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Week one: Fall Mission Feeding: Last week

Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh

Amy Seiffert

RANDY: Welcome to *LIFE Today*! I'm Randy Robison; Sheila is with me as always.

SHEILA: Hey!

RANDY: One thing we like to talk about here on *LIFE Today* is this idea of grace. What does it look like? God's grace in our lives, the grace in others' lives. Well, today we have a wonderful guest. She has a book called *Grace Looks Amazing on You*. And we're excited to have Amy Seiffert with us. Welcome to *LIFE Today*!

AMY: Thank you for having me. I'm so excited to be here!

RANDY: This is a big topic, Sheila.

SHEILA: Yeah! It's one of the words we use most within our evangelical culture. But I wonder whether it's one of the words we actually understand the least. What led you to write this book?

AMY: It's possibly the thing I need the most. [Laughing]

SHEILA: Me, too!

AMY: I wrote this book because it actually came out of—I self-published a book before this one on motherhood. I realized I thought I was going to get a cape when I became a

mom, but I was handed weakness and a brokenness, and I just found myself needing grace over and over. And so, just unearthing those stories, finding grace, seeing that we can only receive it if we're empty-handed. Then we can hold grace, but only if we have nothing. So, yeah. It is a concept that we need desperately.

SHEILA: More than ever, I think.

RANDY: One thing you talk about with your children is the self-illustration of—a very frightening time that illustrates the need that we all need to be rescued at some point in our lives. Tell us about that.

AMY: Yes, I still get a little teary when I talk about this.

SHEILA: It's a mother's worst nightmare.

AMY: It is a mother's worst nightmare. It was the fourth of July a few years ago, and we were invited over to a pool party. I knew about half the families, half the families I didn't. We have three kids, so zone defense. We're outnumbered all the time. [Laughing] So I am cutting up hotdogs for one kid, my husband is helping out another, and we both thought that one of us had put our lifejacket back on our youngest, but we didn't.

And so I'm having a great time at the party. I'm the life of the party, and a matter of life and death is happening behind me. Around the corner comes my youngest, dripping wet, crying, shaking. He's not even able to get anything out. I'm looking. What's going on?

And then another little boy that I've never seen before in my life says, "Well—well—well—I saw him sinking, and so I jumped in, and I got him."

And then another little boy goes, "Yeah, my brother and I, we swim, and we saw him sinking, and we got him out."

Time stopped. A near-death experience left me shocked breathless. Obviously, the spiritual parallels, like when you realize how close you are to sinking—I mean—sinking. We need a rescuer. We need Jesus. I just kept thinking, it is by God's grace. It is an undeserved gift that he is breathing and alive and with us. It's by grace that I parent—there is no other way! [Laughter]

SHEILA: We all say a hearty amen to that. Now you've written this as a devotional, so obviously, we can't get into everything. But I pulled a few stories that I just thought our audience would really love. I love the one called "Annoying Grace." I think that has got quite a lesson in it because so often we think, well, no! Talk to us about what happened there.

AMY: "Annoying Grace." Oh, my goodness! So my oldest son was diagnosed with Crohn's disease when he was 11, and that was just—any kind of diagnosis; that process is hard. He was diagnosed, and the day after, we had on the calendar to go to an apple orchard, which we always go to in Ohio with our friends every year. And I thought, let's keep to some semblance of the calendar and go.

So we go, and it was hot, and I was overwhelmed with this diagnosis and didn't want to be there. The cider felt sticky, and I just was like, my kids are climbing trees, and they're singing, "Twist and pull, twist and pull" as they're pulling these apples. I just felt like no; my soul feels twisted and pulled and left to drop like a bad apple rotting. I was just struggling. We managed to have fun, and we ended up filling the biggest bag possible. Like the kind you could fit like a toddler inside. This is how many apples we had. And we heaved it back home. My husband put it on our concrete countertops when we got in. We went on with our week.

We had started a new diet plan for my son. We decided to attack Crohn's disease by flipping our pantry. So now my countertops are precious real estate, and I'm chopping and cooking and making bone broth and yogurt. As I'm doing it, I'm shoving this apple bag around. I'm annoyed with it. I'm bullying it. I'm like, "What are we going to do with

all these apples?”

And I'm just going on with this diet book. As I turn the next page and I read, I just start laughing. It says, "For the next phase of this diet, you are going to need a lot of apples. You will be making your homemade applesauce, and they cook down." I just looked at that bag and what was an annoying bag of apples became this amazing bag of grace right there. I felt seen, I felt known. It was a gift in the middle of a really dark hard time. And he said, "I've got you. You'll need these."

