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Week 16: Spring Mission Feeding

Tammy Trent

Anita Phillips

In the studio

TAMMY: Hello everybody. I'm Tammy Trent. Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm so glad you're here with us today because we have Dr. Anita Phillips with us. She has a brand-new book that hit the New York Times bestsellers list titled *The Garden Within*: "Where the war with your emotions ends and your most powerful life begins." And it is so, so good.

So listen. Today is a day you're going to want to take notes. I promise you the time is going to go by so, so fast. So lean in, grab a piece of paper and a pen because Dr. Anita is not only a licensed therapist but also a minister of God's Word. She has so much to teach us today about all of it and *The Garden Within*.

Welcome, Dr. Anita. It is so great to have you here. We're going to have to unpack so much so quickly today because I feel like I'm just going to wind you up and just let you go because you're unbelievable! This book has meant so much to me. It is going to be something I go back to many times throughout the year and revisit. And I think many people are going to feel the same.

But I want to start first by unpacking just a little bit about your life, your journey, and how you even got to this place of wanting to be a trauma therapist.

ANITA: I think everybody in trauma therapy got there because of their own trauma. I think we're kind of led by our pain to find that healing for ourselves and other people. For me, it began in childhood. I'm a pastor's kid, a pastor's grandkid. But that wasn't the

trauma.

TAMMY: Are you sure?

ANITA: I'm sure. I was really blessed in that area. But I had an older sister who developed the symptoms of a serious mental illness when she was still very young. And so we shared a bedroom. And when I was about six and she was about 11 or 12, one night she woke up in the middle of the night screaming—just screaming. Her eyes were wide open. She's staring at our bedroom door, and she says, "Anita, there's a demon in the door."

Well, hey! This is a real possibility. We are Christians, we understand spiritual attacks and warfare. So I thought, maybe that's true but it is still terrifying. My parents heard her screaming. They woke up, they came, they prayed, and eventually, she peaked at the door and she didn't see this demon anymore. And we thought that's it! It's done. But in the weeks and the months to come it would happen again and again, and it became hard for me to sleep. I had a certain anxiousness that I would wake up to these screams.

So that was an early trauma for me. And eventually, it did seem to quiet. But actually what happened was someone in the neighborhood introduced her to drugs and she found out that it quieted the voices we didn't know she was hearing. It stopped the hallucinations. And that's too much for any child to resist, of course, that torment being quieted. And unfortunately, she became addicted to those drugs and lost decades of her life on the streets.

And so, as I was growing up watching my parents ministering to others but weep at home about what was going on with my older sister Valerie, I wanted to know, what is happening here? So I was led into this field to explain how people suffer, how they break, and how we get better. But I also had a persistent question for God, what does your Bible teach us about human behavior? About the understanding of who we are, how we were made? Because he's the creator. And I was told by lots of smart people that the Bible

didn't speak to these things but I never believed it. And it turns out I was right to trust God because it is in the book.

TAMMY: I'm so glad you didn't believe it! And I'm so glad you dug in. You talk so much about emotions which is a huge topic for me because I'm an emotional girl. And I love that. A therapist said good to my emotions. I love that so much because I think I've been told so many times in my life, "You're too emotional. Suppress your emotions. Don't be so emotional."

But I feel like—I don't even know how it developed if it's just always been there. Maybe you can tell me today and I can send you a check. [Laughing] But I feel like, I always say, my emotions are right here and so is my giggle. Like my joy, it's so close to the surface all the time. But what do you say to somebody that has been told, that your emotions are bad. How do you—and you went into the Word of God to find out are they bad or are they good? Did Jesus have emotions?

ANITA: Jesus was extremely emotional. And this is what was so exciting about this journey. Because even though I was in scripture trying to understand my sister's illness, the Holy Spirit in all his wisdom took me to understand wellness. What did it look like for us to be well? You can't fix something that's broken if you don't know what it looked like before it broke. Otherwise, you're just guessing and a lot of times in psychology and as professionals, without God's insight we're guessing on what it means to be well.

