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Week 17: Spring Mission Feeding
Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh
Larnelle Harris

Sheila: Hey! Welcome to *LIFE Today*! I'm Sheila Walsh, here with Randy Robison. I have to tell you, I'm excited about today.

Randy: I know you are! I know you are.

Sheila: You know there are certain times in life where you hear a voice for the first time and you kind of stop and tune in and think, oh my gosh! Well, I remember hearing that voice at a place called Estes Park in Colorado. I was a very new singer coming over from the U.K. and I was very nervous. And suddenly, this guy got up on stage and began to sing. Not only was I blown away by his voice, I was blown away by the presence of Christ in his voice.

So I am thrilled today that Randy and I get to welcome Larnelle Harris to the show!

Larnelle: Thank you! Good to see you again.

Sheila: I found it so interesting because you've written this book called *Shaped Notes*: How ordinary people with extraordinary gifts influenced my life and career. It was so fascinating for me to hear the back story. You mentioned names like Thurlow Spurr. I mean gosh! He had such an impact on so many lives.

Larnelle: Really started contemporary Christian music. I was in a group called the Spurrflows and we traveled all over the country. We were doing driver education safety programs for the Chrysler Corporation. We would do sometimes two and three concerts a day. And at night we would invite the kids to our spiritual concert, at night, where we could give our testimonies. Our follow-up was done by the Billy Graham organization. In the daytime we would invite the kids to come to the concert and we saw many a young person come to the Lord as a result of that ministry. And a lot of that is credited to Thurlow Spurr, a good friend.

Sheila: How old were you when you realized, I can sing?

Larnelle: Probably, young enough to be teased; that was the thing. I was a boy soprano. You

just didn't sing; that wasn't what you did.

[Laughter]

The ladies in the church choir would just cry when they could hear me sing the hymns and stuff. But the kids my own age would just laugh and throw things. It was not funny.

But I met a lady by the name of Miss Georgie Dunahy. And Miss Georgie taught piano lessons to every kid in town whether they wanted them or not. I didn't want them! But Ida Mae Harris wanted me to want them; that's my mom. She found out I could carry a tune. She started to take me around to various little things, little events there in Danville, Kentucky. And with her playing the piano and me in that little Texas tie with those strings hanging off the end of it, I did my first concert at nine years old in the First Baptist Church, Danville, Kentucky.

They took an offering and the plate passed my mom and me and I said, "Mom, I think we're rich." I never understood why she didn't think that was funny but she did not. But that was my first concert with Miss Georgia playing the piano.

Randy: The thing that struck me in the telling of your life -- part of it anyway, is that you didn't grow up necessarily in the stereotypical Christian home. It was there but your father wasn't always serving the Lord.

Larnelle: No, he was not and my mom prayed for him. I used to sit at her knee; I was a little guy, probably four or 5 years old. Really didn't understand all the dynamics of grown-up relationships, and they were having quite a rocky one. But I would sit and listen to her pray. She was a Pentecostal Holiness lady. She wore that white dress with those big buttons running down the front. Boy, she would flat run over you in a service. You'd be asking her to leave, I've got to tell you. She'd get to praising the Lord and shouting -- and something else.

So as I sat and listened to her pray for my dad, not understanding everything, not getting all this, even I knew that he didn't have a chance. He became a Christian, from a background that was -- well, let me just say that he broke some cycles; some people would call that a generational curse. He was a bootlegger. That's how he made his living. I was a little guy and I could sell you a pint just as good as he could out in front of our house.

Sheila: I've never read that in your bio.

[Laughter]

Larnelle: Left that part out.

[Laughter]

But I have to tell you, he did become a Christian, became a deacon in our church. Even more, became the spiritual head of our home. And guess what little boy needed to see that? Me! I believe that my dad who probably finished the eighth grade, my mom, probably the third, they are my heroes because they allowed God to come in and change their lives.

Sheila: You talk about a time in your own life when I remember back in the days when you're touring all the time and you were worn out and you're depressed, exhausted but it also looked like the very thing that was your gift was about to be taken away from you. What was happening in you during that time?

