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Week 52: Fall Mission Feeding, last week

James and Betty Robison

Ashley Abercrombie

James: It's a joy! It's really a joy to come into your home or wherever you're watching. I'm James Robison. My wife Betty and I welcome you to *LIFE Today*.

We have got an incredibly gifted writer/communicator, Ashley Abercrombie. She has written a book called *The Rise of the Truth...*

By the way, let me just mention this while we're talking about truth. This is not my attempt of a remake of Michael Jackson. I had surgery for carpal tunnel, which I never dreamed that me talking on the phone or using my hands that way could cause that. But it did and I've had the surgery and doing well. This should be off within a week, but you'll have to put up with it this week.

But Ashley, we're really, really glad to have you here. She is part of a staff at Liberty Church in the Manhattan area. Her husband there is one of the pastors at the church that have just really been blessed of the Lord. And they just want people to find liberty. She has been really... she has risen to truth teller. She says that she was taught to tell the truth but actually began to live something other than truth. This is really an amazing story. She is just a really, I think, a gift from God to help all of us understand the importance of not only telling the truth but the truth that gives us liberty, that sets us free.

Would you welcome Ashley to *LIFE Today*? We're really glad to have you.

Ashley: It's such an honor to be here with you guys. Thank you so much for having me.

James: Thank you. How is life up there in the big city? Now just tell me the truth.

Ashley: I will tell you the truth, it is busy. I think that could be because I have a two-year old and a five-year old so I can't tell if it is the city or if it the toddler year -- I'm not sure yet.

James: Well, a two-year old and a five-year old would be a challenge.

Ashley: And two boys on top that. Yes! Pray for me!

James: I want you, because we want to cover some ground because it seems to me very obvious that God has given you a gift, and you're enjoying going out speaking and sharing. If someone wanted you, after hearing you here on *LIFE Today* and reading the book or hearing about it, how would they find out how to communicate with you and invite you to their area? Where would they go?

Ashley: Thank you for asking. Well, I have a website that's AshAbercrombie.org and on there you can watch me speak, you can invite me to speak, and check out all my content. My You Version Bible studies, different things like that on that website.

James: Haven't a lot of people done that Bible study? Several 100,000?

Ashley: Yes! It's almost 300,000 now. I can't even believe it! It makes no sense.

James: Were you just a gifted social person with the social media? Are you amazed at how this just took off?

Ashley: I'm definitely amazed. At the time when I wrote that Bible study it was not even -- I wasn't doing that great on social, in terms of how to work it and how do you respond to people? What do you do? So it really was just a sweet gift from God. I've

been writing my whole life so that was just a sweet kiss from heaven, and I think a great encouragement from God that I had something to say.

James: All right, I want you to tell us what the implications are here. Just tell us a little bit about your journey because you've written about it and it's captivating. But tell our viewers something about your own journey, Ashley.

Ashley: Yes, I'd love to. Well, I was raised in the south, in North Carolina and I loved it. There's so much to love about being raised in a small town and all the community elements. We were raised to tell the truth. We were raised to be truth tellers. You are honest or you're in trouble. So for me, I really learned that that was telling the truth about other people. And so I had to come to a fundamental understanding that actually the Lord wanted me to be honest about my own life and about my own journey and about my own struggles.

So as much as I loved growing up in that small town, I feel like I also learned to wear a mask because everybody knew me but nobody really knew me at all. I knew how to mask my pain and I knew how to put it on and act right and say all the right things and do all the right things but on the same time on the inside feeling very broken and feeling very lost and feeling very alone.

And even though I was in church at a very young age, I walked away as a teenager. And when I went off to my college years I think I just got so exhausted with pretending and performing and trying to keep that mask up and trying to hold it all together so I began to use drugs, I began to abuse alcohol. And then in my freshman year of college developed an eating disorder called bulimia. And part of that was me grasping for control. I wanted something to control in my life. And also, because I was unable to have reciprocal relationships because I wore a mask so often, I didn't have an outlet for my pain. So bulimia really gave me that self-harm as one way that I learned to cope with life. It came to a head...

James: Let me ask you this question. You're talking about being in an area where you learned to mask it. Do you think that in a lot of church settings and religious settings that there is quite a bit of that going on? To where people put on a facade, let's say of what they think people expect or what they should look like or how they should behave? Do you think there's quite a bit of pretense?

