

11/7/24

**Week 45: Fall Mission Feeding**

**Tammy Trent**

**Mattie Jackson Smith**

**IN THE STUDIO**

**TAMMY:** Hello, everybody! Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm Tammy Trent and I'm so glad you're here with us today. I think you're going to be blessed and love today's show. Our guest is a best-selling author, speaker, and podcaster who has walked through some of life's darkest valleys and has come out on the other side with a message of hope and healing.

Mattie Jackson Smith knows the depths of grief. We're going to talk to her about that and her journey today, along with her new 365-day devotional *Through the Valley of Grief*. Welcome Mattie. I'm so glad you're here!

**MATTIE:** Tammy, I'm so glad to be here. I look up to you so much and obviously, I love being on the show. So I'm so glad to be back.

**TAMMY:** You are so sweet. We met in January of 2018. So we met at a restaurant that you had at the time. You just happened to be there. I remember you walking out and we chatted. I can't remember if I told a little bit of my story. But I heard a little bit about your work with widows at the time. It was just such an amazing connection.

Who would have known? Who would have known at that time in January of 2018 that a short time later your life would be forever changed? So I'm going to start there. Like, let's go back. For people that don't know your story, let's go back to touch on that and how that has shaped -- those experiences of your life have shaped who you are and what God is doing in your life today.

**MATTIE:** Yeah, yeah! I got kind of chills when you were talking about us meeting then because

that truly, in all ways, feels like a different lifetime to me. I had my restaurant in Nashville. I'd been in hospitality all in my 20s and I had just married the love of my life; this vibrant, wonderful, joyful man, Ben. We had married the previous Fall in Nashville at my parent's home. I was just living this life; kind of cruising my first entrepreneurial endeavor and newly wed. So I felt like this is it! Like this is the answer to all the prayers and God is good.

It happened that in June of that year, I ended up closing the restaurant for personal and professional reasons. I've always had this tug in my heart to write. Throughout the course of having that restaurant, I also felt this pull to minister to women, especially young women that have worked for me and whatnot. And so I felt that call.

I didn't know that God's call was higher, and to be honest, much harder than I would have ever anticipated. So I closed the restaurant in June of '18, and then that September I lost my husband, Ben, very suddenly in a tragic sort of boating incident in Florida. It led to his 12 days in the I.C.U. and multiple brain surgeries, and a medically induced coma; and just trauma truly from an accident that you never anticipate getting to that level. He passed away three weeks before our first wedding anniversary that year. That was six years ago now, which again feels like a lifetime. What I have walked through and where God has brought me, I feel like it is a message he is still teaching me. It is unbelievable. You know that kind of loss and how it reorients every aspect of your life.

So these past years, I've had the gift of seeing God use that desire in me to minister and to write. And also, to use the worst thing that's ever happened to me to bring hope to other people. What a gift to me to witness that over and over again. So I'm grateful to y'all to continue to help me share, honestly.

**TAMMY:** So I want to ask you, when I heard about your story, and I've gone back and revisited it, especially as a widow myself, you held out in that hospital room for a miracle. You prayed and believed for a miracle. So what do we do when our miracle story doesn't happen?

**MATTIE:** Yes, that is a thing that took years of fighting, I'll use that word because that's what it

was, with God, about it. I write in the devotional, and I've spoken about it many times, we stood on that miracle. I, in my heart, knew this is -- the stage is set for you, God. The table is set for you, God. Like we've paused and prayed over every nurse, every surgeon. We've been to the cold hospital floor. We've teed you up for the miracle. Like this is going to be for your glory.

And when it is not, it caused me not to doubt in a way of walking away but to doubt in really like let's look under the microscope of these truths that I've always just taken at face value my whole life. I'll never forget sitting in my pastor's office at the time, and it was about a month after Ben passed, and asking him that question. Why do we pray for healing? Because I did and I will never forget, obviously. He referred me back to Jesus. He is our model for everything in the Garden of Gethsemane. He said, "You know that was Jesus's battle too. He said, 'I want a plan B. But if not, God, your will not mine.'"

That doesn't make you feel better in that moment when your miracle answer is no, but I think it taught me something about prayer that changed my life in the way that I relate to God. I remember a friend later asking me, "Do you pray for healing when people ask you?" I said, "To be honest, for a while I didn't." Because I didn't know that it mattered. Was the outcome already set? And then I realized, that when we go to God knowing he can answer yes and knowing he can answer no, we are first of all being obedient to worship him when the outcome may or may not be what we want it to be. And B, he is drawing you closer to who he is and separating that from what he does. And that was a hard lesson for me. To be like if God doesn't do what you want, will you still love him for who he is to you? And that's a big call.

