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Week 45

Betty Robison & Blynda Lane

Chonda Pierce

“Laughter And Tears”

MALE ANNOUNCER: The following program is sponsored by friends of Life Outreach International.

CHONDA PIERCE: When my husband passed, they say he comes back as a cardinal every now and then. Have you heard that yet as a widow? That's what they always say, and I go, "Well, my husband showed up and pooped on the porch this morning."

ANNOUNCER: Coming up, comedian Chonda Pierce emphasizes the importance of laughter amidst grief.

CHONDA: I'm happy, not all the time, but there is a joy, even in your grieving. There is a joy that comes that is only in a relationship with Jesus Christ.

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BETTY ROBISON: Welcome to "Life Today", I'm so delighted that you could join us. I'm Betty Robison, and Blynda Lane is here with me.

BLYNDA LANE: Betty, we're already laughing.

BETTY: I know it, I know it. They'll understand in a second when we tell them who our guest is. We have the honor of having Chonda Pierce with us, a dear friend of the ministry for many years.

CHONDA: A long time.

BETTY: It's so special to me. You're, first of all, a dear friend, but God has gifted you too, to make people laugh and then to point them to him.

CHONDA: You know, I used to lament--and your husband was a big part of this. I used to lament all the time when somebody would rise up and they'd say, "The first woman to ever talk about real issues," and I'm like, "I've been doing this 35 years. Where's my award, you

know? Where's my little thing?" And you know, people surpass you, and they do better even than you ever did, and I would just cry and lament.

Even Nate Bargatze, you know, who's done so well, and his father said, "We made him sit down and watch every single Chonda Pierce video there was," you know, when he was growing up. But all that to say, your husband made me feel so loved, and legitimized who I am as not just a human being, but as a brainiac and a witty person, you know. Of course, when I came in, I went through the conference room where we used to always have supper before the shows.

I had to have my cry out, I touched his chair. You know, it was just so precious, and I told my assistant who was with me, I said, "Now, I used to sit right here, James wanted me to sit here, Betty sat on the other side of him, and he made me sit here because he said, 'You sit right here so I can tell you when to hush.'"

BLYNDA: And I bet he would.

CHONDA: Oh, yes, he would. He also told me I can never retire. I put that on my Facebook one time.

BETTY: That was not in his vocabulary.

CHONDA: He called me up, you were in the background, I heard you talking. Y'all, I must have said something pitiful because they're on their knees, intercessing for me. And so they said, "You know there's no retirement in the kingdom of God. You go over there and take that stuff off your Facebook."

And you know, it's James, and you go, "Yes, sir, yes, sir. May I wash your car now, please?" It's just--this is my first trip back, so of course it's tender for me, but I have the most incredible memories from my entire career is in this building.

BETTY: Well, he loved you dearly. We both do, we both do.

CHONDA: I love you both too, I said I met presidents because of James Robison, you know.

BETTY: And this is my first time here as a host. There's a lot of firsts ahead of us. It would scare us if God told us all the firsts he has planned for us, all of us.

CHONDA: When I became widowed, the first thing that happened as a widow, I wanted nice grass to be sown on his grave, and so they did, but while they did it, they shoved the marker over to the side somewhere, and we didn't have the stone yet or anything. And so I had to call the funeral home and tell them, "I lost my husband again. He is somewhere under this tree, but I need y'all to come out."

Isn't that terrible? They had to get a metal detector to find my man, I'm not kidding.

BLYNDA: Chonda, no!

CHONDA: That's the truth, it was hilarious. And I said, "Look what the Lord did for me." I have something to laugh-- and it was so funny.

And then they had these big steel things that would stick down in the ground to see if they had something. I'm like, "Well, I don't have time to grieve."

BETTY: Well, you know he's not there anyway.

CHONDA: I know it, I hope not.

BLYNDA: Jumping and dancing with Jesus.

CHONDA: Well, they say he comes back as a cardinal every now and then, have you heard that yet? That's what they always say, and I go, "Well, my husband showed up and pooped on the porch this morning."

BETTY: I'm so glad you're here, I needed a good laugh.

CHONDA: And I'm so happy to provide it.

BETTY: You know, there are some sad times, as you know, and I'm most recent in it, so to be able to have-- the sadness, the weeping is part of the healing, but also the laughing. The laughter is wonderful.

CHONDA PIERCE: You know, it's often said laughter is like medicine, which is absolutely true, and I've seen it happen, so I know that it's true, and it's true in my own life. You can't give something away that you don't really own yourself, so I've learned to laugh so much that it gets to spill over.