Ashley: I do. I think sometimes it is unintentional because I think our relationship with God very often reveals our relationship with others. So if we struggle with grace, to receive God's grace we'll struggle to give it to ourselves which means we'll struggle to give it to others. And I think the same is true with image.

So for so long I thought God was just sitting up there waiting for me to fail. That he's this angry person that just wants me to get it together or he's just very aloof. Like God created the heavens and the earth but why does he care about my little life?

So I think it was quite a journey for me to understand two things and one is that God is close. And that he is Emmanuel God; God with us. That he is in our pain. That he is not absent in our pain, he is very present in our pain. He is close to the brokenhearted.

The other thing is learning that I'm loved even though I'm broken. I think that's a powerful fundamental understanding. When you learn that you're broken, every person is not exempt from character flaws or issues or problems or pain. Life happens to us all. I think when we understand that we can come to God and come to others knowing that I'm broken, and you're broken but here we are. This great God of grace who loves us.

James: So you're just an overflow right now in this little spiel here of openness and honesty, which is the only way you escape from the facade or the pretense or living as an actor or actress.

Betty, when you came forward out of the choir, Betty was known as...

Betty: Well, excuse me. I can relate to a lot of that you're talking about because I grew up in the church. I came to understand what's expected of me more than what I felt within my own heart and my relationship with God. And so I tried to do those things that would please everybody. But yet like you, I felt empty inside. So that can grab the good person, the one that's trying to be good and kind and loving but yet, there is something missing there.

James: So you've been going through this facade. Now then you've escaped the facade with all the wrong actions. You've gotten into drinking and drugs and all this and so you've just really made a mess.

Ashley: Yep. But it gets worse.

James: Okay. Let's hear it. I want to hear it. Take us on the whole truth matter here. I want to hear it.

Ashley: Well, sophomore year of my college experience I was a resident assistant in our dorm and we were having a party in my room. I remember awaking up to an unwanted sexual assault. I think that was one of the most difficult times of my entire life. However, I had so learned to pretend and to perform and to put a mask on and carry on with life because also I thought that's how you coped with life. I didn't know you could actually deal with hard things or face your fears or face pain. I didn't know how to do that yet. I woke up the next day and went to work as if nothing had happened to me and just carried on with life. I didn't talk about the sexual assault for several years after that.

And then went on in my college experience and I decided to move across the country because I thought, I'll just run. Let's get away from everything.

James: How did you deal with the pain of that experience? Did you continue with things to escape? In other words, that didn't get better?

Ashley: I did. I calmed down on drinking and drugs because I didn't like being out of control anymore. I was afraid of what would happen to me when I was out of control. You know rape is the most under-reported crime in America, especially on college campuses. One in five reported cases of rape happen on college campuses. So this is a really big deal and happens to so many women. I never reported my case and there's millions of women who are just like me who never did that.

James: That's sad! It's even sad that it would happen. It is even sad that anyone would find joy out of forcing themselves on somebody else and call that something meaningful. I can't comprehend it. A lot of things maybe we can comprehend, some issues and challenges. How in the world...

I never understood and I don't even to this day understand how anybody gets joy out of hurting somebody, causing them difficulty. Even in the hazing that goes on in schools, why would that be fun to make someone miserable? I don't understand that. I don't think I have to understand it. I don't even think it is worthy of attempting to understand.

But how this rape continues, what satisfaction is there? It is a horrible thought and it breaks my heart, the reality of it. And then you were vulnerable because of where you put your life.

Ashley: Exactly! And I think we're all -- it comes back to brokenness -- we're all very broken. As much as I made difficult choices, I can't imagine being a person who has so dehumanized themselves and others that something like an unwanted sexual assault would be their choice. That just shows you the deep level of brokenness and pain that people are in. I've come to a journey in my healing where I can understand that the prey also needs as much help as the predator.

But I went on through my college experience and then decided to move, to run away, get away from my life. I thought, great! I can start over again. Nobody knows me. They don't have expectations of me. Then one week before I was about to move across the country, I

found out I was pregnant. I didn't think about it, I just went into fix-it mode. I went into like what are we going to do? I made an appointment at an abortion clinic and went the next morning and had an abortion.

And another thing that I just was like, I never want to talk about this again. I never want to talk about it. It was the first time in my life that I thought, if I don't wake up tomorrow, God, that would be my preference. And I moved across the country.

