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Week 17: Spring Mission Feeding

James and Betty Robison

Erwin McManus

James: Thank you. Don't we have a great audience! I hope all of you at home are as glad to see us as these folks are. Maybe it is because they know Erwin McManus is here.

By the way, if you've heard what he's written, some of the great books, you might want to call somebody right now, keep watching, though. You don't want to miss what he's about to say here but you might want to call someone and say, go to *LIFE Today* right now. Tell them where to find it. They ought to go there every day, I appreciate you doing it. But let's listen to Erwin McManus. And he's written *The Way of the Warrior*. I've got my finger already to the table of contents because we're going to touch on some very specific things.

Would you welcome Erwin McManus back to *LIFE Today*? Glad to see you, buddy!

Erwin: Thank you.

James: You talk about the battle for inner peace, and that's really important because everything around us seems to feed our fears, our doubts, the things that distract us or inappropriately attract us. All these things take away peace. And it's like people seem to be willing to settle for less. And you talk about the warrior fighting for peace. So it's really important. So you're talking about, I would think you're talking about a supernatural peace not something we conjure up or pretend to have but that actually can have peace that passes understanding, that we could actually have peace in the midst of a storm, in the midst of chaos, is that correct?

Erwin: Absolutely. It is more than we might think because there are a lot of things we can fake but it is impossible to fake inner peace. And we spend most of our energy trying to pretend we're not in a battle and we should be using that energy to actually step into that battle.

James: And we're certainly not defeated in that battle. We don't ever want to look like that.

Erwin: One of the things that strikes me is this odd tension that you can have a deep faith in God and still be struggling with loneliness. You can really trust Jesus and still be fighting depression. One of the passages of scripture that really captured me was how Elijah has this epic moment where he prays fire down from heaven and then the very next moment he's running for his life, hiding in the wilderness and says to God, "Just kill me. I've had enough."

When I read that I thought, wait a minute, this looks like my life. This looks like me! I have these highlight moments and this fall by this low light moment. I have these moments where I'm never going to doubt again. Then I have a moment where I'm going, "God, I can't make it one more day!" What is it about us along the way?

One of the things that really struck me as I began to looking at the scriptures and dealing with issues like depression, like anxiety, like fear, is at first...

James: How would you define depression?

Erwin: Depression is when you're so overwhelmed by the life you have that you can't bear to live any longer, because it moves you towards despair. The word *depressed* means to literally be pressed down; when life feels too heavy for you. I think the best way to describe depression is when you feel like you're pulling all your past into the future, you're actually depressed. Because you believe your future is going to be the same as

your past and that's when we get depressed.

James: Is it a sense of hopelessness?

Erwin: It is hopelessness. But here's the good news about depression. You cannot be depressed if you cannot imagine a different you. You cannot be depressed if you cannot imagine a different life.

James: Somehow you're saying it really shouldn't have to be this way. Surely it doesn't have to be this way.

Erwin: Right. If you thought this is all there is you wouldn't be depressed. You would just exist. I have a Labrador retriever. It's never depressed. It never wakes up saying, "I should be a Doberman." It's never over ambitious. My lab just eats and sleeps.

James: And loves you unconditionally.

Erwin: That's right! But not cats! Not cats.

[Laughter]

But think about us as human beings. There is this phenomenon called phantom pain. I've studied this for years. Phantom pain can only happen if you lose a limb. If you lose an arm or a leg at war perhaps, and then you remember that limb, it is as if that limb is still there. In fact you feel pain where that limb once was. For phantom pain to happen you have to lose something that you actually did have. You never experience phantom pain for the second head you never had or the long tail you never had.

[Laughter]

Depression is the phantom pain of the soul. See, human ideals are the phantom pain of

the soul. We're talking about peace. We're talking about world peace but we've never known world peace. We're talking about inner peace but we've never known inner peace. You are fighting to feed every child on this planet but we've never known a world without hunger. We fight for a world where everyone has justice but all we've known through history is injustice. Every human ideal has no evidence it can exist and yet we humans are driven by these ideals. And I'm convinced human ideals are the phantom pain of the soul. Our souls remember what it means to be human even though we're living beneath our humanity. Depression is our soul's way of letting us know you were never created to exist and survive. You're created to live and to thrive.

