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Week 51: Fall Mission Feeding
Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh
Susie Larson #1

SHEILA: Welcome to *LIFE Today*! I'm Sheila Walsh, here with Randy Robison. I have to tell you, I'm very excited about our next guest. I can honestly say that she is one of my favorite people on the planet. Every morning on Instagram, and every evening, she does like a morning blessing and an evening blessing, and I never miss them, and they speak to me. So Susie Larson, what a joy it is to have you.

SUSIE: Great to be back with you both again. Appreciate you both so much.

RANDY: It's always wonderful to have you here.

SHEILA: Whenever your name comes up, like when we have production meetings, and we sit around and talk about guests, whenever your name is mentioned, Randy and I are like, "Yes! Yes!"

[Laughter]

But this is a little different for you. It is a gorgeous book, by the way. It is called *Prepare Him Room*: A daily advent devotional. What led to you writing something like this?

SUSIE: You're so right that it is a different kind of book than what I typically write. At Faith Radio, where I work, we did a whole reading program during advent with the gospel of Luke a couple of years ago. And immersing myself in the gospel of Luke prior to Christmas just was absolutely life-transforming for me. I can't even explain it, but the

words jumped off the page, and I felt convicted, corrected, redirected, and invited. So I just started to take ferocious notes. And I sent a note to my editor that just said, "I think I want to write an advent devotional." He said, "Do it." I'm so grateful for how it turned out.

Advent means arrival; it means coming; it means preparation for arrival. So as we do that in anticipation of Christ's arrival to earth the first time, we're nearer now than ever before to his arrival on that great day. And this is a time, advent is a time for fasting and preparation to get our hearts ready.

Sheila and Randy, I feel like, in the holidays, I love the holidays. We have a lot of December birthdays in our family. I love the holidays. But I think so often, partying and soothes, all the things that we do to try to numb the pain has been sort of accumulating over the year, and this is precisely the time to bring Jesus into your very real pain because he's a very real redeemer.

I say have your parties, have your fun but prepare your heart in a way where you're going to see Jesus come into your story, develop an expectancy that he can radically transform you as you live with the holy expectancy. So I'm excited about it.

RANDY: You actually start it with that right there; embrace expectancy. What should we expect? Because for a lot of people, the holidays, this time of year, is tough for whatever reason; it is stressful. But you're really urging us to look beyond the holidays and look to something good from God.

SUSIE: I love that! You couldn't have put that better. That's exactly right. Again, I do love the anticipation of the holidays, but this is not a fluff book. This really does identify; it does invite people into the depths because of that reality. Some of our hardest times happened over the holidays. When I think of just the opening story with Elizabeth and Zachariah, the word says that they were righteous and barren. They were honorable and heartbroken. It's like to me, so hard to see those words in the same sentence. But that is

our reality. If we're honest, all of us, in some way, are bleeding under our armor and are living in the tension of the now and the not yet where we've seen the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. But if we're honest, some of these things haven't turned out the way we hoped, or there are still answers to prayer that have not happened for us.

So to live with a holy expectancy, Randy, to me, is to not let our hearts get offended with God, to not let our hearts sort of settle into, that's not for me. But to have a kind of divine contentment with a holy expectancy is to really believe any day now God may break through.

The people who identify Jesus were the ones who are waiting for him. The Pharisees had this fossilized idea of what religion was supposed to look like, even what the Messiah was supposed to look like, so they missed him completely. I don't want us to miss him because he very much came into troubled times when he was born. He is coming into troubled times when he returns.

But the thing that's interesting to me is Jesus himself said when he returns, it will be like in the days of Noah. People will be partying down and getting married and doing all their stuff, and they're going to be unaware of the fact that heaven is coming to earth for that last time to invade earth, to really put a stake in the ground to say I'm going to show you who is mine, who belongs to me.

And the fact that people are going to be partying and completely unaware, to me, speaks to they're trying to numb out a pain that they don't want to feel. That's why people numb out; that's why people turn to this stuff is there is so much hurt that they don't want to feel. So if we're looking at the holidays as an excuse and opportunity to finally just set it all aside and numb out, and I don't want to feel what's boiling beneath the surface, we miss the whole purpose of Christ in our Christmas. So if we could understand, he loves us so much, he wants to invade those places in miraculous ways, and he is a miracle-working God.