But the sweet thing is, I'm happy, not all the time, but there is a joy even in your grieving. There is a joy that comes that is only in a relationship with Jesus Christ.

BETTY: And you can't explain it.

CHONDA: You can't explain it. Comics will come and go. You can go hear your favorite comic, whatever, but when they come and there's something to be said at the end, which in other words is something more about the laugh, there's something to add on.

The laughter in itself is great medicine, but if you can take them while they're vulnerable and hearing the laughs and tell a crowd, "Let me tell you how I have joy and what he's brought me joy in the midst of." That's been my MO for 35 years. I can't believe I've still got a job.

BLYNDA: How did you learn the difference between "I'm using laughter to mask pain" versus "I'm using laughter because it's an overflow of what God's done in my heart"?

CHONDA: I think--well, one, I am probably smarter because of reading James's books, and Anne Graham Lotz you had on not long ago. I'm smarter for reading those books and knowing those things and reading Scripture and studying it for myself. Because then when that stuff gets pressed into you, you start realizing, "Hmm," you know, I used to tell a joke--how can you tell a joke and not tell it, but I used to tell a joke about standing at the water fountain, two little old ladies from the church, you know, patting me on the head, and water kept going up my nose, and it's a long little joke, you know, but I used to tell it knowing that my heart was, "I hope those two little ladies are still alive and can hear this."

You know what I mean? It was a little vengeance.

BLYNDA: Oh, it was a real experience?

CHONDA: Exactly, as a preacher's kid, and I don't tell it anymore because, one, I don't have to, two, they're probably dead, but three, I know where my heart was. And I didn't feel good when I laid my head down after-- and I would get a laugh, people would laugh, but I didn't feel good about it. And that was when you start trusting your own instincts and what the Holy Spirit is breathing into your ear the whole time you're working.

I've had to go back and apologize for certain wordage that I thought, "Well, that probably was a little much," you know, especially talking about menopause. I had to apologize a lot during menopause, it was just--.

BETTY: It's real.

CHONDA: It is, it's satanic. That's what it is. But it is, you know, there are times I just know in my own heart, and as you begin to--you know, it's funny, I get finished with a comedy set, and four shrinks will have handed you their card, you know, "We probably need to talk about that."

BLYNDA: "You need this. Take this, you'll call me."

CHONDA: And actually, that's true. I came from such dysfunction, even though it was a parsonage, that I was a part of founding a place called Branches Counseling Center. I'll never forget telling James Robison our dream, and helping other people that grew up in the church that just didn't get that they were loved.

They didn't really figure out that God is not waiting to pound them, and it intercepts in their life in ways that are just brutal. And we were telling them, I said, "I think the Lord's calling us to make a counseling center," and so we did. And one day at Christmas, well, I was speaking for your Christmas party, he just got up and gave us this offering love for Branches, and now there's five of them across the country.

I mean, thousands are helped with the mixture of great, incredible psychological counseling and the Word of God. That helps heal a myriad of things, and he's done a great healing in me, from all kinds of grief to a lot of dysfunction, a lot of depression. Brother James used to not mind me saying, "I'm here because of the Holy Spirit's healing and 150 milligrams of Effexor."

BETTY: Well, tell me how difficult it was for you, because you're a comedian, how difficult it was to get back to that after your loss of your husband.

CHONDA: You know, what's interesting now, when I was a teenage girl, both my sisters-- one was killed in a car wreck, and the other one was 15 when she had leukemia and passed in 21 days. My father divorced Mother and left in the midst of all of that, it was such a confusing time. And those were grief of a different sort, the grieving of who you used to be as a preacher's kid, the grieving of your sisters, the grieving for your mother who's having to pick up all the pieces.

And then when I married and was doing fine, all of a sudden my husband dies, he was 53. We had been married 31 years, and you met him, we'd been on the show here together before, and that's a totally different type of grief. I do think when the Lord mentions widows and orphans in the Word, that was transforming for me because it made me know he knew exactly how I felt.

You know, I felt orphaned when my father walked out and left. I felt--I was definitely a widow when my husband passed, and of two people groups that the Lord could have said, "Take care of these," he said widows and orphans, and so it made me feel like he knew my plan already. He knew already I was gonna be in that special group where I would need to find some type of hope and healing that's even deeper than other people find, and he's faithful, and I did, and I found great healing.