And what the Lord showed me was that he designed us like gardens. When I was taking a neuroscience class in grad school for the first time, I saw a picture of a neuron and that neuron looked like a seedling. And I was so shocked. I said, Man, if I believe in the God of my Sunday School book, who created the heavens and the earth, who made plants on day three, and us on day six, I can't avoid the truth of these plants and neurons looking alike.

And so I believed that God was being intentional because that's his character. And so I

dove into scripture saying, why would he talk about plants the way he does with us?
We'll be like a tree planted by rivers of water. I'll plant you in a good land. Isaiah 58:11
says, "You'll be a well-watered garden."

I said, "My gosh, he meant it!"

Because inside of us our nervous system is modeled after plants, and we are gardens.

And in the parable of the sower, Jesus puts all the pieces together. He talks about a sower going out and sowing seeds. Those seeds are words. They fall on the soil. Jesus says the soil is the heart. Depending on the emotional state, Jesus describes the different soil types based on joy, anger, and fear. Depending on the emotional state, the seed's growth is affected. Then the plant, that's the mind, that's why neurons look like plants. And then the fruit is what we do. Seed, soil, plant, fruit; words, feelings, thoughts, behaviors. It is that simple.

And so when we recognize that the heart is the soil of our lives then it means what's going with me emotionally, my emotional well-being affects every word spoken. God's Word, my words to my children, our words to ourselves, every word spoken falls on the soil of our heart. And our emotional well-being determines what happens to those words. And so the heart is the soil of your life!

And we have seen emotions as a problem, as something to separate ourselves from. And people love to quote the scripture. Well, the Bible says the heart is desperately wicked. I'm like slow down. It's one verse and we're taking it out the context, that's in the book of Jeremiah, and we ignore that later in the book of Jeremiah God says, "I'm going to give you a new heart. I'm going to exchange your heart."

So we're not walking around with desperately wicked hearts, especially if we know Jesus. Then we've had that exchange. So paying attention to where we are emotionally affects everything else in our lives.

TAMMY: My goodness! Dr. Anita, there are so many things that you cover just like that in the book, the heart is deceitful. There are so many things, to me, like moments that will set people free, that we've hung on to certain things, taken it out of context and it's bound us—

ANITA: Good intentions but bad context.

TAMMY: Yes! And it will set you free. There are so many things about your book. I've written down so many different things. Chapter one, you had me out of the box, girl. I want to read this: "I grew up believing that I was meant to harness the power of my mind, to live well and that emotions were nice but were more often problematic."

So I love that you have given me permission to say it's okay to be emotional.

ANITA: We are all emotional. Some of us are just less in touch with it than others.

TAMMY: How do we keep it intact? How do we do that? How do we balance those things? Is balance even a word? Are we fighting for wellness in our lives?

ANITA: I want us to take off all the restrictive words we use for our emotions. Balancing it, managing it, because we're presenting it as if it was a problem. The heart is the soil of your life. If a plant, and imagine your mind is the plant, if a plant is wilting, or a plant needs nourishment, what do you do? You water the soil. You don't spray the plant. You put the fertilizer in the soil, not on the plant.

So in the same way, we go to our hearts. When the soil is dry again next week, nobody gets mad at the soil. Oh, my gosh! I can't believe I have to water this soil again. This soil has to be managed! We just give it what it needs. We expect it to need.

The same thing is with our hearts—our hearts, our emotional pain gives us the

information about what we need. When we're sad, we need connection, we're hungry for it. When we are angry, it is usually because we need value and worth to be applied to something important and someone has not done that. When we're afraid we need to feel safe. The emotion of fear is a human emotion. It is saying I need safety. Just like when I'm hungry, I need food. Humans need food and water to survive but we need connection and worth and safety and our emotional pain is a hunger pang for those things. When we ignore those needs, eventually we find ourselves unwell. And we never saw Jesus do it. I want to point that out because I know so many people who know Jesus are listening. When Jesus expressed his emotional pain, he never held it back. He didn't apologize. He never repented. He cried in front of the tomb of Lazarus, in front of people—public tears!

TAMMY: Emotional.

