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Week 46: Fall Mission Feeding

James and Betty Robison

Johnny Baker

James: Boy listen! Somebody out there likes freedom. That word *freedom*, listen. If you've ever not been free, freedom is pretty special. Ask someone who gets out of jail. Ask anybody that's ever been addicted or hooked or beat down; or really freed from depression and heartache and just hurt and bitterness -- *The Road to Freedom*.

I'm James Robison. Betty and I welcome you to *LIFE Today*. Johnny Baker is pastor, National Director of *Celebrate Recovery*. Actually, his dad, Johnny Baker launched *Celebrate Recovery* and it ends up, his kid needs recovery.

[Laughter]

The kid is in the mess. He needed healing from his hurts, his hang-ups and his habits. By the way it is the kid that wrote this book. He is now the National Director of this freedom ministry that freedom leader's kid needed. And you need to hear the story.

So would you welcome Johnny Baker to *LIFE Today*? Johnny, good to see you, buddy. All right. You're out at a little struggling church, Saddleback, out there where Rick Warren is; right?

Johnny: Small little place. Yeah.

[Laughter]

James: Well, you give my love and regards to the family. They are a great couple and I

know they have had heartache big time too like all of us do, especially those who have lost a child.

Now here dad has started a ministry, *Celebrate Recovery* which is getting people set free from all sorts of addiction. It was as though he took the positives of Alcoholic Anonymous because he was an alcoholic. He saw the positives but it was almost like he added some things to it that made it so much more effective. And of course, that was the power of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now I want you to just tell us how it is that you -- you saw his life before and after, I'm sure. But tell us about your journey.

Johnny: Like you said my parents started *Celebrate Recovery* in 1991 at our church, Saddleback. And it was after they had been separated for 13 months; my mom said, "Either get counseling or get out." And he left. After going through A.A. himself and finding sobriety he came back and they began to restore their marriage.

In that process he did something that's part of recovery, he made his amends to us and it was the first time he ever said "sorry" without excusing or trying to tell me how it was going to be different. He just said, "I'm sorry for the damage I'm done to our family."

That was when I realized he was different. But then he did something really different. He said, "Can I come to church with you?"

See we had stopped asking him to go to church. We had started going to Saddleback and he wanted to come with us. He had experience that a lot of people have when they hear Pastor Rick speak, he felt like he was speaking right to him. After a while of going to church there, he looked around our church and he said, "There's got to be more people like me and our family who are struggling with an issue." So he sat down and he wrote Pastor Rick a short 13-page single-spaced letter.

[Laughter]

Now I say "he wrote" but as the two of you doing ministry together, you know he dictated, she typed. They sent it to Pastor Rick, knowing that Rick would find the right person to do this ministry. About a week later he found himself in his office and Pastor Rick said, "Great John. Do it!" And *Celebrate Recovery* was born. What is really for our family and people like us at our church, and God has taken it and turned it into this ministry. It's in 30,000 churches all over the world.

I went through it as a teenager. I was the first leader of the teenagers group which we should have just called it "Complain about your parents" because that's all we did.

[Laughter]

I went through it as a child of an alcoholic. Years later I walked away from the church. I had walked away from *Celebrate Recovery*. I had watched them do it and thought it was really their thing. But then I decided, you know I think I've learned from him and I know how to avoid the trap of alcoholism, I'll be able to control it. So I began to drink and do things. And then sure enough I got caught up in it as well and in December of 1999 I was arrested for a D.U.I.

I wish I could say that was the beginning of my recovery journey but it wasn't. It took another few years until actually my wife got pregnant with our oldest daughter. I thought about becoming a dad and I thought, I don't want to bring alcoholism into my family the way it was for me when I was a kid. So that's when I called my dad and I said, "I don't know how to stop drinking but I know I need help." I began attending *Celebrate Recovery* for my alcoholism and my life was changed again.

James: So you actually went into the ministry that your dad had started and found the help. Now how long did you just stay in the growth process before suddenly you found yourself going into a leadership role?

Johnny: It was about a year that I was just in the recovery program just for me where I was able to focus on just that. Then I felt called into ministry. I'll never forget. I was driving down this toll road in California and I felt God say he wanted me to get into ministry. So I turned the radio off because I figured his voice was coming through the radio.

[Laughter]

That didn't work. So I began seeking out different ministry opportunities. And door after door after door was just shut in my face until eventually my dad said, "Hey, if you're willing to do some of the things you're thinking about doing, would you ever think about coming to work at *Celebrate Recovery*?" See we both wanted it but we both wanted it to be the other person's idea. So when he invited me to come along then I started working, answering phones and emails, and learning the ministry from a different area. Then slowly but surely began stepping into more and more roles.

James: So what do you do now? Do you travel? Or do you stay primarily there or do you go and try to help other churches and other groups set it up?

