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Week 27: Summer WFL

Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh

Taya Kyle

Randy: Welcome to *LIFE Today*! I'm Randy Robison and this is Sheila Walsh.

Sheila: Hey!

Randy: Sheila, this is the time of the year that this movie keeps popping up on television. I love the film. Tragic story but it's such a great movie, *American Sniper*. Have you seen that?

Sheila: Oh yeah! Very, very powerful. But the thing I think is amazing is out of the devastation, the loss of that amazing life his wife Taya, she's written a couple of books but this new one is perfect for this time when we celebrate America and we celebrate freedom. So would you please help us welcome our guest Taya Kyle? It is so great to have you here.

Taya: Thank you! Good to be here.

Randy: I love the title of this book Sheila, *American Spirit*.

Sheila: Yeah! "Profiles in resilience, courage and faith."

Can we back up just a little bit? I'm sure most people are aware of your husband's story but if they're not would you just give us a little background into what happened?

Taya: Chris knew there were two things that he wanted to do when he was growing up and it was that he wanted to be a cowboy and he wanted to be in the military. He was able to do both.

He really loved serving. So when he got out he wanted to help another veteran, and of course, his friend Chad Littlefield was by his side a lot when he got out of the military. And they went to go help another veteran who killed them both. So since that time we've just been putting the pieces back together and part of my journey is the reason for the book.

Randy: You mentioned his friend Chad, and his parents actually came out to support you. They're in the audience.

Taya: Yes! Don and Judy Littlefield.

Randy: Have you taken a lot of strength and encouragement from the other relationships? Because I see a lot of that in these stories.

Taya: When I was out on the road and I was doing speaking engagements and I kept meeting people who were sharing their story with me and it really started to settle in my soul that there is this chess game between evil and good. And my belief is it is God and Satan. I see that every time Satan makes a move God says, "I can do good with that." And then I think Satan tries again and he said, "Even that I can do good with."

These stories were inspiring me and they were healing me because I thought you know, yes, people have the choice to use their free will for evil but there's always a provision and there's always something beautiful that God not only blesses these people but blesses them mightily.

So these stories -- and by the way, not all the people in this book are believers. You don't have to have faith for God to bring you the blessing and try to remind you and reach out and say, "I'm here." So I think it is fascinating when you read these stories to see if you think that it's God or if it's coincidence or whatever else. Regardless, people are finding beauty in the ashes of their life.

Sheila: What did it do though, initially, to your faith when a good man like your husband who has given so much for his country? His life has ended in such a... Somehow on the battlefield it is almost something more you would expect but to come home and in an effort to help

someone else, to have your life ended, did that rock your faith?

Taya: It's interesting because I do look at it, the loving Father, and I think, what would any loving parent do if they knew your child had to have an amputation? I think God knew in advance that there would be this amputation, this severance of a part of me which is Chris. And he prepared me in advance, like any loving parent would, and then he stayed with me during and he stayed with me after. So the preparation in advance, I had a cousin die when she was three. Chris and I had young friends die. We had friends die on the battlefield, and off, and I feel like there was so much time for us to really think about what's fair, what's not -- what's right, what's not -- what has God designed and what's not.

In the end I think that preparation helped me because I never assumed that Chris's only possibility for death was on the battlefield. And I never thought I was immune to a struggle. I think sometimes people go through life and think, it's not fair! It shouldn't happen to me. But the truth and you see in *American Spirit* is that something happens to everyone, and if not directly to you to somebody you know and love. There's a point where all of us have to consider the "fair" in life.

Randy: Can I ask some very difficult questions?

Taya: Sure!

Randy: Does God allow suffering? Does he cause suffering? Is he just distant? What do you think?

Taya: No, I love those questions because I've spent a lot of time thinking about it. And actually, when Chris and Chad were first killed I thought it might be God designed because I saw that their lives mattered and that people were inspired and changed by their lives. It was about a week into it that a friend of mine, also a widow said, "I never thought God did it. I think God cried with me." That really stuck with me. I had to think about that. So I researched, I talked to academics and pastors and they said, "This whole idea of this realm, God giving it to Satan to

say, 'Do what you will and I'm going to prove to you that my people will still seek me, find me, want me, and be good in spite of the darkness that you think you can entice them with.'"

