

5/31/18
Week 22: Spring Mission Feeding
James and Betty Robison
Afshin Ziafat

James: You make us feel good. You too! I'm glad you welcomed us into your home. I know some of you say because you've told me when I meet you, "I'm so glad you can't see me when I'm watching you." Because some of you watch us early in the morning or maybe late in the evening. We come on throughout the day all over the world. I don't know what you're doing or how you're dressed or what's going on but thanks for welcoming me, James Robison, and Betty into your home, and *LIFE Today*.

I don't know how many of you focus on the Middle East situation and the tension that's there. I don't know how you address the pressure there in the tension and division and the danger and what seems to be hostility and animosity, and oftentimes unparalleled not only tension but hatred, danger. How do you pray for people in the Middle East? How do you pray for people of another faith? How do you pray for people who are part of Islam? They're of the Muslim faith?

Well, I pray that God will appear somehow to those who he gave his life to redeem, gave his son to die to redeem that somehow they might see that; they might understand the reality of it. Here's what I'm positive of. The message of truth, transforming truth, gospel truth has to be delivered in love and it has to be genuine love, the love of God.

Well, we have someone from Iran here who was when his family was away from Iran, he was born here in the state of Texas. His family went back to Iran and then a crisis and hostage situation erupted and basically, they came back to a haven of security. You've got to believe not only acceptance but love possibly? But they were Muslims -- committed Muslims.

Well, I want you to meet Afshin Ziafat. He is a pastor of a church called Providence Church in Frisco. I think it is important that we realize our nation was founded with the guidance of divine providence. This church named Providence is rightly named because that divine providence reached a Muslim, reached Afshin.

Would you welcome him to *LIFE Today* right here in the Dallas/Fort Worth metroplex. You pastor in Frisco.

Afshin: Yes, sir.

James: Which is north. That used to just be nothing out there -- just dirt. And you've got a lot of people going to your church.

Afshin: The whole area is booming. Yeah, we've been blessed. I've been there almost eight years and we've actually planted two churches and are planting a third this fall. So we're really excited about that.

James: And you're still a pretty young guy.

Afshin: Sort of. Yes. Yes. We look younger though, Persians.

[Laughter]

James: All right! Give me some of that; will you? Tell us your story because you were born here. Did you leave to go back over there when you were like two? And then came back here. How old were you when you came back?

Afshin: I was six. And the revolution hit in that country, the Islamic revolution when the Ayatollah overthrew the Shah, the king of Iran.

James: Very much aware of what was going on -- very tense time.

Afshin: A very tense time. My dad, in fact, we left ten days before the Shah escaped. We came back and not so much that my dad was pro Shah necessarily but he just wanted us to be in a more secure environment.

James: He could see there was danger. He could see the lack of security was a reality and he knew it would be best to get his family out. Did he feel like it would be safe here?

Afshin: Yes, he did.

James: Was there much tension toward Iranians then or not as much?

Afshin: Yes. Well, we thought we were coming into a place that was going to be more secure but then shortly after, the hostage crisis that you referred to happened and so now it was not really easy to be from Iran living in America. So on the radio they took...

James: You're just a little kid. Did you feel like you were Iranian?

Afshin: Oh yeah. In fact, my dad would say, "Don't say you're from Iran." He was really worried about us. On the radio they took that Beach Boys' song "Barbara Ann" and they changed it to "Bomb Iran." So everyone is talking about it and we had rocks thrown through our window in Houston because we were from Iran. My parents' car tires would be slashed. So I say all that not to throw a pity party but just to say it was a very hostile time. So I'm thankful that there was a Christian lady who intersected my life.

James: How?

Afshin: She was my tutor. She was basically teaching me English as a second language every day after school.

James: By the way, you've learned it well. You may have more Texas twang than Iranian twang.

[Laughter]

Afshin: That's true. Well, I guess the credit goes to her.

My family didn't know she was Christian and they were paying her. Basically, she would meet with me every day after school reading me books. And in the second grade she came up to me and said, "Afshin, I've been reading you all these books. Now I want to hand you the most important book you'll ever get in your life." And she handed me a New Testament. She said, "You're not going to understand this today but promise me that you'll hold on to it and read it when you're older." So I took that New Testament home, threw it in my house.

James: Your parents didn't notice it or did they?

Afshin: They didn't. No. The only reason I took it I would say is because she earned the right to be heard by me. She earned my ear by the way she was loving me.

James: You thought she actually cared about you.

Afshin: Yes. Had anyone else given it to me, I probably would have thrown it away but since it came from the one lady who loved me, I said, "It must be important."

So no, my parents didn't know. In fact my dad was the president of the Islamic Medical Society in Houston. He was a very prominent Muslim doctor there in Houston. So I grew up being taught

that Jesus was just a prophet and the Five Pillars of Faith of Islam and that if I was good enough, then maybe I would get to heaven.

