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Week 47: Fall Mission Feeding

James and Betty Robison

Michele Cushatt

James: Thank you. My goodness! Thank you very, very much.

Michele Cushatt is with us and she's got a book titled, *Relentless*: The unshakeable presence of a God who never leaves. I'm telling you the enemy will tell you that you are alone when you're not. But sometimes the weight is heavy. Michele understood with a terrific battle, several of them throughout her life; one of them with cancer that started on her tongue, lost two thirds of her tongue. But boy the battle she's been in! And what she's able to share, this is a phenomenal book. You're going to see that. Where a lot of people are, she meets them right where they are and I think leads them into the presence of God. I think she is going to be a tremendous blessing. It's a miracle that she's able to talk.

Would you welcome Michele to *LIFE Today*?

Michele: Thank you, James, Betty.

James: Let me just ask you this, because we actually lost a daughter who had cancer that started with the tongue, and it was a seven-year battle. And she is perfect now. How long

ago did you have the battle and lose that part of your tongue?

Michele: It started actually almost nine years ago now. I was 39 years old; a mom, a wife, an ordinary Tuesday before Thanksgiving. So it was a big week and full of joy and so much to be grateful for. And on a Tuesday morning right after I sent my kids to school, I got a phone call from my doctor. He simply said, "I'm sorry, Michele, it's not good."

What happened is a week before I had an ulcer on my tongue that just wouldn't go away. I went to the doctor. On a whim he decided to do a biopsy but must have told me no less than a dozen times, "It's fine! It's fine! You have nothing to worry about" until that Tuesday morning when he told me that he had been mistaken. It was squamous cell carcinoma of the tongue.

That first time it was relatively, best-case scenario for cancer. They caught it early. We had a surgery. We took it out. We thought cancer was gone. Put it in a box and set it on the shelf never expecting to see it again. But in the five years following it came back two more times. The third time it came back was again right before Thanksgiving of 2014. And basically, at that point doctors did not have any promises of a cure. No promises of a happy ending.

They gave me two weeks to get my affairs in order, put me in the hospital where they did a nine-hour surgery where they removed two thirds of my tongue. Cut my arm open from wrist to elbow to help rebuild my tongue. Cut open my leg and my neck as well to try to get rid of all the evidences of cancer, and then put me back together again. I was

like Humpty Dumpty.

What followed in the months after that surgery then was extreme radiation and chemotherapy. The doctors said basically they needed to take me to the brink of death in the hopes of maybe saving my life. So truly, I never expected to be here still.

James: And that's so much a part of the journey and you held on. I just want to pause here and just thank God.

Lord, I want to thank you for Michele's miraculous journey. And we thank you for the journey our daughter had too and that she is in your presence, and do some things that we don't understand and a lot of people right now are watching and looking in and they need your arms around them. They need to be held really close to your heart like you held our daughter throughout the journey and you held us, and after the journey.

But also with Michele. And in this journey that she was on you taught her a lot and she really wants to share that. So I ask that you bless her as we try to reach out and get your arms around everyone watching on television, wherever they are, and in the studio so you can pull them up real close to your heart, and then begin to flow your love and your life through them freely; in Jesus' name.

Michele, I sense that through the battle, you know you talk about the unshakeable presence of a God that never leaves because I think when we go through some of these trials we feel like he is not there. Jesus even asked the horrible effect of why did you forsake me? Of course, he was cut off in order to experience the full weight of our sin.

And yet, the enemy is trying to tell you this.

Tell us how, even here in the book, you try to show people that even in the midst of pain or suffering or whatever, and through your life you had some pretty hard times. How do you find yourself experiencing that presence?

Michele: Well, we see the fact that I'm still here as a miracle and it certain is. I'm still alive. But I live with permanent functional disabilities: Eating, talking, swallowing is extraordinarily difficult for me. I have chronic pain all the time. And not to mention that my life now is very different than before. My capacity is different. It is just a hard thing to live in pain 24 hours a day.

So you have on one hand the celebration of the miracle but then on the other hand you say but God, why won't you bring relief? And I know that there are people watching today that they are in that place of they're still here but they have this ongoing pain that is unresolved. And we equate the presence of pain with the absence of God. Right? We think if we still feel pain that somehow either God isn't real or if he is real he's abandoned us.

So I've had to spend the last few years not only physically coming back to life but trying to resurrect my faith walk after questioning some aspects about what I believe. What do I do when God doesn't always behave the way that I think he should? What do I do with that?

James: Tell us.

Michele: Well, some of it I had to go back to the facts. I was basing so much on my circumstances and my emotions. I had to go back and say, okay, what do I really believe? And I literally started in the book of Genesis and went all the way through Revelation and tried to see what I could learn about God's character there. And what I discovered is that from beginning to end, from first page to end, God was all about being with us.

