

12/6/16
Week 50: Mission Feeding
Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh
Michelle Bengtson

Sheila: Welcome to *LIFE Today*! I'm here today with Randy Robison and we're excited to be here. James and Betty have worked incredibly hard over the last few weeks and months, very passionately caring about our nation so we said to them, "You know what guys? You need a night off. You need to stay home and put your feet up."

I was particularly thrilled when I realized that this guest would be available. Her name is Dr. Michelle Bengtson and her book is called *Hope Prevails*. Here's why it fascinated me, "Insights from a doctor's personal journey through depression."

Would you please welcome our guest?

[Cheers & Applause]

Every now and again I get the opportunity to read a lot, we both do, and I love that. But every now and again I get a chance, a book comes across my path that I think there's a possibility of this book really shifting my life, really changing my life. I was diagnosed with severe clinical depression probably 30 years ago. I was hospitalized for a month. And so when I saw the beautiful combination of you as a doctor but as a fellow struggler I was fascinated.

Would you give us a little back story to how you came to write this?

Michelle: Nobody wants to write a book on depression. Nobody wants that to be their mission field but I believe God gives beauty for ashes. And part of that is in sharing my story, I am a doctor, and I've treated patients for 25 years who have gone through depression. But then when I came down with it myself and I tried the same recommendations that I'd given to my patients, and they helped but they were insufficient, that's when my world really shifted.

Sheila: What would you normally have recommended for somebody who was struggling with depression?

Michelle: Well, first line of treatment typically is therapy or medication. And I did both. But it's also taking care of your temple; so looking at your sleep habits and your diet and your

exercise. I tried all those things and they did help but they weren't enough to eradicate the problem.

Randy: What was missing?

Michelle: Addressing the spiritual component of disease. Really looking at the fact that John 10:10 says we have an enemy who seeks to steal, kill, and destroy. But the second half of that verse is: But I have come that they might have life and have it to the full.

When I was depressed I had anything but the full life. The enemy had stolen so much from my family. I grew up in a household where my mother was depressed the whole time that I was growing up, and her mother was depressed, and her aunt was depressed. But we didn't call it that back then; it was just the way she was.

Randy: How prominent is this? I know both of you have struggled with this but it's not something that I've dealt with, thankfully. Is this fairly common?

Michelle: It is so common that by 2020 it's going to be our greatest epidemic worldwide. Greater than heart disease, greater than cancer, greater than diabetes all put together.

Sheila: From your perspective as a doctor, but not just as a doctor, as a believer, why do you think the statistics -- why do you think it is getting more and more and more?

Michelle: Part of it is because I think we're buying into society, culture. Part of it is we're looking at each other and comparing ourselves. That's one of the biggest traps the enemy has is if he will get us to take our eyes off of the Father and on to everybody else and compare ourselves. Comparison is the thief of joy. So when we do that we lose our joy.

But we buy into the lies. There are so many lies that are perpetuated in our head from the enemy. When I was going through depression I felt such shame because I was the doctor. I was supposed to have all the answers and yet I went through it. So I thought I'm a fraud. Then I thought, I must be joy immune and I'm always going to be this way because my mother was always that way.

Sheila: Joy immune? That's an interesting phrase. Wow!

Michelle: But I bought it. I believed it. Instead of believing what scripture says that I'm more than an overcomer, I'm victorious in Christ Jesus, I'm an heir to the throne. It was only when I started transplanting those lies with God's truth that the difference came about.

Sheila: Walk us through that a little bit because I'm imagining someone sitting at home and maybe they've been on medication for awhile and they would long to be free but they think, well, okay, I'll just read a couple of verses and I'll stop taking my medication. What would you say to them?

Michelle: Oh, but it is not just reading the verses, it is believing them. Faith comes by hearing and so for me it was the matter of I would write down the scripture verses.

