

8/21/18

Week 34: Christmas Shoes & Smiles

James and Betty Robison

Rich Wilkerson, Jr.

James: Well, I'm telling you, it is always a joy to come and talk to you because you give us joy because you give joy to people that never thought they'd have any.

I'm James Robison; Betty and I welcome you to *LIFE Today*. The Wilkerson name is pretty well known in let's say communities of faith -- let's say transforming power faith. Rich senior is to be praised God for every time you think of him. I'm glad I'm his friend. I'm glad that we've been able to pray for each other and pray with each other.

Well, Rich Wilkerson, Jr. Is amazing, the anointing he's got. He's got a church -- this is a great book that just came out, *Friend of Sinners*: Why Jesus cares more about relationship than perfection. Did you get it? Not religion, not pretense and going through the motions but relationship. There are a lot of people in church, Rich and they don't really have a relationship and they seem to just go through pretense. You are really right when you say Jesus touched sinners and that love transformed people that many thought were impossible.

Now you've got a church called the VOUS church. What in the world is VOUS church? It's spooky sounding.

Rich: It is spooky. I apologize about that. What an honor it is to be here with you guys. You guys are two of my heroes and it is a real honor, privilege to even get to come on your program. So thank you so much for all that you've done for the gospel and what you continue to do for the gospel. Thanks for letting me come on.

Let me please explain VOUS church for a minute before you call me a heretic and kick me out.

[Laughter]

For many years I served with my dad in Miami, Florida; North Miami. We started a young adult movement ten years ago called the Rendezvous, which just meant the meeting place; meeting God, connecting with people. It began to grow and begin to flourish. It was a really special time. In many ways, it had all the signs of a revival, people coming from all different types of places. It is an inner city urban church so you had that audience coming but then people from South Beach and people from Fort Lauderdale coming. This Tuesday night program, 1200 20-somethings on a Tuesday night -- which is when you tape.

James: There's something about Tuesday!

Rich: There's something about Tuesday! Before you know it though rendezvous is a weird word to spell. There's a silent Z that nobody knows about. If you Google rendezvous, really shady websites come up. So quickly we just started calling ourselves the VOUS and it took on an identity of itself and that's where VOUS church came out of. So it's more about the identity of the roots and the foundation that is a meeting place to connect with God, and really what this book is about in terms of relationship. So it's worked well for us.

James: So when people get this book, what do you want to happen?

Rich: Yeah! I was writing this book, *Friend of Sinners* and I have a friend of mine who is kind of on the journey of faith and still hasn't really probably crossed all the way over. And I was telling him, "I'm writing this book called *Friend of Sinners*."

He says, "Bro, you cannot do that."

I said, "Why?"

He goes, "All your friends are going to be so mad at you."

I said, "No, no, no. I'm the sinner in the title. Jesus is the *Friend of Sinners*. This is the nickname they gave Jesus."

What I want to do is I want to awaken people of Jesus' mission and message. I think so often what happens is in the areas of religion people start to think that Jesus came to establish religion. He came to establish a relationship with people. Really, he is the friend; that was his nickname. It was provocative 2,000 ago and it is provocative today.

James: They said it as a criticism; didn't they?

Rich: Yeah! They said it as a criticism. I think as we befriend him, as we start a relationship with him, what ultimately happens to us is that we have a heart for those that don't know him.

I was talking to you not too long ago and you said, "I'm not mad at people that are lost, I'm sad for people that are lost." Ultimately, what I want people to discover is the friend they have in Jesus and then out of that relationship, he fills you up in order to be spilled out. You get comforted by God to simply go and be called to be uncomfortable for him.

I'm really, really hoping that there is an awakening in our generation about who Jesus is. But then our response, our reasonable response to this gospel message is to go and show it to other people.

James: Why do you think Christians, who say they're Christians at least, when the New Testament Christian, as early as the 4th chapter of Acts said, "We can't help but speak of

the things that we've seen and heard?" And they were talking about spiritual reality -- of seeing spiritual reality. We've seen. We've heard. It was as though we've entered into a relationship with the Father of all fathers, with the creator, with God, with the Savior, with the Messiah and we can't be quiet. How is it that so many people who say they know him are able to be so indifferent about it? You have to wonder, have you really met him?