That was a big call for me to write this book which is so just drenched in scripture and the gospel. I'll tell you, I just did the audiobook and I was going back through and I was like, girl, you were not light on the gospel. Like I'm glad. I was like we did not sugarcoat this. But my big lesson was when God's hand doesn't feel good in your life, where do you go to learn that his heart is still good? And it is in his word. So that's what sustained me and that's what brought me back to prayer is just as much about drawing near to God as it is about getting the outcome you want. Because sometimes you do, and sometimes you don't. That's tragic. It is!

**TAMMY:** Totally. I think that's what I love, Mattie about your devotional too because it is drenched in the Word of God. So many times it is easy for us especially when we're going through something. I mean grief looks like a lot of things, whether it is loss that we've gone through, divorce, the death of a dream, a ministry that didn't take off, or a friendship that failed. I mean loss is loss and it feels deep in the heart, and lonely and painful.

And if we are constantly in a place where we are saying, well, I say this about the situation or I feel this about it. Well, what does God say? And if we don't know the word, then we don't know what God is saying to our loneliness, to the feeling of isolation, to the feeling of loss, to the feeling of I'm not worthy, I'm not good enough, I'm not smart enough, I'm without. And if we don't know the Word of God then we will stay in that rather than what does God say? I can't do this. Well, with all things it is possible. I've not given you a spirit of fear. There are so many promises from God.

What I love about *Through the Valley of Grief*, there is so much. And it was good for me. Mattie, 23 years later in my own loss, there was so much in this book, probably every day there was something where I thought, wow! I needed this today. I thought I handled something right and I didn't and I needed this truth from God's word. I loved that.

But you know what? There are a lot of people that are probably watching today that feel like their whole future has been erased because of the path that's been chosen for them or that they're on, that they're taking. What would you say to somebody that feels like that? Because in the season they're in like their whole future is erased. It is done. This is all it will ever be.

**MATTIE:** I would say first of all, I've written and spoken those exact words over and over that my future looked like it was erased. Because for all intents and purposes, a lot of it was, right? That I had dreamed and planned, so I get it. And that is a very hopeless and helpless feeling and it is very disorienting from every direction. So you're not alone in it.

The next thing I would say is to be in God's Word. He says in Isaiah that he makes streams in the desert and he makes ways where there are no ways. That's what he does. He is a God who

makes everything new. And you are the pinnacle of what he creates so he's creating something new and beautiful. I know it is horrible when you can't see it and I know that it is scary when you can't see it. I hope that you can see hope in my life when you can't see hope in yours because Tammy, that's what I had. We were just talking about backstage. I had widows who lost husbands in their 30s who were then in their 50s who walked with me. And I saw their life full of joy, remarried, with children, thriving, ministering. And when none of that seemed possible for me, I could see it in them and they could speak it to me. They would speak God's truth back to me. When you go back to his word you see him make new things out of broken things, and you see him restore.

What you can't picture God has already written. I know that may sound trite but like dream big with him. Imagine the beauty. Imagine the restoration because he'll do it in his way. Stick around to see what it is because his way is awesome eventually.

**TAMMY:** Yes. I love that you said his way. So we have to be careful, even for me, I remember a lot of people thought for me, the redemption story, the resolve would be that I would find love again. Then she'll be whole, then she'll be healed. But I think that looks like -- look our stories are parallel but your story is different than mine right now. But I am healed, Mattie. You are healed, and that story looks a little bit different. So we have to be careful not to say, it needs to look exactly like this or then God's not in it. God is in the business of restoration, whatever that looks like for Mattie, whatever that looks like for Tammy, whatever that looks like for you. It might look different and you have to be willing to open up to surrender to God's way, and trust God's will for your life. So can pain and joy coexist?

**MATTIE:** This is one of my favorite topics honestly, now, to speak about to people and conversations to have. Because for all intents and purposes, he wired me as a pretty joyful person. I'm grateful for that. I'm just a glass half full almost to a fault. So when I lost Ben, those were very foreign feelings to me. Like just feelings of despair, feelings of darkness. That was just not something I had ever traversed. And so for me, one of the biggest lessons was you don't have to come out of that to experience joy again. Because in this type of loss, you don't come out of it, you just keep moving forward and healing forward.

But you don't have to be in your better place or your new normal to experience joy. I think that was a lesson the Lord taught me early in my grief. Not because of me but really because of Ben. I write about him often. Just like I said earlier, he was the most abundant man I have ever experienced. And so in a way, it was God saying carry on Ben's legacy. Don't miss these joys. Celebrate the things he would celebrate. In that way, he taught me how to do that. He taught me how to keep my eyes open for small goodnesses. And really, I think we overuse the word *gratitude* now. But can you really overuse the word *gratitude*? Like to pause and thank him. To pause and worship him when I didn't feel like worshipping. I think keeping my eyes open and my heart open, and literally praying, Tammy, like God give me a little joy, a tiny joy today, and let me see it. That accrues and that adds up, and then you learn to look for those things the moment after you fall on the floor weeping. And both are true. They just are. It is miraculous!

