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Week 60: Fall Mission Feeding

James and Betty Robison

Bonnie Gray

JAMES: Well, I welcome you to *LIFE Today*. Betty and I are thrilled to have you. And our guest is Bonnie Gray. You may have heard her or of her; she's got a wonderful book. Listen to the title of it, *Sweet Like Jasmine*. Well, we're going to ask her what she means by that: "Finding identity in a culture of loneliness." She was perhaps, surprised to know that I'm the product of a forced sexual relationship on a 40-year old hospice nurse--most of you know that--and the doctor refused to abort me.

She was born in Chinatown. Her journey is indescribably remarkable. You're going to enjoy listening to Bonnie. Bonnie, we're glad to have you.

BONNIE: Thank you so much, James. I'm so happy to be here with you, Betty, also. I feel like I'm walking in a dream! Because how does somebody like me end up here, in Texas, with you, sharing my story, my broken story?

JAMES: Well, you're on a Christian television show that presents real-life today every day. And the viewers who watch us love to share *LIFE Today* every day all over the world. They're going to love to hear your story. So take us on the journey. Tell us about your journey and why you wrote this book.

BONNIE: When we first met this morning, you said, "Where is your home, Bonnie?" And that really struck me. I really felt I never had a home because my parents emigrated from Hong Kong, and I was born in Chinatown. My mother was not a loving mom. And that's so hard to say

because, in our Christian culture, we feel like we have to have this perfect story. But yet, that's where God met me. He met me in this home that was just so toxic. And when my father left when I was seven, James, another piece of my story fell apart. So even when I went to church, I felt like there were all these beautiful families. Everyone had a father and a mother, but I didn't. So I grew up hiding those parts of myself and my story because I felt ashamed.

JAMES: What put the shame on you?

BONNIE: I think we all want to have a nice story. And so all the places that I felt like I didn't fit in, I wanted to belong. I didn't want people to run away from me; I wanted them to welcome me. So I thought the way to share my faith was to share the mountaintop stories, how I overcame. I didn't share the valley stories. I felt like I had never heard anybody share them before.

So that's why I wrote this book because that's where God met me. God met me because he wasn't ashamed of me. And later on, when I went to college, my first year, I never had a boyfriend in high school, but I was a victim of sexual assault, date rape! And this is the first time I'm even talking about it. So when I was growing up, my safe place, the only place I could find to be myself, was my journal. That's where nobody could tell me what to say or how to feel. And so I could write about it with God, and yet God was saying, Bonnie, I want you to share your story.

Now what's odd about my story is it happened during a time when I finally found a loving husband in my 30s. I thought maybe because I grew up without a father and I didn't have a loving man in my life, maybe I'm destined to be alone. Maybe the best I can do in this life is to be serving God, serving others, loving others. Maybe I won't find real love until I finally see Jesus in heaven. Because I didn't fall in love. I didn't know; maybe something was wrong inside.

But when I finally found Eric, my husband, and I finally had two boys, I just wanted two boys; I named them Josh and Caleb to remind myself we're building a new legacy of faith. But I started experiencing panic attacks and anxiety when I became a mom. And I didn't understand why. Why am I waking up every two hours at night choking with panic attacks? I wasn't worried; I was sleeping.

JAMES: You didn't even know what was causing them?

BONNIE: I didn't know at all. I found myself in this weird state where who I was on the outside didn't reflect the loneliness of the inside.

BETTY: So you never really had been healed from that loneliness or the fear of not being accepted for who you are.

BONNIE: Exactly! Exactly! And so God used, by His grace, my body as the last line of defense to say, Bonnie, no, I don't want you to be silent anymore.

So I was ashamed. I didn't tell anybody because I didn't want anybody to think I was broken; something was wrong with my faith. I went to a counselor. He was the head of a Christian counseling center of 100 therapists. Well, he said to me within one minute. He said, "This is a classic case P.T.S.D."

I said, "P.T.S.D.? I've never even seen violence. I'm not a soldier. Why would I have P.T.S.D.?"

And he said, "Bonnie" -- and this changed my life. He said, "Did you know that emotional and verbal abuse has the same impact as physical abuse?" I'd never heard that before in my life.

I said, "No." And I was silent for the first time. I said, "But wait a minute! Why is it happening now? I've been through harder times in my life. Okay. Why is it happening now? I have a loving husband. I put myself through college. I'm the overcomer, I'm the encourager, I was a missionary."

