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**Week 37: Christmas shoes and smiles**

**Lizzie Velasquez**

**Betty:** Welcome to *LIFE Today*! Thank you so much for joining us. I'm Betty and this is James.

**James:** We are thrilled to have I think one of the most special girls, women on the planet. Her name is Lizzie Velasquez. She has written a book titled, *Choosing Happiness*. Lizzie knows what it is to be made fun of, bullied, picked on. She has a condition, a syndrome that is unique -- only three people in the whole world. She is kind of a living miracle. And she has chosen happiness.

I want you to hear her heart and her story. Would you welcome to *LIFE Today*, Lizzie Velasquez?

Hi, Lizzie! I find you refreshing because from the moment I met you, there was joy and it's apparent that you have an unusual journey and battle. Tell us when the battle became, let's say, obvious to you and when you really began to feel some of the pressure and stress or unkind things that people would throw your way.

**Lizzie:** Well, I think I would say battle from the beginning of my life but now I kind of will look at this whole syndrome as a blessing instead of a battle because it has gotten me to where I am today.

I was born with a very rare syndrome that only two other people in the entire world, including myself, I make three that we know of have. It's undiagnosed; it doesn't have a name. I can pretty much eat whatever I want, whenever I want and not gain weight. So on one hand it's the best non-diet in the world, but on the other hand is where the hard part comes in to where I do look different. I am smaller than a lot of other people.

That was hard when I started kindergarten because my parents raised me 150% normally so much to the point where I had no clue that I was different from any other kids until I started elementary school. That's when I was really opened up to the world of bullying. It was never any physical bullying; it was mostly name calling and people staring at me and being afraid of me. And I could not understand why because I thought I was a really awesome kid and they were just missing out on me.

I had to go home and ask my parents why, what's wrong with me? And they sat me down and I credit their answer to absolutely everything I've done in my life because when I asked them, "What's wrong with me?" their answer was, "Nothing. You have this syndrome; it makes you a little bit smaller than other people but you're beautiful, you're smart, you can do anything you can put your mind to."

So that's the attitude I've always been raised with.

**James:** That's some great parents; don't you think? That's the way parents should be.

[Applause]

Do you have other siblings, brothers or sisters?

**Lizzie:** I do. I'm the oldest. My sister just finished her first year of college, she is 19 years old, and my brother is a sophomore in high school and he is 16 years old.

**James:** And they don't have any of the syndrome symptoms?

**Lizzie:** They don't.

**James:** Do they know what caused that? Is there any explanation for it?

**Lizzie:** Nope. We really have no clue why, how I got it. I'm kind of writing my own medical book because we don't have anything to look back and say, "This happened to someone else so you can expect this in the future." So it's just a day-by-day thing.

**James:** Well, I think that you are writing it to the glory of God when you say or you quote the scripture "all things work together for good to those who love God, who know they're called according to his purpose," which is to reveal himself right here on this planet as he really is. It seems to me that you realize you have that opportunity. Am I right in that?

**Lizzie:** Oh, without a doubt.

**James:** So how long have you been sharing, let's say, the fact that God has made a difference in your family and in your life? Did you start when you were pretty young when kids were mistreating you that you started trying to share or has this come a little bit later in life?

**Lizzie:** It started probably around high school because I had to learn to accept who I was first before I can go out and share a message or share anything. Because I was at a point, I was a preteen who was figuring out who I was; wanting to be like the quote popular kids, wanting to be able to fit into the really cool clothes instead of the tiny clothes that I had to wear.

There was a point where I would pray at night and I would say, "God..." I thought of him as a magician. And I would say, "God, please, when I wake up in the morning make me look like everybody else," then I wouldn't have to look in the mirror and not like what I see -- then I would be able to go to school and have friends with the whole school. There were times where I would just -- I didn't know who to blame. I didn't want to blame my parents because they didn't decide to have a daughter with an unknown syndrome. I couldn't blame my teachers. I couldn't blame my friends. So I was upset with God. And I was at a point to where I couldn't go out and share his message when I was still figuring it out myself.

So when I was in high school, I realized that I had two choices. I could either choose to be happy or I can choose to go down a really bad path. That's where I used to see my syndrome and my purpose as a curse. Once I decided to choose happiness I realized

that when I wake up in the morning, it's a gift from God. This syndrome is a gift from God.

My purpose is a gift from God. And it is something that I absolutely cherish. It is something I do not take lightly, and it is something that I think is the reason why I feel like you can tell that I'm a happy person because -- God is good and I'm here and things are really, really good.

