

6/22/15
Week 26 WFL
John and Brooke Skipworth

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

James: And it is a joy, it is a privilege. This is an incredible story. We don't have any dull stories on *LIFE Today* but this is amazing. This is a guy that he didn't have a father situation that was the best. You talk about really getting trapped until you do like the dumbest thing you could imagine -- horrific -- and then an indescribable, improbable miracle occur, and just have a blessing that only... like a miracle that only a god could do.

That's the story with really John and Brooke Skipworth. They're from over in Louisiana; part of a church staff there in West Monroe. I want you to welcome John and Brooke. Would you? Welcome to *LIFE Today*. Glad to see you.

John: Thank you.

James: John, I want us to cover some ground. You and I both had some father issues. My father had a drinking problem; he was an alcoholic and it repulsed me. It so wrecked the man that I'd only seen a few times and then came into our home and made it hell on earth, tried to kill me and my mother. But what had happened to him through alcohol was so repulsive I wanted nothing to do with it. A lot of people though, have alcohol in their family or a big issue there; it just really goes like the sins of the father right on to the kids. Somehow John didn't handle the situation well. So tell us what's going on. Tell us your story.

John: I am one sibling of five. I have three stepbrothers who later became my adopted brothers, and I had one-half sister. So growing up in a family with the same father as none of your siblings and the same mother as one of your siblings, and not the same last name of any of your siblings can be very confusing for any child but especially was for me. James, just to cover some ground and to set up where we're going...

James: What age were you when you had all this mix?

John: My mother and father, my biological father, I don't have a memory of them together. At two, I believe, the number they've given me, two, they were apart.

My stepfather who later became my adopted father took parental custody of me. He was in the picture from probably two, two and a half, three. And honestly, because I lived with him, the proximity and spent more time with him, worked with him, worked on the farm for a tremendous amount of my life, I looked at him more so as my father. And of course, he, at that point in time in his life had a severe alcohol problem as well, was a severe alcoholic. For me, I think it set me up to be just the poster child for an identity crisis.

But my mother and father, stepfather eventually split up; years-long overdue. He was an abusive alcoholic, much like your scenario; violence in the home -- physical violence in the home. So eventually about 16-17 years old, all my siblings were gone, stepbrothers were gone, half sister was gone, they were all married or in college, with their own families and I was a sophomore in high school. My parents split up. And I was tired of running, James, just to be honest. Our lives had been so turbulent from Shreveport to Bossier, to Louisiana to Arkansas, to my grandparents, just no stability. I was ready for stability and somehow I dreamed up an idea that I could just not be bothered by any of it and I was going to stay.

So when my mom left I said, "Mom, I'm staying." My stepfather at that time said, "I would love to have you stay"; maybe as a last hope for my mom to come back, maybe for somebody to be with him. Let me tell you what that turned into. 16 years old, you couldn't beat me on a pool table; probably still can't today because I spent every night of my life in a honky tonk as a designated driver driving my brokenhearted, adopted stepfather from barroom to barroom through one of the darkest hours of his life, which led me into feeling like that was my identity. Okay, this is where I belong.

So I gravitated into the drugs and the alcohol at 16, 17, 18 years old, out of really, a need in me to figure out where I fit in life. Where do I belong? What is my identity?

So that's how the road of -- the wrong road got started in my life.

James: Where did that take you?

John: Well, that took me to, at 17-18 years old, because we had moved so much and because I knew so many people, no parental supervision. We owned a big farm, a big house, charge accounts for gas, to the liquor store at the other end of our town. So basically, we just had the perfect concoction, if you will, for the perfect storm. And just everybody was coming over to our house on the weekends, all of my high school friends and it was big bonfires and big parties. And that led to 17-18 years old drinking, fighting, and within 90 days of no parental supervision like that, drugs were introduced into the picture and within 90 days of that I was an I.V. drug addict sticking needles in my arm, cocaine, methamphetamines.

That led me to a series from 18-22 of three felony convictions. The first of which was 18 years old, I was trying to fit in with this group of drug dealers, who were buying drugs and bringing drugs from Dallas, Texas to Shreveport and pushing them on the streets. A hotel room situation one night, a drug deal went bad and I was going to prove who I was and proved I fit and proved I belong and this was going to be an identity.