He said, "Well, did you know a soldier when he is on the battlefield is strong. He's helping others; he's solving problems; he's surviving and fighting and being brave. When does a soldier experience panic attacks? When he comes home." He said, "Bonnie, you're coming home." (I get emotional.) He said, "It's not because there is something wrong with your faith, it's not because

you're broken, it's because you've done good. You've done good, girl! Your faith in Christ has helped you overcome hard things. But faith is not just for the mountaintop experiences. Faith gives us the courage to go back and look at the broken things that we weren't able to face when we were going through them."

And I was freed up to know that there is no shame. I'm here now. I am not ashamed anymore, James, because I understand. Faith -- sometimes, it takes greater faith to allow ourselves to fall apart in Jesus' arms of love than to pray that it doesn't happen.

And suddenly I said, okay God, I understand now. You don't just want me to be a missionary to help love others. My heart is your mission field. Thank you for the opportunity to share my story because God said, you know what? Bonnie, I'm going to go back. I'm going to show you all those times and places where you thought you were alone. I'm going to show you, we're going to go back a second time; I'm going to show you how much I love you.

I grew up below the poverty line, and we didn't have medical insurance. We lived in Chinatown, so we went to have Chinese herbs. Herbs can only go so far because when you need antibiotics, you need a western doctor. So, my mother, I had not seen my father. He left that morning. He packed his suitcase as we all have those moments. The suitcase is there. I have no idea why he's leaving. He is peeling off in his green olive Nova, screeching off the driveway.

I'm like, "Mom, what's going on?"

My mother says, "Get over here!" She is pulling out photos from the photo album, cutting up all the pictures of my father. She said, "Get over here and cut up these pictures. I don't want any pictures of him ever left again."

And I'm thinking, oh my gosh, I think I want to save one photo of him. I tried to slip it under behind me as she's wildly raging and cutting up photos of like weeds under a lawnmower -- all over the living room. She caught me.

She said, "What are you doing? What are you doing?"

I said, "I'm not in this photo, you're not in this photo. Can I just keep one photo of my father?"

She said, "No." She's like, "You want to go live with him?" She dragged me -- dragged me over to the phone; this is back in the day when we had those phones on the wall. She said, "You go pack your bags. You go live with him; you love him so much."

And right then and there, I stopped crying. I said, "I'm fine. I don't need to know where he's going."

I made a vow. I said, "I'm never ever going to need to find out. It's fine. He's left. I don't know why." We all make vows kind of like that to be strong. And at that moment, God was there. Because when I had my babies, I was looking for a birth certificate to sign up my second son so he could go make Popsicle stick art for a few hours so I could get a break. I stumbled upon my own birth certificate. I looked at it. Have you ever studied your birth certificate?

JAMES: I've seen mine.

BETTY: Yeah.

BONNIE: I never really looked at it that closely.

JAMES: Mine says "Legitimate: No." Literally.

BONNIE: See, I feel right at home with you.

JAMES: So what did you see?

BONNIE: It said, "Chinese Hospital." I was like, why in the United States is there a hospital named after an ethnicity? In fact, it is the only hospital. I was like, why? Second, said: "Mother,

age 18, residence.” It's on the same street as the hospital in Chinatown. I'm like, that's odd. And I suddenly got curious. God used curiosity to have me find out; I realized my sons one day will ask me, "Where is grandpa? When did we come to America?" And I had no answers. I never had the courage earlier to ask. Because of that vow I made.

And God said it is time for you to let go of that vow, Bonnie. I want you to find your father. It started out for my son, but God's very -- he's very compelling. He knew I needed to find out for myself. So this story, *Sweet Like Jasmine*, is about what happened when I finally stopped running away from those secrets and tried to find my father. Where was he? Why did he leave me? And I was shocked by what I discovered.

JAMES: You said you wanted to read something in the book. Does it touch on any of the things that you've already mentioned?

BONNIE: I think all of us have a moment where we're at the crossroads of life. We have to make a decision. Am I going to allow myself to change my story? Allow God to change my story? Am I going to let go of those old lies that I believed about myself? And one of those crossroads was when I finally thought, maybe I've fallen in love, in my 30s. I did not think I would fall in love with a blond-haired blue-eyed boy because I thought I needed to marry a Chinese person who would understand my brokenness and growing up Chinese American. But God said no, I'm bringing you a boy from a lumber mill town; that grew up in a lumber mill town. He's in the military; somehow, we found ourselves. At the time, I was in my 30s.

And he said, "Hey, why don't we go with some church friends to go ride the roller coasters?" The secret was my mother said, "You can only stay with family on holidays. Family is first." And so I had to make a decision, am I going to go?

