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Week 3: WFL
Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh
Bayless Conley

Randy: Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm Randy Robison. My co-host is Sheila Walsh. Would you welcome Sheila to *LIFE Today*? Always glad to have her. I'm a little excited because we've got a very good guest here today.

Sheila: Yeah!

Randy: He is a pastor in Orange County, California, Cottonwood Church. He's also someone who speaks all over the world through a television show called Answers with Bayless Conley. Then he travels a lot speaking in Europe, really all over the world and he's blessed so many people.

And yet, somebody like that, you think, should avert all tragedy and he nearly lost his life here just not too long ago.

Sheila: Why don't we introduce our guest and let him tell his story because it really is amazing. Would you welcome please Bayless Conley?

Bayless: Glad to be here guys.

Randy: Start not quite from the beginning but your spiritual beginning because just the way you found Christ is amazing.

Bayless: Randy, as long as I can remember, since I was a little boy, I was looking for God. My mother was certain I was going to become a Catholic priest because of the questions I asked her as a two year old. But through a process of things I ended up having major league problems with drug addiction and alcoholism.

I was raised in southern California. Shorten the story. I left home as a teenager. Moved from southern California to the state of Oregon and things sort of went from bad to worse there as far as the drugs; I was involved in just a lot of illegal things.

Never heard the gospel; no human being ever shared Christ with me. I was at a park one day and I was walking through a kids' playground area. You just wouldn't notice them; there's kids running everywhere and a little Mexican kid with Cowboy boots on walked by me and I couldn't take my eyes off of him. There was just something amazing about him. I didn't know what it was. I recognized it was wholesome and that I didn't have whatever he had. I watched him until he disappeared across the other side of the park. I thought that was weird.

I walked up, it went into sort of forest. I walked maybe half a mile back into the forest and sat down next to a creek. I was completely isolated from view. An interesting thing happened -- I'll just back up a little bit. For some reason I was thinking about Jesus. I couldn't get Jesus off of my mind but it was Jesus the guru, Jesus an eastern teacher. I didn't know the Jesus of the Bible. It got to the point when I was walking by myself I stopped and looked around and said okay. I'll think about Jesus, just over and over and over. Then I saw the kid and just thought that was weird.

So I'm sitting down by the creek. About 15 minutes I hear something. That same boy comes sliding down the opposite creek bank, sits on the creek across from me. I didn't look much like I do now. I had real long hair; I used to braid it with feathers. I had a long red beard.

Randy: Wow!

[Laughter]

Bayless: The kid looked up at me and said, "Can I ask you a question?"

And I've been thinking about Jesus for like an hour. I said, "Okay."

He said, "Do you know Jesus?"

I about fell off the rock I was sitting on. Honestly, my first thought was this kid must think I'm Jesus.

[Laughter]

I really thought that.

I said, "Come here."

He sat down next to me. He said, "Isn't he wonderful?" And started talking like Jesus was still alive.

I was so taken aback. I talked to him for about 20 minutes. He's going on and on about Jesus.

He said, "Come on. I want you to meet my mom."

So I follow him across the park and here is his mother asleep in the grass. His two little sisters are playing there. He wakes her up. I talk to them and I'm thinking these are the weirdest people I've ever met! And I say "good-bye" as I'm walking off.

She said, "Come to our house for dinner."

I said, "No."

And as I'm still continuing to walk away she shouts the address at me and I just blew it off. I thought I'll never see them again.

Anyway, a lot of things happened in-between. I moved to Mexico City, was involved in some bad things down there; decided that I needed to come back and try and find that family.

I was walking down the street one day and I remember the address and I found the street. It's been weeks. And I'm walking down the street, it was an incline. They called me "Bay" -- was my nickname then.

I hear this lady, the kid's mother, she's hanging out of a second story window going, "Bay! Bay! Up here!"

And I went up and they had a place set for me and they had dinner ready. They said, "We've been waiting for you. The Lord told us you'd be here tonight."

I said, "Who told you?"

She said, "Jesus told us."

