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Week 49: Fall Mission Feeding

Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh

Jennifer Greenberg

Randy: I'm Randy Robison. Sheila Walsh is with me. We are glad to have you with us today. We're going to be talking about something that is tough. But you know what? It is very necessary. It is necessary not just in culture but within the church.

Would you welcome someone who has bravely come forward to discuss this subject, Jennifer Greenberg?

Jennifer: Thank you.

Randy: Glad to have you.

Sheila: Welcome.

Randy: You put this into a book called *Not Forsaken*, which given the context is a beautiful title, but we'll get into that. I've got to tell you though, I started reading this book, I got angry as a Christian, as a father of daughters, just as a human being I got angry. Tell people a little bit of your background so we can understand what you've been through.

Jennifer: Absolutely. Well, I grew up in a family that was Christian. We went to church. We read the Bible daily. We prayed together. But we didn't live in the way that a Christian family should. So there was a strange dichotomy for me. On the one hand I would go to church on Sunday and I would read about God's love and how he's a loving

father, and his mercy and his compassion and forgiveness. And then I'd go home and my father, my biological father was violent and perverse and he was unforgiving, unmerciful and unkind. So there was a stark contrast between what I was hearing about at church and reading about in the Bible and what I was seeing lived out in my family's life. So it was very confusing.

Sheila: Do you remember how young you were when things started to happen that would not be normal in any loving Christian home?

Jennifer: My earliest memories of abuse date back to when I was about two years old. At first I had these memories and I thought that can't possibly be real. I can't possibly remember something from that far back. But then I described the sandals I was wearing, the pattern of the blanket on the bed. And my mom said, "No this is real. Those are the shoes you wore when you were two years old." This is the blanket on our master bedroom. She corroborated my memories. So that to me was very shocking.

Randy: You write that your father would go from reading apologetics into Christianity to physically hurting you.

Jennifer: Yes. There was one weekend, and I was in a living room playing with my dolls and I remember my dad telling me to be quiet because he was trying to read his book. So I went back to playing and he went back to reading. And I thought that I was being quiet but you know I was probably 10-11 years old. Before I knew it, he had grabbed me from behind and he jerked me around and he just started hitting me. And he wouldn't stop hitting me. I started screaming. I remember thinking, it's going to be okay. He is just going to spank me a couple of times and then he'll be done and I'll go back to playing but he just wouldn't stop.

Finally, my mom ran in and she yelled at him and she said, "What are you doing?" And he dropped me and I fell on the floor and I ran into my bedroom. I huddled against my closet door and I remember just waiting for someone to come and check on me. For

someone to come and put ice on these welts. I remember looking at my arm and matching my fingers up to the bruises and thinking, this is how big my dad's hands are.

Sheila: But no one came?

Jennifer: No one came. And so for me, it was kind of a double betrayal because in addition to having my dad attack me so violently no one did anything.

Randy: I would like to let people know that it stopped at a few physical things, but it didn't.

Jennifer: Yes. So there was all manner of abuse. There was psychological abuse. There were death threats. There was sexual abuse. I still remember being, probably around the same time and through my teen years, I would sign into my computer to write a book report or a history report or whatever and I would find pornography saved on my desktop on our computer. A couple of times I would catch him watching me find this.

Sheila: So your father loaded pornography onto your computer? I just don't even have words for that. Was there ever a conversation in the home about this is not normal, this is not good? Were you ever able to talk to your mom?

Jennifer: I tried to, but I think one thing that you have to understand, particularly child abuse, is children don't have the vocabulary. So I'm not going to -- a child is not going to come to you and say, "I'm being sexually abused." They don't know what sex is. They don't know what abuse is. So the way I would describe my dad's issues is, "Why does my dad treat me differently?" Or "Why does my dad have anger issues?" And part of that I think, was also a tactic that my dad used. He would call his violence "anger." So when I tried to tell maybe a pastor or a friend that my dad was violent, I would say, "anger" and so that didn't translate to them and they didn't understand.