**TAMMY:** So let's talk about grace now. And where God has brought you now to this day and the beautiful story that he's continued to write for your life.

**MATTIE:** Yeah. So I appreciate what you said earlier about redemption and restoration not looking cookie cutter. You didn't use those words but it is not cookie cutter. There was a part of me that before I met my now husband Connor, and before we remarried last year, praise God, and before we had our baby boy three months ago, just unbelievable the direct answer to these prayers that I prayed tearfully for years and years and years. I just tell people, remember, the first redemption was me like you just said. There was a point where I could sit with myself and I could sit with the Lord and I could sit with my very best friends where I don't sugarcoat things and say, like, if this isn't it if God healing me and him giving me this beautiful love story that only lasted three years, one year in marriage, then that's enough. Then he is enough and I will live my life as best I can, and some days I do it great, and some days I don't, as if everything else is a cherry on top. I really feel like when you get to the depths through the valley with the Lord, he teaches you in a way that he doesn't teach you anywhere else, I am enough and everything else is a bonus. And like Connor and my baby boy are the biggest bonus I've ever experienced. And my joy for that is even deeper than it's ever been because of what I've gone through. But if God didn't take me to the God-you-and-me-are-enough place, I would be right back where I was

which is just taking it for granted or thinking it is what is going to complete me. Or thinking being a wife again is my identity when it is just the cherry on top of the identity that God already gave me.

And that is a life-changing lesson to learn at 28, 30, 34 years old. Not to my credit. It's to God's credit.

**TAMMY:** Amen for that. Let's talk about *Through the Valley of Grief*. What do you hope for this devotional and how did it even come about?

**MATTIE:** Well, it came about because I wrote those entries to myself. When I was grieving in the first year, long story short, my mom's best friend gave me a similar book but it was just quotes. It was called *Healing after Loss* and it was specifically about when you've lost someone to death.

It spoke so directly to my experience that I read it every day but it wasn't scripture-based. It wasn't a Christian book. I said every day I wish this was God's word. I wish these words shepherding me were God's Word. So I started writing the entries like they were written in that book but with scripture instead of just quotes. So I started doing that as my daily routine. And then I thought, my goodness like other people probably want this too. And this is just a resource that I wanted.

My hope for it is that it is not only a soft place for people to land in the comfort of God's arms. I heard a quote one time, "When you hit rock bottom he's the softest place you can land." So I hope it is that from a spiritual perspective. And honestly, from a practical perspective, I hope it gives people action steps. There is a call to meditate or pray or do some sort of call to action at the end of every day to practice one of these four rhythms that I think ended up saving my life once I learned what they were and how to do them in a practical daily way.

**TAMMY:** Mattie, this is a devotion that you and I both needed. We needed this. And I think we as widows early on in life, we searched for things -- I did. I'm sure you did too. That's why I'm so

glad you took the time to write this devotional. Because again, I don't think it is just for someone who has lost. It can be grief on any level. It will minister to so many people who just need the Word of God, who need a little help, who need a tool, and every day -- every day there is just a little nugget where you walk away. I did!

Day 30: "Any time the Lord allows you to struggle is because he can already see the magnificent fruit on the other side. When you rejoice, pray and thank him even in your low valleys. That's when your heart is most open to receive his divine work of sanctifying your soul. His ultimate will is to lead each one of us to become more and more like Christ even in the struggle."

Mattie, I cannot thank you enough for today, for you, for your life. It is not even that your prayer was to be known and seen, but to be known and seen by Jesus. And he sees every piece of you, every part of your life and nothing is wasted. I love that about the connection we had just briefly in 2018. We get to be in this space together today to say, look! Look at what God has done in our lives. It is possible to breathe again. It is possible to live again. It is possible to be restored. It is possible to be healed.

And our stories look entirely different than what we thought they would look like. But we are here today, strong women of God who are growing and breathing and moving because of what God has done in our lives. I love you. I appreciate you. And I'm so glad you're here.

You know there are a lot of people in the world right now all around the world that are struggling, that are facing loss, that are facing grief. I've had the privilege and opportunity to travel the world with *LIFE Outreach* and I've seen a lot of it. It has taken me to my knees at times when I think what could I leave with them? What word could I leave with them? How can I help?

Well, I want to show you a story right now, Isak, it is pretty powerful and I want you to see this heartbreaking story of many around the world but there is a way to offer them hope. Watch this.



