

8/29/17

Week 36: Christmas Shoes & Smiles

Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh

Derwin Gray

Randy: Welcome to *LIFE Today*! We've got a wonderful guest here. I like him because he is a former N.F.L. player and that's always going cool. You know him from personal experience.

Sheila: Well, and the interesting thing is I've actually never got to meet him until today. But I had the privilege of preaching in his church, Transformer's Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. And honestly, the minute I was around his people, I came back and I said to our people, "We've got to have this Derwin on our show."

Randy: Which is amazing because he was not there when you were there.

Sheila: No. But his footprints are all over the place. So I probably stop talking now. Would you help me welcome our guest, Derwin Gray, Pastor Derwin Gray? Welcome!

[Applause]

Derwin: Thank you! Thank you!

Sheila: I was truly blown away by your church. I'm 60; I've been traveling for 40 years. I've had the privilege of being in churches all around the world but there is something very unique about your church. I realized the longer I was around your people it's really intentional. You have absolutely decided this is what the body of Christ should look like.

Derwin: God has been incredibly gracious to us and we have a conviction that the new heavens and new earth is multi-ethnic, it is multi-class and so we want to practice that now. So our church, because of the work of Jesus, because of His grace we're multi-ethnic, multi-generational, multi-socioeconomic, not because that's something that's politically correct but because it is kingdom correct.

So what you experienced was "You will know my disciples because they love one another."

It's probably good that I wasn't there, then that's why they were displaying the love of Christ because I was gone somewhere. But no, they're just wonderful people that I get to serve with and

people that love Jesus.

Sheila: That's quite a leap from N.F.L. player. Now I'm a huge -- I'm a huge football fan but you played with the Colts and the Panthers. So tell us a little bit about -- was that always your dream to be a football player?

Derwin: It was. It was. So I grew up in San Antonio, Texas so I'm a Texas boy. Whenever I come to Texas, just something comes out of me. I want to tackle something or eat something.

Sheila: Tackle Randy.

Derwin: Yeah, I may tackle you before the segment is over. Like if I just start twitching in my face, get ready, you're going to get tackled.

Sheila: I can tell.

Derwin: But you know, so growing up, football was just what you did. But about age 12, football became more than just a game. It became a way for me to get out of where I was.

So I couldn't say this then but I can say it now, football became my god. It gave me identity, it gave me mission, it gave me purpose. So the environment that I grew up in was lots of drugs, violence, and so I wanted to get out.

So in eighth grade, my eighth grade coach told my mom that "Derwin could get a scholarship if he continued to play well."

And my mom told me that. I said, "What kind of ship is that?"

No, because I didn't know what a scholarship was. So she explained. She said, "You know like those boys on TV; they play in college."

So that gave me a vision of what could be. So I didn't start off like the biggest, the fastest. So right now my son as a sophomore, 6-foot one, 200 pounds, when I was his age I was 5-8, 145. So I wasn't the biggest, strongest, fastest but once I got the idea that you may be better than me but you're not going to outwork me and you're not going to have a stronger will than me; but my why for doing that was rooted in I've got to get out of where I was.

So on the outside it looked healthy but on the inside that furnace was eventually going to catch up with me. So I went to B.Y.U. Yep! Went to B.Y.U. Played college ball there, had a great career. Then I ended up getting drafted to the Colts. I was the 92nd pick in the '93 N.F.L. draft.

By my third year I'm a team captain. We make it to the A.F.C. championship game. We end up losing with like two seconds left.

But on the outside it was like okay, so I've got the money, I've got the girl, I've got the career but what I don't have is unconditional love, I don't have forgiveness and I can't get rid of this fear I had. And the fear is this: Who am I going to be when I don't play anymore? Because the N.F.L. stands for: Not for long.

Sheila: Wow!

Derwin: So I played for six years, which is twice the norm. So when I was done, I was 27-28 years old. As an adult male, my brain had just stopped forming basically. Like I just became an adult. And you have the rest of your life. So I was always afraid of who would you be if you couldn't play anymore. But I had a teammate starting in 1993 who literally, every day after practice would take a shower, dry off, wrap a towel around his waist.

Sheila: The naked preacher!

Derwin: The naked preacher. Yeah! He was 6-foot two, 240 pounds and after practice he'd get his Bible and he would walk around the locker room. And he would go, "Tsk, tsks." -- like that because he had one gold tooth and he would go, "Tsk-tsk. Do you know Jesus?" And in my mind I'm going, do you know you're half naked? So his nickname was the naked preacher. But for five years he shared the gospel with me, not just in words but the way he loved his wife and his kids, the way whenever my teammates had a problem they were at his locker. Whenever there was a charity, whenever there was an event to serve the city, he led the way.