Rich: That's where I would start. Have you really met him? I love Acts Chapter 4. It says that they took note that the disciples had been with Jesus. Something powerful about that. They didn't even say anything, I'm taking note on that guy's light. There is something different.

James: They didn't say they'd been at church but had been with Jesus.

Rich: The message of Jesus I think is so counterculture. The fact of the matter is that sin has not rendered us bad, it is rendered us dead. We keep forgetting that. We keep thinking the gospel is about making bad people good. I'm sorry! It's far worse than that. Your sin hasn't made you bad, it's made you dead.

James: In trespasses and sins.

Rich: So we're dead in our sins so really, Jesus has done the work. We respond to him coming and finding us. When you ask the question why is it that so many people say they know him but they don't have love for other people? I come to them going, "Have you actually encountered God's love? Because whatever you're full of is what you're going to be led by."

So when you're led by anger, when you're led by judgment, it makes me wonder, I think you're full of those things. And grace, the Bible says that Jesus came full of grace and truth. Grace is the unmerited favor of God. I understand I did nothing to deserve this. In fact, I believe the closer you get to Jesus, the more you realize just how far away you were to begin with. The more and more I discover Jesus, the more I realize I'm utterly

lost without him, and that doesn't lead me to being more upset with people, it leads me to have a greater burden that I can point them to Jesus.

I think we live in a time period now where people are afraid and so many times we want to control things. Yet relationship is a trust journey. Relationship is going, man, I trust that the Holy Spirit is working on you and so I want to give you the truth but I have to do that full of grace first. I love the idea that he is not a balance between. It's not like 50% grace and 50% truth, he is full of both. But I do think the order matters. Grace came first. Grace then truth. Our churches need to be that. Connect and correct.

James: If people don't think you love them, they're not really going to be anxious to hear what you have to say.

Rich: Thank you. One of the big things I think that we talk a whole lot about, especially in our church and people that we're discipling, is that we can't view people as projects. Projects have a start date and a finish date. And when we view relationships like this, it just becomes so unhealthy. Many times, I sometimes felt like the way that I kind of grew up, I would view evangelism as part of my checklist: Did my evangelism for the day. It was kind of a project mind-set. But people are eternal beings and our job is to love them, God's job is to change them.

I love that Jesus when he called the disciples he said, "Come follow me and I'll make you fishers of men." Notice he didn't say come follow me and I'll make you catchers of men because our job is not the catching, our job is the fishing. I'm not the savior, I'm not the deliverer, and I'm not the healer. He works through me, gives me those opportunities but my job is to simply fish, simply love, simply share, simply witness, point people to Jesus.

I think people sometimes, we get carried away and we think that we are more than what we really are. I have a very good idea of who I am without Jesus. I am a lost sinner who is dead in my trespasses and if it's not for the grace of God, I have nothing. Once again, I have encountered this love. I want to fall under -- I call it the waterfall of love. I want to

stand at the waterfall of love every single day. Because as I do that, what that does, is that leads me to loving people better and helping point people to Jesus.

Betty: And the difference in my own testimony was I tried all the "religious right things to do." I tried to be the good little church goer and the one that went to visitation every week and hoped that when you went up and knocked on the door that nobody was there because you didn't know how -- you were scared to death.

[Laughter]

But when I met the real Jesus, there is something that changes in your heart and in your life and I believe people can see that. They can see through all the fakeness, all the practicing, and doing all the right things but when they see Jesus coming out of you, the difference is made because they say, "That's what I want."

Rich: The scripture says that His grace is sufficient; that his strength shows up in our weakness. Like this idea of being vulnerable and transparent and being okay with who you are right now, God shows up in that.

I grew up, I'm a fourth generation Pentecostal preacher. If you don't know what that means, don't worry, I got more problems than you.

[Laughter]

But my first slow dance was to our "God is an Awesome God."

[Laughter]

You can't make that up. You know what I'm talking about?

So I used to go door to door witnessing. My dad would wake me up at like Saturdays at

6:00 a.m. I'm like, "Dad, I don't think Jesus is awake right now."