RANDY: Yeah. I think we do that a lot. We don't recognize God's grace in our lives as it is happening. Is there anything that maybe we should be more aware of to go, yeah, that's God actually working? Be patient with it.

AMY: Right! Totally. I think hearing stories like this, you start opening your eyes to if we start to tell each other, hey, someone sent me this message, and that feels like a gift to God. Or a coworker brought coffee today; that was grace today. Because the words grace and gift are synonymous. Which is so beautiful to think, well, there's gifts everywhere, there is grace everywhere. Let's open our eyes and open our hands and be able to share that and encourage each other with that.

SHEILA: You share what was a devastating experience and revisit it in later years. Can you talk to us about that?

AMY: So I was eight or nine, third grade, and was invited to sleep over at a friend's house. All the normal sleepover things, popcorn, P.J.'s, hanging out. But there was an older brother that was just kind of hanging around us. I felt uncomfortable, but I was little, and I didn't know how to trust myself. And late that night, I was sexually abused by him at the sleepover. So the next morning—I was only about four houses down from my own home. The next morning I made two promises to myself, my little nine-year-old self. I said I'm not telling anybody about this ever, and I'm not going back in that house ever.

I kept that promise for about 25 years until my son turned eight, about the age when I was abused. I started to have these—I had locked it away. So many survivors, just the coping, right? But God said you need to deal with this.

So many things in my motherhood, right; so, looking at my son, I started going to counseling—praise God for therapy and counseling—and found a lot of healing there. But I don't write about this here. There was a moment where my counselor said, "Have you asked Jesus where he was that night?"

SHEILA: Gosh! What a question!

AMY: And I said, "No. And I don't want to. I feel like he wasn't there, and I don't know what answer I'm going to get if I ask him." So that question was at the back of my head for about two years after that counseling session.

So this was just a few years ago. I was praying, and I felt led to ask God, where were you that night? And I went back there, and I pictured myself, and I had done this with my counselor, but I'm telling you what, he gave me a vision while I was praying of that night I'm sleeping and I'm safe. All the walls kind of melted down, and his protection and—it was as if there was hail and lightning, and there was protection from a good father for his daughter. I kind of was like, am I imagining this? This actually feels like Psalm 18. And so I went back, and if you read Psalm 18, he is angry, and he is coming for us. He says, "I rescued you because I delighted in you." And so he was rewriting my story—he still, years later, rewriting that narrative for me.

SHEILA: I think that's so beautiful because one of the things that are so confusing to so many people is where were you, Lord? And yet, we have this promise in Hebrews 13: I will never leave you. I will never forsake you. I think that can bring a lot of peace and healing to circumstances that are otherwise very hard to reconcile.

AMY: One hundred percent!

RANDY: I think that also ties into another of your devotionals where you talk about struggling with depression. You come to the conclusion that I think people need to hear. That is, not that we don't fight, but we never fight alone. What's your experience there?

AMY: Yes! I think it was freeing—yeah, that I'm not fighting this battle alone. The Psalmist wrote of depression and of anguish, and I always thought taking antidepressants was anti-God, anti-church, anti-Christianity, and it's not. I've seen grace written on a prescription note. Like there are so many ways that God shows up. And yeah, we don't fight it alone, so he's been with me in those dark places; even when I feel like he's not, he is there.

SHEILA: We talked about that when we were actually having one of our meetings, just talking about that. Randy was saying that when he does his show by himself, that sometimes you get a mixed response, like 50 percent of the church.

RANDY: I know when I grew up, I always thought, if you're fighting depression, if you're fighting any mental health issue, it is because I don't know, you've sinned maybe, or you're not -- you don't believe right. But yet, when I can't read my own Bible because my vision is shot, I go to the doctor, and they fix me up. Well, did you have to overcome some of those negative things?

AMY: Oh, for sure. Yes! Lots of people. We started with infertility, as well. And the same thing, you're not having babies; it is probably something you've done. Oh yeah. Really, is that how this whole thing works, or is there a different narrative here? So yeah, I definitely had to overcome talking about this and sharing about depression, infertility, and thinking, no, God is here. He works with broken people. This is who he came for, the whole broken lot of us! And he knows. And grace comes in every kind of form. I'm not going to shun medicine. Good gracious! We take aspirin when we have a headache; why wouldn't we?

SHEILA: I think there is a lot of genuine ignorance. I think a lot of people -- because when I was hospitalized for depression, and I still take medication, a lot of people were, well, don't you think if you had more faith or here are some scriptures. I love the Word of God. The Word of God literally saves my mind. But I think people don't understand there is a difference between going through a situation where you're just having a bad day, or a bad couple of weeks, or when your brain simply doesn't produce enough of the right chemicals. I think we condemned and judged a lot of people who really needed mercy and help.

