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Week 35: Christmas Shoes & Smiles

Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh

Megan Alexander

Sheila: Welcome to *LIFE Today*! I'm Sheila Walsh, joined by Randy Robison. And we're very happy that you stopped by and are going to spend a little time with us.

I'm very excited about our guest. It's fascinating when you watch someone on television and you think they seem like a really amazing person and then you get to know a little bit of their story. I think you're going to enjoy this so much. Please help me welcome Megan Alexander.

Megan: Thank you!

Randy: So good to have you!

Megan: Thank you for having me.

Randy: For people that are going, "She looks familiar."

Megan: "Did I go to high school with her?" I get that a lot.

Randy: That's funny. Just give us a little bit of a resume of what you've done in your life just to give a little context to what we're going to talk about.

Megan: Sure! Born and raised in Seattle, Washington. Go Seahawks! Whoo! And by the grace of God born into a Christian home. And I attended Christian school my whole life, K-12, went to a Christian college and have been in the television industry and the

entertainment industry for almost 15 years now; and have been with the show, *Inside Edition* for ten, just celebrated ten years with our show.

Sheila: Congratulations! That's awesome!

Megan: Hanging in there with TV as our industry is changing so much.

Sheila: Absolutely, that says a lot.

Megan: You all have such incredible longevity too. And then yeah, I got to cover C.B.S. Thursday night football for two seasons and just do a lot of different side projects. But the main thing is I really believe in encouraging this next generation. So a couple of years ago decided to also add author to the resume which is why I get to be here with you all.

Sheila: I love this because it is *Faith in the Spotlight*: Thriving in your career while staying true to your beliefs. That speaks volumes just right there. It made me wonder, Megan, are there times when you have found that your faith has clashed with your job?

Megan: I think it is an ongoing journey. And for me, I didn't necessarily get encouragement to go into this industry being raised in a Christian home. Kind of a pivotal moment for me was my junior year of high school. We were all getting ready for prom and I was standing next to my friend Nathan whose father is a pastor, the Reverend Shields and we are all getting ready and sort of talking about what we wanted to be when we grew up and where we were going to college. When it was my turn to share I remember sort of apologizing and going to Nathan's father, "I think I want to be news anchor or work in entertainment. I know it's not a pastor, I know it is not a doctor. I think I want to work in the entertainment industry."

And the Reverend Shields said to me, "Megan, every person is a minister, every industry is a ministry."

That was a huge moment for me. I hadn't necessarily gotten a ton of encouragement in the Christian community but to get that from a pastor, the world just opened up. And it's if God plants a dream in your heart, anywhere can be a mission field.

So that's how I tried to approach my job. I didn't necessarily talk about my faith a whole lot in the beginning. I wanted to be known for good work, get that seat at the table in the first place, do excellent work because at the end of the day I know my boss hired me because I'm a good news reporter but then look for those small opportunities to share my faith and develop those relationships.

Sheila: What's interesting, looking on your childhood, because you talk about having this dream journal as a teenager and so often, it would be things like, "I hope I'm going to meet Prince Charming." But you've been very focused, very intentional since you were a little girl.

Megan: Yeah. I think how I kind of kept on the straight and narrow was instead of chasing boys I was chasing my career. All through high school, all through college I didn't date a whole lot. I really went after the career and just had a lot of goals and dreams. That was my journal and that was my conversation with the Lord and still is I'd like to do this, what do you think about this? That's just sort of my makeup in who I am.

I love right now that the conversation is so encouraging for young working women of faith because I think that is something that's improved that we haven't always had in the church. And I know for me, I had to really seek and find those mentors and those role models just because some of it is generational. I'm excited for the time now.

Randy: Sitting here between two very successful women in the workplace, I want to know what you would say to the young girl who is watching right now who is going, "I think that's me." But needs that affirmation. What do you tell them?

Megan: Well, honestly, Sheila and Randy, the book came about because I got an email

from a pastor in Seattle that wrote to me many years ago and said, "Megan, I have a church full of young women of faith, big career goals and dreams. They want to go after it in life but they're terrified they're going to need to compromise their faith to get ahead. They're not sure how all this works." He said, "Would you come speak to my church? I want them to get some encouragement. I haven't heard of a lot of people that I can offer up to them."

