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Week 46: Fall Mission Feeding

James and Betty Robison

Matt and Bowen Hammitt

JAMES: You know one of the most exciting things in a person's life should be—well, getting married should be. And marriage should still be special because marriage should be what God says it is. Redefining it makes everything go downhill. Looking forward to the birth of a child. It's hard to believe that people can think of a child as being something expendable, something you just do away with. I can't—

We had a goldfish die this week. I'm about to cry. I just liked it because his little buddy tried to take care of him when he couldn't swim right side up anymore. You know that. I wanted to go get him a buddy when his buddy died. How do you look at life and not see it as precious?

Well, here's a couple about to have a little boy and they find out there is a lot of trouble coming when this little boy, they called Bowen, as a matter of fact, there is a documentary on it, and dad's going to tell you about it, but they knew they had trouble. Well, Matt and Bowen are here. Bowen is 12 now. No child very rarely lives past five that has this condition, if even that long. Well, Matt, I'm glad you and Bowen are here.

MATT: Yeah, it's good to be here. Thanks for having us on.

JAMES: Bowen, I'm glad you brought your dad.

[Laughter]

Because you're a really good-looking guy.

BOWEN: Thank you.

JAMES: I love your smile, buddy. I could just sit here and look at you smile at me, and knowing what you've been through, you're just fortunate to be able to smile, and just sitting here and be 12 years old.

Matt, I want you to tell our people what it was, all of our viewers, what did he have? What did you know you were facing; and tell us about the journey.

MATT: Yeah, so in April of 2010 we went in for a 20-week ultrasound. We had two little girls, Emmy and Claire. We actually took Emmy with us. It was a special moment because she was in there just looking at the screen, watching the wonder of life in mommy's belly, and we found out that her and her little sister's dreams of having a little brother was coming true. So it was a joyful moment.

JAMES: How old were they at the time?

MATT: Oh, gosh, at the time they would have been only two and four.

JAMES: But they still knew we are going to have a brother.

MATT: Yeah! A little brother. They told us he was coming! We said slow down. We've got to find out. So at 20 weeks, we found out. But that same day we also found out that he only had half of his heart. It was a condition called hypoplastic left heart syndrome. That's a lot to come at you. It's a mouthful. What does this mean? What is our life going to look like?

And leaving that appointment we had a lot of support from our O.B. who is a good friend of ours, but that led us to, from April to September when he was due, many months of just having to wait and pray; trust the Lord of what he is going to do. And like anyone who has been through

medical journeys, they know all the different specialists and doctors that you see. And we got a pretty grim forecast from some of those doctors.

I think for me, one of the most heartbreaking parts of the story is that there were several of those doctors who told us that the loving thing for us to do for him, for our marriage, for the siblings would be to end our pregnancy. That broke my heart as a dad. Here I am thinking I'm going to a doctor to get help for our son to live and being told that maybe we shouldn't allow him to live at all.

JAMES: And they say abort.

MATT: Absolutely. So that was a really difficult part of the journey which gave me a lot of empathy too, of course, for all the women and men that sit in that chair and hear this news, who maybe don't have the support that we had.

But we believe that life is sacred, every life has an inerrant value from God and so we chose life for Bowen. We named him Bowen because Bowen means: Small, victorious one. That's the meaning I found, and I loved that. A small heart but he had a big story, it is God's story, and we just get to carry it.

So from April to September, we did, we just had to grow in our faith. We had a lot of feelings, and a lot of fears that we just prayed that God would help us through. And on September 9th, 2010, this little guy was born.

JAMES: You were born one month before my birthday, October 9th.

BOWEN: Really?

JAMES: Yeah. Yes, sir. My mother tried to have me aborted and the doctor wouldn't do it. Because she was raped and got pregnant but the doctor for some reason let me live and have three children and 11 grandchildren, 14 great-grandchildren, 25 grandkids and I'm sure a lot

more on the way.

Well, I want to know about the situation here. How long did it take? Because he is sitting here at 12. So how long before you could tell that you had a turnaround? Was it a very slow progress?

MATT: Well, five days after he was born, he had his first open-heart surgery. We were not sure what to expect. They told us that it had gone pretty well but he was still recovering. That first night was the hardest for us. We went to get some sleep and were called at 2:13 in the morning. I'll never forget that time because you wake up and there is the alarm clock, the big bright numbers on it. We were told that Bowen's heart had stopped beating. So that night started really difficult.

