

Week 51

12/13/10

James: I sure like you three boys out here that admitted y'all were brothers earlier, sitting up here. The way you welcome -- the way y'all are clapping and welcoming, it really just makes us feel welcomed and it really encourages us. You are fine boys. I love your smiles and I love what I sensed when I talked to you earlier about the fact that you love each other... obviously love your family. They told us they didn't know -- we didn't know this, they didn't know, I go to Gateway Church, Betty and I do in Southlake and they're going there now. Hey, I'm James Robison. This is Betty, my wife. These are my buddies that are sitting up here and I love. I love everybody in this audience. I love all of you! We welcome you to *LIFE Today*. We're glad you're here. We have one of our real good friends -- you know we don't ever have anybody on that we don't love. We don't have anybody on that we don't think have a real meaningful story. Carol Kent is our guest today. She's a truly gifted communicator. You know we have Beth Moore every week, "Wednesdays with Beth," she is a gifted communicator. So when you begin to look at people that are gifted to communicate, you think well, are they all pretty similarly gifted? Well, let me tell you yes. And do they have a communication style that is unique to themselves? You better believe it. She is so articulate. She is so... I believe truly gifted of God to not only communicate verbally but in writing. I'm holding a book here, and get this title, "Between a Rock --," and you know we normally say "a hard place," we call it "Between a rock and a hard place" -- "a Rock and a Grace Place." Let me tell you, her hard place became a grace place because the son she loves so much, he made an awful, awful error -- a grave mistake. He committed murder. He thought in behalf of those he loved, but nevertheless he didn't receive grace to not be in prison for the rest of his life, he's got a life sentence, an unpardonable life sentence, no parole ever, he's in prison. Carol came here and talked to us about it, Betty in the midst of the journey, when they didn't know what the verdict would be. So we've been praying for Carol a long time but now she's found herself between that rock and the hard place, that became a miraculously a grace place. She's going to tell us about her son, her journey and the place where she finds herself now. Would you welcome Carol Kent back to *LIFE Today*? Carol, glad to see you.

Carol: Thank you, James! So good to see you, Betty.

James: Well, there you are. Between a rock and a hard place that you say has become a grace place.

Carol: I'll tell you, James, if you would have given me 100 possible things that could have happened to our family, this would not have been it but it is where we live our life. Our son was a joy to raise, he was an only child, and he was in little league and went fishing with his grandpa. Got into high school, was president of the national honor society, just showed great promise. He came home from camp and he said, "I really want to do something that matters with my life." And he said, "I think God wants me to serve in the military and maybe even in political leadership and I believe the best place I could get equipped to do that would be at the United States Naval Academy." Well, he received the appointment and we were there in May of 1997 when on national television all of those midshipmen tossed their hats in the air, and we as the proud parents were just cheering him on expecting great things out of the future. He went off to nuclear engineering school in Orlando, Florida, joined a great church. And there were women in the young adult Bible study and by the end of summer he had fallen in love with a young woman who was previously married and had two precious little girls. And he fell hard and fast and we put together a very quick wedding. We so celebrated the joy of becoming grandparents as well as inlaws on the very same day. Little Chelsea had been in our house less than a half an hour before she came rushing up to me, grabbed my hand in her two hands, kissed all over it and said, "You're my new favorite Grammy!" Well, that will warm a heart really fast! And little Hannah would sit at my kitchen counter and sing songs about how much she loved Jesus. But there were multiple allegations of abuse against the biological father of the girls and he was trying to get unsupervised visitation and it looked, legally speaking, like that was going to happen. And in retrospect, we saw our son unravel emotionally, mentally, spiritually. And one year after their marriage we got that middle of the night call that no parent ever wants to get. And I'll never forget looking at my husband as he pulled that receiver away from his ear and he said, "Carol, Jason has been arrested for the murder of his wife's first husband. He's in the jail in Orlando." We went through two and a half years and seven postponements of his trial. The court TV cameras were there. The news media wanted to zoom in on the grieving, weeping momma and it felt like the worst invasion of privacy I've ever known. I will never forget when they told us the verdict had been reached, we all gathered and the cameras scrambled to be in place and the camera men were there, and all of the sudden the verdict was read, "We, the members of the jury find Jason Paul Kent guilty of murder in the first degree." And then because Florida is a state of mandatory minimum sentences we knew instantly what the sentence would be, it is either the death penalty or life without parole, and the death penalty had been removed earlier since it was Jason's first offense. He was asked to stand and the judge said, "I sentence you, Jason Paul Kent to live out the rest of your natural life in a Florida state penitentiary without the possibility of parole." I now believe it is possible to die of a broken heart. We got back to the house and we could hardly speak to each other. We

