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Week 18: Spring Mission Feeding

James and Betty Robison

Benji Kelley

James: Thank you very much. Thank you. Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm James Robison. Betty and I are so glad to be able to share this time with you.

We heard Sheila Walsh, she comes in a lot of times talking about somebody she's been with and she's just seen Jesus in their life.

By the way, don't you appreciate Sheila Walsh being on *LIFE Today*? All of you right here and all of you watching? What a blessing she is!

She comes in telling us about this pastor that had just had a miraculous change in his life as a young man. As a matter of fact, she mentioned a book called *Wrecked and Redeemed*. When you hear the story of Benji Kelley, when you hear it you'll understand it was wrecked and redeemed and it's really a miracle.

I just praise God for the leadership there in the Raleigh/Durham area. He's in Durham. It's not quite as large as Raleigh. There is probably a little push and shove between the two. Probably some competition too. But the point is that he is in a great state.

You know many of the states that I'm still watching make a lot of real good decisions and trying to help us make some course corrections so we don't just crash this whole ship of state are from the states where I saw God do great things in the city wide crusades over all these different states.

In other words, it wasn't a matter of they received James Robison's crusade. It was like

the Word of God and the truth of God, the love of God and faith in God and family and a foundation that freedom has to stand on meant a lot to these people. North Carolina was one of those places. I've got to think pastors like this are finding that people are responsive. And one of the things that Sheila said about this church is it is so diverse racially but they're just all family. There is no tension there. There is love.

Well, Benji is a source of inspiration and his *Wrecked and Redeemed* story is here in this book, and he's here. Would you welcome Benji to *LIFE Today*? Benji, good to see you. Good to see you, buddy. The church is called, and it is amazing that it's in small letters: New Hope Church. Small -- is there a reason that it is not bold capitals?

Benji: Yeah, when we started the church 17 years ago we just decided that there's lots of New Hope churches in our area. There is a New Hope River that runs through and so we just...

James: New Hope okay?

Benji: And Romans 15:13 was the verse that we founded it on: May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

So we knew we wanted it to be New Hope but there was just so many New Hope churches. So it was our attempt to copyright it and set it apart a little bit. And we bolded the *hope* because that really is the heartbeat of this book and the heartbeat of our church is to give people hope.

James: Well, we need it desperately today. Let's get with the title here. Let's hear your story because I get the impression with what I know about your journey, your life was a wreck.

Benji: Yes.

James: And then there was a wreck. But just tell our viewers, what was going on in your life?

Benji: So I grew up in a typical family, I guess, a normal family, whatever you would describe that to be these days. But back then it was a normal family.

Dad coached us in baseball, football, basketball, hunting and fishing. But we never ever heard the gospel, never heard the name of Jesus. We weren't de-churched or unchurched, we were never churched.

So when I hit the age of 11, and James and Betty, I've got five kids so it's hard for me to imagine my kids at the age of 11 but when I hit the age of 11 I started down a road of self-destruction. And I started doing drugs. And by the time I was 13 years old I was doing L.S.D. By the time I was 14 years old I was doing cocaine. By the time I was 15 years old I was doing crack and I moved out of the house. My parents got a divorce and I moved away. I basically said, "If y'all can't live together I don't want to live with you." I left and my life went out of control.

I had progressed so quickly from doing drugs to feel a sense of euphoria to doing drugs just to feel a sense of normalcy, and my life got wrecked. The meaning, the title of the book actually has two meanings to it. On September 23rd, 1988, I was arrested for the sixth time. It was a beautiful September sunny day. I had been injecting into my body a deadly cocktail of heroin and cocaine for 48 hours straight. I had shriveled up to about 135 pounds. I had hair down to my rear end. I was in gangs. I was out on my own. Like I said, a high school dropout.

And I went into a Burger King parking lot after 48 hours of this intense drug binge. I went into the Burger King stall, took another hit and overdosed. I don't remember a lot that happened over the next 10 or 15 minutes. I'll only tell you what I do remember and what the police report said. But basically, I passed out in the stall of Burger King, came

to my senses a little bit, made my way back out to the parking lot. I think I crawled some of that distance, got into that Mustang, 1968, pearl white Mustang -- I loved it. It was a beautiful car. But this was the end of the car. Because I then got in that car and I tried to drive under that condition.