For the first couple of months it was better because I felt like I don't know anyone, nobody knows me. I can kind of relax, maybe find a little freedom. And then I found out that everywhere you go there you are. You actually can't escape yourself and the pain follows you. So I had to really start looking in the closet of my life and acknowledging that there were real things that I didn't know how to deal with and I'd never had the tools to deal with and I had to find them, had to figure that out.

I met these awesome believers on my job, and they were the first Christians I had ever met who were so non-judgmental. They would come out with me for coffee, they would ask me to dinner; eventually, I was like, "Can I come to church with you?" I have never met believers this kind to a crazy person like me. And so they were wonderful. I ended up going to their church and it was the start of my faith community.

I heard a woman stand up in church and preach. Not only did she preach but she told her story of sexual brokenness and she talked about the abuse in her life. And for the first time in my life I was like [gasps] -- we talk about this? And also, God cares about this? And there is an intersection of my pain and my faith? And it was the first time that I just allowed myself to accept God and to allow him back into my life. And just say, God, you know what? This is where I am. I can't fix it anymore. I'm exhausted. I'm tired of pretending. I'm coming at you as I am. Please make something of my life.

And then began the recovery process of therapy, support groups, serving, all the different things that you do to work the steps. So now I have 16 years of sobriety under my belt

which I'm very, very proud of. And met my husband through that faith community. We have two little boys. Moved to Manhattan where it's wild and crazy. Not that L.A. wasn't, it's just a different wild. And so God's done so much. I don't mean to shrink that down as if that wasn't a very hard journey, and as if it isn't still painful sometimes but I think that's the power of truth telling is that it never ends.

Truth telling is strong because we have to take our mask off all the time. Like we never lose that temptation to value image over integrity. That's always going to be a temptation for me. It would be a temptation for me to walk in pride and to not reveal myself as God created me and not to reveal what I'm going through. But I have to take that courageous step to do that regularly. I think it is important for us to teach people how to do that.

James: You've told your story beautifully here. You've obviously say you've been writing. You probably never knew it could reach this place and this point but it is. When you go out and you share your story, and like you said, now it's nearly 300,000 that have done your Bible study that you put on line, which that's amazing!

Ashley: It's amazing! It's crazy!

James: That's the same thing as reading 300,000 copies of a book. I pray this goes up hundreds of thousands and even way past that. What are you seeing happen in the people following you on your journey and they relate to what you're saying? What are you watching happening that encourages you?

Ashley: I think one of the most powerful things I see happen is that we can normalize other people's experience. So I think so often we think about faith in such simple terms, and sometimes that's great, but sometimes we're just thinking about victory outcomes or all these different narratives and we lose sort of the process that it actually takes to live this radical open honest faith.

And so I think when people journey with me in my writing not only can they not only

normalize their human experience, like you're not alone in your stuff. You're not alone in your issues, your problems, and your pain but also, it is a process to becoming like God. God uses everything in our lives. He does not waste anything to teach us how to be like him, to teach us to walk in integrity, to teach us how to walk in wholeness -- like God uses it all. So I think that's a very valuable thing that I can offer readers and I'm proud of that.

James: I believe that. You have the glow and glory of God and His grace. It's radiant in you. You communicate it well.

Don't you think she communicates her story well? And don't you appreciate Ashley?

You know, you'll ask God about things all your life that you don't understand or comprehend. Most people say if you lose a child that it is as perhaps as great a challenge as a person can endure on this earth. Betty and I lost a child, our baby girl, as the mother of teenagers, when we lost her. And many, many times I've said, God, how did a girl that believe and have such faith, unshakeable faith, how is it that she didn't get well when she trusted so totally, and we all did, and yet, she's gone? And God, I just -- my heart is broken. Here's the -- you don't get a satisfactory answer. In this lifetime, you don't ever get the pat answer.

But here's what Betty and I experienced. By the way, many of you who prayed for us and prayed for others in their challenged times, you have no idea the healing power of those prayers, it is miraculous. What God did is he took this couple, and I know I felt him holding me many times, and so I'll ask him, "God, why did we go through that?"

And it was like he would say, "I know how broken your heart is. I'm holding you your broken heart. I want my presence to heal the broken heart with the comfort my presence offers. And James, do you realize that I want to hold every broken heart, every broken life, everyone that doesn't understand?" And it's like he said, "Would you help others understand that as surely as I hold you and Betty, and your family, in arms of love and

comfort, I want to hold everyone."