We went to his room and the doctors were around him and they had taken the patch off his chest, so his chest was open. There was a nurse who had her fingers between the walls of his chest pumping his heart with her fingers to keep him alive for 45 minutes. We were surprised but felt very blessed to let us be there because we just got to hold on to his little feet through everything.

JAMES: I'm thanking God for those little fingers on that nurse, that little heart. Thank you, ma'am. Thank you!

MATT: Beautiful. But they worked to save Bowen's life with God's help. That night we thought we lost him. They pulled us into another room, me and my wife; and I just remember two things in that moment. I remember just praying first, saying to Jesus, "Jesus, you're my treasure, the only thing nobody can take from me in this life." So in that weird way, that moment of darkness, it was like the light of Christ was still shining so bright there. But I still felt that despair and I prayed a prayer in that moment of desperation that God would save my son's life. And moments later, the nurse that had called us to tell us that Bowen's heart had stopped beating came back and told us that Bowen's heart was beating again.

JAMES: Thank you, God!

MATT: I remember walking back into that room and one of the doctors was stitching him up from where they had placed him on life support. He looked at me with tears in his eyes and said, "Hey, dad! You've still got a kid in there." And two more open-heart surgeries, a stroke, all kinds of issues that we've had to deal with.

JAMES: How old was he when he had the stroke?

MATT: That was in the first visit to the hospital which was the first six months that we were there. And so we had two major open-heart surgeries in the first six months. And then we really had a really sweet season where he was doing much better over time. And when he was eight years old, we knew that it was time for another surgery and we had to make a hard decision to go back in with our little buddy.

When they're a baby you don't know them yet, you love them but now he is part of our family. He's got a little brother at the time, and we had to take him back for his third open-heart surgery. And that's when we decided to make this film because we had so many people asking us, how do we deal with this? What do we expect when our kid goes into the hospital? When he has this surgery, how does it affect your marriage? How does it affect your family? We've spent so long answering those questions for people because his story had been public.

JAMES: Do you have something you want to ask, Betty?

BETTY: The only thing I was thinking about is you faced many surgeries already with him, the emotions that you and your wife have gone through, and the family, just waiting, really not knowing what would happen after every surgery, is that right?

MATT: Yeah. Yeah. It was hard for us because we wanted to be able to help others through all that. We wanted to use his story, we always have, to encourage others but we still had to learn how to deal with our own grief. I think a lot of leaders or people in ministry deal with those issues of how do I be vulnerable about my own pain and grief? My wife and I had quite a journey together with some trusted counselors who walked us through some of that grief and

helped us through those times. But it is real, and it is hard; and we still have those moments where we face what's going on inside of us and some of the grief that we feel. And we try to look out for his emotions too because we know that's not always easy for him either.

JAMES: Did you feel like you were kind of a load on the family sometimes?

BOWEN: Kind of. Not really.

JAMES: Did you want to help them because you knew they were doing everything to help you? And what did you feel? Did you pray for mom and dad?

BOWEN: Yeah. I felt like well, scared for the surgery and I would always like to snuggle my mom.

MATT: He loves to snuggle mom.

JAMES: So this surgery was successful. I suppose at eight it was quite a remarkable change. So they gave him, and now do you see more surgeries in the future?

MATT: So at this point, this is considered a full repair for what his issue was medically. So we could have more. At this point, we're not totally sure. A lot of kids who go through this find themselves needing transplants at some point or other procedures, but at the moment we're experiencing a season where he's doing pretty well on the heart that he's got. So we're praying for him every day.

He still deals with feeling sick sometimes because his body just tuckers out a little quicker. There are still a few things; he lives on lower oxygen because he has half a heart. But overall he's doing really well.

JAMES: Well, you know, you're a musician. When did you know you could sing?

BOWEN: Oh ever since I was like two maybe? I was drumming, singing, doing all that music stuff. But yeah, eight was when I wanted to get into music and start singing.

JAMES: So you've got—you wrote several songs, and have you put all of them on one DVD or anything you can get them, CD, can you get them?

BOWEN: So we've done all—so we did an album, an EP with two songs, it's called *Safe Right Here—Safe Right Here EP*.