I feel like in so many ways that was me yesterday; that girl sitting in church wondering how it was all going to play out. So I headed to the bookstore to get some resources for this pastor and I found a lot of great books for Christian men; incredible ones that I have read for Christian businessmen, and a lot of great secular books for women, whether it is *Lean In*, Sheryl Sandberg, *Knowing Your Value*, Mika Brzezinski. But for the working woman of faith, the ambitious young woman of faith, I couldn't find a lot.

So it was my Isaiah 6:8 moment, "Here I am, Lord, send me. Me? You want me to write this book, Lord? Okay!" I put pen to paper and it came out.

So to answer your question I want to offer them practical stories and examples of what it's like on the job and how to take that sermon that you hear Sunday morning and apply it to the nine to five, Monday through Friday. I'm still figuring that out myself. But what do you do when you're on a movie set and a director wants you to push something in a scene a little more than you're comfortable with? What do you when your boss asks you to cover this story and you're not sure about it? That's what I try to talk about in the book; all kinds of stuff like body image as a female, negotiating a contract, finding mentors, even dating and marriage in this world.

Sheila: You're kind of brave in that. One of the chapters in the book you talk about which is kind of counter cultural, that you talk about you and your then fiancé now husband, determined that you would stay pure until you were married. Why did you choose to include that?

Megan: Yeah! And if you want to clear or silence a New York City newsroom, talk about abstinence. I know I got so many people that just didn't even know what to do with that because nobody talks about it anymore. And that's why I included it, Sheila. Honestly because I didn't think when we made this decision, gosh, when we were in our 20s, I didn't think I would talk about it publically. It was our decision, I was proud of it but then here we go with life.

But I realized I wanted to include it in the book because I know, for me, there was a moment in high school where a young couple that had graduated from my high school came back and talked to us about abstinence and they were willing to go there and say, "Ask us anything. We'll talk about it all." They were willing to get uncomfortable.

And when I got asked to write about our abstinence story I called up my husband because he is the other half of us, if I'm going to share my story he's going to too. I said, "Babe, what do you think about us talking about abstinence?"

He said, "Meg, if it encourages one person it is worth it. One person!"

I just want young people to know it is still an option. It worked for me, it can work for them and God can really bless you through it. So that's why I included it. And you're right, nobody really talks about it anymore.

Randy: If I remember correctly, the story in the book you talk about someone who is a friend of yours who is looking for someone to represent that viewpoint and couldn't find anyone.

Megan: Exactly! Yes! My pastor in New York City called me one day and said, "I know of a women's magazine that wants to do a whole issue on dating, marriage, and abstinence and put someone on the cover in the entertainment industry who believes in abstinence," and they couldn't find anybody! She said, "But we heard of you. Would you be willing to go there and share?"

Again, it was, okay, Lord, I'm going to trust you in this one. If it encourages one person it's worth it.

Sheila: I love that to me, what I got from your book and from your life is really living out what it means to be as wise as serpents and innocent as doves because you've had some tough decisions to make. I'm thinking particularly of the story of "the dress." Tell us about that because that was -- you used some real godly wisdom there.

Megan: Oh, thank you! Again, I didn't know what I was getting into, necessarily when I got into this industry and I want to share with you, I really thought oh it would just be fun to be on TV one day. I didn't think oh, I'll have this incredible platform or opportunity, because I was just a 22-year old that was excited to get into the industry.

But the situations that I found myself in, we didn't necessarily talk about in high school and college and one of them that you mentioned is the story of the dress. *Inside Edition* tends to cover the award shows; who won what and who wore what. It's your favorite segment, the fashion segment.

Sheila: Never miss it!

Megan: As one of the female reporters, oftentimes we do a story where we talk about a certain celebrity wore this dress. It cost tons of money but you can get it for \$25 and here's what it looks like. Megan is going to model it for us now; a replica of these expensive dresses. And a certain celebrity several years ago had walked the red carpet leaving nothing to the imagination. It was a white dress, plunging neck line. Good for her, I wouldn't be caught dead wearing that dress. And I walked into the office the next morning after that award show and saw a white dress hanging in the office and I knew what was coming. And the stylist on our show said, "Megan, there you go. That's your dress. Put it on. We're going to do that story today." National television, I needed to wear this dress and my heart sank.

