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Week 20: Spring Mission Feeding

James and Betty Robison

Jennifer Greenberg

In the studio

BETTY: Welcome to *LIFE Today*! Thank you so much for joining us. I'm Betty and this is James. We have a delightful guest today with a beautiful testimony that you're going to be blessed by.

JAMES: The title of her book is *Defiant Joy*, Jennifer Michelle Greenberg. And she tells us she lives in Houston. Well, I was born in Houston. We met in Pasadena. Pasadena is a suburb of Houston. We actually got married there. I was called to preach there. So she's real close to where we were in high school in Houston, and where I was born miraculously, as a product of rape, which you can see what God can do with a child that's not expected and a doctor refused to abort. We've brought many people to Jesus and saved lots of lives. And we experience this *Defiant Joy*. I have to ask you, why do you call it *Defiant Joy*?

JENNIFER: Because this world doesn't want us to have that joy. Sometimes, we're in situations where we can't feel joy. You think of even Jesus on the cross when he cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Sometimes, we reach those depths in our lives when we just can't be happy. We can't feel peace or contentment. And yet, like Christ, we have a joy set before us and that can keep us enduring and persevering as the Holy Spirit perseveres through that.

JAMES: Do you think that when Jesus said, "Father, why have you forsaken me?" And

we know the reason. He didn't forsake him because he had failed. He forsook him because he took the sin of the world on and he had to turn from the effect of that. It was too much to look on, what that sin was doing to his only begotten son.

But many times, people feel forsaken. They feel forsaken by everything that matters. Forsaken by God. I remember when we lost our daughter, Robin, 12 Christmases ago, I made this statement. Because she just believed with all her heart she was going to be perfectly healed, and we were all believing with her, but suddenly, she was gone. I remember her face as we were watching her leave, it was like her face said, Daddy, it's not supposed to be this way.

I remember when we got the call because Betty had come home to pack to be her hospice care full-time and to move to Tulsa there with her, and we got the call, that Robin's gone. I remember I ran and I screamed. I ran down the hall. I wanted to run into the wall or through it. I remember saying to some friends, "If I didn't know God so well, I don't think I'd like God." You feel that way.

Okay. So you experienced some things that hurt you very deeply. So *Defiant Joy*. Tell me that defiant means I'm determined to have it or do I have to be defiant to overcome this one who attacks joy and tries to destroy it?

JENNIFER: Defiance of the devil. Defiance of evil people. Defiance of horrible circumstances. For me personally, I grew up in an abusive home. My father was very abusive. So I experienced child abuse and domestic violence for over two decades. At the time, I didn't understand what it was because, for a large part of that time, I was just a child. Because I grew up in it, I thought it was normal.

We were very involved in the church. My dad would sometimes teach Sunday School. So I was always told that he was a good Christian man, and so I always assumed that this is how good Christian men treated their daughters and treated their families. And so, I didn't understand—I knew something was wrong. You have this gut feeling that something is

just wrong and I never expected to make it until I was 21 because I honestly thought that either I would commit suicide or that he would kill me. I really did.

But then I got married and moved out and moved in with my husband, Jason. Suddenly, I was living with this guy who was kind and loving and cared about my ideas and my needs and wanted to know how I felt, and I'd never had that before. I started learning by contrast how wrong my father had been and that he was very much a false Christian.

I struggled a lot. I was angry at God for several years. It's funny, I never lost faith because on the one hand even though I was angry with God I was praying to him, I was talking to him. God, why did you let this happen to me? Why didn't you save my dad? Why didn't you change him into a good person? He's very smart. He's very talented. He could have been such a cool dad and a cool grandpa someday. Why didn't you take his sin away? And why didn't you fix him?

But even in any darkest times there, I just had this feeling that God was with me. That he was like, it's okay. I know you're angry but I will never leave you or forsake you. I went through a season of P.T.S.D. Which is like what soldiers get after war.

