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Week 18: Spring Mission Feeding

Randy Robison

Zach Williams

In the studio

RANDY: Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm Randy Robison. Tammy is not with me today but she will be back soon. I'm excited because I have a wonderful guest; a gentleman I've talked to online several times and I know you've heard him. His name is Zach Williams. He came onto the Christian music scene back in 2017 with a beautiful song, musically and lyrically called "Chain Breaker." I know it blessed so many people's lives. Since then he has had numerous hits. A couple of years ago, in 2021, he won another Grammy for a song with Dolly Parton called, "There was Jesus." And just a gentleman whose life is blessing people through song and through his testimony, which I'm excited for you to hear today.

He tells it in a new book called *Rescue Story*. It is available now. I know it will bless you. Zach, man, it is so good to see you in person.

ZACH: Thanks for having me.

RANDY: You know what I love about your story? And I know there are people out there watching right now who have that loved one in their lives who seems like man, they're just far from God. I want to encourage you today. If you've got someone that you've been praying for, don't stop praying. Zach, I know you know how true that is. Tell us a little bit of your story.

ZACH: Well, that's it. I think this book was inspired by my mom and dad and the love they showed me through this messy life that I lived for a long time. I grew up a church kid but I didn't live the life that I was raised to live for a long time. But thankfully, my

parents planted a seed at a very early age. And I wouldn't have known about this God that loved me so much that he sent his son to die for me. I wouldn't have known about Jesus.

There were a number of years in my life that I ran from what I know now as the calling on my life. When I was running as far and as fast as I could, God was still chasing me, pursuing me. I owe that to my family. Like I said, when I started thinking about this book, I meet a lot of moms and dads, I meet a lot of grandparents, and people at shows that have talked to me about you should write a book one day. Me and my wife have talked about it for years. And this past year it just felt like the right time.

My prayer was that people who have children, loved ones, prodigals that struggle, that were raised in the church, or maybe not raised in the church, they can read this book and just find hope. To know that it is just prayer, trusting God, and believing and praying. Just knowing that his plans are better than our plans. I think for a lot of us, I think a lot of people want to pray and immediately see God do something. Sometimes, it doesn't work that way. I grew up in church but I was 33 years old when I gave my life to the Lord.

But I watched my parents and I just watched their unwavering faith through all those years. And ultimately, I saw just that love of God through them.

RANDY: So was there anything in particular that made you run, in a sense? Or was it just chasing the world?

ZACH: It was just chasing the world. Thinking I had to be a certain thing to achieve what I wanted. When I started playing music in college, I thought I had to live a rock star life. I was already partying in college and things like that and I thought I'll take the party life and add this to music and I'll become a rock star. And it will be accepted because that's what you do.

I got caught up in that for about 10 to 15 years of my life and carried it into my marriage. It was just one of those things where I knew that if I didn't change and something didn't

happen, I probably wouldn't be here. I wouldn't have my family, still, I know that.

RANDY: Now you also talk about in the book an early disappointment. Because you walked in today and I was like, okay, this dude is a tall guy! You had something you wanted to do early that didn't work out.

ZACH: My dream was to play in the NBA one day. I wanted to play college basketball. I wanted to go to the NBA and play. But I lost—like I said I lost track of all the things that my parents had taught me and raised me to be. And I got involved in drugs and alcohol in my early high school years. By my senior year of high school, some Division One basketball scholarship offers, and schools talking to me, but those all quit. I ended up getting in trouble for drug use my senior year.

I dropped out of high school. I got my GED and I went to work for my dad. I thought my life was over. I was working construction at that time thinking it was gone, I'll never get another chance. Then a year later, I walked on to a college and made the team and got a full scholarship. But then I tore my ankle up the day before the season started.

And that's where the guitar came in. I picked a guitar up. I think it was out of pure boredom. I didn't have anything else to do and this guitar was in our apartment. I remember picking it up and immediately, being like this is what I want to do for the rest of my life. What was crazy was my dad had played music growing up my entire life and led worship. So there was a guitar in our house, there was a music stand in our house. I guess it was in there somewhere but until I couldn't play sports I was like—but as soon as I held it, I was like okay, there is something here. It was just one of those things.

RANDY: Where did that lead? Because you talk about several years where you were out chasing your musical dream at that point, what did that look like?