I thought, I don't want to. My parents watch the show; my grandfather was still alive at the time, he watches the show. And who am I as a woman and how I value myself and how I present myself to the world? Again, other people can make other decisions but for me, I didn't feel comfortable. So I pushed back and the stylist pushed back on me and said, "No, you need to wear this. We've got to make deadline."

I had no time, Sheila to call a friend, I had no time to sleep on it and give them an answer the next day. I needed to make a decision within a couple of minutes.

And so that's what I tell the young people is think about what are your black and whites and then how can you work the problem? So I said, "Hang on! Just give me a couple of minutes," to the stylist. Ran to the closet, looked at the other dresses we were going to also be talking about and I grabbed a black one and I said, "Can I wear this one instead? I know I can pull this off." Another celebrity had worn this dress.

I think she was just exasperated with me and said, "Fine! Go figure it out."

I did. Threw my hair and makeup together myself in this dingy little bathroom, not glamorous at all -- but that's real life. And came out and said, "What do you think? Can I do this one, please instead?"

And she said, "Okay."

That's working the problem. Finding ways to still live out your faith and yet deliver for your team.

Randy: I love the way that you illustrate this point that we don't always have to stand against something as Christians in a secular world but we can actually come up with better solutions, better ideas. We don't just have to belittle someone or try to correct them or tell them they're false. We can just show them something better.

Megan: Exactly! Offer options. Offer another perspective. There have been countless times when I have been in a room and have raised my hand and offered up an idea and just because I come from a background of faith, other people don't necessarily, they're not aware of that, they haven't grown up in the church, but I call it having a seat at the table. I believe that Christians need to just boldly take that seat at the table and then offer up another idea, another option, another alternative.

Sheila: I love that. That whole concept of having a seat at the table because so often we can get very narrow minded and think, well, I'm supposed to be at that table but I'm certainly not supposed to be over there. But if God is God he can keep us wherever we are.

One of the things I love about your book, I've never seen anyone do this, but every single chapter begins with an introduction from someone I'm assuming, just mentors or people you admire or love?

Megan: All of the above.

Sheila: How did you make that decision? It's very unique.

Megan: Yeah! When I wanted to put this book together I had a certain literary agent say to me, "You're pretty young. You don't really have a ton of life experience under your belt." But that was part of the reason I wanted to write it was still be able to connect to young people in the next generation and say to them, "I'm still figuring it out too. Let's figure out this journey together." But I knew I needed to go after my role models and mentors and glean their wisdom.

So I asked people like Roma Downey and Mark Burnett who I greatly admire, they're distant mentors to write a forward, DeVon Franklin who is an incredible pastor. Some personal friends of mine; I have a Bible study in New York with a couple of girls that

offered up their thoughts, Kirsten Haglund who is a former Miss America, wrote the "Body Image" chapter and a strong believer. People that I admire that are out in the world in all these different industries, all different areas of influence and being salt and light. I said, "I need you to go real practical. Share with me really what are your thoughts for how people can do this and most importantly, offer encouragement."

Sheila: I think my favorite one of all though was written by your mom and dad. I loved that! It was so touching. Because they talked to you about the whole principle of fighting the good fight but it's not a sprint, it is a marathon, and to keep going. What kind of influence have your mom and dad been in your life?

Megan: Yeah! It was pretty fun for me too to have my parents write that because I think in the back of their mind I had parents that said, "We believe in you! You can be anything you want to be." But my father worked in finance for 40 years, my mom was a stay-at-home mom with my sister and I, and also worked in education. So they said, "We have no idea how the entertainment industry works. Good luck! We can't help you. But we're cheering you on."

And I wondered too, in the back of their minds if they really thought, she'll eventually grow out of this.

Randy: Let her try. She'll come home.

Megan: To a more "sensible" career. So for my dad to write that, he's seen the marathon that it is and he knows how important it is to me to try to be that light in this world and he's been on that journey with me. So my parents writing that, I think most importantly it was them saying God has planted a dream in your heart, go for it. Don't give up. And stick with the Lord about what you're supposed to be doing in this world.

Randy: It's interesting that you talk about that because I think a lot of Christians would think, if my child was saying, "I want to go into Hollywood" or going into some area that

you think of as really secular, there is a little bit, I think of an idea in the church that there's a hostility out there. They don't want you. It's going to be vicious. But you've seen something kind of different.