That to me is this beautiful message that I now see so clearly. It wasn't an easy time to write *American Spirit* but it felt so selfish not to share these stories because you see it illustrated so clearly that I think we're always in this place where we think Satan has got us in check on the game of chess. He goes, "Check!" And we're all going, "Oh no! Oh my gosh!" And God is like, "Check mate! Check mate! Check mate!" You know what I mean?

And so when you see it that way you start to be a lot less fearful and you start to be a lot more confident in God and you start to see this life as not even so much as a testing of us but it's a point, we're on team God. Right? Like if there is a team Satan and a team God, we're team God! We're just here to prove a point. And staying faithful is the point.

Sheila: Your stories are so diverse which I love -- young and old. There was a story that came out of 9/11 that really touched me because you can almost imagine nothing good coming out of 9/11. Tell us about that.

Taya: I appreciate you noticing that Sheila because we worked hard to get a cross-section so that there is a story that is relatable to anybody who gets this book. But 9/11, of course, like you said, a terrorist attack. You would think there is nothing good that could come from that. And certainly, we know that the country came together in a way that we haven't since, I would suggest.

This particular couple, Mel and Brian Birdwell, Brian Birdwell was given a less than one percent chance of survival; burned over 60% of his body. Their story is in a book called *Refined by Fire*. They talk about these divine sort of events leading up to the fact that he even survived at all. If you read their book you can't see anything but God's orchestration to get them through it.

But after that, they aren't angry with God. They don't feel that God let them down. What they feel is their faith is different. They dove into their faith in a way they never did before, and they

were faithful before but they also started a ministry for other people. I think that when something like that happens to a person who is still seeking God, God will use that and be like a force multiplier. That term in the military where you can use one person in a way that multiplies the whole force. That's what I think God does with people like Brian and Mel Birdwell.

Randy: Wait, wait, wait now! I'm not a military guy. What does that mean?

Taya: So, a force multiplier is, let's say we have the three of us and we're battling 30 people. You have to have some element of a force multiplier so that the three can conquer the 30. So the force multiplier -- yeah!

Sheila: Wow! I love that!

Taya: Yeah, right! And so I think God uses us and you'll see Jamie and other guests that you have on, you'll see that I think most of them are probably force multipliers. And God knew that when Satan struck on that chess board that God had already planned other pawns in place, five or six moves ahead and he said, "I'll use that as a force multiplier." I just started to see Satan like pulling his hair out going, "No! It was supposed to ruin them and it multiplied their force!"

Sheila: Brian has actually been on the show sharing. It's really powerful. You also tell this incredible story about the blind biker? That blew me away!

Taya: Yes! And you know what I love about that, Sheila? Is they have this -- we have I think this thought that what could be worse than losing of some of our sight or something else? And this guy, Artie Olyphant, he had a life that was great and blessed and all of the sudden you see he gets hit with these things, these physical things. And ultimately, he's blind. He ends up running a marathon and his spirit is so strong. But it turns then into biking, which is now an in-tandem biking program in Central Park.

You think, when you're hurting, when you're really broken, you need something that says you haven't lost everything. There's still this. So for people who are athletic to be able to say, "I'm

blind but I can still ride a bike and feel the wind in my hair." And the cool thing about it is it's not just the blind people who are blessed. We hear this but it's so true. The people doing it are almost more blessed than the people they came to help. What a unique program!

Sheila: That's fantastic.

Taya: I think that was my other love of this book is there are really unique ways, there are gaps that aren't being filled and there are unique ways that people are giving back that I wouldn't have thought of that. But somebody did because they're different than me, they brought that to the table.

Sheila: The *American Spirit*.

Randy: And not just the *American Spirit*. I think it is a lot broader. I think it is the human spirit.

You've made these connections with these different people and these great stories that you're telling and bringing to us, what has that done for you personally coming through a very difficult time, still wrestling with things, still dealing with the fallout and the pain but yet telling stories of hope?