And Ashley, don't you wish everybody would understand that? How much he wants to hold them.

Ashley: Yes!

James: And if our pain, and you being able to see that somehow we've not just endured or survived, but we've actually found a peace that passes understanding; not satisfactory answers to every question. But if we can be a blessing and an inspiration to you then that means so very much.

Ashley, I think that's what you're seeking to do. The book is great! It is in the bookstores. Again, would you just tell the Lord thank you, and Ashley, for sharing this story not only here but as she travels?

There's her website again. You can see if you want to contact her and say, "Would you come share in our area?" I believe she would really bless you.

Ashley, I told you and others that are our guests that people will say on our program that we believe our viewers are the most Christ-like loving people in the world. All of our mission workers, they say that, that you are because you make it possible for them to do what seems to be impossible and that's to demonstrate the love of God not just in word but in action. I want you to just listen to God when you listen to the heart cry of a love-filled mother. When you hear the challenge, see if you don't hear, I'm the answer. God's answer through me. 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: Lord, I want to be an answer. I want to see people's prayers answered. I've said to you many times, I believe if we want our prayers answered we should seek to be an

answer to someone else's prayers. God talks in Isaiah 58 about touching the hungry and those that are in need, and that he'll answer us quickly. He says we'll become a well-watered garden. It is as though when we release life, we receive an expression of life that we've just poured out on someone else.

Betty, what do you want our viewers to hear? Here we are in the very last week of mission feeding and, to be honest with you, we need a miracle, what I would often call a year-end gift where people say, you know what? I want to make the greatest gift I've ever made. When I tell you we've got the sources and places to place it to be a miracle for people, I'm not exaggerating.

Betty, what do you want our viewers to hear and to feel as they pray about meeting needs like we just saw and witnessed?

Betty: As I watched and listened to that mother, her heart's cry, she was calling out to God, God, please spare this baby that is now in my arms. I've lost one. I don't want to lose this one too.

She is very vulnerable to what God wants to do in her life and she is asking for help. We can be a part of that help. We can be a part of that hope by reaching out and getting food to these precious little ones that haven't had a chance to live life -- and for these mothers that so love their children that they would give their own life for them. Please join with us.

James: Would you please just go and get a bankcard or get a check? If you get a bankcard use it like a check. But I want to ask you to do this. I want you to go online or dial the phone number there that's a prayer line. I want you to turn that prayer line into an answered prayer line. A miracle line -- literally a life line! And would you call and say, I'm going to give hope and life for the next months to at least ten children or five children or three children, whatever you can do because we can feed ten children for the next several months for \$100; we can feed five for \$50, and three for 30.

Now \$30 is not a small gift to the three children who will receive health and nutrition and perhaps life. But if you could help ten would you please? If you could make the greatest gift you ever made, make a great year-end gift. Please do it.

Father, direct everyone to do what you want them to do and you'll enable them to do it; in Jesus' name.

A \$1,000 gift to feed 100 children; there's a level at which I think every one of you watching can participate; would you? We have some beautiful gifts to send you to say thank you. And so we're asking you right now, go get your card or get your check. You make a check, make it to *LIFE* but call the number and tell us what you're mailing. We need to know. We've got to tell the missionaries, yes, we have the resources! And they totally depend upon us. In a sense, they depend upon you.

So would you make the gift right now please? Or call the number, make the gift. If you put it in the mail, call us and tell us what you're mailing. Thank you so much!

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."

This is the last week! Please call, write, or make your gift online.

End of video

In the studio:

James: You're going to be blessed by Anthony Evan's incredible gift, his voice and the message and the songs that he sings. During these cooler months, you're going to enjoy a warm drink in the "Faith" cup or the "Joy" cup.

And then of course, we have the "In the Shepherd's Arms," the beautiful bronze for those of you who can make a \$1,000 or more. And I hope you will.

If you'd like to have Ashley's book, *Rise of the Truth Teller*, you say, would you send it to us? We're going to help you be an answer to somebody's prayer, James. Would you please send us the book? I think you could help us or somebody we know. We'll be glad to.

Again, would you join me and Betty in saying thanks to Ashley for blessing us?

Ashley, we really appreciate you. I pray God opens a lot of doors and just continues to bless you and those two boys and your husband. God bless you!

Thank you so much for watching. Thank you. Remember, last week -- mission feeding! We really do need to hear from you. Thank you so much!