just sobbed and held each other and two hours later Jason called. He said, "Mom and dad, they brought me back to the faith-based area of the jail" -- and by this time he had been there so long, two and a half years, he was the cell coordinator in the faith-based area and many maximum security inmates had come to faith. He said, "The news of my conviction and sentence had already hit the jail." And he said, "These big old maximum security inmates were weeping as he came back in." They said, "Jason, if a man like you got a sentence like this, man, there is no hope for us! There is no hope!" I knew he was going to be okay when he said, "God gave me the ability to stand up and preach. I said, 'Men, if we walk in freedom in this lifetime or in the next we will still one day walk in freedom if we know Jesus.'" So this book, James and Betty, is about pressing into the sweet spot of grace when you are in such a hard place you have nowhere else to go. And so many times I have found myself beating into the chest of God saying, why? This boy had such potential! He was the apple of our eye. But I can't resist leaning in to his embrace and there I find divine surprises.

James: Gosh, I'm a -- I'm kind of a wreck.

Carol: You're a nice wreck, James! You're a compassionate wreck!

[Laughter]

James: I want to say I don't want to question God but I do, as I know Carol has. And I've questioned him about a lot of things in my journey, fatherlessness and failure and missing the mark and disappointing God and others through my life and yet as I've grown older and he's deepened -- and you said it is compassion, it is a suffer with. As I was listening to Carol and it is the same way when I see anybody hurting, which is why I get so disturbed about -- and really, I get a little bit angry, which is a total flip side of the broken heart -- over the fact that so many people are being hurt by bad decisions on the part of leaders, and a church that simply slumbers and sings louder while people are in misery and pain and while national leaders make mistakes. So it disturbs me but the reason I'm this way is I identify with where people are. So when you were telling your story as a mother, I'm feeling it. The Holy Spirit has more feminine characteristics than masculine, I promise you! And believe me, that's why women are such a powerful force and influence on the planet because in so many ways they are probably a lot more god like than we men are, in many ways, beautiful attributes. But God has really broken my heart. So I feel what you're talking about. It is empathy, it is an identity, and I feel it with the starving and I really don't apologize for it. I've asked God why he made me this way, he let me be this way but I am, I feel what she is talking about, Betty.

Betty: Well, I do too, James, especially as a mother because mothers are supposed to be able to fix things for their kids. When they come in with their little hurts and their scratches and things mothers can do to fix, but Carol, you were in a place, and are in a place, you can't fix this.