Now, this is the moment. Ama, that means Chinese, "mom." "Ama, this is just a simple, fun weekend to go ride the roller coasters. I haven't dated anybody since college. I'm 31 years old. Maybe you're right, it won't last, but I like Eric. I won't know if I don't try. I've taken care of you my whole life. Why can't you be happy for me?" I started crying because I was more scared

than anything. Scared I said it so bluntly. Scared because I had never spoken to my mother this way.

"How stupid can you be? So a man comes along and pays you a little attention, and you think that makes you special? Ama scoffed. "You've forgotten who you are. You are Bonnie Lee. You are my daughter."

Ama screamed it at the top of her lungs. Her eyes wild with rage, wailing with all her might like she was blowing air out of her lungs. Her face started turning purple, her hands balled up in a fist. I thought she would storm out, and I would hear her grab her car keys and slam the front door, as she often would, leaving me behind alone as a little girl in the house.

Instead, Ama tore out, thundering into the kitchen, and I heard her opening and slamming doors shut. The next thing I knew, she flew back into the room with a glint of steel, brandishing a large pair of scissors in her hand. She shoved my sliding closet doors open, violently yanking my clothes off the hangers. She was shaking as she pulled apart my clothes by the neck openings to tear them up. Haphazardly cutting up my clothes, running the blade of the sheers against my clothes, and tugging at them like she was strangling the life out of them.

"Everything you have, everything you are, is because of me. There would be no you if it weren't for me." Ama screamed it at the top of her lungs while she clawed at my desk, clutching whatever she could get her hands on, ejecting everything. My room became a confetti of fury.

I stood there choking in my tears, afraid to move or breathe, frozen and paralyzed. Confusion engulfed me. How could something so simple become so very wrong? A thought hit me like a siren. Something is really, really wrong. I think we all have those moments where you know what? All those things that we carry, it hits us. Something is very, very wrong.

I ran into the bathroom, James and Betty. I'm not ashamed to say it anymore. I was 31 years old. I was fearful for my life. Would my mom end it right there? Would she harm me? In fact, she threatened suicide. She said, "If you go, you'll come back to find me in a blood -- a pool of

blood." And right then and there, for the first time in my life, I called someone, and I told them, "I'm so scared. I can't handle it if my mom does kill herself." But it's like things can get so crazy that you realize at that point, I have to choose my own -- I'm the daughter of a loving Father. This can't be what I was born to live?

And at that moment, this is why I wrote this book, we all need someone. That vow I made to never need anybody, to never ask questions was broken.

JAMES: You title it, *Sweet Like Jasmine*. What do you want to imply coming out of all the pain, to say, *Sweet Like Jasmine*? What are you saying?

BONNIE: Well, when I was a little girl in Chinese, the most popular tea was jasmine tea. It is fragrant. The tea opens up as it steeps in the warmth of the tea. And so, in the warmth of God's love, we can open our lives. We will be the beautiful fragrance of Christ wherever we go because we can share the valleys, we can share the mountaintop of God's love and his peace.

JAMES: I want to just say to all of you, I want to pray for you right now. Father, this has been an amazing story. Bonnie is overflowing, not only with the story but the glory of your grace. And Lord, she's told it in a book that can impact so many lives because many listening right now identify. So, Father, I pray you'd touch their broken heart, touch them in the area of challenge and need and panic -- or wherever they are, and take them in your arms.

You heard Bonnie talk about talking to God, but you heard her talking about God talking to her. That's the relationship God wants all of us to have. I believe with all my heart that's what she's really trying to help lead people toward; to find identity in Christ and the peace that passes understanding. That he walks through every valley, even the shadow of death -- it doesn't matter what it is, he is with us.

You know our viewers are the most amazing people. I can promise you if some of them wanted to know how to contact you, do you have a website they can go to if they want to ask you a question or find out if you're speaking somewhere?

BONNIE: Absolutely! That's become my life passion. Exactly that. *Sweet Like Jasmine.com*, I would just love everyone to be able to go there and to be able to see what this journey is for you. I'm offering a free journal of faith. These are the very 28 questions that I had to ask myself on my journey of healing. And I'm offering this because these very stories that emerge from here became the book.

JAMES: So they go to the website: *Sweet Like Jasmine*. I want you to do that.

Let me just say this about our viewers. When we've shown everybody that watches us on *LIFE Today* how we can share life today, how we can actually give people life today, and there are many people right now challenged for another day to even live. You really do become the miracle answer to their need and their prayers. I think in many instances, especially the prayers of the mothers.

