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Week 18: Spring Mission Feeding

James and Betty Robison

Jonathan Pitts

JAMES: Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm James Robison. Betty, I've got a little break in my voice right now because this is going to be one of the most powerful programs you've ever sat through because we're talking to one of the greatest people at Tony Evans, and the Urban Renewal ever introduced us to. We're talking to Jonathan Pitts. He's got a book and it's called *My Wynter Season*. Spelled Wynter: W-y-n-t-e-r.

Boy, was it indeed a winter season but his wife was Wynter. He subheads: "Seeing God's faithfulness in the shadow of grief." Boy, he had it. Boy, it hit hard and it hadn't been long ago. Had his 15th wedding anniversary to his sweetheart, Wynter and they got it dancing together; beautiful pictures of that. He didn't know that about a month later she would be gone.

Betty and I lost our daughter when she was 40; mother of three beautiful children. And he lost his Wynter when she was 38, the mother of four beautiful girls. Jonathan is here with us. I just say to you, Tony Evans, thank you for the way you inspired Jonathan. He married a niece so y'all are family. But Tony, I love you, buddy. You've been through an awful lot. And not only have we had our arms around you non-stop but you know the Lord has. And what you've watched God do in Jonathan's life, you knew he had greatness of God all over him. You know it is a miracle.

Jonathan, I want to welcome you to *LIFE Today*. I'm sorry we don't have this studio packed with people that love the *Urban Alternative*, love Tony, love you. You are now in Franklin, Tennessee. What's the name of the church?

JONATHAN: Church of the City. It's good to be with you guys. I sense the Holy Spirit is here. That's all we need I guess.

JAMES: He is already. And the tears in your eyes, you know I said I had a little crack in my throat right now; we knew that this would be tough. But here's what you've got to hear. It's tough because we don't ever... You don't get over it in a sense of like it is gone and forgotten. You live with it. You don't have an instant healing where it is just like... No, it's kind of a process of continual healing. I know Jonathan is going to share some things with you.

But you've got to stay with us because you don't know when you might have a winter season. We love all of you and everybody that has a broken heart or had a winter season you need to hear what Jonathan has to say.

Jonathan, I pray for you there in Franklin. Steve Burgers' there. One of our great friends, his family. A lot of our friends are there. A lot of people we led to Christ to help build the expansion of Franklin, Tennessee. We love Tennessee. I want you to take us on a journey that you're hoping you can kind of capsule the reason you would even take the time to write this book. Because I feel like you never for one moment thought I'm going to hand you something that will break your heart. I think you want to hand people something to heal their broken heart.

So just kind of take off and take us on the journey of where you are now. Talk about the journey there with your wife. I do want you to tell us in the process of our talking about how when you knew, they said when she's leaving you sang to her. We may see if you want to tell us what happened there. But I want you to just tell us what you're praying with all your heart that not only you experienced fully and continue to but they will; that what God has offered us. So just take us on the journey. We love you, buddy.

JONATHAN: Yeah, I guess I would say in story form with my story, with Wynter's story, what that book is right there is prayerfully packaged, a picture of the kindness of

God. It's funny because I think people would think I'm crying because I'm sad. There is always sadness attached to loss but I'm crying because I've seen God's kindness in amazing ways littered through my story. You know Philippians 4:8 says: Whatever is true, whatever is right, whatever is kind, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy think about these things.

So in my loss, in my winter season I was able to look back at my full winter season, my 15 years with Wynter and see the truth of what God gave me in her, 15 years and 27 days. I could look at, I wish I had her for longer. I wish I had her for 30, 40, 50 years but I got her for 15 and I'm grateful; 15 years, four beautiful daughters, a ministry that she created called "For Girls like You," which I still get the steward. There is so much that God has done.