This came about when I went through a life-threatening illness and I was sick and I was unable to work so I thought what good am I? Instead of recognizing that my worth doesn't come from what I do but whose I am. So I would write down scripture on a post-it note and put it next to my bed so when I would see it I would say it out loud because faith comes by hearing. Then I would write down the next scripture and the next. By the end I had over 100 scriptures plastered on my walls so that every time I saw them I was reciting what the father says about me instead of believing what the enemy says about me.

Sheila: You know what's fascinating about that is I've been studying Ephesians six, about the spiritual armor. And when it came to taking out the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, when you actually look at the Greek there the word for sword is actually a dagger. It is talking about personal hand-to-hand combat. And for the Word of God, it doesn't mean the whole Bible. It is actually talking about promises in the Bible. So it's almost like our great defense is knowing these specific promises to attack when the enemy comes against us.

Michelle: Absolutely! Right down to the promise that no weapon formed against me shall prosper. I use that one every day!

Randy: Let me ask a couple of questions here. First of all, what kind of a doctor are you? I don't want to guess.

Michelle: I'm a clinical neuropsychologist. So I evaluate patients to see what might be going wrong in their brain functioning and arrive at a diagnosis and then give a treatment plan.

Randy: So if I understand depression correctly, which is a bit of a presumption, is there a difference between just hey, I've been comparing myself to others and so I don't feel so good about myself versus something that is physiologically going on in the brain, a shortage of certain things in the body chemicals or whatever that caused a depression that one can't get out of on their own? How do you know what you got?

Michelle: Well, first of all, you don't decide. You go see a doctor. Don't leave self-diagnosis.

Sheila: Don't get the woman out of a job.

[Laughter]

Michelle: No, there are -- you bring up a good point, Randy and that is there are several different types of contributors to depression. Sometimes it is biochemical; there is chemistry in the brain that can cause depression. But some of the times it is reactive from a medical condition. For example, you could have a thyroid disorder or a vitamin deficiency and that contributes.

Some of the time it comes because of the life stresses that we go through. We go through difficult situations and that leads and contributes to depression.

But almost all of the time there is a spiritual component as well and that's the part that I don't think doctors are really addressing. I didn't with my own patients until I went through it myself. Once I went through it myself and I realized the power that's when things started to change.

Sheila: Let me just ask you to kind of unpack that further. Where do you begin? Like when you began to think, okay, I've tried the medication, I've tried to eat better, I've tried to sleep, I've tried to exercise and it's still not enough, how did you begin and when did you begin to see a difference in your life?

Michelle: It was when a dear friend sent me a verse out of Isaiah. I was going in for surgery the next day and I was really hopeless. I thought this is my life? Like if this is my life I don't want this. She sent me a scripture verse. But Sheila, a lot of people will give you scripture verses when you're going in for surgery or when you're depressed and just say, "Your strength is in the Lord." That, to me, felt like a slap in the face. That told me you don't understand.

But this one friend gave me a scripture verse out of Isaiah about "He makes the crooked paths straight and He makes the rough plain." And that was a verse that I thought, I need to cling to that. I need to hold on to that. But I also knew her heart and I knew her heart was for me and she wasn't just slapping a Band-Aid on it. But that was the beginning. I thought, that's a verse I need to cling to.

Then he would give me other verses. Sometimes it would be song. In my book I have a play list of music at the end of each chapter and that's part of the reason because there were times when I couldn't verbally praise, I just wasn't there. I was too depressed -- but I could in song. And the enemy will flee.

Sheila: I love that because if you think about it, his original name was Lucifer. He was head of the cherubim; he was the number one worship Angel. One theologian said he was literally a walking orchestra. But when we begin to praise... And I do the same thing. I have a worship play list. I played it in my car on the way here.

But how long did it take you to come to a place of saying, okay, I know how to do this battle and maybe I don't need this medication?

Michelle: It took probably nine months because it is a long process. It doesn't happen overnight. It is a matter of renewing your mind. It is a matter of taking every thought captive and bringing into obedience.

Sheila: How do you do that because I've known that verse since I was like five years old, "taking every thought captive" and it is like, how do you do that?