So that tension of going, "I'm going to stay about the daily duties that he's assigned to me, but I'm going to keep the light on in my heart. I'm going to keep an expectancy that God's going to break through."

SHEILA: Your book, it's like -- I don't even know how to describe it. It's like a fresh, it's like turning around and seeing this season in a way you've never seen it before. You have an interesting feature that I've never seen in a devotional. You have at the end a beautiful prayer, but then you have a fasting section. Talk about that because that really hit me. I thought, wow! That's a very doable discipline.

SUSIE: Yeah, I love that part as well, Sheila, because as someone who has battled chronic health issues, really active, engaged fasts around food have been difficult for me, I've done them, but for many years, for my whole adult life, I've practiced partial fasts that have been unconventional because I want to make space for God. And so I've done that. Or there are times where I give up TV, or I give up my suspense Christian novels, which is -- I love those!

[Laughter]

SHEILA: Suspense Christian novels?

SUSIE: But Keven says I've developed the spiritual gift of suspicion. So I need to get rid of them. But we all have our things that are not sinful, but they're sort of our comfort and our fun things, and when you push those out of the way to make space. So these are unconventional. So one of these days, I'm asking you to fast "overdoing it." When you're trying to impress more than bless.

Another day is fasting self-contempt. When you start to see, come to the edges of yourself, and the temptation is to turn inward because if Christmas isn't a time for comparison, I don't know what is. You may think you've got it together, then you see so-and-so, and you think, I've got moldy clothes in my washer. And you start to really

realize, I don't have it all together. And you can go to that self-contempt place. So fasting from some of these things that are attitudes of the heart, engaging restraint so that God can move in those spaces is really powerful.

RANDY: That ties into, let me make sure I get the date, day three, "Prepare the way." And you said some things in there that kind of convicted me, to be honest with you. Because you talk about what we do to prepare the way for Christ means that we prepare to change. And that change is exactly what you're talking about, making room; that's not just a nice rearrangement of our lives, that's saying, you're the king of everything. Not just a season or some nice thought, but no, you're the king of all my life.

SUSIE: I love it! You got it. Randy, you've really picked it up. Because when John the Baptist is saying, "Prepare the way," I started thinking, prepare for what? Did he want everybody to run home, get their act together before they jumped into the waters of baptism? No! Because that's Jesus' work.

But what he is saying is prepare to change because the high places will be brought low, the low places high, the crooked ways straight. And the idea that, are you ready for this? Because jumping into the waters of baptism is not just to escape hell. It's for the radical redemption of your whole life. And when you start to think, Jesus, you're my savior, but you're also my king and my Lord. So I'm inviting you into my story, into my coping mechanisms, into my default responses, into the fleshly ways that I react. I'm inviting you into all of it.

But the thing is, he doesn't come in to condemn. He comes in to set us free. But when John is saying, "prepare the way," he's like, "Are you ready for this?" Because I think so often we make it really about pray the prayer, check the box, get out of hell. It's not that. You follow Jesus, and he radically redeems your life. But guess what? He turns you into someone you never dreamed you could be.

So are you ready? Are you ready for that? I don't want you to postpone that. I don't want

you to numb out, overindulge this holiday season, wake up on January 1st, feel toxic, lethargic, and go okay, here I am in a new year. I want you to practice some restraint. I want you to dig deep and go, what are these things I've been trying not to feel? Jesus, I invite you into these places. I want to see your kingdom come in this holiday season because it's been quite a couple of years, and we need you now more than ever.

RANDY: We like the idea of a kingdom. We want to walk in the kingdom. We want to be part of the kingdom. But you can't be a part of a kingdom if he is not king.

SUSIE: Come on! Somebody give me an amen!

SHEILA: Amen!

RANDY: So when you talk about that, to me, it's good news like you say, it's good news. But it does mean clearing out that clutter, making room. And that means getting rid of our old junk, which is the good news. We get rid of the junk to get the great gifts.

