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Week 22: Spring Mission Feeding

Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh

Abby Johnson

RANDY: Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm Randy Robison, Sheila Walsh is with me. It's right there in our name, *Life Today*. Life is a big thing to us; it's paramount. We're honored to have one of the legends in the pro-life movement with Abby Johnson today. We're going to talk about some interesting things because in our quest for life there is something else that has to be a part of it. She touches on that. Abby, great to have you.

ABBY: Thank you so much for having me.

RANDY: I'll quit teasing the audience. The other part of that is Mercy; it's what you call *Fierce Mercy* in your latest book. I like the direction you're going in this because it is a good reminder that as we stand for what is right, we all stand on God's mercy. Talk us through some of where this came from.

ABBY: Well, the people that know my story know that I worked in the abortion industry for eight years. During that time, I had two of my own abortions. I helped to facilitate over 22,000 abortions. Looking back, obviously, a very dark time in my life, but now, standing on God's promise that he forgives us of our past sins. Just thinking about my life, thinking about my past, thinking about how he can use everything, He wastes nothing. I have thought, gosh, I need to showcase that. I need to showcase how good God has been to me.

I've written two books before, and both of those books *Unplanned* and *The Walls are Talking* talked about abortion. They talked about how I got into the abortion industry, and

how I left the abortion industry. They talked about specific stories relating to the abortion industry. I thought I need to write a book that talks specifically about how God has poured out his mercy in my life.

And then I wanted to talk about more personal parts of my life that had nothing to do with abortion. So how have I seen God's mercy displayed in my life as a wife, as a mother? How has he used me to love people who are -- other people would look at and go, that's an unlovable person. I don't want to love that person. Right? We all have moments like that, specifically in our culture right now because we're so divided; we're such a divided nation and divided society. I think we need practical reminders of how we can love one another and how we can show mercy to one another.

SHEILA: When I was reading through your book, which is so well written, it was great getting to know you in a different way because I've had the privilege of interviewing you before. But I found myself wondering, why do you think as believers, we find it so hard to extend mercy and grace to other people?

ABBY: I don't know, maybe it is just part of our sinful nature. Maybe we just have a hard time recognizing how much God rejoices over the lost coming back to him. And I think about that all the time. I saw a graphic the other day, and it was on Facebook, and it literally made me catch my breath when I read it. It was so powerful when I saw it. It said, "Paul entered heaven to the cheers of those he martyred." And it made me tear up. I just sat there looking at it and reading it and rereading it. I thought, oh my gosh. Please Lord, let that be my life. Please Lord, let that be me. Please Lord, let those 22,000 children, and my own children, my own two children be there to greet me when I enter the gates of heaven.

SHEILA: That's powerful.

ABBY: But that is how big God is -- that is how great our God is. Maybe we don't understand that. Maybe we don't understand how small we are in relation to how great

our God is. Maybe if we understood how much he loves those who we deem unlovable, maybe if we understood that more, then we would have the same love for them that he does.

RANDY: That's big. And it is easy for us when we're taking a stand for what is right, and rightfully so, to get over into condemnation of people when we condemn a wrong action. And we have to separate the two because we need to redeem the person while standing up for what is right and wrong by God's standards.

I like the way you have put that idea into practice. Because I'd be happy if we shut down every abortion clinic in the country today, right? But you said okay, instead of taking an antagonistic angle you've got a ministry called *And Then There were None* where you're going help the people that we think of as our opponents and transition them out of the industry. Explain why you did that and how that works for you. Because I find it fascinating.

ABBY: It was sort of funny when I started *And Then There were None*, I just saw a need in the movement. Nobody on a large scale, on a national scale, was reaching out and saying to abortion clinic workers, "Come to us. Come to our side and come experience the love of Christ." I found that what had happened in the pro-life movement was that we were doing to the abortion clinic worker what we had accused them of doing to the unborn child. We were dehumanizing them. And so I thought, I've got a great idea, I'm going to start a ministry and we're going to start reaching out to them. And now, *And Then There were None* has seen 615 abortion clinic workers leave that soul-ravaging industry and come into a relationship with Jesus Christ. And I believe that the Lord rejoices in that. I know through His Word, that because of His Word he rejoices in that.

