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Week 40: Christmas Shoes and Smiles, last week

James and Betty Robison

Ruth Graham

JAMES: We're so glad that you're joining us because we feel like you're family. We've got family here. We've got Billy Graham's daughter, Ruth, and many times when she's spoken with us, she says, "Remember, I'm also Ruth Graham's daughter, not just Billy Graham's daughter." We're talking about what mom did. And, of course, she bears mom's name. But she's family to us; she calls me her big brother. She doesn't mind telling the whole world. I love her; we've been very close. And she's been here many times. Many of you may remember at her dad's memorial service, she lifted Jesus so high that it was a message heard around the world. What an honor to God and to dad and to the power of love and grace.

Well, she's written another book. She wrote a best-selling book years ago. I remember when we first started talking about it, *In Every Pew There Sits a Broken Heart*. She knew what it was to sit in a pew with a broken heart, but she knew so many people who did. This is interesting. She hasn't told me yet why she was moved to write this. But I can tell it wasn't something that came out of Ruth's mind; it came out of her heart. But frankly, we believe it came out of the heart of God. And it's called *Transforming Loneliness*: "Deepening our relationship with God and others when we feel alone." So, Ruth, we're really glad to have you back today.

RUTH: I'm so glad to be here. This is so much fun. I always look forward to coming.

BETTY: It is so good to see you.

RUTH: Thank you!

JAMES: I've reached out to you many times in your life's journey. Have we ever comforted you when you might have felt lonely? I would like to know if we have.

RUTH: Oh yes! Absolutely. Just knowing I had a big brother was a comfort. I knew I could call you -- and I have called you and asked for help or advice, and you've been very liberal with that.

JAMES: Well, it's a joy. Tell us how you were moved to write this book, *Transforming Loneliness*. Because the whole world is in a pandemic and a panic in many ways. But probably lonely because of what's going on.

RUTH: Well, James, as you know, I've spent most of my adult life alone. I saw and know what loneliness is. So I realize that I'm not alone. That there are a lot of people who are suffering loneliness. You just have to look around the church and see people sitting by themselves.

So I thought, well, I'll tackle this subject. This is a different book for me because I delved into research and got statistics on loneliness. And loneliness is universal, and it is very serious. Loneliness, we all want to be seen, known, heard, valued. But when we are alone, we don't feel that. Now we have to differentiate between loneliness and solitude and isolation. Loneliness is a feeling that we have, and it's usually temporary; it's not long-lasting. If it becomes chronic, then it leads to all sorts of health issues. It can lead to obesity, it can lead to --

JAMES: Does it contribute to depression? I would think it does. That's become a massive problem.

RUTH: That's a massive problem as well. And it also attacks the prefrontal cortex in our brain, which affects our feelings and our reasoning. So if we have sustained loneliness, it is the equivalent of smoking 15 cigarettes a day. So it's a serious issue. But that's

loneliness.

But then you have solitude, and solitude is something we seek to recalibrate sometimes and to think and be with God. And that's what we want to do; we want to spend time with God and develop that relationship with God.

And then there is isolation, and isolation is not healthy. Isolation, in our culture, is the worst punishment we can give. James, I had a wonderful time speaking with prisoners about loneliness because I've been working with prisoners up in West Virginia. I asked them to write me about loneliness. They wrote such interesting things, but one in particular. He said, "You know, Ruth, I came to prison so angry, so mad, so just against the world." He said, "While I was in prison, I came to know Jesus." And he said, "I'm not lonely anymore." It really was a real thing for him. I was very pleased to be able to ask the prisoners about their loneliness.

But loneliness is worldwide. In great Britain, 30% feel alone. And Teresa May, when she was prime minister, created a Minister of Loneliness for her cabinet. In Japan, they have an epidemic of lonely deaths, deaths of despair, where people die, and nobody knows they've died until the neighbors notify the authorities of the stench coming from the apartment. This is just worldwide that people are so lonely. And yet, we have abandoned faith.

JAMES: It's actually balked at -- the thought of God. You're presented oftentimes as an enemy. You may even be the cause of what they call racism or these horrible ideas. This is where the deceiver has begun to prevail, deceiving to the core. That certainly contributes to loneliness and a sense of isolation, being cut off. And really, the only source of healing comes from the healer, God, who is full of love and compassion, and care.

This isn't like an American crisis or a North American crisis; this is a worldwide crisis. Don't you think the pandemic has actually made a heavy contribution to making it worse?

RUTH: It's exacerbated. So we have the problem, so what do we do about it? So I developed an acronym REACH. *Recognize* the symptoms and sources of loneliness in your life. *Express* it to God and to one other person. And then *anticipate* that God can transform the loneliness into something for His purposes in your life, drawing you into a better relationship with Him and with others.

