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Week 24: Spring Mission Feeding: Last week

Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh

Ben Stuart

SHEILA: Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm Sheila Walsh here with Randy Robison. I have to tell you I'm excited about today's show because I've wanted to meet this guy for some time, and as a mom, say thank you so much. Our guest today is Ben Stuart. And your new book, Ben, is *Rest and War*. So welcome!

BEN: Well, thank you! Thank you for having me.

RANDY: It's great to have you. I think what Sheila is alluding to is the fact that you were at Texas A&M for so long working with the students. And both of us had sons that attended A&M.

SHEILA: My son was impacted because Break Away, which was the Bible study you had, didn't you have to hold it in the basketball arena because it was so big?

BEN: We did. And sometimes the football one.

SHEILA: Well, my son's first year at A&M, he went to Break Away while you were there and I just want to say thank you for the impact that you had not only on my son's life but on many, many young people's lives.

BEN: Well, thank you. Well, I feel so honored that I got to stand at that intersection for so long. I've seen the university moment -- you're making some of the biggest decisions in your life in your 20s. And to stand there on that campus and proclaim the name of

Jesus is an enormous privilege. I'm just so grateful I got to do it. So I'm thrilled to know that.

RANDY: That's wonderful. Let's talk about *Rest and War*. I think at my age I've got the "rest" part down -- I think. But it's also this war; there's a lot going on here. What are you trying to communicate?

BEN: I think you look around in the culture today and people feel there is something wrong in the world today but are having trouble grabbing what it is. A lot of times it is shame. They shame themselves.

I think for me, part of what I'm doing in the book is letting people know life feels like a struggle because it is. I tell the story in there of when I climbed a mountain, Longs Peak, with a buddy of mine in college. We started out optimistic. We're racing up this mountain, passing lesser hikers; but then as we got near the top, we got nauseous and depleted and stuck and scared because we thought we can't get down. And I remember we prayed, Oh God, we are so stupid. That's how our prayer started.

SHEILA: That's a great prayer.

BEN: And then asked for help. And this mountain guy shows up out of nowhere and gives us gloves because we were up there in T-shirts. We were not equipped for this moment. Then he said, "You're breathing wrong." He said, "The atmosphere's changed and you need to adapt if you're going to survive."

And standing at this intersection of so many of the changes culturally over the last 15 years, there's been shifts in the atmosphere that have affected our vibrancy, all of us. And I think it helps people to acknowledge that. It feels like a war because it is. It feels like a struggle because it is. So can we learn some rhythms to help us struggle well and to move forward on a challenging day? So that's why I wrote it.

SHEILA: I underlined "You're breathing wrong" because there was something so powerful about that, about shifting. Before you moved really into the whole war section, you talk about if we're going to fight well for our faith, we need to remember who fought for us. You talk about Jesus in a very powerful way.

BEN: Thanks. Well, I think it is important for all of us. You look even at children. By every standard statistically, kids from loving two-parent homes outperform other kids; and that doesn't mean you're doomed if you didn't have that. I grew up in a divorced home. But kids are wired to need to see someone fight for them, "I choose you. I move towards you. I sacrifice for you." We need that.

I read a book about the Spartans and there is a lot to not emulate about the Spartans but one of their great accomplishments was how successful they were in warfare, and so this book was contemplating why. And one of the reasons was because their king went first and they would watch him. He would run to battle for them. When they watched their king risk his life for them, it empowered them to fight.

I think for us, that's the message we're given. That Jesus Christ fought for us. So the Bible is not shaming you like do better, try harder. It is letting you know, yeah, there are spiritual forces out there that are eating your lunch because you don't have the equipment to overcome them. But you've got a hero who fought for you. And when you understand that, it frees you up to fight.

It is like David with Goliath. When he showed up, what did Israel do? They cowered in fear. But when they watched David take out their big enemy, they didn't all high five and throw a party. What happened? They were suddenly liberated to drive the Philistines out of their land. That's kind of part of it. For me, it is like when we see the son of David fight for us, all these Philistines of fear and lust and pride that are just wreaking havoc on us, we can now be equipped to fight. And so there's hope in knowing you've been fought for.