SHEILA: You have a really -- when I got to the end of your book you have this really interesting thing where you're sitting watching the movie *Unplanned* with your 13-year-old daughter. Talk to us about that, what that was like.

ABBY: Yeah. We were at the theater in L.A. for the premier and Grace has, she is 15 now, she was 13 at the time. Grace has grown up in the movement. So she knows about abortion; she knows all the details and everything. So I was not concerned about her watching the film at all. In fact, I think 12-13-year-olds need to watch *Unplanned*. I think that is the right time for them to see the film. Because Grace had so much knowledge about abortion, I was not concerned about her watching it at all.

And so we're sitting there in the theater, and she is so proud; she is a proud daughter. Proud that this is her family's film. So we're sitting there, and we get through the first, sort of the opening scene, which is a very difficult scene to watch, and we get through it. And she's you know doesn't seem to be too fazed by it, maybe a little tearful as expected. And then we get to the scene where I find out I'm pregnant, and I'm pregnant with her. And this is exactly what happened. I'm at Planned Parenthood, I'm in the clinic. I take the pregnancy test at work in the bathroom. My boss sees that I'm pregnant and my boss says, "We can take care of that for you."

And then the next scene is of me in my boss's office. And my boss is saying, "Are you sure you're committed to carrying this pregnancy? Are you sure you don't want to have an abortion?"

I'm saying to her, "No. Doug and I are doing this. We're having this baby. This is not going to affect my work." We're sort of going back and forth. I look over and Grace is very upset. She is crying. And I'm thinking, oh my gosh! I've never told her that; I've never told her that my boss wanted me to end her life. So I just sort of put my hand on her leg, and she sort of leans over on me. And it's not the time to talk; it's in the middle of the film. Unfortunately, my husband and I and my publicist had to take a red-eye that night to New York because I was doing some interviews with FOX and A.B.C. So my parents had gone with us to L.A. and Grace was flying back home with them.

So we're in the lobby of the Grauman Theatre and I said, "Grace, I'm so sorry. I've got to go. Daddy and I have to go. We have to go get on a flight." And I give her a big hug and I

notice that she's crying. And I said, "Oh honey, are you okay? I'm so sorry! Are you upset about the film?"

She said, "No, mom. I'm not upset." She said, "I'm so thankful."

I said, "Thankful? What do you mean?"

She said, "I didn't know that you had to negotiate for my life." And she said, "Thank you. Thank you for not having an abortion. Thank you for choosing life."

She was 13! And I just started crying and just hugged her. And I said, "Oh, Grace! I never would have considered it."

But it was in that moment that I realized just the gravity that she realized that two of her siblings were gone. Abortion affects everyone. Abortion affects a family. Abortion affects siblings. It affects grandparents. My parents are affected by the two abortions I had. Abortion harms everyone it touches. I think so many times when these young women, in particular, going in to have these abortions are thinking of themselves, they're thinking about their own futures. They're not understanding that abortion has a large ripple effect, and it will affect so many other people in their lives in the future.

RANDY: Right now in our country we are seeing two things. Some states are passing laws that are very pro-life. Other states are going in directions that are very disturbing. I'm grateful for everyone who fights on a legislative level, who fights in the public arena. But I think you and I both know that it is not going to be solved into we get to people's hearts.

How do we do this? How do we balance all the complexities of the issue of women and pregnancies and children and all these things and get to a place where we just get down to life?