Michelle: It's a matter of when you're in the moment and you're feeling that way, asking yourself, what am I listening to? What am I believing? Then asking the Lord, is this from you? If it is not, then what is the counter to that? Instead of hearing "I am worthless," he says "I am worthy." But it is a matter of really listening to your thoughts and figuring out where are these thoughts coming from? Because if they don't line up with scripture then they're coming from another place but there is scripture to do battle.

Sheila: Because Christ says there is no -- Romans 8:1, there is now therefore no condemnation to those in Christ. So any condemnation has not come from the Father. He brings conviction which brings you closer to the Lord but not condemnation.

Michelle: But it is hard work. You asked how long it takes. It is hard work. One of my favorite passages in the Bible is where Jesus is talking to the lame man at the pool of Bethesda. And he says, "Do you want to get well?" Part of the reason he asked that is because it is work. He had to do work. Once he was no longer lame, he had to get a job. He had to get a new identity.

Randy: That can be depressing.

[Laughter]

So what do you think the other side of depression is? What is in it for me if I say, I'm going to do the work? ...Other than getting off some meds? Does it really improve?

Michelle: It brings joy. It brings joy.

Randy: So you're not joy immune?

Michelle: No, I'm not but it was a lie I believed but I'm not.

Sheila: Do you feel that's something that you have been able to say, "Okay, this stops with me"? You talked about your mom and you talked about your grandmother and suddenly said, "I'm not passing this on."

Michelle: And that was part of the reason I decided it was worth doing the work because I wanted it to stop in my generation. I have two sons. Satan is not going to take anything from my children. It stops here.

Sheila: I love that! I think that's fantastic!

[Applause]

Randy: It's bigger than I realized. I'm just curious because you have spoken to a lot of women over the years and you still continue to go out and speak even as you're ministering with us here. Do you find this comes up?

Sheila: You know what's really interesting, just a couple weeks ago I was speaking at a very large women's conference. It was wonderful, and two or three other friends were there. I did something at the end of my message which I've never done in my life. It was funny because when I got in the car that morning I felt, I've never heard the audible voice of God but I felt as if God said, "I have a new assignment for you." I said, "Yes, Lord." And I didn't know until I was 35 minutes into my message what it was.

So I looked out at this crowd of like 8,000 women and said, "If any of you have ever contemplated suicide or if you're a cutter or if you're plagued with thoughts of death, I want you to come join me at the front because I've been plagued with it all my life. At 18 years old I stood on the top of a railway bridge and all I could hear was the thought of just jump! Jump!"

My husband told me later, he said, "When you started doing that," he thought, "she's lost her marbles. We knew it was coming but nobody is going to come forward." Do you know that over 500 women came to the front? -- From 15 to 75. I thought, Lord, there is something that needs to shift here.

Michelle: Well, by 2020 it is going to be our greatest epidemic worldwide. So if someone has not gone through it themselves they have a family member or a friend who is going through it right now.

Randy: How do you spot it? Is it something you can spot early in a loved one and intervene?

Michelle: Sometimes it is the family member who spots it first before we do. But I think what's so important to keep in mind is that it doesn't manifest the same with everybody. For some it comes across as irritability and agitation and frustration. Others are weeping and they can't get out of bed. So it's different for everybody.

But sometimes it is the friend or family member that spots it first and they can be crucial in helping them get help. Because when you're so depressed that you're down in that pit, sometimes you need someone to reach down a hand and pull you up.

Sheila: I think of that scripture where it says: Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Sometimes it is easy to learn scripture verses and not think, well what does that look like in my daily life? I love the fact that you started copying out verses and just pasting them everywhere. It is kind of like your own little War Room; you know Priscilla Shirer's movie.

Michelle: It was. It was all up against my walls. It was down my doors. It was on my mirrors. It was on my dashboard. It was everywhere. But it makes a difference.

Sheila: If one person struggles with depression within the family, does it affect the whole family unit?