We sit there and think it's all about us trying to be good enough to earn him and from day one to the end he was trying to convince us of how much he loves us. How much he loves us.

Philip Yancey said it this way, "From Genesis 2 to Revelations 22 God is trying to get his family back." And as I continued to dig through that, ultimately, I ended up at the cross. How can you not end up there? And I realized that God's affection for me, his love for me was so great that he chose to put on human flesh that hurts, that doesn't always work right, that experiences pain simply so I could be with him forever.

So ultimately, I had to decide what am I going to choose to believe? Am I going to choose to believe my history or choose to believe his?

Betty: Well, the pain doesn't always go away just like you said. Even if we don't experience it physically, our hearts experience that pain. Because our daughter is not with us here on earth, we will see her again someday.

Michele: But that hurts!

Betty: It does hurt. And at different times of our season in life that it comes back and hurts, the pain, it comes back and hurts. But also, I guess I was really blessed in what we went through that I always felt that God was with me. Had he not been, I couldn't have held on to anything. Of course, I had the support, I had my husband and our family and friends that loved us and held us close. But it was a time for me when I just hung on to God with everything I had.

Michele: You have to! Both hands, toes, everything that you've got, you hang on to him. One of my favorite stories in the New Testament is Jesus talking to Peter. It is right after the Last Supper. He's at that place. Jesus knows what's coming. Peter doesn't but Jesus knows his suffering is coming. And he looks at Peter and he says, "Satan has asked to sift you as wheat but I have prayed for you that your faith would not fail."

I have read that section over and over again. What that tells me is they are on the precipice of unbelievable suffering -- all of them! They're about to lose everything! And in that moment Jesus doesn't pray for Peter's health, he doesn't pray for Peter's career, he doesn't pray for Peter's home or family. He tells Peter, "I'm going to pray for the thing that matters most right now. You don't realize this, Peter but what is at stake in this moment is not anything but your faith."

And I read that and it was like God just spoke over me and said, "Michele, you think what's at stake here is how many years you're going to live. You need to know that what is at stake here has nothing to do with what the doctor says. It has to do with your faith." And Jesus himself, and I believe this, has prayed for my faith that it would not fail. And

the fact that I can sit here nine years into a horrific battle and say, "I have never loved Jesus more than I do right now" is an answer to his prayer for my faith.

That's what helps us get through the pain is understanding really what is at stake here. What is at stake? Somehow we have to figure out how to live with one foot on heaven and one hand reaching... or one foot on earth and one hand reaching for heaven -- kind of like Paul said, "To live is Christ, to die is gain." I don't know what I would choose. Part of me longs to go and be with the Lord which would be better by far. But for now I'm here. So one of these gifts of dealing with such suffering is I get that tension. If I didn't make it another day, Jesus is waiting for me. But as long as I'm here, it's going to be fruitful labor for him.

Betty: And it's not that we'll always -- we don't always get the answers. Or the answers we want especially but still we have to have that faith and trust in him.

Michele: It's interesting how much we want answers; isn't it? Answers... we think the answers will make us feel better. I have... trust me, I'm a pretty bulldog personality. Me and God wrestle and I try to get him to give me the answers I want. I want him to tell me why. We want answers but I suspect that if everything was nice and neat and tidy, God would be too small. I want God to be so big, so beyond my ability to wrap my mind around him. And that means if I want him to be that big, I have to be okay with mystery.

James: You indicated in the book, you share so openly, and this is where you just kind of get into a situation where you're able to identify with it. Living with pain –

By the way, the reason lepers are so, let's say, in such serious trouble is they feel no pain. They can literally rub a finger off and never know they did it. They can hurt themselves and not know they just destroyed something. There is no feeling. So pain is actually in many ways a gift. It cautions you. But when you live with it, it is an incredible weight. And the enemy is telling you that God has left you but he hasn't. One of the things you actually talk about though is in the battle, the journey you actually contemplated suicide.

Michele: Yes, it is very difficult to wake up every day knowing that pain is what your day is going to be filled with. Even in the days leading up to this moment being here today I have had some of the worst pain days that I've had so far. And that's hard. That is truly very, very difficult. And you get to that place of despairing of life.

James: Do you have a typical way that you've learned to deal with it when it is heavy like you said it was before you got here?

Michele: Yeah. I have a very clear process that I do now to deal with those days where the despair weighs me down. The first one is you have to acknowledge it. Sometimes as Christians we don't do a great job of making space for people to not be okay. And so being able to say, I'm not okay. This is what is going on. I feel that weight of despair and sadness today.

