

5/3/22

Week 19: Spring Mission Feeding

Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh

John and Debbie Lindell

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

SHEILA: Hey!

RANDY: And we're excited you're with us today because there is a phrase we've heard kicked around and that phrase is the title of a book as well, *New Normal*. Well, we're going to tell you about a little bit of a different *New Normal* and we're excited to have back on *Life Today*, John and Debbie Lindell. Welcome! Great to have you.

JOHN: Thank you, Randy. Sheila, it is good to be with you.

RANDY: So we've heard this phrase "new normal" and usually it doesn't -- it's not good news. We're going to have to learn to live with... You're going in an entirely different direction. Where are we going with this?

JOHN: My observation as a pastor is that through the years, I would watch believers and they would visit the land of blessing they just wouldn't stay there. So too many people view God's blessing as temporary or as random. When you read the book of Joshua you find that in order to live in the land of blessing there is something we have to do, there are things we can do. God gave them the land, but they were going to have to fight some giants. God gave them the land, there were some cities they were going to have to take. God gave them the land but there were some things they were going to have to do to

make room for God to work in their life. The same thing is true for us.

SHEILA: When you say "live in the land of blessing," for someone who is flipping through channels and doesn't even know what that is, what do you mean by that?

JOHN: It is a land where you experience the goodness of God in a variety of ways that effects every aspect of your life. It's seeing God work. It's seeing prayers answered. It's seeing a fullness to your life that doesn't come accidentally or incidentally. It is a matter of positioning ourselves in a way so that God can work in our life in the way that he's desired to all along.

RANDY: There is this whole tension, I think in scripture; we see it very much in scripture, it is if/then construct. If you'll do this, then God will do this. In the New Testament, we go, oh, Christ has done it all. What is still left for us to do?

JOHN: I think that is a great question. Paul puts it this way in Philippians. He says, "God is at work in you. Now work out your salvation with fear and trembling." So is it God or it is us? It's both. This is the thing, God desires a partnership with us. He invites us in to be a part of the work that he is doing on the earth, and the work he's doing in us.

So there is a sense where we have a responsibility to own some things. Think in the beginning of the book he says to Joshua over and over again, "Be strong and courageous." He doesn't say, "I'm going to make you strong and courageous," though he does! But Joshua has to decide. He has to determine that I'm going to be a person of strength, that I'm going to be a person of courage. You have to believe, Moses is dead, he is leading them into a new land. Just the intimidation factor of following a man whose face glows with the glory of God is daunting. But God says, "Listen, now is the time for you to be a person of courage." And if he does, great things will happen. If he doesn't, nothing is going to happen.

I think it is that way in our life. I think a lot of times Christians don't understand that we

have a part to play that makes a big difference in what we see God do in our life.

SHEILA: Debbie, you're somebody that I've watched God just blossom. And the way you bless women, the way you welcome women in, the way that God has blessed your conference that you do is phenomenal. But you've also faced some personal health struggles. What does this book mean within your paradigm?

DEBBIE: Well, I think, as John was talking about, just to live with courage and strength is a choice. When you're walking through a challenge, whether it is for me, battling cancer or a major accident, or watching someone you love experience a challenging situation that you have to walk with them through, you know you have a choice in how you're going to walk through that yourself. Are you going to live by faith and hold on to the things that you know are true about the Lord and his love for you and his goodness and that he never leaves you or forsakes you? Or are you going to face it with fear?

I think every day you have to make that choice. And as a leader, just like Joshua, as God is calling you to new things and new responsibilities and new aspects of leadership, you've got to walk in it just believing God is going to be with you. And so it's been a fun journey to see him take that and take what little you might feel you have and do something with it.

RANDY: You said an interesting word there. You referred to God's goodness and yet, you also were talking about health problems; things you both faced are very serious health issues. When we talk about blessings, some people might hear, well, if I'm blessed, I won't have these problems. And you're talking about goodness, if God is good then I won't face this illness. What is it maybe that we're not seeing in our earthly way of seeing things when we think of the idea of blessings? What does God see?

JOHN: Well, God is always working all things together for the good of those who love him or are called according to his purpose, Romans 8:28. God is inherently good. "You are good, and you do good," the Psalmist says. He is a good God.

So when I'm going through a challenge, we live in a world that isn't perfect, we live in that world that is fallen and we have flesh that's not been redeemed. So all of that is subject to the world we live in. And yet, in the middle of that, God's ability to be redemptive in everything we face. So when we're going through something, I don't know what he's going to do, I just know he is good. And I know he's got something he is doing in this that will change me for my good and his glory.

