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Week 36: Christmas Shoes and Smiles

Kyle Idleman & Alan Robertson

James: I'm so glad... it's such a joy to be here! I'm James Robison. This is Betty. And I spell my name right; I spell it R-o-b-i-s-o-n. There's a real famous family that doesn't know how to spell their name; they spell it Robertson. I was too poor to have all those other letters in mine -- and they've got a dynasty going! It's a Duck Dynasty and we've got one of them here. Hey, we've got one of them you can actually see what he looks like. You're going to meet him in a few moments but he is here because of this book.

It is amazing when somebody has what they call an "aha moment." I talked to the pastor to Southeast Christian Church in the Louisville, Kentucky area, to Dave Stone. I love you, Dave! I love your family. I love everything you stand for. I love the church. I love your witness, your testimony. We love Kyle; and Kyle is an incredible associate minister there and he's just gifted.

He wrote a book and when it was in the copy before it actually got circulated; it kind of showed up at Duck Dynasty headquarters down there. And Alan picked it up, and it really blessed him because it kind of told his story. He was kind of the prodigal of the family. So he actually asked if he could come and encourage you to read the book.

So he's here with the author, Kyle Idleman. I want you to welcome Alan Robertson and Kyle Idleman to LIFE Today. Could you give them a good welcome?

[Cheers & Applause]

Kyle, I've got to ask you, what is "Aha"?

Kyle: So the phrase "aha moment" is not an uncommon one but really, what this book seeks to do is to reclaim the spiritual foundation to transformation. In other words, we focus a lot on self change and bringing about something in our life that we know needs

to happen but it tends to be pretty humanistic. In other words, what do I need to do to fix myself? And this book is a you-can't-help-yourself book. It brings back the truth --

James: It's a book of hopelessness.

[Laughter]

Kyle: If you think about it, Jesus said at the very beginning, Sermon on the Mount, he said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." In other words, blessed are those who get the fact that they are helpless, that they are broken. When we finally say, "Look, I've tried to fix myself, I can't do it. God, I need you to do what I can't do on my own," we make room for God's power to show up in our life in a way that we could never bring about without him.

So *Aha* is really about reclaiming the spiritual foundation of transformation. And it comes from over the years as a pastor just listening to thousands of stories of people telling how God has worked in their life. As you guys know, when you listen to those stories, they can be very different but some of the elements are the same. So in the book I talk about there is an awakening moment where eyes are opened, God gets our attention. There is an honest moment where there is repentance and there is confession that is required, and there is a call to action. So I've heard all kinds of stories but I have found that God consistently uses those three elements. If we can learn to look for those in our lives, if we can look for God getting our attention, if we can be intentional to be repentant, confessional, and honest on a regular basis, not just when we become Christians but on a daily part of our spiritual journey, if we can take action -- when we're purposeful with those things it brings about lasting change.

James: Jesus said, "If you try to hold on to your life you lose it, but if you lose it in my purpose you'll find it in all of its fullness and meaning." Okay, Mr. Duck Dynasty family, I want to know, how come you don't have a beard?

Alan: Well, somebody needs to have some class in this organization so I figured it might as well be me. Actually, nobody knows this, James but I'll tell you since you're a good friend. We drew straws when we were kids and I drew the short straw that

someone would go out into the world of the shave skins and figure out how to take their money. [Laughter] So I became a pastor. Now you know the story of how that works. Now it's -- we didn't always have beards but certainly now that it's such a trademark of the show, and my family, that I do stand out a little bit. But I sort of relish that I dare to be different; I sort of stay in charge of the family and my brothers.

James: Are the other guys nice looking too like you?

Alan: It's rumored that they are. [Laughter] I'm sure their wives think so. Most of them have just embraced it. Misty says she still doesn't like Jase's beard. But the other wives have sort of embraced it. Yeah, they're pretty nice looking. When you look at the pictures of us, and there are plenty on the Internet now of pre-beards, they're pretty good-looking guys.