Johnny: We do both. So we have our program that meets at Saddleback every Friday night, 52 weeks a year. Even if that Friday night is Christmas, we're going to have *Celebrate Recovery*. And I run that ministry. But we also do about 15, what we call one-day training conferences all around the country and then we do summits twice a year as well where we have a few thousand people to two different events.

James: When you wrote this book... Betty, here's some things that's amazing, the "Ten Life Lessons." But I think this one right here is a biggy. Would you...

Betty: You'll have to read it for me. I don't have my glasses.

James: Well, this is really a biggy, Betty.

[Laughter]

You've got to admit you have a problem. You just did.

[Laughter]

Admitting you have a problem does not make you weak.

Johnny: It all starts there. That's the beginning of recovery. We call it coming out of denial. But so many people are afraid to admit that their life is a mess and so it keeps them stuck. Because they're told that strong people, they pull themselves up by their boot straps. Strong people are self-starters. They're able to just get over it. Just stop doing what you're doing. But admitting you have a problem, it actually doesn't make you weak, it makes you strong because it is saying -- it actually gives God the power to come in and help you where you couldn't help yourself.

James: And you're saying admit it. That sounds like there's somebody else involved. It is like you're going ahead and sharing it with somebody else.

Johnny: Well sure. It starts with admitting to ourselves, actually. We have to look in the mirror and say, "You have a problem. The person here is the person that has the problem." It is funny because we'll do a lot to keep ourselves from knowing or from admitting that we have problems. We'll rationalize, we'll justify. Well, if she didn't nag me. It's not as bad as him. Or I only have a few drinks after work. Or whatever that issue is, we can justify it.

But when we finally admit to ourselves, we can admit to ourselves, then we admit it to God and then we can admit it to somebody else. The Bible says confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. And that is such a huge part of

it because if I just keep it to me and God, then I can be forgiven but if I want healing, I have to bring somebody else into it.

James: I think that's probably one of the greatest needs and the enemy has made us afraid to confide in one another. We don't find a sense of trust. And really, too sad to say but true, it is justifiable, that a lot of people feel that way because then when they shared their weaknesses somebody else may spread it around and it becomes gossip, it becomes damage and it just seems like -- now you've got social media so it can just go like a wildfire.

I feel like what you're doing, and what you're trying to do when you inspire the churches to do it, you're trying to create a safe place for someone to go; not only to admit to themselves I've got a problem but I can admit to you I've got a problem. And if I'm going to be in the arms of Jesus and Jesus is in you, then you're going to put your arms around me and help me. I think we've got to say that. We've got to say that loud and clearly, and in a trustworthy manner to others.

But the leading preachers, leading say individuals over the years have felt safe coming to me and bearing their soul. Why? They believe they can trust me with their life and their soul and they can. I've watched people get totally free but they needed somebody they could trust. They shouldn't have to come to me because I'm visible. They think I'm one of the few people that you can trust. You ought to be able to trust people sitting all around you. You ought to be able to trust people in the church family. Now isn't that what *Celebrate Recovery* tries to teach people to become that in your own situation?

Johnny: It really does. And to go even a step further of not just being a safe person to receive information but to share your information with someone else as well. Somebody who struggles with alcoholism, you may not relate to that but there are other things in your life that you probably feel are issues that you'd like to overcome. Or if you sit down and somebody starts telling you about something you might think, I don't relate 100% to what they're saying but I've got pain in my own life or I've got issues in my own life that

I'd like to overcome or I've had places where God has walked in and set me free so I know what that's like. So not just being safe to hear but also safe to say, "Hey Johnny, I struggle with that too. Or I struggle with similar things as well."

Betty: This is not just people that have visible problems. These are people in the church, a lot of the times that are dealing with things deep down. I dealt with fear. I was so afraid half of my life. And until I realized I didn't have to live with that and I was in the church -- deep in the church.

Johnny: One of the things I talk about in the book is that people are in pain all around us but not everybody wears their pain on their sleeve. Some people it's really easy to tell. Oh I can tell what that person is in pain about. But other people like you said they're sitting in our pews right next to us and we have no idea the pain they're going through.

One thing I love about *Celebrate Recovery* is that is not just for people with chemical addiction issues. About a third of the people that come to C.R. come for drug or alcohol issues, the rest come for a wide variety of other things. So it doesn't matter what is hurting you or what is going on in your life you can find a safe place and safe people, to your point, in *Celebrate Recovery*. Who again, may not understand everything that you're going through but they're going to say, "Hey you're safe here. You're welcome here and let's figure this out together."

James: Now "Covering up problems" -- since you can't read this --

[Laughter]

This is number two: Covering up problems always makes them worst. Hiding it. Covering it. Why? Why does it make it worse?