DEBBIE: It was amazing during John's last battle with cancer which he was diagnosed with cancer a year and a half ago, I think, almost now.

JOHN: In July of 2020.

DEBBIE: And then had his surgery, and then went back for a checkup and they found more cancer. But out of that season or trial, God did such incredible work in us. And we're seeing now fruit from that in the ministry. You can't even put wrap your mind around all -- understanding is just so supernatural. It's like beyond what you could understand. How he could take a difficulty and bring fruit from it. It's been exciting!

SHEILA: I wondered how much of that was a real intentionality on your part. Because sometimes to go through cancer but then to have to face that beast again, how did you in your own heart and mind prepare for how I'm going to go through this.

JOHN: Well, I think when I looked at it the first time, I went through it and messed around. By that, I mean I watched reruns of Star Wars and...

[Laughter]

...until I felt good enough to do what I wanted to do. I realized I didn't come out of it any different than I went in, which isn't the end of the world, but it was a missed opportunity. The doctors told me, "Your recovery is going to be longer." And when I thought of that, I

thought, if it's going to be longer, I want to be different. And if it's going to take more time, I want to put more into it. So I just purposed, this is how I'm going to seek the Lord. And really, part of what I talk about in the book is the idea of consecration is making room for God to do something he wouldn't have done otherwise. I think that's what we did. We said we're going to live differently. We're going to redeem time we hadn't redeemed. We're going to look to God in a different way and set our hearts on seeking him. And when you do that, you're going to see God do things you've never seen.

RANDY: Another thing you do talk about in the book, and I'm curious how this played out in your life, especially during that season, a lot of times, and when I grew up, we wouldn't necessarily pray for healing, we would pray for God to guide the doctor's hand, which is wonderful, I pray for that too. But you talk about asking for big things. And I think some of us are a little beaten down by life to be like, oh, man! It is just the way it is. Maybe God doesn't always want to do that. What did you guys ask for when you were going through your struggles?

JOHN: Honestly, I thought when they were doing the final, they did one last scan before they did the surgery and as I was laying on the table I was like, I can't wait to see what God's doing to do. So in my mind, I was fully thinking, I'm going to get a report that I don't have any cancer anymore.

So I think the key for Christians, at that point, is we have to be careful we don't build a theology based on disappointment because the Bible doesn't. The Bible does not theologize that. And I think too many Christians take an experience, build a theology of disappointment, how to handle disappointment around it, that really then cuts out of them the audacity. Because I think it takes a boldness of faith to say, I'm believing God for big things, and that God is going to come through.

And so in that, when it happened, I just said, well, then, I'm going to use my recovery time to really dial into God. I figured hey!

DEBBIE: And we didn't know how long that was going to be.

JOHN: Either he heals me and I don't have to do that, or he doesn't and his plan is -- because I kind of had in my mind, I really thought, on the table I can remember thinking, I can't wait to see what they say.

But I never in the whole deal, I don't remember thinking, O God, you let me down. I was just like okay, I'm going to grow close to God in this. I'm going to set my mind and heart on seeking him because when I come out of this, I will be different -- I know that! So it's that thought of, when people are going through this trial, I think we have to think, what is God wanting to do in me that is going to change me in a way that is going to help me live a whole different life and be a blessing to people I come in contact with?

SHEILA: One of the things I've been journaling about just in my own life is this whole idea of redemptive remembering; of remembering the goodness of God. Because sometimes, when you're right in the middle of something, it is overwhelming. But I began to write down all the good things God has done and the faithfulness of God. I was wondering, Debbie when you heard that this is going to be a different adventure than you thought, how did you as a wife, how do you position yourself to keep your face toward Jesus?

DEBBIE: I think it is one day at a time. It is just leaning into the Lord. I think it is more difficult to watch somebody you love walk through a challenge than it is when it is yourself. You can rise to it; at least my personality is like, I'll make it through this. But when you're watching -- and he didn't share this, but he really struggled with discouragement leading up. We wanted to be full of faith going into it but the enemy like really attacked us.

JOHN: There was the minute I got the diagnosis a despair I had never felt in my whole life. I didn't know the feeling of the word until I actually was hit with it. And it was a despair that was unbelievable. So you can have that happen. And sometimes people think

if I'm believing God for great things or God is at work, I'm not going to have any battle with my feelings, and that's not true. That is just not true. And for that month, I had despair like you would not -- like I ever knew was possible to feel. Yet, you feel like, man, I've got Easter, I've men's conference, I've got this book being launched. I've got to be game-on and I can't tell people because I knew word would get out. So you can't tell people, you've just got to do it. But still, you're battling that inside. So that's --

DEBBIE: And I was like, I've got to stay on top for him. He's in a deep battle, so God, you're going to have to give me the strength to carry, do what I can to lift him, and encourage him. But you know, some days are hard!