AMY: Yes! Which makes me think about, we have a God of compassion and grace. That's how he introduces himself to Moses. He's like, I'm the Lord, compassionate and gracious. He has empathy for us; that's why he came.

RANDY: I like that you're pointing out all the different places where the grace is at. I think we're, with that situation, with mental health, I think we need to approach it on all fronts, whether it's diet, medication, whether it's counseling, prayer. Absolutely! Hit it in every area.

But I'm grateful for the doctors that have put my retinas back -- the Muslim doctor who put my retinas back together so I can see. I see that as grace. How did you learn to start seeing God's grace in all these places that I think we take for granted?

AMY: Once I saw the synonym of grace as gift, it just flipped the script for me. I was like, okay, the very breath in my lungs right now that we have is grace. I'm on borrowed breath. Just really relaxing and thinking, okay, there is grace around every corner, even in the valley. Like when I think about it, we spent ten days in Psalm 23 here in the book. He has, the shepherd, the good shepherd has a rod and a staff for protection and for pulling us back to follow him. That's grace. Those are tools of grace for our good.

SHEILA: One of the things I thought was really interesting was you talk about circus brain. [Laughter]

AMY: I have it!

SHEILA: I wonder if anybody who has ever been diagnosed with ADHD, you can relate to a squirrel, that. How has the Lord helped you in that struggle? Because you're a mom with three kids. Life is crazy enough.

AMY: Life is crazy. Because I was diagnosed with ADHD, it's humbling. I am always dropping balls, and I'm always needing to ask for help and grace. So I'm always trying to give it as well. Like yep! I dropped that ball too. I didn't sign that paper either. It is fine. We're okay. Can we have an air of like we're going to be okay?

SHEILA: Life will go on.

AMY: Life will be okay. I want to have the air of perfectionism and control, and God's like, sorry. You're going to just be juggling and dropping and relying on my grace. It will be perfected in your weakest place when you want to be shiny; it's not about you being shiny.

SHEILA: You talk about how meditation, I found that fascinating because that's been a real strength in my own life; just finding a scripture and meditating on that, chewing that scripture over and over. How has that helped you? Because a lot of people think, well, that's eastern. We don't do that.

AMY: Right! Oh my goodness. Yeah, Richard Foster, with his *Celebration of Discipline*, really opened my idea to the spiritual practicals. I'm a little bit obsessed with how much they help our lives. Meditation has been huge. When I sit down and just think, five minutes, I'm going to meditate on this one verse; it takes a while. I feel like my thought monkeys are everywhere and just to corral them, and to breathe for the first two minutes, and then just really take my time and meditate like "The Lord is my shepherd" and go slow. I think part of ADHD is zipping and to really slow down. It's so good for me. And

the world isn't on fire, God is in control, and I'm okay.

RANDY: That's good! That's good! I have to hit this one thing, and I think this will help a lot of people that may be struggling, trying to comprehend this and say, okay, it's great for her but I still haven't gotten it. There's one thing you do that horrifies a fiction reader like myself. You talk about people that pick up a book and – with non-fiction you can get away with this. Fiction, this is so wrong. You read the last chapter and get the end of the story!

SHEILA: My husband does that. It drives me nuts!

RANDY: That's borderline insane -- I'm just saying. But you talk about how that actually really helped you. And I think that will help a lot of people if they do what you did.

AMY: To be fair, my girlfriend and my book club read the last chapter; I do not. But I'm paralleled at to reading the last chapter of the Bible, going to Revelation. Yes! I often find myself going to what is it? Revelation 20, where we see the end of the story. The good story, and to know, okay, it's going to be good even if this whole thing is a dumpster fire. God is coming back, and there is a tree of life to heal the nations. Don't our nations need healing? We can just bank on that description at the end of the book.

I sit there, and I think about how he says his name is written on our foreheads. That's so beautiful. For those who struggle with identity, I'm his kid forever, and everyone will know it; we will all know it. Yeah, I found myself flipping there often, especially when we were trying to figure out what was wrong with my oldest son before he was diagnosed because I needed the ending.

SHEILA: Absolutely. I love the fact that Revelation 21 says God himself will wipe the last tear from our eyes. Such a beautiful, beautiful promise.

Well, you know we've met, Randy and I have met some people who have wept more than

their fair share on this earth. It's been our commitment to be able to be part of God's answer to what's causing them so much pain. We're going to tell you how to get a hold of this book, but first of all, I would love for you to watch this.