Carol: Well, it has gone on now for many years now, Betty. And Christmas was approaching again one year and I was going through those struggles of we'll be eating out of the vending machines and we won't be at our wonderful festive celebration at home with our family feeling sorry for myself and it was 9:15 at night and my doorbell rang. I thought, well, who is stopping by? It is too late for a delivery. And Gene met me at the door and turned the porch light on and nobody was there. There wasn't a car there, not a human being, but the doorbell had been rung. We opened the door and there was this beautiful Christmas gift on our porch, just gorgeous bow, metallic wrapping, and it had a card on it and it said, "Mom." I had this flash of who has played the most cruel joke on me that could ever be played? But I was curious. I am a mom and it was my porch, and we brought the gift in. I opened the card and it was from my son. It said, "Dear mom, I've been incarcerated for several years now and you and dad have given and given and given to me and I've never been able to give to you. And with the help of a good friend this year, I have the privilege of giving you a special Christmas gift." And I opened it up and it was a beautiful russet-colored silk jacket, tailored made as if it was made just for me! I put it on and felt like a princess and at the end of the note he said, "Mom, I hope every time you wear this you'll know how much I love you." God is showing us that when we're "Between a Rock and a Grace Place" there really are divine surprises in the form of splashes of joy through the compassionate acts of other people, through the favor they give to us through the unexpected mercy that people shower us with.

James: Jason has given her a typical day in the prison and it's just broken down hour by hour. It took a lot of time to just say here's the day. And it was not like here's my sad day, it's just here's my day. So she read the day but after he had sent the agenda he then sent this and I'm only going to read a portion of it but listen to it. "Dear mom, yesterday I felt I was able to love, encourage and bless you for once where normally I've been the recipient of your love. It was a privilege for me to give back to you. God has been filling me with more of himself and I'm truly at peace." -- This is in prison for life -- away from his children, his wife, his family. "-- Out of his peace and love within, it is easy to pour it out on others but it is a special treat to pour it out on you, mom. I love you! I'm grateful for how you've always been there for me and you've tried to comfort, protect, rescue and help me throughout my life. God is doing something powerful within me. I'm very aware I'm unworthy. I find myself often speaking words

that sustain the weary." He goes on to talk about his great God. This is an awesome God, this grace that you find between the rock and the hard place, it can become a grace place. You said that you wanted to share one of the concluding things about surprised by the adventure you are on that you share in the book; you wanted to share with us and our audience.

Carol: Well, James, I was speaking in Atlanta two years ago when I had been asked to share our story. And the next week I received an e-mail from a woman named Tammy Wilson. She said, "Carol, I heard you speak last week and I want to thank you for showing compassion to the families of the victims as well as telling your own story because there are always so much pain on both sides." She said, "My own mother was murdered 13 years ago and when I got home I looked your son up on the Internet and I discovered that he is in the very same prison that the man who murdered my mother is in, and his name is Matthew Ben Rodriguez. I have been praying for Matthew to come to faith in Christ for several years." She said, "Do you think your son would share the gospel with Matt and try to lead him to to the Lord?" Well, I'm not allowed to initiate phone calls to my son so I printed that letter, put it in a envelope and sent it to Jason. And a few days later I was in the prison at visitation and Jason came out and I greeted him. I said, "Jason, do you know Matthew Rodriguez?" He said, "Mom, he's one of my best friends! He is in my biblical counseling class. He is a dynamic believer." He said, "We don't live in the same quad so I couldn't speak with him immediately but after counseling class I said to him, 'Hey Matt, is your middle name Ben?' He said, 'Well, yes, how would you know that?' He said, "Matthew Ben Rodriguez?" He said, "Yes." He said, "Well, then, Matt, I have a letter for you." And Jason handed Matthew the letter from the daughter of the woman he had murdered 13 years earlier saying that she was praying for him to come to faith in Christ. And Matthew began to sob. Jason said, "Mom, you'll see Matt today. He's coming to visit his sister who will be in the visitation area shortly." And a half hour later out came his sister and out came Matthew and they embraced and then Matt came over to our table and he already had tears streaming down both cheeks. And he got down on his knees and he grabbed my hands and he said, "Mrs. Kent, thank you so much for sending that letter!" He said, "I had already written a five-page letter to Tammy Wilson and her family asking for their forgiveness for taking the most precious person they knew." Tammy had a sister, a brother who had not yet graduated from high school, it was a terrible loss to their family. But he said, "I've had nowhere to send the letter. Every attempt I've made to find an address for this family fails. Will you ask her if she will receive my letter?" I said, "I sure will, Matt." I got home and I e-mailed Tammy Wilson and that same night she sent a note back with her address. And since that time, multiple letters have gone back and forth between Tammy and Matt and Matt and the sister, and Matt and Patrick, their brother. And there has been forgiveness and