So my senior year in high school I became curious about the person of Jesus through various things that happened. God put that New Testament on my mind. I went all over my room and I found it at the bottom of my closet. If you can believe this, after ten years I found that New Testament sitting, waiting for me. I opened it up, the first book of the New Testament Matthew starts off: A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham. Being a Muslim, I knew Abraham. So that kind of drew me in. I read the whole book of Matthew in one sitting. I didn't understand it all but every night I keep reading under the covers with a flashlight so my parents wouldn't walk in and figure out what would happen.

I think when my life really changed was when I got to the book of Romans and I started reading about a righteousness that comes apart from the law, meaning apart from what I do for God. And that it is a righteousness that comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe; that's Romans 3:22.

James: You are preaching great right now. No, I mean it is powerful and it is profound because you are not just saying words, you're speaking those words that the life that really fills those words.

Afshin: And for me, it was. It was life. Everyone knows the next verse, Romans 3:23, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." That 3:22 nailed me because it says: "To all who believe."

See I thought you're a Christian because you're from America. I'm a Muslim because I'm from Iran. But that's for anyone. Christ came for all the nations, anyone who believes. So two weeks after that I was sitting at an evangelistic crusade -- I'm sorry, I was sitting at a football practice when I was invited to an evangelistic crusade and the only reason I went was because there was free pizza offered at this crusade. So I went and heard the gospel and gave my life to Christ that day.

James: And did you know something happened?

[Applause]

Afshin: Yeah. Yeah.

James: Did it happen then that you were able to talk about it?

Afshin: Driving home from that evangelistic meeting it hits me, what am I going to tell my father? Nobody sat down and told me there's a cost to following Christ. Jesus says, "If anyone wants to follow me he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me." So I didn't really understand the cost of discipleship. It hit me like a ton of bricks. What am I going to tell my dad?

I'm ashamed to say this but for about a year and a half I would sneak out to go to church. I'd hide my Bible, intercept mail from the church I was attending; and finally, one day my dad found out. So when he found out, my dad, he sat me down and made me choose between him and Christ. I always say everything in me wanted to say, "Forget it, I'll be Muslim." Because I didn't want to lose my dad. And I share that so that you know I'm not boasting because even I...

James: Your dad was a guy you could be proud of too because he is successful.

Afshin: Successful and loved us; and I always wanted to be a dad like him. So everything in me -- but I was surprised and I believe it was the power of God speaking through me when I said, "Dad, if I have to choose between you and Jesus, then I choose Jesus. If I have to choose between my earthly father and my heavenly Father, then I choose my heavenly Father."

So my father disowns me and probably, the definitive moment of my life was when I went upstairs to my room, very honestly said, "God, how could you do this to me?" And the Lord spoke to my heart. Said, "Open the word." I turned to Matthew 10 where Jesus says, "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me, I'll disown him."

Then it goes on to say -- Remember I'm reading this right after my dad disowned me. Then it goes on to say, "Do not suppose I've come to bring peace to the earth; I didn't come to bring peace but a sword for I have come to turn a man against his father." And I'm going whoa! This just happened for me. "A daughter against her mother. Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. Anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."

So what I really understood is not that God hates the family and wants to tear up the family. It's that even that precious relationship of a family should not come between you and following Jesus.

James: What kind of family do you have now?

Afshin: I have a beautiful wife, Meredith and two girls Elyse and Ansley and I have my first son on the way next month. In fact, what's really cool, I'm preaching Genesis at my church going through the life of Abraham. My dad's name is Abraham -- Ebrahim. You know Abraham had

two sons, Isaac and Ishmael. Obviously, through the line of Isaac you get Christ. So I'm naming my son Isaac because it tells the story from my dad to me the line...

James: I want to pause... Go ahead, Betty.

Betty: How is your relationship with your parents now?

Afshin: I would say this. Before I say that real quickly because I want to be very quick to say because my story isn't about hey look at me and how faithful I was. My story is about look how faithful God was. So when I lost my life -- when I say "lost my life," let go of my dad and the dream was for me to go and be a doctor and he was going to pay for my entire medical school and I was going to take over his practice and be set. God called me into ministry. I had \$4 in my pocket, didn't have a job and the Lord provided a free place for me to stay, somebody to pay for my seminary degree -- doors opened for me.

James: And that's love.

Afshin: Yes! And doors opened for me. I was Jack Graham's intern at Prestonwood. Then from there...

James: Love you, Jack!

Afshin: From there the Lord opened the door for me to travel all over and preach for about 13 years. But what's cool is all of that is great but then my relationship with my dad was restored. He's not a Christian yet. We're still praying for that. But four years ago I was preaching down in Houston and my dad actually came in and heard me preach. The message was John 19, "It is Finished" where I preached what Christ finished for us on the cross. So he heard the gospel.