SHEILA: I think it's great that you acknowledge that. I think sometimes we feel obliged to be God's P.R. agents and he seems to be doing fine by himself.

DEBBIE: But yet there is a balance as a leader because you know you can't just get up and go, hey, here's where we're at! Although, we were pretty open with the people as far as we need your prayers.

JOHN: Once we let the word out, but still I wanted to be faith-filled and positive with them because I wanted them to believe God with me for God to do something. And so, I never really told the people about the despair because when it is that deep, you just feel I don't know that people can handle hearing --

DEBBIE: Their leader --

JOHN: This is where their leader is at.

RANDY: You had someone you could talk to. Yes?

DEBBIE: Well?

JOHN: Right here she is!

RANDY: That's where I'd go.

JOHN: Even in that.

DEBBIE: Our kids.

JOHN: Our kids knew. But even in that, God met me. After I had the surgery, then I had a secondary septic infection, and it is a bad deal. So you get out of that, and they released me from the hospital. We begged them to get out early because of COVID. And we're out in California, we don't know anybody. And so I'm at the V.R.P.O. and I'm lying on the bed, it's Sunday night. It's 12:30, I can remember looking at the clock and I'm so filled with despair. I've got a splitting headache, which really, they had me on morphine, and it's what was the initial symptom that put me in the hospital. And then, my legs are killing me because they put me on medicine that cramps your legs up. And so I'm just feeling miserable. And I just say, God, listen. Either take me home -- and I don't know why I said this because it is interesting. I look back and think it is really odd -- either take me home or send an angel to minister to me and to touch me.

And you know, what happened in that moment, an angel walked in the room for the only time in my whole life. And he's behind me and he touched me. And when he did, it was like a vortex of fire that went up to the top of my head, went back down, went back up to the top of my head, went back down. Instantly, the despair was gone. Instantly, in one minute it was gone. My legs no longer hurt, my headache was gone. It was an amazing --

SHEILA: An answer to a genuine cry from a heart. And God says, okay, here he comes!

JOHN: I mean it was such a -- I still had the recovery, I still had -- I lost 45 pounds during my sickness. So I was sick, but I wasn't dealing with the things that were at that point just almost crushing, too much.

RANDY: Who gets to go? Because man!

[Laughter]

DEBBIE: How big was the angel?

[Laughter]

SHEILA: I've underlined so many things in the book but this I thought was so great. You said, "Our feelings are often not chosen, our words always are." That seemed important to me.

JOHN: It is important! I think what we say frames our reality. We know that! If I come home and I am unkind, that frames my night at the house. If I come home and I'm pleasant -- that frames -- that's how that works! And so the words we speak have much to do with the reality that we experience.

And that's especially true when it comes to faith. The words we speak, the things we say, Joshua says, "Sun stand still!" And it happens!

RANDY: What I wanted to ask is what was the timing of these experiences and the writing of the book, are they concurrent?

JOHN: The book had been written before, so I was just releasing it when I was going through the second surgery. So it really, at that point a lot of it is still very fresh in my mind what I've told the people.

[Laughter]

RANDY: Because here you are talking about the story of Joshua, who had this Promised

Land of milk and honey, but he had to not despair like the others did, he had to not look at the obstacles, he had to go in. And you're having to do this. Surely you felt God sort of like I'm preparing you a little bit for this.

JOHN: Well, I do think this, I think in our heart there was this anticipation that God was going to do something. In Joshua three, "Consecrate yourselves today for tomorrow the Lord will do great things." There is this idea that if we really set our heart on seeking the Lord, we're going to see God do exceptional things. And honestly, it's proved true in a way that is far beyond what we would have imagined in the church because we've watched the Lord move. We're in this season of revival where we're having record numbers of people come to Christ, record numbers of people filled with the spirit, we're having record numbers of people healed. We've got 235 testimonies from September one of people who have experienced dramatic healing. People who are born deaf healed -- ears opened! Multiple people! So when you hear that or when you see that and you watch what God is doing, and honestly, I don't think it's unique to James River, I think there are places around the country where God is visiting -- this is a day where God is visiting his people in a unique way in power to demonstrate his presence, his power, and his personal care for people.