ANITA: Emotional. And some people say, oh well, he is sad that his friend died. And some said that he's sad because he was thinking of his own death. Whatever reason it was, they weren't tears of joy. He was crying. Even though he knew he was about to raise Lazarus from the dead, even though he knew his father was going to raise him? Just because you have faith for the outcome doesn't mean you don't have pain in the process. And Jesus expressed the pain of the process because he was wearing a human body. Just like us! We see him so listen, we go tears at Lazarus's tomb, raises him from the dead. We see him flipping tables in the temple when he's angry. I mean, he went off. And then people flow into the temple and he heals their bodies. In Gethsemane we see him distressed beyond measure. He is crying out to God, the book of Hebrews says with loud crying and tears, he sought his father who could save him from death. He's crying.

And then a few minutes later after he strengthened, he walks down and says, I am he to the soldiers and knocks them off their feet. Every time Jesus had an emotional breakdown, he had a broke through. Something miraculous happened! And we are holding in all of our pain, and I think we are aborting our breakthrough because we're not releasing the pain and allowing the spirit to flow behind us just like Jesus did.

TAMMY: That is so good. I love how you talk about that. The breakthrough and coming to the other side of that. Oh my gosh, what would you say to the person that has been told you don't have enough faith because you're showing emotion. This pain hurts so you're crying so you're not believing enough that God can turn this around. You have no faith. What do we say to people like that?

ANITA: I would say, am I required to have more faith than Jesus? Because Jesus was crying. Why didn't Jesus just walk into Gethsemane like hey! It's crucifixion day. But I know I have the victory. He did not! He did not. He expressed the pain of what it meant to be in that human body and we're allowed to do that too. But we have allowed cultures' view of emotion. Our Western culture, some of the Greek philosophies that have been formed the way we approach Christianity, approach the scripture where the thought was emotion is bad to show, the mind is more important. And we have absorbed that into our theology. But doesn't reflect the Jesus I see in that book.

So we have to be very careful not only in studying scripture in the context where it was written but paying attention to the context where it's being read. Why am I reading it and not having seen this emotional Jesus before? We have to shed our cultural lens and—

TAMMY: I never did!

ANITA: We weren't taught to see it. We have certain cultural blinders on.

TAMMY: And that alone set me free just reading that. Like oh, Jesus was emotional? Then I'm okay to have some emotions.

ANITA: And when we miss it, we don't care for the soil, and then the seeds fall and the power of the seeds is not unleashed because the soil isn't ready for them. And not because we have painful emotions but because we don't allow them to flow through and out. It is okay to feel all of the feelings. Hebrews 4:15 says we have not a High Priest who cannot be touched by the feelings of our infirmities. And that he was tempted in every way but

he never sinned. So that means no feeling in itself can be a sin. Because if Jesus felt everything we felt and he never sinned—

TAMMY: What about anger?

ANITA: Anger is not a sin. What does Ephesians say? "Be angry and sin not." It doesn't say don't be angry so you won't sin. It says, "Be angry and sin not." Anger can push our behavior and so we need to pay attention to that. But a lot of times, we don't even want to touch that we're angry. But it's under there just boiling, just boiling, just boiling, and then we say, "I lost my temper." No, you've been holding it in so long.

It is okay to be angry. There are things that we should righteously be angry about. But when we hold it in, you know what? It makes us sick, it undermines our immune system. We're more likely to get ill. So our bodies, our hearts, our spirits, our minds, everything's meant to work together.

But this obsession with the mind, it's the original sin. Isn't that what the first woman and then the first man did? Oh, if I eat this fruit, I'll be wise like God. I'll be able to think like God. It was a pursuit of the mind. If she had—if that first woman had just kept his word hidden in her heart instead of thinking about what she could do with her mind.

TAMMY: Oh my gosh! How do we understand mental wellness through the scripture? This is also what I love so much about your book. It is so—it is so sound—biblically sound, practical. There is so much science here. I'm like, she is sending me back to school. There is so much in it. It's just wrapped around so many scriptures, the Word of God. It is solid. There is a revelation, a bit of a revival in your life that can happen if you tap into the truth of what you are speaking of. This is stuff you've researched, you've studied. This girl knows what she's talking about.

