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Week 19: Spring Mission Feeding

Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh

Joy and Tait Cruse

SHEILA: Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm Sheila Walsh here with Randy Robison. This is a program that I've really been looking forward to and yet it has been kind of heavy on my heart too. Because I heard of this family some time ago. We only lived a few houses apart. When I began to hear some of their story they were in my prayers every day and every night. I want to show you a little video clip and perhaps you'll understand why. Watch this.

Pre-taped video:

RANDY: Thanks for being with us. The Cruses have put their story into this book called *Hope Transformed*. The photo on the front is Connor.

ANNOUNCER: *In May of 2012, Joy and Tait Cruse shared with Randy and Debbie Robison the story of their son Connor and his battle with cancer.*

JOY: Connor went through rounds and rounds of chemotherapy, two long surgeries, one in Boston, one in Houston, radiation, pills and pills and pills. Clinic, all these visits to the clinic and blood transfusions and...

TAIT: Yeah, there was 18 rounds of chemo, 18 rounds of radiation, 75 pills a day.

JOY: They couldn't remove all of his tumor in Boston, they removed 70% and every doctor said if you can't get all of it out it will grow, it will continue to grow. And it never did. In fact, the later tests, when they pulled more of the tumor out showed it necrotic. It was 100 percent dead. It was a miracle.

RANDY: So basically, he beat the cancer.

JOY: And then in December of '08 they found a new cancer called malignant peripheral nerve sheath tumor and it was created by the radiation that they had used to treat the first cancer.

RANDY: What you were doing to beat the cancer caused the cancer that killed your son. Where are you left at the end of that?

JOY: Angry. Frustrated is an understatement. I just remember thinking... I was confused. I asked God, why did you heal him of the first cancer for him to get a second one? It just seems cruel. And I definitely had a lot of conversations with God. I remember going to the bathroom, I didn't want Connor to see me and I shut the door and I said God, I can't do this again. I can't watch my son go through this again. We went through at this time four years, almost four years, and I can't tell him that he has to do chemotherapy again.

TAIT: And again, how as a father you want to go out and slay the dragon and you can't. You've just got to sit there and take it.

JOY: They asked him, if you have anything to tell somebody going through cancer or fighting this, any kid going through this what would you tell them? He said, "Have courage and believe in Jesus." That was after the second cancer when he was two months, a month from passing away. He still... he didn't waver.

End of video

In the studio:

SHEILA: We're very honored to welcome Joy and Tait back to the program. That's hard to watch.

JOY: I was getting teary-eyed again.

TAIT: You haven't changed. I've lost a lot. Radiation.

SHEILA: You don't have to cover up perfect heads. You just have to cover up the others. But watching your little one going through all that again, I mean honestly, as a mom, I don't know how you faced that.

JOY: It just brought all those feelings back up and those emotions. Just like I said, I cried out to God a lot. It was a long healing process. And actually, writing that book, *Hope Transformed* was very therapeutic for me. It was really my conversations with God; like my questions and his answers to me. And that was really the thing that helped me the most.

RANDY: With Tait's diagnosis, well, tell people what it is but also, did you feel like you were kind of right back there again?

JOY: Oh yeah. Diagnosis day.

TAIT: I have A.L.L. It was quite a shock. I thought it was COVID, leukemia. How do you say the full word? Acute Lymphatic Leukemia or something. I went from zero to 100 just like Connor. Saturday afternoon you're mowing and the next thing the doctor says, "Get in your car," we were at my ranch. And he said, "Get in your car, don't even grab your kids, drive here. I don't know if you'll survive by the time you get here. You're so close to death. Get here." I went, well, happy Saturday to you too.

So I drove four hours and got there. It just became the gauntlet. It was a gauntlet. And then I was diagnosed the next morning in Plano. They transferred me to Medical City Dallas which was a great decision; 60 days later, the cycles were just horrible. It is human torture.

SHEILA: Did that just come from a blood test? Because you have no idea there is anything wrong with you.

TAIT: I was lethargic. I had played like 54 holes of golf and I was gray. I was like, man, this

COVID is kicking me. It wasn't COVID. I wish it had. And then they thought it was mono. Luckily, most people they say just put it off and I went and saw my cardiologist and got A++ but he said, "Something is wrong. I need a blood test." That's why he called me the next day and said, "Get here and get here now."

JOY: All his counts were cut in half; like his white blood count, red blood count and platelets were like cut in half. So he needed transfusions. And they're like, "This is not normal. Something is very wrong. We need to find out what is causing this."

TAIT: They were worried I was going to bleed out of my eyes driving. It was that bad.