RANDY: Yeah. You know, one of my dad's favorite sayings is, "Christ doesn't free us from the fight, he frees us to fight." And like you say, up on the mountain he equips us so that we can -- what do we need to know about that spiritual battle and the equipping part that maybe some people are missing?

BEN: Yes, that's a great question. I think for me, there are a lot of ways you could go with that. But I think GI Joe says it, that knowing is half the battle.

RANDY: Sounds good to me.

BEN: I think sometimes we have to do that, be aware. Jesus told his disciples that "Watch and pray that you do not enter into temptation." He said we need an awareness that we have an enemy. He hates our king, so he hates you. One of the ways to twist the knife at the Lord is to come at his kids. So if you know that, I'm on a battlefield, you have to know how does my enemy work against me? Sun Tzu said that; if you don't know your enemy or yourself, you'll succumb in every battle. But if you know your enemy and you know yourself, you need not fear the result of 100 battles. So I think awareness is where it starts. I know I'm in a war, how does he get me?

I think oddly enough social media has kind of helped us see a bit of like how the devil works. I remember I took a marketing class in college and one day they taught us, how do you market a product? How did you get people to do what you want them to do? You find an insecurity in them, and you pick at it. And you keep poking at it and then you present your product as the solution to the pain you helped cause. And so you manipulate people to get what you want.

And you look at social media and you're like, what do they want you to do? Click more, post more. So what do they do? They need emotional energy to get you to do that. So they track your emotions. They can't control those, but they can solicit thoughts to your mind. So they solicit thoughts to your mind to stir your emotions, to get you to do what they want.

That's what the enemy does. James told us that. Each one is tempted when he's lured and enticed by his own desire. The enemy wants to solicit thoughts to your mind to get your attention, to stir your affections, to get you to enact to the will and move in a direction you were never meant to go. But when you're aware that this is a game, like Jesus said, when I watch and pray that I can choose to not enter into that temptation. So some of the best self-knowledge you can have is how did he get me? If temptation is coming for all of us, knowing is half the battle.

SHEILA: One of the things I found compelling in your story was, and I get lots of notes from women saying, "I struggle with this idea that God is a good, good Father." And you talk about that in the book and some of your own experiences. I struggled with that too. My father was very violent with me before he committed suicide. So I struggled with that for years. How has that impacted your own life, Ben?

BEN: Yeah, well, I think God chooses to present himself as Father because I think he wants us to see that combination of authority and love. And so strategically, if you're thinking about an enemy, what's the best thing to do? Destroy the image because it will distort the fatherhood of God. So I do think the enemy targets fatherhood; I think father wounds are an issue.

For me, my dad's passed now, I believe he is a good man but he's a fallen man. And when my parents divorced, I wanted the love and approval, and blessing of my dad. And I heard someone say it recently, if you don't get the blessing of your father when you're young, you'll spend the rest of your life searching for it. That was a bit of that.

So what could happen? For a lot of people, you try to find the thing to prove you're worthy. And so workaholicism is common in that environment. And then if you can't achieve enough to feel worthy, you go to some kind of addiction or sad broken thing to try to alleviate the pain. And so, so many people I meet have that. Here's the ladder I'm trying to climb to show that I'm worthy, and here's the sad broken place I'll go to get

relief from that sense of unworthiness.

Patrick Carnes says it; he's one of the leading voices on addiction. He says addiction is an intimacy disorder. I don't know how to connect and receive love because I didn't get it. So I go to a substance or experience to obliterate the pain. But if you can believe that God loves me, the lie that launches a million sins is that he is not a good dad. If I can't run to his arms, I'll run into a lot of other arms that don't care about me. And so that's why the enemy attacked that first, in the garden with Jesus, with us. And that's why James, when he talks about temptation says, "Don't be deceived." And he doesn't say "Don't be deceived" like this addiction is bad for you. He says, "Don't be deceived every good and perfect gift comes from above, from your Father." He says the deception that launches temptation and destruction is that God doesn't care about you. So if we can get that right, a lot of sin loses its power.