Megan: Yes. And I totally understand those thoughts. I know my parents were very uncertain and nervous about it. I think it is being realistic and trying to talk about all the scenarios beforehand. In college and in high school I didn't necessarily talk to a lot of my professors about some of these practical scenarios. So I encourage parents, sit down with your children, your young people, if they want to get into this industry then really talk about to them about, okay, what are your black and whites? What will you not compromise on? What is important to you? Let's go find people that work in that industry that you can talk to.

I let high school and college students shadow me on the job because they need to get that real world experience of what it's like. You need to sit in a crazy New York City newsroom when things are just a hurricane and experience that.

So I think for the parents it's -- I think of the phrase that I heard growing up which is, "Don't prepare the road for your children, prepare your children for the road." Go over those scenarios with them beforehand, and then stick with them. I check in with my parents all the time. Stay close to them. Stick with them.

Randy: But they're not necessarily hostile toward Christianity they're just ignorant in a lot of ways.

Megan: I really do believe that. Having been in this industry now for 15 years, I believe personally there is not a master plan to keep faith out of the media. I believe at the end of the day there are just not enough believers that have taken their seat at the table. I have seen it. There have been countless times -- an example, quickly is when *The Bible* was on the History Channel, Roma Downey and Mark Burnett brought the Bible.

Sheila: Awesome!

Megan: Wasn't it? Had a party in New York City every Sunday night and we all watched that together. But a classic example of that is when that movie scored amazing ratings on Sunday night, the next morning my boss was looking at the ratings and said, "*The Bible*? Who watched this show?"

I'm like, "I did!"

And it became this fun, sort of running joke, every week on Monday morning my boss would say, "Okay, who watched this? Who watched Sunday night football? *The Bible* -- somebody get Megan. Where's Megan? Okay, what was on this past Sunday?"

And I'm in this crazy New York City newsroom telling them about Daniel and the lion's den and the lions are circling around him. I literally had a producer say to me, "That's in the Bible?"

And I said, "Yeah! You should pick it up sometime. It is a pretty amazing book."

So we take for granted -- we take for granted that people know the Bible stories that we learned in Sunday school.

Sheila: And I think sometimes we anticipate that they're going to be antagonistic. That's why I love what you did about the dress. You didn't say, "I'm a Christian. I'm not wearing that." You came up with an alternative way to go. I think that earns respect from people because you respect them as well in what they have to do.

Megan: And everyone has been, honestly, very supportive of this book. A lot of people asked me, "When you did decide to share your faith, did you feel some hostility?" I really didn't. And I wonder if it is because I tried to just do good work first and they knew at the end of the day, that's just Megan. She will meet deadline with us. She will still

deliver on the job.

And my boss is a father; he has a daughter and his response was, "I'm all about encouraging young women to be their best self and stay true to their values."

So when you can touch on things like being a father, a friend, I think that's when we can sort of break through some of those barriers.

Randy: What I'm kind of hearing is that the secret to success in being a light in the world is relationship.

Megan: Yes! Absolutely! Build those relationships, get to know people. Then they get to know you and they know what I'm all about, and my family. And the people that I work with, this news business, it is 24/7. We're working long hours, long days; you all know that. I'm with some of these people through marriages, babies, divorces, hard times, tragedies and that's when you build those relationships and you get opportunities to give some comfort and maybe share your faith in those moments when it is real and it's raw and you've developed a relationship.

Sheila: This book is amazing. It's called *Faith in the Spotlight*. You're going to love it. You're going to want to get it for your kids. I have several friends I want to give it to. It will put a smile on your face.

And that's one of the things we're really committed to here at *LIFE*. We have an amazing opportunity to present to you now about how you can actually physically put a smile on the face of some children. Watch this.

On the mission field

Announcer: In the rural highlands of Southeast Asia, *LIFE*'s mission partner Tony

Brewer has worked to provide life-changing care for special needs children throughout the region, including those affected by cleft lip and cleft palate. With few wage paying jobs available parents can seldom afford medical care for these children or the cost of travel to a health facility.

Tony: Many children that are born with cleft lip and cleft palate simply did not get corrective surgery and do not unless we go the extra mile to go get them.

