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Week one: Fall Mission Feeding, last week

Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh

Julie Busler

SHEILA: Welcome to *LIFE Today*! I'm Sheila Walsh here with Randy Robison. We get the privilege, publishers will send us lots of books and we get a chance to read them. And every now and again I'll read something that just stops me in my tracks because I feel like I'm reading my story. And that's how I felt when I read this book. It is called *Joyful Sorrow* which I totally get those can coexist: "Breaking through the darkness of mental illness." And it is by Julie Busler. I want to thank you so much for being with us.

JULIE: Thank you so much! It's an honor to be here.

SHEILA: This is a brave book. At the end, I think you'll see how well she has stewarded her suffering. But you tell the story right up at the front, which is shocking, will be shocking to most people. In 2018, you and your husband are missionaries in Turkey. You have four children, and your mother-in-law is coming to stay. In the suitcase is all the snacks that we would never eat here but over here it is like, oh! American snacks! The family is excited but what's going on in you?

JULIE: So this was a really shocking turning point in my story. So we are so excited that she's there. We get to show her the culture, which is beautiful, and show off our language skills and just play tourist for a while. And I'm watching my children swarm their grandma and I think, I should be feeling something and I'm just numb. I don't really know why. I had felt lots of despair for many, many years but this is a moment where I thought there was something broken that I don't feel the joy that my kids are showing. And that's when the stop popped into my mind. Now's a good time to kill myself because she's here and she can get my husband home, my kids home and my body home. And that is so shocking to hear come out of my mouth. But at the time it was, I mean it was irrational but it was logical because I was in so much pain and I could not figure out how to make it stop. And so that was really where my

mind had gone to.

These thoughts started many, many years ago and just snowballed eventually into plans because I never got the help I needed.

RANDY: So this is when you're missionaries? You're going to have to back us up a little bit to see how you got there.

JULIE: Before we went to the mission field -- I really have to start back at childhood. When I was eight years old, my mom was diagnosed with breast cancer. And I grew up in a family where you didn't talk about your emotions or what grief is. Counseling wasn't allowed. It wasn't that we didn't know it was available, it wasn't allowed.

So as a child, it is a very scary existence. I don't know what cancer is and this is my whole upbringing really. So I shove everything deep down. I try to be a really good kid. I excel in a lot of things and stay out of the way is really what I thought. And then when I was 19, my mom, unfortunately, passed away from cancer. It was just -- it was shocking and devastating and traumatic. It wasn't handled the way that I had hoped it would be. Hospice wasn't called in. I didn't even know hospice was a thing. And so it was very, very traumatic. I didn't even realize she was dying. So after that, I just did all I knew to do to survive and shoved it deep down and became a master at wearing the mask. Because I wasn't trying to be deceptive, didn't know what else to do.

So I went to college, no one in Oklahoma knew what had just happened in Kansas where I'm from, and I met my husband in college and I become a follower of Christ in college. So I'm a baby believer in college trying to navigate. I've got all this trauma. So I have no idea what the Bible says about suffering, sorrow, or what people in the church think about depression. The thought of even saying the word *depression* was not even in my mind.

So we get married. He is an amazing, godly man. We're still married 16 years later, and he has no idea what's going on because I just put it over here, and I was able to do that for many years. We get married, we graduate, we're working kind of living the American dream, having kids, have a boat, have a car, and

we're focused on just building our life. And then everything comes crashing down when I'm in my 20s, and I'm pregnant and my dad dies by suicide.

SHEILA: Did you know that your father had been struggling?

JULIE: No, I didn't. I could -- now looking back I see the warning signs but because I didn't know them, I didn't see them. Whenever my mom died from cancer, that's the kind of death you can wrap your head around. I mean it's tragic, but people get sick and die.

SHEILA: You can talk to other people about it.

JULIE: But suicide, it's so complicated in the traumatic grief and I had no idea how to handle those emotions. So I did what I had been doing my entire life, I just pushed it down. And meanwhile, my husband and I feel this very distinct calling from God to get rid of everything, sell all our possessions and to move overseas as missionaries. Because we were realizing, we are grieving these deaths, we have hope in the Lord. And there are people who are living and dying every day who don't know Christ. So while these are -- I'm still a very much traumatized and haven't gotten the help I needed, the Lord already was using his death to spur us on to go share life.

SHEILA: What I think is so interesting in your story is that your mother-in-law is there, those thoughts are going on. You don't follow through with it but then she writes about you when she goes home and you realize how other people perceive you isn't even close to what you're feeling.