**James:** So you've actually made the choice to be happy. I was wondering as you were talking about kids making fun of you. I never have understood that. Now you and I both are Austin folks. I lived in Austin. I've talked about some of my childhood there. And then when I lived in Austin, I didn't have a home, I lived on back alleys in what we would call a little shack. I lived on the dump; it was like a salvage dump and we got our mail at someone else's house.

So I wasn't the kid that everybody's inviting to come over to their house. No church bus ever came by and invited me on it. I was the kid that when they picked teams, because nobody knew me, I moved like 17 times in 10 years, they didn't know me so I would still be standing there when they went off to play.

I always watched kids make fun of other people. I never did understand that. It's really amazing but here I am, a kid without a dad, not getting picked, and yet I had a soft spot in my heart for others. I've got to tell you, for anybody to make fun of anybody for any reason, it's fine to have fun with people, we kind of laugh together and laugh at ourselves but to put somebody down, I never understood that. It's amazing that it's as though God planted something inside me to want to pick people up, to want to lift people up. I found the best way to do that is lift the Lord Jesus up.

I sense that's what you feel. So when you made a choice to be happy, you made a choice to exalt him. You just put your hands up just a minute ago and said, "God is good." And you really do believe that. So when people are unkind, we don't understand it. But the best way to overcome it is to answer them with love and forgiveness, and try to be understanding toward them; correct?

**Lizzie:** Oh, without a doubt! One of my biggest things is, don't bully the bully. You get nowhere when you bully the bully. If someone tells you something mean, if I go back and I say, "Well, you're this..." or "You're that..." what am I doing? Sinking down to their level. What is that accomplishing? Nothing! It's just continuing to spread negativity.

I made a choice that if someone was hurting me or upsetting me, I would acknowledge it, and say, "I'm sorry you feel that way but I'm going to go over here and I'm going to continue to make myself better."

So I set goals for myself. I wanted to be a motivational speaker. I wanted to write a book, graduate college and have a really awesome career. And I worked really, really hard and it took a lot of people, it took a lot of prayer.

The three things that have gotten me where I am today are my faith, my family, and my friends. And with those three things I was able to -- I've been a motivational speaker for eight years. That's *Choosing Happiness* is my third book.

**James:** And you've been on Barbara Walters. I've never even been on Barbara Walters! And I have a whole television program all over the world.

**Lizzie:** She hugged me too!

**James:** Hi, Barbara, how are you doing? By the way, she was really sweet to you; wasn't she?

**Lizzie:** Yes! She is so sweet. She hugged me during my interview. Her compassion for me was amazing. She was just the nicest, nicest lady.

**Betty:** Well, you're talking about choices that we make and we all have to come to that point in our lives. We make choices whether we're going to love God, put God first, whether we're going to be happy. There is a lot of people that on the outside they look

like they have everything. They look beautiful all this but they're not happy. So it is a choice that we all have to come to.

**Lizzie:** Without a doubt. I always tell people, you have to love yourself on the inside to be able to love yourself on the outside, to then be able to love other people. It was kind of like a puzzle piece for me to just say, "You know what? I'm surrendering it all to the Lord. I'm just going to do your will and I'm going to do it with a smile no matter what it is. And I will find out what it is, and it will come to me."

And motivational speaking was something that came to me on accident when I was in high school. The feeling that I felt right after I finished speaking; I had never felt more comfortable in my own skin. I had never felt more confident in the things that I've gone through. And in that moment, I said whatever I have to do to make that feeling happen again, to be able to help other people, I will do it. I did it!

**James:** And you are doing it! Now tell me, are there some other points that you make -- and by the way, you have a web site if people want to know where you're speaking, or if they would like for you to come and speak to their group, they could go to your web site, they could get the book there on the web site, and we'd be more than happy to send it to you today too if you'd help us put some shoes on some little children's feet because we ask you to give and share love and life and we love to give and share life and love with you. If you'd like to have the book we'll send it to you. But what's the web site?

**Lizzie:** The web site is the LizzieProject.com. It's actually a web site that also has information about my first documentary that we will be filming this summer. And I'm very, very excited about it because it was another God thing because I have been approached many times to share my story in a movie form and I never felt like it was right.

When I got the offer to do it, right away I said, "This is it! This is it." And I have had the most amazing, amazing -- I call it my dream team who have rallied around me, really just helped me not only be excited to share my story but to be excited to show other people that there's life after bullying. There is a light at the end of the tunnel. I've

been asked many times if I could go back in time, not have my syndrome, if I could have a cure, if I could take back all the bullying, would I do it? And without a doubt, I would never do it. Because I look at all the struggles, I look at the negativity as steps to a ladder to get to where I am and to get to my purpose. And I wouldn't take that back for anything because it's made me who I am, it's made me help other people, and I am so thankful for all of it.