JAMES: That is the name of a song, *Safe Right Here* that he wrote, but you helped him. And you all are going to do that song for us.

MATT: We absolutely are. Yeah. And also, we'll mention that if people listen to them online, which they can listen to wherever they stream music, there is a version of “*Safe Right Here*” that Mercy Me sings with him as well.

JAMES: Wow! Isn't that cool?

BETTY: That's great!

JAMES: Mercy Me is pretty good! Glad you helped them get known.

MATT: He made them famous.

JAMES: Do you know, are you all traveling? How do people pray for you in ministry?

MATT: Yeah. So I was in a band called Sanctus Real for 20 years. And in 2016, I left the band to be at home with my family more, probably because of what he was going through. So we remain doing music and speaking. It's been a real blessing. I get to have the family travel with me, probably about half the time that I go. I've slowed down quite a bit. But a lot of times, Bowen come with me, and it's been beautiful, especially when we're doing pro-life events to help

out pregnancy resource centers and bringing him and telling his story and having him come and sing. There is not a dry eye in the building. It is a blessing to hear his story firsthand for people.

JAMES: When I came in when I first met you, I just prayed immediately for Bowen's heart to just be perfect. And not have to have a transplant but whatever God wants to use or whoever like he used that lady with her little fingers. But you all did a song and it's called "Safe Right Here." You wrote, basically, I'm sure dad put some finishing touches on it. But it's amazing how God's used you. So we're going to get to hear that song where I first walked into this studio and met you all, and you're going to be a real blessing to all of our audience. So let's listen to the song, "Safe Right Here."

[Safe Right Here]

You're so close to my heart I can feel it
 I hear your wind moving in my spirit
 Whispering come and find your healing
 When scared I just keep on breathing
 I know that I have a rhyme and a reason
 I have the faith that it takes to keep believing
 No fear, no tear, my heart stays right here
 Safe in the hands of the one who created me
 Safer right here
 Safe right here
 Safer right here
 Safe right here
 When I'm down I just get back up again
 I see a new life
 Not a dead end
 I see a light in the night where I've been
 No fear, no tear, my heart stays right here
 I'm safe in the hands of the one who created me
 Safer right here

Safe right here
Safer right here
Safe right here
Safer right here
Safe right here
Safer right here
Safe right here
No fear, no tear
My heart stays right here
I'm safe in the hands of the one who created me
No fear, no tear
My heart stays right here
I'm safe in the hands of the one who created me
Safer right here
Safe right here
Safer right here
I am safe right here
Safer right here
Safe right here
Safer right here
Safe right here
Safe right here in your arms
Safe right here in your arms
Safe right here in your arms
Safe right here in your arms

MATT: Proud of you buddy!

BOWEN: Thanks.

MATT: Good job!

JAMES: Oh, boy! All I've got to say is that is absolutely fabulous! You can get it again, let's say the name of the documentary, the film.

MATT: Yep, *Bowen's Heart*. And people can go to Bowen'sHeart.com. They can find the music, the film, all of it.

JAMES: And how long is the documentary? If they wanted to set aside some time to watch it.

MATT: It's 90 minutes. It's full length.

JAMES: So it is like a full movie.

MATT: Yes, it is.

JAMES: All right. Now then if they want to get let's say the album in whatever format it's available, I'm sure you tell them. Where do you go to get it?

BOWEN: Spotify, iTunes, wherever you listen to music on your phone or like we have CDs but—

JAMES: Well, what do they type in?

MATT: Well, they can type Bowen Hammitt, H-a-m-m-i-t-t. Bowen Hammitt.

JAMES: I hope you'll get that. I want to show you, I'm going to show you something. Listen to our mission's director sharing the heartfelt concern of a mother. And you're the miracle mothers long for. You're a perfect miracle! Yes, you are!

On the mission field

JOHN: So I'm sitting here in Vesa, Angola. It is a very rural countryside area. And I just listened to Rosa here share her story of the loss of her children. It's so tragic. She's lost three of her children to hunger. And she was sharing the story of her oldest child that died from malnutrition, he was four years old.

Open Captions: Because of the drought our seeds will not grow, and it is a struggle to get any food. Three of my children have died because of hunger. The night my son died he said, "Mama, I'm going, I'm going."