And I'd like to tell you I got saved right away; I didn't. Things sort of spiraled out of control. I ended up on a mountain road one night, was staying with friends and no street lights, no other homes around but theirs and I laid across the hood of my truck and I said, "God, if you're real, if this stuff about Jesus is real what about this?" And I fired a question off and got no answer. I fired another question off and just silence. I began to cry and I started to yell at God. I yelled two or three more questions, got no answer.

I wiped the tears off my face, went in and went to sleep. The next morning when I woke up something amazing happened to me. God spoke to me. I knew it was God.

He said, "I want you to go to..." -- the lady's name was Ramona. He said, "I was you to go to Ramona's house."

So I went over there. They're packing up, getting ready to go somewhere. I said, "Where are you going?"

They said, "We're going to a street mission in the next town over."

God speaks to me a second time and I know intuitively it's God. He said, "I want you to go with them."

Instead of obeying I argued inside. Just internally I said, "I don't think so. God, I'll tell you what. I'll make you deal. If they invite me I'll go."

Immediately Ramona wheels around and points to me and says, "Bay, will you go with us?"

I said, "Okay."

[Laughter]

I'm sitting on the front row. I still remember I had a pair of skin tight bright orange pants with big yellow stripes down the side and a little sweatshirt and my arms are crossed with a bless-me-if-you-can attitude.

They're going to have testimonies. I have no idea what this is, and it is filled with derelicts and street people, drug addicts. I'm right at home. This little lady gets up behind this giant wooden lectern and instead of sharing a testimony she begins to quote word for word the first question I'd asked God the night before on the hood of my truck, and then shared the answer from the Bible. My eyes starting leaking.

Then another guy got up to give a testimony but he quoted the next question almost verbatim that I asked God the night before; shared the answer from the Bible.

Several people got up, even the questions I shouted at God they shared the answers. I mean quoted the question, shared the answer. By this time I'm undone. I'm sitting on the front row sobbing like a baby. It hit me like a ton of bricks that it was true. I'd been set up. That night in

that little mission I accepted Christ. People laid hands on me and prayed for me. I was set free from drug addiction that night. It's been a journey of about 40 years since that happened.

Randy: Why do you think God pursued you like that?

Bayless: I think my heart was honest even though I was involved in a lot of things. And honestly, anybody that's watching right now, I think anyone that earnestly wants to know God, that wants to know the truth, I think God will move heaven and earth to get the truth to them; be they in a village in the middle of the Brazilian rain forest or in one of the world's metropolitan cities. I think God, he looks for people with honest hearts. I think it is because I was serious about wanting to know why I was here and if he was real.

Sheila: Where do you go from that, Bayless? You've gone from the long hair, the feather, the orange pants, the slightly illicit things that were going on and suddenly you're radically saved. What do you do next?

Bayless: I immediately got a handful of tracks and went out on the street and gave them to anyone that would stand still long enough for me to talk to. I took my guitar that also had feathers hanging off of it. I would go to the park and I would sing songs and get a crowd and then put my guitar down and tell them what happened to me. So I just immediately, shared with all of my friends. I won about half of them to Christ. The other half I lost. But it's what I looked for my whole life.

Sheila: What's amazing to me is you think of that little boy. Your mom thinks you're going to be a Catholic priest because you're asking these questions. So clear, the Holy Spirit had been working on you since you were a child because he had something amazing for you.

I think if people watching in who are just flicking through channels and they stop because they hear your story, and maybe they've been asking a lot of really tough questions and not getting an answer. What do you say to people who think well, I've asked God tough questions? He's not speaking to me.

Bayless: I think the person that's watching right now that that's them, it is not a coincidence you're watching. It's a matter of divine design. If you just open your eyes and recognize it, he's talking to you right now.

Sheila: That's absolutely right. You go from your guitar with the feathers and I'm noticing today there are no feathers. Feathers are gone. Chickens around the world are safe once more!

[Laughter]

How do you go from that to becoming a pastor?

Bayless: Well, honestly, I haven't gotten rid of the hippie thing. But early on as a Christian, I moved down to Mexico. I lived in Mexico before I was a Christian getting in trouble, I moved back down there and did missions work shortly after I was saved. I was one day praying in somebody's backyard and God spoke to me about pastoring. I didn't jump in right away -- thank God I didn't. I would have skinned all the sheep alive.