So his words matched his actions and his actions matched his words. So on August 2nd, 1997, in a small dorm room after lunchtime, training camp with the Colts, I picked up the phone. This was before -- this is like phones were attached to the wall then and they had a long cord. I called my wife on that phone and I said, "I want to be more committed to you and I want to be committed to Jesus."

And that's when it hit me that I was loved unconditionally. I just cried like that whole night. Like I might even start crying now. I just cried the whole night and I was taught as a little boy never cry because that is a sign of weakness. But now I realize that those tears were living water of God healing me. And I got infected with this virus called grace and the symptoms have just gotten better ever since.

Sheila: I love that virus!

Randy: In your book *Limitless Life*, you talk about the things that limit us. Did you feel limited by that fear of what you were going to do, what you were going to be? How did that carry on in your life?

Derwin: So before I answer that question, the very fact that I wrote a book is a miracle. My teachers at Converse Judson High School would be surprised. If they were atheists, they would become Pentecostal believers. They would be like, "Praise the Lord!" Because I was horrible at English. I scored a 16 on my A.C.T. A 16! That's as low as you can get. That's low. And now I've got a doctorate and I'm working on another one and my masters, I graduated magna cum laude which means like really, really smart.

[Cheers & Applause]

So that is a testimony of God's grace. But yeah, throughout the book I talk about labels that limit us. So what we typically do is we define ourselves by what we do or what's been done to us. And so I grew up in a very chaotic environment so I was always afraid. Like even now, one of my tendencies when I'm not walking in the spirit is to walk in fear. So one of the ways I try to prevent that is try to control things. And at 46 years of age and through parenting, God is like, "No, I'm in control. Trust me."

So one of the labels that I always had was fear. I was afraid. I was afraid something bad was going to take place because I had seen so much pain. I was afraid that I would never measure up. I grew up as a compulsive stutterer. So the fact that I write books, the fact that I preach... Oh my gosh! Like in high school, there would be oral examinations that I was required to give that I wouldn't give because it was too hard to talk and who wants to be laughed at? And so those were labels that Christ had to take away from me and give me a new one based on what he had done and not what I did or what happened to me.

Randy: What is that new label?

Derwin: Well, beloved child of God! That everything that I have can be stripped away from me except for I am a beloved child of God. Family, church, accomplishments can all be taken away but nothing can ever take away the life of God in me and the identity that I have in him.

Sheila: So how do you get from being an N.F.L. player to a pastor of a pretty phenomenal church? I mean that's -- you didn't end up on E.S.P.N.

Derwin: Actually, I did some work for E.S.P.N.

Sheila: Forgive me! That's kind of cool!

Derwin: It was cool. So the way you end up from the football field to the pulpit is God tricks you.

Sheila: He's like that.

[Laughter]

He's like that!

Derwin: Yeah! Because I didn't grow up church. So I had no idea about what evangelism meant. I thought that was like a skin cream or a skin disease that hydrocortisone fixes or something. I didn't know all that stuff.

All I knew was Jesus loved me, he's transformed my life and he wants to do that for others and I want others to know. And so, as a Christian with my teammates, I just began to share what I was learning from the Bible. Because I knew this, that if I had a playbook in the N.F.L., if I studied it, I played well. So I go, "Okay, well, God must have a playbook called the Bible. So if I study it, then I can play his game well, called life."

So the more I learned, I would begin to teach that. So I had a teaching gift from the spirit of God and didn't even know it. I had a gift to be an evangelist to see others come to know Christ. And so as that began to take hold other Christians would go, "You should pastor a church."

I was like, "No."

One of the reasons why is because in my early formative years whoever got close to me ended up rejecting me -- so that was a label. Ended up abandoning me -- so that is a label. And it took Christ going, "I'm going to stitch a new label in you that you are accepted, that you are loved. And you know what? As you risk loving, you may be hurt but it is better to be hurt loving than to stay hurt and not love."

Sheila: The two things that I took away from being with your church were these: Come as you are and on mission 24/7. Because at the end of a service and I'm not going to do it properly, you have the congregation, everybody says this thing which is kind of cool. Do you mind doing that? Because I'm going to mess it up.

Derwin: Sure! I would love to. At the end of every service we do this as our liturgy, as our creed to remind us of who we are. So together, thousands of us, we stand up and we raise our hands and we say "upward." That stands for loving God completely because he first loved us.

"Inward" to love ourselves correctly because of Christ in us. "Outward" to love our neighbors compassionately because of the Holy Spirit through us. I point at the congregation, the congregation points at me, and then we say, "Transformers roll out." So "Upward, inward, outward, transformers roll out." Because now it is time to roll out that love to a world that needs it. So we don't want to keep all that goodness confined to a building. We want to take it to the streets.