Johnny: Well, it's the other side of "admitting you have a problem doesn't make you weak." Those two lessons work together. So when I cover up a problem, it might feel like

I'm solving it but really, I'm postponing the inevitable. And I believe that God is going to allow pain to increase in our lives until we finally do what we need to do, which is turn to him and allow him to help us. Often pain is God's megaphone where he is saying, "Hey! There is something I want you to pay attention to." When I try to cover it up and make it go away, it just gets worse and worse and worse. When I turn it to him is when I can find freedom from that problem.

James: And when you share it, and don't cover it anymore, it doesn't mean that you necessarily shout it to the whole church. There are a lot of problems that need to be kept in the counsel setting and not shared. What the True Confessions magazines of the world secular presses, "Tell us all the details of all your miserable failures and we'll write a whole book about this encounter." That is not what God talks with confession. So when you're not covering it, you're uncovering it for God to cover it with His grace but you don't necessarily shout everything from the house tops.

Your 10th point here is: There is no one God doesn't love, won't forgive, or can't change. Sheila Walsh makes a great statement, "When you know something is bad, that's one thing to know that's bad. But then when you hear the enemy say you're bad! You're bad! That's when you tend to not reach out for help."

So you need to hear that first part. There's no one God doesn't love. No matter what we've done, he loves us and he loves us perfectly. He loves us compassionately. He loves us redemptively like the father of the prodigal who was waiting to cover the kid with a great robe, to put sandals on his feet, to have a feast, a joyful time because "Even though you made a mess, I love you and I want to cover you." That is the God people need to realize is waiting for them.

Johnny: Sure is. I think so many people who need to know about the road to freedom, who need to know about *Celebrate Recovery*, they don't believe that God loves them. They believe that what they've done has disqualified them from God's love, that what's been done to them has disqualified them from God's love. Maybe the enemy has told

them, maybe another person has told them. I can't tell you how many people I've talked to who have been told by a parent or somebody that should have been speaking truth and love into them has been saying, "You're not worth anything, you'll never be worth anything, and no one will ever love you."

I think to hear that message, that there is no one that God doesn't love, that there's nothing you could have done or you'll ever do that will separate you from God's love, it's so important. And it's why it is the last lesson. Because to me, if you hear nothing else, that's what I want people to hear. That no matter what is going on in their lives God loves them, he can forgive them, and he can help them change.

Because that's the other piece. People say, "Johnny, you don't know where I've been. You don't know what I've done. It is impossible for me to change."

I can't tell you how many nights I used to spend as the room would spin around me and I'd say, "God please help me change."

The problem was I woke up in the morning with choices and I woke up in the morning deciding what I was going to do that day. But night after night I thought, God, I'm never going to change. I'm never going to change. And it's been 15 years and God has set me free. But he did it one day at a time after one day at a time, and one choice at a time after one choice at a time. So I think there may be somebody watching this who is saying, "God isn't going to love me. God's never going to forgive me for what I've done and he can't change me."

My heart of hearts wants to say that there is no one who escapes God's love. There is no one that Christ didn't die for. And no matter what you've done, God can and will change you if you submit to the process.

James: Johnny, that's why you're here, for people who are watching us right now on television, not only the ones here in the audience. But wherever you are right now, if you

just admit, I have a need, there is no one needing to tell you, you ought to be ashamed of yourself. You already feel that way. But Jesus took the shame. He took the blame. He took the guilt. Jesus did all of that for you. And he wants to give you life right where you are.

If I was sitting right there in the room with you right now I would simply say, "Would you just ask him to cover you with His grace? To cleanse you from all that's unrighteous and not right, to forgive your sin?" Would you ask him to do that? Would you ask him to break the yoke, the chains that bind? And Lord, would you set me free? I join with you in that prayer.

Father, let many people right now find freedom right where they are. They may be in a public place. They might be in a bar, a hotel or motel room, or at home; it doesn't matter. Lord, right where they are, would you break that yoke? Would you begin this process of recovering freedom that they can ultimately celebrate? This is the day right now the moment they make the choice. They choose this day to serve you and to be set free; in Jesus' name.

If you want someone to pray with you, see the phone number there? It's paid for by love. Somebody will be glad to pray with you.

Johnny, you are a blessing. Would you say thanks to Johnny Baker? You can get the book on Amazon or get it in the bookstores.

Johnny, our viewers I think are some of the most wonderful people on the planet. When they see a need that they can meet it's like their hearts leap to meet it. It is like they say, "Show me an opportunity, show me a need and I will meet it." Well, I'm going to show you a need.

Here's the thing you've got to understand please. You are the answer to the need you're about to see. And you can be the perfect answer right now. Would you please not turn

away? But would you look and just listen to the father's voice and extend his hands? I believe you will. I think you're going to want to and you're going to be someone's miracle. Watch closely.

On the mission field

Open Captions:

>> My children ask, "Where is brother?" I had to tell them, "He died."