JAMES: Let me just pause right there too because it's really, and this is something as I've gotten older, and I've begun to see some things in the Word that have been there all along that I see so much more clearly. When Jesus said, "You'll only find your life if you lose your life in me." Betty, you know because you've watched this journey. It's been amazing how it's affected people. What He's actually saying is lose your life in His, the Father's kingdom purpose, and you begin to live with not just purpose but his purpose. And one of his main focuses is on benefiting and blessing the family where the family can benefit and bless others with the blessings that God offers. That is a great, great healing touch.

Now I didn't want to mess up the spelling of R-E-A-C-H, but that really is very, very important for people to understand. God will move into the situation, and they've got to believe that.

RUTH: You can anticipate that he will do that. Yes! And then *connect*; connect with a community of faith. Dennis Prager says that religion, of course, we believe that's Jesus is the strongest thing that we can do to deal with loneliness. And we just can't ignore the fact that we are isolating ourselves with technology.

Generation Z is the loneliest generation, which I was surprised by. That's the age born in 1995 to 2015; that's generation Z. And I have grandsons that are in generation Z. So I called them, and I said, "Are you lonely?" He said, "Absolutely! We're the loneliest generation ever." He said, "We're connected, but we're not connected."

JAMES: By the way, Dennis Prager, sitting right where you're sitting and repeating it as

he walked out and said it twice, he said, "Christians are the only hope freedom has. Christians are the only hope." Basically, what you just said. He pointed something out, but he also acknowledges that Christians are the most effective at meeting these challenges, which is exactly what you just said. He said, yes! What you've written confirms it. We see it confirmed when people receive the love that Christians should freely offer; it is a healing factor in their life.

RUTH: Absolutely! Absolutely!

BETTY: Well, I know that I've seen people and heard people say being in a crowd, you can be in a crowd and feel so lonely.

RUTH: And I think sometimes lonelier than ever.

BETTY: Lonelier than ever! So it's important that we understand the healing of that loneliness is that connection with God.

RUTH: There is no question. And he will transform it. I'll give you an illustration from our life. One Christmas that you went hunting with Ted, and I've told you this story, I think. I was so mad at you and Tim. Here I had been busy shopping and cleaning and cooking and wrapping packages. And I thought we could spend the afternoon --

JAMES: I'm so sorry!

[Laughter]

RUTH: As a family. And you all decide to go hunting. I just thought, well, he needs to be here with the family! And so he left me alone with my children.

JAMES: Are you sure he went with me?

[Laughter]

I must have pulled off a miracle either way at that time.

RUTH: The thing is, I was set to be really angry and feel sorry for myself. But that afternoon, after I'd cleaned up the house and put the kids to bed, I realized I had gotten some nice gifts; I'd write my thank-you notes. So I wrote my thank-you notes and got that off my to-do list. And then we had a piano, and I don't play the piano, but I began to plunk out some hymns. And I just worshipped the Lord, and the Lord transformed --

JAMES: See how we helped you!

BETTY: Gave you that time.

RUTH: But the Lord transformed that loneliness. I think back now and think that was one of the best Christmases I ever had.

JAMES: That's cool. I'm glad Ted and I could help you. Have I ever contributed anything positive to our marriage? I just thank God, and I want you to continue this until we get this all the way through this acronym that you've got. But I just -- I want to say this to you. When you wrote the book, *In Every Pew There Sits a Broken Heart*, you wrote that because you knew what a broken heart was, you sat in the pew, and you knew everywhere. I just felt like as you were talking about this sense of loneliness, and you said you could be in a crowd and feel lonely; you could be sitting in a church and feel lonely. And this really did occur to me. So many people sit there and wonder if anybody around them has ever noticed them.

By the way, one of the greatest things that we together get to do, talking about you, we, with God's direction, inspiration, and his love, notice the least notice together. So we notice what Jesus referred to as "the least of these." And noticing them and letting them know that they are noticed. And that they've been noticed because the greatest noticer,

God, and his Spirit notices them, and we're able to give them a connection.

If the church would just let people around them know. Oftentimes, you'll have people shake hands, but it's almost like a duty. They're not really looking. I look around the congregation just like when I used to preach. God would single people out when I'd have these big crowds, and I would zero in. I always made sure that the four-and-five-year-olds that happened to be not in the nursery but out there, I wanted to be sure they were still looking at me. I wanted to be sure they were listening. I told one lady, I said, "You wake that little boy up there, lady." She said, "You wake him up. You put him to sleep!"

I always look to see if people are listening. And I look around the church when I'm waiting for my pastor to preach or even while he's preaching, and I pray for people. And I see people, and I pray somebody will go to them. Very difficult for me to walk over to them, occasionally I do, but all of a sudden, I get mobbed, and suddenly, they look at us in the wrong place like some kind of celebrity, which we're not.