SUSIE: It is super important to know that we don't go home and clean out the junk, but Jesus -- it is so interesting because when John was preaching, the question became over and over again, what shall we do? Did you notice his answer was different for each of them? Because it's not that they were -- this isn't works salvation where he told the Roman officers quit misusing your power, or the tax collectors, quit being corrupt. He was going to those places in their flesh that proved why they needed a savior in the first place.

If we're willing to make him king, there are going to be times where he gently points to some things to say, you know that fear? I want to redeem that. That tendency to show up late everywhere you go, we both know that's not time management. You're trying to keep yourself from being known. I want you to be known. The Lord always calls us up. The enemy always beats us down. But God is not just satisfied just to save us to slave us. He wants to save us to redeem us. But we've got to be humble and teachable enough to let

him do that.

SHEILA: In that same devotion, you talk about Sodom in a way I've never seen it before. Because when we think of Sodom and Gomorrah, we think of sexual sin. But you quote from Ezekiel 16, where it says: The problem was you're arrogant, overfed, and unconcerned. That's kind of different.

SUSIE: That's jarring to me. I read that a number of years ago where he talked about gluttony, pride, overfed, and then apathy while the poor and needy suffered outside their door. It is so easy to judge Sodom for their sins, but who of us haven't thought of our -- maybe you don't have a problem with ego and pride. We all have a problem with overthinking about ourselves. Who hasn't overindulged and consumed more than they ought? Who hasn't seen the need and shrugged their shoulders going someone else will take care of that? These are really big deals to God. And again, not for condemnation, but what about if this holiday season we gave gifts not just to the rich but to the poor? What if we did practice some restraint? What if, instead of apathy, we chose engagement? There are missions all over the world that need our attention. And you will come alive when you start engaging with God that way.

RANDY: One of your chapters is on encountering Jesus. The note I made struck me, and it ties right into what you're talking about. Is that we encounter Jesus in times of need. And you talk about people in scripture who are at their greatest point of need. And that's where Jesus comes in as Lord in a way to fulfill that need, to change what has put us in the position of being needy. I love how you talk about the people who found the answer to that need in Christ.

SUSIE: Amen. In that chapter, the thing that kind of stuck out to me was one, when the Jewish elders pleaded with Jesus, "Help this Roman officer." When normally, they were at odds. But he cared about the Jewish people, and he had a slave who was on his deathbed. And this man, this officer, understood authority because he said, "I'm under authority, I have authority, you can just say the word." And he also said, "I'm not worthy

of having you in my home."

There is something so powerful about humility and understanding authority. I think it was Watchman Nee who said, "You can't have authority unless you're under authority." That juxtaposition of humility and understanding authority makes the devil tremble. I'll just say that. So we need to understand that.

But then there was a story in the village of Nain, a woman, this widow, it was the worst day of her life. She lost her husband already, now she lost her son, and women without men in that day were so vulnerable. I'm picturing her, her face in her hands, weeping trails of dusty tears down her face. I mean, her life is over. And she didn't ask Jesus for help. She was in the funeral procession, and Jesus came in and decided, not today. And what that speaks to me about him is there are times when you are in such a desperate place, you can't even call on him; he's there.

Sheila, you and I have both have talked about this behind the scenes. He's met us in those places where you can't even lift your head, but he is there. He is not indifferent, he is not lost your address, he knows where you live. And I just say, understand that about Jesus and push him aside this holiday season so you can numb out and not feel your pain. To me, this is a travesty because this is why he came.

SHEILA: You're speaking so much about hope, Susie. Because I'm just thinking of the letters, of the notes, we all get from people who have found the last almost two years devastating. People are really shattered. I think what you are suggesting is, rather than pretending none of it ever happened, inviting the hope of Christ into everything that's happened.

SUSIE: I love that you both are grasping the book; it means so much to me because it is a radical invitation to encounter a radical God. His promises are as potent as they've ever been. And people are traumatized.

