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Week 39: Christmas Shoes & Smiles: Last Week
James and Betty Robison
Erwin McManus

James: Wow! Hey! You make me feel good. Some of you don't know, I was just telling the audience here –

By the way, I'm James Robison. Betty and I are glad to have you join *LIFE Today*. I've been wearing glasses for years. Betty actually said, "I like you with your glasses on. It makes you look a little bit more dignified and so forth." I'm not wearing glasses now. I had cataracts removed. Couldn't believe the lights so bright. I thought Betty put new lighting in the house. But they put new lenses in and I can actually pick something up and read it. I can even read it in not such good light. And I can see distance, I have depth perception. It is kind of a miracle.

You know what I've been praying as I got better vision? I pray I'll have the greatest possible spiritual vision. As a matter of fact, I'm praying that for the whole church.

We have a guest that I think has -- well, he is a walking, living miracle at the moment. His church, Mosaic that is in Hollywood, of all places; I kind of laugh, Hollywood, what kind of church in Hollywood? And it is standing -- it stays. It is there and it is growing. Erwin McManus has had this incredible gifting of God. It's like how could it happen?

In the middle of writing this book, something unbelievable happened that you'd say no one wants to hear but he heard what no one wants to hear and it became part of the journey and the story. Would you welcome Erwin McManus who wrote the book, *The Barbarian*? And this is the new one, *The Last Hour*. Would you welcome Erwin to *LIFE Today*?

Erwin: Pleasure to be here with you.

James: How is it going in Hollywood, by the way?

Erwin: It is going so well. Having a wonderful time. We love Hollywood, California.

James: Now do the actors and actresses listen? Because I don't think they do well at the Oscar presentations to represent your church quite like you'd want them to. How are they doing?

Erwin: You know what? I've been in L.A. For 25 years and I've seen a lot of people come and go. You usually think about Hollywood as the big celebrities, the ones who everyone knows but there are tens of thousands of young actors and actresses and individuals who want to be directors and producers and be in the film industry who never make it but they are the most creative and intelligent and talented people from their cities all over the world.

What people don't realize is that L.A. is a magnet for some of the most gifted/talented/creative people on the planet. It just gives us the best opportunity to talk to them about Jesus. For the ones that don't make it in the movie industry, isn't it just fantastic to know that we're going to get those people and they're going to be part of what Jesus is doing in the world?

James: I think that's great! I want you to tell us about your journey in *The Last Hour*. I want you to go to this book because you really do have a gift to write and you believe it is a gift God has given you. Something happened that I think you need to share with us. Tell us about what led you to even begin writing this and then kind of what happened in the midst.

Erwin: When I first started writing the book I was writing it because like yourself, I've been on a long journey, seen a lot of decades pass in life. I'm almost 60 years old and I've seen so many people with incredible talent and intelligence and potential, and the kinds of people that others could look at and say, "Something is amazing is going to happen to their life." And then they hit some really hard moments in their life, hit some huge struggles and it is almost as if they were trapped into the rubble of their failure.

I started wondering after I was reading a particular passage of scripture when the king was told to strike his arrow and he struck it one, two, three times and stopped. And Elisha got angry and said, "Why did you stop? If you had kept striking, you would have had a full victory."

In that moment I thought to myself, I wonder how many times I actually quit but I thought I failed? I wonder, how many of us have not expected enough from God? Because it began by saying to the king, "You're going to have a complete victory" but it ended by saying, "You're only going to have a partial victory." I wonder how many of us God has this huge dream for our life, God has such incredible intention for our life but we dream so little, we pray so small and we have such a small amount of faith that we actually exercise that we never live the bigness of the life God has for us. That's what motivated the book.

It was really born in a conversation I had with my stepdad. My son, Aaron was 15 years old. I had not seen my stepdad for 15 years but he wanted to meet the man who gave me the name McManus. So I found him across the country, you flew, set up an appointment with him, got to see him. He was happy to see us. I was just struck that the one moment I saw my stepdad after 15 years, the only conversation he ever had with my son, he looked at my son and he said, "I

don't know what your dad has told you but he was just average. His brother, now he was exceptional. He was really talented but he was just average."

And in that moment I just remember saying, "Hey dad. What else would I tell him? I told him I was just average."

I thought, how strange that the one thing he wanted to make sure that he could pass on to my son was that his dad was just average. As I walked away, I felt really heavy. But I realized I wasn't heavy because this is what he said to say about me or what he chose to tell my son. What really bothered me is it was true. In fact, to say I was average would almost be a compliment. I was really below average. I never even rose up to average. I hid being average. I found myself a safe place where I could be lost in mediocrity.