Sheila: One of the things I found fascinating, Jennifer, in reading your book is that even

with such a disturbed home life you have this incredible understanding of the father love of God even at an early age. How do you explain that?

Jennifer: I really just have to credit it to God. I think that it is the Holy Spirit at work in my heart from a very, very young age. I do not remember a day that I did not love Jesus, that I did not believe, that God was active in my life. Some of my earliest memories are of praying to God, even before I could read the Bible. And telling God, "I'm not old enough to study your word yet but I want to have a relationship with you. So when I'm playing with my toys or I'm talking to myself I'm going to be talking to you." So I just kind of grew up talking to God. We had this ongoing conversation throughout my life. And really, I feel that that protected me through a lot. I think God providentially provided for me. He was my shepherd through the valley of the shadow of death.

Randy: There was another incident, we don't have to go into detail, but basically, a pastor did not come to your defense and actually made some comments that were hugely inappropriate. Between that and the Jekyll and Hyde kind of thing at home, what kept you from just sprinting away from the church as fast as possible?

Jennifer: I think in my mind I differentiated between the sin of individuals and the church as an institution.

Randy: At a young age? That's actually quite amazing.

Jennifer: I never blamed the church of God. In fact, I think on possibly a subconscious level, I realized these people were wolves. They are not of God. They are not of the "true church." That's one thing that I think my -- the churches that I was in did well. We did, we talked about the visible church, the people you can see, and then there is the true church who are not hypocrites. They are genuine; they have the Holy Spirit in their lives, in their hearts. So I was able to, even though I prayed so hard that my dad would change and for a long time I did, I thought that he was a Christian who just had some severe sin problems but still I differentiated his sin from anything resembling Christ.

Sheila: As you grew up, Jennifer, how did you -- did you leave home at a certain age? How did you get away and begin to build your own life?

Jennifer: Even from a young age I kept thinking, I need to just make it to 18; right? I need to make it to an age where I can go to college, I can get a job, I can get an apartment and get out of here. When I turned -- when I was about 15 I overheard my dad talking to my mom and he was telling her what a beautiful figure he thought I was developing. And something kind of just broke in my heart and I realized, because before I understood it with a child's mind but now as a teenager I understood that my dad was a sexual predator... and that I was his prey.

I decided that I wanted to die. I decided that death would be preferable to life. And made preparations and I got ready and I sat down on my bed and I was ready to take my own life. I told God, I can't live like this any longer. I told God, I want you to take me to be with you in heaven. But I need a sign from you that you're not going to abandon me. That you love me. That you're going to take care of me, that you've got this.

So often when we pray we hear silence in response. You can pray really, really hard and sometimes all you've got is the Bible and you've just have to rely on the Bible. But that day something truly special happened and one thing that I really would like to say to people who are in the audience, if you struggle with depression, if you struggle with suicidal thoughts, if you're an abuse survivor, these words are for you too because they're straight out of scripture. And when I was in despair, ready to die, I heard the voice of God fill my heart. He said, "I will never leave you or forsake you."

Sheila: What a promise! What a promise! Yeah!

Randy: What did that do for you in that moment?

Jennifer: I went from tears of sorrow and despair to tears of joy and relief because I

knew that I had a dad; I had a father who was good, and he was faithful, and who loved me, and who would never abandon me.

Sheila: Yeah, wow!

Jennifer: I decided to live because of that.

Randy: As you got beyond that, I know you went to college, you eventually met a man that you're now married to.

Jennifer: Yes! Jason, my husband.

Randy: At some point in there you started realizing, you know what? That was not the way things are supposed to be at home.

Jennifer: Yes. It was actually being married to Jason and living with a godly man that helped me look back at my childhood and see this stark contrast. Because here I had a husband who was interested in my hobbies, he wanted to know my ideas, he wanted to further my career. He consulted me before he made decisions for our family. And to me, that was like wow! This is new. This is great! Love is awesome!