So again, to me, it just would be a complete waste of a sacred holiday to just numb out. Engage with God and see. He may ask you for something different than he asks from me. For me, he may say, I want you to create space. I want you to quit worrying about your health. I want you to create some space and cultivate expectancy. He may say to someone else, I don't want you to get a third job to cover those finances. I want you to sow some seeds and trust me. Obedience looks different on each of us, but it's always an invitation to encounter him.

SHEILA: We've got to get this story in. You have to share the story of the Christmas tree.

[Laughter]

It's so brilliant.

SUSIE: So I had this Christmas fantasy. I love Hallmark, I love Christmas commercials, and I was born a week before Jesus' birthday, which it's hard to compete with Jesus but anyway, I love Christmas. And so I had this Christmas fantasy.

Well, I came into marriage, we got married young, we had our kids young, had a lot of crisis with Lyme disease and high-risk pregnancies and babies with respiratory issues. And all the while, my friends had money, and they had their health. So it even created more of a contrast where I'd see those commercials and go, one day you will be mine. Like I pictured all my kids sitting on the couch in a just perfectly decorated house. That's what was in my head. It just never happened because that's when our kids had their respiratory issues. But this was going to be the year this was going to happen for us.

And our dear in-laws, Kevin's parents, had given us a really bountiful tree to replace our Charlie Brown tree. And my hubby has this nervous thing he does when he is afraid he's going to let me down. He rubs his nose. So I'm baking cookies, we've got the Chipmunks on, the kids are dancing, they're pulling out the big tree, and all of a sudden, he's rubbing

his nose. I'm like, what's the matter? What's the matter?

Long story short, during spring cleaning, he accidentally had thrown away half of that tree and somehow half of the Charlie Brown tree, so we had two halves of trees that didn't fit. So he's a construction guy. He's like, "Not a problem, honey bun!" He gets his screw gun; he gets his -- he tried everything he could. And I'm like, "It's okay, honey." I mean, our living room looked like a catastrophe construction zone.

I kissed him on the head, went to bed, put the boys in bed. In the middle of the night, I woke up, and he wasn't there. I went out, and he was sitting in front of the most perfect medium tree, decorated, holding the lights like they were a remote control to a race car. I came up behind him. He goes, "I was going to make it rotate. But I thought I should stop while I was ahead." I crawled in his lap, and I was overcome. I was overcome because of what a picture it was of our lives.

Our lives were such a mess -- so, so, so hard. And the Lord in the middle of that, Kev had vision. I'm like, we don't need a tree this year. He had vision for it, and the Lord just said, I'm not giving up on you. So don't you give up on you. I'll never forget that. We had that tree, the medium tree, for years because it was such a testimony and a trophy of God's grace.

RANDY: What I like about that chapter is that's where you talk about seeing the story, or just to think higher and see deeper. And if people will just take what you're telling us, what you're trying to give us a glimpse of Christ this Christmas season, if they will take that to heart, they will see their story as Christ wants it to be, which is good.

SUSIE: If they could ask the Lord, I dare you, Jesus help me see my story. Help me see where the kingdom has come to my story. Because in the mess, I couldn't see it. Kev could. But when I got up in the middle of the night and sat with him and marveled, the mess was cleaned up, and there was just this beautiful creation. We are works in progress, and he is making something beautiful of us. One of my friends said, "If your story is not

good yet, God's not done yet." Come on and hang on and keep the light on in your heart; live with a holy expectancy this season.

SHEILA: One of the challenges in Susie's book and in Susie's spirit is it might be great to take our eyes off ourselves and reach out and do something for some other people who are in desperate need. And we're all about that. So I want you to watch something and then we're going to tell you some more about how you can get a hold of Susie's wonderful new book. Watch this.

On the mission field

ANNOUNCER: In Southern Africa, where the mortality rate for children under the age of five is the highest in the world, you'll find malnutrition clinics like this.

These children are living with the consequences of not receiving the nutrition they need because of the lack of food. Their mothers now wait and watch as their children cling to life.