But the point is that people need to know. So I want to tell you something, God not only sees you, He loves you beyond anything you could ever imagine. Let me make this suggestion to you. Ask Him to pour His love new and give you the wisdom and direction of how you can share that love. And while you are sitting there praying, like Ruth was talking about being alone, she actually had a happy time because she was alone with God. And she actually had some fun. Well, just ask the Lord to let you have some fun by receiving. But then find some places to touch somebody with that love. You'll touch a lonely heart that's a broken heart or about to be and begin a healing process. Continue with the acronym if you will.

RUTH: The C is *connect*; connect with God and connect with others because we were not meant to be alone. God created us for community. For us, community is church. But if it's not church it could be a book club, whatever. If you're lonely, reach out to connect with somebody. And yes, the first step is very hard to do. You don't want to do it but do

it. And H is *honor* God; honor God with your loneliness. Dedicate your loneliness to God and say, "God, I'm lonely, I give it to you. Will you use it?" And invariably, he will. He will use it for His glory and His purposes to draw you deeper into Himself and deeper into a relationship with others.

JAMES: Everything you've shared with your life testimony and the things that you've written, it's just such a tremendous blessing. I just want to thank you for not only being who you are, Ruth, but letting Him be who He desires to be in you. Always, since I've known you, you've presented Him a broken vessel many times. You've presented Him clay that didn't seem to have the shape that you knew God wanted, but you wanted Him to. You and I have had an honesty in our relationship that I think has been really refreshing and remarkable. Would you agree? And do you always feel the love of God flowing through us and through the *LIFE Outreach* family?

RUTH: Absolutely! Absolutely! And I think that's why your audience is so --

JAMES: That's it! They've actually been caught by the vision of the Father, not the vision of *LIFE Outreach* -- and you've demonstrated it. So you're the most amazing people. Our viewers are the greatest donors, faithful supporters on the planet. In the sense that they see a need, and nothing is too big. We're going to do it, but we're going to do it together. And they don't try to make somebody look big because you did what God wanted them to do, really just having fun with it.

I want you to get the book. We'll actually send it to you if you give a pair of shoes. How about several pairs of shoes?

And Betty, our missionaries have asked, this is the last week when we have committed, we have given over 2 million children shoes. But to give 150,000, that's what we're giving this year. And now, we're reaching the end of that, and the missionaries say, "Could you give us another -- we really need another 50,000!"

Okay, this is the last week. So I'm saying, "God!" We've got a huge miracle here. And we can do it; I think it's \$180,000. I think, God, do you know what the Lord said when I said, "God!" He said, "There's somebody sitting there that could do the whole thing." Where are they, God? Well, they may be in Australia. They may be -- I don't know where they are. Canada?

And by the way, Canadians, you've been amazing! Thank you, God -- and thank you. So all over the world, could you give \$1,000 or \$180,000? Whatever. But if you'd like to have, along with the other gifts that we're going to send you, a little Christmas shoes for your tree to make people ask, why that? You tell them. It will inspire them to give. We'll also send you Ruth's book.

And Betty, one of the ways we live with kingdom impact is we touch the least of these. And Jesus said, "When you touch them, you touch me. You minister to them you minister to me. You knew I asked for a cup of water, they gave me vinegar and gall. When you give them water, you give me water."

Listen. Let's give some children shoes. Let's put peace on their feet and talk about how they can get it, and they can have the Father's love all the time. Please watch closely. I think you're going to be blessed when you see the need, and you know we can meet that need. Watch prayerfully and closely, and then let's meet the need.

Begin video clip

Announcer: If there's one thing mothers around the world pray for above all else, it's the health of their children. And with everything these children are exposed to, that can be a tall order.

This year you may have partnered with *LIFE Outreach* out of compassion to take care of some basic needs like clean drinking water and a daily bowl of food. But have you ever thought about the dangers children face every day simply from being children?

With poverty as the deciding factor in what these mothers can provide for their children, a pair of shoes is a necessity that many children will never have.

This coming Christmas season, we'd like to do something special for these children and give them a pair of shoes of their very own. These shoes will not only protect their feet from injury and disease but will be a treasured possession that will remind them of God's love.

BETTY: We come over here to be a blessing, but we always go back so much more blessed, James. I think, because we see what can be done, we know that our friends, because they love children, they love to give, they love to share – that's you I'm talking about – you love to help. And this is a real need: shoes for the children.

Please join with us. You'll get such great joy out of it. I know you will. God bless you and thank you!

End of video

In the studio:

JAMES: Betty, don't you love looking at the children? I want to mention this. Ruth has been right there in the midst of those precious children, just loving them when we're giving them food and water. Betty, I think it is a joy that we get to help them.