Sheila: One of our favorite parts that we were talking about earlier is that you have it in your book where you talk about going from racism to gracism. That's a pretty cool story.

Derwin: So I'm preaching one Sunday and our church is incredibly diverse and beautiful people. We've got farmers, people with dreadlocks -- it's awesome! So one day I'm talking to folks after the service and I notice this white guy about 35 running down the aisle and he is crying and snot is hanging from his nose.

Sheila: Not a good look.

Derwin: It's not. So I'm thinking, what would Jesus do? He would do a miracle, make the snot disappear. Or like is this guy coming to attack me? But I'm too slow. And before I know it, he is on me draped on me. I have no clue where the snot is, don't want to know where it is at. So he's draped on me and the white guy says, "I can't believe I'm in church. And I can't believe the pastor is black! I don't even like black people."

Randy: That must have made you feel good.

[Laughter]

Derwin: It was awesome! Because for him to be there and to be in this state and his next words were, "I want to know Jesus." And so eventually, his girlfriend who had invited him for awhile, who herself had been in prison, eventually they both get baptized. And as the gospel is penetrating their hearts, they're like, "Pastor, we need to get married."

And then the woman says, "Well, my dad abandoned me when I was about 17. He won't have anything to do with me. Will you walk me down the aisle?"

So here I am, walking her down the aisle. She is wearing jeans, a white frilly-type shirt with the arms cut off because she is buff and she's got barbed wire tattoo. And he is standing, waiting for his bride and I'm walking her down and he is crying again. And so I get to walk him down the aisle. And it is just beautiful. So I call that going from a racist to becoming a gracist.

I think that's what the church of Jesus Christ is supposed to do. Is that for God so loved the world -- the world. In Hebro -- not Hebrew, but in Hebro, that's er'body, that's everyone -- that Jesus loves everyone. That he spilled his blood equally for everyone. And then when we become followers of Jesus, First Peter says we become a chosen race.

So next time, if you're a Christian, it asks you, "What's your race?" You put "Christian" and move to the next question.

Sheila: That's great! I love that. I'll be doing that from now on.

Derwin: That's what Peter says and he walked with Jesus. He was kind of like a big deal. He's a big deal -- that Peter. And so that's one of the foundations of our church is we treat everyone as though Jesus died for them.

Sheila: Which would actually technically be correct.

Derwin: Correct. Yes.

Randy: I'm curious so Sheila made note that your church is very multi-ethnic and you're telling this story about a white guy in the racism being broken. It would be kind of cool if churches were more diverse and all that kind of stuff but manufacturing it wouldn't really work. It would be artificial and it wouldn't work. It's real in your church though.

Derwin: It is a theological conviction that is rooted in the work of Jesus Christ. In Genesis 12:1-3 God says to Abraham, "Through you all the nations are going to be blessed" -- all the ethnos. In Galatians 3:8 the scripture says -- God preached the gospel beforehand to Paul saying, "In you all the nations will be blessed." So the work of Jesus, his life, his death, his resurrection, ascension and sending of the spirit to build a church is a church comprised of the nations; that Jesus fulfills God's covenant with Abraham that says God hears your beautiful diverse family and this family now becomes a tutor to teach the world how to love.

So for us at Transformation Church, one of the most powerful witnesses is our community that people go, "How do y'all get along? With so much racial upheaval in our country, how is it that you guys get along?"

And we're like the fifth grader in Sunday school class, we go, "Jesus." But then we begin to explain it. So you can't manufacture it but it has to be a theological conviction rooted in the gospel. But then there are practical applications like listening to other people's stories.

Sheila: See, that's huge! If we learned to listen to one another, that would change the way we

live with one another.

Randy: Even just taking the time to sit down and try to listen even if you don't get it the first time.

Derwin: One of the things that I love about sports teams and I encourage parents to let their kids play sports. It is not about being the best, it is about who you are becoming. So the great thing about sports teams is you have diverse guys coming together for a common vision with a common role.

How much more should we do that with the church? But what do we do at the church? "Well, I don't like that music." I haven't read in the Bible where God asks our opinion on what kind of music we like. "Well, I don't like this and I don't like that." Can I preach just for a minute?

Sheila: Go! Go!

Derwin: We need to put down our preferences and pick up our crosses. Let me say it again for the people somewhere over there. We need to put down our preferences and pick up our crosses because it is Jesus' church.

In Revelation 5:9 says: Every nation, tribe and tongue will be worshipping the king together. So you know what that means? I don't like every song our worship team sings but Jesus didn't ask me my opinion. He asked me to build and join him in building his church which means I put down my preference and pick up my cross so a cross-shaped community can be built. Why? Because the unbelieving world is watching and they're looking for hope. They're looking for love. They're looking for Jesus.

