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Week 16: Spring Mission Feeding

Randy Robison and Tammy Trent

J.D. Greear

In the studio

TAMMY: Hello, everybody! Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm Tammy Trent and this is Randy Robison. It is going to be a great day today and I'm glad you're here with us. It is going to be a good day for me because we have Pastor JD Greear with us.

RANDY: Back with us.

TAMMY: Yeah, first time for me meeting him. I love him already. He pastors a great church in North Carolina, The Summit Church. But what I'm most excited about today is he has written a new book that has meant so much to me already. And I think it might mean a lot to you watching because it answers a lot of life's biggest questions. And I have had a ton of questions—a ton of questions for God. I don't always know that I've had all the answers. I've always often been asked questions as well and I haven't had the answer. So I'm glad to have Pastor JD here. He's got this new book out, *12 Truths and a Lie*; "Answers to life's biggest questions."

Glad to have you here. I'm going to start with the lie. Tell me the lie. Tell me the lie.

JD: The lie is one that I lived with for a long time. And as a pastor of people, a lot of millennials, a lot of Gen Z, I find a lot of people carry around this lie. And it is that the presence of these kinds of questions and doubts means there is something defective about your faith or makes you a bad Christian.

That keeps a lot in prison for never really expressing this. When I started to do that as a pastor, I mean people just came out of the woodwork saying, I've had that same exact question and I've always been afraid to verbalize it. What I tried to show them, and I explain this in the book, is that the majority of our Bibles were written by people in a season of, you would have to call it doubt. God, why aren't you doing this? And where are you? And God, if you were good and loving, why wouldn't this happen?

And what you find is God actually, he doesn't cause doubt but God uses doubt in our lives. Charles Spurgeon, the famous British pastor used to say that doubt is like a foot poised, it is like picking up your foot, to go forwards or backwards. He says it is true that doubt can drive you backwards into unbelief but it is also true that you'll never go forward in your faith until you pick up your foot.

So God uses doubt to drive you deeper into intimacy with him and to just rest in his presence.

RANDY: My favorite apostle, I guess, I don't know if you do that, right? I like Thomas. And he gets the bad rap of "Doubting Thomas." But here's what I see in Thomas and this is what I appreciate. First of all, to say that the rest of the apostles weren't doubting is a little bit hypocritical because a woman came to them and said—

JD: She's like, why should I get blamed for—

RANDY: Jesus is raised from the dead. They're all like, "Woman, you're out of your mind." Then they saw him and they're like, "Oh, now we believe!"

Well, Thomas wasn't there. I hear Thomas just saying, "I need to see him for myself." And guess what? Jesus honored him, didn't shame him, showed up and he saw him. To me, that's the questioning that we can have. We can go, God, I don't understand this but I'm taking it to you and I'm relying on you to show up.

JD: Well, Thomas is an example because what Thomas ended up getting was not an explanation of his questions. What he got was a revelation of who Jesus is. And if I could actually, one up it a little bit, even when Matthew records Jesus' ascension, it says when they got together with him at that final mountain, it says, "Many worshipped but some doubted." I'm like he's floating in the air and some are doubting.

I don't think it is hard for you and me to appreciate this, they were so confused by why Jesus had not restored the kingdom to Israel. Why was there still injustice? Why was Rome still in charge? And their question was, God, if you're good and if you're really in charge, I feel like this would be different. And even in light of all they'd seen, they still struggled with doubt.

And what happens with us, and I'm sure you've been there at different points where something happens and you're like, God, this was a reasonable prayer. God, I asked. I did what I was supposed to do. And what God gives you is he says, one day you will see the explanation. There is an explanation. One day you'll get it. But for right now what I give you is I give you who I am in the cross and the resurrection, and the tenderness that we find in the arms of the Heavenly Father.

RANDY: I love that.

TAMMY: I do too. I love that. Those are things that I actually wrote down about going deeper with Jesus and that I might not get the answer but what do I get? I get God. So many people I think want to—inner doubting, at least I've been there, Pastor where when the answers aren't there in the suffering. The questions, why does God allow suffering? Why wouldn't God want me to benefit? Why isn't he answering this prayer? I don't always know how to answer that for people.

How do you answer that? As a pastor, I'm sure you get so many questions. But how do you answer that? If I came to you today and said, why—why did Trent have to die? Why

did God see that as a great thing for me to live without one of the greatest gifts I've ever known?

JD: There is a story in John 11 where there were a couple of sisters that had the exact question. If you were here my brother wouldn't have died. It even says—it's confusing because Jesus says that he actually delayed his coming. And you just think like if he knew what was going to happen why wouldn't he go ahead and get there and heal? He said, "I'm doing this because I need you to know more about who I am."