A drug deal went bad and a fist fight broke out and a young man was... several people were hurt but one man was brutally beaten. And after he was left unconscious a friend of mine and I took him down the road to get him out of our hotel room, and that led to a robbery situation. My friend and the gentleman at that time came back conscious and that led to my friend cutting this man's throat, and we left him for dead.

James: Did you have anything to do with that throat cutting?

John: I did, James. I was actually the guy waiting in the vehicle. When my friend never showed up I went down there and I said, "What's going on?" I saw they were both conscious and it was a struggle going on. I went down there and I struck the young man with a big billy club and knocked him down, and running away. In just drug stupor and a blur, not living in a real world, a fallacy world, I said, "Just cut his throat." Before I knew it, a friend of mine pulled out his knife and cut his throat.

James: How old was the guy whose throat was cut?

John: He was probably about 23, 24, 25. We left him in a ditch, went back to a hotel room. Everybody began panicking, trying to figure out what to do. A pastor, Easter morning, sunrise service setting up his chairs, Bossier City, Louisiana, Swan Lake Road heard a young man gurgling and went down to the ditch. And long story short ended up calling the paramedics, calling the authorities.

The friends saw the authorities; saw the friend in the white bed sheet from the hotel room. They rushed him to a hospital. His father was a leading surgeon in Shreveport, Louisiana, Dr. Byrd -- James Byrd. Sewed his son's throat back together; saved his son's life; by his own admission, just a few centimeters away from slicing his jugular vein.

James: And probably, if the pastor hadn't stopped he would have died anyway. So it's a miracle he lived.

John: It was a miracle. So that led to about a 73-day jail arrest. I did the worst thing in the world. I cried wolf, and said I was innocent, had no part in it. And my parents did the worst

thing in the world, they believed me and enabled me and came to my rescue, and 73 days later I was walking free and feeling like I was invincible.

But at that point and I believe many of the viewer audience would connect with this if they've ever fought an addiction, my drug addiction spiraled out of control. I didn't have the friends anymore; I didn't have the drug connections. I just became a skid row drug addict very, very quickly, doing anything that it took. I got picked up for possession, guilty of distribution of cocaine within a matter of 90 days after my family spending lots of money and coming to my rescue. It was my second felony conviction at 19 years old.

Over the next couple of years burned every bridge, told every lie, broke every heart, let everyone down as you know drugs and alcohol will do. Anyways, what ended up happening at 22 years old I went on a drug binge, a high speed police chase; was arrested for a string of robberies, with guns, without guns, ski mask, with weapons, people of individual stores. Definitely not proud of any of it; it was just trying to feed an addiction that had me in its grasp.

So at 23 years old I was arrested for the third and final conviction of first degree robbery after a high speed police chase -- and helicopters, state troopers, Shreveport, Bossier City police. That night I was hiding in the back of a shed, James, and I was tired of running. I was tired of living the life. I didn't have the answers but I turned myself in because I was ready for a change. I went and turned myself in.

I woke up a few days later and they took me to an arraignment. And oblivious to my knowledge, in the state of Louisiana, three felony convictions or three strikes and you're out, they call it a multi-deal. They marched me down to a courthouse, presented a piece of paper, and they said, "If you won't make the taxpayers spend their money, you're on camera, you're guilty, you have two convictions, you're arrested now for five or six more felonies, we'll do you a favor. We won't give you the multi-deal, which constitutes a life sentence in the state of Louisiana we'll just give you 20 years. You'll serve every day. If you'll sign the paper today, you'll come home in 20 years."

That was the experience that led me to go back to a jail, Caddo Parish Jail. Laid down on the floor in the jail cell, no one to impress, no telephone calls to make, no one to reach out to, no lies to tell, no scams to run, no games to play for the first time in my life, like Jacob in Genesis 32. I had to lay down on a floor and I was all alone. I had to face the music; lay in the bed that I had made -- now what I would refer to as a purging, a spiritual purging. I laid down on the ground and I just began to cry out to God and tell him how ashamed I was of what I had done to my family, to my father, to my stepfather, to my mother, to our reputation, to family members that I'd hurt. "God forgive me for being a murderer. God forgive me for being a liar. God forgive me for being a drug addict."

