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Week 47: *Fall Mission Feeding*

Randy Robison and Tammy Trent

John Burke

In the studio

RANDY: Welcome to Life Today! I'm Randy Robison. And Tammy, as they saw in the opening tease there, we are talking about near-death experiences.

TAMMY: Woo!

RANDY: Have you ever had one?

TAMMY: I haven't.

RANDY: Do you know anyone that's had one?

TAMMY: I don't and I'm fascinated by it, honestly. I'd like to know more.

RANDY: I don't—did you grow up, was it okay to talk about these things?

TAMMY: I don't think so. I think it was kind of a spooky thing. Like you don't—no, that's not even biblical or godly. I was even like, you don't talk about that stuff.

RANDY: But it is interesting. It's interesting. So we're going to talk about it today. And we have the perfect guest to talk about it and put it in a biblical perspective because that's where we start. John Burke is our guest and he has a new book called *Imagine the God of Heaven*. Great of you to be here because this is so fascinating.

JOHN: Great to be back.

RANDY: So your background is in pastoring and church planting, and things like that?

JOHN: I was actually an engineer for years, and then I became a pastor. I started a church in Austin, Texas; my wife and I did.

RANDY: How did you make that jump to near-death experiences?

JOHN: Well, actually it goes all the way back to how I came to faith. I was an Agnostic and my dad was dying of cancer. This is way back in the late '70s, early '80s and someone gave him the very first research on near-death experiences. This is when people clinically die, they have a heart attack, no heartbeat, no brainwaves, and yet they're resuscitated, or God brings them back miraculously. And they talk about how they experienced the life to come.

And I saw this book on his dresser. And like I said, I didn't believe in God, I thought Jesus was a legend. I read it in one night and I said, oh, my gosh, this could be real evidence that there really is an afterlife, and maybe even evidence for God. And that opened me up to actually seeking and actually starting to study the Bible. And I came to faith in Christ not long after that.

And I just had a curiosity. I have a curious brain. So really, for 30 years I studied well over 1,000 of them trying to understand how what these people are saying fit with what the Bible says. In 2015, I wrote the book *Imagine Heaven* showing that the theology of Heaven that you see in the Bible is what they are describing. And so I was trying to show that.

In *Imagine the God of Heaven*, what's fascinating is after interviewing hundreds of these people, studying thousands of them, of all the beauty of Heaven, of all the wonderful reunions of the incredible experience beyond any words what they commonly said, I

mean person to person if they encountered God they said nothing—nothing compares to just being in the presence of God; that he was the love we've always wanted.

RANDY: So it was less about Heaven and more about the God of Heaven.

JOHN: That's what I'm writing about in this next book is showing how the love story of God throughout the Bible, that he's been telling throughout history, his character, his attributes, his heart for people. And what he wants. How we relate to him. How we walk with him. That that is actually what people are experiencing of God all over the globe. And that's the crazy part is that they're experiencing the same God of the Bible all over the globe.

TAMMY: Okay, so I'm at home watching television right now, watching John on television on Wednesday, okay, of all the people you've interviewed, all the stories that you've written about, tell me a couple. Convince me that this is real and these people have really experienced God. Do you have a couple of favorites?

JOHN: I do. Let me say first of all, I was skeptical about them for a long time. And I write in *Imagine the God of Heaven* about the ten points of evidence that any alternative theory has to answer to. And it's what convinced me. Like just really quick, verifiable observations. So when people die, they say that they leave their bodies but they're still there. They have a spiritual body.

I think Paul actually may have had a near-death experience. In Acts Chapter 14 it says he was stoned to death in Lystra. They dragged him out of the city and left him for dead. And then he gets back up and goes back into the city, which I wouldn't do. I would not advise that. But interestingly, Paul says in Second Corinthians 12, "Fourteen years ago," he's talking about himself, "whether in the body or out of the body, I don't know, but I was taken up to the third Heaven and saw and heard things inexpressible." And then he talks about these things, and these things correlate with what these people are saying.

So one of the things he said is we still have a spiritual body, buried and broken, raised in glory. It is buried in weakness but it is raised in *dunamis* or power. And they talk about that. That we're ourselves and initially, when they die, they're in this spiritual body but they're there in the room, and they can see the resuscitation taking place.

So there have been many studies done. You know, millions of people have had these experiences. Gallop poll found that one out of 25 Americans has had a near-death experience.