On the mission field:

Announcer: Perhaps the greatest fear of parents concerns the health of their children. It is especially true in Africa. Adriano is a godly father in Angola who once took pride in his ability to provide for his family. But tragedy has changed that.

Open Captions:

>> We lost our two children and it's like we lost part of us. That's why we're working, but not with full power.

Announcer: Adriano told us food and health are two critical issues in his community. You see when parents take care of sick children, there is little time to farm and produce food. But without food children's immune systems become weak and more susceptible to disease. It's a vicious cycle.

Sheila: When you look at a little one like this. This little one's name is Balvine Natula. This color of hair, this red hair means that the body has stopped sending nutrients to the hair. So there is no protein. These are terrible sights. And it's why mission feeding is absolutely vital for us. We want to be able to get to where help is needed now, and help is needed now in these villages to feed their bodies so that they have strength that we can feed their souls and spirits. You can't hear that Jesus loves you when you are starving to death.

End of video

In the studio:

SHEILA: Honestly, those sights, those mothers, those little ones, I will never ever forget

the desperation in the mother's eyes and the lifelessness in the eyes of these little ones, little ones who should be running around or playing with a soccer ball. But they're just staying still because their bodies are so weak.

I remember the first trip feeling so desperate until we were able to, just a couple days later, go to one of the villages where Mission Feeding has been set up. It literally is hope in a bowl. I had no idea that you probably saw me there being able to dish the food out. It looks a little like oatmeal, but it is specifically made for children in Southern Africa with the nutrients, the vitamins, the protein that they need. And it is as if with one bowl, you shift from death to life.

We've made a commitment this year, and this is our last week of Mission Feeding. We've made a commitment to feed 350,000 children. Randy, I remember your mom saying, "Our prayer is that the line of children will never be longer than the food we have to put in the bowls."

RANDY: Absolutely.

SHEILA: We need to do this now.

RANDY: Yes, and it's only possible through the support of viewers like you. What we see is this cycle they were talking about of malnutrition and sickness, and it just spirals down and down. What we do, and we have people in place ready to do this right now, is to break that cycle. How do we do that? It's what Sheila was talking about with that bowl and that special nutrition mix. We go in, and for a simple gift of \$30, we can feed three children for three whole months. That's what we do to break this cycle. That's how we stop them from dying. This is literally life and death, Sheila.

So your gift today of \$1,000 would do that for 100 children for the next three months. It's the end of the year, so many of you are looking, where do we make those year-end gifts? Let me tell you, this is a solid place to invest in saving lives. We've been doing this for

decades now, and it works. We go from crisis area to crisis area to crisis area. We break the cycle, break the cycle, break the cycle and give them a future. Maybe \$1,000 is beyond your means. A gift of \$50, for example, will feed five children for three whole months.

Pray about it and see what God would have you do. I hope you'll go to the phone or go online right now, and don't forget, this is the last week on the air that we'll be talking about the malnutrition clinics that we're rebuilding in areas where they've been destroyed by floods or other circumstances. We're going into the most critical places with the love of Jesus Christ, and we're inviting you to be a part of that. So do it right now. Go to the phone, go online, make the best gift you can and know that you will be helping to save a life.

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."

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

End of video

On the mission field:

RANDY: This is a grave. It's an empty grave. It has no real significance until you put someone in it. Unfortunately, they're putting far too many children into these graves. Malnutrition is robbing children of their future and robbing families of their joy. They've already dug these graves because they're expecting death.

But I have a prayer. I'm expecting life. So I ask all of you: Will you fill a bowl, so they don't fill a grave? I hope everyone watching will do the best they can. Give the best you can because they don't have to be waiting on children to die. We can make that difference. If you'll just go to the phone right now, go online, give the best gift you can and know that when you fill that bowl, you give a child hope and life.

End of video

In the studio:

RANDY: Don't forget this is the last week we will be on the air with this, so I hope you'll go to the phone right now. Go online, make the best gift you can and join us in this beautiful mission we call Mission Feeding. And today, Sheila, we have a special gift if they'll request it.

SHEILA: Yeah! For any gift at all, you can request Amy's book, *Grace Looks Amazing on You*. So please, please call with your gifts. This is the last week. We've made a commitment to these, to our friends on the ground that help is on the way.

Amy, I just want to thank you for this book. It is beautiful, it is honest, it is real, it's transparent! Thanks for being our guest.

AMY: Thanks for having me!

RANDY: Thank you. We appreciate your message, and we appreciate you guys being with us here on *LIFE Today*. If you miss any of our programs, you can catch them at LifeToday.org. We'll see you again next time.

SHEILA: Bye!