[Laughter]

We would knock on the doors. So I grew up in that way. In a lot of ways I learned much from that. I learned about resiliency and I learned about not giving up and I learned about boldness and courage. But I've seen more effective fruit and more results by simply being who I am, being comfortable in my skin, realizing that His grace is sufficient. The word *sufficient* means: Adequate for its purpose. The word *adequate* means: Just the right amount. Meaning God has just the right amount of grace for all of our races. We have to run *our* race. Part of that is going, I know who I am in Jesus. I'm a son of God. I don't have to work for it. I can't earn it. I never deserved it.

James: You started experiencing the power of Pentecost instead of just being Pentecostal and Pentecostalism. You actually began to experience the fullness of the spirit which was in your dad and in so many people. But a lot of times when we get caught up in church life it becomes more ritualistic, more traditional, more expected.

Betty was talking about going to church. We used to joke about Baptists had visitation on visitation night so the people would go visiting. They would pair up and they would go visiting. They would say, "Before we go to the door, let's pray."

The other person would say, "What do we pray?"

"Let's pray they won't be there."

[Laughter]

Literally, because people were terrified. But once the Holy Spirit gets in your life you're anxious to go. Sure, there is a little bit of uneasiness about it when you start but here's the deal. If we realize that we're not the person who makes the sale, we're not the person who

signs them up, we don't go get another spiritual scalp and go back and say, "I got another convert."

We go out and we love somebody and we realize the power of the gospel is the transforming effect that changes lives. We just go and love the people and tell them our own story about what Jesus did for us and you've got their attention. And especially, if they believe you just care about them. In other words, you really are a *Friend of Sinners*. You care about them. It's not you wish they weren't drinking. You hope they don't get hurt.

I saw a motorcycle -- and I had a terrible wreck when I'm 14, nearly killed me. It's a miracle I lived through it. I saw a motorcycle that the pieces would cover this entire circle, right in the middle of the road. I almost couldn't drive because I thought there was somebody on that bike. I'm already checking to find out. I know they went to the hospital. Don't know how old they are yet, don't know everything but I know if that person is alive, it is as big a miracle as we'll ever see. I want to know.

What is it? I care. I don't know what was going on. I care about that person. This is the way you look at sinners. You're not saying, "Well, I hate what you're doing. I don't want you to ever do anything that could hurt you." What if somebody hit that kid that had been drinking? It was early in the day but sometimes people get high on something. I don't know what happened. All I know is I care. To me, compassion and care is what it is to be a friend of all people. Not a condemner of where they are, but loving them where they are and want the very best for them. I think you can communicate that if it is real in our hearts.

Rich: Absolutely. I think we have to remember we've got good news! The gospel means good news -- it's not bad news. When I actually learned the good news, now I'm real excited to share about it. It is funny that you talk about what you're passionate about. Like you can't help but talk about what you're passionate about. I love Jeremiah. He is in prison. He is in stocks. He'd been beaten. He's upset, "I curse the day I was ever born but

I've got a fire shut up in my bones and even if I didn't want to say it, I can't keep this inside." There's a passion that is stirring up.

If we can awaken that inside of people that will never come from religion. That will only come from an encounter with Jesus and being filled by the spirit. If we can realize that the spirit has so many gifts for us that are not -- I don't think it's an improvement -- it is provision of the spirit that we can have a passion stir up; that just comes out of us naturally. So for me it is so freeing that I have good news.

In my job -- this is where I'm at these days. I'm a reporter. I'm a mailman. You know what I mean? I get to do the evening news but it is always good news. I don't have to... They say if it bleeds it reads. Not at the church. Like he bled one time, praise God and now we've got really, really good news. People should -- believers need to have an awakening of that and stand under that waterfall and don't let that become old news or forget where you came from but realize we've been saved by His grace. Now I get to share that with people.

That sounds so simple but it's helped me so much because God's given us the opportunity to be in some unique circles and unique spaces. I really wrote this book -- I wrote a book prior to this. I actually got to come on your show, thank you! I was with your son and Sheila. It was a book called Sandcastle Kings. It was about building your life on foundations. While I was talking about that book we've had a chance to have different types of celebrities and whatnot come through our church and some people that maybe the world would say immoral and not really a poster person for Christianity.