RANDY: Really? They just don't like to talk about it.

JOHN: Well, it is a sacred thing. That's what you realize. They get the kind of like—and they're like, you don't understand. Because they say it is more real than anything they've ever experienced in this life which is hard to understand even.

But they initially can see their resuscitation. Now, studies have been done on the observations they've made that they shouldn't have been able to make because they were unconscious and found that 98 percent of them were completely accurate to about six percent of those had some questionable things. Only one percent, one to two percent inaccurate. So they're making observations.

RANDY: It's not just that. You talked about last time you were on the program how they were making observations of things that they couldn't physically see from the location they were at, whether it was on the roof of the building or a perspective that they wouldn't have had even if their eyes were open and they subconsciously picked up on it.

JOHN: And that's just one of ten points. Like another one, blind people, when they have a near-death experience, they see the same things. They have the same experiences.

RANDY: And they don't have the frame of reference that we would.

JOHN: And they can see. They experienced God in the same way.

RANDY: Okay, what does God look like? Let's get the God part. What does God look like for the ones that you think are legitimate near-death experiences?

JOHN: Let me tell you, you wanted to hear a cool story. One of the things that is just amazing is after I wrote *Imagine Heaven*, I kind of quit writing. I said, okay, Lord I did what you wanted. Interestingly, your dad was one of the ones that got me back writing. Because the Lord started saying to me through lots of people, you're going to write again. And your dad called me and said, "Hey! Betty and I just read *Imagine Heaven* again. I felt like the Holy Spirit wanted me to call you and say you need to write on this again." It was one of 12 people that did that.

God brought these stories from all over the world. And I think what he's—I believe this is an apologetic, these are testimonies from all over the world for our global age to show that this is the God of all nations, he always has been. For instance, Santosh Acarchi, a manufacturing engineer, grew up in India, Hindu, that's all he knew, his pancreas ruptures. He hears them call Code Blue. He leaves his body, he can see his body there, and this brilliant light appears. Now this is common, that God appears as this light. And they say, "brighter than the sun but not hard to look at." Santosh said, "I knew this light was divine. I knew this was God and I knew I had to obey him. But I instantly fell in love with this light. Because I knew that he was there to protect me and take me somewhere safe."

They traveled. So another commonality; they go through this tunnel and they're traveling somewhere; he doesn't know where. They come to, and this is what's wild, this place where the light parks over this place that Santosh describes as a giant enormous compound—gorgeous. If you've ever been to India, which I have many times, there are compounds everywhere, these walled communities. So I was trying to figure out what do you mean? He's describing Revelation 21. He's describing the New Jerusalem but he didn't know it. And so he says, "very high beautiful walls." And he said, and this is

another commonality, "On the other side you can see for miles and miles." Like your vision is not limited.

Which we would think, oh, that's not biblical. But actually, it is. John in Revelation 21 is taken by the spirit to a very high mountain, and yet he reads the names on the gates of the New Jerusalem. How? That's what they say. So he sees the city and he describes it as this walled place with beautiful—such beauty inside, mansions inside, and 12 gates, all of them closed to him. And they were guarded by angels. And when he saw the angels guarding the gates, he knew this was the kingdom of Heaven. And he longed to get in. He said, "This is what we were created for."

And then he sees hell as well. So he's up on a platform and he looks down to his left and he sees this, he describes it as an abyss, and dark, darkness. And at the bottom, it looked like fire, that's what he describes. He's Hindu.

RANDY: Has this guy read the Bible much?

JOHN: No! He has not read the Bible at all but he is describing it. And he looks to his right and there he sees, he says, the Almighty on a throne. And he knew this is God but he was appearing now as a man. But he looked at his eyes and they were like John described in Revelation one, like eyes of fire, like flames of fire. He sees his whole life flash before him. All his sins, and he falls down and he says, "Lord, forgive me, Lord, forgive me." Because he knows, that's what I deserve.

RANDY: How did he know it was Christ and not a Hindu God?

JOHN: He doesn't yet. He doesn't know who he is. He just knows it's the Lord. He just knows it's God. And he's saying this, "Forgive me, Lord! Forgive me, Lord!" And then the Lord speaks to him. And he said his voice was compassionate and tender and merciful. He said, "I knew I deserved this so I didn't understand why he was so merciful and compassionate."

He said, "I'm going to send you back. And I want you to love your family and especially your daughter. She needs your help right now."