I began to write about it, and not try to escape the grief. I wrote a book called "Laughing in the Dark", I just finished a book called "Life Is Funny Until It's Not", and I don't know how-- I think I've done 15 books, and James Robison has wrote the foreword for everything, you know. It always passed through him first before it would go to a publisher, but-- and then I wrote this book, and I'm so sad, I don't wanna cry, but I wrote this book "Stay Faithtastic!"

I wrote it with him in mind, because it's a funny devotional book. Now I wanted to put on the cover, "A book you'll read at every setting," which is about the potty. When you go to the potty, and you read the book.

And your husband wouldn't let me. "That might be carrying it a little too far."

BLYNDA: There are some limits.

CHONDA: Exactly, so I titled it "Stay Faithtastic!" so you keep living your faith forward, not your feelings, not your circumstance, not what you're going through today, but your faith

steps out first, and then you can walk along anything. The Lord is so faithful to help you through.

BETTY: And having that faith doesn't mean you have all the answers, because if you had all the answers, you wouldn't need faith.

CHONDA: If the Lord would listen to me, I'd have a new Mercedes, that's what I'd have. But I still got a Ford truck. But it's true, you know, we feel like--and sometimes, I will say, I think the church has sold a bill of goods going, "Come to know Jesus and everything's gonna be perfect and wonderful in your life," and it's not so.

You come to know Jesus and it's the only way you're gonna survive this side of heaven, but in this world you will have trouble of every kind, and I've almost marked off the check of all the trouble you could get in. I made the list, and I've been to every one of them, and sure enough, he has been there through every single one. Doesn't mean it was easy, doesn't mean I was out with flying colors.

What I adore about you being here is, one, the bravery, 'cause it was hard to get out again after David died. I stayed off the road for a good six, seven months, and it was people like your husband and you, and my mother and people that was constant-- and my pastor would always say, "The way you wanna heal is you stick it to the devil, and you get out there and you do what you were given a gift to do and what you were anointed to do."

BETTY: Because what he would like for us to do, and I have had these moments where I say, "I just wanna go over there and crawl in the corner and hide and just not be for a while," you know, but God won't let me.

CHONDA: And how good is that? I tell people, especially women that come up at the end of a show and they're widowed, and we all have our stories and our time, and I tell them, "If you're here and you've had a hard time laughing but you've made yourself get out, it's just been difficult because your husband died last week, then your body is doing exactly what it should be doing, and I commend you for getting out of the house and keep moving on," but you're at that special time in grief, and the opposite is true as well.

If you're here and you have laughed so, so hard and he died yesterday, we probably need to go dig up your backyard. I mean, if you're here and you're still-- and you wanna get in the corner and he died 20 years ago, there's a disconnect.

BETTY: Let me ask you, is this part of the process, because I feel like it is. We're laughing here today, which is really good, it is part of the healing process. Now I'll probably go home this afternoon and have a good cry.

CHONDA: Absolutely, absolutely.

BETTY: But it's part of the healing too.

CHONDA: If you didn't, I think we'd be calling some people for some medicine or something. We'd be wondering about your walk with the Lord, you know.

BETTY: But the thing about it is that God brings me out of that as quickly as I got into it, you know?

BLYNDA: So that's the point. So how do you encourage someone to--like, I feel like in the Christian world sometimes it's like, "No, no, no, grieving is-- you know, we grieve as people with hope," and so that grieving needs to be really quick and in a pretty box. It's not always in a pretty box.

CHONDA: And everyone's grief is personal. Whatever you need to do to get through the day, do that. It might be, "I just need to bake."

I wish you were my neighbor, because you could just bake for me all day long and I would let you. You know, maybe it's, "I need to--I just wanna go by the cemetery one more time." Don't go every day, but go a couple of times just to let that out, and I say when a good cry comes along, man, enjoy it.

Those endorphins are flowing. It's the same thing in your brain that makes you cry is the same thing that makes you laugh, those endorphins that make you laugh. God knew both of those things are gonna be so close together, I'm gonna teach you how to use each one of them.

So crying is not bad. Staying in it too long is bad, just like laughing is great.

Staying in it a long, long time, you'll be exhausted. I should weigh two pounds, but I--.

BLYNDA: I was gonna say, I'd have good abs.

BETTY: Well, what I do think God is ready to do, though, he's ready to be right there and catch us when we're in those times, because just almost every time I go through those times, I'm coming out of it, and I'll get a text from somebody lifting me up, or even a phone call. The timing of God is just so perfect.