SHEILA: When you get that kind of diagnosis where are you, Joy when all of this is...?

JOY: Well, because of COVID I couldn't even be in the hospital. So I'm at home but we had a very dear friend who is on the staff and he was able to let me get in the hospital because he knew it was going to be bad news. He's like, "Joy, we're going to get you in because you need to be here when you hear."

I said, "It's not good, is it?"

He goes, "No."

RANDY: So you've had a bone marrow transplant. You've had chemo? Have you done chemo?

TAIT: Yeah, they do 20 days--luckily, it was 20. It could be up to 60 just to clear you. They give you inordinate amounts of chemo; way above what is just to get you clear. So that was in August. So they blasted me with massive amounts of chemo. And I cleared, which means the cancer was gone and a bone marrow check showed that. So they released me.

And at the time I'm like, God, 20 days! Well, then you hear stories where it was double, triple that. And then every three weeks, every 21 days I do an AB: An A-round, a B-round, an A-B,

and they're hitting me with everything. The last round was a pillowcase-size drip of 22 hours, and a two-hour drip. Praise God, even the doctor said, "It's unbelievable." The amount they gave me is beyond and I never threw up, never had any problems. He's like, "I can't believe it!" I had no secondary effects. For what we were going through we were so protected and so blessed.

So I did those rounds and then they said, "We're going in December 3rd," and he said, "I'm going to kill you to kill it."

I'm like, yeah, my son went through that.

JOY: Tell them what it is, the bone marrow transplant.

TAIT: Yeah, he's goes, "I'm going to torture you until I kill you because I'm going kill it."

Joy kept saying, I don't think you realize how bad on the spectrum of cancer, she goes... and I asked because it is a half load, my son, he goes anything can go wrong. Organs blow up, and then I had to do full body radiation on top of the chemo. He said there was three phases. He goes, you're going to go through, I had 20, 25 fevers in three days breaking and going, breaking and going. And they couldn't come in the hospital, they had COVID. And then the hospital locked down because people were sneaking in with COVID. So I was all alone. And then it just the bludgeoning, as they say, the beatings will continue 'til further notice, that's what happened. It was horrible.

SHEILA: What do you do with that kind of loneliness?

TAIT: It was interesting, it was spiritual the first phase, the induction. And then the Lord really, it became mental and physical. It's horrible. It's catatonic. And people who have suffered with mental, you just become this... there is no vision. There is no vision. There is no... I tried to read the Bible, you have chemo brain and fog. Just minute by minute by minute survive.

RANDY: I want to talk about that, but I have to ask you, how are you now? And what's the

outlook?

JOY: He's doing A+ now. So it's a big milestone to make it 100 days past the day he got our son's stem cells. And that was Sunday. So the doctor is like, they rechecked his blood, there is no cancer. He has responded very well. He is recovering. So he has some host symptoms but they're like, but you're doing great. You're ahead of schedule. Thank God he is doing well now. It is now just a slow rebuilding.

RANDY: Finding some hope.

TAIT: It's interesting though. I lost 25 pounds of muscle and I didn't eat for 11 days, 8 pounds or so of fat and I'm always cold. I lost more than 30 pounds. I could literally feel my muscles being digested. When you don't eat that long, it amazes me how believers fast. I mean our own Lord, 40 days. I did almost 11 and I'm like, and I had no desire to eat but your whole body is just being consumed. It's really--.

But I'm doing great. I have little issues here and there. I'm like on 25 pills a day for mostly rejection. They told me that's like nothing compared to... So I don't like to play the comparison game but it helps me count my blessings.

SHEILA: Joy, I couldn't help but think about you because as a mom to watch your wee boy go through all of that twice, and then to have your husband, the one that you've walked this battle together with, I said to you in the dressing room, the fact that you are even still speaking to Jesus blows me away. I don't mean that disrespectful, I just mean the questions that you must have had.

JOY: I think, at first I was blown away but all I could do is think back to when Connor was sick. The only way we got through it was Jesus. Like how could you be mad at the one that is carrying you? There were moments I was angry but our first carrying bridge, and that's where they follow your progress when you're battling cancer it just said, "Battle ready." Like I've been here before, I know we've got to rely on him. We're got to armor up. We've got to be prayed up. We need

believers to stand beside us and pray. I'm like, I got this. It was an advantage so to speak that I'd done this before. That advantage--

TAIT: Your knowledge, your wisdom.

JOY: Yeah, just like the Israelites looked back at the faithfulness of God, I'm like I know this is the only way I can do this. Instead of questioning and wondering I just went right to it. I'm like back here at your feet. You've got to carry us again.