JULIE: Yeah. That was an important moment because I did not realize the disconnect between the despair and the flashbacks, everything that was going on in my mind with P.T.S.D. and depression, which I would later be diagnosed with but had no idea at the time. There was such a disconnect in how the world saw me. And so she posted on Facebook and it's actually in my book and it's very long and a little uncomfortable because it praises me, and just what a good mother I am and how my home is built with hard work and love, and I'm growing in the Lord. And I'm reading her words and thinking, she wrote that as I'm planning my death. That was a wake-up call. That something is not right, and I won't survive if I don't tell somebody.

SHEILA: So who did you tell?

JULIE: So I told a fellow friend in Turkey. And the reason that I think she was safe enough to tell was because she -- I had kind of put some feelers out there with some friends. Like "I think I'm struggling." And if people don't respond, it can just close you back up. But she, with arms wide open, accepted me, listened to me, and was like, "Julie, I think you should tell your husband."

So I told him enough not the -- I didn't know how to verbalize everything. How do you verbalize that? But I told him enough to where he, praise the Lord, was proactive and made an appointment with a psychiatrist, which actually was horrifying to me at the time. I had no idea really what a psychiatrist was. I thought Christians don't go to psychiatrists, let alone missionaries. That was my thinking.

And so I walk into this psychiatrist's office in Turkey, and they hand me a clipboard. And this was a very important moment in my entire life. And on the clipboard, it wanted me to list my symptoms. And one of them, the very first one was: Do you feel worthless? And I immediately thought if I put yes, what kind of missionary is that? Like how am I going to tell the doctor in this Muslim country about Jesus?

SHEILA: I feel worthless.

JULIE: Yes! I can sit here and quote scripture about how much God loves me, how I'm fearfully and wonderfully made, but that's not what I believed. And so, by the grace of God, I circled all the answers accurately, turned them in, and I sat down. I looked around the waiting room and it was other women, Turkish women, and I remember thinking, oh, my goodness! I'm just as broken and human as the women I came to reach. And suddenly, that put me on the same playing field. And I realized that mental illness doesn't discriminate. It doesn't matter what race you are, what religion you are, or what vocation you are, we're all broken, and we all need help.

RANDY: We want to hear the rest of that. But there is a missing piece for me here. And it is this. You suffered, right? You lost your mother, you lost shockingly your father, but now you've kind of built things back, you've got children, a husband, all that. What would make you even want to take your own

life? Was there some deep pain that you just wanted to end or just deception? What would get you to that point?

JULIE: Yes, that's a really good question because people will say things like I've got four healthy beautiful children. My husband adores me and he's just a gift from God. And so it doesn't make sense. But trauma, as I've learned, and I'm not a doctor or a therapist, but as I've learned and researched, trauma shifts the way that your brain functions and perceives the world. And so the strength that I possessed as a mother was being overshadowed by the trauma of being an abandoned daughter. I just lost sight of everything God had given me. Because of the trauma, I would be triggered everywhere I looked, and I would just be tail spinning into these fight or flight responses to where I really couldn't think rationally. And I hadn't learned coping skills through therapy yet. So I was just left with, I mean I could -- I couldn't survive. It was going to be the end of me.

SHEILA: You talk about that moment when your counselor calls your husband in and basically fills him in, in what a serious place you're in. Talk about that. What was that like for you and what was that like for him?

JULIE: My memory is a little spotty because I think it was so traumatic realizing that this secret that I had held for long is suddenly revealed, and I don't even really want it to be revealed. I'm so ashamed. And I don't quite understand how to get out from underneath the shame from the enemy yet. But whenever she tells him, his world, my world is crashing down but so is his. I have a lot of compassion for those who love and live with people who struggle like I do because oftentimes, they also need help. It is very traumatic to love someone and fear losing them every day. I think a lot of that was also traumatic for him. But I praise the Lord that he never once made me feel bad. His dream, he thrives overseas. He's so gifted. And yet, he laid his life down for his bride, like Christ, to get me the help I needed. And he's never made me feel guilty. And that's only by the grace of God in him.

RANDY: So you guys came back.

JULIE: We did. But not yet. So the psychiatrist realized how dire the situation was and so she hospitalized me. Mind you, I'm this most basic mother. I'm a housewife from the Bible belt in

Oklahoma. I'm used to like play dates, going to Target, all those things, and here I am in a Turkish psychiatric hospital where they won't let me have a Bible. It is forbidden. At one point another patient held me down to try to get me to convert to Islam, and they're sedating me.

There is trauma happening, but at the same time it was life-giving and lifesaving because they showed me brain scans. So at this point, I don't even know, is depression a faith problem? I really don't know, and that had paralyzed me from getting help. But when they showed my brain scans and they said, "Julie, right here where it is lighting up in this color it is indicating depression. And this color shows the evidence P.T.S.D." And I thought, you can see that in my brain?

SHEILA: I have those pictures -- I have those scans too and it was like a light bulb turned on.