And there are some things that you and I learn differently in the midst of suffering and absence. There are more things about God that we learn there. The Apostle Paul talked about the whole life being like having—he compares it to birth pains. Being married with four children, I've seen my wife go through this four times when it's a tough few hours. But then the joy that comes through the child that is born makes you forget all that.

It's not that our pain is inconsequential now because of that story in John 11 when Jesus was there at the tomb he wept with them. It means he entered into—even knowing he was about to resurrect Lazarus, he entered into their pain. This means that with you with Trent, with things in my life where I've asked similar questions, I knew that Jesus was there weeping with me. But I also know that one day the joy and the goodness that he brings out of that is going to make this veil of tears that we call life, it's going to make it seem almost inconsequential if we can even say it that way. Paul says, "The lightness of suffering compared to the weight of eternal glory."

TAMMY: A hundred percent, I agree. And I feel like I've gotten there through the years in my life that I stopped asking all the questions. But I do know who the answer is. And Tammy, if you know beyond a shadow of a doubt that God is good, that he loves you, that he is for you, that he is a God of increase, that he doesn't take from you, then you have to find him in the worst moments of your life. So look for him, listen for him, he is there. He is not hiding.

And I think, Pastor, it's taken me seasons to get there. Like I think it will take many people seasons. It's okay to have the questions but there are answers. God gives us answers and I think that's why your book has ministered so much to me because I've had so many questions. Still, I've gotten nuggets of answers but when you go to a pastor that knows the word and can give you scripture to back up some of these questions that you have, I think it begins for me to put the pieces together in my life.

JD: It's what Thomas gets is what you and I, what we get and that is, he got the wounds of Jesus. So when I don't know the answers, when I'm just too finite a mind to comprehend it right now, I'm going to have a lot of questions for Jesus in eternity, right? But what I get is the wounds. And I see that the one thing that cannot be true is that God has either forgotten me or that he is not in charge. Because the wounds of Jesus showed me that he will never leave me or forsake me. And at the worst moment, when it looked like life was most out of control and that evil was winning, God was doing his greatest work in the cross and resurrection of Jesus. And that's also true in my life when I can't see it. His wounds assure me of my future.

TAMMY: Oh, that's good!

RANDY: One thing I love about what I'm seeing here and what you're talking about is the power of truth. Not just the power of the truth on its own but the power when we choose to believe it because we have the choice. And just that right there, the truth that there is a resurrection, while fully acknowledging the pain in waiting for that, how transformative is it to us to choose to believe what God says is true?

JD: Yeah, that is the declaration that overcomes the world, the apostle is saying. Is that when you, in the face of what feels like everything being out of control, when you're on what we call "Good Friday," look at it and say, I don't see the resurrection yet but it's coming because God promised it is.

You know, sometimes, Randy I wonder like why did God add the extra day in between

the death and the resurrection? I get like he died at night. He could resurrect in the morning, the symbolism. But why the whole extra day? I think it is because you and I lived our lives on that second day. And we know that there is a resurrection coming one day but this whole day feels like that awful Saturday where it feels like where is God? But won't you find—Martin Luther said that is when you learn the most about God. Because there are certain things you can only learn in suffering that you can't get by reading books, you can't get by going to seminary, you can only learn it by walking with Jesus through the valley of the shadow of the death and finding that he is a God that is sufficient even there.

RANDY: Hmm! That is true! And it is hard to see sometimes. In fact, we are working in a situation right now where people are walking through the valley of the shadow of death. Death is very real. I think sometimes they need a demonstration of God's power and God's truth in their lives, which is why what we're doing—we've got a few more things I need to ask this man over here because there is a lot of good truth. But there is a situation right now and the truth is they need to see God in it. And you can be his presence. Watch this and you'll see how.

On the mission field

ANNOUNCER: In South Sudan where the sun blazes relentlessly, mothers bear the weight of hunger and malnutrition. Their strength wavers as they mourn the loss of their children's lives cut short by a continuous struggle for survival.

JOHN: I'm walking down a path here in South Sudan in a very rural area outside of a little community that they call Pibor. But today, as I've been here, I'm wrestling with the fact of helping people understand what it is like for the mothers that I've spent today talking with here. All of them have lost children because of malnutrition and hunger in the last few months, the last year.

Open Captions

KIDICH: In my heart, I don't feel like we will survive. I am hopeful that God will stand with us. But something doesn't feel right.

JOHN: Mothers in this type of desperation, they want to grieve. They don't have the luxury of it.

KIDICH: When I get food, I think that I could have fed my baby that died. When my baby cries now, it makes me wonder if she will die too.

JOHN: There is not much hope that tomorrow is going to be even slightly a bit better. The fact is that's the life of most African mothers. We desperately need your help. Mission Feeding coming into this village will change the lives of children because it is going to make the difference between life and death.