Taya: It's interesting that you bring that up too because I actually struggled with the name of this book, the *American Spirit* because I agree with you, it is much more the human spirit but there was a branding issue so we stayed with our line of the American title. But the hope that I get feels like it's done something in my soul that's so different and if I don't share that, I truly feel like I'm doing a disservice. And I feel like it's not mine to hold on to. And if I don't share it, I feel like I've done something offensive, really because how can I be in the depths of despair and have hope in this light and a shimmer of something and just figure everybody else is in despair, hmm-yea, it is not my problem. It is my problem. It is your problem, your problem. And if we come together and share the message of hope, I think it ripples out.

I've already heard one story by the way of a kid who was suicidal and their teacher actually read them a story out of this book and it changed because it was just enough to say, you're not alone and look what somebody else did with their struggle when they were in middle school. They now blessed thousands of people with that struggle. So I'm just so hopeful that it will help lots of people.

Sheila: One of the stories that really touched me was to do with all those little tiny houses. That's beautiful! And very redemptive.

Taya: Right! And who would think? So Donnie Davis is a pastor but he was first in the military and then he was a police officer. And it's a very harsh way to say it but it gives you a very vivid image. He said he was no stranger to the taste of the barrel of his gun. Right? He had thought about killing himself multiple times. He had cumulative P.T.S.D. And at some point God reached out to him and did something in his heart and his soul and it changed his life. He gives a lot of credit to his wife.

And they end up -- I mean he's a pastor and she works with Special Ed kids. And they end up finding this property for \$1.3 million. They find a way to get a loan and they build tiny houses for veterans and other people struggling with P.T.S.D. There is a lake, there is nature, which we know is very healing and there is community. It's that feeling of you're not alone. It's affordable. They're tiny houses. What a brilliant idea! And I, again, would not have thought of that but it's a gap that is filled.

Sheila: And you tell stories of children too. It is not just -- is there one that is like a favorite? What about even just the lemonade stand and how that has continued?

Taya: Yes! So Alex's Lemonade Stand is actually cool because it was a story that ran in 2005, a lot of people heard of it. But what I wanted to illustrate with it is that we hear of these great stories but we don't often hear of the ripple effect that goes out years, decades. Every time you do something good in faith or if you don't believe in God, it is still some sort of faith usually that it will work, it ripples out for years, decades and we'll never know this side of heaven.

So Alex's Lemonade Stand. It's 2013, I think it was when Jim, the co-author, Jim DeFelice, his nephew is online at school and he sees a pop-up about it and he starts to raise money. So stores, corporations, kids today are all still doing Alex's Lemonade Stand raising millions for cancer research -- and it started with one little girl just wanting to help somebody else years ago.

Sheila: The thing that I think is... one of the ways I believe your book is going to have a huge impact is our nation seems really angry and very polarized. I think there is something about the gift of gratitude and seeing other people and making a difference that shifts. Is that kind of your hope for the book?

Taya: 100 percent because I see like you see this polarization, and when I'd hear these stories I didn't know if the person helping was democrat or republican. I didn't know if the person being helped... And what a beautiful thing when we set politics aside and look at the human spirit.

So I think this country is full of good people who are more concerned about helping their neighbor than they are about how they vote. We just don't see that on the news. And we're not going to so we need to get books like this and we need to talk to people about our story and our struggle and see how politics is the least of our concerns when people have real struggles we can help with.

Randy: I think one good example that you give is the Collins family.

Taya: Yes! The Collins family, they're faced with this decision early on where the doctors are telling them to abort their baby because he has this rare genetic disease. They won't live a full life. And in some ways you can see how the doctor thought he was bringing up something that would be almost compassionate, right, so that people don't have this struggle and they don't live past four usually. They had the courage to say, "No. We're not doing that. We're going to see what this blessing is."

In doing that, I remember Chris, I'm not sure if it's in the book, but I remember Chris was a

baseball player, a pro baseball player at one point and he said, "As long as they have their hands we're good." And one of the major deformities with this disease is their hands are not fully formed. And these kids, I don't want to ruin the story but man, they have blown out that whole four-year thing. He said, "The light that they bring the world is extraordinary." One of the effects of the disease is they don't have a filter.

Sheila: I love that!

Taya: Yes! So they say things that everybody else is thinking and they laugh. They show that disability is actually such a delightful part of this world. It is the thing that makes them different and it's a shining light. And two of their five kids have it. Yeah!