JULIE: Yes! So I started to think, maybe this is an illness. But actually, I swung a little bit too far to where I thought, give me medicine, therapy, and I'll be good. And so a little bit later God would intervene and correct that. But it was really important for me to see the illness side of it to cooperate with doctors.

RANDY: The physical side. Okay. So help me out because I'm the naive one here, I admit it. But is it not something that we should approach from a body, mind, and spirit? Is that the right way to go?

SHEILA: Well, that's one of the things I loved most about your book is that some people are like it's just my brain. Or other people are like nope, you just need to pray about it. You have this beautiful combination of getting help and then the power of prayer and the Word of God.

JULIE: Yes. And so I hadn't quite learned that yet where I am in the story, but God would miraculously show up. And so what happened was -- because I do believe that we need all of those. So I was in the hospital for about three weeks, and I was stabilized. So we quickly moved back to Oklahoma.

But here I am, I've got a baby and jet lag. I'm so ashamed. I'm thinking, what will our supporters think of me? I feel like a failure. And so I end up attempting to take my life and end up back in the ER and in the hospital. So this is like back-to-back hospital stays. But this hospital stay is where God changed my

whole life. And so what happened was, I'm there and this is the lowest of the low, bottom of pit. I'm still very focused on death. Two of my friends from church are coming to visit me and I'm just thinking, what are they going to think about me? My hair is wild, I have no hair brush, no makeup --

SHEILA: They took it all away.

JULIE: My husband brought these ridiculous pajamas that don't even look cute. So I'm thinking, what am I going to -- there is no mask to hide behind. And these friends are seeing me unedited in this filtered world very raw. But they didn't come at me preaching. I did need scripture and that would come but they just came, and they sat with me. And one of my friends said, "Julie, I think you're in the valley of the shadow of death from Psalm 23. The word is alive, and it is active, and it transforms our minds." And so even that little nugget of truth was enough to light this flame of hope within me.

And so they left, and I was thinking, maybe I am like the Psalmist in the valley. And I'm sitting in this common area right after and this patient who's just been admitted, still on drugs, coming off drugs, she sits next to me and she stands up and walks past me and she says out loud, "I will fear no evil for you are with me." And I'm thinking, am I hearing voices? Because that literally finishes the verse: Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me.

So I'm thinking, okay, maybe I'm not abandoned. God, are you talking to me? So I go to sleep, wake up the next day and the psychologist is there. He knows nothing about me but what's on paper: I'm on suicide watch, my name, age, that stuff. He looks at me and says, "Julie, have you ever read Psalm 23?" And I'm just thinking, okay, there is no place so dark, so isolated, so locked away from society that God does not see his children. And yes, the presence of God is in the church and worship services and Bible study, but it's also in psych wards. And my shepherd knew where his sheep was. And the Bible says that we know his voice. And like the Israelites in the wilderness where God fed them manna, this is God. I don't have access to a Bible and that does not stop God. He's feeding me my manna. And that's where I realized, okay, at this point, medicine and therapy have started to stabilize me but they don't produce fruit. Because fruit is from the spirit, and joy and peace. So that's why I realized medicine and therapy are good gifts but Jesus is the hope.

SHEILA: I just want to say to any of you who are watching right now and who is just connecting with this, maybe you feel a little desperate, we have prayer partners standing by right now -- right now who would love to pray for you. So if you're feeling, Lord, do you see me? Maybe I'm walking through the valley of the shadow of death. Are you speaking to me? Let me just say in Jesus' name, yes. And you can call, and it will be our joy and privilege to pray for you because you are not alone.

What do you pray that people will take -- because I love the fact that it is called *Joyful Sorrow* because they can coexist. What do you hope that people will take away from your book?

JULIE: Well, really that it is okay to get help. It is absolutely normal. And the Christian life is full of sorrow. That's throughout the Bible but the joy of the Lord really is our strength. I think it is a great thing to embrace our weakness because Apostle Paul boasted in his weakness because that is where the power of the Lord shines.

So I want to give people permission to yes, get the help that God has provided. Praise God for doctors and therapists but also point them back to Jesus because he is our hope.

RANDY: Yeah, if you want *Joyful Sorrow*, the book, you can get it wherever books are sold. But if you will just say today when you make your best gift, we want that book, we'll send it to you.

Interestingly, the title of your book ties into a situation that's going on right now where there is great sorrow but yet there is joy, and that joy is you when you intervene in the sorrow. We're in our last week of Mission Feeding, the last week of the year, but we want to take just a moment to look at a situation to see if maybe you can be part of the joy in their sorrow. So watch this and we'll be right back.

On the mission field

ISAK: All there is, is the dry burnt-out remnants of the last crops that were here. The dry soil is a testament to the fact that nothing can grow here.

