

6/10/24

Week 24: Spring Mission Feeding, last week

Randy Robison and Tammy Trent

Scott and Vanessa Martindale

In the studio

RANDY: Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm Randy Robison. Tammy is with me. Tammy, you know I'm adopted. My parents always did a wonderful job explaining not just the legal thing of adoption but the spiritual components behind adoption; of God creating these connections that may not be earthly but spiritually, they're heavenly. We see a lot of these. We see them in the church but we don't always handle it well.

TAMMY: No, we don't. I think there are many people who have a long list of struggles and hard things that they've had to carry, feeling misunderstood, overlooked, or not enough. A lot. So today is going to be a good day.

RANDY: It is going to be interesting because there is this tension around divorce in the church and I get it. We value marriage. It is holy. It is very important. But then there are situations where there are divorces and then there are families that come together. That's where you get into this spiritual connection of adoption and what we call "blended families" in today's vernacular.

For a lot of you, if you were in that situation and you have felt isolated from the church or maybe condemned by Christ, even though scripture tells us Christ didn't come into the world to condemn the world, there is no condemnation in Christ, we want to give you some encouragement today. If you know something like that, we want to help you handle that situation in the way that God would have us come together and be that adopted family, one in Christ.

And to do that, we welcome Scott and Vanessa Martindale to *Life Today*. I do want to mention your book, it is called *Blended and Redeemed*. I love those two words because when we start blending sometimes, people are like, I'm not sure. But you're saying God redeems that situation. He can be in that situation; yes?

SCOTT: Absolutely he can.

RANDY: Tell us a little bit of your background so people will understand what you've walked through.

SCOTT: Well, thanks for having us. It is a pleasure to be here. So we've been married for almost 11 years. She reminded me right before we got here so I wouldn't forget. Not too much to this story other than I was 36 years old when we got introduced and Vanessa had been married before for a very short time. When I met her, she was a single mom of a great boy. We met, fell in love, and said hey, let's move forward in our life together.

As soon as we got married, nine months later had our first son, second son, 14 months later had a third son, 16 months later had our fourth son, and then we finally figured out what was causing it, went to the doctor, and got that fixed.

We've just begun a life of living in a blended family, which has got its challenges. We've gone through storms, we've gone through seasons of extreme difficulty, litigation, all these different things that blended families, they just kind of expect and they kind of know they're going to go through those. We've had our great days, we had our really hard days but together, through the grace of God and through focusing on him and focusing on our marriage, we have thrived through those seasons as well. And we continue to go through them.

And so now, fast-forward, and I get to hang out with this pretty lady all the time and raise our sons and it is a wonderful, wonderful thing—and do ministry together.

VANESSA: We also grew up in blended families. So I grew up in a blended family. My mom had been married and divorced twice. Her third marriage is to my stepdad. I don't know my biological father but my stepdad is who raised me. They've been married now for over 30 years.

And then Scott also grew up in a blended family. So his dad had previously been married, divorced, and had children. His mom had been married, divorced, and had a child. And then he was what you call the "ours" child. So they came together and had him.

So we both come from blended family backgrounds; and have lived it our entire lives. But it's been a journey and we just love that we get to partner with the Lord in helping families just like ours overcome the struggles and the things that come with that. There are lows and highs that come with being in a blended family but it's—we love what we get to do. It is just an incredible opportunity.

TAMMY: Did you find from the very beginning that you had full support walking in the church? Like we're blended! I'm divorced. And here we are. Or have you ever gone through a time, which I think many people have, feeling disqualified?

VANESSA: Oh absolutely.

TAMMY: There is shame. I've seen that even in my own life within my family. My mom was divorced as well, ten years. Went to church and became the director of women's ministry. But it was you can't sit on the platform. You can't sit in the front row. You can't do these things (whispering) because you're divorced.

It was hard for me to watch my mom go through that. She handled it so well but I didn't like that as a kid; having to watch that thinking, there is something wrong here, evidently. She will never measure up. She is disqualified. She is not going to be enough. Do you think people are still struggling with that kind of feeling today?

VANESSA: Absolutely. I know for us, when we went through our litigation season, I reached out to the local church looking for biblically based resources for stepfamilies and there wasn't anything. I remember one day driving in the car; I was driving home and I remember just being righteously angry with the Lord. Just asked him what this season was for. We had just come out of our litigation. We were about to start mediation. What was this for?