James: Is your mom and dad still together?

Afshin: My parents divorced when I was two; that was the impetus for us to go back actually. So my mom...

James: But he is here? Dad, is he married again?

Afshin: Yes, and my step mom...

James: And is his wife Muslim?

Afshin: Yes.

James: Right when Betty asked the question which was so totally appropriate and the whole discussion that followed, is I just wanted to pause and I wanted to look at dad, Abraham?

Afshin: Ebrahim.

James: I just really felt impressed. Let me say this to you. You really ought to be proud of this boy because it really took something very great and very special -- because he has so much love and admiration for you. And sir, you deserve that love and that admiration. I want to thank you for going to listen to him. And I just want to say to you, sir, you're so very special. You've got a very special kid here, special grandkids. We'd just really like for you to know that the Jesus that you do respect was so much more than a prophet because he said, "I'm the way, the truth and the life. I'm just full of life and love and truth for you."

So we care about you. We care about everybody that is a whole part of your kinship and your race. We just want the arms of God around you. Let me tell you something. God gave you your mind and your ability and you recognize greatness and greatness is sitting here that found the ultimate greatness. We love you.

Afshin: Thank you. Thank you, sir. It blesses me.

James: Jesus, just touch the whole family.

Okay, tell us what else is on your heart because we love it. Now how do we help the Islamic people?

Afshin: Yeah. I think that the greatest thing is at the end of the day, Muslims, I believe need to really know what love is. That love is only love if it's given freely. That's why my favorite verse as a former Muslim is Romans 5:8. That God demonstrates his love for us in this that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.

See Islam like every other works-based religion, at the end the day is driven by fear. That if I'm not good enough, I'm not going to heaven I'm going to hell. But most Muslims would say to me, "Why would a Christian live for God if he has already done the work? And all you have to do is believe? That's it?"

Well, first of all, they don't understand that when you get the grace of God, when you get the love of God...

James: The grace of God gets you. Love gets you. It doesn't fail. It will capture your heart.

Afshin: That's true. And the Bible says: "The love of Christ compels us," Second Corinthians 5:14.

So I live for God not because I'm trying to get something from him because he's already loved me when I didn't deserve it. So I would say at the end of the day, if you have a Muslim in your life, the greatest thing for you to do is to get to know them. Get to know what is it that they are running after in life? Get to know your neighbor, invite them, be hospitable to them, love them and earn their ear, like that second grade tutor did for me.

James: Do y'all appreciate Afshin? Do you appreciate -- if you can't see Jesus in him, we've got problems.

I'm really, really pleased for you. The name of the church again, Providence?

Afshin: Providence Church.

James: Frisco. And then you have several other churches that are being established.

Afshin: We have planted three...

James: One in McKinney?

Afshin: Yes, one in McKinney, one in North Carolina and one in Salina.

James: Boy, I'm glad you're helping North Carolina.

[Laughter]

You know I had 600 citywide crusades. North Carolina one of the greatest states ever crusaded in. Love you! Was just up there for Billy Graham's funeral, not too long back. And didn't we see Jesus? Love you, North Carolina.

Love you and praise God for what you're doing. I hope some of the folks will visit your church who can but I hope they will all take your counsel to just pour love out on people that we may not understand, may disagree with, may even be concerned about but let's pour love all over them.

This is what our viewers do. We put God's arms of love around the world and we've done a whole lot to reach out to those who have been devastated in the Middle Eastern countries. I've

worked very closely with Samaritan's Purse, Franklin Graham, love him. We're doing everything we can to just share the love of God. We're teaching English in Afghanistan and Kurdistan, and a lot of other places; reaching out to them, just doing our best to be a blessing.

I want to show you something right now. Here's what I want you to do. It's like you buckle your spiritual seatbelt and get ready to make a kingdom impact that lasts for eternity. But you'll be able to see it. Here you're going to see a need that love meets and I'd like to think you're getting excited about it: Look what love does! Watch because I think you're going to want to release love -- transforming, lifesaving love. Watch.

On the mission field

Sheila: Angola, Africa -- drought is crushing this land. You see, plants spring from the earth with promise of food, promise of life. But long before they can ever provide any sort of sustenance they quickly fail and wither back into the earth. This drought has affected the many lives that depend on this food but it has affected some more than others. The children suffer the worst. Their bodies are not meant to withstand this lack of sustenance. Some will make it. Some will not.

Open Captions:

>> I had two children. The oldest one passed away from malnutrition. She was seven years old, and her name was Nana. At night, when I sleep, I dream she is still here. Every night, I pray Psalm 23. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Sheila: You could just see it in her eyes, this tremendous loss. And if anybody understands this woman's pain, it is you, Betty. If you've lost a daughter it changes everything and that's community that nobody -- no one on this earth signs up to join that community. So you understand this woman's pain.