RANDY: How did you get that right? Because you can say that and some people will hear that right now and they'll think, I wish I believed that. How did you get to that point where it's deep down?

BEN: Boy, that's a great question too. I think someone said it to me once, where your earthly family fails your spiritual family can step in and take its place. I think for me, intersecting with a believing community and seeing people who loved me when I did well and loved me when I failed, helped me believe God was like that. I knew it intellectually, does God love you? Yes. I got it right on a quiz. But deep in my heart I thought, but I've got to perform or he's disappointed. So meeting some people that could be like Jesus with skin on that loved me even when I failed, that helped.

SHEILA: You know, Randy, you said at the beginning that at this stage you think you've got the "rest" part the right. I have to be honest and say that's the part I struggle with even more than the "war" part. And you talk about this -- this moment when you go after these kids, who've taken your wife's cell phone, and injured yourself, but how God used that. I don't know how much of the story you want to tell but I found that very powerful.

BEN: Yeah. It's sad. Ministers break, people break, but you watch people in ministry, they'll break morally, they'll break emotionally, and I broke physically. I carried all this stress in my body, and it was impacting my back. And then yeah, I chased these kids down -- not a great idea now in retrospect. Just let them have the phone.

But I grabbed the car and they drove down the road with me half in the car, half out. Not ideal. And afterward found out that I had blown out a disk sticking out and risked losing the use of my leg. And the doctor told me, "I can't fix you." So he said, "You have to lay on the floor and hope your body heals itself." That was his advice. So I spent a month on my face on the floor in my house on all these drugs so I couldn't sleep, sleeping maybe three hours a night. So I filled it with movies, watched hundreds of movies. They just put a little laptop on my face. And it got to Teen Wolf 2 starring Justin Bateman. I mean it was a dark place before realized I've got to stop distracting myself.

And laying there in the dark, I felt like the Lord was like, are you ready to deal with me? I was trying to outpace some sad emotions, I was trying to out distract them, which a lot of us do, but in the quiet on the floor for a month, I tell people the Lord made me lie down in green pastures so he could restore my soul. And I never thought of Psalm 23 as like a violent text, he makes me lie down! And I've said he had to with me.

But that injury became a bruising blessing because it made me stop and realize there are some things that I thought were important that aren't and there are some things that are precious that I was blowing right by. And hopefully, people can learn from my pain and not their own.

RANDY: Well, maybe I said that too quickly, but how do we know if we are getting real rest?

BEN: Yeah, that's a great question. I think nowadays, in some ways it's gotten easier because this pandemic season has been an amplifier. So if you dealt with anxiety, it's

been amplified. If you dealt with sadness, it's been amplified. And I know for me, that's been the case where I can feel a little stressed, now it's really stressed.

Now I've tried to and sort of what why I wrote this book too. I call it a field guide to the spiritual life. It's like you have to get better at the basics, back to the mountainside. I remember this mountain guy told us as he led us to the top, he said, "Everything we're about to do, you do on the ground on a daily basis." He said, "The only question we'll answer is: Can you excel at the revealed things while the environment gets more extreme?"

And as we would breathe with him and step with him, these are basics, breathe, step at a time, but can I excel at the basics while the environment gets extreme? These last two years, particularly in D.C., that's been it for me. If I'm out of step with the basics, I'm going to cast my cares upon the Lord, I'm going to breathe in His Word, I'm going to prioritize his community. If I'm out of sync with that, the stress level shoots up, anxiety shoots up. So it's gotten easier to tell because life has gotten more dramatic. This may be a sad but true answer.