It just felt like in moments I was just crying out to God. I wasn't saying, "God save me, and get me out of jail and give me a happy tomorrow." I was just saying, "God, would you just forgive me for all the disappointment, for all the hurt? I'm just broken before you today."

I wish I could say I saw angels and the heavens parted; didn't happen that way. Eventually, over the next two or three months, I had a relentless mom who would never give up on me. She was doing the best with what she had and what she knew to do. We had heard about a program through a church, ironically enough, in Shreveport, Shreveport Community Church, Pastor Denny Duron, and Francis and Rodney Duron, great personal -- they're my spiritual mom and dad today, my spiritual grandparents.

James: Bless you, Denny! Bless you buddy!

John: My mom got me in a program that their church had, a faith-based drug rehab. Somehow a judge signed an order and I was led into a program. And five years to the day, on an Easter Sunday, I walked in, Karnack, Texas, to a place called Eagle Creek Recovery Center. When I walked in, they took me in a room and they said, "Do you know the Byrd family?"

I said, "Man, I'm trying to get my life right with God." I thought it was somebody trying to relate to me on a street level; that was J.P.'s last name, J.P. Byrd. I said, "I don't want to talk about that. I don't know how long before they're going to send me to prison. I really am trying to be in this program to get the most."

And they said, "No, I don't think you understand, John. The Byrd family is the reason you're here."

I said, "What do you mean?"

They said, "Well, when they found out you were trying to get in the program their son came here five years ago and God saved him, filled him with the Holy Spirit; he is in ministry today. And for five years they've been praying for you and the other two boys that almost killed their son. And God spoke to them and said you're the seed to see the other two saved. So they're here at the church tonight and they want to meet you after service."

Easter Sunday five years to the day, Shreveport Community Church, the Duron's took a chance on me, the Byrd family took a chance on me, brought me into their church, brought me into their fellowship. I was there for seven months.

Francis Duron became my momma; brought me to her house, and poured into my life, fed me ice cream at her kitchen counter, prophesied over me, told me who I was in God.

Pastor Rodney, her husband was alive at that time and I'd walk in the doors and he would say, "Hey, champion! You man of God!"

And I would say, "Well, the Evangel football team must be behind me because he can't be talking to me."

You know, James, here's the truth. They weren't powerful words because they made me feel good, they were powerful words that no one had ever spoken over me about my identity; and it was what God had said about me, that I was the light of the world, the salt of the earth.

James: It is a miracle story what you heard. The man is a changed man. The whole miracle even starts that that boy's life being spared -- it's a series of miracles.

Brooke, you look like one of those angels he's talking about that didn't come in. You finally showed up -- you showed up. You're sitting here listening to this story. What do you think when he tells where he was? And you heard him working with young people in your church, I guess in West Monroe; right? Where Shane Warren's pastoring; is that correct? So you're just one of the girls there and you see something in him and you don't see drugs and all that. What did you see in him?

Brooke: Well, I saw that he was a man of God and that's something -- he was genuine and that's something that... I was off at college and when I came back, of course, you're starting to transition, that season of starting to look. I never saw --

James: I started looking before college. I found this over here.

Brooke: Well, you did good! I guess it was at that point where you start looking for someone who is genuinely a man of God. You meet Christian boys all the time but there wasn't much separation between them and the world. And I met him before I even knew his story and I was like okay, that's a man of God. Then I hear his story, and I'm like, okay, never mind, God. That's a little scary!

[Laughter]

I remember our first date, we went on a motorcycle ride and I'm riding on the back of a motorcycle...

John: On my Harley.

Brooke: Yeah, a Harley, and his shirt's riding up and there's tattoos on his arm. I'm like, "Oh, my gosh, what am I doing?"

[Laughter]

It turned out -- God knew what he wanted for us.

James: And you can't believe where he was when you see him now.

Brooke: Even hearing the story, it just sounds like fiction. Like every time I hear it, I can't connect the dots to where he was and what he is now because there's no connection.

James: You hear the greatness of God in his story; don't you? And you see the greatness and the grace of God.

Brooke: Oh, I definitely do. Yes!

James: Betty, it's a story that could be everybody's story that's watching.