This mom, this young beautiful mom has done everything she could but she shouldn't stand alone. We are the body of Christ. We can do something right now in Angola. You may even hear some crying babies in the background. There are a lot of children here who are extremely hungry and a simple bowl of food can change everything.

End of clip

In the studio

James: Betty, obviously, you know so well what that's like. And as that beautiful mom was talking about her little girl she said her little girl was named Nana. And the daughter that we have in heaven who has seen her first grandbaby born from heaven, watching, her children call you Mimi as a grandmother and they called Robin's husband's parents, mother, Nana. So I couldn't hear about little Nana and not think about that grandmother Nana.

You think about the reality of the Psalm that the mom was quoting about the shepherd that leads us in green pastures, not drought-stricken croplands where children die like hers. All those little children that you saw being held there at the first, those precious pretty little faces, precious little children.

You know what the mothers holding them are saying? By the way, they were at a place love established as a last spot to maybe be saved -- malnutrition clinics where they're too weak to even eat food. So you need to understand that love from people like you established those places as the last chance. But here's what you need to hear -- this is what everybody must hear, Betty. When the missionaries are talking about the feeding lines, the feeding centers, we have -- listen to me -- 400,000 children and starving people in those areas -- 400,000! Most of the time it will be 500 or 1,000 or 1500; sometimes 2,000-3,000 depending upon the situation. And it is in those areas where we've organized the feeding.

That's where we're asking all our viewers right now, I'm telling you, the drought is very real. Sheila Walsh was not exaggerating; that mother's heartache and concern was not an exaggeration. That malnutrition clinic is the real deal and there are many of them. Love provided them.

Now I want to see love provide for those 400,000 children. Listen to what I'm saying. I'm going to start at the top: \$100 we can feed ten children for the next months. \$50 we can feed five; we meaning the missionaries and the workers. \$30 we can feed three. If there is any way that you can start at the \$100 level do it. Go get your bankcard. Go get a checkbook. Go online to the website there or dial that phone number that's always a prayer line, now it is a life line. Dial the number please, get your bankcard and make the best gift you can because you're giving the gift of life. You're changing everything for a parent, a mother that's praying for her child, for children that just need food. They don't need to get to the malnutrition clinic. It's there for them, the last opportunity and we've seen miracle after miracle but we can get them before they head there and they're headed there if we don't feed them.

Could you feed ten, five, or three? Do it. Listen, some of you are blessed enough to say, "James, I can feed 100 of them. I can give \$1,000 or more."

You know what I believe? I believe if you're able to you'll do it because I believe you're moved

by love. We have some gifts to send you that are going to really bless you. But you really are giving the greatest blessing, you're giving life. Thank you so much. If you make a check, make it to *LIFE* but call us and tell us you're mailing it. We really need to hear from you today. Lives do depend upon the love of God through you. Thanks for sharing it.

Begin video clip

Announcer: In impoverished and drought-stricken areas of Africa children are suffering. The need is great and without food they face severe malnutrition -- even death.

With your support LIFE's Mission Feeding outreach can save lives by feeding and caring for children in the hardest hit areas of Angola, Mozambique, and South Sudan. With previous reserves gone and Mission Feeding helping in areas with severe crop failure we urgently need to replenish our food supplies to reach 400,000 children who are counting on us.

Your lifesaving gift of \$30, \$50, or \$100 will help feed and care for three, five or ten children for three full months. And with your gift of any amount, we'll send you *Proverbs Power: Successful Communication*. This powerful CD series, along with study guide featuring Steven K. Scott unveils the secrets to incredible wisdom found only in the book of Proverbs. This series will give you the tools to transform your relationships in life.

With your gift of \$100 or more, request the complete *Proverbs Power* library featuring five power-packed sessions that include: The Power of Vision, Breaking through Mediocrity, and much more.

Finally, with your gift of \$1,000 or more to help feed and care for 100 children, be sure to request the "Bridge of Faith" framed canvas print by Thomas Kinkade.

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

End of clip

In the studio

James: I tell you what, *Proverbs Power* is tremendous teaching. You talk about wisdom: *Proverbs Power*, successful communication. We try to send -- here's a whole library we want to send you. We've got a beautiful Thomas Kinkade "Bridge of Faith" painting/canvas. We would

like to say thank you. You know what people tell us, Betty? "We appreciate the gifts because they help us grow in grace and knowledge of the Lord. You don't have to give us anything. We love to give life. We love to help people." I know that and I want to thank you. But we want to be a blessing to you.

I think our guests are a blessing to you. Afshin has been a blessing today. You showed us Jesus. Would you all in the audience here agree that Afshin showed us Jesus? Thank you, buddy. Bless you and bless the Providence Church in Frisco. Pray for them. Thanks for watching. Pray for people and love them.