SHEILA: I think that's one of the reasons I feel so -- that community is so important. Because I think during the pandemic people got kind of got used to thinking, I can go to church in my pajamas with a cup of coffee and this is just great. It is not! It is not the same at all. I find it very easy to withdraw from people because I'm comfortable with that. But I realize how much my own self, I need community and I need to be with people worshipping and I need to hear the Word of God. It is vital.

BEN: You know in D.C. so many people are single and live alone, and you see that community, in particular, has not done well as the pandemic persisted. And it is haunting, those words: It is not good for man to be alone. It is true. But then I would say even with people with families, they're like, oh, but we're fine. Yeah, but John said it: I have no greater joy than seeing my children walk in the truth.

I think a lot of people don't even realize the joy they're missing, of stepping into a community where they have something to offer, they can invest in a younger community. We have people at our church that leave all the time because our average age is in its 20s. And so people in their 50s or above, they're like yeah, this is a kids' church. And I'm like it's not. These kids need you and they want you. And the couples that stay get surrounded by people who want to be parented. I've watched couples that decide, hey, maybe I can be an influence on the young generation rather than shaking my head or being terrified of what they're going to do; invest in them, they have found a joy they didn't know existed. And so we need us.

RANDY: Boil this down, the idea of *Rest and War* from a spiritual standpoint, why is it important that we get this as followers of Christ so that we can engage? Why is that critical? Because I think a lot of people sometimes just want to check out. But you're suggesting we get in the fight.

BEN: Yeah. I think it was Helen Keller who said that the world is full of sadness and hardship, but it is also full of overcoming it. I think what's happening for so many people is that there is so much to be discouraged about in the news that they can think this is all there is. Let me keep my head down and ride it out. And that's exactly what the enemy would want you to think. Because he'd want to discourage you enough that you don't even play ball.

But the reality is, that everything in the Word is still true. Jesus Christ rose from the grave, his spirit is alive in us. People desperately need it. People are longing for a story of meaning bigger than themselves and we have it. I know for me, it's been so encouraging to be in the middle of Washington, D.C. and see a thriving church; people coming to faith, people hungry for Jesus, people who want a connection with the eternal in the midst of the mundane.

So for the folks that are like, man, I don't know if I see any purpose, let me just hide it out, that's what the enemy would want you to think to get you off of the battlefield, to

keep you from playing ball. But there are people right now who you might consider an enemy that God wants to turn into a Paul or a Timothy, who can do damage against the kingdom of darkness and bring hope into the world. So don't miss out on playing this game. Jesus Christ is calling us, like C.S. Lewis said, to take part in his great campaign of sabotage. He's dismantling the kingdom of darkness every day and inviting us to be a part of it. And I don't want anyone to miss out on that.

SHEILA: And that's why you need Ben's book because honestly, it is like a field manual. He even walks us through his own day, and what works for him. This is a very practical, helpful, relevant now book. We would love to send it to you. But Randy and I would love to show you something very important to us. This is our last week of Mission Feeding and it is one of our passions here to make sure that mothers and children around the world are literally starving because they haven't had one good meal in a long time, and we want to be the answer to their prayers. So watch this and then I'll tell you how you can get a hold of Ben's book.

Begin video clip

JAMES: We've got a quarter of a million, plus an additional 25,000. Take as many as you can.

BETTY: I've got to say this. I don't interrupt you too often, but I feel like I must say this. When we've been over there and seen the children, they line up for a cup of soup, something nutritious. And sometimes we run out before we get to the end of the line. I would like for you to join the line with James and me, let's make our line longer than their line so there's plenty for them to have.

On the mission field

ANNOUNCER: When Mission Feeding began over 30 years ago, *LIFE Outreach* and its mission partners were challenged to feed 5,000 starving and malnourished children in

Southern Africa. And there were days when the missionaries would run out of food and some children would have to leave the line hungry. Understandably, desperate mothers and children would do whatever it took to try and get a bowl of food.

JAMES: I can't get them to stop pressing in on us so I can even get to the soup. These people are hungry! And this is an area where we've been feeding.