Why are we called the body of Christ? Why are we called the body of Christ? Because we extend his nail pierced hands to a world in need of His grace.

Sheila: And now you know why you need his book and I'm going to tell you how to get it in just a few moments.

But one of the things that Derwin's church is very committed to is to live out the gospel of Christ everywhere, to every place, to every land. We're kind of committed to that too. Would you watch this with me?

On the mission field

Ralph: It's this time of the year we like to focus on giving Christmas smiles. Today I'm sitting

here in China at one of our *LIFE* centers with little MoMo. MoMo came to the *LIFE* center here with a special need of a surgery because he had one of the worst cases of cleft palate, cleft lip that we've ever seen. The doctors were able to operate and bring him a Christmas smile. But he is just a happy little boy. He is a boy all the way. He is playful. But he's just a bundle of joy and a ball of energy. He is sitting quiet right now but he loves, loves playing and loves being a little boy.

He just loves his life here. He's been loved on. In fact, he is hoping to be adopted sometime soon. Thank you so much to all of our donors who give so generously over and over again to help *LIFE Outreach* bring Christmas smiles to children who God loves just so much. Say bye-bye!
End of clip

In the studio

Randy: What an amazing privilege to be able to do that. Sheila, what do you think about when you see this outreach, the shoes and the smiles where we can change children's countenances?

Sheila: One of the things I find so moving about that story is that darling little boy, four years old, he is actually in an orphanage there, and as he was before, with that cleft palate and cleft lip, his was one of the most severe we'd ever seen; it extended almost right up to his eye. He had so little hope of ever being adopted. There is something about certain cultures, when children are born with deformities, it is almost seen as a curse, as if it is something that has made them like a social outcast. And for you and I, in Jesus' name, to be able to say to a child like MoMo, no you're loved and you're seen and God has a future for you and a plan. For just \$500 we actually are able to perform those surgeries. That would cost so much more here in the United States. But we work with some amazing doctors who are absolutely committed to helping us do that. So literally, \$500 is all it takes to be able to offer those surgeries.

But the other thing that we have going, Randy that I love is Christmas shoes. This is just amazing to me. These shoes, they're literally, we're able to provide them for \$3.60. So here's what we want to do this Christmas. We want to provide 150,000 children with their very first pair of shoes. It's so doable! Literally, for \$72 you can provide 20 pairs of shoes. Thirty six bucks! You can't even buy shoes for that. But that will provide ten pairs of shoes for children who in so many places, if they don't have shoes and they get cuts on their feet and they're putting their feet in water where there's disease they're going to end up with hookworm and all sorts of things that can lead to brain damage.

We have such an opportunity. Christmas is a wonderful time. It's a time where you and I love to

get together with our friends and family. We eat too much, we buy each other things that we don't need. Here's an opportunity for you and I to do something to change the lives of children.

So literally, \$36, 10 pairs of shoes -- that's nothing!

Randy: I know you've been in the field. When we put these shoes onto the children it makes them smile. For many of them, it is the first pair of shoes they've ever had. So these are very durable, practical shoes. A lot of kids outgrow them quickly and pass them on to others so they have a life of their own.

It is just a great gift. This Christmas -- we're thinking Christmas a little early here for a good reason because we want to prepare as we give so many children Shoes and Smiles. Will you be a part of that? Will you go online and make the best gift you can? Call that number. Please do it right now.

Begin video clip

Announcer: Poverty is a killer and because of it children needlessly suffer; not only from 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.

Far too many children living in poverty have never owned a new pair of shoes. And while that may seem minor in light of all their needs, walking with bare feet puts them at risk of life-threatening infections and disease that could lead to crippling consequences -- and even death.

By responding today you can help immediately secure and begin shipping Christmas shoes to 150,000 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 pairs. And the gift of \$180 will help provide 50 pairs of Christmas shoes for children in need.

With your gift of any amount, be sure to request this beautifully crafted crystal shoe ornament, a treasure to place on your tree each holiday season. With your gift of \$180 or more you may also request this keepsake boxed set of LIFE's Christmas shoe ornaments.

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 request our determined eagle bronze sculpture. Please call, write, or make your gift online today.

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: Thank you so much! If the phones are busy, please keep calling. We really care about this. Let's put some big smiles on some little faces this Christmas.

Randy: And when you do today, please ask for Derwin Gray's book, the *Limitless Life* as you've seen on today's show. It will bless you.

Will you thank our guest for being here? Thank you, sir for your life, for your ministry, and for being with us here on *LIFE Today*. We thank you for being with us here on *LIFE Today*. We just invite you to join us every day on *LIFE Today*. If you've missed the program or part of this one, you can see it on our website: LifeToday.org.