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Week 17: Spring Mission Feeding

James and Betty Robison

Claire Culwell

BETTY: Welcome to *LIFE Today*. Thank you so much for joining us; I'm Betty and this is James.

JAMES: And I'm so glad. We told our folks the last few times that we've been married now a pretty good while.

BETTY: Fifty-eight!

JAMES: Fifty-eight years and we went together for four years, so 62 years in love. And I did fall in love before she did. It took a while to really... I don't know what I had to do; enlighten you? But anyway I'm glad we've been together. But since we've been together 62 years, the other day I was talking about we're 77. But you know really, we went together four years so that means we're 81. She said, "We weren't even alive!" She said, "You add those years to our anniversary, not to our age!" So I didn't do it right.

I tell you what, we've got a guest today. You talk about having something in common. Both of us were taken to the doctor to be aborted, our guest, Claire--Claire Culwell. Here we are. You're going to see her in just a minute. She was aborted but she is here. She was aborted with her sister who is not here.

I want you to welcome Claire Culwell to *LIFE Today* and the new book is just now out, *Survivor: An abortion survivor's surprising story of choosing forgiveness and finding redemption*. I wish we had the studio full which we will again be having an audience, I feel like,

in the near future. They would be cheering because they cheer life.

But you and I both were taken to be aborted and the doctor refused. And my mother took me home and gave birth to me and then put an ad in the paper. And I went into adoptive care, except she came when I was five and took me away from that. So my life really was kind of jumbled around. With you, you were adopted. Did you even know you were adopted very young? That you were adopted into this family you were in?

CLAIRE: I did. Thank you so much for having me, by the way. But I did. I knew I was adopted my entire life. It was an incredibly positive thing. I knew that I was wanted, I was chosen, I was loved. And so I knew that there was a possibility of meeting my birth mother one day. But I never imagined that I would find out that I had survived something that was meant to take my life.

JAMES: Did she tell you that?

CLAIRE: She did.

JAMES: In other words, that's how you actually found out. Did your adoptive parents not know?

CLAIRE: They didn't. So my adoption papers were just very basic. I knew that I had a 13-year-old birth mother but we didn't know any of the back story. What we knew is that I had a lot of physical complications growing up. I was born with club feet, a dislocated hip, and have had some pain complications and autoimmune type responses. And we didn't know why.

And so I decided I wanted to meet my birth mother to find out why. But also, just to thank her because I knew she had given me my life and my family and I was so, so grateful to her.

JAMES: And you knew nothing about what had actually happened. You wanted to see if you could understand some of the physical complications or challenges and so you found her. I'm very interested because I know you tell about it in detail. Tell me about that exchange. Tell me

about that conversation.

CLAIRE: So my birth mother broke down into tears when I gave her a ring and a necklace. I had thanked her in a card for giving me my life. When she read the words that I wrote in that card, "Thank you for choosing life for me" her happy tears from receiving this ring and necklace quickly changed. I got to tell you, I have never seen such a deep pain in someone's eyes before. It is indescribable to me today. But the pain I saw in her eyes that day changed my life. And actually changed my response to my birth mother.

She said, "Claire, I was 13. I didn't know what to do. The adults in my life told me that having an abortion was the best thing for me." In fact, they told her it was her only option. And so she had a D&E dismemberment abortion around 20 weeks, which is a late term abortion. And they told her what every single girl finds out today, every woman that their life would go back to normal. That's what they tell them will happen. But it didn't. Her life didn't go back to normal.

She said, "Your life is a miracle! I went to Kansas. I tried to have a second abortion. They turned me away. But you're here. I placed you for adoption. That's the greatest choice I've ever made because your parents are incredible."

And they really are. I owe my response to my birth mother, my forgiveness for my birth mother to how my parents raised me on the love and the grace and the forgiveness of Christ. But the pain in her eyes that day was indescribable. She said no one spoke up for her. No one fought for her. No one told her that she could do it; that she was worth it; that she was supported. All of the things that she wanted to hear in that abortion clinic room that day, no one said those things to her.

So she walked out of an abortion clinic twice and she walked out of the hospital after delivering me alone when the adults in her life just dropped her off to do this on her own at 14 years old, by now. She went home to pretend it never happened and then we're reunited 21 years later. So at 21, this is what I found out. I found out that I wasn't wanted. But not only that, that I was aborted. But that I had survived an abortion procedure that literally tore my twin's body apart

limb by limb.