TAIT: And as a human, after Connor passed and we felt led by the Lord to adopt two children from the C.P.S. type situation, brother and sister in '13? And I really thought, okay, we have punched some cards. We're kind of sailing. We're going to bless those who haven't been blessed. And okay, life is--so I'm not saying I punched the ticket thing and life is going to be roses and sugary plums or whatever.

SHEILA: It would be reasonable to think that.

TAIT: It would because as a human. So when this hit I'm like, what? And I wasn't worried about me as much as the stress again on her carrying the load, and my two children who witnessed Connor, and then Mason, our third who she was pregnant with who has really suffered with the disruption and travel and the six cities. And then these two that we adopted that had heard about it. I'm like, okay, either God is putting a perfect story together, which he always does in his sovereignty. And think it is sewn the family together because the second bout has really brought us, we were a very close family but I think it's brought Tyler and Emma even closer. What do you think?

JOY: I agree. It's like in the crushing of what we're going through, it's like making a wine. It's like brought us together, stronger and better and closer to God. In the beginning it just, it felt like that crushing. Like okay, He's working on us, like Paul's shipwreck, but we're on course and we know that God is taking us to where he wants us to be in his plan. But it's going to be hard and difficult. They always say aging isn't for the weak. Being a Christian isn't for the weak. You

know? You just have to be strong and believe in him that he's going to carry you. Don't think it is going to be easy but know he is there.

RANDY: Here's the difficulty I have in my humanity, in my human way of thinking, I look at the situation with your son and you think a child with cancer, there is a level of injustice about that. And then the cancer treatment develops the cancer that takes his life; that seems hugely unjust to me--and now you.

TAIT: I bent a door in the bathroom in Houston when they told me he had a second cancer. I literally bent a door I was so angry. I've never been more angry at God. Not even when I was diagnosed. Yeah, when I got it, I wasn't as mad as when Connor got the second diagnosis.

RANDY: Obviously, God is just. God is merciful. God is gracious. How do you... I have a hard time sometimes squaring that and I know the problem is me. How have you dealt with that?

TAIT: What's the divorce rate?

JOY: Yeah, the divorce rate is really high.

TAIT: Ninety percent losing a child with a disease.

JOY: The thing I struggled with a lot was do you really love me? Like we drove by where the cemetery was and that song came on, "Oh how he loves me." I'm like, Mmmh. Really? And I grew up, my dad was a preacher. Like we actually grew up watching your dad on the TV all the time. I'm like, I grew up knowing he loved me but it just didn't feel that way. I wrestled with him a lot about that.

I know you've got Connor in a great place but how could you let me go through this? Because you could have saved me from all this pain.

And all he kept telling me is, "I sent my son to die on a cross. And yes, you're going through

momentary pain but you're going to see Connor again. And you're going to be with me in heaven. What you're going through now is nothing compared to what you're going to have in heaven."

And I just heard Connor, just in my ear like, "It is going to be worth it. Mom, it's worth it! I know what you're doing is hard and it hurts but it is going to be worth it. Everything he's done for you, everything that God and Jesus have done for you to prepare a place for you, it's worth it!" I just had to keep telling myself that.

SHEILA: The legacy of your little one saying, "Take courage and love Jesus." What did that kind of faith come from in a child?

JOY: You know his sister would say, imagine the prayers of so many that were praying for Connor. I think that instilled such a faith in him. It was the prayers of so many. He grew up at Prestonwood Christian Academy, Prestonwood Church and they all poured into him, and the prayers. It was so evident. Like he was my hero. Like he inspired me.

TAIT: He got one of those tattoos where he was bald that said Jesus across the back of his head. Obviously, green is his favorite color like mine and he'd walk around and point.

RANDY: Tait, I have a question for you, and we talked to Andy Stanley a few weeks ago. He talks about writing your story. When you're going through something it is hard to see, how do you want that story to be written? When your children grow up and they think about you, what do you want their story to be?

TAIT: Wow! Um, I had a mother with A.L.S. that I nursed, and a father disabled, and my wife was disabled, and all this, those are complete... like I need to find a ghost writer to put all this down. I want them to say, "Man! He fought. He fought the good fight for Christ, for our family." You could use tenacity and persistency. But I didn't quit. I didn't quit when I was cleaning septic tanks at 12 to support my dad, my mom. I just... I'm not going to quit. I ended well, like the Steve Farrar book, I finished strong.

SHEILA: And honestly, I think truly, only in eternity we'll be able to let catch a glimpse of the impact of this little boy who loved Jesus until the end and this amazing couple who refused to quit. Out of their suffering the fruit will be amazing.