ANNOUNCER: In the ensuing decades, Mission Feeding has been stabilized and expanded into many more areas. Food processing factories were built, hundreds of trucks deliver food across miles of dirt roads and rough terrain. And scores of mission workers prepare the meals to feed the children in remote villages.

The *LIFE Outreach* supporters answered Betty's call to have our line to help longer than the children's line. And as a result, Mission Feeding has helped to save more than 18 million lives and feeds over 350,000 children daily in Southern Africa.

But unfortunately, we are still in danger of running out of food. Unexpected crises like widespread flooding in South Sudan, and drought in Angola has left thousands of children without food and at risk for severe malnutrition. With your help, we once again have an opportunity to save the lives of children in desperate need of food.

As Betty asked many years ago, let's make our line longer than theirs so there is plenty for them to have because we know there is life in every bowl.

End of video

In the studio

SHEILA: Life in every bowl! One of the things I love so much about James and Betty is no matter what we're doing around the world, they've never gone in and said, here we are to save the day! They ask the Lord, Lord, who are you using in this area and how can we get behind them and underwrite their work? I'll never forget my first trip to Angola.

During our first couple of days, we were in a malnutrition clinic, and it was one of the most heartbreaking things as a mother I have ever seen. And the despair not just in the children's eyes, the despair in the mother's eyes because they're just like you and me. There is nothing more instinctive for a mother than to want to be able to provide for her child.

These moms I met were at the end of the line. They had done everything they could, and it wasn't enough. But then the next couple of days I got to go to some of the villages where we set up Mission Feeding and I discovered you can bring hope in a bowl. This is amazing! It is a special -- kind of looks like super oatmeal. I tried it, and it's pretty decent but it's got all the protein and vitamins that children in that area of the world need. And it's almost like from the first bowl it goes from death to life. And we provide it at school, so the children come to school, get an education, break that cycle of poverty that goes from generation to generation. But our partners are on the ground. Randy and I haven't been able to go for the last couple of years, but our partners are on the ground, boots on the ground in Jesus' name right now, and they're waiting for us to send help.

RANDY: I'm ready to do it. Look, I'll just be transparent with you for a moment. I watched that roll-in with my parents establishing Mission Feeding with the Pretoriuses in South Africa. That's why I'm here. I have the last name, Robison. I have a wonderful co-host named Sheila Walsh. I'm honored to be able to come to you. But I'm not here for myself. I love the ministry, I love the interviews we do. I'm here for those kids. We're up to 350,000 people a day -- mainly children that we're feeding because of your support on a continent with 1.4 billion people. That's a small fraction. We can do more. It's my heart to multiply the missions of *LIFE Outreach*, including Mission Feeding. But I've got to tell you if you're one of those 350,000 children today, it means a lot. Your support means everything.

We want to make that line so long that hunger is just unheard of. And we need your help. Your gift of \$30 today will help feed three children for the next three months. A gift of \$50 will feed five children. A gift of \$100, 10 children. Many of you can give \$1,000 or

more. I'm not so concerned about the dollar amount, if you will, I want you to give the best gift you can. I want those children to know, we'll be able to eat tomorrow because somebody somewhere hasn't forgotten us.

Will you be that one person who won't forget and say, I'll step up? I'll make that line of food just a little longer. So let the children come, we'll feed them. I pray you will. This is the last week. Go online, go to the phone. Make the best gift you can and let's feed those children. Let's take Mission Feeding farther and farther. We can only do it with your support. Do it right now.

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.

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

End of video

In the studio

RANDY: This is the last week that we're on the air with Mission Feeding but we won't stop! So I pray that you won't stop the support. Go online, go to the phone, and make the best gift you can. And we have something for them.

SHEILA: Yeah! For any gift at all, please request Ben's book. I love it, *Rest and War*: "Rhythms of a well-thought life." You will love this book! Ben, thank you so much for being with us.

BEN: Well, thank you. It was an honor truly.

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