I started asking myself, I wonder how many of us are comfortable with average? Because you know as well as I do, when you're just average no one's against you. When you're just average, you have no enemies. It's when you aspire to achieve something that matters, when you aspire toward greatness, when you open up your soul to great faith and you say, "God, I want you to do great things in my life," all of the sudden you become a target. Because we're not afraid of average but we are afraid of greatness.

That's what's inspired the book, *The Last Arrow*. I want every person when they take their last breath to know they've given everything they have. That they took all the talent, the potential, the gifting, the purpose, the intention and the dream that God created them to live out and I want it to be lived out.

I'm convinced we're all dreams of God before we take our first breath. And I know you are too. But I thought to myself. If we're a dream of God before we take our first breath, shouldn't we live out the dream of God before we take our last breath?

James: Say that again!

Erwin: If you're a dream of God before you took your first breath, shouldn't you live out the dream of God before you take your last breath?

James: See I really believe that many people don't understand that. Betty, if anybody ever felt average, you did.

Betty: Yeah. I think so many people don't believe that they're a dream of God. They don't even believe it. So they get stopped, they get halted right there. They don't ever go beyond where they're comfortable.

Erwin: I think a lot of people also, all they hear about God is that God is a judge, a condemner, that God is all about wrath, that God is angry, that God's all about laws. We forget that God is the source of all creativity, of all beauty, that God is a source of imagination and wonder; that there's no one more artistic or creative than God. The reason we can dream and imagine, the reason we can laugh and celebrate, the reason we can enjoy life is because that's a reflection of who God is. I love that it says in the Bible that God rested from his work of creating. God wasn't an accountant (nothing wrong with accountants), he wasn't a manager; God was an artist. His job was the work of creating. We're the result of creative work.

In the last book I wrote called *The Artisan's Soul*, I actually wrote this statement, "You are both the work of art and an artist at work." We are the result of a creative God who imagined us and now we're to create the life that God imagines for us.

James: I wish people would grasp what that means, what that looks like. I think you really do have to seek the Lord, what is it you want me to be part of divine design and fulfillment? One of the things that happened to me, you tell me if you bear witness with what I say here. As a teenager, I was the kid who was never picked because I moved all of the time, nobody knew me.

Erwin: Me too.

James: I was definitely average or below average. But when the Lord called me and said he wanted to use me, I knew it was a call of God. I couldn't imagine how he would do it because I even asked how would I live? He says, "Where is your faith?"

I said, "It's all in you."

But one of the verses that I had memorized right after that impact was, "If you lose your life for my sake" -- and I really did understand that to mean for his purpose, his kingdom purpose. In other words, what is his purpose? You lose your life in that purpose you'll find it. I really did that. Betty did too. So when we lost our life in his purpose we found life and dreams began to be fulfilled. So I actually was so committed to kingdom purpose that I found out that God was also committed to my heart's desires. And it was amazing how because I was sold out to him, he seemed to be vitally interested in me.

Now here's where I am at this point in my life. I don't know when people get there, I don't know if getting there right now or at any age, a young age, would be better if we say we're okay to pursue our dreams as we live for kingdom purpose. But I have so seen my dreams fulfilled that I have lost my life in wanting to see his dream fulfilled for his church, for his family. And the prayer of Jesus fulfilled in John 17, that we're one with the Father as he is, relationship, that his

word perfects us, sanctifies us, not arguing, debating and discussing merely but the word transforming us. And then when we love one another, in perfect supernatural unity, then the world will know we're actually his family, we're actually his disciples.

So I've lost myself wanting that. Do you think that's misguided devotion that I've lost myself wanting to see his prayer answered and his dreams fulfilled? Or do you think that might be a point of let's say even wise maturity?

Erwin: I think you're actually describing something that is reflected in a great marriage because in a bad marriage you keep wanting the other person to make you happy. In a good marriage or an extraordinary marriage you find happiness in the other person's happiness. But I think in that marriage that is just like unbelievable, your happiness actually is that other person's happiness; that unless that person is happy, you don't experience happiness at all. I know that's true within my own life. I've been married 34 years and nothing gives me a greater sense of fulfillment when I see Kim happy. It's not just that it makes my life easier, but it makes my life better.

James, you really hit on one of the core principles in the book. Because I'd finished the manuscript over a year ago and then just this last Christmas I was going through a series of tests. In fact, I've gone through a series of tests for almost ten years because I could not get life insurance. And I kept trying to get life insurance. There was nothing wrong with me that I could tell and I was healthy. I was living life and I felt a little tired at times. There are things that I knew were just off but I never mentioned them to anybody. But no tests ever validated there was anything wrong with me. Sometimes I thought maybe it is just growing old. Maybe I'm just losing my energy or maybe something is just not working the way it used to.