And my life changed that day. I had a choice to make. My birth mother said she fully expected me to run out of the room that day and never speak to her again. But I saw her pain and I heard her words and I knew she deserved better. Not just me but that she deserved better than what had happened to us.

And so I chose to forgive her so that I could share our story across the country. So I asked her that day. I said, "I really think this could impact people. I really think that your story could be just such a redemptive story of what we can do for women when they find themselves in these situations." I expected her to say no, don't go tell this story. It was her deepest, darkest most painful secret. But she said yes. And she said yes that I could share it so that no other woman has to experience what we have because of abortion.

BETTY: No one knew when she went for the first abortion that she was carrying twins?

CLAIRE: They didn't. No. So it's not common procedure for an abortion to be performed using ultrasound technology. So if you don't have that ultrasound technology, which is the window to the womb, you can see what is happening, how would you know that there were two babies? So the abortion actually ripped the amniotic sac that I was in and so I was born ten weeks prematurely with all of these complications. But miraculously, the abortion instruments never touched my body.

JAMES: What is your mother's name?

CLAIRE: Tonya. Thank you for asking.

JAMES: Tonya, you have a...

BETTY: I have a niece named Tonya.

JAMES: Tonya, bless you, sweetheart. God not only loves you, he's loving through you. And he is showing people our hope; what they must see. Because the only real way to deal effectively with abortion is not to remove a bad law, which any bad law needs to be changed and done away with but you'll never stop abortion if you don't show everybody that every life is precious, every life has unlimited miraculous potential. And they deserve a chance. Goodness, your mother was 13 years old...

BETTY: She was just a child herself.

JAMES: But you put this so clearly out, that she was just a little child that was carrying you and your sister. And you lived and she wanted you to. She didn't get the encouragement she needed. I think we can understand why that encouragement might be tough. But boy, your story just shows... I just wish you could get it because the only thing that will stop it is you've got to see that in the womb of a mother is the most beautiful little creation of God. There is just no limit.

God, you're the only one that can change our hearts. People get so mad about "My body and my rights!" Lord, help them to always protect and use their body properly. You've given us guidance and safeguards and wisdom. God, don't let us execute a little innocent child because of someone's mistake or misdeed or failure. God heal our land, in Jesus' name.

Please hear this! All life is precious. Claire, don't you want everybody to understand what your mother went through? Tonya, I know you're really proud of Claire. She is going to give a lot of children life; like I've been told I've been able to help. What do you want the whole nation and the world to hear clearly with what you're sharing?

CLAIRE: Well, I think that for so long people have said that the unborn child is not a human being. I think the beauty of my story, which I believe that God wrote perfectly for such a time as this, I trust him in that and that is that when you look at my face, you're literally looking at my twin. So you're literally looking at that unborn baby.

I want people to believe and know the truth about what God says about life; that he created it in

his image with a purpose, with a plan and he, regardless of if you have experienced abortion or if you have been hurt by abortion the same things that he says about me are true, he says about every single one of you, and every single woman in this country, and my birth mother too. That they are loved, that they are wanted, they are chosen, that they are worthy, that they are children of the King.

He wants to make something good from our mess, from the evil that maybe has happened to us, injustice like what has happened to me, to my birth mother. But that God can do that. He is good and he wants to bring redemption from things that are hard in our life. So he will go into the pit with us. He will redeem things that are broken if we allow him.

So I just want to encourage people to not only know the truth and to speak the truth and to do something about what I believe is the greatest injustice of our time, abortion. Because if we can dehumanize and devalue the unborn human, we can dehumanize and devalue anyone. And I think we're seeing that in our country right now.

And so I do, I want people to know the truth and to benefit from the truth because we know that God wants that. But also, I want people to hear just the forgiveness and the redemption and the story. Because my story, the way that God has written it for me, even though there are these painful pieces and these hard things, he has brought good, he has been faithful and he has gone before me and I can trust in that. I can look back on my life and say his hand was on my life every step of the way.

So I would encourage anyone tuning in today to know that God wants to work in your life too. And you just have to say, okay, God. I'm ready. I'm ready to work on these ugly hurtful pieces of my heart and my life. And I want you to be a part of that. And he will make it new.