Think about that. The Lord knows us all. He is so intimately involved. And even if we're not involved with him, he knows us and he's there for us. And so he sees this and this is what's wild. To the right of the throne, he sees an open narrow—he calls it a very narrow gate that was open to me and I could see into the kingdom of Heaven. And the Lord said, "I'm going to send you back."

And he said, "When I go back, Lord, I want to come back and go through that narrow gate. How do I go through it?"

And he says to him, "The wages of sin is death. I want an honest relationship. Walk with me and surrender daily to me." And he sent him back.

Now two years later, Santosh's daughter is invited to sing at a church because she was a choral major. She invites Santosh and his wife to come. The message is that Jesus is the gate through which the sheep enter in and the narrow door.

RANDY: And he recognized it.

JOHN: He was overwhelmed and he started reading the Bible and he came to faith in Jesus.

RANDY: Okay.

JOHN: And I have Imams, Muslim Imams in Rwanda, people related to the prophet Mohammad in Tehran, same kinds of stories all over the world.

RANDY: That's what I was going to ask. Because of the great story, Santosh, right? How

do we know you're not making it up? Or he's not making it up? Right? Because I'm a little skeptical. But you're saying, no, it is repetition, over and over again.

JOHN: Over and over. But also think about this Randy. Santosh is a manufacturing engineer and he is a Hindu. What does he have to gain by making that up?

RANDY: Not much in India.

JOHN: Another guy is a Hindu anesthesiologist. What does he have to gain? An imam, a Muslim imam who has now had six death threats on his life? What does he have to gain saying Jesus rescued him?

And so I point that out but also, even in the United States, the people I have in my book are C.E.O.'s, they're surgeons, they're commercial airline pilots, engineers. They don't have—they don't need to write books to make money.

RANDY: And in a lot of cases, you don't want to necessarily tell your friends these things because they'll think you've lost your mind.

JOHN: Absolutely. It doesn't help their credibility in their profession. Again, like I said, thousands of them. And they say the same overlapping things, which doesn't make any sense unless—you know, the scientific principle is that what is consistently observed is real. Well, what do you make of this? And that's what I'm trying to show in this book is I'm trying to show that—you read about 70 different people in *Imagine the God of Heaven* who experienced the same God across cultures, not necessarily the God they were expecting. But what I'm also showing is that this God hasn't just shown up in our modern age of NDE's. He's been revealing himself all along. So I'm showing historically how he told us how we could know. And he put signs in history. And he foretold what he would do through Jesus, the Messiah. I'm showing all of that, as well, along with the heart of God so that when you read—I mean, I'm hoping I believe when people read this book first of all, they'll have a far more comprehensive view of God's story through the

scriptures, of God's attributes.

But here's the other thing. We read about God but we can't help but put him in a box a little bit. We know he's powerful and sovereign and glorious and all that but they're just words. But you know when you hear a 12-year-old, I have a 12-year-old in there who describes and she says, "I came back realizing all these words are trying to describe something that is indescribable." But when you hear her, Karena Martinez from Columbia, who finds herself under the weight of God's glory at his throne in this sea of glass that she describes but she's never read the Bible either, you know? And comes back. She loves Jesus now like crazy.

So what I've realized is God is giving us testimony in our global age that hey, I've always been the God of all nations. I mean stop and think about it. The very first thing he does after the flood in Genesis is he creates a nation, Genesis chapter 12, out of Abraham and Sarah, and he says, "I'm going to bless you to bless all the nations on earth. Through you, all nations on earth will be blessed." That's what he was doing through the whole Old Testament story. He was preserving his record in the scriptures so that we would know the Messiah when he came. And now, he's showing hey, I'm still blessing all the nations. Anybody who calls on the name of the Lord, Joel said, anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. And that's what these people are showing.

RANDY: I want to hear more stories but we don't have time. So *Imagine the God of Heaven* is the book by John Burke.

New text:

And the good news is that you don't have to have a near-death experience to see God. In fact, you can show Christ to other people and that is what we do through our outreaches.

TAMMY: And I absolutely love it. We have talked a lot about the heart of the Father today. Take a second, I really want you to see this. It's really, really special. It is all about truly the heart of the Father.

On the mission field

ANNOUNCER: The love between a father and daughter is like no other. But a father shouldn't have to watch his daughter suffer from something so preventable.