CHONDA: That's exactly right, and recognizing that that's God. That's what, you know, you can say, "Oh, I'm so glad my neighbors didn't forget me," but they could have, so who put the idea in their head? So you gotta recognize that God is there.

And then you gotta be lenient on yourself. Let yourself feel the emotions. Be careful, I used to-- my brother taught me this, he's a--you know Dr. Mike Courtney, he's a psychologist, and he used to say, "Set an egg timer."

And I would wind it up, and I would set it on the coffee table, and I'd have a good cry or I'd be hurt going, "I don't know why you turned out this way, Lord. Why did it have--" you know, or whatever that emotion is, set the egg timer, and when it goes off, get up and move to

another chair. Or get up and go take out the trash, or get up and move, you know, do something. Yesterday, knowing I was coming, I had a grief-ful time, and a girl on the bus walked in, Karen, who opens for me, and she says, "What's the matter?"

I said, "I'm just grieving, I'm just--there's no other word for it, I'm just grieving." And I said--and so the show was about to start, and I said, "And you know what you do when you're grieving really bad and you gotta go make 1200 people laugh?" She goes, "No," I go, "Put your makeup on, go make people laugh."

You just do what you learned. I always tell people, whatever you did-- rehearse in the dark what you learned in the light, and your heart and your mind will catch up with each other, you know.

BETTY: Well, maybe you're sitting here listening and you're saying, "I'm grieving, I'm hurting. Life's not going the way I thought it should." Maybe you've lost a loved one. Maybe you've been disappointed.

Maybe you've lost a job. Give it to God. He wants to lift you up and hold you right now.

The tears are fine, he's gonna catch them every time. He's gonna hold you tight, and he'll send someone your way to lift you up and to inspire you. And if you're going through that right now, I'm gonna encourage you to call that number that's on the screen.

We love you, we wanna pray with you, we wanna encourage you, but right now we wanna show you how you can encourage someone else. As you are being encouraged, you encourage someone else. Watch this for the children.

ANNOUNCER: In the heart of Angola, Africa, lies a village not unlike any other. A mother, Julieta, walks with her son Jose to a meeting of elders and leaders to seek out a medical screening. It is there that their unusual story becomes known to the Life Outreach team, for the truth hidden behind the eyes of this young boy is that he is not a child at all, but actually an 18-year-old young man.

ISAK PRETORIUS: This is why these screenings are so absolutely critical, so, first I thought he was a ten-year-old that was really small.

ANNOUNCER: The mission's team found it hard to believe Jose was 18 years old.

FEMALE: Maybe it was a mistake, there's no way.

ISAK: The thing is, they baptized him in 2009. This is from the church.

BLYNDA: I mean, it's official, it looks very official, it's even stamped.

ANNOUNCER: But his mother presented them with a record from their church, certifying the year of his birth and his baptism. It suddenly sunk in how years of malnutrition had taken its toll on Jose.

ISAK: He's 18 years old, from multiple years of suffering from severe malnutrition has literally been stunted, obviously has suffered again and again. We'll see what his measurements are, but they're gonna be that of maybe a seven- or a ten-year-old or something.

And then we looked earlier at how his belly is distended like it is, you can see how thin his arms are. You can see the external, but that's going on inside, and so this child actually needs to be in the clinic.

BLYNDA: Yeah, this is urgent.

ANNOUNCER: Indeed, the following day, Jose did go to the local clinic for a medical evaluation. From there, he will receive the further care he so desperately needs.

ISAK: And it tells us the story of how malnutrition, sometimes it kills faster, other times it kills slowly, but what it does is it steals life.

BLYNDA: I'm a mom, and I actually had a son that was ill for part of his life, and I remember what it was like to get on my knees at night and pray over my son that God would heal him. And so she deserves the same hope that her son could be made well.

Would you just be moved to action today, to help? Jose deserves that.

BETTY: Wow, I can't believe that. That young man, he's a young man, 18 years old, and he looks like--Blynda, he looks like he's about eight. You were there.

BLYNDA: I was there, and I did, I thought--originally I said he was seven or eight, Isak thought he was ten. None of us could believe that he was 18, and it was so heartbreaking because there was no life in his eyes, there was no life in his body. It's like his body had stopped growing at like age ten, and this is what malnutrition does.

BETTY: It's a miracle he's lived that long.