This Christmas, I went through this series of tests and I went to the doctor's office to hear that I had a clean bill of health. That's why I went in. I'm sitting next to my wife and this doctor tells me that I have cancer. When he said that, and I know that's really close to home for you guys. When you hear the words, "You have cancer" what you're hearing is, "You're dying." I looked at my wife and she just looked broken. For me, even in the process, what I saw my family experience was the most painful part of it, not even what I experienced.

We had planned a little dinner afterwards with my kids, my son, Aaron and my daughter, Mariah. They're in their 20s. We were going to celebrate that I was healthy. I didn't reschedule it. We met there in this public restaurant where people kind of knew who we were. I share with my kids that I had cancer. It is just a really hard night. You can imagine, in fact you know the level of emotion that was there.

When everybody was exhausted they all went home, went to sleep. I sat down in a chair and I

thought, this might be my last Christmas. It might be the last time I can buy my wife a gift or my son or daughter. This might be my last series of lasts.

And then it hit me. I had a manuscript in my hand and the name of it was *The Last Arrow* and it might be my last book, it might be my last arrow. So I opened up the manuscript that night, the same night they told me I had cancer. I thought, I need to finish this book. I don't know what the future holds for me. I opened it to the middle of the manuscript where I had left off and the first sentence I read and I underlined it, I highlighted it and I wrote the date down so I would never forget it. I wrote this a year before. It said: "I need to tell you before you hear it from someone else that I'm dying." I wrote that sentence a year ago -- no idea I had cancer. And now on the night that I discover I have cancer I read this line and it is almost as if I've written something to me in the future and those words were waiting for me.

And then the next line to me is the most important line in the book. It says, "But then again, so are you."

I sat down and I started reflecting on where I was. I know people experience this differently. I gave myself permission to feel whatever I needed to feel. If I was afraid, I was doing to be afraid. If I was angry, I was going to feel angry. If I was bitter, I was going to feel bitter. I just told myself, you just have to be honest and feel whatever is there. I don't know fully how to explain to you this, but I never felt anger, I never felt bitterness, and what surprised me is I never felt fear.

But I could see my family did and they felt all those emotions because they were going to lose me. And I started reflecting on why didn't I feel these things? And I realized when I was younger, when I began following Jesus I was in incredible violent space in a world of drug cartels where people were killed on a regular basis and I was terrified one day. I asked God to give me something to hold on to and it wasn't "fear not for I am with you," or "I can do all things which strengthens me" or anything like that. The verse that came to mind was, "To live is Christ and to die is gain." That's not what I wanted to hear from God right then. It was not encouraging or affirming in any way. But in that moment, I felt God tell me, "Erwin, if you'll just die and put death behind you, I have life in front of you."

I realized that cancer can define how I died but it could not define how I lived and that death was behind me and that's why it didn't have the same effect on me that it has on so many other people. I remember standing before the community at Mosaic and saying, "I have cancer. But I want you to understand something. Death is so last year. And death is behind me and life is ahead of me."

I've always told our community, because we have a lot of atheists who come, a lot of agnostics, a

lot of Buddhists and they go, "How do you know there is a heaven? How do you know there is an afterlife?"

I said, "Do you what the best proof of life after death is? Life before death. And the only reason you don't know there is life after death is that you have not come to know life before death."

But I can tell you this, in the middle of having had cancer, in the middle of having surgery this January, in the middle of all the indignities that cancer brings, that Jesus has been everything to me that he ever promised me he would be.

I went back and I had to rewrite *The Last Arrow*. I had to rewrite the first chapter and the last chapter because I wrote this book as if I were dying and I was able to rewrite the book at the prospect of the reality of death. Then since the surgery, I've been able to live the book out and it's been the most powerful thing in the world for me. I'm more excited about this book than any book I've ever written because I'm convinced it is going to take people out of the slumber of existence into the wonder of life.

James: Don't you think that's exciting to know we can go there?

[Applause]

You express things because you have a marvelous gift. Like you said, you would much rather people read what you write and you have so much more confidence in that as the gift God's given you that it just comes alive. I think you'll find that. Because if you really understand that finding life is losing it in his purpose in his will, which is really best, it's beyond anything we could ever imagine. Would you say thanks to Erwin for being a vessel?

[Applause]

And you're doing well now? Everybody wants to know about this battle.

Erwin: I am doing great. In fact, I was sharing with you, three hours after I had surgery for six hours, I woke up my wife, I got the nurse and they said, "What do you want?"

I said, "I'm getting up and I'm walking."

They said, "You can't get up and walk. You just had surgery."

I said, "I can't do any more damage."

They said, "Do you want painkillers?"

I said, "No. I want to feel this pain because I know if I can overcome this pain I can face anything."