[Laughter]

A guy that I met doing mission's work in Mexico asked me to come on and be an assistant pastor with him. I served him for two years and then my wife and I started our church in 1983.

Randy: One thing I know you do, you travel a lot -- a lot in Europe. We talked earlier, because you've kind of got a reputation of attracting gypsies in Europe, which is not a good thing necessarily in the eyes of a lot of Europeans; right? But I think it's a little bit of where you came from in that honesty, and that just searching.

Bayless: That may be why, Randy. I'm honestly not sure why but I've been for 25 years about been doing meetings in Europe. We probably concentrate more in Germany, Switzerland, and the Netherlands than anywhere else.

But sometimes, an average meeting we might have 300 gypsies turn up. And the pastors say, "We've never seen a gypsy in our church before." I think they are a misunderstood community in Europe. But those that are saved, they fiercely love God and they would give you the clothing off of their back. They're the most genuine passionate creative people that I've ever met. I love them to pieces.

Randy: One of the most difficult questions, and probably one you may have even asked when you were shouting questions at God is why? Why do bad things happen to people? Why do bad things happen to good people?

Here you are traveling the world, ministering to people, opening your heart and your life to share the gospel and you're out doing something you love, which is boating and fishing and sailing. You live in California so you guys get to do that. We're a little jealous around here in Texas.

[Laughter]

And you nearly die. Tell us a little bit about what happened and kind of what brought you through that.

Bayless: Well, one of my hobbies is I free dive and we spear fish and we --

Sheila: Tell people what that means. It means he has no oxygen, people.

Bayless: It's basically, you snorkel, you hold your breath and you dive down either with a spear gun to hunt fish or to get lobsters at night. We were going out to Catalina Island; it's about 25 miles off the coast. Anyway, we T-boned a little point that sticks out, goes into a reef. I have no recollection of the accident that happened. There was two other friends on board.

I was the most severely hurt. My throat was crushed and torn open all at the same time. Both of my lungs were filled with blood. My tongue was lacerated. I had a chunk taken out of my leg. My chin was completely opened up down to there. I was bleeding on the brain. My carotid artery got opened up -- a few other things as well.

Randy: You hit the steering wheel? Is that what you did?

Bayless: I'm not sure.

Sheila: That doesn't survivable though.

Bayless: There's quite a story in there. But to answer your question and then I'll share a little bit of that. We live in a fallen world. Everything doesn't operate the way God originally intended. One day he's going to fix all that; going to make a new heavens and a new earth. There is not going to be anymore sorrow or pain or sickness or any of those things. We have an adversary, the devil. I don't have all the answers. I know God didn't cause my accident. He didn't initiate it but he knew it was going to happen, nothing takes him by surprise. I don't have to have all the answers. I don't have a theology that requires me to understand everything before I believe God is good. I believe he is good even when I don't understand.

But anyway, we had the accident. There happened to be a coast guard boat around the corner that were practicing for just such an event and they're never there. One of our guys was able to put out a mayday and they were there within minutes; got us airlifted over to the coast. They said I would have bled out in another 15 minutes. A battery of doctors worked on me for seven and a half hours. The lead physician came out. First thing she said to my wife was, "None of us thought he was going to live. We didn't think he could make it."

Anyway, part of it was instantaneous. A lot of people prayed for me. The bleeding on my brain stopped right in front of them. The carotid artery had a big flap on it plus another artery was opened up; both of those sealed up right in front of the doctors. But other parts of my healing were a process and it was not... not... not easy.

Randy: Did you think you might not preach again?

Bayless: Well, they didn't know if I would ever be able to. For sure they thought maybe it will be a year and a half because I couldn't even speak. My mouth didn't work. I had a dead vocal cord and my tongue didn't work. They had to sew my tongue back together. I actually didn't get all the parts. And then the big thing was my throat. I couldn't swallow. I didn't have a sip of water for probably four months. I had a G-tube in my stomach. If I got thirsty it was a big syringe of water. I had to eat everything that way. So I had to learn how to swallow all over again, had to learn how to speak all over again. My diction is still not perfect. My voice is a little different than it used to be.