James: Okay, so with all this around us, knowing that the world will always be chaotic without the Prince of Peace, you're talking about us in the midst of the chaos, in the midst of the storm, in the midst of all the challenges that the world can throw at us, that the father of lies can throw at us, that the murderer can throw at us, that we can actually achieve peace and that we should be willing to fight for that abiding peace?

Erwin: Yes.

James: Because I want to tell you something, I've experienced that. And it is supernatural.

Erwin: And people who know you know you have.

James: In the storm, I've experienced it because I also know what it is to be so defeated that you despair of life and you actually ask your wife to pray you die in your sleep. And it's hard to believe that can happen to Christians but see I'm owning the reality of that defeat. And I really think it is when I cried out -- by the way, a friend of mine said this today. He said, "You know what religion is like? Religion is saying, 'I just really messed up. Don't tell my dad!' But Christianity, true faith is, 'I really messed up. Let's tell dad.'"

Somehow isn't there something about that reaching up and reaching out to the one source

of peace and acknowledging that we need it and what's inside is not only created by the turmoil around us but the fact that we allowed it to impose its way on us. And how do we then inspire somebody to fight for and be a warrior for that abiding peace?

So how do we move every viewer and the people in your church, you said, 5,000 people got saved in Hollywood for heaven's sake! Who would have ever thought that? And it's a miracle. That's in a year, right there in downtown. Impossible! Okay, so how do we give people hope to move into that peace, to deal with this depression and start being lifted out of it?

Erwin: One thing that's so important to know is that this is what connects us all together as humans. Whether we believe in God or don't believe in God, whether we've come to faith in Jesus or not, whether we're Buddhists or Hindus or Muslims or Christians, all of us have this common experience of feeling depressed, of feeling afraid, of feeling like we're not enough, of feeling insignificant. We need to pay attention to the fact that all seven billion people are in the same story. That should tell us there's something bigger going on than just our existence.

The last code of the book is "The Warrior Stands in their Pain." Two years ago I was told I had cancer, right before Christmas. My wife and my kids, it was really devastating for them. I had Stage 4, Stage 5 I think cancer and they caught it very late. I didn't know what the future was going to look like. They did a six and a half hour surgery that was supposed to last two hours. They put me in a hospital room at 9:00 p.m. and at midnight I woke up, I woke up my wife who was sleeping next to me and she was panicky. She says, "Are you okay? Are you okay?" Because she was surprised I was awake.

I said, "No, no, I'm good." I said, "I just wanted to wake you. I'm going to get up and I'm going to walk."

I had six holes in my stomach and my wife says, "You're not getting up and walking."

I said, "No, I'm getting up and I'm walking."

She says, "You're not getting up." Then she ratted me out. Called the nurse over.

[Laughter]

And the nurse says, "Can I help you?"

And my wife says, "He wants to walk! Tell him he can't walk."

She's like, "You cannot get up. You can't get up."

I said, "Can I do anymore damage to myself?"

She said, "Technically no."

And I said, "Then I'm going to get up and I'm going to walk."

She goes, "Well, then let me give you some pain killers first because you're going to be in unbearable pain."

I told her, "No. You can't give me anything. This is the whole point. I know that if I can stand in this pain I can face whatever pain is ahead of me."

See, I think culturally, we've miscommunicated to people what Jesus does for us. We've told people that if you give your life to Jesus he will help you find a way around the pain. And so in the moment they're in pain, the moment their life falls apart, the moment they're suffering, the moment they're disappointed, the moment they fail, the moment they're heartbroken, they feel like God has abandoned them and let them down. They didn't understand God was not going to give you a way around the pain, God was going

to give you a way through the pain.