James: Let me ask you why you took an interest in *Aha* and why you would actually want to be here because people try to get you to go everywhere and they just about offer you the moon if you'll just show up. And you actually came, just simply one reason, love God, love this young man, what he wrote; but what was it about the book that made you want to...

Alan: Like you said, I volunteered. I've been a fan of Kyle's for a while. His first book he wrote was called *Not a Fan*, and I actually preached through that book with my co-pastor at the time a few years ago. So I was aware of Kyle.

As you mentioned earlier, when I saw his book which was a pre-advanced copy laying on Jase's desk and I knew he was going to read -- I'm not sure he can read. [Laughter] No, he can! He just came out with a book!

[Laughter]

So I said, "Jase, can I get this book and read it?" He said, "Yeah. Tell me how it turns out." So I read it and it felt like I was reading my life story. Kyle has a wonderful ability to teach and a great way to present. And the book was my story; I had my own awakening.

Whenever I was 17 years old, I'd just graduated high school, and I was in West Monroe there, and I'd had about a three-year life of what I call a double life. I was hiding in plain sight. I was in the youth group, I was in church; the little old ladies loved me but I was dark. I was living a double life. I was partying and doing everything the wrong way and for the wrong reasons. That lifestyle eventually catches up with you. So it came out and so my dad sat me down and he said, "Al, I love you. You know the life I lived. I turned it around but you can't keep living that way and stay here. You just graduated from high school. If you're going to live that way, you can't be here influencing your brothers in a negative way."

And it was a tough conversation. I've got daughters now, I've got grandkids; for a man to love his son enough to sit down and tell him the truth, that's not hate speech, that's love speech and it meant a lot to me, but not at the time because I was prideful. So I went to find myself. And I went to the spiritual oasis of New Orleans, Louisiana to do that.

[Laughter]

Let me tell you, James, Betty, if you don't go to New Orleans with a game plan you're going to find trouble -- and I did. So I spun even further downward for another year and a half. I got into a confrontation with a man because I had been fooling around with his wife so now I'd added adultery to my long list of sins. That day he was there to kill me. He didn't, by the grace of God but I was beaten, literally, and bruised. I had an awakening, as Kyle puts it; that was my moment sitting on a street in Kenner, Louisiana on the side of a curb.

The police came and they left and there was one officer that stayed after to help me, to fix my tire on my car because the guy had flattened my tire and kind of cleaned me up a little bit. And he gave me some great advice. He said, "Son, you don't look like you belong here. You don't act like you belong here on this city street." I'm crying by now and I said, "Well, I don't know. My life is a mess." He asked me about home. I told him about my family back home. And just like on Duck Dynasty when you see those guys

around that table, I knew that was what they were doing that day; that was a Sunday. And boy, the tears were flowing.

That's when I decided, in my own honest look at myself, that I was in a terrible place. He said, "You know what you need to do?" And I would have jumped off of the Huey P. Long Bridge if he had told me because I was that open at that moment. He said, "You need to get in that car and you need to turn in your notice at your job and you need to go home." And he didn't mean just home to the Robertsons, he meant home to be with the Lord. And he was right.

And so I did that; I went home. I was "action." And I got in that car and I went north. I got there and I got out and I didn't know what to expect. I had not even talked to my dad now in a year and a half. So our last conversation was a bad one. I got out and mom came up and hugged me and she was crying because her son had come home. And I was crying as well. And dad, there was a tear or two but he was a little stoic and I thought, oh, boy, here we go. And then he just came over and he hugged me. We're not big huggers, you know. I don't know how the Robisons are but the Robertsons aren't big huggers. But he hugged me and I mean he hugged me tight. I was expecting him to say, "Al, you did this, you did that." He didn't give me a long list of rules. He did just like that father did in Luke 15. He said, "A son has come home." So we killed the fattened catfish.

[Laughter]

And we had a celebration because a lost son had come home. When I read Kyle's description of that, that was my life. So I was crying as I read it because it was so real.