So how do we understand even mental wellness right now? It is a big thing. We've walked through a lot in the last few years. Many people are struggling with mental

wellness, and mental illness, even. How do we navigate through that in scripture?

ANITA: Absolutely, it is in there. Everything is in that book. I take you to Romans seven and we look at Paul who wrote most of the mind scriptures we quote, talking about how he himself struggled. In the second half of that chapter, he's talking about what I don't want to do, I do. What I do want to do, I don't. We all know those verses, right? And we talk about that in terms of trying not to commit acts of sin.

But I think Paul was talking about an internal struggle. Because Paul himself in other passages says that by touching the law, he was blameless, and perfect. Like he was righteous according to the law. So it is hard for me to believe that he never broke the law of God before he met Jesus on the Damascus Road. But after that, he was struggling to like what? Not go out and party? I thinking something else was happening. He says that there was the law of God in his mind but that there was another law in his body, his members, warring against the law of his mind. And he said, "Sometimes it takes my mind captive."

So yes, Paul wrote all those verses about the mind but he also vulnerably acknowledged that sometimes something in his body was doing something his mind wishes it wouldn't. I believe he was struggling with internal feelings. I believe he struggled with anxiety. And you'll have to get the book to read that but he admits that sometimes something in his body was stronger than his volitional mind.

And that's what mental illness is. There are times when our body and our brain, which your brain is part of your body, malfunction in a way that overcomes how we want to feel. My sister didn't want to have hallucinations. She didn't want to hear voices. Nobody wants to be in the grips of depression for weeks. Nobody wants to be suffering with bipolar disorder but something happens in the body just as high blood pressure or diabetes that can overtake what I want to do, what I choose, and how I wish I could feel. And that's not making excuses, it is real.

So we have to understand that if Paul acknowledged that there are times when my body overthrows my volitional choice, that is certainly going to happen to us. And that is all that mental illness is. Something in my body is broken, and it is overthrowing my volitional mind.

But here's the beautiful part. At the end of chapter seven in Romans, Paul laments this. He says, "Oh, this body of death." But then he goes straight on and says, "But there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." That's the very next verse! That's the very next verse!

TAMMY: Amazing!

ANITA: So there is no condemnation if your human body breaks in a way that struggles against your mind. Jesus still lives within you and he goes right on through that whole chapter eight. He says that we are victorious, that we are more than conquerors. And he ends it by asking, what can separate us from the love of God? Nothing! Nothing! No diagnosis, no symptom, no pain, no illness. Whatever is going on with you, Jesus knows how you feel. You are not condemned. And as long as you keep your attention in his direction, go to therapy, take medication, whatever you need, you are loved by God. There is no condemnation.

TAMMY: Oh, my gosh! That is powerful stuff right there. I have so many other things. I have so many other things. Let me just give this one quote and tell me something quickly about it. There are a couple of things: "Never choose an answer that limits God." I love when you say that trauma may have shaped you, but it didn't make you. God made you, not your trauma. Maybe you haven't been formally diagnosed with depression, anxiety, or another mental health problem but that doesn't mean that your struggle isn't real in your life. And why do we feel the way we feel about how we feel?

ANITA: Listen. When I was told the Bible was not meant for this. The Bible doesn't speak to biology and psychology, let me tell you. When you see in this book our very

nervous system outline is mapped out in that book. Never choose an answer that limits God. Say I don't know before you say that God can't, didn't, or won't. Say I don't know.

TAMMY: Even right there, I don't know. That's freeing in its sense. We always feel like we have got to have the answer. But if you don't know, you don't know. I have loved this conversation. I wish we had so much more time. You're amazing. But look, so many questions I think people might have are going to be in this book. I want to make sure to send you this book.

But first, I want you to take a minute and watch this. If God has laid it on your heart to partner with us in feeding children, which is our mission, then with whatever gift you can give today, I want to make sure to send you this book. And I'm telling you, it is going to be life-changing. We're going to change a whole lot of lives out there in the mission field and here. Watch this.