Betty: It's where we could all be without the grace of God. And no matter where we've been or where we are, God can do the same for you or any one of us if we'll turn our hearts over to him and let him take over our lives and change our lives. It doesn't matter what we've done.

James: Have you told your story, a testimony? I see a little DVD here I think could get through the church, "Called by a New Name." Is this basically kind of your story?

John: Yes, sir, it is.

James: If somebody wanted to get it, say they want to maybe get it to a prisoner or somebody in their family that's struggling, is there a web site they could go to? If they ask, would you send it to them?

John: Oh, absolutely!

James: What's the web site?

John: Www.TheAssemblyWM.org -- which is our church website.

James: That's too long for most of us to remember.

[Laughter]

So there it is, it's on the screen. Here's the thing that you know. Anytime you hear something and you say, "I wish I would have gotten that!" You can always go to LifeToday.org, you can watch the show again, you can get that or you can call the prayer center and say, "Give me that web site because I think this might be really helpful to someone who has been through some kind of a huge battle."

I just praise God for your testimony. You're a beautiful couple.

Would you say thanks to this beautiful couple, the Skipworth's?

I want to say to Shane Warren and Christopher there, my buddy, to all of you there on staff, thank you!

By the way, thank you for your prayers. You're over there by the Duck Dynasty bunch. We love all those -- we love their witness and their testimony.

Here's the thing I think you'll really appreciate. One of the things that *LIFE* does, all of you here in the audience know this, we really try to share the life of God, the love of God. Our primary focus is on the potentially billion people that we can talk to every day right here on television. We want to help you; it's as though you might be the only one watching, and to just know God loves you and wants you to know he is noticing.

Here's what I'd like you to see. We have 11 grandchildren. You're going to see in a moment, and you're going to have to really kind of keep watching, and you're going to see our oldest grandson and his wife of a year, and a one year anniversary -- one year married -- you're going to see where they were. I want you to listen to the heart of God through one of our grandchildren and I want you to look at what they're talking about and ask God, what do you want me to do? I think you're going to be moved. Watch.

On the mission field

Announcer: Trey Hume used to work in his village to provide for his family. But since his wife left him, he now takes this long walk every day to collect water for his three children, Huhacklay, Hushaw, and Hucomfake. When our mission team learned of Trey's story his children literally stole their hearts.

Trey shared with the team that his oldest daughter died one year ago from drinking the dirty water which made her sick. Trey fears his other children will die because he has no other choice but to get water from the dirty pond. His youngest child Hucomfake has become the sickest of his three children and she is continually lying down to try and get comfortable. All of this has driven Trey to tell us he has no hope.

Open captions:

>> My life is hopeless. I can't even think about hope.

Cassie: His little baby is super, super sick. She's really uncomfortable. I think she is just trying to lay down and get comfortable over there but it's heartbreaking. I think the worst part about the whole story is that he says that he has no hope. He's just in survival mode and that is just really difficult to be in a situation where there isn't any hope or joy or peace or anything.

Luke: What's amazing is we have the answer for them and that is clean water. We're asking you to please help us be able to bring life-giving water to this family and to other families and villages around here. Please partner with us and help us.

End of clip

In the studio

James: There are not adequate words to describe the gratitude to see our oldest grandson, married a year, standing there with his little bride looking at those precious children.

Betty, I wanted to take every one of them. I know Luke and Cassie, they did hold those precious children, including that little baby, and love them.

Luke started saying he was going to go the mission field when he was four years old. He told me, "I'm going to go and we're going to feed people because if we don't they will die, Papaw." And now there he is. That's his anniversary, his first one year, that was where it was spent.

For Cassie, they said she won everybody to Christ in Cambodia that had two legs -- she was after all of them. And there they are loving them.

And what he is saying is we can do something for that little family. Betty, they don't have to keep drinking that filthy water and seeing the child sick. For him to say he has no hope, and you and I know that hope is watching right here. Hope rises up in our heart and is expressed through loving hearts and we give the hope.

Betty: James, I know there is no greater heartache than a parent watching their child suffer and know that every moment they're in pain and they can do nothing. There are some situations where we can't do anything. We can love them and be close to them. But there's this situation where something can be done and we must do it for the sake of these precious children.