What I love about the book, it's not just that moment, which is obviously the biggest moment for a guy like me, but it is the little moments too of "aha" when you realize that there needs to be action taken on my lifestyle and where I'm at. So I've had a lot of aha moments through the years but that first one was just like that guy in Luke 15 and Kyle's book really spoke to me in that. So that's why I wanted to come here and tell folks, you need to read this book.

James: Would you like to say thank you for his testimony and doing this?

[Applause]

We really love your family. We thank God for all the family. And thanks, Dad for being like the father of all of us as prodigals; and thanks to the rest of the family for not acting like the older brother of the prodigal. For him to come here, just out of love, not simply for Kyle or what Kyle wrote, it is love for you, for you to see some of the things Kyle shares.

Kyle, I know you rejoice that Alan would be willing to say this. When you hope and pray that people read the book, what do you hope the bottom line effect is on them when they get through reading the book?

Kyle: Really, and his story should be all of our stories where we have an awakening and we realize that the arms of the father are open to us. I know because I've been there. There is a tendency to think, okay, before I can go home, I've got to get my life together. Before I can go back to God, I need to make things right, I need to straighten things out. But the reality is God wants us just as we are. We come home and his arms are open for us. We don't have to take a shower. We don't have to get cleaned up first. Then he does that for us in his power and his strength.

My prayer is that this would be a journey for all of us on a regular basis; that it is not just for someone who doesn't know God or someone who has wandered away from God. But there is something wrong, I think, if in your spiritual journey, if you're a Christian and it's been a while since you shed some tears of repentance, that's not because you don't have anything to repent about. That's because our hearts are not soft towards some of the ways God is trying to get our attention, trying to break us. So this idea of continually going back to God, continually stepping into his open arms, that should be an ongoing part of what it means to follow Jesus.

You know one of the things that I know you hear a lot on your show, just from watching it, is that one of the ways that God will often get our attention is when we go

through something difficult. You guys have powerful stories regularly of people having an awakening moment but it wasn't easy, it was something very challenging where God opened their eyes; and in Alan's story that's reflected.

I know as a pastor, a lot of the times I hear people give me their testimony or I see what is going on in their stories and I want to say to them, "Do you not see that God is trying to get your attention right now? There is an alarm sounding in your life and I know you keep hitting snooze and you keep trying to go back to sleep but if you'll just -- if you'll just open your eyes, God is trying to get your attention."

So if we can open our eyes to some of these alarms, some of the ways God is wanting to work in our hearts, then we can know that he loves us unconditionally and his arms are wide open. I think that would change everything for us.

James: One of the ways the Lord sounds an alarm is a loving invitation and that's really what this book is. It is a love invitation to come home, and let you know the father is not angry with you, the pit you're in, the ditch you're in, the pig pen, the mire, whatever -- all the muck, you made that.

In other words because you set aside the truth of God, the shelter of the almighty, his shadow, the security he offers, then you found yourself held captive by the things you put between you and him. You actually are in bondage to them, and you actually reap the consequences of those rotten decisions.

At the same time you're seeing those consequences there is a still small voice. Remember Jesus looked out over Jerusalem knowing it would be leveled. It's not like Jesus is caught off guard; he sees the desolation. He spoke to them in his prayer over them that they had rejected the prophets, that was a voice, that was a clarion call, a clear call to come to repent. But he also said, "I long in my heart," in the face of everything going wrong -- a lot of things are wrong in our nation but the hope is Christ in us is the hope of his glory manifest and in the glory manifest is the invitation to come back to the shelter and the shadow of the almighty. And in that prayer, and you know this because you've got farm life, he said, "I long that you would come like

chicks to the wings of the hen." If you ever see a hen raise her wings, those chicks race to it.

And as I felt Jesus praying this prayer over Jerusalem, I felt like he was praying it over America and over the whole world that you would run -- run to the shelter and shadow of the almighty. That's what you find yourself doing when you went back to Dad; that's what Franklin Graham did when he went back to dad -- it's what other people have done.

And it's what I have done. And I ran back to the shelter and to receive the covering that he offers. He's not trying to expose us. He's not trying to destroy us. He wants to cover us with mercy and grace. Would you come?

