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Week 22: Spring Mission Feeding

James and Betty Robison

Clayton and Ashlee Hurst

James: Thank all of you and thank you. Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm James Robison. Betty and I are thrilled to really have a couple here that have the name of -- we're in the mid-cities between Dallas and Fort Worth. One of the mid-cities is Hurst. This might be the original family.

[Laughter]

We've got a whole town named after them. This is Clayton and Ashlee Hurst. I tell you what, you're going to like them.

They go to Lakewood which has a pastor that you hear occasionally. They actually are counselors -- marriage counselors. Look at the title of this book because this is a good one right here: *Hope for Your Marriage*. People think, boy! Man, I need that book. I need it quick. Every marriage comes under attack.

Would you say in the first months even, this is after you and I dated for four years, you kept me on the straight and narrow for the four years.

Betty: I tried.

James: No, you did a marvelous job. And yet, when we got married, would you say that after we got married, say the first six months or so we had some of our most tense moments?

Betty: Absolutely. It is a real adjustment when you're taking two different personalities trying to fit them together and mesh together. There has to be some compromise there and sometimes that's not easy.

James: Well, you had to learn to compromise, listen to me, do what I said.

[Laughter]

Here's the deal. We actually found ourselves and this is one of the main things that this couple talks about that our communication was let's say cramped to where we could actually go to

different quarters. That didn't work; did it? One of the wise things I said was we don't do that. We're going to talk.

Well, let's let Clayton and Ashlee tell us how important it is to talk as counselors but also as a married couple they had to learn some things. Would you welcome Clayton and Ashlee to *LIFE Today*?

[Applause]

Here you are, at one of the largest churches, if not the largest church in America and you are marriage counselors. Would you say that it's not an exaggeration to say marriages are challenged?

Ashlee: Absolutely. It is an honor to be on your show, by the way. We love you both so much.

James: Well, thank you.

Ashlee: It is the number one prayer need at our church. We have prayer at every service. We take one of the songs and we do a prayer time. There are prayer counselors all over the sanctuary. We kept getting a lot of people that needed prayer for marriage and it is a big church, not everybody knows who we are. So we went to the person that's over the prayer team and we said, "Have you ever done a survey to find out what the number one prayer need is at Lakewood?"

And she said, "We just did it and marriage is number one."

James: So was it tension in the relationships or what? What was the big issue with it?

Clayton: I think it's a little bit, everybody is challenged constantly. I think communication is number one. In fact, when we took over the marriage ministry we sent out surveys to about 15,000 of our congregation and the overwhelming response, 98% of the number one issue was communication. I think that was really our challenge in the very beginning.

We really prepared for the wedding day. We had great parents. Both of our parents had been married now for, mine over 55 years now, Ashlee's over 45 years, my grandparents 60 years. So we had a great model -- great models in front of us. So we kind of assumed, oh we've got this. No problem! I think we went to one premarital counseling and then after that we were going, "We've got this in the bag." So we really prepared for the wedding day instead of for all of the days that followed.

I think slowly but surely we kind of found ourselves not communicating. When you merge those two normals we kept butting heads. It says to submit one to another but yet we weren't really yielding to each other. So there were all these crashes in our communication.

Ashlee: Yeah, and it started out kind of funny. There were silly things like he wanted to bring the 55-gallon trash can and put it in the middle of our kitchen.

James: Now exactly what was the purpose?

Clayton: Well, in college when I lived with three other men, three other guys we had this big trash can in the center of our kitchen.

Ashlee: With the hammocks hanging right beside it.

Clayton: But we only had to take the trash out once a week maybe. So I'm thinking, hey, it worked good for then, why not work now? She didn't.

[Applause]

Ashlee: Men are clapping!

James: Some men are clapping for that. Well, it's just really a big deal about taking it out. It's on rollers.

Clayton: Right! But she didn't see it that way. Then I used one of her... we got some really nice towels for a wedding gift and I thought, I'm going to go play golf and so I needed a golf towel.

James: Now that's double stupid. In the first place, when you get these really nice -- did you know there are some towels you don't use? Like there are some pillows you do not sleep on.

Clayton: I didn't have that knowledge in the beginning but I do now.

James: As a matter of fact, don't move them because they're in the right spot.

Ashlee: He'd blow his nose on our towels too because Kleenex was too rough.

[Laughter]

James: Boy! How did y'all make it? So anyway, this got really serious. We're kind of laughing now but the tension was real. So you had the tension and you even say in the book, you're open enough to say that there was pride involved that what caused you to just not want to deal with it or face up to it or didn't want anybody to know there was any friction. What was the deal?

Clayton: I think that was probably the biggest thing. At the time I was a children's pastor at our original church, at our home church. We kind of thought that we needed to put on a facade, we needed to wear a mask and have it altogether. People were looking to us to have all the answers. We didn't feel like we could go to anybody. We didn't feel like there was anybody we could go to to get the help that we needed.

Ashlee: We were embarrassed. This was five years into our marriage. Our communication was so poor. I had just given birth to our first child and I was dealing with postpartum depression. So not only did I not feel like I could go to him for any help at all, I thought I was going crazy. So we really found ourselves in this valley of dry bones. We talk about in the book of just poor communication. I got so depressed that I even had suicidal thoughts because I didn't feel like I had anybody to talk to.

