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Week 46: Mission Feeding

Randy Robison & Tammy Trent

Jeff Allen

In the studio

RANDY: Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm Randy Robison. Tammy Trent is with me. We're looking forward to today's program because it's been oh, wow, 1999 was the first time Jeff Allen came on *Life Today* and we've been laughing ever since. And I'm excited to have him here in the studio. Welcome to *Life Today*!

JEFF: I'm here and I've got to tell you the last time I was here the place was packed.

RANDY: It was.

JEFF: Do you see what word of mouth does?

[Laughter]

If you don't like the comedy, man, just keep your mouth shut. Nobody likes a bunch of whiners.

RANDY: They used to come when Sheila was the co-host but now Tammy is here and we can't get an audience.

JEFF: And fellow Nashvillite.

TAMMY: Oh, my goodness!

RANDY: We've been just enjoying your comedy. You've done our Christmas banquet, you've been a guest on the program. You've done a lot of big auditoriums, headlining groups, secular stuff. How is the comedy going for you?

JEFF: It's going gangbusters. I haven't been this busy. We had a number of our videos go viral on the internet through Dry Bar Comedy. It changed my life. At this point in our life, we're just settling in, and especially after COVID. COVID was like half my friends have retired.

RANDY: A lot of online has really helped. Are you a big fan of the internet? Do you like technology?

JEFF: Again, it's made my career. So I don't know anything about it. I pay people who are under 30. They tell me about algorithms. I said, "I don't know, just do what you do. I don't know what you do."

TAMMY: Now, I don't understand it myself but I do know you have such an incredible story and you have a new book out, *Are We There Yet?* It is an incredible story of redemption, of what you would say yourself, I had a messed-up life and if God could bring me through this to the other side, he could do this to anybody and for anybody.

But I wonder if there might be one person in the world watching right now that says, I don't know who Jeff Allen is. Take us back. Can you just give us a little back story of your life to how you got to this point of *Are We There Yet*, God?

JEFF: Well, I got married at 30. I was an alcoholic and a drug addict. And then 31, I got sober. I write about this in the book. My father asked me what was the catalyst that got me to quit drinking. I had a six-month-old son and he was crying and I spanked him. Tammy took him away from me. Looked at me and said, "Who does this?" Sat on the end of the bed and fed our son. And the shame that washed over me that night, I looked at her

and I said, "If you don't take me to Alcoholics Anonymous, I won't go. And if I don't go, I don't think we're going to make it."

Anyway, I knew I couldn't keep doing what I was doing and being married and have kids. So anyway, I went through this program and they said pray. And I said to what? I didn't believe in God. I tell churches all the time because there seems to be this friction between 12-step programs and the church. And I said I wouldn't be here. If I walked into a 12-step program and they go, "You need Jesus" I would have left. I was told to stay away from Christians. I write about that in the book. My father told me when I was 14, "Stay away from Christians. They are bad people."

So anyway, I started praying. I did what I was told. I knew if I drank again, I'd lose everything so I was done. I was done drinking but I had a hard time living. So they said pray. So I did. They gave me two prayers that I prayed religiously every day. I'd pray them multiple times. The serenity prayer, "God grant me the serenity to accept the things that I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference." And then the other one is what they called the third step prayer which is, "God, remove me from the bondage of self so that I may better do thy will. Taking away my difficulties so that victory over them others may bear witness to thy strength, thy power, and thy life."

And I look back on that and I think, here I am this naive human being. I have no idea what I'm praying. I was told to pray this. And in the end, this is what I do. I bear witness to God's strength, his power, and his way of life but I didn't know it. It was years. But those seven or eight years we went through just about everything that you could think of that would break a marriage up. Bankruptcy—we went, again, you try to salve the wounds of a broken marriage by buying things you can't afford. Geographical cures, we used to move every two years because we think it's miserable here, we'll just move somewhere else and it will be fine.