Would you have your aha moment and ask him right now to forgive you, to cleanse you, to cover you, to restore you to a fellowship with the Father? Ask him to do it right where you are. Ask him to right there. Do you see the telephone number that just appeared on the screen? That's a prayer line. It's a help line. We're going to ask people to put shoes on little children's feet. But right now you're saying, "God, I want you to be my father. I want you to be the shelter, I want you to cover me. I want you to forgive me, cleanse me." He says, "Confess me. Don't be ashamed of me."

Would you call someone and say, "I just gave my life to Jesus? I came back" or "I came to God"? Let someone pray with you and agree with you. I'll send you a book; it's a simple Bible study. It's called *Knowing God as Father*. It is my story of how I came to know him as Father when I had no father. It will help you get started in the Word of God to know what it's like to be his child. Would you call and ask for that?

Would all of you here in the studio join me saying thanks to Kyle and thanks to Alan? [Cheers & Applause] Let me mention this to you. This is absolutely fabulous. I love outdoorsmen. I have spoken at all the big outdoors meetings. I've helped inspire the starting of Sportsman outdoor magazines and outreaches.

This is *Duck Commander Devotional*. Man, they've got one in pink for sissies like Betty. They've got one in brown camo. Let me tell you something, this is just fabulous. I

actually looked through these devotionals. This is a gift from God from a wonderful family and they're in the bookstores, you can get them online.

I'll tell you what I'll do, if you'll help us put some shoes on some little children, we have some blessed gifts to send you but we'll send you the book Aha if you'd like to have it. I want you to go with us for just a moment and reminisce with me and Betty. You're going to see us on the mission field. Just look in with us. Would you do that? Watch!

On the mission field

James: We want to give children like these, beautiful children shoes -- children all over the world. There goes another one! We want to give them shoes.

You know what Jesus said? "Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not."

You know what? We are the representative of Christ. We are his body, we're his family and we can share his love. We love these little children. We're going to give these little children shoes. Look at these beautiful little feet!

Betty: They have nothing, really but they can still play, they can still have fun. They're children! I think that's what they're supposed to be instead of having to worry about walking around without any shoes where they step on stuff and hurt their feet and also get diseases through that too.

James: Betty, they just tough it out and they play but we found out right here in this area that hookworms get in the skin, maybe where they have a little tear in the skin, get in the bloodstream, ultimately into the intestines and cause very serious disease and sometimes death.

Just look here! This boy has had a blowout in his tennis shoe! He has played so hard and gotten so dirty.

You need to wash your shirt, man!

Isn't it great to see? The kids, they want to have fun. We're going to love them with your help. We're going to give them good new shoes. We -- not me -- all of us together! Let's put shoes on all these beautiful children's beautiful feet! It would just be such a wonderful gift to make at this time and I hope you will do all you can. Just give as many pairs as you can to bless as many children and their families as you can.

End of clip

In the studio:

James: I love those little noises in the background! I love those children! Betty, you saw us sitting there. You didn't get to see a lot of the shots. But I said, "Betty, let's just pray children into our laps." And it was amazing because a lot of times people will be a little bit afraid because of the strangers, somebody come from maybe another country but they'll just begin to come and crawl in my lap. That's what happened.

You who walked in this studio, those of you here tonight, you walked into the studio, if you didn't notice, when you go -- look when you go out -- you'll see a bunch of little kids in my lap. Those were the Rwandan orphans right after their parents had been murdered with machetes. And those little children in my lap crawled out from under their parents' mangled bodies. Their parents laid over them to protect them while they were being maimed. And they were terrified of people, especially white people, even though it was black people that killed black people. But those little children came and got in my lap and we never took our arms away from them.

I see Jesus reaching out when I was just holding those children because he's in all of us. And if only you would understand that what the missionaries said to me and Betty when we were so moved on the foreign fields of the world after preaching in all the stadiums and coliseums to millions of people, and when I saw the pain of the frightened and overlooked world, I said, "I think we'll just come stay here." The missionaries tearfully said, "Please don't!" It wasn't they didn't like us. They said, "Go home and ask people to help us so we can stay -- and so we stay and have something to do for them." And we did.