On the mission field

Announcer: These orange bowls full of vitamin-enriched soup are dished up daily to thousands of children in the school feeding program. This is why we can say, "Mission Feeding saves lives."

And because of Mission Feeding, we're saving lives in other ways. In areas hit by natural disasters, our mission partners are answering the call with emergency food distribution efforts. Mission Feeding also provides malnutrition clinics, and therapeutic meals for children who cannot tolerate solid food. We distribute boxes of food bags to clinics so mothers can feed their children as they struggle to survive the ravages of malnutrition.

Maria de Fatima is a mother who benefited from Mission Feeding. Maria took her son Zasha who is suffering from malnutrition to a rural clinic near her village where he was given food. As Maria shared her story with John Yeatts, Zasha decided he would come in and join the activity.

JOHN: So he just came in from playing. And the fact is, this little boy was severely sick just a few months ago. And he's able to play today because Marie can receive food rations from the malnutrition clinic.

Announcer: But the reality for mothers in countries like Angola is the mortality rate among children under five is the highest in Sub-Saharan Africa. And the major contributing factor for their deaths is malnutrition. Children like Zasha can only be saved if we continue Mission Feeding.

>> So I'm asking you, would you help us? Would you help us continue to help Maria? And would you help us help other mothers just like Maria?

Open captions

>> And God bless you for making a long journey here, and come to my humble house.

End of video

In the studio

TAMMY: She is so, so sweet. And I love stories like this so much. Zasha's life was on the brink of despair but through Mission Feeding he was given a chance to thrive. Today, he is a living testament to the difference that we can make together in the lives of one child at a time.

At *Life Today*, our purpose, it's clear, is to go where the need is, one life at a time, one village at a time. It's an honor and a calling for all of us here to be a blessing to those in need just like Zasha. But we can't do this alone. We need your help today because there are countless others who need us right now.

Today is a new day, and it brings with it a life that needs to be saved. The beautiful thing is we're feeding 350,000 children every single day but we want to do more, we have to do

more because there are so many others that are waiting. They're standing in that line with that bowl right now waiting for that bowl to be filled up, to receive sometimes their only meal of the day. So we have to get to them right now before it's too late before they have to get to a place of going to a clinic where they have to fight even harder to live.

So again, I'm asking if you'd help us reach even more mothers just like Maria and bring relief to so many families just like hers through Mission Feeding. Your gift, no matter how small, can make an enormous, enormous difference. You have to know that. So help us meet our goal of 350,000 children this year.

It breaks down this way so anybody can help. \$30 will feed three children for three full months. \$50 will feed five, and \$100 will feed ten. But for those who can do more, \$1,000 will help feed 100 children for three full months.

You can make a difference today. So go online and call and make the best gift you can. So let's work together to make every day a new opportunity to save lives together. We can continue to provide hope, to provide nourishment and a chance at a better future for those that are in need right now.

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

TAMMY: You can be an enormous blessing right now today with any gift that you're able to give. Man, just go online or make a call to us and let us know that you'll be able to join with us in feeding these children.

Don't forget to request this book, *The Garden Within*. We want to make sure to send it to you with any gift that you give today. Dr. Anita, you are unbelievable. I appreciate you so much. God, you're right, he is unbelievable.

ANITA: That Bible is unbelievable.

TAMMY: It is! His work in you has now overflowed into the lives of so many. So thank you for taking a risk and writing this book.

And if you know someone who is struggling or you're struggling, well, the depth of your emotions and feeling overwhelmed with hurt, grief, anxiety, maybe panic attacks, trauma, depression, or fear, this is the book you need in your life. And just as Dr. Anita says, I'm

going to read this, "You don't need to overthrow your emotions to experience a revolution in your life. You just need to overflow the lies you have believed about your emotions. The creator designed your heart to be a garden, not a war zone. A truly powerful life isn't won, it is cultivated."

May we all learn how to take better care of our garden within with intention and with purpose and to end this war with the emotions of our lives and to embrace the powerful life we've been created for—so much more. God bless you. We'll see you next time.