JOHN: "Mama, I'm going!" She said it caused her to literally faint. And when she woke up he was gone. Can you imagine, "Mama, I'm going?"

I know that you love Rosa and Clementin. Without Mission Feeding we cannot guarantee that Clementin is not going to follow her brothers and sisters in that same path of "Mama, I'm going."

Do all that you can to make sure that villages like this don't have to lose any more children. That no mother ever has to listen to her child say, "Mama, I'm going." Please help!

End of video

In the studio

JAMES: Oh, boy! Betty, shoo! When our little daughter—little, she had three teenage children when she left us, she just was asleep. And we knew she woke up in the arms of Jesus. But that's tough, isn't it?

BETTY: It is. And I'm sure you're sitting there weeping along with me and James because how can you not be? If you were that mother and your little four-year-old said, "Mother, I'm going," can you understand the heartache that that mother must have felt? I do. I understand it.

Let's help these children. Let's feed them so that they don't have to die because of lack of

nutrition. We have the opportunity so join with us. Will you do that right now?

JAMES: I just—wow! You know when you lose a child it's been so well said you live the rest of your life with a broken heart. And I have a broken heart, but I don't just have a broken heart because we lost a child, I have a broken heart because of all the broken hearts. And I know the only one who can heal the broken hearts. And the ache, and the pain, and the memories, they don't go away. He just holds our broken hearts. He used a shoulder to lean on. I try to be a shoulder for people to lean on. A lot of big men have told me I'm the greatest shoulder they'd ever leaned on. I've tried to be a shoulder for a lot of people to lean on because I care. And the viewers who watch our show care.

We don't give because we think we're going to get this big return. We know that God blesses those who sow, and he says he'll provide when you give, and he is your treasure, and if you put your treasure in the kingdom of heaven purpose, he'll see to it that you can keep being a blessing. I know that. But we actually give to bless and to give life—*Life Today* is the name of our show. We're trying to share life with every testimony, every story; such beautiful ones you see here on *Life Today* every day, you see life. But we give life today and we're asking you to do it right now. Whether it is providing water or setting the sexually trafficked free or giving food to the starving, saving a mother's child, a common day miracle! So they don't have to hear, "Mama, I'm going."

Father, would you please help everybody watching right now to go and get their bank card or check or whatever, and make the best gift they can to give the greatest gift, to give life—life itself! And even life eternal because we will share your son Jesus with them? Not just in word only but in demonstration, in deed. So please help them to be part of the deed, doing what you say, in Jesus' name.

Would you go and get your bank card and use it like a check? We've got some gifts to send you, I guarantee you you'll like them. We'll don't send you anything that doesn't bless you. But you're going to be giving the greatest blessing, you'll be giving life. You're going to be the miracle some mother longs for so she doesn't have to hear her child say, "I'm going." She is going to watch

them live, watch them play, watch them be happy because you gave them life. And we're going to point them to the life, to Jesus, and they're going to believe because of your gift.

Get your bank card, dial the number, go online, and make the gift God put on your heart. Help us feed as many kids as you can. Please!

Begin video clip

ANNOUNCER: Across the continent of Africa, children are suffering and facing severe malnutrition. Lack of rainfall and severe drought has led to one of the deadliest food crises in 40 years.

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 *LIFE Planner* bound in soft-touch leather. This planner will help you in your daily walk with space for you to record your appointments, goals, inspirational notes, and prayers.

With your gift of \$100 or more, please request the scripture pen set. Perfect companions to the *LIFE* planner, these beautiful wooden pens are inscribed with scripture references to keep your heart focused on God's plans for 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

JAMES: You know I'm anxious for you to get these pens and use this incredible LIFE Planner. This is a fabulous planner! You are going to love it. It is just absolutely the neatest thing. And you can plan out everything and they've got so many scriptures and beauty and inspiration. And then *Let the Children Come*. I hope if you can help us feed 100 kids you will.

Well, I've got to say to you, Bowen, you really blessed us. And you really do look like Jesus; and you do too, Matt, and I'm sure Sarah does. I'm sure she puts both of you in the shade.

MATT: Undoubtedly.

JAMES: Sarah, one of these times we're going to meet you. What a beautiful family. Girls, we're glad you got this little brother. Hey, thank y'all for blessing us.

Thanks for watching *Life Today*. Always share *Life Today* with somebody. Thank you!