End of video

In the studio

RANDY: You know there in South Sudan where John was, there is an ongoing situation. It is no fault of the people there. We see this. We're seeing this now in Ethiopia where we're going. And geographically, those two nations connect. They're surrounded by Muslim nations and people that are coming in. They are displacing people. Of course, you have seasonal issues of drought and sometimes flooding. We see this in Angola and other places where we've been working.

But the thing we see regularly are mothers who love their children, who care for their children, oftentimes, the fathers are there too but they have to work night and day just to secure anything for their family. But we see people who work hard. And we also see people very often that pray. Many of those there in South Sudan and Ethiopia are Christians. And they do ask that question, God, where are you? God send something!

When I look at this situation I see a lot of pain, I see a lot of unnecessary suffering at the hands of evil people but I see an opportunity. This is the opportunity we bring to you

through Mission Feeding to say you know what? We're going to do something. We're going to do a little bit of our part to at least reach out and say to these people who are so desperate, who are dying, we care enough to intervene. We break it down with the numbers, \$30, \$50, \$100 will feed three, five, ten children for the next several months. We're feeding 350,000 children every day—people, some adults eat. They're not all Christians; we don't have a litmus test. We feed hungry people. That's what we do, we extend the love of God. A gift of \$1,000 will help feed 100 people.

But here's the important thing. We have an opportunity, we have hurting people, we have dying or near-dying children and we have the means to do something good. The scripture tells us do not to withhold that good when it is within your power to do so.

So here's my question for you. What good can you do today? Will you join us? Because I can promise you, it will do good. We need to expand. We need to expand in areas where children literally are on the verge of death.

I hope you'll go to the phone, go online, and make the best gift you can, the one that God puts on your heart. Because the numbers are big the impact on the individuals is so tangible and beautiful. And Tammy, I know you just got back. What do you see when we go in and we say to that mother we're going to help you feed your child?

TAMMY: Whoo! You know, Randy, you're careful not to give a promise that might not happen. So I'm careful with that language. But when I know that it is possible, when I know that I can come back home and I can tell a story, and I can show you the need, and I know it is possible to go in there and help these people, that's what I tell them. I'm praying that we will be back. I'm praying that we can help you somehow.

And that is my hope and my prayer. I know that we can't do it alone. I know that we need you today to come alongside us. I'd love to make a promise wherever I go. I know the promises in Jesus. It is always going to be in Jesus and through his people that come together to make an impact and a difference. May we not hold back. May we not just pass

by. May we look around us always and see a need and then respond. And today is that day.

RANDY: Yeah. Let's go back. Let's go back to every village that needs us and let's give them life.

Begin video clip

ANNOUNCER: Right now across the continent of Africa, children are suffering facing severe malnutrition and even death. Severe drought and famine, including in crisis areas like Ethiopia, means we must replenish food supplies immediately to keep feeding 350,000 children and help reach more people in desperate need.

Through *LIFE's* Mission Feeding outreach your gift of love can be an answer to prayer for a hurting and hungry child in their time of need. Call now with your lifesaving gift of \$30, \$50, or \$100 to help feed and care for three, five, or ten children for three full months. With your gift of any amount, we'll send *The Blessing of Taking Communion*. In this book, discover how the sacred ordinance of communion helps to feed your soul and reminds you of the transformative power of receiving the Lord's Supper.

With your gift of \$100 or more, you may request the LIFE Legacy Journal. This beautiful journal and pen will help you write your personal story and share the experiences that made you who you are. One day, the generations that follow will be able to look back and learn from the legacy you've left behind.

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, "A Cup of Water." Please call, write, or make your gift online today.

End of video

In the studio

RANDY: You can be the presence of God in someone's life today. I pray you'll go online, go to the phone, and make the best gift you can. Some of you can do quite a bit and I pray that wouldn't be limited by anything. Just hear the voice of God and obey, and we can do it. That is the truth.

If you want *12 Truths and a Lie* by JD Greear, request it with your gift today. We'd love to send it to you. As we see something like that, a situation like that, Pastor Greear, you wonder why a good God—and I believe he is—allows innocent people to suffer? Why would he allow the evil that creates the conditions for war or displacement or abuse? Why do we have to deal with that? God can fix it. Why doesn't he?

JD: My daughter asked me that very question. We spent some time in a Syrian refugee camp over in Central Asia. And she asked that. And why doesn't God do something about it? I gave the church answer, "We're what God is doing about it." And that's true. And a lot of people now just give there. They are being a part of God's hands and feet.

But even then, she said, "But why doesn't God himself step in and do something about it?" In some ways, that probably, statistically, it's the primary reason why people struggle with faith is because they say—and it is as old as religion itself, if God is in charge and God is just and God is good then why aren't things different?