**James:** I wish everyone listening at home and those of you here would understand that oftentimes out of our pain and our challenges and even our failures, that it's out of that that we find the greatest ability to help and assist others.

For instance, in my own life, not having a father caused me to have seemingly even greater appreciation for knowing God the Father as the ultimate and perfect Father.

But also, gave me a desire to help others know the Father, whether they had a father that was in place or out the place, they could know the ultimate Father. It also gave me a compassion for people that had a greater challenge than others and a desire to show them that there wasn't any ditch that God couldn't lift you out of. There isn't any difficulty that he can't enable you to overcome -- no mountain you can't climb.

And so we both had challenges and yet, we're excited about what we're doing. Is this documentary going to be something that shown like on some of the major networks or is it going to be something that's available for people to get on DVD or will it go in theaters? Do you know yet?

**Lizzie:** Not yet. It's all a work in progress right now. So if you keep an eye out on the [LizzieProject.com](http://LizzieProject.com) you'll have all of your information there.

**James:** I hope you'll go there. There may be some of you who not only want to assist but also encourage people to get it out. However they decide to release it, it would be wonderful for people to hear her story because she had horrendous things said about her. One of the most watched YouTube events was very unkind to her, and really and truly put a label on her that would devastate most people to the point that they would

never hold their head up -- but God has lifted your head. It really is God that's lifted your countenance; isn't it? It's a supernatural thing and that joy is real.

**Lizzie:** It's a great thing!

**James:** It's very, very real. So if you get people to get to not only the documentary but in the book, and they read the book, what is your prayer and your hope that will happen as they read your story? What do you want to see happen in people's lives?

**Lizzie:** My hope is that people see that no matter where you come from, no matter what your background is, you have a choice -- you have a choice to choose the road of happiness and gratefulness or you have a choice to pity yourself and go down a bad, bad path. But if you choose, all you have to do is make the choice. If you make the choice to choose happiness, everything else will fall into place as long as you have your prayer and your faith and your willingness to keep going, I guarantee you, everything will fall into place.

**James:** You sound a little bit like Nick Vujicic who has been here many times.

**Lizzie:** I love him!

**James:** He has no arms and legs. And he says, "No limbs no limits!" He is just absolutely amazing! He is the guy that can't get up and he gets up. And all the students, I'm telling you, even Oprah, she just came unglued to see the power in this kid's believing in what God can do. That's what we see. Don't you see the joy of the Lord in Lizzie? Can you see it in her countenance?

[Applause]

Betty, what do you think when you realize because I know how much you love children. Betty used to sing on the mission field as we were with little children, "Jesus loves the little children of the world." She just would sing that because she loves them.



When you see someone that has had a challenge like Lizzie has faced and now you hear her, what goes on inside of your heart?

**Betty:** I'm just so excited to see her and you're beautiful testimony and your inner beauty, your countenance is the glory of God. I think that is so refreshing. So many people like I said earlier, they have it all on the outside appearance but they're empty on the inside. You've got it on the inside and it flows out to the outside and you are radiantly beautiful in the Lord!

**James:** Do you think she is pretty too?

**Lizzie:** I think... I was backstage watching and I'm like you're gorgeous! You have perfect skin. So great! You radiate too, not just me.

**James:** The reason I ask you that is because so many people, just like Joseph Prince called me from Singapore and we were talking and he said, "James," he said, "I think Betty -- I see Jesus in Betty more than anybody I've ever seen on television."

I said, "Well, that's nice for you to say that. I agree. I just love her!"

But the reason I'm pointing to her is that what you see in Betty and you just talked about it, we see that in you. And there is a glory. I've had so many guests here that I would often say, "The glory of God is resting on you." We have a guest this week, Ben Carson, the glory of God is all over Ben. It is a radiance of the Lord. I hope that's on me some. I'm pulling it on me off of Betty. But it is just so --.

But the thing is that it really is there, and don't ever doubt it and don't ever wonder. Just continue to not only choose to be happy but inspire other people to be happy. It is Jesus, not a story about a man who lived, but a story about a man who lived and died for us, and now lives to live in us. It's that person that's living in you. Am I right about that?

That's the one that gives you the smile and the joy no matter what we face on this earth, and he is the one. The name above every name; that at the name of Jesus we all

bow, and we all praise him as Lord of Lords and king of kings. Would you say thanks to Lizzie and thanks to God?