ZACH: It was pretty rough. I was a pretty reckless guy. I didn't, at the time, wasn't thinking about the next day. I wasn't thinking about anybody involved. Wasn't thinking

about myself, honestly. I was just living. I was just one of those guys that was 110%, and if there was a party, I was going to be the best at the party. It didn't start or stop until I got there or left. That's just how I lived for a number of years.

But when I made the change to live for Jesus, that's how I've been living since.

RANDY: That's a great story, by the way, as far as what happened. Tell people because you're on the road, you're in a secular band. So you're doing the music thing, you're doing the party thing, and God steps in.

ZACH: Yeah, my wife and me had kind of had this moment before the tour started in 2012. She said, "If you can't make some changes for your family, like we can't stick around," she said, "It's not looking good." I knew enough about the Lord being raised in the church. I knew God was real. Obviously, I had my questions and wondered if he could save me. If I could be forgiven for some of the things that I had done. I just said, God, if you're real in who you say you are prove it. If you prove it to me, I'll walk away from everything that's going on in my life.

We were in Europe, about two weeks into this tour, and I was staring out the window of a bus one day driving down the highway in Spain. The guy was scanning radio stations, driving our bus, and I heard a song by Big Daddy Weave called "Redeemed" that came across the radio. The song just hit me. At that moment, I just realized all those years in church I had missed it. I had this idea growing up as a kid that I thought God kind of sat with his arms crossed on his throne just shaking his head and looking at everything I did wrong. I realized in that moment that he sees me in a way that I'll never see myself.

I remember calling my wife and saying, "You're not going to believe this but I'm done." When I came home from that tour, I gave my life to the Lord on the floor of our closet in our house on June 10th of 2012. We found a church and within a year I started working for the church leading worship. That's where it all went to. Ended up in a book so here we go.

RANDY: The thing I want anybody who may be watching who is out living your own life, pursuing your dreams and things like that, we talk about this idea of repentance. It is absolutely necessary. Anybody that tells you it's not is not telling you the truth. But what did that look like for you?

ZACH: It was just—for me it was a simple, I don't want to be who I am anymore. I didn't have anything fancy to bring. I wasn't dressed up. I remember it was an honest cry for help. It was God, I can't do this on my own. I'm sick of being who I am. If there is something here that you can use, use me. If I don't play music, I'm fine with that. If I do, that's awesome but I want to be a good husband and father. I want to know you.

I remember putting music down for six months. Just completely set it aside and started working on my relationship with God and my family. Out of that season of life of just waiting and listening and seeing what God had planned for me, the music came back. God started giving me opportunities to do things that I'd dreamed of. And then opened doors for things I could never imagine. So that's really how it started for me.

RANDY: I definitely want to talk about that. But I like what you said, you laid it down, that element of surrender. Sometimes, we think, oh, I've got to do something. Well, in a lot of ways it's doing nothing. It is laying everything down.

So here's a question because you had this misconception that a lot of people have that God is the God who is waiting to get you, waiting to tell you how bad you are, punish you for all your sins—maybe or maybe not forgive you. What did you sense from God when you laid everything down and just surrendered yourself to him?

ZACH: What I sensed then and what I still sense now, and I think it is easy to beat yourself up. As Christians, I think a lot of people have a misconception that you have to have it all together. You have to have it all dressed up and perfect before you can bring it to God or come to church. That's not true. And then, I think people think once you give

your life to the Lord then automatically everything is perfect. And it is not. We're never going to have it figured out. I won't. But God does. And that's why he went to the cross for us. That's why he sent his son to die so that we don't have to have it all figured out. I think there is beauty and freedom in knowing that it's all right if you fail, and get it right, like you've got tomorrow. It is not how you start the race, it is how you end it.

For me, I feel like my worst days with God are better than my best days without him. And so yeah, I feel like I have somebody walking with me through all this and I'm not alone.

RANDY: No condemnation?

ZACH: Yep!

RANDY: Love?

ZACH: Yeah.

RANDY: All there? Now this was something that you didn't know at the time but your dad told you later. There were some words spoken early that came true.

ZACH: Yeah. It is a story that I didn't start telling until recently. And then it was really what—it was a big part of this book. It opens the book.

My parents met in high school, got married young, and went through a very similar lifestyle that I and my wife went through. There was a time in their life when there was quite a bit of partying going on. When my mom was ready to slow down and start a family, I don't think my dad was quite ready yet. They ended up separating for some time. My dad found the Lord and it brought him and my mom back together. They made a promise to raise their children in church when they started their family.

They decided that they would move from Arkansas where they had grown up and get away from some of the people they'd run around with. Dad decided he wanted to go to a Bible college in Pensacola, Florida. So they were going to school down there.