Michelle: It does. Not that everyone in the family unit will experience it themselves but they're in that milieu and so it is going to affect. And it can be difficult because sometimes those family members just want to shake you and say, "Pull up your boot straps!" It's not that easy. Nobody wants to be depressed. Nobody wants to live this way. What they need is love and understanding.

Sheila: You talk about, it's really like a road map that you've provided in this book, which is one of the things I like. It's very practical. And at the end of each chapter you really do give very practical steps. So we're going to give you an opportunity in a few moments to get a hold of Dr. Bengtson's book and get it to you. But I think for somebody watching right now who thinks, I want to believe this. Your title is *Hope Prevails*. I want to believe this but I don't know where to start. What would you say to them?

Michelle: Pick up the Bible. Open it up to Jeremiah 29:11. It says: "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord. "Plans to prosper you and not to harm you. Plans for a future

and a hope."

And write that down and recite it three times a day out loud until you believe it.

Sheila: There is something about -- I do that as a daily practice. Daily -- when I get up first thing in the morning before I do anything else, Psalm 143, verse 8: Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love because I place my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I entrust my life.

The thing I love about that is "let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love." I'll fail but God will never fail.

You're facing a bit of a difficult situation in your own family. Your darling husband is on my husband and I's prayer list. Would you just share a little of how we as a family can pray for you guys?

Michelle: Absolutely. Interesting how the enemy works because the day that *Hope Prevails* released was the day my husband was diagnosed with cancer. So we're walking through this together. It is a daily choice. He and I together say, "No weapon formed against you shall prosper." It is not God's will that you will be in ill health but that you would be healthy and prosper even as your soul prospers. So we would appreciate prayers that we would see that.

Randy: Shall we pray right now?

Sheila: Yeah! Let's just do this. I'm going to ask our studio audience and those of you at home, what's your husband's name?

Michelle: Scott.

Sheila: Father, what an honor it is to know that at any moment, because of the finished work of Christ we can come into the very throne room of heaven. Lord, we do that right now as a family.

We lift Scott up to you. Lord, I ask that you would touch him from the top of his head to the bottom of his feet. You created him. You can recreate him. Lord, we ask that for every cell you would breathe life and hope and healing.

I thank you so much for Michelle. I thank you for the way that you have delivered her and the way that she is sharing that with us. But I ask that you would put a hedge of protection around

this family as they boldly stand and yet kneel at the same time at the foot of the cross.

Randy: And Lord, I want to ask that all those that are watching, that have been watching this thinking, is there hope for me? -- Touch their hearts right now and let them know that yes, there is hope and that you are their hope, and you are just waiting to intervene.

Lord, just your will be done in the lives of everyone watching, everyone here. And we thank you for Michelle's witness, her work, and the hope that she is spreading as she continues even in some dark seasons in her life. Amen.

Michelle: Thank you.

Sheila: We're going to look forward to giving you that. But I'm going to show you the difference that you've made already; how you're bringing hope to places that look a little hopeless.

Randy: Sheila, it is by doing something counter-intuitive. It is by changing the thought process behind something, a situation in the world that we're looking at. So I want to point out the contrast you're going to see here and sort of the attitudes that we've heard a little bit here, certainly we've seen in the world versus the attitude that we think is God's idea of things because as we've been discussing here, it's about sometimes getting the mind of Christ in our own minds to be able to find that solution. So I wanted to just set that up just a bit as we watch this.

On the mission field

Jeanne: Let me just talk about this a little bit. There are a lot of signs of malnutrition in this child. That's the good thing about this; that good, regular feedings with this will change that for her. Otherwise, if she keeps going the way she's going, she will be heading toward the malnutrition clinic and we are here to stop that.

Announcer: This is the face of a life who has been saved; the face of someone who now has the opportunity to reach her god-given potential. And she has some of you to thank for that. This is difficult to accept. But there are some who advocate an approach of non-intervention when it comes to child hunger and malnutrition -- to let nature take its course. Simply let them die.

At *LIFE Outreach*, we believe compassion for these children is the right choice. Together we've been able to prevent the deaths of millions of children by helping provide basic needs essential

to human life.