The first accident was in the Burger King parking lot; hit a sweet elderly couple. And backed my car up after hitting their car and went out in the Broad Street and main thoroughfare, through Sumter, South Carolina, hit another head on collision at the next intersection. Backed my car up again, took a right, went down and had my third accident. And the car wouldn't go any further or I'm certain I would have tried to run even more.

The cops came, responding to the hit and runs. I'm out there in the middle of Westmark Boulevard, noon on a gorgeous September day and I'm face planting in the road. It's a sad, sad picture. I was lost. I was wrecked. And I was running from something. And I didn't know at that point in time but I was looking for God. Pascal is credited as saying we're all created with this god-shaped vacuum inside of us that only Christ Jesus can fill, and I was trying to fill it with everything else, the drugs, the sex, the violence, the thievery. You name it, I was arrested for it all.

And that time was the sixth time but I wasn't getting out of jail this time. Thankfully, my family didn't come and bail me out. Notice I said thankfully. They started to practice tough love. They left me. My friends weren't going to get me out. I was facing five years in a state penitentiary for possession of marijuana, possession of cocaine, possession of crack, possession of drug paraphernalia, three hit and runs, resisting arrest and changing lanes unlawfully.

[Laughter]

They literally -- that's what they mean when they say they threw the book at you.

So I was there to stay. But this is when the story really gets good because I had all those

wrecks and my life was a wreck. But a chaplain came by my jail cell, handed me my very first Bible. I still have it. I'm preaching from it these days as I'm leading our church through this series. Red leather bound Bible with the red letters representing the words of Jesus. And he handed it to me, James and I'm like, "I don't know what this is."

He said, "It is the Bible, it is the Word of God."

I said, "I don't know where to start."

He said, "Well, start in the gospel of John."

And I did and John runs throughout this entire book as well. It's my story, it's the New Hope story, and it is the gospel of John all brought together. And I stumbled upon things like John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes shall not perish but have everlasting life."

I got to John 14:6. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one gets to the Father except through me."

And this chaplain kept coming back because I was there for a while and I was the guy who just sat in jail reading the Bible in his cell. Before long, Chaplain Jones came to my jail cell and he said, "Benji," because he'd seen me there many times before. He said, "Benji, why don't you give God a try? You're obviously trying all these other things and it's clearly not working out for you. Why don't you give God a try?"

And I was getting ready to go to court. I was about to face those five years in a state penitentiary and I was scared. But I'd also been reading God's word and I said, "Okay, I'm ready." And we got down on our knees in that little probably six-by-nine dark, dirty jail cell with a steel bed and a steel toilet with the sink on top of the toilet. And we got down on our knees and he got down on his knees with me. And we put our elbows up on that steel bed. He prayed a prayer and I prayed it after him. And there I had another

wreck but it came as a direct of a head-on collision with Jesus Christ who wrecked me in the right kind of way, and my life has never been the same.

James: Now did you just go right out a new person or did you have to take a few steps in the process?

Benji: That's a great question. I think sometimes people think when you're in those situations, you hear these stories and they just think it gets all glorious and the hallelujah chorus warms up. No, no, no, no. My life changed. I sensed the peace that I had not ever sensed before. I had hope but my life still had a long way to go. I would still wake up in the middle of the night in cold sweats craving these drugs.

When I finally got out I asked to go to a treatment center because I knew I needed more help. I was hard core addicted. So I went to a drug rehabilitation center. You're only supposed to stay one month but when I got to the end of the month I asked special permission if I could stay a second month and they said yes. And it was because I just knew that two thirds of the people who go to drug rehabs never make it beyond year two of sobriety.

So I was scared, number one, but I also had this new thing happening in my life. Every Tuesday night they would have a gospel hour. So preachers from in and around that area would come in and they would preach and they would bring their pianists and they would sing the old hymns. And James, I was being opened up to a world that I had never experienced. I never missed a Tuesday night because the gospel was preached and we sang old hymns. And so I also, I think found a place where I was being put back together, slowly but surely.

One of the reasons I'm thankful to be on this show is because I know there are people out there who are hopeless. I believe everybody has got a *Wrecked and Redeemed* story. I think the tendency can be to romanticize stories like mine. When in reality, there might be people out there and they feel hopeless in their relationships or they feel hopeless in

their career or they may feel hopeless in just how they feel inside, that dark depression, and the truth is, our God is a God who instills hope and he is the God of hope who will allow us to overflow with it.