I began getting better and then we had our first daughter. She was so beautiful and so perfect. But I remember this one day looking into my newborn daughter's eyes and I felt nothing. It was like somebody had scooped happiness out of my heart. It was like the emotion had been turned off in my head. Later I realized I had postpartum depression and I ended up getting medical care for that. But in that moment, I realized that my joy could not be dependent upon this world because there are hormones in your body, there are health issues, there are situations, and there are evil people who can do their very best to take your joy away.

So I realized, that if I want to experience joy, God's joy, real joy, then my joy has to be rooted in something out of this world. And that's how I got the idea for *Defiant Joy*. And I went on this spiritual expedition to dig through the Bible and figure out well, what is the

joy of the Lord? So this book is my journey.

JAMES: So tell me about the defiant journey. Give us your—obviously, you're trying to pass on some insight and inspiration. But how would you take that defiant journey to joy?

JENNIFER: Yeah, I think part of the struggle that I went through, and part of this is growing up in an abusive home. In an abusive home, often there is a foundation of psychological and in our case spiritual abuse. They take the Word of God, like for example, the verse, "honor your father." And what that meant to me as a child was to pretend he was honorable no matter what he did.

So part of my journey has been peeling back those layers and unraveling the false doctrines. One of the verses that people would often tell me when I would tell them I'm depressed or I'm struggling with anxiety, they would say, well, the joy of the Lord is your strength. It sounds good and this is in the Bible so you know it is true in some context or another. But then I was like but does God want me to be happy when I'm being abused? Isn't it true that he would want me to get out of that situation? The reason we have fear when we're being threatened is because it is our body going hey! You need to get out of this situation, and God gives us those instincts.

So I was like okay, what does that verse really mean? So come to find out, I dug back into Nehemiah. And Nehemiah is talking to the people of God who are in exile. But the specific reason they were crying in that verse was because they were repenting of their sins. They were so moved and so overwhelmed by the profundity of their guilt and their sin. And Nehemiah and the priests tell them, don't cry. Don't cry because the joy of the Lord is your strength. God gave you the strength to weep, and now it is the joy of the Lord to forgive you. And so because they're forgiven, he says, don't cry anymore.

So when I realized that I was like, this isn't a guilt trip. This isn't God telling me to stop crying, you're supposed to be a happy Christian. It was God saying, don't cry, I've got you. And when you understand that it completely flips the meaning.

Same with the verse in John where John says, "Count it all joy in your sorrows and your struggling." I used to wonder well, why would I count it joy when I've got a flat tire? Or when my dad disappoints me again? I think what it means is to count on joy because when we struggle, we are walking in the very footsteps of Jesus. When Jesus walked to Gethsemane, but obviously to the cross, he was living his life in honor of God. He was going to sacrifice himself for the sins of us all. When we suffer, we can count it all joy knowing that God has joy stored up for us in heaven. That's what it means in Hebrews when it says, "For the joy set before him, Jesus endured the cross." And for the joy set before us, either in the next season of our life or in heaven, we can know that God has joy. We can count on joy being for us and that he has good things planned for us.

BETTY: There is such a difference between being happy and having joy—the joy of the Lord. Happiness comes and goes. But God's joy can be consistent in our lives when those times are troubling. And that's when we need that joy the most. We lean on that joy, just like you said, we trust that joy that God has put in our hearts. We can't always explain it but we know it is there.

JENNIFER: You know what's interesting about God's joy is, it can coincide with sorrow. We are not a people who grieve without hope. It is not in—we don't deny the grief, we don't deny the suffering, but in defiance of the suffering and the hardship and the fears.

BETTY: We choose to have joy.

JENNIFER: Yes! Yes! And God gives us so much joy and he is our joy.

JAMES: What happened that you talked about in the last chapter of the book? What led to what you shared?

