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Week 35: Christmas Shoes & Smiles

Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh

Alex Seeley

Randy: Welcome to *LIFE Today*! I'm Randy Robison. I have Sheila Walsh with me. Good to have you.

Sheila: Thanks Randy! I'm really excited about tonight because it is funny, if you're on Instagram, like I will follow, I'll see my friend post something and I'll see it liked by this and this person and I'm like, well, you know all my friends! And so when I knew that this was amazing girl was going to be with us I thought, oh I love her already because so many of my friends say she is she is just *amazing*. So please, would you help me welcome Alex Seeley?

[Cheers & Applause]

Randy: So good to have you again.

Alex: Excited to be here.

Randy: I don't think -- were you not here last time she was here?

Sheila: No. I've never met Alex but I've heard so many amazing things about her.

Randy: So the conversation that we had last time, she was saying all these great things. I'm like, boy, it would help people. I hope people watch this show. And she is like, "I'm working on a book and I'm trying to put it in a book." Well, here it is!

Alex: Yay!

Sheila: Ta-da! It is a very arresting cover actually because it is very clean and it's not foo-foo.

Alex: Yeah, I'm all about clean lines. My aesthetic is very clean.

James: My husband loved it. But it is interesting, the dragonfly on the cover; that's significant to you, isn't it?

Alex: It is! Because firstly, I've always loved dragonflies but when I was actually -- you know you'll Google something and you'll be like, well, does it have any significance? And it did! And it freaked me out because I didn't know this when I just always loved dragonflies. But it actually symbolizes a transformation of perspective of how we see ourselves, especially the inner part of who we are. I thought, oh my goodness! This is exactly what my book is about. It is about discovering the true essence of who you are and seeing that transformation take place. So I thought it was so appropriate to put it on the cover.

Randy: So it is not just sort of a spiritual transformation, it is a physical transformation for the dragonfly, which I thought was really interesting. Because what are they when they're...

Alex: A nymph -- under water. And they're mean and they bite.

Sheila: They're mean?

Alex: Yes! They are mean and they bite when they are an insect. And then they take this metamorphosis into a beautiful dragonfly. And if you notice, they're the only insect that leave you alone. They don't attack you like a wasp or a bee. They're beautiful. They hover over water.

Randy: It is a complete transformation though and that's sort of what you're talking about. It's going from a perspective under water where there is pain, where there is hurt and really flying and being beautiful.

Sheila: I have to say Alex when I read the first part of your book I found so much of it really heartbreaking. Because I think the things that we're told about ourselves when we're young, I don't think people realize the smudge that leaves on our soul -- and the wound. But the fact that you were called "stupid" and I think even by your mom, do you remember the kind of impact that had on you and how little were you when that happened?

Alex: It started right from when you... Because in the Italian culture it is not -- she wasn't meaning to be horrible. It was something you would say to cause you to step up. So if you were called stupid well then that was supposed to do something on the inside of you as a child and cause you not to be stupid.

But words have the power to kill or heal and those words, I just began to believe how stupid I was. So it effected every decision I made, how I saw myself, everything because constantly it was like, you're stupid. You're an idiot. How dumb can you be? If I broke something I was stupid. If I dropped something I was stupid. If I got the wrong thing out of the cupboard I was stupid. So when you're told it long enough you begin to believe it.

Sheila: And yet, you have to live in terror. You tell a story about being sent to get peas and you can't remember if it is green peas or mint peas and how you're terrified to come home. But I think one of the hardest things I read is you come home with this report card which would make any parent proud, all A's and one C. What did your mom say to you?

Alex: My mom looked at me, she looked at the report card and she just had this glare about it. She said, "Well, you might as well just go and get a low job. Don't even get educated because you are a failure." And she ripped it up in front of me.

My mom, this is the thing about my mom, it's almost like two split personalities because my mom was actually amazing on so many levels but because of her own brokenness and because of her own fractures she was never given an education. She had that withheld from her so anything less than perfection to her was seen as I was wasting my opportunity.

So it was so much of her brokenness being manifested through to me. As a child though, you never see it that way. You just take it at face value.

Sheila: You also encountered that in school, I know through our mutual friend Chris Caine that being from a Greek family in Australia, she encountered a lot of prejudice. But you from an Italian family which explains that glorious black hair, you encountered the same thing.

Alex: Absolutely. And I went to a school where it was predominantly Australians; I think it was me and one other Italian kid. It was looked down upon because you were ethnics and our parents were blue collar workers, they weren't white collar workers. And so even though we were financially well off, it was, we weren't educated and we weren't... So you were seen as less than so you were made to feel less than -- and the way you looked.

Randy: How did this manifest itself the older you got and as you moved into adult relationships? How did it affect you?