So wherever you are and wherever you are in your life, if there is wreckage, just know that ours is a God of hope who can help you through it, put your feet on solid ground, and give you a purpose and a peace and a passion for life to experience John 10:10, abundant life.

James: And it is so much more than a religious affiliation or association. It is relationship and it is life. And you talk about something that's very important in one of your last chapters. You talk about unity with diversity. And you have that according to Sheila, with everybody in the church, the mixture of races but it is like a family, which is what Jesus prayed for in John 17 that we would actually be one with the Father, the word would purify us and sanctify us but then we would be supernaturally brought together in a oneness that causes people to look and say that's his family, that's the disciples of Jesus, they're his followers. That evidently, you're seeing it happen. How do you explain it?

Benji: Well, I'll give you the preacher answer first. It is a God thing. I really firmly believe that. But I will also tell you that every step along the way we've been incredibly intentional. I don't know if we've thought about that but Jesus says, what scholars often call the high priestly prayer, his prayer before he goes to the cross, as he prays for himself, the believers, and then you and me, future believers. He prays that they would be one, that they would have unity.

James: It is so important.

Benji: It is unbelievable! And yet you look out across the landscape of America particularly and you see that we're still as divided as ever. And so it is God. I think God...

James: But in the church though, Benji, I'm seeing church leaders come together that I

never thought would go in a room together. And they're staying together and they're praying for the will of God to be done for everybody where all these divides, these walls that keep us apart can literally be removed and they are walls of dissension and strife and anger and resentment or bitterness or disagreement. I am seeing that change. So I see the ugly of what the enemy does to show how ugly his fruit is and how divided we are and religion can even keep you divided, but a relationship with the Father leads us into being an answer to the prayer you just referenced and you're seeing it in your church in North Carolina.

Benji: And I couldn't agree with you more. I think the church right now -- right now is at an unbelievable opportunity to show the world what it looks like to bring people together of all ethnicities. And that's why we did a little play on words for that chapter, "Unified Diversity." And the church just has an incredible opportunity to say to the world, it can be done, we can love one another despite our differences. And we're finding that folks who come to church today, especially young folks, they don't want to have anything to do with a church that is all white or all black. They want that diversity. They're looking for it.

James: Well, they realize that if the love Jesus talks about is prevailing you're not going to draw a color line racially when God sees us all as one family with one Father.

Do you appreciate what Benji shared with us and what the book is saying? A miracle of the Lord. The book is in the bookstores. I would encourage you to get it.

Benji, we have found that our audience loves to literally be the miracle answer to people's prayers and the solution to the challenges that can be simply met with an expression of love. You're going to look right now, and Betty and I always want to be deeply moved when we see needs that can be met.

But also, we've got a grandson that's on this trip and you may know, I think most of you do, we lost the overseer of the Africa mission outreach, our partner Peter Pretorius. Peter

had started that outreach to feed the hungry 40 years ago. We came in 30 years ago and we partnered, and we began to multiply and expand that. He was feeding a few thousand, we went in to feeding hundreds and hundreds of thousands, saving millions of lives and winning more people to Christ. We know the Africa governments have said we've saved at least 13 million of the lives of their people. But we've seen now closer to 15 million people trust Christ as savior, in those very same areas of outreach because love opens hearts.

Well, our grandson has been before, two of our grandsons have been. Luke just went back. He is now the father of a little girl approaching her first birthday and what an incredible grandson he is. But he is there in one of the hardest hit places on the planet, in Sudan, South Sudan. You listen to Peter Pretorius' son, Isak, who has been working with us for a long time doing what his dad was doing. Listen to the trip they just come back on. Listen to Isak and look at the need and the miracle that you can be.

On the mission field

Announcer: There is a crisis in areas of South Sudan because mothers have no food for their children. Emotions run high among our mission team as these scenes of desperation play out. Isak Pretorius is motivated more than ever to carry on the fight against starvation on the continent of Africa that his dad Peter Pretorius began over 40 years ago.