ABBY: That's a great question. There is always a debate. Is politics upstream from culture? Is culture upstream from politics? And I'm not sure it is either/or. I think it is both. I think that we have to fight for both. I think that what's happening with our Supreme Court right now is vital. Many women would come in and say, I've always been against abortion but it is legal, so I guess it is okay. I guess it is acceptable. So I think that that political fight is important. But you're absolutely right, we have to work on hearts as well. We have to work on that conversion, that heart change. That ultimately happens by bringing people to Jesus Christ. And so, we have to work toward that.

Abortion is a sin problem. Anything that is a sin problem is a Jesus problem; anything that is a Jesus problem is a church problem. Almost 60 percent of women having abortions are actively attending church. We have a problem in the church. We have a problem with silence in the church. We have a problem with apathy in the church. The church thinks that by and large, this is not our problem. That this doesn't affect our women, but it absolutely does. Because believe it or not, every single person sitting in the church is a sinner.

SHEILA: Amen.

ABBY: And so, we have got to start talking about this issue from the pulpit. We have got to start talking about God's mercy from the pulpit. What if you've had an abortion? Not to worry, God's there for that sin too. But we have got to start actively speaking out against abortion. We've got to start calling it what it is and that is a sin. And pastors have got to start leading on this issue. Are you going out? Are you praying outside of that abortion clinic? If pastors start doing it, their congregations will follow.

So we have to have pastors that are willing to lead by example, to start speaking the Word of God, to start unabashedly being pro-life, speaking life, and not worrying about offense. Because the truth of God will offend those who are opposed to the truth. But we need to take Jesus' example, we need to lead by Jesus' example. When he had something to say he said it. He didn't worry about offense. And we need to follow that example.

SHEILA: There is a moment, a very poignant moment in the book. The scene is Times Square. You're having an ultrasound of your little boy and it is, I don't know how this all happened, but it is being broadcast outside. And when the heartbeat is playing you say, "I heard the echo of God's mercy." That gave me chills, Abby when I heard of that.

ABBY: Yeah, Focus on the Family had put together this event in Times Square. And they had said, "Hey, you're pregnant. We want to play a heartbeat in Times Square of a baby, and we want to show a 3D image of a baby's face on these jumbotrons in Times Square. They said, "Would you be willing for us to use your baby to do it?"

I said, "Yeah."

They said, "Well, it's going to be a surprise. Nobody is going to know it is you so don't say anything."

I said, "Okay."

So I'm in this ultrasound van and they start doing this. I was in the van, so I didn't know what was going on outside. My reporter friend, Kevin McCullough, described it so beautifully. He said, "The busiest place in the world is Times Square." He said, "It is loud. There were protesters there banging on drums." He said, "When that baby's heartbeat began to play on the speakers all across Times Square, the loudest, the busiest place became silent." He said, "There was a holy hush that came across Times Square." He said, "The only thing you heard was the beating of your baby's heart."

And I think that just shows the beauty of God's creation. That even those who oppose life in the womb can't help but listen because it is beauty -- it is a perfect creation. And then his face appeared on the screen. Kevin said it was just silence. And like I said in the beginning, God wastes nothing. And so, he was our last baby and I just thought, what a profound moment in my life that as a woman who has aborted two of her children, who

has facilitated in all of these abortions that God would use me in that moment to proclaim his mercy and His grace in the middle of Times Square to show what he can do in someone's life if you allow him to use you. It was amazing.

RANDY: Yes! If you allow him to use you. Yes?

SHEILA: It is just one of the most powerful things. You're going to want to get a hold of this book for yourself. *Fierce Mercy*: "Daring to live out God's compassion in bold and practical ways." This is an incredible book, and we'd love to send it to you.

But first of all, Randy and I would love for you to watch something. Some mothers are losing their little ones, but it is not because of their choice, it is because they have not been given a choice and we want to change that. Would you watch this?

On the mission field

ANNOUNCER: These mothers are working hard. Struggling each day. They try to grow food for their families with little success. Not from lack of work. Not because they don't love their children. But because they just don't have adequate resources.