Sheila: Wasn't it hard for you because part of your book, it kind of amazes me, it's like this special protection that God has had over you since you were very little. Because I would have thought getting married would have been hard. It would have been hard to trust a man that he would take care of you.

Jennifer: Yeah. And I think that comes back to a differentiation I made in my mind. My dad's sins are his sins. It's not the sins of the male gender. It is not the sins of all fathers. It is not the sins of all spiritual leaders. These are his sins. That's his sin over here. I have my sin and my sins are mine, his are over there.

And so thankfully, I think God, I did. I still to this day have difficulty trusting people. I have difficulty letting people get too close to me because I'm always afraid that those relationships are going to be damaged or I'll get to know someone too well and realize that...

Randy: What about your father? What did you have to do with him literally or emotionally or spiritually to be able to have any kind of peace?

Sheila: Because you use an interesting phrase that Randy and I were talking about earlier, "boundary forgiveness." Explain the difference between that and the other kind of forgiveness.

Jennifer: Yes. So "boundary forgiveness" is when we're dealing with someone who is unrepentant. Someone who is living in their sin, maybe they say they're sorry but they're not acting like they're sorry.

Sheila: There is no fruit of it.

Jennifer: You don't see the change in their life, at least not over the long-term. They might behave "nice" for a week or so but then they fall back. So boundary forgiveness is going to be, well, having boundaries. Saying I will meet with you in this context but it is going to be with my husband or maybe you can't be around my kids alone. So you're very careful about the situation where you meet that person.

Or it could just be I'm sorry, every time I'm around you, I feel like going to have a panic attack. I'm depressed for a week after. I'm at a place right now in my life where I have three little girls. So I need that inner peace. I need to be a happy and supportive mother for them. I need to be an emotionally calm and emotionally present wife for my husband.

So I got to a place where it wasn't healthy for me to be around my abuser. So I had to tell him. No contact. And Jason was actually helpful in that. He said, "You cannot call her.

You cannot send her cards."

He would send me these creepy birthday cards with no return address and just a Bible verse or something inside about how I need to forgive him. Of course, that just reopens because in our home, when I was a child, forgiveness was basically a code word for don't say anything. Don't tell. Forget. Pretend you're okay. Which is not biblical. Not at all.

Randy: How would you define forgiveness?

Jennifer: Like we said. There are two different kinds of forgiveness. There is the boundary and there is the reconciliatory. Occasionally, you are blessed. You may have someone in your life who is truly repentant and you see the fruit of the spirit in their life and you're able to work with them. It's not going to be an overnight thing. It's not going to be like... your emotions are not like light switches in your head that you can just turn off and on. You have to process your grief. You have to process your anger. And that's another thing, being angry when someone does something that is evil, that's actually good.

Sheila: That's appropriate.

Jennifer: God is angry with the wicked every day the Bible tells us. So on the one hand we don't want to wallow in our anger and be trapped and drown in it forever because it can, it can become caustic, it can damage you emotionally and spiritually, and just keep you from being a happy person.

But at the same time you need to process that anger and you need to express it in healthy ways. Once you process it, once you go through that phase of grief, you can come to a place where you can say, "You know what God? Whether this person is repentant or not, you're in control. You've got this."

I had to come to a place where I told Jesus you took my sins to the cross so I trust you to

carry my anger now because I can't do it anymore. I'm exhausted. I'm tired. I need to be happy. I need to be free. And so I did. I trusted God to be angry for me. But again, it was a long road.

Randy: I think it is important that people understand that it is a process. It's not some magical snap your fingers overnight thing where everything is suddenly right. It takes a while.

Jennifer: And trust is so difficult to rebuild.

Sheila: You also talk in your book about the fact that Jesus himself went through abuse. And so there's a great compassion and empathy there.

And one of the things that as you probably know is very, very important to us here at *LIFE* is to have the eyes of Christ for those who are struggling and those who are suffering. Both Randy and I have been to Angola and seen some children and some moms who are desperately crying out for help. And the great news is that you and I can do something about it. Would you watch this?