Larnelle: Well, I have to tell you, I was -- when I graduated from college I was a voice major so I understand how the instrument works. But sometimes doing two or three concerts a day -- that's abuse, it can catch up with you. And God didn't do that. The Bible says that good and perfect gifts he gives. But he certainly used that time in my life to teach me a great lesson.

I was going to doctors all over the country. They would hear a recording and they'd say, "Well, I don't know if you're going to sound like that anymore or if you're going to sing at all." But boy, that "at all" part, that's what got my attention.

Mitzi, my wife of some 46 years, and I had been on the road for a couple of years. She was pregnant with our first, heading home to be with her doctor. We had found a little house very near her mother [Laughter] that she wanted to buy and so we had entered into that agreement. And now I can't sing -- not a lick! I could sing two or three hours and then it was gone.

Randy: What was going on?

Larnelle: Well, I had the formation of nodules. It is like little corns on your hand on the vocal folds, on your vocal cords. So I was going around to doctors all over the country and as I said they didn't know if I was going to sing or not.

So I've got to tell you, I was pretty angry because we're out there stumping for the Lord, telling people about Christ. So I was -- I went through that phase. I mean it was not a good phase. Then I went through that pity phase, why me? I'm doing the right thing! What is this all about?

But come to find out that God used that time but it wasn't about voice at all other than my letting it go. When I got out of college, I could sing high and loud and I did that quite often. But it wasn't about that. It was about trust. I was trusting in what I could do. But God had another plan.

He wanted me to trust not in that but in him. It took just living in the Bible to understand that. I had come off the road. I was anemic, I was sick, and boy, I just stayed in the Bible. I've always enjoyed the Bible and loved reading it but this time there was something different. There were words jumping off the page and finally, after writing notes for a year --

Randy: Just to communicate.

Larnelle: Just to communicate. I may whisper to you, but to really communicate I was writing notes. So it got to the point that I knew something was happening in my life when I was able to say if I'm not going to be able to sing anymore, which I love to do, then you must have something awfully good coming because I know the bottom line is you want me to serve you.

But he was saying to me, we're not going to trust in the world. We're not going to trust in all those things. Put your trust in me. That's a lesson that I've never forgotten. And to have the opportunity that he has given to put myself in the place where God can do his work in my heart and my life, there is just nothing that beats that.

Sheila: But God didn't just restore your voice. I mean it's -- I was looking at the back of your book, the number of Grammys and Dove Awards -- and I mean huge awards but there is something, I've always thought your wife was darling but there is just something about the first Grammy Awards that you won, I mean that's heady stuff, people. You come home and tell us the note.

Larnelle: Listen, it was not one, it was two. I had won two Grammys and I got -- and we were both out there. So we get home and she has a little party for me and invited friends and family over and some dignitaries. So I just knew that the next morning it was not going to be business as usual. It still happens, I have a note, first when I get up in the morning I go to the kitchen table and there's a note there and it's telling me what I'm supposed to do for the day, giving me my chores. None of you leave those, I can understand that.

[Laughter]

And the note said -- I still have it. It said: "Larnelle, proud of you! Love you! Would you take out that trash? And make certain you get the trash that you missed in the garage. You missed that the last time." Listen, I was going to the trash can with newspapers that had my picture in them. I was just -- it was amazing.

But that's -- she is just an old country girl, get on a tractor and drive it. Shoot a shot gun. She is just that kind of girl; helped me to understand what Grammys and Doves are all about. They are just tools that have helped me get my feet in some doors that I would not otherwise get in.

Randy: After you went through such a struggle and had to give up everything and not even know if you'd be able to sing again, when you were able to sing again, what was different than before?

Larnelle: Boy, there was just -- there was weight -- Holy Spirit weight. It was no longer just notes and cords. It was no longer just singing a particular melody but really communicating what I know that God wanted me to communicate: God's love, grace, peace, and the fact that he wants more than anything else to be the center of your life -- but first the center of mine. I don't think you can communicate that.

In fact, it was not -- I joined church when I was 12 years old but I didn't really become a Christian until after college. I met an old boy named Stan Morris and he was a trombone player, a fabulous professional musician. He asked me a very pointed question, "You say you're a Christian? What does that mean?" And I'd been in church all my life, Pentecostal Holiness for awhile, and Baptist church, so I had all the answers. And I started spitting all those answers out to him. You know what? He was backing up on me. He wasn't agreeing with me. I was expecting that.