[Applause]

Wow! What a beautiful story! And here is the book and there is the web site. So you go there and you perhaps get her to come and share with you, find out how you can help get the story out on the documentary. Let me show you something that I promise you will move you. You're going to see Betty and me really looking in through the eyes, I believe of Jesus. And I really believe we'll be looking the way you would look if you were looking on the scenes that we see.

See if you don't agree and see if you don't find an excitement about recognizing and realizing what you can do to make all the difference in someone's world. Watch closely.

### **On the mission field**

**James:** Well, you know it's hard to -- it's hard to believe that this is a mini-subdivision is what it is. It's this kind of area where children need shoes. They're subject to diseases. We've found that hookworms are major destroyers of children because they get into their skin, and then ultimately into their intestines and destroy their life -- horribly! Slow painful death.

And love makes the difference. But it is not love discussed or love even declared -- it is love demonstrated. It is somebody who says, "I won't just talk about love, even God's love, I'm going to demonstrate it."

>> We're busy handing out shoes here. These are life shoes that we are putting on precious little lives. It is an exciting day. You can hear the noise in the background. The kids are just getting their shoes at the different points here. You don't understand what these children go through; how dashed up their little feet get. These kids just cutting their feet open, getting infection. There is no clinic here where they can go and get some sutures putting to a cut on their feet.

But this little girl doesn't have to worry about that anymore because she has got a pair of life shoes. Thank you for making that possible. Thank you for giving her these precious little shoes that are going to protect her feet and improve her life!

**James:** And can I just tell you, it's a joy to reach out to these children, and to be able to share something with them because you help us? And from the very bottom of our hearts, thank you!

**Betty:** Thank you so much!

**James:** Do all you can to help us right now touch these children and share God's love.  
**End of clip**

### **In the studio**

**James:** Betty and I spent 25 years doing city-wide crusades and coliseums, stadiums, and then we spent the next 25 years going to nearly 50 countries and putting God's arms of love around overlooked children.

Hold up that little Christmas ornament, that little shoe. And then here I have all four of the little Christmas shoes we've been offering the last several years to put on precious little feet because Jesus loves the children of the world. And when Betty and I got a burden for the missions of the world, and the third world overlooked children, we wondered if anybody would notice with us. We wondered if anyone would care.

We've been amazed and inspired by the way you, the viewers of *LIFE Today* have responded. You've overwhelmed people all over the world with God's love. You're really a demonstration of what happens when we notice and then we extend the hands of God and express the very heart of God. The millions of people that not only have gotten assistance or food or water but better health because somebody cared and then they've come to know Christ. Third-world countries are being very positively and profoundly impacted, and it's because people like you didn't just look, you reached out and touched someone with love.

So what we're asking you to do is make a gift, we'll send you the little Christmas ornament. It will become a conversation piece and it will focus prayers on children's feet and their need.

And for those of you who will make a larger gift of \$100 or more, we'll send all four of these beautiful little gift shoes and Christmas ornaments. But here's what's going to happen. Think about this, \$3.60 a pair for a pair of shoes. We've targeted 200,000

children that the missionaries have told us are in place with great needs but the opportunity is there to turn the whole area around with the love of God. Would you make a gift of \$36 and say, "I'll give ten of those children shoes"?

A gift of \$144 will give 40 children shoes. Would you do that? You can go online LifeToday.org or you can just dial the number that you see right there on the screen and literally reach out and touch someone with love. Take your bankcard and use it like a check, that's how you use a bankcard, like a check. If you write a check, make it to *LIFE*. But would you call us and tell us what you're putting in the mail? It's really important that we hear from you.

Then remember this, we're giving smiles for Christmas, cleft palate surgeries. We're asking people to consider a gift of \$1,000 to give two surgeries to two precious children. So we're giving shoes and smiles for Christmas and we have to start way ahead of time so we can have the money, get the shoes, get them to the mission field in time.

Thank you for making a very special moment for precious children, for changing their lives with an expression of love. Thank you for making the call or for going online and making that gift!

### **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 hope you will ask for the beautiful set with all four of the Christmas shoe ornaments that we have offered, and make that gift of \$100 or more.

By the way, if you make any gift, we are sending you one of the little Christmas decorations. I hope you'll give some smiles too. We've got a wonderful guest today that's smiling, and she is very grateful. We can help some little children have smiles who have a cleft palate and they need a surgery. Boy, you can't believe the difference it makes. Would you give some smiles?

For any gift you make, if you'd like to have Lizzie's book, *Choosing Happiness*, we'll be glad to send it to you. There again is her web site.

Would you join Betty and me saying thanks again to Lizzie for being a blessing to us? -- And to people all over the world! God bless you! God bless you for loving other people! Betty and I appreciate you loving us because we think you do. Thank you so much for helping us share God's love.