I always tell people when your marriage is full of acrimony that's bad. Wait until you get

to apathy, there is nothing worse than when we just give up. We coexisted in the same house. We'd walk like—we ate dinner, we were cordial people for the most part. We had our share of disagreements but I got tired of arguing. And I knew what would happen to me if I flipped. I just was done. And Tammy would just shake me, "We're losing the house and you don't care."

And I'd go, "I don't!"

She goes, "Who says that?"

"Somebody who doesn't care." Obviously. But you don't think I want to care? I wanted to care. I felt the weight of it but I didn't know why it mattered. And that was—to search for meaning and point, is so relevant today.

RANDY: Here's my question because you mentioned you went to rehab, AA. They talk about a higher power, in sort of a generic way. But many years go by before that higher power becomes a person, like someone you could relate to. What was that sort of in-between? And what got you to the point where you went, okay, this is an actual person that I can have a relationship with and it transforms everything.

JEFF: Well, the best description I can give is in hindsight. Again, I'm writing this 35 years later. Is I had a spiritual thirst. I think we all do. We may not be able to identify it but there was a spiritual thirst. So I went into books. I never read a book my entire life. I got sober, went to a therapist, and she said, "Do you read?"

I go, "No, I can't sit still long enough to read."

She goes, "Well, you should."

She gave me *The Road Less Traveled*, Scott Peck's book, a really good book. But I have two things I still remember. Opening line: "Life is difficult. When it can be accepted as

such, it is no longer difficult. It just becomes a series of problems that need to be solved." So that made sense to me logically. I just go okay, I have a bunch of problems. I have terrible tools in solving them, which is what my therapist told me. And then the second one was: "True love cannot exist in—true love doesn't exist until conflict enters the relationship. There is no such thing as a conflict-free loving relationship." That resonated with me because I hated conflict.

So every relationship prior to my marriage, I'd flee conflict and that was the end of it. So those are the two things I got out of that book. And then I just became a voracious reader. I started reading Bradshaw's stuff on family identity. So everything wasn't necessarily spiritual, it was more psychological. And then that didn't quench the thirst. It gave me knowledge but I was still miserable.

And then I got into New Age, and then tried to affirm myself and it was funny. Somebody told me you need to smile more. I go, "I do?"

"Yeah."

So I tried to work on smiling in a mirror. It's funny now. You look back, here's this grown man standing in front of his mirror. And it was like oh, this is ridiculous, I'm not doing this. And then to affirm yourself, again, it goes such in the face of you're affirmed because of the Imago Dei. But I wasn't there yet. So I started Buddhism and I write about this. I wanted to raise the kids Buddhists. Came home one day and I said, "I'm putting the kids in a monastery."

Tammy says, "Over my dead body!"

She says, "It's finally happened."

I go, "What?"

"The last screw has finally fallen out of your head."

Because everything—everything that quenched it I'd bring it home and go, "I think I've got it, Tammy! I think I've got it."

Again, God knows you intimately, whether you acknowledge him or not, he knows you. He certainly extends common grace to the entire planet. So we are there. He is there waiting.

I would have never gone into the church to hear the gospel. So anyway, I hear about a guy doing comedies from Texas. He goes to Denton Bible. Because of his wealth, he can get me on some nice golf courses. So I called my agent and say I want to work with him. Again, God knows your heart. So where are you going to hear the gospel? I'm going to hear it on the golf course. I didn't want to hear it. I didn't sign up for that.

So I'm out on a golf course asking this capitalist how do you accumulate wealth?

He said, "You don't want a lot of money."

I said, "I don't?"

He goes, "No. You can't handle the little you have. It would be a burden for you. Besides, you can't even begin to enjoy the creation until you have a relationship with the one who created it."

Yeah! And I went, "Wow!" It sounded new agey.

I said, "That's kind of cool. Where did you read it?"

He goes, "Well, the relationship is in the Bible with Jesus."

And then I kind of went, "Eh."

A couple of holes went by, something else. I'm going, "That's great. Where did you read it?"