RANDY: And that, his personal care, his love. That is the *New Normal* that we hope all of you guys will embrace. The blessing, and we would love to send you John's new book, *New Normal*, when you help us be a blessing to others. Watch this.

On the mission field

ISAK: In these areas of southern Angola, they're facing the worst drought in over 40 years, crops that have failed year after year. One and a half million people are facing severe hunger; 114,000 children under the age of five right now are suffering from acute malnutrition.

And we see it when we visit the malnutrition clinics here. Literally, over-filled clinics

with children fighting for their lives. Nine days ago this grandmother, Duonece, brought her grandson Jrah to this clinic, literally because he was battling the battle of life and death; fighting for his life because he had acute malnutrition. How, you might ask? Because she didn't have any food to feed him. When I asked her about her food situation, she became very emotional. Explained to me that there are as many days where she has no food to feed him they go without food. That's how a child like this ends up with his skin literally peeling off his body, as the body starts to shut down, trying to just keep him alive. But we're seeing more and more children suffering like little Jhar, many of them dying in villages before we can ever reach them.

What is the solution, you say? This is it. The solution is food, and us being here as mission teams reaching these children, each and every one of them, getting to these mothers, answering their prayers, and saving their children's lives.

End of video

In the studio

SHEILA: I'll never forget my first time in a malnutrition clinic in Angola. I've watched things on television, I'd read things, I knew the statistics but nothing -- nothing prepares you for the sight and the sounds in a place like that.

I went over and sat beside a mom and her little one who I assume to be about two or two-and-a-half years old. But no, this little one was seven and had just shriveled away to almost nothing. No energy, not the ability to cry, just literally laboring to take one breath.

I remember feeling such despair that night and asking the Lord what on earth can we do? But the following day we had the opportunity to go to one of the villages where Mission Feeding is already set up and you see these orange, sometimes red bowls of food that we give especially made there for their nutritional needs, and it literally is like they turn the corner from death to life with so little!

James and Betty have been committed to this for years. This year our commitment is to be able, Randy, to feed 350,000 children. There has never been a greater need than there is right at this moment.

RANDY: Absolutely. You know for over three decades now we've been doing this, and the need is still there. When we look at situations like this, and as Sheila talked about, it is very difficult to go into some of these places, especially the clinics where children have deteriorated to their worst. Many of them, unfortunately, don't get out of the clinics. You see this and, I can wonder, God's a good God, right? How does this happen? But then you hear in your spirit, you're his hands and his feet.

This is an opportunity for us to share God's goodness in a very simple bowl with people who desperately need to hear him. I'm asking you to be a part of that outreach, the hands, the feet of Jesus to go into those villages where they're most desperate by partnering with us. Your gift of \$30, \$50, or \$100 today will help feed three, five, or ten children for three months! That only works because we have the people in place, we have the systems in place. We've been doing this for decades; we know how to get to the most desperate areas. But we have to have your support. Your gift of \$1,000 if you can afford that will bless 100 children for the next three months.

We can turn this situation around, and not just physically but spiritually, emotionally, in all the ways God wants to heal his people. We need you to join us. I'm asking you whether you have been a faithful partner for years or whether this is your first time, to join us in Mission Feeding. Let's reach out. Let's fill that bowl so we can turn their lives around. Go online or go to the phones right now and make 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.

Through *LIFE's* Mission Feeding outreach your gift of love can be an answer to prayer for a hurting and hungry child in their time of need. 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.

With your gift of any amount, we'll send you *The Chosen: 40 days with Jesus*. From the creators of the widely popular television drama, *The Chosen*, this devotional invites you to discover Jesus through the eyes of those who knew him best. With your gift of \$100 or more, please request the "Amazing Grace" sheet music framed wall art. This timeless and well-beloved hymn can be displayed as a reminder of God's grace to you. 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, "Let the Children Come." This beautiful bronze is a reminder to care for children around the world in both word and deed.

Please call, write, or make your gift online today.

End of video

In the studio

RANDY: I pray you are going online or going to the phone right now and making the best gift you can. We can save lives. Sheila, and I'd love to send them this book if they'll request it.

SHEILA: Yes! "Experiencing God's best for your life": *New Normal*. Very encouraging. It will lift you up and fill you with faith. John, Debbie, it's such a delight to have you here! Thanks for being with us.

JOHN: Thank you for letting us be here.

DEBBIE: It's been wonderful!

SHEILA: Remember to ask for the book when you call, and we'll be happy to send it to you.
We'll see you next time!