, a lot of us are getting older, and it's just fabulous. It's an incredible thin line study Bible. The beautiful glass sculpture of "The Blessing" -- that's what you are -- just make the best gift you can. Would you please -- please!

If you should call and get a busy you say, "I'm getting through. I'll call until I can help those little children that need to be in the line, that are in the line, and keep them from being in the position that one was that Tammy was weeping over. Would you do that? Thank you for doing it. I believe you will. From the bottom of my heart thank you!

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 even some Ebola-threatened areas of 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. Your life-saving gift of \$30, \$50, \$100 or \$300 will help feed and care for 3, 5, 10 or 30 children for the next three months. With your support and the partnership of others, your gift goes a long way to help save lives. Please call us, write, or go online today and make your gift.

With your gift of any amount, we'll send you All Things New, a brand-new 31-day devotional featuring inspiration from a variety of special guests of *LIFE Today*; and an instrumental worship CD to bless you in your quiet times with the Lord.

With your gift of \$100 or more to help feed 10 children please request the N.I.V. larger print leather-bound reference Bible.

And finally, with your gift of \$1,000 or more to help feed 100 children, be sure to 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****On the mission field**

Peter: We are here in this malnutrition clinic, and you can see how full it is and how many children are here. The reason for that is the severe drought that has been in this country for four years. What I want to explain to you is, this mother wants to provide

for her child, just like you want to provide for your children. There is no difference in her desire. The last thing on earth that she wanted was to end up in this malnutrition clinic with her little boy fighting for his life.

If you'll go to your phone now or get to the Internet right now and make a donation, I want to tell you that it is going to change a child's life here in Africa by giving them a meal a day.

End of clip

In the studio

James: My heart is still pretty full, Betty, because I just feel like sometimes I'm thinking, I'm pleading the cause, so to speak, of the widow and the orphan, which the prophets told us we're to do. But you just really wonder how effective you are in rescuing the perishing and caring for them.

Thanks for your help. We want to be a blessing to you. If you'd like to have Matthew's book, *Misfits Welcome*, we'll be glad to send it to you. You just ask for it. It's in the bookstores. Thomas Nelson published it. Great publisher! Great book!

I want to say to Matthew again and I want to say to Cassie again, thank you so much. Would you just say to Matthew and Cassie thank you? Bless you! Thank y'all! Thank you so much!