He kept bringing up the Bible.

I finally said, "Stop it with the Bible!"

He goes, "What do you mean?"

"Who actually reads the Bible in this day and age? I mean the concept of God, God's word, a little archaic."

He goes, "Well, it's what's in the Bible. You don't think it's true."

I go, "Well, I'm an atheist—I'm really an atheist. I don't believe in God. I never read the Bible."

He goes, "Then you're not really an atheist, you're a moron."

"Well, explain that please, how I'm a moron."

He goes, "It's the most influential book in the history of the world. You can't even crack it open. That's lazy and moronic. That's not even intellectually curious."

And he said, "At least crack it open, study it, read it, whatever, and then come to your conclusion. But just to ignore it..."

Anyway, he said, "I'd like to help you out." He signed me up for tapes from Denton Bible. But we had a friendship for over a year before I opened up one of those tapes.

RANDY: So how did God get you? Because obviously, once that happened—

JEFF: Well, Tammy packed up. We were ten minutes from filing divorce papers, probably six months before the summer she left, and we're on our way to the courthouse to file the papers to end our marriage. And she said, "Pull over."

We're on the side of the road talking. And I said, "You're out."

And she said, "What do you mean?"

I said, "We file these papers, we're done." I said, "Tammy, I love you. I really do. I'm just damaged goods. I can't stop raging. I don't know why. But you deserve better than me."

She had given me seven years. So I—she said, "Let's go home."

I said, "We go home divorce is off the table." You know?

So anyway, we came home and in six months she takes the kids and goes, "I'm going to my parents for the whole summer. I've got to get away from you. You're draining me."

I was. I was always in my head. I didn't know what I wanted to do. She goes, "Figure out what you want to do with your adult life. We're losing the house, we're losing everything so figure it out while I'm gone."

And she gathers up these tapes, a whole pile of them, I'd been collecting them for over a year. She says, "Listen to these."

I said, "Leave them on the floor."

Eventually, I opened one up and it was Ecclesiastes. And this was it. I'm telling you, my

living room, Phoenix, Arizona, 1996, "Meaningless, meaningless, all of life is meaningless." And my heart leapt, yes! Yes! It was such a deep profound truth that I knew in my heart nothing matters. Everything on this planet is nothing. It didn't matter how much money I made, it didn't matter—and then he went on to say in Ecclesiastes one, "The eyes never get enough of seeing, the ears never get enough of hearing."

And I'm looking at a video library that has five shelves of videos. I'm looking at my audio library, by then it was all cassettes and stuff. And I'm going, that's true! We buy things and they wear out and we take them to the landfill. If I'm lucky I get a sitcom or movie deal. We buy nice things but they all wear out, and we take them to the landfill. It is right! This is true! And if this is true, there has to be another—I don't know if there is another chapter in the Bible that would have captured me like that did at that moment. And I ripped open every envelope looking for more Ecclesiastes tapes.

The next one was, if happiness is an act of human will, basically these are Solomon's conclusions through Tommy Nelson, if happiness was an act of human will we'd all be happy. You ask anybody on earth, what do you want for your children? I want them to be happy. Well, let's define that. Is it the next gym shoe, the next iPod, the next material thing that Blaise Pascal described as a God-shaped hole that we keep stuffing things into.

And I did all that. I had tried to affirm myself in the mirror. He said no. Basically, the conclusions were this: Life without God will have no meaning. Without meaning in your life there is no purpose to your life. Without purpose to your life, you might as well off yourself. And I knew that in my heart was true. And I went, this book—

And I soaked that up for the next two months. Tammy was gone, no distractions. I mean God had me right in the place where we wanted me and needed me. At the right time.

RANDY: So in this desert, spiritual desert that you're in, what happened to bring the meaning, to bring the purpose, to bring the joy?