James: Did he kind of confirm your problem rather than alleviating?

Ashlee: You know I didn't even know that I had that. It was afterwards that I was like, oh my goodness! That's what was wrong with me. I had no idea. I didn't do the research that I needed to do.

Clayton: But our communication was so bad she didn't tell me. So she didn't know, she was embarrassed, and then our communication was so bad we didn't work through it together. And so probably five years in, at a smaller church you have a lot of different hats that you're wearing so people were coming to me for marital help to get marital counseling. So I could tell somebody how to have a good marriage, I just couldn't have one on my own.

But I'll never forget, there was a couple that came in and I just heard the Lord in my heart say before this couple came in. I just felt like God said, "Are you willing to do whatever it takes to have the marriage you've always hoped and dreamed of?" And I thought, oh that's a great question! I'm going to ask this couple.

So I asked this couple that and they said, "Of course, that's why we're here."

I got finished with that counseling session and I just felt the Lord tell me in my heart. He said, "That question wasn't for them, that question was for you."

I remember going home that day and telling Ashlee, "I feel like the Lord's told me and I'm willing if you are." And that was really the turning point for after year five.

Ashlee: That was the first time I saw him humble himself. I didn't humble myself either but that was just -- that was everything to me.

James: Did seeing him humble himself then move you toward the same humility?

Ashlee: Absolutely.

Betty: Then were you able to start communication?

Ashlee: Yeah, it was that mustard seed of faith. We had a mustard seed of faith that maybe everything could be okay. We just began to declare, we began to speak -- we'd speak to the mountain and ask the mountain to move or tell the mountain to move and that's what we began to do. It was little steps. It didn't happen in a day. It didn't happen in a week. It took us a while to get there but we were determined that we were going to have the marriage we'd always hoped and dreamed of no matter what it took, regardless of the sacrifices we had to make. Humbling ourselves to one another was probably one of the most beautiful things we could have done for each other.

Clayton: I think that was the key for us was just continuing to declare life -- declare life over our marriage. And even changing the way we would respond to each other. Like Ashlee said it didn't happen overnight but instead of being sarcastic with each other or short comments back and forth, we chose love. Love is not a feeling, love is a choice that you make every day. So we chose to show love to each other in different ways.

James: I'm going to go down a real quick list of just the chapters. As I go down them, whatever jumps out at you I want you to kind of touch on them a few minutes. You started with "Dry Bones come Alive." Boy, that's a heck of a picture. "Happily Ever after Myth." "The Right Choice." "Love, Security, Respect and Honor." "Effective Communication." We started there. "Healthy Conflict." "The Power of Partnership." "Forgiveness." "Sex is not a Four Letter Word." Hmm. "Declaring Life over Your Marriage." "Jesus at the Center."

Which one of those jumps out at you that you just want to comment on? See our audience is just racing all over. What jumps out at you?

Clayton: I think "Jesus at the Center." I think that's where we got our eyes off of him as our source. We got our eyes off of him as the center of our marriage. When we came together on our

wedding day and they talked about the threefold cord, and it is not easily broken we took advantage or we didn't take advantage of that partnership with him and stay connected with him and made sure that we communicated with him daily and together daily. I think that was huge for us, that we didn't do that from the very beginning. We've learned to do that now. We realized that without Jesus at the center of your marriage I don't think you can have the marriage that he's designed for you to have.

Ashlee: To me, it's "The Power of Partnership" because when we had our first child that's when I had postpartum depression and I didn't have him beside me. It was terrible. It was only by God's grace that I made it through that year. Like I said I had suicidal thoughts. But then fast-forward 14 years later, so we have a 17-year old, an 11-year old girl and then we have our surprise two-year old boy. And so that, I was two months from turning 40 years old when I found out I was pregnant. Yeah, it was a big surprise. I went through postpartum depression with him and what a world of difference with him beside me.

He would talk to me every day. "Are you doing okay? What thoughts are you having? What's going on?" I would tell him. I was open, I was honest. I didn't hold anything back.

James: And he seemed to really care too. It wasn't just language. It wasn't just communicating, he was really actually caring. You actually believe that he wanted to know, can I help bear something?

Clayton: I think the difference between the first child and this one was not just that I cared but for me, I realized that we were on the same team. Before it was that she was on one team and I was on the other so if she was in pain it was okay, as long as I wasn't. I think now I realize -- or with our last child I realized you know what? If she is in pain, I'm in pain. So I want to be there to help her while she goes through this.

Betty: Don't you think in our relationship too we have to learn to be good listeners? Listen with the heart not just spouting off your discrepancies or things you disagree on -- that's not communication but learning to be a good listener.

Ashlee: The Lord's really been speaking to me about being more intentional about what I say and not speaking in assumptions. I share that with Clayton and he said, "You know what I feel like the Lord is telling me that I need to listen better." So when we do that because a lot of times we can speak with a bunch of assumptions. When he asks, "How are you doing?" And I say, "I'm fine." It never really means that; right? So to be really intentional about what I'm saying to him because it is to death do us part; we're in this together.