Ongoing drought in Angola and record-breaking floods in South Sudan have made it almost impossible to grow the food their families need. In South Sudan, mothers are forced to rely on feeding their children leaves from trees. Angolan mothers will forage for pods from the baobab trees. At best, the children can relieve their aching stomachs when they eat from the pods. But they receive little or no nutritional value.

Unfortunately, as hard as these mothers struggle to keep their children alive, a small grave is where the story ends too many times.

SHEILA: In January, this mother had to attend a third funeral for her children. I asked

her, "On any given day, what is your number one concern?" And it is one thing: Getting food for these children. That's all she thinks about--every single day morning, noon, and night. All she thinks about is where can I get something to feed these children today? And she said many times she has to put these two to bed hungry and she tries to encourage them. You know what she says to them? "Who knows what tomorrow will bring?" She is trying to keep hope alive.

Mission feeding saves lives! We've done it before, but the need has never been greater. We need your help today. We need your help now.

End of video

In the studio:

SHEILA: Right at the moment, Angola is suffering the worst drought they have had in 40 years. I want you to imagine you're coming with me. You and I show up at DFW, Dallas airport, and buy a bottle of water and a sandwich and I throw it in my backpack. I get on the plane, and in a few hours, I step into her world. And I walk with her for a long, long distance just trying to see is there any food available? Their village is miles away from anything. You actually get to see what Abraham saw, the stars are so brilliant, but the need is desperate. I get down on my hands and knees with her and scrape in the mud to see if there is anything that she could give these precious children.

Let me tell you, they love their children every bit as much as I love my son. Can you imagine as a mom putting your children to rest with an aching stomach? But these moms are doing it every single day -- and they're hard-working women! But some of them get up at 4 or 5:00 in the morning because they want to be the first out in these arid fields where it hasn't rained in a long, long time to see if they can find anything. Here's the thing, she tells her children, "Who knows what tomorrow might bring?" What I've discovered in these places, a lot of these women are godly women. They believe that there is a God who answers prayer, and they ask every night, "God will you send help?" And Randy, we want to be the answer to that prayer.

RANDY: We are the answer to that. It's fascinating you mentioned that because you drive for hours and hours through the middle of nowhere in some of these places to get to a village and oftentimes, you see a church -- a beautiful little church. It may be the nicest building in the little village. And you go, what's that about? Well, they look to God like we do.

There is this crisis situation, and we need to establish this food train if you will. We've got it. We've been doing this for decades now in Southern Africa and different places. We've got it in place. We just need some people to step up and say I want to be a part of that because when you do, you don't just share the love of Christ in Word, as we often do with the missionaries, but you share it in action. You say, hey, I don't know you but you're my neighbor and I'm here to bring you something that you need.

How do we do it? It is simple. Your gift today of \$30, \$50, or \$100 will help feed three, five, or ten children for the next three months. It is that simple because we have everything in place to bring the food in, mix it in the bowl, to deliver it where it is most needed. We just need some people to step up. When you've done it in the past, we've seen amazing, amazing things. We're asking you to do it again.

If you can make that gift of \$1,000 to feed 100 children, what a blessing! What an honor that is! Whatever you can do, let's step up. Let's be a part of the solution. Go to the phone, go online now, make the best gift you can and know that you are 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.

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 hope you are going online or going to the phone and making the best gift you can. When we demonstrate God's mercy to people, they will see him and that's what I love about what we do, not just around the world but here on our program that we talked about today.

SHEILA: *Fierce Mercy*, request your copy for any gift at all. But honestly, Abby, thank you so much for stewarding your suffering and your joy so beautifully!

ABBY: Thank you. Thank you both for having me on the show today.

SHEILA: Loved it.

RANDY: And we love you being here with us. Join us again next time. Visit LifeToday.org if you missed the program and we'll see you again here on *Life Today*.