reconciliation and redemption that we can only explain by God's mathematics. And I believe nothing can touch us, no rock, no tough place can touch us without God's permission. He can use it as a platform upon which we can have the greatest adventure in serving him. I don't want to serve the Lord through prison ministry, that wasn't on my agenda. And now, people say, "Where do you go to church?" And they're waiting for me to say what the denomination is. I said, "We go to the church of the razor wire." And then they say, "Well, what denomination is that?" Saturdays and Sundays are visit days. So when we are out in ministry on a Saturday, we take the last flight home on Saturday or the earliest on Sunday so we can see Jason. And we have our little service there in the prison, and priceless things happen there. One day we were sharing scriptures and then my sister began to sing "To God be the Glory." My momma joined in in her alto and my daddy in his monotone and then the next thing I knew people at the table next to ours were singing, and then the table next to that one. I thought we are having a church service at Hardy Correctional Institution and it is good! We've been favored -- we've been favored!

James: Are y'all blessed hearing about the grace of God here in this audience?

[Applause]

I need to just say to you, listen to me, please, please, this is not about a God that is untouchable, mystical, some fiction, somebody's imagination, this is the real living God. He wants to live in us. He wants to live in you; loves you! There are people here sitting in this room, we've had lots of pain but oh, what a mighty God -- what a mighty God! What a loving God! What a grace-filled God! Do this not own for a mom with a son in prison but the son in prison! And really the only reason some of you are not rejoicing in your church services is you're in prison yourself, you're in bondage, defeated, you won't let the grace of God lift you up. That's why we're offering a series Robert and I taught on "Living Free," really, overcoming the cycles of defeat. We don't have to live trampled down, we can be overcomers in this life. But some of you have never even met this life of God in Christ. Father, I pray everyone watching would just as a child, in their heart receive you as their father and Jesus as their savior. You can ask God right now to become your father, invite Jesus into your hearts; he really wants to be your savior, your Lord, your friend. I want to let you know this book is in the bookstore. We'll gladly send it to you. I'll tell you what we'd like to ask you to do, would like to ask you to help us share grace and love, not just in word but in action. We'd like to ask you to literally -- please -- become an answer to prayer. You're going to hear some prayers that you can be the answer to.

On the mission field:

Luke: Father God, I come to you right now and I ask you to perform a miracle in this child, God. Please stop its suffering, Jesus. God I ask you to put your hand on this child and heal him.

Ruth: Lord Jesus, you've made this child. You gave this child life. We ask that you will touch this body. Lord, give it the nutrition that it needs.

Peter: We pray for a miracle for, Lord, she needs food but she needs your miraculous touch too. In the name of Jesus.

Jeanne: Lord, I just ask you to let the food we give him be a nourishment to his body and quickly restore him, in Jesus name.

James: I pray, from the bottom of my heart, that you would raise them up as a great shining light in a country so desperately in need. God, bless them, Bless this hospital. Bless these nurses. And God, bless these boys. Raise them up in Jesus' name.

Beth: Lord, I pray that you would move in this village and that you would move through us, God. We praise you, Lord. We thank you that you are the God who knows, you are the God who heals and you are the God who provides. Use us, Lord, as your instruments. Use us as your servants. In Jesus' name, amen.