So I hope you will feel it in your heart to want to help. Let's make a difference. Let's drill the water wells so that these people can have an opportunity to offer something good for their children -- clean water that won't hurt them and kill them in some situations.

James: I guess I feel like I knew I'd be talking to the answer, I'd be talking to you. You're hope's answer -- you are the answer for hope. You really are -- we together. I can already tell you because Betty and I will do it, and I will tell our grandson, we'll drill a well. Betty and I will drill a well right there. We started years ago, when we started drilling wells, we said, "God, every time we come to drill a well, please help us."

When we first started we couldn't drill a well but then we got where we could drill a whole well; they were \$3600. Then the price went up because cost goes up and now it's \$4800. We've been able to hold it there. But we'll do that. I know Luke and Cassie can hear that, they're going to get a well. But we need to drill 500 wells in situations like that with precious little children like that, and parents like that. I believe with all my heart you want to do that.

We have some beautiful gifts to send you to say thank you. This is a devotional guide for every day, and a journal, "Every Day a New Day." You're going to love this! It's divided by seasons of the year.

Then the "Names of Jesus" pen set, two pens that are just beautiful.

Then the incredible painting by Thomas Kinkade, "Forest Chapel."

We send those gifts to say thanks but that's not why you give. I don't believe any one of you -- I don't believe one of you give to get. I believe you give because it is a blessing to give life. And we're going to share with them *Water for Life* and tell them about the water of life. And when they see love, they receive it because it is so real to them.

Would you right now go to LifeToday.org? Or would you dial the number there on the screen and take your bankcard, use it like a check -- that's how you should always use it -- but I wish you would make the largest gift you can.

Remember, \$48, and this is where most of the money comes for the wells, people who give \$48 and others join, and that gives ten people water for the rest of their life; that's how it breaks out -- \$144, 30 people. Somebody gives \$1200, three people join, we've got a well. \$2400, another person joins, we've got a well. At any level -- see, there is no area too great or too small if we just do what God put on our heart and what we can do. If you can give a well, I know you'll want to and I believe you will. So would you please reach out and touch someone with love right now?

Dial the number, go online, LifeToday.org and make that gift. If you write a check, please call the number and tell us you're putting it in the mail. Would you do that? Thank you so much for doing it.

Begin video clip

Announcer: Every day millions of children are forced to make a dreadful choice: drink filthy, polluted water filled with deadly disease or die from thirst. No child should ever be faced with this decision.

The good news is there is a solution! *Mission Water for Life* is one of the most exciting and viable demonstrations of God's love in the world today. Suffering can end because clean water changes everything.

With your gift today we can establish and drill 500 water wells for remote villages in over 12 different nations. Your gift of \$24 will help provide clean water for 5 people. A gift of \$48 will help provide for 10 people; \$72 will impact 15 people. And \$144 will help provide fresh, clean, disease-free water for 30 people for a lifetime!

With your gift you'll receive the "Every Day a New Day" devotional broken out into the four seasons of the year. This daily devotional features scriptures, inspirational thoughts, a Bible reading plan, and a place for you to journal each day.

With your gift of \$100 or more, you may request "The Names of Jesus" pen set; one inscribed with the names of Jesus found in scripture and the other reflecting the gifts of the spirit.

Finally, please consider a gift of \$1200 to help provide water for 250 people or a gift of \$4800 to help sponsor a complete well.

And request this beautifully framed canvas print of “The Forest Chapel” by Thomas Kinkade.

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

End of clip

In the studio

James: Betty and I are really excited to send you these beautiful, literally seasonal, "Every Day a New Day" -- it's 365 days. And with the devotional guide and the scriptures, you'll have a place to journal your thoughts. It becomes a real time of growing in the presence of the Lord. You'll love the insights and inspiration that's shared.

I want you to join us with the audience here in saying thanks so much, literally, to our incredible guest, John and Brooke Skipworth. What a beautiful couple! Bless y'all! You give our regards to your church.

John: I'm a bigger hunter than Shane or Chris!

James: We'll talk! Thank you so much for watching. Thank you for sharing!

Announcer: Be sure to visit stream.org, a rich and lively source for breaking news, analysis, and entertainment! Stream.org