Then he said, "Larnelle, has there been a time that you can remember that you asked Christ to come into your heart?"

I couldn't remember doing that. It was in Brighton, Michigan, I know the place, I know where we were standing that I asked Christ to come into my heart and that was the beginning of a whole new era in my life. Not only was I, at that time I was auditioning actually for the Spurrllows. Not only was that a change in my life but it was a change in my priorities. What does God want me to do now? I had never thought that way before. That's when it happened.

Randy: What a great, great testimony! Sheila, I'd love to hear a song. You want to hear a song?

Sheila: Would you sing for us?

Larnelle: Oh, I'd love to!

Sheila: Would you like to hear Larnelle sing?

[Applause]

[Larnell sings]

Disturb us, Lord
When worldly things delight us
And we fail to look above
When we withhold from others
Though we've been given much
If the fire of our first love
Is not burning bright as before
Disturb us, Lord

Disturb us, Lord
When we're not in your word
And we don't spend time on our knees
When we have a chance
But we don't speak the truth
That sets men free
If we don't worship you
With fiery passion anymore

Disturb us, Lord

Sometimes in your great love
You comfort the troubled
But other times in your great love
You trouble the comfortable

Disturb us, Lord
If our lives never touch the lives
Of those still in the dark
If we don't live with hearts
That break with things
That break your heart
In tenderness please lead your church
Back to your heart once more
Disturb us, Lord
If we ever lose the wonder
Of the cross that you once bore

Disturb us, Lord

Disturb us, Lord

Randy: Amen! Amen! That's so good.

Sheila: That was absolutely stunning. Your voice, you're not supposed to keep getting better. But only that, just the anointing on that message, Larnelle. That is like a prophetic word for us, "disturb us."

Larnelle: I believe that God needs to shake us up every once in a while. He does that; such that we can take part of the wonderful things that he has for us. The disciples, that's what he was doing. Here's life and death in the balance and they were asleep. That's our human thing and he wants to wake us up so that he can be the central part of our lives.

Sheila: Powerful!

Randy: We know from your testimony that there have been some disturbing times in your life. Has God not used every disturbance to get your attention to draw you closer to him?

Larnelle: You know what that is -- I wrote a song once that said, "If not for the storms." I was surprised at how many people don't subscribe, don't understand what I was trying to say in that song is that you know what? Trials are a part of my Christian growth. God uses those times to bring me closer to him. I wouldn't know that I even needed him, I wouldn't even understand who he is at all if it were not for the storms. I run to him for shelter and comfort and peace.

Randy: And I'm betting that every storm you've been through and you look back and see that God hadn't abandoned you but he was right there with you all...

Larnelle: He was right there with me all the time but you know, you have to learn it again. You have to go through it again many times.

Randy: Sheila, there is a lot of people right now -- right now in some really tough storms in life -- some very, very difficult times. But they can be reminded that God's with them through you and I.

Sheila: Would you watch something with us? It's really important and then we'll tell you just how you can help. Thank you!

On the mission field

Isak: I'm here with little Bernardo who is two years old, who is fighting for his life; dying in a malnutrition clinic because of the tragedy called starvation, lack of food. I wish I could tell you that I believe Bernardo will actually leave this clinic but I don't know if he will. Because unfortunately, more children that come into these clinics don't leave than what leave alive. See you have the luxury of changing the channel and I really hope that you don't do that right now because I actually need you to do the opposite and to see the reality of what's on your screen.

You say, "But how do we change that? What do I do?"

I'll tell you what you can do. You can give a gift right now that is literally a gift of life -- the best gift you could ever give. The gift of life to Bernardo. You can reach out and you can give that gift to multiple children, to children out in the villages where there isn't enough food. Children that haven't got to malnutrition clinics yet. If we meet them before they're in this condition, we know we can save them. We do it time and time and time again. We can guarantee that we save their lives.