End of clip

In the studio:

James: You heard the prayers of our grandson, you heard Beth Moore, you heard Billy Graham's daughter, Ruth praying. Our grandson's prayer for a child they thought would not live another day or two was saved. We actually have a picture of that little boy saved because somebody like you said, "I'll get food for that child and others." All of the others we don't know. We have seen miracles happen. We've seen the lives saved. It's not like we're looking for a cure, we know what it is, it is just food, it is nourishment. That's why we have the mission feeding emphasis. And right now we're in the last week, Betty, this is -- we need a miracle. We feel the impact of people who feel financial strain. We know there is a world food crisis and shortage in many areas and we sense that and we feel it. And right now I can tell you in the last days, right now this last week, we need a miracle response. We need the greatest response we've ever experienced in our mission feeding. Now we do have this miracle, we have a matching gift challenge that anything you give today will be doubled. If you gave

\$1,000 it will become \$2,000; if you gave \$5,000 it will become \$10,000. It is possible for someone to do that. Let me show you what we can do. \$1,000 enables us to feed 100 children for the next months to stabilize their diet, get them on their feet, literally turn it around in a matter of months and give them a future, give them a hope; that will be doubled to 200. \$30, \$50, \$100 -- we can feed three, five, or ten children for the next months. If you would help us -- by the way, don't think that \$30 gift is meager and not important. How important is it for three children? It will now become six children; it will be doubled because someone is going to match your gift. But we need to hear from you. Would you put your arms around three children or five children? Let me tell you this, I'll always ask you to help as many as you can. If you can help ten children, do it! But if it is three, please do it. We've asked God to raise up people who would care enough to do just what our friends have done, they'll match what you give. They know it works. Some of them have been and seen firsthand what happened, they wanted to see it and after seeing this, they said, we'll do anything to save these people's lives. What you're doing works in mission feeding. Would you make that call? Please do it. Right now, go to the phone, get your bankcard, use it like a check or write a check, make it to *LIFE* because that's precisely what you're giving. LifeToday.org, if you want to make the gift online. Many people are doing that now and we thank you for that. But if you write a check and plan to mail it, please do it, mail it today but call us and tell us you're putting it in the mail because we need to hear from you this last week. We have some very special gifts for you to bless you as you help us share life. We want to bless your life as you help us give life to others. Thank you so much for making that call. Thanks for the gift.

Begin video clip:

Announcer: At this very moment children are drawing their last breath, struggling to stay alive due to a lack of food. Today you can help stop the cycle of death... you can help save a life! Life's mission feeding teams are in place right now ready to answer the hunger cries of hundreds of thousands of children throughout remote areas of Angola, Mozambique, and Sudan. With previous food reserves gone, we desperately need to replenish our supplies for the feeding programs *immediately*! As an answer to prayer, a group of *LIFE's* friends has set a \$750,000 matching challenge for mission feeding. This means your gift today can have a double impact! \$30 to help feed three children will be doubled to impact six children! \$50 to help feed five children will be doubled to help save ten children! And \$100 for 10 children will be doubled to help feed and minister to 20 children! With your gift of any amount we'll send you the "Living Free" audio series and companion study guide. With your double-impact gift of \$100 or more to help save the lives of 20 children, you may request the "Living

Free" series on both audio and video. Finally, please consider a double-impact gift of \$1,000 or more to help save the lives of 200 children, and you may also request the beautiful "New Creation" bronze sculpture, as well as "The Butterfly Effect" by bestselling author Andy Andrews. This is the last week! Please call, write, or make your gift online!

End of clip

In the studio:

James: It's very, very important that we hear from you. This is the last week and I do want to mention if you'd like to have Carol Kent's book, "Between a Rock and a Grace Place" and boy, has she found that amazing grace -- we'll gladly send it to you for any gift just to say thank you. We have other gifts that of course we'll be sending. I want to say thanks to Carol Kent. Would those of you in the audience like to join us in saying thanks? Carol, God bless you! Thanks for sharing with us the grace of God. Jason, bless you Jason! Bless all those prisoners! "You can be free while you're in prison." We love it!

>> He said that he saw five angels carry me out of the car.

Announcer: A terrible car accident, a miracle and the boy who came back from heaven -- tomorrow!