But the second step I do is you have to share it with one trusted person. God knew we couldn't do this life alone. That's what the church is. The church, the greater church, right? The fact that we're sitting...

James: It's supposed to be the family.

Michele: It's supposed to be. What you and I are doing here is we're making space to say I'm not always okay but Jesus is still God. So you acknowledge it, you tell a trusted friend, "Hey, today is a hard day" because that's when we really get the flesh-and-blood hands on of Jesus' presence with us.

At times I just try to acknowledge what other things are going on. Is pain wearing me down today? Am I tired? Am I lonely? What is it?

But ultimately, the fourth step is I have to remind myself of the truth. There is a verse in John 14:18 where Jesus said, "I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you. I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you."

There are days that my pain is so great that I feel alone. Pain and suffering creates an aloneness and I will quote that verse over and over. I can hear Jesus in my ear saying, "I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you."

James: I'm going to speak to thousands of counselors this week, thousands who comfort with people who are depressed and hurting and defeated and desperate. You know I'm just passed my 76th birthday and I never dreamed I'd be this age.

And here's what I want to say to all of you. I sense this in you, Michele, very strongly, I know it is in Betty. I really want you to hear me because a lot of times you think if you were sitting here in the room, "Maybe you look at me, James, you wouldn't be impressed

with the way I look." You wouldn't depress me either. Because regardless of what you might think or the condition you might be in, I'm telling you, I know what will happen. Because you see when I'm sitting there in the room with you, just like I am with all these people right now, and it is the truth, if I can just take each one by the hand, look right in their face, they would know I'm telling them truth. I want you to know that I unconditionally love you.

And here's what I would want you to hear. I would say to every counselor and I'll say it whenever I speak to them, if you can show the individual you're talking to how much the God of all creation, the King of kings, Lord of lords, how much he loves you and you can show people how much he loves the person you're talking to and that he wants to pull you close to his heart, and I mean I'm telling you, I know what he wants, so that you'll know what's on his heart. And one of the first thing you're going to see when you see his heart clearly, you're on his heart, very much. You are with all the challenges and he does in fact understand.

Now we don't get the answer satisfactory necessarily to the why. Can we explain why we would say good-bye to the most wonderful girl in all the world? A 40-year old girl that just loved Jesus and witnessed all of her life, and three children, teenagers love God? We can't answer all of that. One thing we do know is she just loved Jesus. And her husband told her when he didn't think she could hear him anymore, right before she left.

He said, "Robin, if 22 years ago I had known that we were going to be right here like this, I would have done it all over again. I love you!" And he did, and does. And he loves his kids and he has a wonderful life in Christ.

See, the thing about it is if you could just understand how much God wants to hold you. This is what I want you to get. And I think you see this, Michele, once we realize how much God loves us and we receive the fullness of that love it can overflow to others like a river. And you help them see how much God loves them. If you would just receive the love, and that's what you've been doing. That's why you're able to sit here. There's a grin deep down inside of you that's on your face. Here's the deal. You can pour that love like a river on others.

Father, I pray that for every person. Lord, if they need to call and say, pray with me about something, they'll find a caring prayer partner right here because we do care. We care very deeply because your heart is our heart and they're on your heart. I want you to heal them, Lord, the brokenness within and the loneliness and the emptiness and the sense of abandonment. Lord, just give them the consciousness of your presence; in Jesus' name.

I hope you'll go online or go to the bookstores and get *Relentless*. Do you here in the audience appreciate Michele being willing to share her journey so openly? Thank you Michele!

All of our... Somehow, gosh, I really do wish I could know all of you. We recently had a conference. We got to know people from in their 20s all the way up to their 80s. Some of them have supported us for a few years, some for decades. But just to be around them and see the beauty and the glory of God and the hunger, it was just beautiful!

I feel like I talk to the most beautiful people. I know some of you say, James, I'm needy.

Okay, that's why we're here for you. God loves you so much. And he does want to love through you.

But I feel like those of you who are able to look at the overlooked, the unseen, and you're able to see in just a moment, here's what you're going to see. I really want you to watch. You're going to see a mother with a broken heart. But now I want you to look at her real close. I want you to just think, would God like to hold her? Could we in some way hold her and give her hope? You better believe it. You actually are the miracle somebody's praying for. I'm telling you! I want you to be excited about it. Watch!

On the mission field:

Open Captions:

>> Sub-Saharan Africa's child mortality is one of the highest in the world. Nearly half of the deaths can be attributed to the effects of malnutrition. [Woman weeping loudly]

Announcer: The pain that comes from losing a child is indescribable. There are simply no words. It is possibly the worst experience one can know in this life. And to realize that your child has died due to malnutrition causes a parent to be riddled with guilt for not being able to provide the necessary food to sustain their child's life. For so many parents, like Margarita, she did all she could for her baby, but it simply was not enough.