JEFF: I was designed. Something finite has to be attached. Every cell in my body was created and put here for a reason. I may not know it right now but my job as a follower of him is to acknowledge him every morning, thank him for another day, and your will, not mine, be done. I don't know what that is. I had a mess of a life. Believe me, we had debris to clean up.

But Tammy, believe me, she came home, I gave my life August 17th, 1996, to me that was a rebirth. She came home at the end of August with the kids. It took me about a week or so. She was raised in a home by Christians that abused her. So when I told her, "I'm a born-again Christian," she goes, "What does that mean?"

I go, "I really don't know. I heard the term. I don't know what it means." I said, "I'm to love you as Jesus loved the church." I did enough study on Ephesians to understand that.

She goes, "What does that mean?"

I said, "Well, he gave his life, I'm to give my life to you."

And she laughed because she knew how selfish I was.

I said, "Look, I'm just trying to be a better man and a better husband. That's it. And this is my journey. So if you want to come to church with me, come to church. If you don't, don't. But I'm taking the boys."

Two weeks she came. She saw something different. And she told me years later, and I write about this in the book as well, we were sitting at the escrow table, and we sold the house. I.R.S. was taking everything. And the escrow lady was just apologizing, "I'm so sorry but the I.R.S. is taking all your profit."

I said, "It's okay. The only thing that matters is sitting right here."

And Tammy said for the first time in eight years, she said, "I believed you, that we were a priority."

TAMMY: Wow! Jeff, what I love so much about your story is that, whew! That God met you right where you were. But he knew individually what he needed to do to get your attention. That Ecclesiastes might not have worked for me but it worked for you and it resonated with you. And something switched in your heart and your brain at that moment. And even, I think when you talk about it, it is like okay, I can align with this. I believe this. Tell me more. And you stayed in it and you kept searching. And you wanted to change and you wanted the transformation. And it's like it all became so brand-new to you, which I love that innocence of God, tell me more, show me more. I want my life to change because what's sitting around this table is the only thing that matters.

JEFF: Well, it's been right in front of you. It's almost like Dorothy, you can go home. You always had the ability to go home. The value was here. I just kept looking. There has to be a point to all of this out there. The point is love, and respect. What do you value? What voices do you listen to? Where does your hope lie? What defines you was so important to me because you ask most men and they start with their job. What defines me today is I'm a child of his, and then I'm Tammy's husband and I'm a father to Aaron and Ryan, a grandfather to Evelyn and Vivian.

RANDY: How beautiful is that?

JEFF: And then I'm a comedian. I am funny.

TAMMY: You are funny, Jeff!

RANDY: But you found who you are and only in Christ. You looked everywhere else.

JEFF: Absolutely! Again, those seven or eight years, that verse would not have resonated without the previous—and again, I loved to have had a road to Damascus

moment where I wake up one day and boom, it's there. I've heard those stories. For me, it was seven or eight—and if God had sat me down when I walked in and he said, here's what I'm going to put you through for the next eight years. By the end of this, you're going to know my son, you're going to know peace. I wouldn't have signed on. This is why he doesn't tell us his plans.

Again, it was all self-inflicted. Everything in that book was self-inflicted. I didn't want to blame anybody. I'm not a victim. But it was something that I had to go through apparently, to get to the point where it's like I just surrendered. I can't do it. I did. Like I'm yours.

RANDY: I love you sharing your journey and your book, *Are We There Yet?* You can get this wherever you get books. It will bless you. If you know someone who is searching and struggling like Jeff talks about, what a great thing to put in front of them. Send them some comedy and say, “You ought to read his book.”

Jeff, thank you for being so honest and open. There are so many ways for us to reach out and express God's love to people in a world that is dying and that needs a real experience with God as Jeff talked about. You know what? We have an opportunity where people are literally hungry. And now we can reach into their lives and give them not just food for their body but food for their soul. Watch this.

On the mission field

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

Monica has brought her child here to this screening clinic in the Kabul 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 that have been 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 is stealing their lives.