Isak: James, you know, you and dad, you traveled all over this continent. And God took your heart and my dad's heart, and literally knitted them together. You became the best of friends. But more than that, you became the best of servants to this continent. I can tell you this because it makes me recommit my life, recommit my promise that I made to my dad that we will continue to serve our continent, that we will serve the people of this continent, that we will continue to strive for what was his dream and is mine, and that is that no child go hungry.

The situation here at the moment is desperate. It is really is at a crisis level. We've been to

villages here where mothers have told us how their children have died because they have literally starved to death.

So I'm asking you please, James, from the bottom of my heart, speak to the viewers. Ask them -- ask them to do whatever it is they can do. Appeal to them, James because we need your help today! And I know that you know that they are the true heroes, the ones that make it possible for us to be here. The ones that make it possible for us to save lives are the true heroes. But without them, another child dies today because we didn't get there in time.

Please, James, do whatever you can do because this is about life and death.

End of clip

In the studio

James: Boy, I thank you, Isak. Thank you for the way you communicate the love of God, and the compassion you have for the people there in your own country, your own continent, all over it. And yes, your dad and I did go and put God's arms of love around millions of people together, and we continue to because of the viewers like you said, "Speak to the viewers, it is because of the viewers."

Peter Pretorius said to me many times, "The greatest Christians in the world are the people who keep us here and enable us to do what we do and not be empty-handed."

So, Betty, it was a joy for me to see Luke there. And when he came back he said, "Papaw, you just cannot believe the tremendous need and hurt."

He actually came back talking about they wanted to bring three kids home and his wife sitting there with me and Betty and saying, "If we go over there and get them we'd bring them. They're teen-aged down to about ten."

And I said, "Luke, I don't think it is possible to do it."

But he said, "Papaw, we just want to take care of them."

That's the love of God, and that's what we see. And when you see it in your grandchildren and know how real it is, and then you know that when they're saying like Isak did, "Ask the viewers to please help these children."

Where Isak was talking that was the place where, and we don't talk about this on the air, but we also equip those centers that are the malnutrition clinic where children go at the last stage. And we feed them intravenously, we give them a kind of content they can contain and hold to try to get them back.

But it is like Isak said, we've got to get them before they get here. We've got to get out in the area where we've got these 400,000 located. And by the way, they were very specific about the thousands they located in those areas and they had them ready to come together, promising the hope for food. And it depends upon us to keep them there, to be sure they have the food, and it depends upon our support.

So, Betty, I'm praying that every person watching will do whatever God leads them to do. Let me just clarify something. For \$30, for \$50, or for \$100 we can feed three, five or ten children for several months. It's not total child care. This is life-saving nutritious food. It's in the form, most of the time, what we would call a porridge or a heavy thick mix of oatmeal that's been scientifically designed for the nutritional need in that particular region of the continent. So it is very precise and very, very effective. You don't save millions of lives with something that's just wishful thinking. We know it works. 400,000 right now. We need your help to feed them.

Would you go online or dial that phone number and take your bankcard and would you make the best gift you can? Would you be an answer to the request that missionary, Isak

Pretorius just made to you the viewer? Would you please make the best gift you can? If you could give \$1,000 we can feed 100 kids. \$100, we can feed ten. \$30 or \$50, three or five. We have some gifts to send you to say thank you to be a blessing to you. But you're giving the greatest gift of all, you're giving them life because of the love of God and we're going to point them to the God who loves them and the Son he gave for them. And they will have already seen his love in action through you.

Please go get that bankcard. If you write a check, make it to *LIFE* but call us and tell us you're putting it in the mail. Thank you for doing 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.

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: Well, Father, thank you for those who were moved by your spirit to help; in Jesus' name.

You just touched a lot of lives and saved a lot of lives with your love. The book, *Wrecked and Redeemed* is in the bookstores. If you say, "James, I think that that is something I need or I want to give it to someone, if we help you feed these kids and their families, would you send it to us?" I sure would, along with *The James' Code* that will literally get the word in you carrying you with greater truth and understanding.

If you'll help us take care of ten kids or more, *The Passion* translation is absolutely beautiful. It is a tremendous translation for Bible study and inspiration. We just want to send you blessings as you bless others to say thank you.

Would you join Betty and me in saying thanks to Benji for coming to share with us, and for the book? Thank you for your testimony. Bless New Hope Church! Thank you.

Thank you so much for watching. Encourage your friends to watch *LIFE Today*.