And for so long I'd been asking the wrong question, I was asking why. I started asking what. In that moment he asked me, would you help me build blended kingdom families? It was this invitation. The first thing I said was God, I'm not qualified to do this. He said, Vanessa, I call the qualified. He said the very thing that man says disqualifies you, I will use to qualify you in front of men for you be able to help these families. I was like—just to hear that was like, oh, my gosh, Lord. Thank you.

After we started the ministry, Scott and I did something called, "The Blended Kingdom Project" which is how we created this resource, the book, *Blended and Redeemed*. When we reached out to these families, we spoke to about 60 families from all over the world, from the U.K., South Africa, Australia, Canada, and all over the U.S., and we asked them is your church equipping you? What resources do you need? All these things.

So many people—there weren't—the church wasn't equipping. No one had resources. Just like us, we had reached out to the church and there wasn't anything. So we kept seeing this theme over and over and over. The stories that we heard about people feeling disqualified, unworthy, their churches kicking them out. Scott grew up in a church where that's what happened. So we knew that after hearing all these stories that okay, Lord, the Lord was asking us to partner with him in creating a ministry that helps these families through this.

So yeah, we still hear it today, that a lot of people do feel that but our heart and hope is that the church, the church is the place that people run to and not away from despite our brokenness and the things we've gone through. We've all sinned. We've all fallen short.

But it tells us in First John that when we repent, we are cleansed of all of our unrighteousness. And so that is our heart. We want to partner with churches all across America, and we do, to have these classes and these resources for blended families to be able to be supported and equipped and have community, and have accountability, and to be able to walk through in those seasons.

RANDY: Can we hit some of the big ones for people out there? Because I know scripture is sometimes misinterpreted, sometimes misapplied, oftentimes not taken in context or totality. What are some of the sort of theological church positions that get thrown at people that you think are not right or damaging?

SCOTT: That's a great question and I'm not a theologian and—

RANDY: But you've been on the receiving end of these.

SCOTT: Here's what I would say, and Vanessa and I probably have different ideas on this. Not different from opposing, but there are a lot of things that we think. Here's my position on it. I understand that divorce is caused by sin. I get that. And it is not always the person who is divorced who did sin. We see factors of abuse, we see factors of abandonment, neglect, substance abuse, and people completely walking away from their faith. We know that sin causes divorce and God hates divorce. He doesn't want people to hurt. He doesn't want his people to hurt.

The first thing he created here was marriage. He puts marriage on such a high place with the people he loves and he hates when that gets separated. Because it hurts not only those people, it hurts children. We see generational divorces. The curse of generational divorce is so real and it is so prominent.

So now you fast-forward and you say, okay. We asked one of our good friends, Pastor Jimmy Evans this exact thing because we struggled with this. Like how do we talk about this? The question we asked was hey, can God bless a blended family? His answer was

really interesting to us. He said he can. It doesn't mean that he will. Because there are things that we must do as people when we've sinned that cleanse us. That is seeking forgiveness. That is admitting that hey, if you messed up and this is what's happened, seeking forgiveness, seeking redemption in those situations.

I think that's the greatest thing about the ministry is we don't just walk in and say, hey, whatever is going on we're just going to walk right with you. It is like hey, there is a process by which if you want to have a blessed marriage—and this is another thing that Pastor Evans says to me, "I don't care if it is your first or your 20th marriage, if you do it God's way it is going to be the greatest marriage you've ever experienced. Because there is one way to do it and it is God's way."

So our encouragement to the church is, number one like Vanessa said, to be the place people run to. And be that place that can have resources for them. I just know this. I've been in churches where we have stood to our feet and we have clapped at the victories of prison ministry. We've clapped at redemption in criminals and those behind bars. I've seen an entire congregation come to their feet and say, God is doing something amazing.

I would say the same thing when a couple walks into the church. And instead of walking and sitting in the back pew, where they won't get noticed, where they won't have to tell a story, they walk to the front and they say generational divorce stops here. My kids will not experience that because I've experienced divorce and I have decided to seek forgiveness, seek redemption. And my marriage is going to be honoring to God. And my kids are going to see a healthy version of marriage. And their future is not going to be decided by what sins happened in the past.

TAMMY: Amen. And why do we pick and choose what gets to be redeemed and what gets to be restored? We pick and choose that in the church. Why do we do that?