When they get to where Bernardo is right now, when their arms are the thickness of my thumb, I can't guarantee anything except that I'll do my very best. Please, do your very best today. Give whatever gift you can give because that gift is a gift of life.

End of clip

In the studio

Randy: I appreciate so much Isak being willing to go there. It's hard to be there. It's hard to watch those pictures. But you saw many times that bright orange bowl, that's something we provided, it's something actually *you* provided. Every bowl represents a meal. Every meal represents life. And every time we give that, we give those children hope.

This would be an impossible thing to do if we didn't know that we are in a position, that God has put us in a position to reach out and save lives. That's what Mission Feeding is. It is life, it is hope, and it is all in the name of Jesus. So we have an incredible opportunity here to reach out.

Our goal is 400,000 children that we want to feed and not just once or twice but on an ongoing basis. We ask you to join us so that we can give food for three months at a time. \$30 will give food to three children for three whole months every day! That's revolutionary!

Sheila, I know you've been there, you've seen what just that simple bowl of soup every day will do.

Sheila: I remember something your mom said that our commitment is that the line would never be longer than the food that we have to offer them. That's what we said to so many of the villages that we've gone into and we're going back again. Randy is going to Angola and I'm going to Burundi and we've said that to the chiefs, to the teachers, "We will not forget you. We will not come home and suddenly think, well..."

In fact, somebody said something to me and it made me so mad. They said, "Well, don't you think they get used to that over there?"

Do you think any mother on this earth gets used to putting a child in a grave? There is no way that a mother would get used to that. I watched this one woman who said, "I wish sometimes there was a stairway up to heaven because I've got more children up there than I do down here."

If there was nothing we could do, if there was some terrible disease that we couldn't help, but this is so curable! It literally takes one bowl of food. It looks like super oatmeal but it is specially made over there in our factories to provide every kind of vitamin and nutrient these children need. I've seen it. The first bowl begins to turn them from death to life.

Then we've earned the right to say to them, "Hey, do you know there is a God in heaven who loves you?" But they can't hear you when their stomachs are empty. And those mothers are saying, "Please, would you help us?"

\$30, you can blow that just going to see a really bad movie and some really bad popcorn. So we can decide to stop living for ourselves and say that we are here as Christ's arms and hands and feet and heart. So please, go to your phone. Give the very best gift you can and then we can go back to those places and say, "We're bringing help and we're bringing it now." Please make the best gift you can.

Begin video clip

Announcer: In impoverished and drought-stricken areas of Africa children are suffering. The need is great and without food they face severe malnutrition -- even death.

With your support LIFE's Mission Feeding outreach can save lives by feeding and caring for children in the hardest hit areas of Angola, Mozambique, and South Sudan. With previous reserves gone and Mission Feeding helping in areas with severe crop failure we urgently need to replenish our food supplies to reach 400,000 children who are counting on us.

Your lifesaving gift of \$30, \$50, or \$100 will help feed and care for three, five or ten children for three full months. And with your gift of any amount, we'll send you *Proverbs Power: Successful Communication*. This powerful CD series, along with study guide featuring Steven K.

Scott unveils the secrets to incredible wisdom found only in the book of Proverbs. This series will give you the tools to transform your relationships in life.

With your gift of \$100 or more, request the complete *Proverbs Power* library featuring five power-packed sessions that include: The Power of Vision, Breaking through Mediocrity, and much more.

Finally, with your gift of \$1,000 or more to help feed and care for 100 children, be sure to request the "Bridge of Faith" framed canvas print by Thomas Kinkade.

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

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: Thank you so much for helping. If the phones were busy please call again. It really matters. These children need our help right now.

We've had the incredible privilege of having Larnelle with us. This is his book. You're going to love it! It's called *Shaped Notes*. And for any gift at all say, "Hey, I want to get Larnelle's book" and we'll be glad to send it to you.

But, Larnelle, thank you. What a joy it has been to have you on the show.

Larnelle: Well, it's been a joy to be here. Thank you so much.

Sheila: Thank you so much! Amazing! Fantastic! So for Randy and I just want to say thank you for being with us. Remember we love you and thank you for loving others in Jesus' name. We'll see you next time.

Randy: Thank you!