We want to ask you to take a look at something with us. Somehow when you've suffered it washes your eyes and you see other people differently and you want to help. Would you watch this?

On the mission field:

Open Captions: Thousands of children cry. They are hungry, malnourished, suffering, and dying.

ANNOUNCER: The mortality rate for children under five in Sub-Saharan Africa is the highest on record worldwide. Severe malnutrition and starvation are two of the contributing factors in an unrelenting food crisis causing misery and death.

ISAK: It's absolutely devastating to just walk through this cemetery here and see how they're digging graves. They're preparing graves for young children; more than ten graves that have been dug here. These graves don't have a name yet. They've been allocated to a child, but they've dug them because they know that children will die in the next week. Children who don't deserve to die. They don't deserve to die simply because they didn't have enough food. Because their families couldn't provide for them. Because their village was ravaged by drought. Because they don't have mission feeding.

You see, we can stop the digging of these graves. We can stop children from dying. We can stop children from filling these graves. We can bring the cycle of death to an end if we'll just act. You give mission feeding, you give life--life in the form of a bowl of food--a bowl of food that not only fills a stomach but empties a grave.

End of video

In the studio:

SHEILA: I'll never forget my very first trip to Angola and walking into a malnutrition clinic and watching these tiny little ones that are so fragile. They can hardly even cry, where their bones are literally sticking through their flesh. I have to tell you as a mom, as a mom it absolutely broke my heart. And I looked into the eyes of the other mothers. They love those little ones every bit as much as I love my son. And they would do everything they could to provide food for their child, but the drought has been so desperate in parts of Africa that there is no food--no food at all.

And here's the irony at this particular moment that's different than other moments. Parts of Africa the drought is so drastic, all the crops are gone. Parts of Africa the flooding has been so severe that all the crops are gone. It's just this horrible situation unless we as the body of Christ say, "Not on our watch."

We have our people like Isak that you just saw there on the ground waiting to make a difference. We commit every year here at *LIFE*, and particularly this year, to feed 350,000 children. When they bring those little red bowls up and they get that food that's especially made for them, all the nutrients, the proteins, everything they need, that literally turns the corner from death to life.

And if you'll join with us, if you'll join with Randy and I we can see life saved in Jesus' name, and it is possible, Randy. There is an entry point for everybody.

RANDY: It is. And you know what's interesting? We talked today; there are things that are out of our control--whether it is a diagnosis, a tragedy, an accident, a virus. This is something though that is within our control to do something about. We have the people in place, Sheila, you said that. We have the systems down. We've been doing this for decades. That's why I can tell you that for \$30, \$50, or \$100 you can help feed three, five or ten children for three whole months! Why? Because we've got this down. We've been doing this for a while. It's not always the same children. We go to where the crisis is, like Sheila mentioned, the drought or the floods in different parts of the country. We go to where the need is.

We just need one thing. We've got the people in place, we've got the processes, we need your support. We need you to reach out and partner with us to make this possible. \$1,000 will actually help feed 100 children for three entire months. Many of you can do that or even more. I'm asking you to go online or go to the phone right now and make the best gift you can. You will be saving lives. Do it now.

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

On the mission field:

Sheila: One of the things at *LIFE* we care about so much is bringing the hope of Jesus Christ. But first of all we want to bring hope to a mother that she can feed her children. Many times she has to put these two to three to bed hungry. And she tries to encourage them, and you know what she says to them? "Who knows what tomorrow will bring?" She's trying to keep hope alive.

That's why mission feeding is so critical. This is not a let's do this sometime next week, next month, next year. No! Its life and death right now. And mission feeding saves lives. We've done it before, but the need has never been greater. We need your help today. We need your help now!

End of video**In the studio:**

RANDY: We want you to know we are never going to stop helping and we want you to help us with mission feeding. Don't forget, medical clinics that were destroyed in the floods, we want to replace them so an extra gift would be a tremendous blessing in the lives of those people. And if you're interested in fighting cancer there is a way, Tait and Joy that you guys have been doing an amazing thing for children. Tell us about that quickly.

JOY: So in honor of Connor's battle we started Team Connor Childhood Cancer Foundation, and the majority of our funds go to fund research. We've funded over \$4 and a half million dollars of research. Ironically, during a pandemic, people wanted to support Tait by giving to Team Connor Childhood Cancer Foundation and we raised over \$1 million in one day for Team Tait for Team Connor event.

RANDY: It is amazing what we can do.

SHEILA: That is phenomenal. So let's take that to \$10 million, how about that? Thanks so much for being with us. It's just been an honor.

So for Randy, I'm Sheila, and we will see you next time on *LIFE Today*.