BETTY: You brought some little shoes with you. Will you tell us the story about that?

CLAIRE: I did! Yes, so when I found out that I had survived my birth mother's abortion, that I was a twin-less twin because of choice, someone asked me, "Claire, have you named your twin?"

Or does your birth mother know the sex of your twin?"

I said, "No." We know that we were probably in two separate sacs just because my body wasn't harmed. But we don't know. We'll never know until we get to heaven one day. And I believe that. I believe that every single person who has had an abortion or lost someone to abortion that we will reunite in heaven one day because Christ is taking care of them.

But I named my twin after my dad's only son, the only son that he would have had. And my dad is a junior, his dad was a senior and his son would have been the third. And I wrote, "I will speak up in honor of you, Warren Dale Culwell, III, aborted January 1988." And I made that promise. [Emotional]

In 2010, and wherever God's asked me to go to share this story I've gone. And I wrote that as a reminder because I am, well, my parents still laugh when I get on a stage or I talk about these things because I am one of the most introverted people you will probably meet. And for God to ask me to talk about the most controversial topic of our time, it took a lot of trusting on my part. But my twin, my birth mother, what we experienced, it's been worth it for me to get out of my comfort zone in order to be able to change lives and save lives.

JAMES: I can't hardly... You know when you have three children and they wore these little shoes, and one of those children is in heaven, left three beautiful teenagers here when she left. She now has grandchildren and they have little shoes. But as I was looking at these little shoes, I thought about our 11 grandchildren who had little shoes. And now this year there will be 11 great grandchildren in these shoes. I just know how precious they all are.

All the children we try to feed. We give away little shoes; we give Christmas shoes to children, and people use them as Christmas ornaments. I don't really think I could say much more. I just, if people want to help you do what you do, do you have a website they could go to?

CLAIRE: Yes, sir, I do. ClaireCulwell.com.

JAMES: Go there. Help Claire and her mom and all the little children. I don't think I'm doing too good, Betty with knowing that we're trying to get you to help us feed 350,000 children that we found that are hungry. And we're trying to feed them and take care of them and you help us do it. You help us so we'll be glad to send you Claire's book, along with the other gifts that we have for you.

I just want you to listen to the story and the journey I've had with the missionaries in Africa for three decades, for 30 years. We've been putting God's arms around precious little children, you've given them life. Just keep doing it. I'm sorry I can't not weep. Please watch.

On the mission field:

ISAK: There is a proverb that says: He who gives to the poor lends to the Lord. James, that has truly been the testimony of our partnership, your partnership with my dad; that started with my dad and has gone on for three decades now; has literally been a partnership that has been a legacy of love. A love that has been rooted and grounded in the heart of God inside of you, Betty, the friends of LIFE and inside each and every one of us here on the ground, in the mission field doing the work; a love and an empathy for the children of our continent, a desire to see those children reach their God-given potential through mission feeding. And we've been able to achieve that in so many lives--hundreds of thousands, millions of children's lives who have been saved, turned around and given opportunity.

But James, as you know, we are facing a crisis in many areas that is greater than we've ever faced here on the continent of Africa. In South Sudan we've seen raging floods, the worst floods in recorded history that have destroyed our malnutrition clinics. In Angola, as a result of continued drought we've got malnutrition clinics that are literally bursting at the seams, totally over full, two or three children on one bed, children on the floor. Mothers arriving every day. Many of those children are not leaving those clinics alive.

That is why we have to continue this legacy of love. We actually have to raise it to another level

because if we don't, those children we love so much are going to die because they don't have enough food.

Please James, help us! Help us to continue the legacy of love.

End of video

In the studio:

JAMES: You can't imagine the memories, Betty, that rush through our mind when we're watching those images. That little child that was so emaciated there, Betty, reminded me of when we were talking about the malnutrition clinics when we took a little squeeze bottle in Angola, and we were trying to squeeze it, with the rescue people and the nurses, the people were trying to say they didn't have any oxygen, just a little squeeze tube, and the little baby died. And then I watched you out in the entry area trying to comfort that mother and it was just horrible.

BETTY: It's a great devastation for these mothers. They're coming to these clinics because it is their last hope for their child that they love so much. And some of those children don't make it. But if they get there soon enough, they can help them and restore their little bodies, James. And it is so important that we continue those clinics.