Announcer: Victoria's oldest son was buried yesterday. The loss fresh and weighing heavy but still hard to believe. The lack of food in Victoria's village has made malnutrition a constant companion creating a burden too heavy to bear.

Open Captions: It's very difficult to find food. There is no rice, no fish, no vegetables. Our only food is maize if we can find it. We eat maize meals once a day or not at all. I tell the children, "We can sleep without eating. Tomorrow we will find food."

Announcer: Victoria and her husband work hard producing charcoal for wages. But when combined with failing crops, their limited resources can't sustain the health of their children. Weakened and malnourished, their immune systems falter and allow minor illnesses to turn deadly.

Open Captions:

>> Right now, I am too weak and tired to even think. I'm suffering, and my son is too sick. I don't know what I can do.

Announcer: The burden Victoria bears is one expressed by so many mothers in this area of Southern Africa. Their lack of resources has created a collective hopelessness. But we know when we join together in response, we can introduce a new hope and health.

End of clip

In the studio

James: There is nothing more beautiful, Betty, than to watch a mother holding a little child. Wherever I watch mothers with children it touches my heart because it is so beautiful. And we watched that mother there and she is too weak, the child is sick. The losses are great.

As a mother and a grandmother and now a great grandmother, what goes on inside your heart when you look at that precious mother and you see those beautiful little children?

Betty: As I listen to that sweet mother that loves her babies more than she loves life itself, her babies are all she has. She will go out every day, tired and worn out like she said but she'll search every day for just a morsel to keep her babies alive.

We can make that difference. These babies don't have to die before their time. This mother doesn't have to lose the only thing that she has, her children. Please join with us. Let's get the food to them. It can save their lives. And they can be productive. Children grow up. We've seen some of them later on, they grow up and they're safe and they're smart and they've learned. We can just make the difference in it. So please join with us right now. Let's get the food to the babies.

James: This is an incredible statement of gratitude to God and to you, but we have saved the lives of now right at 15 million children and their families. That is not an exaggeration.

But here's the thing you need to understand. It was one child at a time -- three children, five children, ten children that somebody said, "I'm going to be the miracle." That's not an overstatement. You become the miracle that gives life for those children and their families. It changes everything. It's so easy to get them to hear about the love of God that you've just demonstrated, which is why they respond to the gospel.

I want to see the whole continent of Africa healed. I want to see amazing grace poured out all over it and those people learn what it is to live free and fruitful and productive. But it all starts one life at a time.

Would you right now dial that phone number that's there as a prayer line for you? Or would you go online and take your bankcard, and would you make the gift God puts on your heart? Now listen to what it takes. Listen to the miracle: \$30, \$50, \$100 we can feed three, five or ten children for the next months. That's not total child care, that's nutritious food to get them totally stabilized and healthy. And it absolutely works. So if you will right now, write a check and make it to *LIFE*, that's what you're giving. Or take your bankcard, go online or dial the number and make the gift God puts on your heart.

We have some gifts to send you to say thank you. They're going to be a real blessing to you. But you're being the greatest blessing because you're sharing the greatest gift, you're sharing life. And then the life of Christ will be presented because you have demonstrated the life and love of Christ, you become the miracle.

Thank you so much for doing it. Please go get your card. Dial the number and make the gift God leads you to make.

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.

Through *LIFE*'s Mission Feeding outreach you can save lives by feeding and caring for children currently suffering in parts of Angola, Mozambique, and South Sudan. With previous reserves gone and Mission Feeding helping in areas with severe crop failure, we urgently need your support to replenish food supplies to reach the 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. With your gift of any amount we'll send you *Death-Defying Faith*, the extraordinary life of miracle man, Peter Pretorius. This autobiography, completed just days before his unexpected death, chronicles the thrill-seeking adventures of missionary, Peter Pretorius. You will love reading how God took this ordinary man and performed extraordinary miracles throughout all of Africa.

With your gift of \$100 or more, request the beautiful "Faith and Hope" pen set; two beautifully crafted pens featuring the key words of Hebrews 11:1; a key verse for every believer especially when facing adversity, trials and challenges.

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 gift online today!

End of clip

In the studio

James: We're going to send you Peter Pretorius's book to say thank you. You know the beautiful "Faith and Hope" pens, the life pens, I tell you what, they're beautiful! They just really, really are. The "Bridge of Faith," beautiful painting. But if you'd like to have *The Road to Freedom*, you say, "James, if we help some of those kids and give them food, would you mind sending me some of that food that I think is in that book for me?" You better believe we will. All you do is ask for it. I do hope you'll tell your friends to consider getting it and let them know about it. You pray for the *Celebrate Recovery* ministry.

Would you join Betty and me in saying thanks to Johnny Baker? Johnny, thanks for

being with us. Thank all of you for being here. Thank you for watching. Thank you so much for caring about others and being someone's miracle!