I want you to watch and just look in right now on a scene that you have become the miracle answer to the challenge. Watch closely.

On the mission field

ANNOUNCER: All across Southern Africa, mothers like these are facing an epidemic -- an epidemic that slowly takes their children's lives. Not because of an illness or a war, the children are dying from will malnutrition. And even though these mothers know why their children are dying, they can't do anything about it. There's simply just not enough food to feed their family.

OPEN CAPTIONS:

>> Only a few people in the village have food. I don't know what else I can do. I end up begging for food, and my children keep getting sick. It makes me cry. I don't know where to get the food to feed my children.

RANDY: What we've seen here over the last few days is heartbreaking. We literally have seen children die. In this part of the world, death comes quickly, and it doesn't always come with much warning. That's why it is critical that we come in here where they're at and supply some kind of nourishment.

We have to have the support of our partners, our viewers, to expand in areas like this because it is critical. They're losing too many children. We've never seen this many go so fast in the short time we've been here. It really is desperate.

ANNOUNCER: With our help, Mission Feeding will give a bowl of nutritious food to hundreds of thousands of children every day. Without our help, the children of Southern Africa will face this epidemic alone.

End of video

In the studio

JAMES: But they're not going to. I'm so grateful to see our son, now a grandfather himself, first little grandson, but to see how much Randy loves sharing God's love. And then, Betty, I don't know how many of you may have noticed the length of that line. Let me tell you something very unique about it. Those children know that food makes them feel better. It is the most exciting thing that happens. And if you've ever gone to an entertainment park like Six Flags over Texas or some of the places in like Florida, Disney World, wherever, you'll see long lines waiting to have fun. These children wait patiently in line. We have to organize them so you can apportion soup but not create chaos. And they stand there.

Betty, when I looked at that long line, and you and I had been there when we ran out of food, and the kids would crawl into the barrel and start scraping. Any that had fallen in the dirt, like say come out of the scoop and fell on the ground, they scooped it up. You began to pray; I remember when you started. You were looking at our viewers, and you said, "I'm praying that the line to feed the children will always be longer than the line to be fed."

And Betty, we saw the miracle with our viewers. That's why we're saying to you right now, give \$30, \$50, or \$100; it still feeds three, five, or ten children for the next months. Please, understand that. You may be able to give several thousand dollars. And you know what? Betty, our viewers are going to do it because God answered your prayer. The line is longer.

And I'm praying you'll get your bank card; use it like a check. Go online or dial that number and make the gift God put on your heart. Make the largest gift. I'm always going to say, stretch your ability. You know feeding three is a miracle to three, but if you can feed ten, please do. If you can feed 100, please do. Give \$1,000, whatever you can do. Betty, I believe they're going to do it.

BETTY: I believe you will, too. I know you will. You've done it before, and you're going to join us again. Let's please get the nourishment to these children, so they have an opportunity in life to grow up and know Jesus for the first time. Please join us. Let's do it right now.

JAMES: That really is the truth too. Because they see the love of God, they're ready to hear about it. They've seen it demonstrated by you. So please, right now, if you write a check, make it to *LIFE*, but call us and tell us what you're putting in the mail. Would you? Or use your bank card like a check; go online or dial the number. Thank you so much for giving life. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts on behalf of all those whose miracle you make possible.

Begin video clip

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. This urgent need is \$392,000 above our normal feeding budget and is critical to help save the lives of those suffering most.

With your gift of any amount, we will send you *Christmas Grace*. This eye-opening, new 31-day devotional will give you a fresh perspective on the greatest gift ever given and the life-transforming hope found in Christ's birth.

With your gift of \$100 or more, request the "Love and Thanks" tumbler set with scriptures reminding us that "God's love never fails" and to always "Give thanks." These tumblers will keep drinks hot or cold wherever you go.

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: I'm believing that the line to help all the children and their families is, in fact, longer than the line to be fed. Bonnie is a miracle story. Her website again: *Sweet Like Jasmine.com*. And she says she will send you, let me see your workbook, she will send you this free to just bless you. So you may say, James, you've got some gifts you're sending us, and they're pretty nice gifts, we go there, you're saying she'll do this for us? She will.

Thank you for sharing, Bonnie. God bless you, and you keep pointing people to Jesus.

BONNIE: Thank you, James! Thank you, Betty, so much!

JAMES: Well, it is a joy to share your story with so many. Thank you for watching *LIFE Today*. And as I say all the time, thanks for sharing life today because you really do.