BETTY: I do, too. These really are true needs for their smiles and for their precious little feet. As we've been over there, able to be a blessing and to put the shoes on the feet of those precious little ones, it just does something to your heart. I think that's why you keep continuing to help us do these things because it comes from your heart. You sense that we're all joining together and making that difference. So I hope you will do it again. These children need our help. Let's put shoes on the precious feet of these children.

JAMES: When we talk about adding another 50,000 pairs of shoes, that's a lot. And we're talking about \$180,000 cost. And they're not many people, there might be somebody that can. And Lord, I believe we just may see that happen. We see wonderful miracles.

But every one of you can say, oh okay, I can do this. And the \$36 may seem small to some people. For you, some may even say, James, that's really big. Well, it's big to ten children that get the shoes too. So there's no gift too small. Jesus said the biggest gift made was by the widow that gave the mites, just so little, but it was so big! If when we do what God leads us to do, it's huge because it accomplishes God's will and fulfills kingdom purpose in that situation.

So whatever you can do. If you can give over \$100, do it. And please know that you're going to put a smile on children's faces with the shoes. But if you could give enough money to give surgeries, \$500 per surgery, this would be very expensive surgery here. These surgeons go as a mission effort to bless people. And this is just covering basic costs that have to be covered. We can give two children smiles for a \$1,000 gift. There is some level at which you can help.

We're going to send you the little Christmas shoes to hang on the Christmas tree. It becomes a conversation piece. And you talk about loving others and not overlooking the least of these, even in small ways.

So please, get your bank card, go online, or dial that number and make the gift God puts on your heart. We're going to send you the gifts that we talked about, and also, if you'd like to have Ruth's book on loneliness, more than happy to send it to you. You may even be getting that because you want to give it to somebody that you love to bless because you've touched them in their loneliness, and you want to bless them even more.

Thank you so much for getting your card. If you write a check, make it to *LIFE* but call us and tell us you're putting it in the mail. We really need to hear from you. The last

week -- we need a miracle! Thank you for being a part of the miracle.

Begin video clip:

Announcer: Poverty is a killer, and because of it, children needlessly suffer, not only from a lack of food and clean water but also from a lack of things we often take for granted -- like a simple pair of shoes. Far too many children living in extreme poverty have never owned a new pair of shoes. And while that may seem minor in light of all their needs, walking with bare feet puts them at risk with life-threatening infections and diseases that could lead to crippling consequences and even death.

By responding today, you will help secure and make ready 150,000 Christmas shoes to be shipped and delivered to children around the world just in time for the holidays. Your gift of \$36 will help provide ten pairs of shoes. A gift of \$72 will provide 20 pairs, and a gift of \$180 will help provide 50 pairs of Christmas shoes for children in need.

As a thank you for your gift of support, be sure to request this beautifully crafted, green crystal shoe ornament, a treasure to display each Christmas. With your gift of \$100 or more, you may also request this keepsake boxed set of all four shoe ornaments celebrating the various outreaches of LIFE.

Finally, please consider a gift of \$1,000 or more to help provide over 275 pairs of shoes or two children with corrective cleft lip or palate surgeries. And you may request the beautiful "Divine Servant" bronze scripture.

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

End of video

On the mission field:

Isak: I'm here with this mother and her child, Aralmundo, and you can see from what you're seeing on your screen how this little baby boy has been born with a cleft palate. So her child will grow up with this deformity and will ultimately end up having huge struggles in life. And yet it is so easy for us to be able to bring this solution to Aralmundo.

You've seen how we've given shoes and we put shoes on children that so desperately need them, and how that just changes their lives because their little feet are not breaking open and bleeding and getting sores and infection. Well, we want to do the same here. We want to bring shoes and smiles. Smiles to Aralmundo. And I want to ask you from the bottom of my heart to please be the person that says, "Yes, I'll bring that smile. I'll give a smile for a lifetime to this little baby boy." Please, do that for me today. Give the greatest gift, give the gift of a smile.

End of video

In the studio:

JAMES: Well, we're going to send you the little Christmas shoe for any gift and the little box with four of the beautiful colorful shoes. Betty actually bought a bigger Christmas tree to have more places to hang the little shoes because we like those ornaments as well as anything on the tree.

Well, if you'd like to have this book, *Transforming Loneliness*, perhaps you experience it, or you know someone, I'm going to give this to them because I believe Ruth Graham is a blessing, and she knows what she's talking about. So we'll send it to you. You just give some smiles and some shoes, okay? Ruth, I love you. Thank you for being my sister.

RUTH: Thank you for being my brother! And Betty, my sister!

JAMES: We're going to stay close forever. Any time you have something you want to share, this is home. Okay?

RUTH: Okay. Thank you.

JAMES: Bless you. Thank you so much for watching. Thanks for putting God's arms around people that are too often overlooked. You are such a blessing.