Open Captions:

>> You have kept track of my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book.

Randy: In this hut right here, right now they're mourning the loss of a seven-year old girl. When you look around, you understand how desperate the situation is because some of these children we've seen around this village are showing some of the early signs of malnutrition, the bloated stomachs, the reddening hair.

We're so far from the clinic and from anyplace where they can get help that if a child

does get sick, they could be gone within a day, maybe two. That's how desperate the situation is here. Death comes quickly.

Announcer: Just as a brokenhearted mother sits with her precious child, God marks every groan of sorrow and pain. No matter how much anguish and heartache a mother is going through now, it doesn't go unnoticed by God.

Randy: I know God hears them. He hears them and you know what? He sent us and he sends you to answer that cry. This doesn't have to be a place of mourning. It can be a place where the suffering is alleviated.

Will you answer the cry of these children? Will you stand with us as we give them life?

End of video

In the studio:

Randy: It is amazing -- it is disturbing to see how quickly death can come upon a child, but it is a process to get there. It's a process of not having food, not having the right kinds of nutrition. It wears over a fairly short period of time but it does wear children down to where if some kind of illness happens, some kind of sickness comes on then that's when death comes quickly.

But we can intervene because this is not the type of thing that should happen anywhere. And it really, it just crushes our spirits and our hearts when we see those mothers holding their children, fearing for their life because they know that they've lost another child.

Sheila, I look at that sometimes and I think, I don't know how these women bear it!

Sheila: I know because they are just -- the reality is they are moms like you and me. So often, we think, well, they've gone through that before so it's different. It is not different!

There is never a time when a mother gets used to burying a child.

Sometimes you watch these things on television, and it is like a million miles away. Well, I can get back on a plane and I can be back there in 24 hours and sit with these moms because this is happening right now. There is such an urgent need. Not for a new iPhone -- for a simple bowl of food. That's all they're asking for. And so many of these moms are women of faith! They are praying and crying out to God saying, "Please, will you send somebody to hear my prayer?"

You know what? We're it. We've heard their cries and we want to respond. And we want you to help. Randy, it is very doable. It is not like it takes a ton of money. If we all do something, we can change this.

Randy: That's the key. A lot of people will say to us, and it is a good thing to say that I'll just pray that God will provide for all those children that you want to help. But I kind of want to go, he is providing because he gave us you. We need to do this together. This is the body of Christ, not just one organization or one individual. When we come together it makes a huge, huge impact.

Just to give you an idea, \$30 will feed three children for three months. Now you're going that doesn't work out. Well, not in our country, it doesn't work out but it works because we have a process in place to bring the food into these countries, process it so that it has the right kind of nutrition, and then take it to these villages. And the villages change according to the need; it's not the same children every single month for years and years on end. It is a developmental process.

Bottom line is you can do something now. \$50 will take care of five children; \$100, 10 children; \$1,000 -- 100 children! Whatever you can do, go to the phone, go online because together we can give life to these children. I hope you'll do it today. I hope you'll do it right now.

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

On the mission field:

James: Betty, you look at this long line and boy, it goes all the way back to the big four-wheel-drive truck. You started praying years ago that God would make the line to feed the children longer than the line to be fed. I think God's answered your prayer.

Betty: He has, James. At the same time, the line gets longer so we need to help our line to reach them, continue to grow and you to reach out more because I know you're blessed as you see these children being fed here. Let's don't let it stop. Let's keep soup in the barrel so they can come and line up and get fed.

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: Thank you so much. If the phone's busy, keep trying. We're going to change the world in Jesus' name.

I want to thank you so much, Jennifer. Your book is called *Not Forsaken*. What a message to anyone who has ever struggled with any kind of abuse. So thank you for being our guest. We pray God's blessing on this book and on your story.

Jennifer: Thank you so much for having me.

Sheila: We've loved it!

Randy: Would y'all thank Jennifer for being here? And thank you for watching. Appreciate you watching *LIFE Today*. Join us again every day.