We know that regardless of what we go through that we're going to be on the same team. When

both couples see that, when they're both on the same team, they have Jesus at the center, they have that partnership, nothing can come against you. We can face anything. We've gone through stuff. We've gone through death of friends, and illnesses, and you know what? I don't know if you've had Jimmy Evans on your show, I'm sure you have, but he said something.

James: Jimmy, we're very close.

Ashlee: "Soulmates aren't born but they are created through the trenches of life" is something that he said at a teaching we were at. I was like, yes! That is exactly right! When we got married we weren't soulmates but now we are. We are because we've been through stuff.

When you get married you don't know what your future holds but you better make sure you're on the same team with him because you're not going to be the same person, he's not going to be the same person; 20-40 years from now, what's holding you together? Where are you grounded? And always go to that.

James: Now when you said, "Healthy Conflict," real short, healthy conflict, what do you mean?

Clayton: I think conflict is going to happen. Like what you said it comes to that certain point and you have to be willing to diffuse it. A lot of times that is from listening. A lot of times it is seeing her perspective. There is something we write about in the book. We call it "The Monsoon Story" that I had a perspective and she had a perspective. The following day whenever we sat down and began to unpack, okay, what was the friction? What was the tension that was happening?

I shared my vantage point and why I felt that way and she shared hers. What we've realized is that feelings aren't right or wrong but they're real. So we had to come to the understanding that you know what? It's okay if she doesn't see it the way I see it. In fact, it is better. It kind of gives us a holistic approach to understanding us as a couple.

I remember she saying, "I don't understand why you see it that way."

I said, "But you know what? That's okay." We choose to still be on the same team, we choose to love each other through it and to choose to honor each other to say, "You know what? You see it that way but I don't. I see it this way and that's okay."

James: When you deliver that kind of message it does bring healing and it wouldn't just be in marriages, it would be just people getting along. We can kind of wish that on Congress a little bit. They could realize they see things from a different point of view and not try to destroy one

another.

This book has been out for a while, several months now. What do you think is happening to people that read it? What do you hear back?

Clayton: What we're hearing is just people's willingness to be vulnerable with each other -- primarily men. I think for me it was hard for me to be vulnerable and to share things with her. I think a lot of it was because maybe my father didn't teach me, his father didn't teach him. But I think what we're seeing a lot of times is just people's willingness to be open and transparent and really that's where the healing begins.

James: Do you see the book actually becoming another way that you extend your counseling as though you've taken the wisdom and insight God's given you and not only you personally but what you've shared and you've seen the benefit of truth shared in love. So you feel like if people go through the book it's a little bit like maybe they sat down with you in a counseling session and they found the hope that they desperately needed.

Ashlee: Absolutely. We're very vulnerable in that book. We're very open about the things that we've gone through and we feel like that's what people appreciate the most. I had a high school friend call me last night and just say, "I started reading your book and I cannot believe how open you're being about things. I would have never thought in a million years! I just assumed you and Clayton have the perfect marriage. I had no idea."

She goes, "it gives me hope in my marriage." She was like, "I want you to know that my husband and I are going to church now."

I was like, wow! That's amazing. That's kind of the stories that we've been hearing from a lot of people.

James: Well, you're offering this counseling to everybody who is watching right now. You know one of the things Betty and I hear so often from people either by email or communicate or when they see us, "You all are open and honest about yourselves. You don't set yourself up as something you're not. You're both vulnerable, you're transparent, and we appreciate that." You've obviously done it here.

This is like good counseling with people who've admitted, hey, okay, we've experienced at least some of what you encounter and experience and we want to be a help. So it is in the bookstores. But I will tell you this because we're here at *LIFE Today*, one thing you'll know, when you come here you're going to see people who are loving people, who are encouraging you to love somebody. As a matter of fact, we're going to show you in just a moment how you can love

someone into a whole new way of life and it is the most simple way to express love -- and it never, never fails.

If you'd like to have the book simply ask for it. We have some other gifts to send to you when you give the gift of love and life because you're overflowing with it because Jesus is love and he is life.

I want you to watch right now and I want you to listen because I promise you, you're not only going to hear someone expressing their heart, you're going to hear the heart of God. Yes, you are. I think you're going to respond to it.

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: Thank you so much. From the bottom of our heart, thank you! Boy, I'm telling you

what, there are going to be some moms that are going to see their children get fed, watch their little lives get stabilized. You're an answer to someone's prayer. I pray God answers your prayers. It may be that he'll answer a prayer here; maybe for not only your marriage but maybe somebody you know. Say, "You know what? I'm going to get that book." You give hope to these children and their families, you want this book to give you some hope, perhaps or share with somebody that you think, you know what? This just might bless them. It's in the bookstores. You help us take care of those kids, you ask for it, we'll send it to you.

Would you join us and say thanks to Clayton and to Ashlee?

[Applause]

You're a beautiful couple. We appreciate you sharing. Thank you for the book offering hope. Thank you so much for watching *LIFE Today*. Thanks for being a part of what God's called us to do.