You know as you grow in your faith, you get less confident in your explanatory ability. When I was a young Christian, it would be like oh, well, this bad thing happened but this good thing happened over here. And sure, God does that sometimes. But ultimately, what God gives us is he gives us a picture of a God who we understand the best in the cross and resurrection. What we know that pain and suffering can't mean is that God is absent or is not in control. And we see that God is bringing forth resurrection through it. That there is a joy coming.

There are multiple strands of answers. And not to get all philosophical on everybody but

the Bible is going to teach that the curse of the world that we suffer under is not happening to innocent people. We all are participants in that curse. And God has reversed that curse by sending Jesus. But that's part of the answer. But then sometimes you see things happen and you say: That person didn't seem to deserve that. And what God gives is the answer to that. He gives himself. He says, right now you can't—you may not understand everything there is to know. Even if I explained it to you, you wouldn't see it. But what you can understand is who I am.

One of my favorite definitions of faith, Randy, is faith is accepting what you cannot understand based on what you can understand. And what you can understand is that God of the cross and resurrection is somebody you can hold on to.

RANDY: My favorite prayer in scripture is: Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief.

JD: I've prayed it a million times I believe, I feel like.

TAMMY: Speaking of unbelief. I think about prayer a lot, and a lot of people feel like prayer isn't working for them. That question is often like why should I pray if it isn't working for me? How do you answer that? And I've certainly been one of those too. Probably when I hit rock bottom in the house, something goes wrong. I'm like God, you know you're not there. My friends are like, pray. And I'm like why? It's not going to change. He's not listening. But I know that he is and I know that prayer works, but why do we give up on prayer?

JD: Thank you for saying that because I think when you just said that a lot of people thought, I can't believe she just said that on TV. But we've all said it.

TAMMY: Yes.

JD: And what I always do is point people to the Psalms. I'm like, read the Psalms. They're filled with people asking that very question. And they're saying, God, I don't—

what I'm asking for seems reasonable. Again, it is just like the question of suffering and evil. I don't know if I can always give you the answer to God's timetable. I do know the Bible teaches, Jesus taught repeatedly, that we ask and we ask repeatedly. God always answers. But sometimes, God gives us a different thing than we're asking for. I think about how many prayers I've prayed and I look back now and I'm like thank you Lord for not answering that prayer. I thought, the songs are about to start coming out. But I need prayer.

But I'm like if already from a limited perspective, I can already see that God is good in not answering some prayers, I know that given infinite time and perspective I'll see that God had a good reason for all of his—I can't remember who said it but God sometimes gives us what we would have asked for if we knew what he knew. And thank God for that.

RANDY: I think about, you have kids, right? You think about some of the things your kids ask you for in their limited reasoning. It's perfectly reasonable but as the parent you're like—

JD: My three-year-old wanted an iPad just to—I'm like no! Not in spite of it but because I love you I'm going to say no to that.

RANDY: Or because I know what's best for you. Here's the question I think a lot of people struggle with is does God hear the prayer and does it influence the outcome? In other words, can God change his mind?

JD: You know a lot of times our theology gets the best of us. I'm a theologian. But you start saying, well, prayer doesn't change the situation, prayer changes us. It sounds so spiritual. It does. But it's impossible to read the stories of scripture and not see that prayer is, to quote Charles Spurgeon, the nerve, the slender serve that moved the omnipotent hand of God.

Yes, I don't know if I can explain to you how God knew I was going to pray. Did God already know that? I don't know. But I know that John Calvin who we always credit with, most theologians thought most about the sovereignty of God. His favorite verse was Deuteronomy 29:29. Anytime I sign a copy of the book I put that on the cover. Deuteronomy 29:29 says, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God but the things that are revealed belong to us and our children forever."

There are things about God's omniscience and his sovereignty that honestly, I'll never understand. My dad gave me some of the best advice going into the ministry. He said, "Son, people a lot smarter than you have tried to figure out things like Calvinism and God's sovereignty for 2,000 years. You're probably not going to get there yourself."

So the secret things belong to God but the things that are revealed belong to us and our children. What that means is that I know what God has revealed is that when I pray God moves and things change. And Jesus said, don't give up. If you knock once and don't get an answer, keep knocking because you have a Father who is listening and is ready to help.

RANDY: That's good! Good truth!

TAMMY: Amen! Amen to that. *12 Truths and a Lie*; "Answers to life's biggest questions." Man, thank you for this so much.

RANDY: If you're watching and you're not sure where to go with this, ask for this book when you support Mission Feeding. Your gift of \$30, \$50, or \$100 today will make a difference. Your prayers will make a difference. When you get this truth and live it, it will make a big difference for you.

Pastor JD Greear, thank you so much for sharing this with us today. We appreciate you guys being with us. Don't miss an episode of LifeToday.org. We've got all of them up there. We'll see you again next time here on *Life Today*.