Because people ask me all the time, okay, you've been following Jesus for 40 years, does it ever get easier? I said, "No. You get stronger."

We keep wanting life to get easier and God keeps wanting us to get stronger. We keep fighting for the wrong thing. That's why the last code is you learn how to stand in your pain. You stop running from pain, you stop running from suffering, you stop running from sacrifice because you realize your greatness is always on the other side of your pain. What God wants to do in your life can only happen when you find the courage and the faith to step into that pain and know you stepped in one step at a time and God will meet you there.

I can tell you this. I don't know how fully to explain it because when they told me I had cancer I told myself I give myself permission to feel whatever I need to feel. I don't need to pretend as a pastor or as a follower of Jesus, I'm not going to act like this isn't real for me. So I said if I'm angry, I'm going to be angry. If I feel bitter I'm going to feel bitter. If I'm afraid I'm going to feel afraid.

But I don't know why but maybe that release was a part of it but I can tell you that I never felt afraid. I was sort of surprised that I never felt afraid and I had to go back and reflect on that. I realized that most people are afraid of death because they were always afraid to live. That really, the fear of death is more regret than anything else.

But I had this deep sense of I've lived a life that I never could have imagined. I felt like I have stepped into God's intention and purpose for my life. If my life was supposed to end then it ended on a big chapter. And if God wants it to continue then I get to be a part of an epilogue I did not expect.

I have a great marriage; I have a beautiful wife Kim. I have a son named Aaron, a daughter Mariah, her husband Jake. I've gotten to see my kids become beautiful human

beings. How could I ever be bitter? How could I ever be angry?

So I was filled with this overwhelming sense of wow, I'm not afraid. Then it hit me. So many of my friends who were atheists keep telling me, "Erwin, where is the proof of life after death?" And I knew what it was. The only proof of life after death is life before death.

James: Okay, you walked right?

Erwin: And it hurt!

[Laughter]

James: What happened to the cancer and how are you?

Erwin: Two weeks ago, I hit my two-year follow-up and my surgeon, Dr. Kahlili told me I was 100% cancer free.

[Applause]

Betty: That's awesome.

James: And for those that don't hear that, feel peace. You know we lost a daughter to cancer. That was pain for us. Most people say there is no greater pain than to say good-bye to a child. I can't imagine that there is. But he walked with us through the valley of the shadow.

Betty: Absolutely I can say he stood with us through the pain and he still does because it still hurts at times.

Erwin: Absolutely. One of the things I keep telling people because there are many

people I know who are beautiful people who didn't have the same outcome of cancer. Even though that cancer did not take my life I'm still dying. We're all dying. The question is not whether we're going to die, the question is whether we're ever really going to live. And that to me is the powerful reminder that God gives me. In this life, this life does have an expiration date.

James: But the person that lives in this decaying body never dies. We're not waiting to have eternal life, in Christ we have eternal life.

Erwin: And that to me, is the way of the warrior. That you realize that you're not waiting -- I hate it when people say this life is practice or that this life is like warm-up. I'm going, no, this is real life and you're supposed to live the fullness of this life because God is fully real.

My daughter wrote a song about heaven is where you are. Because where Jesus is that's where heaven is. When we're fully alive in him we are living in the fullness of that beauty and that wonder. I want to live in that. And I know that without any doubt, no matter what you're facing, what you're going through, no matter how much you struggle with fear, anxiety, or stress or depression, you can have this deeper peace that is the core of who you are. So that the center of who you are has always the calm of this confidence that God is with you no matter how much the storm is swirling around you.

Betty: And is that peace, is that what you call *The Way of the Warrior*? That's what the peace is, *The Way of the Warrior*.

Erwin: I'm tired of losing people I love to suicide. I'm tired of talking to people one after another after another who are struggling with ending their lives. And it is more hopeless when they feel like I believe in God and I believe in Jesus and I'm still having these suicidal thoughts. I want people to know, hey, if you're not strong enough to fight for yourself let us fight for you because we're not going to give up on you.