So my tears now, my tears then when I lost her were heavy with grief and sadness and despair, and a lot of different things but the book is littered with the kindness of God, how God met me in my loss. And how God provided for me with her. Because I am who I am in large part because of Wynter Danielle Pitts. That girl made me in a lot of ways. And so I'm grateful. I'm grateful for what God has given me.

You talk about me being at the bedside. Wynter was a healthy girl. She was 38 years old; 27 days after our 15-year anniversary. She basically was taking a nap. I walked into the bedroom and in a matter of seconds I could tell something was wrong because she sat up and she just kind of fell back over. I thought she was having a seizure.

I spent the next 20 minutes trying to save her life, C.P.R., all the things. The paramedics came, rushed us to the hospital. And it was a traumatic hour of my life. I'm standing in the hallway pacing back and forth in the ER. And I'll never forget one of the younger doctors coming out and saying, "Hey, we had a pulse. We don't have a pulse anymore. So you might want to come and say good-bye."

I guess I can't tell you what I was thinking in that moment. I wasn't thinking much but the

good thing for me, growing up with parents of faith that raised me in the faith is that in the good, and the really hard, we grew up pretty poverty stricken. In the good and the hard all we did was worship God. My parents taught me how to worship. And so in those hard times we worshipped. When we had need we worshipped.

So I went into that ER room and I remember putting my face, Wynter's face is here on the bed, beautiful as ever. I put my face in her face, and my tears, I can remember my ones here hitting her face. But I just said--sorry!

JAMES: What did you do?

JONATHAN: I just said, "It's going to be all right, babe. I've got the girls. It's going to be okay." And then just instinctively I began to sing. I felt like God gave me the words and I began to sing, "It's your breath in my lungs so I pour out a praise, pour out a praise. It's your breath in our lungs so we pour out a praise to you only. Great are you God!"

I just sang it through a couple of times. And really, I felt like all I was doing, I didn't know I was doing it in the moment, I felt like I was reminding myself of the very breath in my lungs is here because God gave it to me. And the very breath that was in her lungs he gave it to her. Like Job says, "You give and you take away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." I was reminding her of where she was going, maybe she was already there. And reminding myself of why I was left here, which part of it was the continued purpose that God has for my life.

See Dr. Evans taught me Acts 13:36; says that David served the purposes of God for his generation and then he fell asleep. So as short as Wynter's life was, I could trust God's word to be true. That Wynter served the purposes of God for her generation and then she fell asleep. And so I don't fully understand that why she couldn't be right here for my girls right now, be at my daughter's graduation in a year from now, proms, all the things, weddings but I trust God, I trust that she served the purpose he put her here for. And then he took her home. And the woman that was my bride is now with her better husband. It's

hard to believe that but it's true. We believe it.

So I guess I would just say God's word is amazingly beautiful. When you have nothing else, you better hope you have that because it will carry you through. And Dr. Evans says another thing, I can't talk about anything without talking about him. He says if all you see is what you see, you'll never see all there is to be seen. That's faith! If all you see is what you see you'll never see all there is to be seen.

I guess the book is my effort to see past what I can see with my eyes tangibly and see what God is actually doing. So when Paul says in Philippians 4:8 whatever is true, right, kind, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, praiseworthy, think about these things. He's saying that because the things are there. Paul is speaking to a church that is being persecuted from prison. He's telling them, a little earlier in the chapter, "Rejoice in the Lord always." He's telling them rejoice and look for the things that are true and right and pure and lovely because all that you're going through, what you're going through as believers, the reality is there is some good things that are happening if only you look for them. So that's the story. That's what I want to show. It's really just showing a lot of stories of how God met me.

My sister Carmen, 40, never been married, never had kids, praying for a family for years and years. On the day of Wynter's funeral she walked up to me after the funeral and says, "Hey, God told me I'm supposed to come help you with the girls."

So two and a half weeks later my sister leveraged her entire life, sold her car, broke her lease on her apartment. It was from New Jersey to Franklin, Tennessee and has been with me since. And the woman that my girls used to call Aunt Cece, they now affectionately call her Cece. I'm here because she's there right now. It's just, God is just really beautiful and kind.