SCOTT: I think it is something that people think is safe. It is the way that people have looked at culture. You know, divorce, if you look back, to the last generation that's still

here. In the oldest generation that's here, divorce wasn't very prominent. This was something that just didn't happen as much. We've seen a rapid increase in the fatherless household. We've seen the rapid destruction of the family. We've seen second-marriage divorce rates hit 70 percent plus. You don't attack a statistic like that without the backing of the church. And say, let's go do something about this and stop generational divorce. We can't do that by ignoring the people who are hurting.

RANDY: Vanessa, did you—you went through a divorce.

VANESSA: Yes.

RANDY: Did you feel shame either from the church or just from your situation? Was that one of the major barriers maybe that held you back in your life?

VANESSA: So I very much felt like the black sheep in my family. My stepdad, who I call my dad, was a Sunday School teacher. My grandfather was a Southern Baptist preacher. My uncle was a Southern Baptist preacher. So I was the one in the family that it didn't work; divorced and I just did it all wrong, so to speak. Had a very colorful background. I had that self-shame.

I saw my mom—my mom raised me as a single mom for most of my life up until the age of 12 years old when my mom and stepdad got married. I remember looking at her and I remember the struggle. I remember thinking, that's not going to be me. I'm not going to be a single mom. I always wanted to be a mom. I always wanted to be a wife. It was just a desire of mine. So I fought so hard for it to not be that, and then one day it was that. That was really hard. That was a really hard pill to swallow, so to speak.

Then I had to share that with my family, my grandfather who had married me. Then walk out this six years of being a single mom and the struggles that came along with that. Getting back in the church after falling out and recommitting my life to Christ and reestablishing that relationship and going through freedom and healing and all of that.

And doing the work to get to the place of just being whole and being free in the Lord.

So yeah, luckily for me, the church I went to had very open arms for where I was at. They had a program for single parents. They didn't have anything for blended families but they did have something for single parents. We sought pastoral counseling at the church so they knew my situation. They were very welcoming to me and my son in our situation. I'm so thankful for that because it really changed the trajectory of my life and my son's life as I was in the process of then receiving a husband in the future. My pastor—I didn't want to get married again. I wanted to be a single mom. I had a pastor approach me that said, "I've been praying for you. And I just felt like I needed to tell you to start praying for your future husband. And to start for your ex-husband." I was like—

TAMMY: Come again?

VANESSA: Yeah. I said, "I don't want to do either." But I was obedient and I started praying for both of them. It changed my heart and how I viewed my former spouse. And then it also opened my heart to receiving my husband, which then all the blessings that have come with that with our three sons that we had together and everything that we have now.

So it's been a beautiful process but a lot of shame and blame. The enemy loves to attack us in that area.

TAMMY: Absolutely. There is a lot you've had to work through. I think, Vanessa, that there are probably people watching right now that either you've gone through that or you have someone in your life, maybe a child or a grandchild that is walking through that, and you don't know how to encourage them. I believe this book will help people with that.

How would you encourage somebody? Just a quick speak into somebody's life. Because I don't know what it is like to be divorced but there might be watching today that knows what it feels like and doesn't know how to come out and find hope even in that. Is it

possible for God to redeem their circumstances?

VANESSA: Absolutely! I think when you're in those wilderness seasons, and our first chapter is "Refined by Fire." There is a refining that the Lord will do in our hearts. It is pulling all those impurities and things out and the things that we've experienced to get us into a place of pureness and wholeness. I would say don't fight against that. Walk into that and embrace it.

I think blended families are a beautiful example of God's redemption. If you think about a mosaic and how it's these broken fragments and pieces that are then put together. God can form something so beautiful out of those broken things. It is not because of our brokenness it is in spite of it. He can create something so beautiful with the things of our past and the things that are broken and that have fallen apart and make something whole and beautiful if we surrender and allow him to do that. I think it is just taking a posture of full submission because that is the safest place that we can be.

TAMMY: Yes, God can form something beautiful with the pieces of our lives. That is such a great word today because some people give up on that. Like there is never going to be anything beautiful about the brokenness of my life. That is a lie from the accuser. There is something that God has today for your life that is so beyond beautiful. It is enough because of who he is in your life.

There are some people right now, I want to show you a story about their lives where they have a lot of broken pieces in their lives. We get to be part of picking up some of those pieces today and helping to bring hope into their lives. Watch this.

On the mission field

ANNOUNCER: At *LIFE Outreach* we rejoice in the solutions that address critical needs around the world.