But I was shocked as I was talking about that book how many people would ask me about people we've associated with or we've befriended. They just couldn't believe it, especially in the Christian world. I remember one day I was on Instagram and I had put up a photo of a famous person and the comments started coming in; mostly from Christians, really just outraged, upset -- a photo. Somebody wrote on the thing, "How on earth could you ever associate with that person, Rich?"

My response just came really quickly. It was like, "Because Jesus chooses to associate with me. The fact that He loved me where I was."

And if we as believers aren't willing to go... the gospel came to us. I could not get to God so God came to me. I want to be a believer. I love what you guys are doing across the world; that you're taking supplies, you're taking good news to people. And you've learned that in order to give them the living water, you actually have to give them physical water sometimes. It doesn't make the living water any less, it just goes, hey, they can't really hear about the good news if they're sitting there dying of thirst.

I just want to be a person that bridges the gap a little bit to say, "Hey, whatever you've heard, Jesus didn't come for behavior modification. He came for heart transformation. He came for more than just good moral behavior. He came from a radical takeover of our lives. It is a change from the inside out."

I think we're seeing fruit with it and I'm excited about sharing the message.

James: Well, you were. You're doing what Jesus did. Think about it. Everybody who is let's say in any way tuned in to the Word of God; we know the Pharisees were not highly regarded for many reasons and prostitutes were not and Jesus was called the *Friend of Sinners*. One of the most powerful stories in the entire New Testament is Jesus walks in the house of a Pharisee and he sits down on the sofa of the Pharisee and a prostitute kneels at his feet and is weeping.

Now if this gets out to the church crowd, that Jesus is in there with a Pharisee and a prostitute in that house, it's not very good for his reputation. But miracles occurred because listen to me, love never fails. It doesn't work on our timetable, we just release it and let it flow. Miracles are the result.

This guy is a miracle of love. Would you say thanks to God and to Rich? You are a

blessing. You are full of the riches of His grace and his glory. I count it an honor to meet you. I count it a privilege. I will be your prayer partner and your friend as long as I'm breathing and I plan to be breathing until Jesus comes. I plan to be dressed up in his glory when he comes in glory to get a bride adorned in that glory. We are a part of that bride. You are too if you love him. Let's get dressed up in his glory.

You like what he's doing? Would you say thank you God and thanks for the book? Go get it. It's in the bookstores.

Rich was talked about a moment ago that we like to help people and we really do. I want to put smiles on children's faces. Two ways -- I want to give them shoes, 150,000 of them for Christmas that you give, and I want to give some cleft palate surgeries, some smiles. I want you to listen to our mission director and I'll remind you of this. Here he is loving others, Betty on the other side of the world when he's just said good-bye to his precious wife who died of cancer, joined our baby girl, our daughter in the presence of God forever where we will be forever. But Betty, we're in his presence now and I want you to listen to Ralph in the presence of God overseas representing not only you but the Lord. Watch and listen.

On the mission field

Open Captions:

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news. Isaiah 52:7

Announcer: Through your generous support, the mission teams of *LIFE Outreach International* have extended the hands and feet of Jesus to the far corners of the globe providing sustenance for the malnourished, water for the thirsty, medical aid for the infirm, and freedom for the captives.

But on a recent trip to the African nation of Burundi our missions' director, Ralph Done,

was introduced to a young boy named Jahdu who highlighted another crucial need that countless children share.

Ralph: I've just seen so much poverty, so much sadness. One of the things I've noticed is there is no kids wearing shoes hardly. Almost all of them had no shoes. The terrain here can be really tough even walking in shoes but much less barefooted. Jahdu was brought to me here. I saw his feet and you can see the toll that it's taken with him not wearing shoes, probably most of his life if not all of his life.

Announcer: Like Jahdu children in villages around the world endure cuts and sores while walking barefoot through contaminated water, soil, or animal feces which can open the door to deadly diseases and infections including hookworms.

Ralph: You can be a blessing today by giving a child like Jahdu his very first pair of shoes. It will change his life forever. It will change his walk. In fact, I believe one day he's going to be a little champion for Christ and it will help him even walk with God. So please partner with us to provide Jahdu and children just like him all around the world with a brand-new pair of shoes this Christmas season.