JAMES: What we did there that's such a miracle, we immediately got them some breathing apparatuses, oxygen. We furnished that clinic, it's a malnutrition clinic. See we already were establishing the feeding all over Angola, saved millions of their children's lives. No question about it.

When I say that, it's you, you the viewers, because you're the ones that gave the food. But what I remember so much about that clinic is that we made it effective. And a few years later, one of the most famous people that we've ever known in the world, Lady Di, Princess Diana stands at that clinic and holds up the most beautiful, healthy little baby you've ever seen that the love of God through people like you restored and saved and got that child totally restored. And Princess Di said, "We've got to take care of the hungry of the world! We're got to help the suffering!" And

that went around the world. It did have an impact that we've got to notice others.

I don't think there are any people anywhere on this planet that demonstrate the love of God any more directly than you do. Because when you see people filled with God's love planting their lives in the midst of that suffering to lift them up into peace and comfort and life, and save their life, you give them the wherewithal. You put the oil in the lantern, the light that they are sharing and the love that they're pouring out.

We right now need your help. \$30, \$50, \$100 feeds three, five or ten children for the next months. Not total childcare! Lifesaving nutrition. We need every one of you watching to say if you could help us feed ten that's \$100, five is \$50, \$30 is three. There is a level you can come in. But I'm telling you, there is some people who can help us build, restore those malnutrition clinics; 16 of them right now have got to be restored or totally rebuilt. The average is over \$24,000. Somebody says, got it! I'd say probably not likely 16 of us can say that. But could hundreds of you say, I'll put \$1,000 toward it.

Father, just help everyone to do what you need them to do, in Jesus' name.

We've got some beautiful gifts to send you. You talk about "It is Well" Quiet Time Bundle, the most beautiful hymns, 31 prayers. And I want you to know this. If you'll help, we'll send you Dr. Jeffress's book devotions on heaven to say thank you. A beautiful portrait of Jesus, "No Greater Love." You're going to cherish these gifts. Why do we send them to you? Because we love you. We want to inspire you. We want you to know you are appreciated because you're sharing the greatest gift, God's love, his life through Christ. Thank you for doing it.

Go online, dial the number, use your bankcard like a check or make a check to LIFE but call us and tell us what you're sending. Thank you.

On the mission field:

Announcer: Across the continent of Africa, children are suffering facing severe malnutrition and even death. With food reserves gone and many areas experiencing severe famine, we urgently need to replenish supplies to keep feeding the 350,000 children who are counting on us.

Call now with your lifesaving gift of \$30, \$50, or \$100 to help feed and care for three, five or ten children for three full months. Also, please consider an extra gift to help immediately rebuild malnutrition clinics destroyed by record flooding in South Sudan. The urgent need is \$392,000 above our normal feeding budget and is critical to help save the lives of those who are suffering most.

With your gift of any amount we will send you "It is Well" Quiet Time Bundle featuring an instrumental music CD with 12 classic hymns and a 31-day prayer booklet to help renew your soul.

With your gift of \$100 or more, request the "No Greater Love" framed print. This portrait is a reminder of our Savior's love and the price that was paid for our salvation.

Finally with your gift of \$1,000 or more to help feed and care for 100 children be sure to request our inspiring bronze sculpture, "Divine Servant." Please call, write, or make your gift online today!

End of video

In the studio:

JAMES: Well, you just have to accept my thanks for helping. I told them I couldn't even talk anymore but Claire's really touched my heart. You see, those little shoes that I was holding up, would you hold them up over here again for me? Claire, these little shoes, gosh, when you've got 22 grandkids they're so precious, these little children. Every life is so precious for God to give his Son.

So anyway, I just want you to know, we sure love you. Please help us share God's love. A lot of

people are calling for prayer but help us feed these kids so we don't see these grown up children that were born lose their life because somebody didn't love them.

We're going to send you Claire's book if you'd like to have it. You help us feed these kids and do what God's given us an opportunity to give and just say, "Would you mind sending that book along with the other gifts please?" And we will.

Claire, Betty and I really want to thank you. Hold those shoes up for just a minute. I want everybody to see them. Precious little ones. God bless all of you. Let's save all the precious ones we can all over the world. That's what we've been doing together. I sure love you. Thank you for helping us share God's love. What a blessing you are.