Announcer: Recently, Tony was joined by *LIFE's* Mission's Director, Ralph Done to meet a young boy named Dui whose parents have been longing for the day when their son would have a normal smile.

Ralph: Little Dui here is only four months old but he is one of our latest recipients of Christmas smiles. His sweet family, his mother and father and Dui have traveled over 250 miles just to get to this point. We're here today because today is his big day. He is going to get his surgery done.

Tony: This child would probably not have gotten the cleft lip repair that he's getting today except for *LIFE Outreach International*. A changed life.

Ralph: I cannot explain fully in words the stories that I hear all around the world of the need where children, boys and girls just like little Dui who need this surgery. So I'm going to ask you to give a generous gift to help little boys and girls just like Dui. And you're giving a gift that doesn't just last through the season but it lasts a lifetime.

Open Captions: My wife and I thank you.

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: Wow! That's powerful, Randy!

Randy: What a huge opportunity. We cannot just put a smile on a child's face but give them the ability to smile? Can you believe that?

Sheila: And having been in some of those countries and watch some of those procedures and that darling little one you saw there at the end with the little Band-Aid over his lip, we've had some updates and that's now off and still a little swollen. But see here's the thing in so many of these countries, when a child is born like that, there is a kind of belief that somehow that child is cursed, that that child has no future.

If it was your son or your daughter, if it was my son, I would do everything. I would scrub toilets to get my son fixed. But so many of these people in those countries are desperately poor and they just can't. So they're crying out to God, what can we do?

So this is not something we have to do. This is this glorious privilege this Christmas that instead of buying some more ugly sweaters we actually get to make a difference in the lives of people. Do you know that for \$500, and I know that's a lot for some people, but if you could do that do you know that \$500 will repair one child so that they're able to have this beautiful smile for the rest of their life? That's what my husband and I are going to give to each other this Christmas because it is like, that's -- what a gift! That's what the coming of Christ is all about. It is not about us, it is what we can do to make a difference in the lives of other people too.

Randy: That's very cool, Sheila. I thank you for that. And everyone that comes together.

The other part of this are the shoes. I like the shoes because these shoes are not only fun for the children because a lot of these children have never ever owned a pair of shoes but they also, they're a health issue. There is a lot of diseases you can get from running around barefoot and cutting your foot and getting things I won't go into because they're not pleasant. But we can avoid all of that. You can give a child a pair of shoes for \$3.60.

That means \$36 will provide ten pairs of shoes. \$180 will provide 50 pairs of shoes! I've spent, I'm sorry to say but I've spent more than that on less than this. Do you know what I mean?

Sheila: Don't you think it would be great, Randy this Christmas for your whole family to take it on as a project? To teach our little ones that this life is not about getting more, it is about becoming more. So to be able to say as a family to your kids, let's do this. Let's decide together what we're going to do.

So please, would you go to your phones and make the best gift possible? If we all do something, we all have different amounts -- and we'll send you this. Every year we have the new little Christmas shoe. This year it is like a little jolly rancher in red. We're going to send that to you so please go to your phone, make the best gift possible and together we can put a lot of smiles on a lot of faces.

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

Randy: There you go, buddy. Look at that -- brand-new shoes! New shoes on dirty feet but you know what? Not all of you can come here and have the privilege that I have of actually putting the shoes on the feet of these beautiful children but you can still be a big part because really, we can't do it without you. This is not just something fun for them -- they love it -- we're also improving their health. This is a significant outreach.

These children are all smiling because we've given them new shoes but there are others that need a little extra support to correct that cleft palate so they can have a smile too. I hope you'll make an additional gift today as we take the Shoes and Smiles to as many children as we can. Go to the phone, go online, do the best that you can and you can give Shoes and Smiles to children all over the world.

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: Thank you so much. If the line is busy, please keep calling. We're going to love to send you this little shoe for your Christmas tree. With any gift at all, we're going to send you Megan's book, "Thriving in your career while staying true to your beliefs." Thank you so much for being with us and sharing your story. It's awesome!

Megan: Thank you.

Sheila: Please help me thank Megan Alexander.

[Cheers & Applause]

Randy: And we thank all of you for watching *LIFE Today*. Please join us again every day on *LIFE Today*.

Sheila: See you next time!