Alex: Well, what I think it normally does, I think you exist, you live through life but internally you're a mess. So what you're doing is I'm self-sabotaging relationships already, I'm hurting people before they can hurt me, I'm assessing situations, I'm manipulating situations, I'm damaging myself; I had an eating disorder for over 20 years because I'm trying to attain some sort of perfection. I'm exhausting myself to try and be validated all the while putting on this brave face that everything is okay on the outside

but I wasn't.

Randy: So what was the switch that flipped that made you see all this for what it was and turn it around?

Alex: Jesus! It was my relationship with Jesus. I think it's not an overnight thing, and that's where I try and explain in my book is that I grew up in a Christian home and my mom and dad loved the Lord. I think sometimes we think when we're saved that it fixes everything. But we've got to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. And we're becoming sanctified. So a lot of people think they're saved but they're not actually free. So that walk of freedom took years. It took layers and it took the renewing of the mind. It took me being in youth group listening to those messages, applying those messages, making those mistakes. But really, ultimately it was my personal relationship with Jesus that changed everything.

Sheila: And you talk in the book about the way the Lord redefined terms for you. Because there was a very derogatory name you would be called. But how God unpacked that in a totally different way.

Alex: Yeah! I loved it. I was called a "wog" but he turned it into an acronym. Instead of it being a derogatory name it was now an acronym for Woman Of God. [Laughing]

Sheila: I love that. That's powerful!

[Applause]

I was wondering about -- I mean as parents, I have a 21-year old son. None of us get it all right but when you've had a parent who has really damaged you as a young woman, and the closer you come in your relationship to Christ, what did the journey of forgiveness look like for you? And is that something you wanted to do? And did your mom receive it? I kind of wonder what that whole process was like because it is huge.

Alex: Yeah, it was crazy with my mom because like I said she was the most nurturing, the most giving, the most self-sacrificing, like practically, she was everything you would want. She would bake the three meals, she would make our beds, and the house was perfect. Because of her fractures it was the words that wounded and wounded and wounded. So there developed in me just a -- I was so hurt by her and so I didn't want to forgive her because forgiving her would let her off the hook; that's what I thought. I thought, well then, she gets away with that. I'm left with the collateral damage, she doesn't.

But I'll never forget being in my bedroom and reading and just saying, "God, it hurts too much. It just hurts! How do I forgive her?" And he showed me that picture of when he stood before Pilate and all the people that he had once healed and that he had shared the good news with and that he had delivered. And first they're saying, "Hosanna! Hosanna!" And then the next minute they're saying, "Crucify him!" And he doesn't defend himself. Then the next scene is on the cross and he is saying, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do."

And something clicked on the inside of me and I just went, my mom actually doesn't -- this actually isn't about me. She's broken. She is fractured. Forgive her for she doesn't know what she is doing. And something broke where I began to see her as the little girl that was also abused physically and verbally and now it was no longer her inflicting pain on me but it was just her manifesting the pain that she had grown up with.

And everything changed when I was able to go, I have no right to hold unforgiveness. And when I forgave her, it wasn't like one minute and it was all over. I had to forgive her 70 times seven. [Laughing] It was like whoo! But I'm telling you, mom and I, we are awesome!

Sheila: Were you able to have those kinds of conversations with her?

Alex: Yeah. Not during the process, only really over the last six years.

Randy: It took time.

Alex: Yeah.

Randy: I think an interesting point that you make is illustrated in the Old Testament because when God's people were set free from slavery, they weren't just all of the sudden -- they had to walk and they had to walk through some deserts. They had to walk through some frightening times. Then when they got to where God wanted them to be they had to fight; they had some giants they had to drive out. So this process of deliverance, it's pictured in the Old Testament but we still have to walk through these things. And I see you doing that and encouraging others in the church that you and your husband now pastor to do the same thing.

Alex: Absolutely.

Sheila: Tell us a little bit about that. Because I used to live in Nashville and then we moved to Dallas and when I heard about this church, The Belonging, the buzz was different. It used to be the buzz was, "Oh this is a church where so-and-so goes to." -- Christian music artist or country star. This was like, "This is a church where Jesus is." What was that journey like for you?

Alex: Oh I tell you, it was the accidental church. We never actually planned on beginning a church.

We'd been pastors in our previous season in Australia and so coming to America was a complete seed change for us. My husband has always been in music production and worship. We get to Nashville and I'm looking for a church and I just can't find one, like you said, that really goes after the presence of God. They all love Jesus. They love the word. It is not that they were bad churches; there wasn't that essence of the presence

factor. I couldn't find it. So we just opened up our home and gathered five or six friends over and the presence of God hit that place.