One of my favorite statements in the Bible is when the guy says to Jesus, "Lord, I believe but help my unbelief." I think this is the power of inspiration, of encouragement; that you're putting hope into someone; you're putting strength into someone. And I'm absolutely convinced that this is the most important book I've ever written. That this book is going to put into people what they desperately are longing for. Because Jesus is our peace but you have to follow him on this path of peace to get there.

James: You said many people look at the Bible characters and they only see their highlights, they don't see the low moments. They don't see the fact that some of the greatest glory was God carrying them through the defeat, through their weakness and finding his strength adequate. And really and truly, that's basically the story of every great champion in here. You don't find many who didn't seem to miss the mark drastically, and yet we need to learn.

This is what I think. Erwin is gifted. You really are. You've been gifted by God to help us all, Erwin and we're very proud of Jesus in you. We are proud of the glow and glory of God on you and your countenance.

Every single friend I have that's read this book has said, "James, I've never read a more important book."

He said, Erwin said, "It's the book I give my kids; I could give to everybody's kids. I wish everybody would get it. I feel like God's given me something that will really help you." And really one of the great killers, you know many people don't commit suicide but they're walking a living death. It's like they're living suicides until they can just get out of here.

God wants you to get out of that pit. He came to lift us out of the pit. I mean we may have dug it, somebody's circumstances threw us in it, I mean whatever. It doesn't matter how you got in, he says, "I'll lift you up."

Isn't it wonderful that he's leaning down? Think about this. I don't care how deep the pit is, I don't know how much despair or hopelessness you sense, he's leaning down. It's like he tries to get as close to the one in the pit. And he inclines his ear. He says, "Just ask me. I'll lift you up." It starts by the ask. But say, "I'm going to battle for this peace." He gave his life for it. He sent the Holy Spirit, one just like him to live in us. We can live with peace.

Would you join Betty and me in saying thanks to Erwin for sharing this? Erwin, we love you, buddy! God bless your family, bless your church, bless your ministry, and bless this book! And we want to ask you to do something. If you'll just help us feed some hungry kids, and not look away, and you say, "Would you mind sending us that book?" You better believe it! Because when you give someone life we want to bless your life. That's why we're here every day at *LIFE Today*.

I want you to watch right now. I want you to watch very closely. Our oldest grandson just came back from the area that you're about to see. And we hold the hope for the future of these you look at right now. Watch. Listen. Hear a mother's heart.

On the mission field

Announcer: Throughout God's word we are challenged to reach out to the least of these, to the widow, the orphan. There are few places in the world which present more opportunity to embrace that call than Africa. The one we present to you today is Monica. A broken widow whose family is losing the fight for their lives.

Open captions:

>> My boy was only three years old. He died from hunger.

I once had five children. Now I have only three.

Announcer: Doing the best she could as a mother, Monica journeyed in search of new

land and resources to provide for her struggling family. But her best was met with impossible circumstances and she was left to watch her three-year-old starve to death.

Open captions:

>> I prayed to God, please help me. I have nothing for my children and I'm all alone in this world.

Announcer: It's no accident you're watching today. God has heard the heart cry of a widow named Monica who has lost two children and now fears starvation may claim her remaining three. While Monica is unique her cry echoes that of countless grieving mothers here in South Sudan. Today you have the opportunity to answer that cry and the call God has given us all.

End of clip

In the studio

James: Hard to imagine losing two of your five children.

Betty, what do you want our viewers to feel in their heart and what do you want them to do as they watch and see this situation where we've held mothers who just saw their child die? We've watched them put them in the ground. What do you want our viewers to do?

Betty: We've got to understand this is a slow painful death for these precious little ones. And it's a slow painful heart for their mothers to watch them die. And to know that they have nothing to offer them to save their lives. Nothing's left. They've gotten all the resources that they could get and there is none there now. They're depending on someone that can offer hope to them.