One of the things I really want to emphasize in the book is that a lot of us don't realize that our greatest life is on the other side of our pain and suffering. And that whatever we fear, that is the boundaries of our freedom. We need to push through our fear, we need to push through the pain and live the life that God created us to live.

James: Isn't that great? Do you see what he's saying? Right here. And you can take this home. I hope you'll get it. You know what our viewers love? This is so exciting. As a matter of fact, this is way before Christmas. This is a little ornament; this is the crystal shoe. We give shoes to children all over the world. And we give them cleft palate surgery, we give them a smile. I'm smiling because I know what it means. This is awesome! I want you to just look in. If you want to have fun, you give joy to somebody that never expected it. You be that source of joy. You be that miracle that someone longed for, never dreamed would happen and you can be that. Boy, to tie it to Christmas, the greatest miracle gift of all! Watch closely.

On the mission field

Clint: We're approaching a time of the year when *LIFE Outreach* does its Christmas Shoes & Smiles campaign. The smiles are for corrective surgery. But what we're doing today is we're getting these young boys and girls shoes for the very first time. You can actually see the importance of what we're doing because look at this little girl, Veronica, she's got these sores on her feet already. She's obviously never owned a pair of shoes. She's been walking around bare feet.

James: Betty, they just tough it out and they play. But we found out that right here in this area that hookworms get in the skin, get in the bloodstream, ultimately into the intestines and cause very serious disease and sometimes death. We can turn it around by simply giving them shoes.

Sheila: Something as simple as a pair of shoes can really change a child's life. This is a happy place today. [Laughing] Look at this face! Who wouldn't want to give her a gift at Christmas? So thank you so much on behalf of her family, those who love her. I think you've put the biggest smile on her face that we've seen all day. So thank you. Thank you for the gift of shoes. Thank you for the gift of life!

[Children yelling]

End of clip

In the studio

James: I hope, and I can't imagine that you're not smiling. Betty, what do you think when you see that? You've actually been there. You've seen the situation. You've seen how love impacts them.

Betty: I'm smiling along with those children as they're dancing up and down with their new shoes on. Shoes have never meant so much as they do to these children because you see what happens to their feet when they walk on all kinds of trash and junk and cut their little feet and then it causes disease to set in. So I'm thrilled. This is one of my favorite times of the year when we give the shoes to the children for their precious little feet.

James: Well, I'm telling you what. These are precious little shoes here. I want to ask you to give as many shoes as you can right now. I know it's way before Christmas but this is the last week now that we're asking for your help. They cost \$3.60 a pair. Think about this now: \$36 -- ten children have a pair of shoes. \$180 and I want to use that figure because we're going to need those kind of gifts, that will give 50 children shoes. So this is an amazing thing that you can do.

Then we're also emphasizing the cleft palate surgery when you can give a child a smile and you can. We have the doctors that are ready to do the surgery and because of their willingness to serve, the surgeries are only \$500 each. I know that's a lot but when you really compare to what it would be back here in North America and more of the advanced countries, it would be far more than that. But these are doctors that are willing to give their time but we have to cover those costs. Would you consider giving maybe two children smiles with a gift of \$1,000?

Here's what we're doing. I mentioned the little crystal shoe, how beautiful it is. We would really like for you to have that for any gift that you make.

Betty, I want to ask you if we couldn't do this. We always give right upfront; when we begin any project, we give. In this last week, I'd like for us to give two more cleft palate surgeries and I'd like for us to give 50 more pairs of shoes. So that would be \$1180. We might round that off to \$1200. Can we handle that?

Betty: I like that!

James: This is the last week. Some of you may have done what we've done, we gave earlier, but in this last week, we just need a surge of support. So could you do that? Would you give two children, hey, think about what it is going to do their parents, to their family, what it is going to do to others when they see that beautiful smile that love provided? Would you do that? And would you give as many shoes as possible? Thank you so much for doing it. Thank you for sharing that love.

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. This is the last week. Please call, write or make your gift online today!

End of clip

Begin video clip

Ralph: Little Dui here is only four months old but he is one of our latest recipients of *Christmas Smiles*. He's getting his cleft lip surgery done. His sweet family, his mother and father and him, they 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.

Thank you so much for giving a Christmas Smile to little Dui today. 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 do this. Find the number on the screen right now, call that number. Or if you prefer, go online, whichever gives you the greatest opportunity 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. Please give right now.

End of clip

In the studio

James: Also, if you would like to have *The Last Arrow* by Erwin McManus, you ask for it. He's walking this out right now. And he's watching miracles. And I think we can be a part of fulfilling the miracle journey that God has planned for each of us.

Would you join Betty and me saying thanks to Erwin for being a blessing?

Erwin: Thank you.

James: You help us and you want this book, you give shoes, just ask for it. God bless you! Thanks Erwin! Thank all of you.