I can't even explain it. It was so sovereign where people by the end of the night are confessing their sin, the Holy Spirit is moving upon each person, people are getting delivered of addiction, people are getting their marriages restored. And I'm thinking, hold on a minute, what is happening? I felt like God is saying, "This is what I'm after. I want my presence to change people."

This is why we call it The Belonging because I think so many people think we've got to behave and then we belong. But Jesus said, "No, you belong before you even believe."

I think if we can make an environment where it is safe for people to come in with warts and all, full of their stuff but not judge them for it but bring them to the healer, not to us, to the healer, the very essence of God, he will do the changing, and he'll do the convicting.

We invited the first five. Every other week ten people came. And we were opening the door to strangers saying, "We're hearing what God is doing in this place. Can we come?" We're like, "Come on in!" And it just grew from there.

Randy: When you lived in Nashville when you were working in the music business, how often were you there on the weekend?

Sheila: I was often on the road on the weekend which is one of the hardest things in fact.

Randy: Initially you started by doing a week --

Alex: Yeah, we started on Tuesday night. Because my husband obviously was working with all of these musicians and he said, "They don't go to church. They get on a tour bus on Wednesday, they get home on Monday; they're doing 'the work of God' out on the

road but they're not being filled." So we started and opened up Tuesday night and it is funny how people were like, why didn't anyone ever see this before?

Randy: It is interesting though because a lot of them are Christian artists or Christians at least working in music but there's that need for continual being poured into, discipleship, and for the community that can be almost a little bit fake in a work environment. But being able to come and open yourself to be a part of -- to belong to the community has been important. So you're seeing that making a huge difference.

Sheila: So what you're saying too is what we're all hungry for, the presence of God, the weight of his glory because then you don't have to say to somebody, "Put that cigarette out," or do anything. You just say, "Come and let Jesus love you."

Alex: Absolutely! He does all the fixing.

Sheila: Why did you call the book *Tailor Made*?

Alex: Because I love fashion.

[Laughter]

First of all, but with that, in high-end fashion there is a thing called couture design, which is a one-off piece and garment that is made for a specific person. As I started to look at that whole couture piece of garment it's only made, the exact measurements are for that person and it's made to fit perfectly for that person.

I thought, it's just like the way God, he is the master designer, there are 7.5 billion people walking on this earth yet each of us have our own fingerprint, our own tongue print, and our own footprint and we are couture designs. We have been tailor made very individually to fulfill a very individual purpose. But I've found being a pastor for 24 years that the church almost clones people and we're not able to express exactly who we are.

Because who you are, Randy and who you are, Sheila are completely individual people but we need your voice and your reflection of who God is on this earth.

That's why I call it *Tailor Made* because we're all tailor made specifically.

Sheila: I love that! And as a woman, one of the things I hear more often than anything else is from young women saying, we'll be talking about their insecurity. How do you shift from those very real feelings to finding your security in Christ? I know it is a process but what would you say to somebody who says, "I just can't believe that God would love me"?

Alex: That would take an hour to unpack. But I think honestly, he knew us before the foundations of the world. He purposed us to be his. It says in Psalm 139 that he designed us, he fashioned us. And it says he wrote down every single one of our days before one of them ever came to be in his book. Therefore he has a book with each of our names on it and our life listed out.

I want to get to know the one who wrote that book. I need to know the fact that if God is that intentional about writing every detail about our life, then he's made me uniquely special. So I don't need to be insecure because I have a loving Father who is perfect in all of his ways, who is good all the time, who is love. He doesn't feel love. He doesn't move out of love. And there is no guile in him. There is no angst in him. He loves us. I just need to get to know him. When I know him everything changes.

Sheila: You did not need an hour.

[Laughter]

That's beautiful! That's a simple, beautiful, glorious truth of the gospel that we are fully known and fully loved. I think if that message could get out to every single person in the church because so often we feel well, I'll change that habit and then I'll really get close to

God. He says, "No! Come as you are." It is beautiful.

This is a fantastic book. *Tailor Made*: Discover the secret to who God created you to be.

One of the things that Randy and I love that we get the privilege of doing here at *LIFE* is reaching out to some other people who have no idea who they are but one of the great privileges we get to meet some very real practical needs first of all and then we get to introduce them to the God who made them. So would you watch this? And then we'll tell you a little bit more about how you can help us make a difference. Watch this.

On the mission field

>> Yes, I'm so excited for you. So happy for you.

Announcer: *LIFE Outreach* and our friends have another reason to celebrate this holiday season providing some 150,000 children from around the world with a Christmas gift they have never possessed or enjoyed -- a brand-new pair of shoes! The joy that this gift of a simple pair of shoes brings to these children can be measured by the excitement and the smiles on their faces.

Ralph: Look at them running right through all that with their shoes. Look at them! Look at that! That's what it is all about right there.