Veronica has brought her child to this screening clinic here in the Kabala area of Angola today. You can see. I don't have to describe the condition of this child. You can see that this child is suffering. But you know the reality is it is not just a lack of crops. It is not just dry parched soil. It's lives! Lives are being stolen by the lack of food. Not a war, not some human-made crisis, simply the fact that there isn't enough rainfall to grow crops to feed their children. And that is what's stealing their lives.

This child is suffering from severe malnutrition. Why? Because there is no food at home. Literal starvation. Children in these areas have been starving to death. Children dying of malnutrition. Many parents are telling us, "We don't know what to do. We don't know where to turn. We've done everything we can do. But we can't feed our children."

For five years there has been a drought in this country that's meant that mothers like Veronica are not able to grow food for their children and are not able to provide what their children need. And you can see that this child, Samuel, is just a representation of more than 250 children that are here today; 250 mothers that have brought their children saying, "Please help me. Help me save my child's life."

The solution is food. The solution is expressing God's heart and extending his hands. And I'm asking you to do that today. Please, give that gift. Give the gift of food, give the gift of life.

End of video

In the studio

SHEILA: Just listening to those little ones' cries is just heartbreaking. But the amazing thing about Mission Feeding is that we can provide hope in a bowl.

I'll never forget the time when I was sitting at home with my son Christian and he was probably I don't know four or five years old at the time. We were watching James and Betty and they were talking about the situation in Africa. They were talking about the fact that they had this great food, kind of an oatmeal that has all the vitamins. But so many of the people are either coming with these little cans that would burn the children's hands or else they would come with something that was paper and the food would

fall right through it. I remember James talking about the fact that we are going to now provide these bowls. And my son for a whole year put most of his allowance in a bag and then asked, "Mom, can we go there, and can I give this to Mr. James?"

I'll never forget watching my son -- and I wanted to turn all these coins into notes so it would be easier to carry, and he was like, "No, mom, this is what I brought." And carrying this little bag up here on the platform and giving it to James. If it touches the heart of a child, how can it not touch us? And I have to tell you, that conviction has never left. He still wants to put hope in a bowl.

Please help us. As Isak said, there is a situation right now that is devastating. Those malnutrition clinics are so overrun. Some of the camps in South Sudan, they're just -- it's a hopeless situation. And as a mom, I can't imagine what that's like to hear my child cry and not be able to ease their suffering. That's why Randy and I today are asking for your help. We can change this.

RANDY: Yeah. Sheila, I know you noticed when you've been in these places that these people are bringing what they have in a sense to care for their own children. In other words, they work. They work harder than most Americans if we're honest about it. They work the soil, they work the land. If there is a problem, they will take their child wherever they can for whatever help they can. It's just a situation that most of us just -- we can't even fathom the situation.

And it does shift from region to region at times. We'll go in, we'll help, we'll stabilize an area. There will be another area where maybe there is a drought or a flood or something else and we will go. We'll respond to those who have the greatest needs. But we can only respond because you support Mission Feeding on an ongoing basis. And even though this is the last week that we'll be on the air talking about this, this year, as we get to the end of the year, and by the way, if you have year-end gifts, this is a great place to put it, a great time to make it, but we rely on you guys to enable us to respond as the needs shift and change. And so we will go as much as you will send us.

I'm asking you to keep sending us to these places to help these children. Your gift of \$30, \$50, or \$100 right now will help feed three, five, or ten children for the next three months. Some of you could feed 100 children with a gift of \$1,000 today. Some of you could do even more.

I'm asking you to go to the phone, go online, and make the best gift you can. I can promise you just as we promised your son, we will take whatever you give us and we will help save lives. So do it now.

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.

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

End of video

On the mission field

SHEILA: One of the things at *LIFE* that we care about so much is bringing the hope of Jesus Christ. But first of all, we want to bring hope to a mother that she can feed her children. So 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.

That's why mission feeding is so critical. This is not, "Let's do this sometime next week, next month, next year." No! It's life and death right now. And 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: Thank you so much. If the lines are busy, please keep calling. It's been -- I don't know if it's been a rough year for you or a good year, but I think one of the things that we realize is the hope that is available in Christ and we want to bring that to other people. So please, give the best year-end gift you can. And --

RANDY: Yeah! If you want *Joyful Sorrow*, the book, you can get it wherever books are sold. But if you will just say today when you make your best gift, we want that book, we'll send it to you. We would love to. We want you to get healthy and healed. Julie, what do people need to know as we go out today?

JULIE: It can be really scary to make that first step of telling someone that you're not okay but it's so worth it. And when we bring these things into light that's when healing happens.

SHEILA: Absolutely! So for any gift at all, request this book, *Joyful Sorrow*. And we'll see you next time!