JAMES: You can be here for a moment and you'll see five children go by, some of them with these new shirts we gave them. See for \$30, \$50, or \$100 we can feed three, five, or ten children.

ANNOUNCER: And when the solutions are this good, it is tempting to overlook the problem they purport to solve.

Open captions

>> Malnutrition has immediate causes and it has underlying causes. One of the underlying causes may be no access to food. And also malnutrition is intergenerational. So if the mother is malnourished, the possibility of the kid to be malnourished is more high.

ANNOUNCER: Right now, Ethiopia is in the midst of a tragic crisis and the children do not have enough food.

TAMMY: I've gone into a couple of hospitals in the past with *LIFE Outreach* and I've been around malnourished children but I've never come into a clinic like this today. I struggle to find those words, strong enough that you would believe me if I told you that children are dying right now. Right now, this very second, behind me they are dying.

If you're in a position today to give to this outreach Mission Feeding, will you please do it? They need a miracle today.

End of video

In the studio

TAMMY: I wish I could tell you that that baby survived. I wish that I could tell you that all those children survived. But I don't know. I don't know today. I know that the situation was dire. I know it was urgent. I know it was critical. I can tell you today that it is the

same; that they are still struggling. They are still fighting for life with every breath they take.

They are searching for food. They're searching for opportunities. They are in desperate need. I know what I can tell you today is that we *might* be the only miracle with our hands and feet at this moment to do something. God has placed us in this moment today to do something, to bring them relief, to bring them hope, to bring them life.

Is that you today? Is God asking you to step in? Have you stepped in before but he's asking you again to step in today? If God is speaking to you right now, please don't wait another moment. Please don't hesitate. Please pick up the phone. Call us today. Let us know if you can step in with us. That you can help us be that miracle today. Randy, we have to do it.

RANDY: I love what you talk about, the hands. If you look in scripture when Jesus performed so many of the miracles, it will say things like "he stretched out his hand" or "he raised his hands." Jesus's hands were that touch point for that miracle. As you said in that piece, they need a miracle. And scripture says we are his hands and his feet.

I walked into a place where children had died that day and the mothers were out back wailing and weeping. They need that miracle. They need Jesus' hands. And Jesus says we are his hands and his feet. It is you. You wonder what the solution is, it is you. It is us. It is our mission partners in the field every day feeding 350,000 children. We move to where the need is.

We're ending this campaign. This is the last week we'll be on the air with this Mission Feeding campaign but we're going to keep feeding because the need is there. Will you join us? Will you be Jesus' hands? \$30, \$50, and \$100 feeding three, five, ten children for the next three months. \$1,000, many of you—many of you more than that, 100 children. It is not as much about the dollar amount. It is about stretching out that hand, raising up that hand. If you've got nothing in your hands, you can pray and we covet your prayers as

well.

We can come together. We can show people the love of Christ. Go to the phone, go online right now. Make the gift that God puts on your heart. We can be their miracle.

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." This is the last week! Please call, write, or make your gift online.

End of video

In the studio

RANDY: I do hope you'll go online or go to the phone. Make the best you can. We can make a difference. We will be doing this always. Every day, we're feeding children. But this is the last week of this campaign and we need to let our mission partners know, yes, we can continue. So please join us in that.

It is all about that encouragement, the giving life to people. Scott, I know some people, they're struggling with this still but there is hope.

SCOTT: It is such a beautiful thing to have that. I know there are people watching that you feel hopeless. You don't know what the story is right now. So let me encourage you in two things: one, your story isn't finished. God is still writing. He is still redeeming you. He is still purifying. He is still preparing something absolutely amazing for you and your family. I just want to encourage you through our verse of the ministry, Luke 1:37, "Nothing is impossible with God." And that is 100% point on to your story—nothing is impossible.

TAMMY: Seal that with a yes and an amen, you guys! Hallelujah for your walk, for your blended family that's been redeemed. It is possible for your life. We believe it for you too. There is hope.

God bless you. Thanks for watching and we'll see you next time. Bye-bye!

JAMES: This is the last week. This is Mission Feeding. Lives depend upon it. That is not an exaggeration. Eternity will be changed for all those we get food to because we're going to give them the bread of life—not just food for life but life in Christ. Please, this last week, make the largest gift you can and know that it is going to change everything for someone, many people even, in very hard-hit parts of this world. Thank you so much.