Sheila: It is such a joy to give out these shoes to these children. You might think that's just a fun thing but sometimes it literally saves a life. When these children walk around with bare feet and they get their feet cut with stones or all sorts of diseases can enter their just darling, beautiful, little body. So this really is a gift of life as much as anything else. So let's try these, buddy. Let's see how they go. Yay!

Announcer: This year also marks a milestone as literally hundreds of children who

previously could not smile because of cleft palate problems now have a new outlook on life thanks to corrective surgery that afforded them the ability to smile.

Ralph: Today I'm sitting here with little Momo. Little Momo is a little boy that was brought here, just recently that had one of the worst cleft palate, cleft lip needs we've ever seen before. The doctors were able to operate on him and bring him what we would call a Christmas smile. And today we thank God that all of our donors, each one of you who give so generously to bring smiles on little children like Momo.

Announcer: What a wonderful gift of a corrective surgery that love provided! A gift that will last a lifetime.

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: I can imagine you're thinking well, it is a little bit early to be talking about Christmas Shoes. But there's a reason for that; that's because we want to get everything in motion so that we can make sure that by Christmas these shoes have arrived.

I can't tell you what it is like to watch a child's face where for the very first time in their life they have a pair of shoes. They're so happy. It is not just that it is a fun thing, it is literally keeps them safe from so many of the diseases that are in the water that they have to walk in.

But I think one of the things I'm particularly passionate about are these surgeries, these cleft lip, cleft palate. Do you know that we have some doctors here in the states who have agreed to work with us? And they've said that for \$500 they can do the whole surgery on a child -- \$500! So my husband Barry and I have decided this year for Christmas gifts to each other, because we do not need one more sweater or one more jacket that we're going to -- Barry's going to give the gift of a surgery for a child to me and I'm going to do the

same for him.

Randy: I've got a question for you. Have you ever gotten a pair of shoes for \$36?

Sheila: For \$36, no. I'm ashamed to say it. They're usually a little bit more than that.

Randy: \$36 will not just buy a pair of shoes like these, it will buy ten pairs of shoes. We can provide shoes -- and these are a little different, these are not necessarily fashion statements but they're durable. And you know what? They protect the children from some of the infections and things that you can get from cutting your feet and running around in the dirt.

You can actually not just give a great gift this year and a smile, but you can give something that will impact a child's health. You can reach out impact 50 children for a gift of \$180. I wish all my Christmas gifts went that far.

Sheila: Oh I know. Because some of you can't afford \$500 for surgery, I totally get that. But could you afford -- I mean \$3.60 -- that's all it costs to make these. So maybe you could afford \$36 and that would give ten children the best Christmas they have ever had.

Randy: Yep! Let's do Christmas early. Let's impact children's lives for the positive. Let's give some children a smile and let's share the love of Jesus Christ around the world as we give Christmas Shoes & Smiles.

Call us now. Go to the website. Make the best gift you can and you'll be helping to put a smile on a child's face this Christmas.

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

On the mission field

Tammy: It's a great day when you can give "unto the least of these." I have hung out in this village all afternoon and I could not wait for this moment to be honest with you. But I've had a chance to play with the children. We've hung out and I've played at their playground with them. But you would not imagine what playground they play on. It was filled with broken glass, broken tin cans, all kinds of debris, trash, animals everywhere, fecal matter everywhere. And I'm watching the kids play in this stuff. It was just awful. We would never allow our children to play in an atmosphere like that. But that's all they have in this village and they were the happiest children I've ever seen.

Yet even in that moment we witnessed before our very own eyes a little boy stepping into something and cutting his foot. The reason why is because you'll look around and you see that most of these kids don't even have shoes -- not hardly one of them. If they do, they're broken apart and falling apart. It's just not a good scene.

So let's do something special this time of year. It's not just about a pretty pair of shoes, it's so much more than that. It is really about the quality of life and something so simple as putting on a brand-new pair of shoes on their feet that will protect their feet whether it is infection, cuts, hook worm, whatever it is, it is going to protect their life. It is so simple. Let's do it. Let's make a difference one child at a time. They're a perfect fit!

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: Thank you so much. For any gift you send in, I would love to send you Alex's book. The thing is, sometimes people share their problems and it is wonderful but Alex actually shows you a way out of the labyrinth into freedom in Christ. So you're going to love this book.

Randy: So get it, and do what you can as we share Christmas. We've got Christmas ornaments.

And would you thank our wonderful guest today, Miss Alex Seeley? Thank you for being with us. It's always a pleasure. We appreciate the encouragement that you are sharing, sharing your heart with everyone.

We appreciate you tuning in. Join us here every day on *LIFE Today*.

Sheila: If the phones are busy, keep calling!