JENNIFER: So it was actually—it was a hardship but it turned out to be something of a

blessing. As I was writing the book, I realized that I was writing mostly from memory. I had a lot of hardship in my background but it was mostly stuff that I'd recovered from. And then shortly before Thanksgiving, when we were wrapping up the editing on the book, my husband, the company restructured and his whole department got laid off. I realized you know what? This is an opportunity for me to edit this book from the trenches; to look at it from the perspective of someone who is currently going through a lot of uncertainty, instability, and fear. What ended up happening was that the company realized that my husband was a great asset and they had room for an engineer in another department. So they moved him into that other department. And so it was unstable and scary for a while, but it was just a little roller coaster dip that we needed, I guess.

[Laughing]

JAMES: You know one of the things I've come to realize because I have preached on the joy of the Lord being our strength in many different settings, but what I've come to realize and I can see it as the Lord spoke it through you, he has a joy over the progress and the journey as you progress to where, in spite of all the pain and the mistreatment, you reached a peace level and a joy level and then you talk about the shock and your husband and then boom, all of the sudden despite this slide suddenly launches.

But here's something I've seen. The joy of the Lord is what he's made very clear to me. I've been so overwhelmed by his love in allowing it to flow freely through me like a river all over the world watching what that love does and seeing my desire for his will to be done through his family on his earth for his glory and his kingdom purpose. And as I've had that total commitment to the Lord, I have seen the smile on his face. And when I realize that he's looking down and he's smiling at what he sees in me, gives him joy. And the fact that I'm giving him joy gives me strength to know that I'm pleasing him. He said, "This is my son in whom I'm well pleased." He is able to say of me, "This is my son in whom I'm well pleased."

Does that make sense? Don't you think that just absolutely—he gets overwhelmed with joy when he sees the journey and us making progress on it?

JENNIFER: Well, it's like he rejoices over us. We read that again and again in the scripture. Even the wayward son, when he returns home in the parable, the father is just rejoicing to have him come home.

One thing I talk about in the book is the parable when Jesus—or I guess he's a shepherd in the parable who seeks out the lost lamb. I've taken so much comfort from that parable. One thing that I've noticed is that it doesn't talk about why the lamb wandered. It never tells us. You always assume, at least I did when I was a kid, that this was a naughty lamb and it busted out of the fence and it went off to play or something like that. It was like no, it doesn't say that. Maybe the lamb—maybe the grass was greener on the other side and he did wander off. Maybe he just got confused and he got split up from the flock. Maybe there was a wolf in the pasture. Or maybe another one of the sheep bites. You know? But he never tells us why.

I think that's so comforting, especially since I do a lot of advocacy work for victims of abuse and children in the church. Sometimes, victims of abuse wander. They wander away from the church because they're scared or they're hurt. And maybe people in the church just don't handle the situation well. I think a lot of times that's the case. But we have a good shepherd who seeks out those lost lambs no matter why they've wandered. And that gives me so much hope, and joy in my ministry work. Because I talk to survivors who say, I don't think I can ever go back to church. I'm like, you know, you have a savior who is going to bring you back, and it is going to be okay. So take this time to recover. Take this time to pray and get close to God again. He will bring you back and it will be okay.

JAMES: Thank you, Jennifer. Why don't you let Jennifer help you experience the joy that is unspeakable and full of his glory that is that abiding joy and that joy within?

Jennifer, we've enjoyed putting God's arms around the overlooked. Jesus called them "the least of these." You, our viewers, you're the most amazing people. I want you to look at

something that we just found. We found one of the most challenging situations we've ever faced. We know that the love of God is the only hope. He expresses that love through yielded vessels like us.

I want you to look in on a scene that I pray captures your heart and you immediately share his heart and his love because you can be the miracle, the only hope for this situation you're going to see. Look prayerfully. Watch prayerfully.

On the mission field

[Music]

Open Captions

My heart pounds, my strength fails me: Even the light has gone from my eyes.

Psalm 38:10 N.I.V.

TAMMY: We talk a lot about the children. As I'm traveling, I spend a lot of time with the children. I see their need, especially the little ones under five that are so vulnerable. And sometimes, the elderly in these communities can be overlooked because we're focused so much on the children.