I'd say Psalm 34:7, "The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he rescues them," is the story of my life these last couple of years. That God's rescued me

and he's rescued me through his people; not through these spirits in never-never land. Just people that are stepping in to provide resource and to provide care. He moved me to Franklin, Tennessee two weeks before Wynter died and it's been an incubator. You know Franklin, it's an incubator of a town and it's been a place of healing for me.

So anyway, I'm just really grateful. So it's the kindness of God, if you see anything on my face, it is the kindness of God.

BETTY: I love what you say about the kindness. I understand what you're saying about the kindness of God through our loss. And I understand what you said about the tears, they change as the process of healing comes along. Those tears now are for those people that don't know or have that relationship with God and they have a loss. Who do they turn to? That's who I weep for now. It's through that kindness of God, a closeness comes in that relationship that might not have been an experience for me had we not lost our daughter.

And yes, we miss her. We always miss her but we know she is with him and your wife is with him. They may have met by now. But anyway, just that loving kindness and the closeness that you feel in that relationship with God is indescribable.

JONATHAN: Yeah, so many scriptures that were kind of cognitive realities to me that when Wynter died immediately became real to me. I think about Paul's words, "To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord." That was just cognitive to me before. I'd lost loved ones before but never anyone that close and I'd never witnessed it myself. I knew that I knew that I knew when Wynter passed away she was absent from me and she was present with Jesus. It's just a beautiful truth in the fact that I'll get to see her again. I'll see her again. You'll see your daughter again.

JAMES: Jonathan, this is what you're experiencing. You're experiencing the miracle of God's grace that you saw in her being spilled all over you right now. And you know she would have been rejoicing with you, and she is.

But the fact is, the reason there was such a transforming impact made by her life was she brought the kingdom of heaven to earth. God's will was done on earth through her. It's been done through you. I watched it being done through you when you were trying to watch me and Tony bring church leaders and various denominational groups together to learn that we can be different, diverse, and even wrong about some things and we can still be a family, and we can still show a world how much God loves them, and not make our disagreements a barrier or a wall and force us into camps or tribes. We're trying to be a family of God.

I'm looking at you and I just say, Tony, you've sown so much beautiful kingdom fruit. I can't tell you how much I love you, buddy, and your family. All of you! I look at this and you're talking about the seeds that Tony sowed in you was kingdom, but you were there serving Tony. And he says greatest in the kingdom is servant. You're one of the greatest servants I ever saw. And we're trying to get the whole church to realize we can make a kingdom servant impact on planet earth.

Here you are making it in a way you never dreamed about God binding up the broken hearts. Boy, there is a lot of them. And I mean with all the junk. If we have the unbelief and change God's truth into a lie mentality controlling the world, you talk about broken hearts, devastated hearts, it's just unbelievable what the enemy can do. And the only force on this earth that can heal those broken hearts is the Jesus you're talking about and singing about. And I see it all over you.

That doesn't mean you don't have a broken heart, but that broken heart is moving just like it is with me and Betty. It is moving from our broken heart to their broken hearts to the people all over the world to know that we've got somebody that can hold your broken heart and can hold your broken heart and heal your broken heart. Jonathan, he can, can't he?

JONATHAN: He can. He does it over and over and over again.

JAMES: I just want you to give us a rapid journey of somebody got what you want them to get what you share, what do you want to happen to them if they read this story?

JONATHAN: I would say more than anything else that number one that they would see God as kind but also, they see that God is good.

My oldest daughter, she's told this story publicly, but I tell the story in the book. But at one point, eight months in to us losing her mom, losing Wynter, she was in her bed and I walked up the stairs. The door was open and she was just laying down. I said, "Are you okay?"

She said, "I'm okay."