Sheila: I think it sounds good though. It's kind of got a growly quality.

Bayless: Well, thank you! This is my Lou Rawls version right here.

[Laughter]

Randy: What did you take from all that? Obviously, you've got to go, God, why did you -- not like why me? But why am I -- what's going on? Right?

Bayless: Well, there is certainly -- I don't think I ever questioned why. That was never an issue with me. I just knew that God was good.

It was a big deal. My wife and family, they're the real heroes. They didn't know if I'd be a vegetable. I was in a coma for ten days. My first memory is waking up in I.C.U. ten days after the accident. But they didn't know if I was going to be normal mentally. They didn't know if life as we knew it was over, even if I was okay, mentally, if I'd ever be able to speak or preach again. Bless my wife; she stood with me, and the whole family and the church.

I think that's one of the things that stood out, Randy, is in the book of Psalms it says, "May God help you in the day of trouble. May he send you help from the sanctuary and strengthen you out of Zion." Sanctuary is a place where God's people gather. In Hebrews 12 as well as referring to Israel, Zion is a type of the church. I'm here because people prayed. People rallied around my

family. They rallied around me. They brought food over that I couldn't eat.

[Laughter]

We didn't tell them. My family enjoyed it. I wouldn't be here if not for the people of God.

I think for the promises as well. People prayed the promises over me when I was able to talk again. I began to pray them over myself. I think the promises of God are what connects us with his nature and his nature is health, his nature is life, his nature is peace. Without a promise, you don't have a pipeline to connect you with his nature. So promises were important.

Patience was a big one. Like I said, part of what happened to me was instant. But all of my healing wasn't and I wish it had been. Some of it has been just a long process. I couldn't eat for the longest time. The first thing I did, I had a cup of tea. The very first thing I had.

Sheila: That's a very good choice! As a British person, let me just say excellent choice!

Bayless: It took me 90 minutes to cough and sputter down that cup of tea; gagging like I was going to die but I was determined to do it. Those things, with my speech and my swallowing and my diction, that's been a process. I think sometimes people think if God does things it has to be instant but not everything he does is instant.

In John chapter six there is a story of the disciples in a great storm on the lake. Jesus gets in the boat, immediately they're at the shore. We love that! But in Acts chapter 7 they're in a great storm that lasted for weeks and there was divine intervention, an angel appeared but the storm blew itself out, they lost the ship, ended up on shore. Nobody wants to be in the Acts 27 story.

I honestly, I wish with everything it had been John chapter six, I'll just go on record, God, I prefer that. But for "So it seemed good in his sight" and I'm happy and I just trust him however that rolls out.

Randy: Well, we're glad you're here and we're glad you're still preaching the gospel and sharing your life's story. We appreciate it.

Thank God for those guys that were close by. When the situation was bad, they were able to respond. I think that's a pretty good picture of what we do.

Sheila: Absolutely! There are so many people around the world in places right now where they're asking God for a miracle. I believe that you and I are going to get the opportunity to be an answer to that prayer.

Randy: Absolutely! In fact, I want you to see it. Watch this right now.

On the mission field

Ralph: Steady now. We're going to home of little Stanina. She actually lost a little sister with the contaminated water here. They use this same water to drink, to wash their clothes, to clean the house, and also washing dishes -- and then they drink the same water. It's a very startling scenario.

She has to walk about two kilometers, about a mile and a half one way, to collect water and then bring it back home to her mother. What she showed me here, I was really surprised that somebody would actually drink this water.

Her little sister died at about three years old from drinking this water. They couldn't save her life. She got so sick and so ill they just couldn't bring her back. She's lost a little sibling drinking this water from the river.

Open Captions:

>> When I drink the bad water I feel it in my stomach. Before my sister died, we did everything together. I now have a broken heart because I lost my best friend. During my sister's funeral I got very sad because I fear that my little brother will die too.

Ralph: It just kind of disturbs your soul when you know that it's a very simple solution -- just a cup of clean water would have saved little Stanina's little sister.