We can do this. Just now by first praying for them and then giving an offering to help get the food to them. Please join with us and let's be that hope that these mothers are looking

for for their children and their lives.

James: Really, she's making it very clear that her heart's crying out. It is like a prayer; it's a cry out to God. I love my babies, I love my children and I want to take care of them. I've tried to tell you over the years, nearly 30 years now, I've tried to tell you that these mothers, they don't have a lot of entertainment. The vast majority of them don't have television, they don't have some place to go. Their children are their joy. And the mothers are the greatest strength in the third world countries.

But all of you right now who are watching would you please help us save children like the ones she's talking about wanting to keep alive? And we could have saved those others if we would have had a feeding center in the area where they're starving. Like I said our grandson just came back from South Sudan. He said, "Mimi and Papaw, never seen anything like it. But we can just do it. We can do it."

Whose we? We the people, the viewers of *LIFE Today*. That's what the missionaries always said, "James, we really wouldn't want you to come over here and stay. If you can just go back and get us the help so we can stay here and be effective." That's what we're doing.

Would you right now go get your bankcard please? Dial that number, it's always there as a prayer line. Love pays for that call. Would you go get your bankcard, call the number or go online and make the largest gift you can knowing this, that for the next several months, think about this, a single gift of \$100 we can feed ten children for the next months. For \$50 we can feed five. I want you to start thinking as high as you can, not low, \$30 we can feed three. But don't think that's small because for those three it means everything.

See, she's still got three children. Made you'd say, "I've got those three." But if you could say, I've got ten. Or I can even give \$1,000 or more and feed 100 kids. Whatever you can do I'm asking you to go right now please prayerfully and reach out in love. Take that

bankcard, dial that number, go online and say, "Here's my gift." Give the largest gift you can because you're giving the greatest gift, you're giving life. And we're going to tell them about the love of God and the life we found in Christ. But we're going to demonstrate that love first.

Would you do it? We have some gifts to send you and we'll send them to say thank you for sharing life. Please go right now, make the gift God put on your heart.

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 from starvation in parts of Angola, Mozambique and South Sudan.

With previous reserves gone and mission feeding helping in areas of great famine, we urgently need your support to replenish food supplies to reach the 400,000 children who are counting on us. Your life saving gift of \$30, \$50, or \$100 will help feed and care for three, five or ten children.

With your gift we'll send you *The James Code* by O.S. Hawkins, an outstanding devotional to help you go from knowing about God to living for God, and putting your faith into action. You will also enjoy this beautifully grafted leather bookmark.

With your gift of \$100 or more please request *The Passion* translation Bible. This New Testament edition including Psalms and Proverbs ignites *The Passion* of the Bible to modern readers by merging *The Passion* of God's heart for his children with the life-changing truth of his word.

Finally, with your gift of \$1,000 or more to help feed and care for 100 children, be sure to request our commemorative bronze sculpture, "Safe in the Shepherd's Arms."

Please call write or make your gift online today.

End of clip

In the studio

James: I feel like, in my spirit, I just feel a sense of gratitude. By the way, if you ever call to make a gift and you get a busy, it could be that a lot of people are calling in to give their life to Christ. But it also could be a lot of people are calling to help. But you be persistent and determined and say, "I'm going to get through because I'm going to be an answer to somebody's prayer. I'm going to be the miracle they're longing for."

We're going to send you *The Passion* translation. I promise you it will be a source of inspiration in your devotion time. I promise you that. If you'll help us, would you help us rescue and feed ten? Also, if you'd like to have Erwin McManus's book, *The Way of the Warrior* just ask for it. It's in the bookstores, encourage your friends to get it. You may want to get a copy for your friends. But you help us care for these kids and give them a future and give them a hope, be an answer to the mothers' prayers, you want the book, just ask for it. We'll send it to you to say thanks.

Join Betty and me in saying thanks to Erwin McManus. Thanks for being with us. God keep you safe. God bless this book! Let's live in peace and let's share that peace. The only hope the world's got is the Prince of Peace. Thanks for watching.