BLYNDA: This is what we concluded, it was a miracle he was alive, we were so grateful he got to the malnutrition clinic, but he has a long road ahead, such a long road, painful.

BETTY: He's not the only one. You understand that there's many, many, many of these children like this. Some of them don't live that long.

It's a miracle that he's reached the age of 18. Will you help us now with the children? We can feed them.

$44 will get 400 meals, can you imagine? $77, 700 meals. $110, 1000 meals.

And $1100, 10,000 meals. That's a lot of children to be able to feed. Eleven cents per meal, that's not much.

And it can make a difference between life and death. Blynda, I hope they'll help us.

BLYNDA: And Betty, something that's really important that they may not recognize is we're trying to provide 20 million meals because we cannot, in these villages, just give them one meal for one day. That's not going to change the malnutrition crisis in that village. They need, ongoing, a daily meal of this hot, nutrient-dense, vitamin-enriched food, and so that's our goal, of 20 million meals, because they need them every day.

BETTY: Absolutely, I hope you feel this urgency as we do to help these children. Let's give them meals. We can make this happen, join with us.

We love you, God bless you, and if you will give and help us, we'll send you James's book, "A Life Proclaiming Freedom", it's a joy to read. God bless you.

ANNOUNCER: This holiday season, many families will gather around tables filled with food, but for mothers in impoverished communities, simply finding enough food to feed their children can be a daily struggle. Through Life's Christmas Meals Blessing, your generosity can help provide 20 million nutritious meals for hungry children. One meal, one child, and one precious life at a time.

Eleven cents, that's all it takes to provide a lifesaving, nourishing meal. Your gift of $44 today can help provide 400 meals. $77 will provide 700 meals.

And $110 will help provide 1,000 meals for children in desperate need. And with any gift, you may request James Robison's final book, "A Life Proclaiming Freedom", as a thank-you for your support. Discover the freedom James found in Jesus and how you can experience it too.

With your gift of $110 or more, request the "Fruitful and Flourishing" bundle, a beautiful collection of daily encouragement to remind you of God's faithful care and his promise of guidance from Isaiah chapter 58, verse 11. Finally, with your gift of $1100 or more, you will help provide 10,000 meals for children in need and can request Life's beautiful bronze sculpture, "The Good Shepherd". So please call, write, or make your gift online today.

ISAK: We've been hearing Rute's story. It's a tragic story. The story of a mother who lost her young child this year to malnutrition.

We can break the cycle of death in these communities through that silent killer of malnutrition that is literally coming and stealing their lives. And here's how we do it. We make sure that we can establish Mission Feeding programs here and sustain them so that we're bringing the nutrition every day that these children both need and deserve.

We have our teams on the ground, we have our infrastructure in place, thanks to many of you who've made that possible through opening your hearts and giving the gifts that you've given before. But what we need now is we need the support to be able to provide the nutritional resources that ensure that the food keeps flowing to these communities, that ensures that that vital, life-giving nutrition is provided to Rute, to her family, and to the families that she represents in these communities here in Angola.

We're ready to do the job, we're in place to make it happen, but we can't do it without you. And that's why we need you to open your hearts today, and we need you to do everything that you can do to give that gift of life, to give the gift of food.

BLYNDA: We know that you have loved this episode with Chonda, thank you, Chonda, for coming. Okay, so you--this book is not out yet, it's "Stay Faithtastic!"

BLYNDA: When does it come out?

CHONDA: November 24th. It's about living your faith forward in everything that you do, so just instead of staying fantastic, just stay faithtastic.

BLYNDA: And can they pre-order this somewhere?

CHONDA: Yes, on Amazon you can get it right now. You can get everything. Amazon, you can get a new toilet.

You can get a bicycle. You can get a bicycle with a toilet on it.

BLYNDA: "Stay Faithtastic", it's amazing. Chonda, thank you for joining us today, and thank you for joining us. We've loved being with you, can't wait to see you back again soon.

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ANNOUNCER: At Life Outreach, we believe in making a lasting impact on your life and the lives of others. Through Life Planning Services, we offer estate planning and giving solutions that provide tax advantages, income, and the satisfaction of supporting a cause close to your heart.

With options like bequests, charitable gift annuities, and IRA rollovers, you can chart a purposeful path, creating a legacy of love and hope for future generations. Call or visit Life Planning Services today.

DR. ANDREW FARLEY: He's taken the law, he's not watering it down, so that you'll see, "Whoa, no wonder I need grace instead."

ANNOUNCER: Next week.

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