I could tell she wasn't okay. So I walked into her bedroom and I kneeled down beside her bed and I just said, "Just talk to me."

She didn't want to talk. So I just kept trying to encourage her. At this point I was just a dad that was just trying to do all I could to be there for my girls.

She said, "Well, dad, I'm having a hard time that God is real. If he is real, I'm having a hard time believing that he is good."

And I wish I could have said I was an understanding dad in that moment. I took every one of her words as a personal indictment of the job that I was doing as a dad. I went into my bedroom.

What's funny is that my wife and I wrote a prayer in the book we wrote together on parenting called *She is Yours*. The prayer of stewardship that says, "God, she is yours. I trust you with her." I had this moment of not trusting God with my daughter.

I went into my room. I knew it right away. So I just had to repent. So I repented to God and I literally, moments later, gave my daughter back to God. I apologized to her a couple hours later, probably. It's just been this journey of trusting that God is good and trusting that God is real and trusting that God is kind.

It's my hope that they can find the very God that I've trusted through this season that they can see him, trust him. And even trust like their... For me as their dad, the hardest thing I've ever had to do is walk with these girls through their grief. And I've not been able to do it by myself. So it's been a complete dependence on God.

So I would say anybody that's reading this book, if they've lost, whether it be a loved one, a spouse, a child, a grandparent, if they've lost a job; there are so many losses right now because of COVID even that I always say grief is just dealing with lost expectations. So I hope that anybody that's had an expectation that they've lost it, and they can find it even in their loss that God is still kind, he is still good and he is still there for them. And he can heal, he can bind up the brokenhearted, whatever their broken heart is broken over. If they'll only look hard enough they'll find him. There is a book by a guy named Leighton Ford. I don't know if you've ever met Leighton?

JAMES: Know him very well.

JONATHAN: Gosh, there is a book called *The Attentive Life*. He talks about paying attention to what God is doing regardless of what's happening. And that book has really walked me through this season of my grief and I've been looking for what God is doing despite the grief.

JAMES: Do you sense that people will feel like God's taken them in his arms if they hear what you believe he wanted you to share here in your winter season?

JONATHAN: Yeah, it's really beautiful. I thought to myself, who is going to want to read this book about my story about my grief and my loss? And what's been really

beautiful is watching and just seeing people on Instagram and different methods responding to me telling me that watching my story, learning my story has helped them to kind of see themselves in my story. The real hope was that I could just put my story out there and maybe somehow, some way, somebody can identify with the feelings I had and be able to see the Lord that much closer.

JAMES: Well, Jonathan, I'm telling you Betty and I are always going to have our arms around you and your family in every way possible. I want to say to you that I know we're not supposed to be hugging now but God really want to give you a big hug. He wants to pull your broken heart, your hurting heart up to his healing heart. You know the more I found that if I could identify with what's on his heart and wanting to see his dreams and his vision fulfilled, Betty, it is incredible healing to just say, Father, I want to know what you feel. Well, I promise you he wants to know what you feel, and he does know. And he will heal and hold your broken heart.

Father, Betty and I want to be a part of helping heal these broken hearts today. Jonathan does. God heal these hearts. Help them know your healing power and your love, in Jesus' name.

If you say James, I know somebody in a winter season or I'm in one, of course you can go online or you can go to the bookstore and get it but if you say, "James, would you send it to us?" We would. Because we're here to minister to you. So you just ask for it.

I'm going to give you an opportunity, and all of our viewers, Jonathan you know, Tony Evans knows, everybody knows well *LIFE Today* and *LIFE Outreach* tries to reach out to the least of these. We've saved millions of lives. That's not exaggeration. Not only save their lives, when I say we, the viewers of *LIFE Today* but we've led millions to Christ, millions all over the world; as many as seven million in a year that registered their commitments to Christ.