ISAK: So often when we're here, we see mothers and children. We hear the stories from mothers. We've seen so many times the broken heart of a mother. It so often comes down to us telling the story about the mother, the heart of the mother. And yet, the heart of our Father is also us as fathers. And that role as a father is actually the role of protecting.

ANNOUNCER: While our mission team was at this Angolan clinic, they came to know the story of Albano and his daughter Margareta. Isak and John, as fathers, can relate to this love all too well themselves.

ISAK: A father who literally is the expression of their Father's heart. This is a man like you and I, a man who wants to protect his precious little child.

ANNOUNCER: But what is a father to do when the enemy attacking your daughter is malnutrition?

ISAK: The dad was telling us how he traveled close to 100 kilometers to get here -- seven hours! And this is a father expressing that heart, standing up as a man, okay? As a man who says, I have to protect the life of my child. That's the reality of the day, this father has done everything he can do, and all he could do got his child here.

I want to talk to you, the dads, the fathers watching today, and I want to ask you will you

help us to be the extension of the Father's heart? The expression of it? The extension of the Father's hand? You give the gift that expresses the Father's heart, you extend his hands when you give the gift of life today with mission feeding.

End of video

In the studio

RANDY: I have four children, two sons and two daughters and I've got to tell you, I would walk more than 100 kilometers. I would break down walls to get help for my child, especially a daughter.

Tammy, I'm the dad that cried at the wedding giving away my daughters.

TAMMY: I'm crying right now just watching you cry.

RANDY: And the thing is, man, when you're talking about God's heart, I know a lot of us were like, why didn't God just do something about that? Why doesn't God just multiply the bread and feed all those people that need food right now? And he can! We hear stories of miraculous things happening. But you look throughout scripture and God says you are my hands, you are my feet. Those of you who believe in me obey and do something. Go out there right now.

So that's what we're asking people to do, Tammy. We're saying, look, there are children right now in desperate need. They need the hands and feet of Jesus. They need food right now and that's what Mission Feeding is. So my question for you is will you express the heart of the Father? Will you answer the cry of a child? And will you make a gift towards Mission Feeding? Tammy, we can do this.

TAMMY: We can. And you know what I love about that piece, Randy, too? Is that father wrapping his arms around that little girl, protecting her. And like you said, he would go to the ends of the earth to do whatever he could for his little one. And yet, the

reality also is that there are many children over there that don't have a father. And so we get the opportunity today to step into this beautiful place, this opportunity to be able to give like the Father would want us to give. He would want us to step in and to rescue and to save and to feed as many as we could that might be dying today because of lack of food.

If that's you today and you feel a tug on your heart like Randy and I do just thinking about it, then I would encourage you please, number one pray about it, see what God would ask you to do, and listen to his voice and then respond. Make a call, go online, and make the best gift you possibly could give in Jesus' name to change a life today. Let's do it together.

RANDY: We can. And it is very simple. Let me break it down for you real quick. \$30 will help feed three children for the next three months. \$50 will help feed five children for five months. \$100, you get the point, will help feed ten children for the next three months. And we feed through the Mission Feeding outreach at least 350,000 children every day. Some of you could feed 100 children for the next three months with a gift of \$1,000. Some of you could do even more.

Just do what God puts on your heart. And know that when you do, you're expressing the heart of the Father. Let's reach out. Let's be his hands and feet in obedience to his call to remember the poor. Will you go online, go to the phone, 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

On the mission field

TAMMY: Here I am in Southern Africa. Probably one of the most heartbreaking scenes. It's so hard for me to sit here and watch these tiny little babies fight for their life. They don't belong here. They should never be here. This little baby should not be here.

Together we can make a change. Together we can make a difference. That's why I'm asking you to partner with us today. Go online or call the number on the bottom of the screen and make a difference today. Help me, help us to provide for these children, thousands of children, with a bowl of food. Just one bowl of food every day will make the difference.

In the studio

RANDY: I hope you're making the best gift you can. Let's meet their need, their practical need. Let's give them food. And at the same time, we give them the food that never perishes in Christ. And be sure to request *Imagine the God of Heaven* when you support the outreach today. Because Tammy, this is fun, and I love that it points to the goodness of God.

TAMMY: Absolutely. That's what we're all about, honestly, is continuing to point to the goodness of God. John, thank you for being here and helping us to keep pointing to the goodness of God in our lives. Thank you for watching. We'll see you next time on *Life Today*.