Open Captions:

>> When my baby girl died, I lost all my strength inside. It's so hard to find food for my children. She was sick one day and died the next. I still have not accepted her passing.

She died so quickly.

Announcer: Margarita's grief became almost unbearable when her youngest child she now holds in her arms appeared to have died as well.

Open Captions:

>> Two days ago everyone started crying because they thought my youngest baby had died. Everyone started to mourn, but suddenly she came back! Each day I pray that God will continue to give life to my baby.

Announcer: Just like Margarita has been given a second chance, we now have a chance to be an answer to her prayers.

End of video

In the studio:

James: Margarita, I can't see you. I've seen so many mothers like you, Betty and I have, and I just want to tell you, you are beautiful. We would hold you in our arms and ask God to heal a broken heart and we understand that.

And the wonderful thing is, though, a lot of times we fight diseases and we don't seem to be able to find the cure and we don't see the miracle. But there is the perfect cure for what took your child's life and can spare the life of others in your family and those around you.

Betty, our viewers have seen the healing miracle for millions and millions. We're not exaggerating when we tell you that probably at least 15 million people, children mostly, lives have been saved by you. And then the missionaries have reported consistently that

we've led more people to Christ in those areas.

If we save five million lives in an area, we would win more than five million people to Christ in that area because they saw the love God displayed, not just proclaimed or declared but demonstrated. Love not just in word but in deed. You've done that. I want to thank you for it because you've seen that love never fails.

So what we're asking all our viewers to do right now, would you help us give life for the next months to three, five or ten children? Or could you even think about this? Are you able because God has given you the ability, could you help us feed 100 kids? Could you give \$1,000?

Father, what an incredible gift. God, to touch these lives!

But please understand this. It's real important for three, \$30, \$50 for five, \$100 for ten for the next months to give them food -- not total child care, life-nourishing, lifesaving food given in love.

Would you right now please go online or dial the number? Get your bankcard, please. You may have to walk over and get it. Do it! It's really better to respond right now because it is so easy to distract you. You don't intend to. But get that bankcard and use it like a check. That's how we should use those cards, like a check. Go online or dial the number. Say here's my gift of \$30, \$50, or \$100. If you can give \$1,000 or more, I believe you'll do it. I just believe you will.

We have some gifts to send you. We don't send you a gift to get a gift. We send you a gift because we love you. Anthony Evans, when he did this song, his mother is fighting cancer, a real serious battle; the whole family, Tony Evans, Priscilla Shirer, all of them and yet the joy of the Lord was there. We're sending this to you that you can have an altar experience and see things altered by the power of God. That's the title of this.

We have some beautiful little mugs to give you that will... joy and faith reminders. We give that to you to just say thanks, we love you. But you're giving the greatest gift, you're giving life. And we'll share Jesus.

Would you please help us make that gift right now? We have a beautiful bronze to send you "In the Shepherd's Arms." If you can make that \$1,000 gift or more, I pray you will.

Thank you so much! If you get a busy when you call, be determined, "I'm going to get through. I'm going to be somebody's miracle today." Thank you for doing it.

Begin video clip

Announcer: Mission feeding began with a promise to be there in times of crisis for thousands of hurting and hungry children in their time of need.

Now more than ever we need your help to save lives by feeding and caring for children across the continent of Africa. With food reserves gone and many areas experiencing severe famine, we urgently need to replenish our supplies to reach the 400,000 children who are counting on us. Your gift of love can be the miracle answer to a desperate mother's prayer.

Call now with your lifesaving gift of \$30, \$50 or \$100 that will help feed and care for three, five or ten children for three full months. With your gift, we'll send you the authored worship CD by Anthony Evans. This powerful full-length album includes unique versions of some of today's most cherished worship songs that are sure to uplift and inspire you.

With your gift of \$100 or more please request the "Filled with Faith" and "...Joy" travel mug set. These 12-ounce mugs are crafted with large handles, double-layered insulation and vacuum sealed lids to prevent spills. Each mug includes a message to remind you of

God's blessings and faithfulness.

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 video

In the studio:

James: Betty and I just want to thank you in behalf of a lot of mothers, grandmothers, families. And Michele, wow! What a blessing she is. If you say, James, if I help you take care of those kids, would you send me her book to say thank you? I sure will. You believe it will help you, we want to help you. So we'll be glad to send it to you. You just help us get God's arms of love around those precious children, okay? And give them a future.

Would all of you join Betty and me again saying thanks to Michele for being a blessing. Thank you. Thank God for what he's doing in your life. Thank y'all for being here!