End of clip

In the studio

James: You have no idea what just a little gift like this can mean. Betty, you and I years ago started going into the impoverished nations even in Central America and going to the dumps and seeing the horrific conditions where the children were. And then we actually went out and saw children that were already being treated because they had gotten the hookworms from getting in the open places in their little feet and then ultimately ending up in their brain. We saw what love could do when we would go in.

Do you remember us sitting in one of those villages and there was a real pretty little girl

that looked shy and she just kind of disappeared behind the little huts. I just said, "Betty, I'm going to pray that little girl back. I want to sit on the ground and I want that little girl to come sit in my lap and I'm going to tell her how loved she is."

Do you remember she came and sat in my lap? The missionaries said to me over the years even in Rwanda and the horrors of what happened to those children, they were amazed that kids would come and just crawl up in my lap. There is a picture in the entry of our studio of me with a bunch of little kids in my lap. Their parents had just been killed with machetes. What made them come? Love! Love! What causes people to want to say, "Let's meet that need?" Love! It's the love of God.

And Betty and I can go all over the world and we can weep. Betty, if the people watching us don't say, "James, Betty, we will help the missionaries and the people love those children, love those families" we simply weep when we have no results. Our viewers make the difference.

Betty: They really do. You really do! You're such a big part of what God wants to do here in putting the shoes on these precious little feet. We've been there and had the opportunity to personally put the shoes on the feet of these precious children. Their little hearts just light up. They're faces light up with a smile. As you saw they were dancing around. They had something to celebrate. Not only that they had received a gift from those that loved them and cared about them but they received a gift that is going to possibly save their lives because it protects them from all the disease and all the ugly things they have to walk through. So please join with us and let's put shoes on these precious little feet!

James: If you'll join us with Shoes and Smiles for Christmas, please, go online, dial the number, take your bankcard. I want you to make the largest gift you can. \$36 will give ten children shoes. \$72 will give 20. Please! If you could give \$180 and give 50 kids shoes, would you do it? There is some level at which you can help. Would you do that please? Whatever you can do, we're asking you to do it right now. Please!

We have some gifts to send you. The beautiful little red crystal Christmas ornament, this little shoe to go with others that we've given you over the years, and the beautiful scented candle. This one is cinnamon and vanilla. And it says, "The light shines in the darkness." And you turn the candle, "And the darkness can never extinguish it." You can never stop the effect of love.

Would you right now make the largest gift you can, please? Thank you for doing it. Let's give Shoes and Smiles for Christmas. We need to start now so we can get them to the ends of the earth by Christmas. Thank you for doing it!

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 often take for granted like a simple pair of shoes. Far too many children living in extreme 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 can 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 and for many, just in time for the holidays! Your gift of \$36 will help provide 10 pairs of shoes, a gift of \$72 will help provide 20 pair and a gift of \$180 will help provide 50 pairs of Christmas Shoes for children in need.

As a thank you for your gift of support, be sure to request this beautifully crafted red crystal shoe ornament, a treasure to display at each Christmas. With your gift of \$100 or more you may request "The Light Shines in Darkness" frosted glass candle featuring a beautiful golden design that's scripture from John 1:5.

Finally, please consider a gift of \$1,000 or more to help provide 275 pairs of shoes or two children with corrective cleft palate surgeries and you may request the "Bridge of Faith" canvas print by Thomas Kinkade. Please call, write, or make your gift online today.

End of clip

In the studio

James: I don't think there is any question you're going to enjoy the beautiful little ornament. And it is a conversation piece. People are going to ask you what it means and you get to tell them. Inspire them to give smiles and shoes. We'll send you the book, *Friend of Sinners* if you say, "James, that's going to inspire me, it's going to inspire some young people I know too to get on fire because Rich has a gift to really communicate with them." You help us give shoes and smiles and you want Rich's book, you can get it in the bookstores but we'll send it to you to say thanks for expressing love to those precious children. Join Betty and me in saying thanks to Rich.

Rich: Thank you guys so much! Love you guys!

James: Give love to your family and give them my love and regards. Please, and your mom.

Thank all of you. Thanks for watching. Thanks for sharing.