And when I came back and asked you, I had no idea you would help. Every mission conference that we had at any church I was in was the one thing nobody attended. And I came back and said, "Please help!" Joel Osteen's dad called me right before he died and said, "James, I'm a mission-minded pastor. Thank you and Betty for bringing the mission fields of the world into our homes."

Well, we have. And you know what? You put the arms of God around children like those children Betty and I were holding and talking about. I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart.

And for what we call Christmas Shoes and Smiles, would you make the greatest gift you can right now to help us put little shoes on little feet -- feet like this? Stop the hookworms that get up into their little brains and hurt them or kill them or make them sick. Make them happy for Christmas. You say, "We're giving you a gift, its special." Would you do that?

Would you help us give smiles to little children with cleft palates? It costs \$500 for each surgery. We have doctors that work with us. Could you give a smile for Christmas? Maybe a couple of them with a gift of \$1,000? Did you know that the shoes are \$3.60 and \$36 will give 10 kids 10 pairs of shoes? \$144, 40 kids! There's a level at which you can help.

We want to send you a little Christmas ornament. It's a little shoe. This year it's red. We have a whole box of the shoes with all the different colors over the last years. You can just decorate the whole tree. I tell you what; I bet if you just gave several thousand dollars and said, "Send me several boxes," you can just have a whole tree with shoes. And everybody that comes in you say, "You know what that is? We're giving shoes and smiles."

Father, I pray everybody watching will help; in Jesus' name -- do all they can. Would you dial the number, take your bankcard, make the best gift you can? Please do that! If you write a check, make it to *LIFE* but call us and tell us you're mailing it. You can go to LifeToday.org. A lot of you will do that. Probably half the people who give today will go in there and make the gift; use your card like it's a check.

Please give these shoes and smiles. Would you do it? Thank you so much!

Begin video clip

Announcer: Poverty is a killer and because of it children needlessly suffer not only for a lack of food and clean water but also from a lack of things we take for granted such as a healthy smile or a simple pair of shoes. For most of these children they've never owned a new pair of shoes. While that may seem minor in the light of all their needs, walking in bare feet puts them at risk of life-threatening infections that could lead to crippling consequences, disease, and even death.

By responding today you can help *LIFE* immediately secure and begin shipping Christmas shoes to 200,000 children around the world just in time for the holidays. Your gift of \$36 will help provide ten pairs of shoes. A gift of \$72 will help provide 20 pair, and a gift of \$144 will help provide 40 pairs of Christmas shoes for children in need. With your gift of any amount, be sure to request this beautifully crafted red antique shoe ornament, a treasure to place on your tree each holiday season. With your gift of \$100 or more you may request a special boxed set of *LIFE's* Christmas shoe ornaments from past years.

Finally, please consider a gift of \$1,000 or more to help provide over 275 pairs of shoes or two children with corrective cleft palate surgeries. And you may ask our commemorative glass sculpture "The Blessing."

Please call, write, or make your gift online today!

End of clip

In the studio:

James: I do want to remind you that we are going to send you the little Christmas shoe. And hopefully, you'll make a gift that will give lots of shoes and we'll send you all four of them, the little shoe decorations.

But the *Aha*: Awakening Honesty Action that Kyle Idleman wrote to say thank you.

I want to remind you that Duck Dynasty family, the Robertsons are a great blessing. I love all of you! You don't have to shave. I'll keep loving you. You know you don't have to be like your brother, I just love you all.

These are incredible devotional books. They really are! And some of you, this is a great gift to give for any special occasion. If you've got guys that like to hunt or fish and say, "I wish I could get something in their hands." Well, they're read this and it will bless them.

Join me in saying thanks again to Kyle. Thank you, Kyle!

[Cheers & Applause]

Appreciate you guys. Thank all of you. Thanks for helping us put shoes for Christmas and smiles! Thank you!