But it's the love of God poured through you that makes it possible. Right now we're

trying to feed 350,000 children. We've already found them. They're starving. All we need is the help to feed them. Asking you to help us do that. Listen right now, will you please to Isak Pretorius, Peter Pretorius's son? 30 years we've spent with his family. Peter is in heaven now. This is his son. Listen. And then let's get God's arms around these precious little ones.

On the mission field:

Open Captions: Flooding. Drought. Starvation.

ISAK: Our teams all over the continent of Africa are testifying to us that they are seeing levels of food insecurity like we have never experienced. This has been driven by multiple aspects. In some areas like South Sudan it is flooding. Floods that have raged through there. The worst floods in recorded history!

In Angola in specific, we're seeing a situation of multi-year drought. A drought that has gone on for many years, crops that have failed. Some families have lost not just one crop but multiple crops. Now there's no food--nothing at all! They don't have the ability to be able to provide for their children at all.

The problem is we don't have sufficient resource to reach the villages that so desperately need mission feeding where those mothers are saying, "Please, you have to help us." Because they're not only crying out to God, they're crying out to us because they know that we'll respond. They know, James, that you and Betty, and the friends of *LIFE*, when they ask you, you turn the world upside down and you do everything you can do to respond and to make it possible. And so that's why they're crying out to us.

And I'm crying out to you, James, please! We need you to reach out and ask the friends of *LIFE* to dig deep in their hearts and to give the very best gift that they can give because their gift is the difference between another mother mourning the death of her child.

End of video

In the studio:

JAMES: Father, I pray for every one of those mothers. And I pray for every person watching that may have a broken heart because of the loss of a loved one or family member. God, heal their broken heart. Put your arms of love and peace and comfort around them, in Jesus' name.

We really do love you. You are such an inspiration to us because when we show you a legitimate need and an effective way to meet it you do it. Thank you so much!

Would you help us feed those children, save those lives that Isak Pretorius was talking about? And he referenced the flooding in so many areas that is destroying homes and they're not big homes. It's their home though. It may be a hut. It may be made of grass or mud, but it is gone. And in those little homes they have the joy of their children--if their children can stay healthy.

Well, we're the miracle. The floods have destroyed malnutrition clinics. Isak told me, "James, I don't even know how people handle this, but we've got to rebuild 16 malnutrition clinics." That's the last step. That's where you've seen us holding so many little children. Where you've seen many of when it was Billy Graham's daughter or whether it was Sheila Walsh or whether it was Randy or whether it was our executive vice president, and the one over all of our television production, Bruce. And you've seen many times, you've seen these people in these malnutrition clinics. We need to build 16 of them, rebuild. That's a miracle. Over \$24,000 per clinic.

Is there somebody who can say I can give a clinic? Perhaps you could. Or I could give \$1,000 toward it; 23 people join me. Pray about that. But here's what I want all of you to know. And we're going to send you Dr. Colbert's book. And we're going to send you the beautiful "It is Well" Quiet Time Bundle. The hymns are going to bless you. The

inspirational scriptures and the Word of God, and those little daily devotional thoughts will bless you. We want to bless you.

But here's what I want to ask you to do. Could you help three, five or ten children? Could you do it by giving \$30, \$50, or \$100? This is not total childcare. This is miraculous life-saving nutrition presented because you love God and you love your neighbor, including the most overlooked, the least of these. Would you go online? Would you call that number? Would you make the best gift you can? It's giving the greatest life--life itself, the greatest gift. Thank you for doing it.

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 life-saving 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

JAMES: Thank you for putting arms of love around the broken hearted. Thank you for doing what God leads you to do to help. If you'd like to have the book just ask for it. Tell us where to send it. Jonathan, Betty and I are going to be standing with you. We're never going to let you go, buddy.

JONATHAN: Thank you.

JAMES: We're going to be together forever.

JONATHAN: Grateful to be on your team and your family.

JAMES: Boy, we're just so glad to get close to you. Love you. Thanks for sharing God's love and his life. Thank you so much.