Sheila: When you go out and speak what is your message to people?

Taya: It's changed over time because I think in the beginning people wanted to know more about Chris and they wanted to know more about his story and the military story. They wanted to know some of the depth of grief and how we get through that. It turned into more of a ripple effect story because I started to see hope and perseverance differently.

I usually have some component of faith but it is important to me that people know that it's not freedom from religion, it is freedom of religion. So when I tell my story, I hope that I'm always respectful about it. I have this faith but I also have friends of different faiths and I'm okay with that. I'm great with it in fact. It's helped me dive more deeply into my faith and there's a beauty, there's freedom that we have so it's morphed into some of that.

Now it's kind of ended on this place of the ripple effect, perseverance, hope. What do we have to offer? How do we get through hard times? And where are you going to be if something hits? My friend, Sheriff Bill Weyborn is in the audience too and he always said, "Troubles coming." He's a sheriff, he knows this. Trouble is coming but when you put your feet on the floor you have to know who you are, what you believe in and what you stand for. And when you know those things the trouble can come and you're going to be resilient to it.

For me, that's God. For me, that's the one thing that gives me courage.

Randy: I like that you're respectful towards those who don't share that faith but I also like that you say no, it's for you. It's God, it's Jesus Christ.

Taya: 100 percent! I couldn't -- I would not be here talking to you today if it wasn't for God. And I see that in my hardest times leading up to Chris's death I was able to put my toe in the water and say, would God have me here? Would God have me there? And every time he did.

So at some point you realize that he has you no matter what. And this worry that we have of all these horrible things happening in life is really a trick to steal your joy because if God will see you through why worry about it? Really? Be smart. Wear your seatbelt but we don't have to live with a spirit of fear. In fact, we're told not to and now I see why. Because even when the worst happens you're still here and the other side is a blink of an eye away where we get to see everybody again.

Sheila: I bet team Satan just groans every morning when you get up.

[Laughter]

Taya: Yeah, I know! He still tries, let me tell you. I've come a long way but I have those moments. In fact, driving here tonight I all of the sudden started to feel like things weren't right and I was going to... and I had a friend reminding me. She said, "You know you're about to go have a really great evening with some really great people and believers. Don't let this attack hit you right before." I thought you're right! What am I doing? I don't normally do this. So you have to just kind of bye!

Sheila: Shake it off!

Taya: Yeah, bye!

Randy: Well, I appreciate you being here. I appreciate you sharing. And I really like this phrase you used a couple of times, "ripple effect." Because what we do, even the things that seem small they go out. They have an impact. And that really fits well with what we're going to ask our viewers to help us do and that is to give clean drinking water to people that desperately need it. It is a nice picture of the ripple effect but it truly is a huge impact around the world that you can have. I want to show you a little bit more of that. Please watch this with us.

Randy: Our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. It's a tenet of our faith. But as a believer, I can tell you I view my hope with a new perspective when I encounter people who have lost what they hold sacred, their children.

I want you to understand something about the people here. They tend to have quite a few children, up to seven in some of the families in some of these villages we've seen, and they typically will not all grow into adulthood. They will lose them and they're losing them the same way.

One of the most profound lessons I've learned from my parents is that we are blessed to be a blessing. At *LIFE Today*, we find people around the world in desperate need of a blessing. Many of them lack one of life's most basic needs.

To you and me this is just dirty water. But to countless people around the world this is the only source of water -- the only thing they have to drink. And for far too many, this is death.

Life and death, it could not be simpler. Our hope in Christ challenges us to fight for life and in this case our path is clear.

This water is clean. It's drinkable. It's beautiful. It's nothing like the water we've seen around the world in places where children, especially, are dying of waterborne diseases. When you give this clean, pure water you give them a chance at life. Let's give Water for LIFE.

Randy: It really is a matter of life and death, but it really is easy to give life. Sheila, I know you've been around the world like I have and you've seen these places. It is hard to watch the way they're living. It just feels like we have to do something.

Sheila: And that's the great news. We can do something. If you know my story, you know that I've struggled with depression. But you know what I've discovered helps me almost more than anything? It's getting involved in somebody else's life and helping somebody else.