Today was a different day for me when I've come to this village. Yes, I see the children. Yes, my heart is wrapped around those kids but I'm sitting with this elder of the community, 80 years old, and I think about my own parents. They should be thriving. They should be in a season in their life where they are not struggling, where they're looking around and seeing people prospering, living, laughing; and all he does is cry, feel the weight of the burden, and he can't do anything about it.

Even as a father or a grandfather, he can't change it because his hands are tied. There is no water, there are no crops, there is no food, there is nothing. They have very little to survive on and they're barely making that happen.

I have no doubt he is struggling and carrying so much weight every single day. We could do something to help lift that from this community. We could do it today. We could do it together.

End of video

In the studio

JAMES: I just—Betty, I find myself wanting to lay down and weep. Please, God!

Now listen to me. We just found these people. Ethiopia was in between some of the areas we're working on. It is a very large country. They said there are 190,000 in this area right here that basically face death. We're committed to feeding 350,000. I'm thinking, Betty when I saw the missionaries bring this back, and Tammy and Isak Pretorius went in and saw this horrible crisis that's occurring, I said, God, we need to jump at 100,000. They're burying those kids in a pit; they're dying so fast. God, if you would just give us a miracle response today, we could go put your arms around thousands of them and give them life. Don't let the love of God—how better can you express it than to rescue the perishing, care for the dying, snatch them from sin and the grave? It is God's love that does that. And we express his love by meeting needs.

Jesus said if we just give a cup of water, it's bigger than you can describe. Betty, I'm praying for a miracle that absolutely takes our breath. That every single person watching would say you know what? I can feed three. I can feed five. I've got \$30. I've got \$50. I can feed ten, I've got \$100. Some of you could give thousands of dollars.

We have gifts to bless you. You're going to love what we're offering you because we come every day to share the life of God and the love of God, and you help us. But we try to put something in your heart with our guests and the message of love and life, and we reach out and put God's arms of love around you every day. But right now, you can put God's arms around people that are dying. They're going to see the love of God

demonstrated. And then we're going to share that love in Christ—and they'll come to Christ. But we will save their lives and give them lives. I believe everybody watching is going to do something.

BETTY: I do too. I'm just counting on you. God is counting on you to step in and do your part. Let's help feed these precious little ones that don't have a chance if someone doesn't help them. So join with us, please. Maybe you've done it before, or maybe it is the first time for you, you will be so blessed. Thank you!

JAMES: You heard Tammy talking about the older person. You know, we're the older people. It's nice to know you'd be cared for if you couldn't get around like Betty and I can. We believe you would.

Father, please pour your love out through the viewers today, your divine love, in Jesus' name.

Would you please make the gift God puts on your heart? Would you go online, take your bank card, use it like a check, or dial that number and make the biggest gift you can because you are giving life, the greatest gift? Please do it 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

On the mission field

TAMMY: Would you also take a minute to pray for these people who need to know God's provision, who need to know that God is still a good God, that God still sees them in their need? And then would you ask God, is there something I can do, Father, to be a part of this?

Please, just go online, and make a call. I'm going to say it again, just give the very best gift you can give—whatever that looks like. No gift is too small. No gift is certainly too big. Whatever you can give. When we all come together and we give whatever we can give, it will save the lives of these children one child at a time.

In the studio

JAMES: Well, you see the beautiful gifts that we have for you to bless you. Our guests are normally a beautiful gift. Knowing that you're becoming the miracle someone needs is inspirational and encouraging.

If you'd like to have Jennifer's book, *Defiant Joy*, you just simply make any gift to help us give those children and their families a chance at life. If you ask for it, we'll gladly send it to you.

Jennifer, we'll be praying for you, your family, all the ministry you have, and everything you're doing. I know you will be us too.

JENNIFER: I will!

JAMES: Thank you so much for joining us as his family to put his arms around the world he gave his son to redeem. That's what we're doing, and we do it together because of you.