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: That little girl Stanina is carrying such a heavy load. She's carrying the burden that usually a mom or a dad would carry and that profound sadness she feels at the loss of a sibling and so afraid she'll lose her brother too.

Whenever I know that my son is coming home from college, one of the first things I do is I go to the supermarket and I buy bottles of the water he likes best. When I watch that, my heart breaks for that little girl that simply, the very thing that they need to sustain life, which is to be able to drink water is the very thing that is killing them.

But you and I, we have the privilege, we can change this! We can do this. Our plan, our prayer, our commitment this year is to build 500 new water wells. The thing that's amazing about these wells, I'm learning, is that this is not just some hole in the ground that can cave in. These are amazing wells that can operate without electricity; they're steel based. Children can pump them.

Do you know they last for 70 years? That's why it's called Water for Life because this will do for life -- this will sustain them for life. So we want to do this. \$4800, which I know is a lot for some of you, and not so much for others, will build a well in a village that will change the life of every person in that village.

But maybe you can do less. Maybe you can just do \$48, if you could do that. If we all join together, you might think that's a drop in the bucket but if you and I join together the bucket is getting wetter every single day.

Randy: Go to the phones right now. Go online. Do what you can.

Those tears, golly -- the first time I saw that -- those tears, it's just not right. It hurts my heart to watch a child to have to go through that. She's clinging on to her brother and there are so many kids like that.

If I couldn't make it through it if I didn't know what we do when you partner with us as Sheila mentioned, our goal is another 500 wells this year, and that's in over 15 different countries. We can only reach that goal with your help. Some of you -- you know what? I know \$4800 is not feasible for me but I know there are some people that are watching, I bet there are some people that could do two or three wells. I just want you to pray about it. God will tell you what you're supposed to do, and then you need to be obedient.

But for most of us, \$24 is what it breaks down. The math breaks down to \$24 will give five people clean water for the rest of their lives.

Stanina, her brother, a couple of other siblings, cousins, if they were in your neighborhood, you know you would run to their door and say, "Here! Here is \$24. My goodness! You don't have to drink that deathly water." It's just a matter of obedience.

Pray and ask the Lord, what can I do today? And then reach out. Partner with us and let's give Water for Life.

Begin video clip

Announcer: Every day children living in extreme poverty 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.

Our teams have recently located remote villages in southern Africa where children are dying from contaminated, disease ridden water. The situation is desperate. They need clean disease-free water immediately.

With your gift today you can help drill 188 water wells in remote villages across seven African nations. Your gift of \$24 will help provide clean water for five people. A gift of \$48 will help provide for ten. \$72 will provide for 15 people. And \$144 will help provide fresh disease-free water for 30 people for a lifetime!

With your gift we'll send you Sheila Walsh's devotional, 5 Minutes with Jesus, a fresh infusion of joy to help you find perspective in the midst of daily life and experience a deeper connection with God.

With your gift of \$100 or more you'll also receive our No Greater Name canvas, a beautiful artistic expression of our savior's name and a daily reminder of his presence in your life.

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 you may request our beautiful new hand-painted "Determined Eagle" bronze sculpture.

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

End of clip**On the mission field**

James: These ladies are here washing and you can see by looking at the water, the water is totally contaminated and we know for a fact that thousands of people have died in this area. So we must, I mean, just absolutely must drill water wells here and literally give these people a future. This is typical of all of southern Africa.

We need your help and we ask you to help provide the answer and the remedy to this very serious problem. When you've got children dying every day because of contaminated water sources... We can turn that situation into a situation of hope. So would you be that source of inspiration and help by making the best gift you can today?

End of clip

In the studio

Randy: Do go to the phones or go to the web site. We appreciate you just reaching out and giving life.

I also appreciate you, Bayless. Appreciate you being with us. I do want to mention to people that you have a book called, *From Generation to Generation*. It's available now in multiple languages. It shows your heart for reaching other people. And also, what's your web site if they want to watch your show?

Bayless: AnswersBC.org.

Randy: Great! We appreciate you. Would you thank Bayless for joining us on *LIFE Today*?

[Applause]

And as always, we appreciate you. Join us again next time on *LIFE Today*!