If you take the word *depression* and you rearrange the letters, do you know what you get? I pressed on. There is some of you right now and you're thinking well, I'd love to help somebody else but I'm not in a great way. Can I tell you there is something beautiful about the way that God has designed you and me that when we decide to reach out and help somebody else touch somebody else's life you suddenly catch your own reflection and discover you're smiling? There is nothing more beautiful than giving back.

And the great news is we can make a difference. I've been in the villages where there is no water well and I've watched the mothers grieve at the graves of their babies that they've buried. And I've been to the villages where we've been able to put in a well that lasts usually for 70 years. They don't even need electricity. There's a pump that will go for 70 years and serve like a thousand people in the village.

Now if you and I determine we're all going to do our bit, we literally can change the world for some people. And it is very doable, Randy.

Randy: Absolutely! The breakdown if you look at the 400 wells we want to do this year, we've already done, in the history of *LIFE Outreach* we've drilled over 6,000 wells now but 400 this year in 15 nations, average cost of a well is \$4,800. It lasts a lifetime for most of these people. So if you look at sort of the mathematical breakdown you realize that \$48 will give clean drinking

water for a lifetime to ten people. \$72 will serve 15 people. \$144 will serve 30 people. That's gives you an idea of how a little bit can go a long, long way.

I hope that you'll give -- if you can give a well, if you can give two wells, do what you can. The significant part is not so much the amount. The widow's mite means more to Jesus because it is the obedience. It is standing up and saying, "You know what? I'm going to be an example of Christ's love to someone around the world. I'm going to obey. I'm going to give out of whatever I have. I'm going to give out of a heart that just says I want to express the love of Christ to someone." We do it through water. It's a beautiful example of Christ who is our water of life.

So will you join us in Water for LIFE? Go to the phones, go online, just be a part of this. You can be a part of something so good. Do it today.

Begin video clip

Announcer: Today, a mother living in extreme poverty will do the unthinkable, give her children dirty, diseased-filled water that she knows could kill them. With no other choice what else can she do?

With your help, clean water is on the way. Mission: Water for LIFE provides a way for parents to save the lives of their children to offer them a bright future free from the fear of death.

With your gift today, you can help drill and establish 400 water wells this year. Your gift of \$24 will help provide clean water for five children. A gift of \$48 will help provide for ten. \$72 will provided for 15. And \$144 will help provide life-giving water for 30 people for a lifetime!

With your gift, we'll send you the "New Mercies Each Day" desk calendar. This 17-month calendar will not only help you keep track of important dates but also remind you of the Father's love and goodness with scripture quotes and encouragement from all the hosts on *LIFE Today*.

With your gift of \$100 or more, request the "Fruit of the Spirit" bowl. This beautiful and decorative ceramic bowl features scripture revealing the "Fruit of the Spirit," a lovely addition to your table or home.

Finally, please consider a gift of \$1200 to help provided water for 250 people or a gift of \$4800 to help sponsor a complete well. And you may request our "Safe in the Shepherd's Arms" bronze sculpture.

Please call, write, or make your gift online.

End of video

On the mission field:

James: Betty, we've seen the effect of the cholera because we've gotten the reports in this area here, from just these water sources. And then we went and saw a well. Their teacher told us that they're not sick anymore and the kids can come to school. It's a simple solution but it is only simple if people will help us.

Betty: That's right, James. And the water is such a need -- a life and death situation, James. I saw a mother actually drinking the water a while ago and it broke my heart.

But you know, we have to give them a choice. They don't have a choice right now in so many places all over the world. Because they don't have that choice, their bodies are being contaminated with this bad water and their families are dying. We can give them the choice of fresh clean water. I hope you will help us.

In the studio:

Sheila: Thank you so much! If our lines are busy please persevere.

And please, if you request this book, it's *American Spirit*: "Profiles in resilience, courage, and faith." It's brilliant! Get one for yourself, get one for your family.

Taya, I just want to thank you so much. You're an inspiration. Thanks for being with us. And thanks for the difference your life is making!

Taya: Thanks for having me.

Randy: Appreciate you being here. We appreciate you watching *LIFE Today* today and every day. If you miss an episode, you can always go online and catch it at LifeToday.org.