Then a couple of years later I was born and they decided to have me dedicated. And so my dad and I are on this job site one day, and I'm 33 years old, and we sit down to take a lunch break. He tells me he's got to share a story that he's never shared. He said, "When you were born, we had you dedicated at this church."

I said, "Yeah. I remember you telling me that."

He said, "Well, what I didn't tell you was as we were walking down to the front of the aisle you were screaming and crying and making all this noise. And the pastor said, 'Sounds like Zach has a strong set of lungs. He'll probably be a singer one day.' And everybody laughed." He said, "But then the pastor got serious and looked at him and said, 'This child will be a voice for his generation.'"

I'm sitting there in tears on this construction site. My dad and I are crying. I was like, "Dad, why didn't you tell me this?"

He said, "Well, I didn't want to put any pressure on you. The thing was," he said, "We watched you grow up as a kid and never showed any interest in music. We always wondered what the pastor meant by that. But you were always a natural leader. People seemed to follow you. Then you came home from college and took my guitar back and said you were going to teach yourself how to play." He said, "I didn't think anything about it other than you just don't pick up a guitar at 20 years old and start playing music." He said, "Then you came home from school and you were really good, and you were singing and writing songs. But then you got in this band." He said, "You lived this life that me and your mother hadn't raised you to live."

So my parents would come sit in these smokey bars night after night after night. They

would just pray that God would take all of this one day and use it for his glory. He said, "When you started playing me these songs that you're writing now, and this stuff that you're writing for the church," he said, "I'm not telling you to put any pressure on you, I'm just telling you because God has given you a gift. And this is the platform. He's allowed you to live through and walk through a lot of these dark days to stand on this stage and share with the world how good he is and what he wants for you."

So it was one of those moments where you're like okay, I never like to share that because I don't want people to think well, look at me. It is all about God. I don't feel chosen at all. I feel honestly unworthy of it most days because I know how I can mess it up and get it wrong more than I get it right.

It just goes to show that God can take the messiest parts of your life and turn it into a message. He can do that with anybody. I think that's what this book, to me, represents. Just read it. I'm hoping anybody that struggles can find something in there to hang on to.

RANDY: Paul told Timothy whom he was mentoring, "Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called." That's saying, look, what God has put in you now on this earth, grab a hold of that. Go after it. That's not our own doing, as you know. We don't have to be perfect to do it. But man, when we take hold of what God has put in us and use it to bless others, I'm guessing "Chain Breaker" was not just a nice tune that rhymed a little bit. It was a testimony.

ZACH: It was. Honestly, I don't even feel like I wrote the song. I remember the day I wrote it. It was a Friday afternoon. I was ready to go back to Arkansas. I was still living in Arkansas. I'd been writing all week. I was still working at the church that I was leading worship. I'd already written all the songs that week that I thought I could write. I didn't have any lyrics or any ideas. And I shared my story with a guy named Jonathan Smith and a girl named Mia Phillips for about two hours. When I finished, Mia said, "You need to write a song called 'Chain Breaker.'"

And as Jonathan was playing the piano, I just said, "If you've been walking the same old road for miles and miles." And they looked at me like what did you just say? I was singing it. I was like, was that pretty good?

They were like, "Yeah! Do you got more?"

I was like, I don't know. We just kind of got out of the way. That song wrote itself in about 15 minutes that day. The vocal that ended up being on the record was from that little demo. I couldn't sing it better if I tried. I tried three or four more times when we recorded the record, and I never beat what I did the day we wrote it. It was just one of those God things where it was like—I remember driving home four hours after that and just going, God, if you will, take this song to the farthest corners of the earth and find the people that need to hear it. And he has. It's just been so cool. Humbling to see what God can do and how when you have a prayer for something, God hears that prayer and uses it the way you intended it. It is pretty unbelievable.

RANDY: So what did you tell that parent or grandparent that shows up to your shows? I know you're touring now. They're like, man, I didn't raise my kid that way. Or I didn't raise them in a Christian home. Whatever the case may be, there is somebody I'm praying for, what do you say to them to encourage them?

ZACH: I just say to keep praying and to hang on to that. That's the whole thing. God hears our prayers. I see people every night at my concerts that I know would not be sitting in that concert had it not been for a mother, a father, a grandma, or a grandpa's prayer. That one prayer that got through to them or that one prayer that changed the course or direction of their entire life.