This child is suffering from severe malnutrition. Why? Because there is no food at home. Literal starvation, children in these areas are starving to death, and children dying of malnutrition. Many parents 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, please. Give that gift. Give the gift of food. Give the gift of life.

In the studio

TAMMY: They have done everything they can do but they can't feed their children. But I want to help. I want to be the one to help. And I want to ask you if you would consider helping as well. They're doing everything they can do but they need help. So I know you hear us often, every day, talking about the need out there and asking you to help join with us and make a difference in the lives of these children. I hope you don't grow weary. I hope it is not hard to keep hearing the stories. And especially for those people over in those countries that are hurting so desperately and are asking for help, I hope we think about them in this season, in this moment to know that we can be a difference.

Randy, there is something simple that we can do. We've seen it, we've been there as we've traveled. We know that that bowl—that bowl is filled with life. Every time we give this to a child and fill it up, it changes their life. I know that we want to stop them from

going into a malnutrition clinic. And we've been there too. And I hold this because I'm thinking, I've been with children that have been even tinier, their wrist than that. So I know we want to stop that. There is a way we can do that together. And I know that you've been a part of that too.

RANDY: Yeah, it is the success of the Mission Feeding outreach. Literally, 350,000 children every day get a bowl of food because of your love. Now let me explain how it works. The way we have people on the ground, systems in place, and a track record of doing this so that we're able to get food to people, your gift today of \$30 will help feed three children for the next three months. Your gift of \$100 would help feed ten children for the next three months. So it really is that easy. Many of you could give \$1,000, \$5,000, \$10,000, whatever God has enabled you to do. I just ask you to take a moment and say, God, what would you have me do to share your love?

Now, you can get into the complexities of the various situations where we feed but the bottom line for me is regardless of the reasons why someone is in that situation where they can no longer feed their children, the response is what's critical in my mind. Because we serve a God who says, don't forget the poor. When you see someone in need, don't withhold good when it's in your power to do something good.

So for me, the world is a mess. We know this. There are all sorts of negative things going on. And sometimes, it is just the circumstance of weather, the crops don't come in. It doesn't matter to me. I look at it and say, what are we to do as followers of Christ to show his love to someone who is hurting, to people who are dying? And this is it—Mission Feeding. We go in, we give them food, we tell them why we're there. We share the love of Christ in word and deed.

I just pray you will respond in love to these people who are dying and hurting. Go to the phone, go online, and make the best gift you can.

Begin video clip

Announcer: Across the continent of Africa children are suffering, facing severe malnutrition, and even death. With food reserves gone, and many areas experiencing severe famine, we urgently need to replenish supplies to keep feeding the 350,000 children who are counting on us.

Through *LIFE's* Mission Feeding outreach your gift of love can be an answer to prayer for a hurting and hungry child in their time of need. Call now with your life-saving 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 brand-new *LIFE* planner. Bound in soft-touch leather, this planner will help you with 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 "God's Promise" serving bowl. This beautiful and versatile ceramic bowl is decorated with Second Corinthians 9:8 and will make a lovely addition to your table or home.

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, "Consider the Birds." Inspired by Jesus' words in Matthew 6:26.

Please call, write, or make your gift online today.

End of video**In the studio**

RANDY: I hope you are going online or going to phone. Make the best gift you can. You can make a difference. You can help save lives. And for your own entertainment, I would highly recommend JeffAllenComedy.com.

JEFF: Yes!

RANDY: If they're looking to connect to your social media, see your calendar, all of that. Pick up the book, *Are We There Yet?* It's been a blessing.

TAMMY: So, so good. And I love your entire testimony. And listen, if you are out there and you're a person, you feel like something is missing in your life, maybe you feel a little lost or you've lost your way, I know that Jeff's book will encourage you in so many ways. There is power in the redemption of Jesus. He can save a marriage, he can save not just your marriage but he can save your life just as he has done for Jeff. You are not alone in this.

We love you. We're praying for you. Thank you for watching and we'll see you next time on *Life Today*.