**On the mission field**

**BETTY:** When James and I go to the field, we go to the feeding areas where the children are being fed, and we're even partaking in the process of pouring the nutritional food into the containers for the children. My heart is either blessed or hurting because when I look down in that barrel and I see it nearly empty, and the children are lined up, still long, long lines, my heart breaks.

**ISAK:** Betty, we've just heard a tragic story from Maria. Maria is a grandmother of four who unfortunately lost her youngest grandchild.

**OPEN CAPTIONS:** My grandbaby was sick, and her body started swelling. The doctors told us it was malnutrition. So they promised to provide some food, but unfortunately, we never got it. Then they started giving her milk until the baby passed away.

**ISAK:** Oh! I can tell it is very -- I'm sorry. You loved your grandchild. I'm sorry that they couldn't do more to save her life.

Betty, I know that as a grandmother you must know how she must feel. I asked her, "What do you pray for?" She said for provision and health for her three remaining grandchildren. Please, Betty, I'm asking you today on her behalf and her grandchildren, to appeal to all the grandmothers and mothers, to the friends of *LIFE* to respond and help us with her prayer.

[ Child crying ] Copy mission spot from 11/5

**In the studio**

**TAMMY:** I've had the privilege of traveling to many places with *LIFE Outreach* over the years. One of the most heartbreaking things I've witnessed is the food crisis and many people, many children starving to death. It is a terrible thing. The struggle is very real.

And as Isak has shown us here, you could see it for yourself. It is overwhelming when you ask

the mothers how many children they've lost because of it and hands go up everywhere. And not just one child, many have lost multiple children. To be there with them personally, seeing firsthand suffering and losing so much because of the lack of food, well, it is devastating. You know what? These families are not asking for much -- just enough to survive. But without it, without our help, many will perish, especially those precious, precious little children, and babies.

Isak often says this crisis is an opportunity for us to do something. And he is so right. We might be their only hope today. So if the Lord is moving your heart today to come alongside us to help bring relief, hope, and the love of Jesus, then please, please consider giving that gift.

Many of you have faithfully given to Mission Feeding before, and for that, we are deeply, deeply grateful. Your generosity is -- it is making a difference. And I pray you can continue supporting all that God has called us to do as the family of God. We are committed to finding and reaching the next village, the next family, and as many children as we can. And you can be a part of that life-changing work with us.

We are currently feeding 350,000 children in desperate need throughout Africa. So if you haven't yet had the chance to give, I encourage you right now to take a moment and pray. Just ask the Lord if today is the day to partner with us. Because together, I know we can help change lives and bring hope through Mission Feeding. This is what that would look like. For \$30 that will help feed and minister to three children for three full months. \$50 will help feed and minister to five children. \$100 will help ten children. And for those who are able, \$1,000 will help feed and minister to 100 children for three full months.

I believe God reveals many things to us for so many reasons. So I pray today, just as he has shown us this need that we will be faithful. Not to ignore it, but to respond to it. So today, with your gift, we would love to send you a copy of Mattie's devotional book, *Through the Valley of Grief*. If you will simply request it, we will get it right out to you. So please, go to your phone, or go online and give -- just give something today.

**Video begins**

**ANNOUNCER:** Right now across the continent of Africa, children are suffering, facing severe malnutrition and even death. Extreme drought and famine putting at risk thousands of lives means we must replenish food supplies immediately to keep feeding the 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 life-saving 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 Daily LIFE devotional calendar. This perpetual calendar has 365 days' worth of scriptures and inspirational thoughts to remind you of the rest you can find in God's loving arms.

With your gift of \$100 or more, you may request the "The Light of Life" desk lamp. Find comfort and encouragement from Jesus' words in John 8:12 displayed on this stand-alone acrylic gas lamp, perfect for home or office décor as a reminder that Jesus is the light of the world.

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:** I hope you're going online and giving the best gift you possibly can give. You must know it will make such a huge difference in so many lives. And for whatever gift that you can give today, we want to send you Mattie Jackson Smith's devotional, *Through the Valley of Grief*. I know you'll want it. You might want many of them, I'm quite sure because we all know

somebody that needs to be encouraged today.

Mattie, thank you so much for being here. Is there anything you want to say at all, one last little something?

**MATTIE:** I would just say, your pain is not wasted. That was my greatest fear. In the hands of God, everything is made new and every story is redeemable.

**TAMMY:** Pain is real but so is hope. I love you.

Gosh, and I want to leave you with a little something from day 147. Mattie says, "You may not fathom it now, but the Lord has dreams in mind for your future. He has plans to bring you back, bring your life back into your barren heart. Not to replace what you've lost but to restore the days of joy." Psalms 126:5 says, "Those who plant in tears will harvest with shouts of joy!"

Thank you so much for watching. We'll see you next time right here on *Life Today*.