But our work is far from over. When you make the decision to support mission feeding you literally help save lives from the ravages of malnutrition, and you also send these children a message that they matter, they're not forgotten, and they have a future.

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: I don't know about you but something just rose up in me when I heard that people would say, "let nature take its course." I say no. Let the love of Christ take its course through the body of Christ. We are there to make a difference in this world.

Randy: I'm glad God doesn't take an attitude of non-intervention in my life because I would be in serious trouble. That's why we don't take an attitude of non-intervention.

We think this is not something that is cool or fun to do or maybe noble. We think this is the calling of Christ on our lives as Christians to reach out and to share his life, literally, his love with others around the world. And what's more obvious than people who need food? Lord, give us this day our daily bread. We take that as a nice spiritual thing, and it is, but for them, it is literal. They literally don't have anything to eat.

So the question is what will we do? We've made our decision so now the question is put to you, what will you do? We're asking you to join us. It doesn't take much. A little bit of a sacrifice, \$30, \$50, \$100 on the lower end will feed three, five, or ten children for three whole months. We do have some of our faithful donors who have come together and said, "We will double that gift in impact." They'll match your gift so giving today makes twice as much sense as any other day.

But it's really about doing something. It is about participating. It is about all of us doing what we can because there are some of you that the widow's mite is everything and God knows that, we know that, and we rejoice in that ability. For some of you, the school sponsorship of \$1400 where we feed children in the schools, which is a great way to not just give them food but to teach them the skills so that they can be self-sufficient because we're thinking long term here. Some of you, \$1400 is nothing. Some of you can double that, triple that. Do what God has enabled you to do. I can promise you, he'll bless you for sharing his life and his love with others. You can't go wrong.

So as we approach Christmas, and we're thinking about our own needs. I know it is a busy time in our lives. I just ask you to take this moment, think about someone else. Join with us, go to the phone right now, go online if that's how you give, that's how I like to give. You can mail it if you're more comfortable doing that. I just want you to do something right now to join with us as we reach out and save the lives of children across Africa. And we also share the gospel of Christ in our actions as we share mission feeding.

Begin video clip

Announcer: In remote and impoverished villages of Africa children are suffering, desperately in need of life saving food, facing death by starvation.

LIFE's mission feeding program is there, ready now to feed and care for children in crisis areas of Angola, Mozambique, and Sudan. With all of our previous reserves gone, and Angola facing a record food shortage due to crop failure, we need to immediately replenish our funding and supplies for our feeding programs.

As an answered prayer, a group of *LIFE's* friends have set a \$400,000 matching gift challenge for mission feeding! This means your gift today could have a double impact! \$30 for three children will be doubled to help feed six children! \$50 to help five children will be doubled to save ten children! And \$100 for ten children will be doubled to help feed 20 children! And don't forget, your \$1400 gift to sponsor a school will now be doubled to feed children in two schools!

With your gift of any amount, we'll send you *Without Rival* by author Lisa Bevere. With your double impact gift of \$100 or more please request *The Complete Illustrated Children's Bible*. Finally, please consider a gift of \$1000, which will now be doubled to help feed 200 children and you may request our beautiful Majesty bronze sculpture.

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

End of clip

In the studio

James: Betty, you look at this long line and boy, it goes all the way back to the big four-wheel-drive truck. You started praying years ago that God would make the line to feed the children longer than the line to be fed. I think God's answered your prayer.

Betty: He has, James. At the same time, the line gets longer so we need to help our line to reach them, continue to grow and you to reach out more because I know you're blessed as you

see these children being fed here. Let's don't let it stop. Let's keep soup in the barrel so they can come and line up and get fed.

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: Thank you so much! We do not need one more ugly sweater for Christmas. You can change the lives of children around the world.

And for any gift you send in at all, we would love to send you *Hope Prevails*. Would you please thank my guest? Thank you so much, Michelle for being with us. It was awesome!

[Cheers & Applause]

Randy: Thank you for being with us. Join us again tomorrow for more *LIFE Today*.