That's it. Just standing in your faith unwavering and just believing and trusting in God for deliverance for your children or for your loved ones or for whatever you're going through in life.

RANDY: Did you ever thank your parents?

ZACH: Oh, yeah! Yeah! They're pretty proud. I thank them all the time. It is pretty unbelievable to look back where I was ten years ago and to see where I am now.

RANDY: I love the testimony. You keep telling it. You keep writing it. I love your vocals, I love your music. So there's that. That's a great bonus. If you're watching and you haven't checked out Zach's music you can go to his website and check that out, tour information is there. It is all great.

But when we talk about this idea of a *Rescue Story*, man, there are so many people in this world that need that touch from God. Just like Zach is out touching people right now with his music and his testimony and his encouragement, you have the ability to touch someone right now in a faraway place, someone that needs rescue, someone that needs a touch from God, someone that needs a touch from another believer. Watch this and I want you to see how you can be a rescue story in someone's life today.

On the mission field

Open captions

>> The crops of the fields have been destroyed. The ground is in mourning because the grain has perished. Joel 1:10a N.E.T.

Life is a big crisis. We have nothing to eat. We are waiting to die. There is no harvest from our homeland. We are praying to God for something to eat. We are waiting for your hand. Even if you cannot help today, we will wait for tomorrow.

TAMMY: I want you to know that I hear you. I hear everything you're saying. And I'm so sorry that you are going through this. I'm so sorry!

She's waiting for somebody to reach out. And if we can't come today, then she'll wait

until tomorrow. If we can't come tomorrow, then she'll wait another day. That's what the problem is. They can't wait until tomorrow. They can't wait another day. They have nothing!

Could you even imagine what that must feel like? The weight that you must feel every single day? You have nothing. The sadness, it's deep. It's really, really deep because I don't know how many tomorrows they have.

End of video

In the studio

RANDY: So many people waiting, praying. We can be the answer. We *must* be the answer. Look, when our people rolled into Ethiopia there and we saw the signs we've seen in many other places, the malnutrition, you can see it on the children, you can see it obviously on the crops that have failed.

This is a classic situation where malnourishment has already taken hold and we know what happens then—starvation, death. We need to intervene.

Through your help, we are feeding 350,000 children every day across crisis areas, primarily in Sub-Saharan, Africa, even up into eastern Africa. But in this new area, we need to do something immediately. They are waiting but they can't wait long. When we look at the Mission Feeding program and its effectiveness, we have so many things in place that we're able to respond quickly. But it is only through your action, through your support, that we can expand the work that we're doing.

The numbers break down like this. For a gift of \$30 today, you can help feed three children for the next three months. And that is only possible because of the people and the processes that we already have in place. They are waiting to go. They're just waiting on us to tell them, "Don't wait any longer. Go help these people. Here are the supplies, here are the funds that you need to mobilize immediately."

A gift of \$50 will help feed five children for the next three months. A gift of \$100, many of you can do that, that will help feed ten children. And some of you can help feed 100 children for the next three months with a gift of \$1,000. Many of you can do more. I hope that you will say that prayer, not the prayer that these mothers and grandmothers are saying of God, please help us! But God, what can I do? That is the prayer that we who have must pray so we can give to those who don't have.

Right now there are many people with these little bowls. You've seen them on TV if you've watched *Life Today* over the years. They are waiting. They are praying. They are asking God for help. We need to put the food in the bowl to put in the hands of those who desperately need it. You are the answer to their prayer. So take a moment, and say, Lord, what would you have me do? And then obey. That's all he asks of us. He wants our obedience. And our obedience turns into action. And our action turns into answered prayers for those in need.

So please, go online, go to the phone, however you prefer. Make the gift that God puts on your heart. Together, we can be that answer to their prayers and they won't have to wait any longer.

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: I do hope you're going online, going to the phone, making the best gift you can. You really can rescue someone today.

If you want Zach's book, *Rescue Story*, just request it when you make any gift towards Mission Feeding. We'd love to get that in your hands.

Man, Zach, I so appreciate you and your testimony. Keep encouraging people. If somebody is watching, is there something you want to just leave them with today?

ZACH: Yeah! I would say pray for your kids. Trust God for all things. I'm living proof that prodigals return.

RANDY: We've got a prayer line. If you want someone to pray with you right now, you dial that number, we will pray with you, we will believe with you, and we will encourage you. God is a good God and he is waiting there with open arms for all of us to come back

to him.

Thank you for being here. We'll see you again next time on *Life Today*.