ISAK: This is the reality of malnutrition. This is the silent killer, the destruction that malnutrition causes because it starts here. A mother doing everything she can, everything in her power that she can do, she's doing. A child that is helpless and hopeless just needs nutrition. So you say, what do we do? What we do is we reach out, and we help these children. But the best is not for us to help them here. The best for us is to be able to help them out in their villages, in the villages where we're not feeding, where Mission Feeding hasn't got to them. Because if we can get to those villages with food, with the Mission Feeding program, we're able to almost guarantee that we save each and every one of those children's lives.

I'm just asking you to give the best gift that you can give. I'm just asking you to open your heart and say, "I'll give to Mission Feeding. I will bring help to these children and to the tens of thousands of children in this area that so desperately need the Mission Feeding

program."

Please! Open your hearts today. Give the best gift you can. Give the gift of life.

End of video

In the studio

SHEILA: What a perfect, perfect invitation to change the way we view this season. I was studying James chapter 1, verse 17 recently. It is talking about pure religion, which is to take care of orphans and widows. That word *pure* in the original Greek is the word that we get "cathartic" from, "catharsis." And it means it is cleansing to us, a cleansing out of all that we are, or all we've gathered to look and care for others. I can't think of a more perfect time or a more perfect way to do that than through Mission Feeding.

Randy and I have both been in the situations where we're in the malnutrition clinic and watching children who don't even have the strength to cry. They're on their literal last breath, and the hopelessness in the eyes of those darling mothers who have just like us, they're just a mom like you and me. And then we've also been to the villages where Mission Feeding has already been set up. The difference is night and day. We have these orange bowls; I call them a bowl of hope. Because the special food that's made over there is specifically made for their dietary needs: Protein, vitamins. And your literal one bowl can turn from death to life in a child.

Let's make this Christmas not about us. Let's make it about inviting Christ into every broken place and then reaching out in his name. And if we all do it together, Randy, we can change this.

RANDY: Absolutely. We've seen it. We know this works. Sheila and I have been there, we've seen it, we know that it works. We can bring hope to these children in so many of the situations. I know the images are hard to see because it just looks hopeless, but it is not if you'll join with us.

Let me break it down for you. \$30 will feed three children for three whole months. That's because of the people we have in place, the systems we have on the ground, the experience we have in doing this, and the wonderful volunteers that are already there. We just need you guys watching in the audience to partner with us. \$50 will feed five children for three months. \$100 will feed ten children. Some of you can easily feed 100 children for the next three months with a gift of \$1,000.

As we approach the end of this year, I just hope you'll take a moment and say, "Lord, what would you have me do? How many children would you have me feed just to get them through that season of difficulty, to stabilize them where they can function on their own again?" We've done this for many years, decades; my parents started this so many years ago, out of a burden for the needy. And we have brought this to you over the years, and you have responded. I want to say thank you, but I'm asking you to respond this time of year, reach out, give the best gift you can. And by the way, if you can help with one of the malnutrition clinics, the average cost on those is \$24,500. Join with others. Let's put those back in place. Those are critical. Those are the last stops before the grave. Let's rescue them. We can do it together. Go to the phone, go online, and give the best gift you can.

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

On the mission field

ISAK: I want you to experience what we're experiencing today. I want you to feel my joy, to understand the gratitude I have in my heart for the fact that we can hand out these bowls of food. Because they are not bowls of food, they're bowls of life. We're here, and we're able to fill these bowls on a daily basis as long as you continue to partner with us. As long as you do your part, we'll do ours, and we'll make sure that these bowls get filled, that they get handed out and that these tummies get filled, and these lives get saved.

So please, continue to partner with us, continue to bring joy, happiness, and life to child after child.

End of video

In the studio

RANDY: I hope you are going online or going to the phone to give the best gift you can. You partner with us; we can give hope to so many children. Sheila, I hope people will request Susie's book.

SHEILA: It's gorgeous. For any gift at all, just say, "I would like Susie's book." And honestly, I think you should probably buy ten and give them to all your family members.

Susie, thank you for everything you pour into everything you write and for this beautiful gift that will change our advent season. Thank you.

SUSIE: Thank you for having me. It is always an honor to be with you both.

SHEILA: And we will see you next time here on *LIFE Today*. God bless you.