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**Week 39: Christmas Shoes and Smiles -- Last Week**

**Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh**

**Rob Koke and Daniel Koke Germain**

**Sheila:** Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm Sheila Walsh and I'm here with Randy Robison. We're here with some amazing guests, I think you'll find very relevant to what you might be going through in your own life.

You probably know that we have a national crisis of addiction and of people's lives being completely out of control. But I wonder what it would be like if you were a pastor who had to get up in the pulpit on a Sunday and preach knowing that your daughter is also addicted to drugs? What can God do? Well, I think you're about to find out.

Would you please welcome our guests, Rob and Danielle? I want to get your new first name, Coke Germain. She just got married. Welcome!

**Randy:** So good to have you guys. We're going to try to get a lot of story into a very short amount of time so I'm going to let you guys just jump right into it. Give us a little bit of your story and your viewpoint and just run with it.

**Sheila:** And why did you write this book?

**Rob:** Well, the book is our story. The story of Danielle finding herself in a very difficult place in life with some addictions that were controlling her world.

We, as pastors of a church in our community, learning to deal with it and struggle through the process and trying to find a place of healing and restoration for our greatest

gift in life.

So I still remember with my wife Laura and myself, we were opening up the mail in our kitchen and when we got Danielle's bank statement. And we saw on her bank statement all of these charges to alcoholic establishments and we were just shocked. As shocked as you could ever imagine.

**Sheila:** Wasn't she a student at this point at Oral Roberts University?

**Rob:** Yeah, she was a student at Oral Roberts University, which is a Christian university in our country. So we immediately called her on the phone and asked her what this was really all about. We could tell from the tone of her voice, just the way she was communicating that she was in pretty significant trouble.

**Danielle:** So a key part of that story is, when I was 14 years old, I lost my brother, their son, in a car accident. We were super close. When I was 14, I didn't have the emotional capacity to handle that gravitude of a loss. So I remember that intense feeling of needing to escape the way that I felt. I didn't want to feel that way anymore. I didn't know how to handle that or how I was going to get out of my emotions, but I knew I needed to.

And so I, pretty much first thing, boys, attention from boys. I was 14, didn't quite have the access that I would have when I would get older. And so when I went to high school I started experimenting with drugs and alcohol and I knew that it made me feel different, that it made me feel good. I felt like my personality came alive. I was electric. I did not feel any of the pain that I was feeling. So it was this magical bullet.

Then when I got to college, I didn't even have the limitations of parents. My addiction went wild. But I went there with the dream of walking in their footsteps. They also went to O.R.U. I really wanted to restore my relationship with the Lord, have the college experience.

**Sheila:** When did you know that Danielle was really in trouble?

**Rob:** I think honestly, we had no idea. I wish we would have been a little bit clued in. Maybe our own grief journey clouded our perspective a little bit in terms of understanding what the needs in our children were. But when we got that bill, it was the first idea that we had that Danielle was even experimenting with things. We didn't know even at that stage in the journey how significant it was.

But when she said, "Dad, I need to come home," then we knew that it was more than just college experimentation; that there was something really significant going on.

**Randy:** Can I ask you something? You both mentioned your son, your brother, Caleb. That was obviously a very, very difficult situation losing him that suddenly, that quickly. Tell me a little bit about him so we can understand why it was so hard.

**Rob:** Any parent that loses a child, it is a devastating experience. There are just no words to describe the excruciating pain of that experience. You, as parents, you know or even as adults you know that you're supposed to bury your parents, you're not supposed to bury your kids. Caleb was a unique personality. He was the captain of his basketball team; he took his basketball team to the state championship. He was an All-American kid. He was extremely good-looking, very popular, and he just doted on his little sister. And it was just a magical relationship as parents to see and so yeah.

**Danielle:** Most brothers don't like hanging out with their little sisters, but he did. Like my friends were his friends, his friends were my friends. It was always just... yeah, he was my protector.

**Sheila:** Huge loss. There's a really poignant scene in the book where you describe you coming home from a party and you're drunk and you crash your car into something. At what point did you realize that's exactly the same road where my brother died?

**Danielle:** Well, many hours after I woke up, the fog cleared, and I had a conversation with my dad and he had mentioned something about that. Of course, I was lying at that point, texting and driving was the story. But there was this realization when I was actually driving again down that road and I saw the tree where Caleb had -- the tree that Caleb had hit. I just sank. Yeah.

**Rob:** I think that was part of the emotion too, even as a parent, that we had already lost one child in a tragic car accident and now Danielle was running this risk with her behavior and it was devastating. The emotions of that were just beyond anything we could ever process.

But when she was at school, we heard that in her voice, things became very, very aware from our perspective that she was in trouble. We brought her home. And we connected with a family counselor who really recommended for Danielle to go to 90 meetings in 90 days; that was the mantra. Because I don't think we knew how serious her issues were. We knew she was in trouble, but we didn't know again whether it was something that was worthy of rehab or something that she could manage with concentrated effort.

**Sheila:** What were you using, Danielle?

**Danielle:** I was using Adderall to wake up, study, party drug, the college famous drug, and then I would smoke weed to go to sleep and drink, partying. Yeah.

**Rob:** And you were involved in those 90 days program and there was some minor relapses during that time but after the course of the summer unfolded we felt like she had been sober for a period of time and we thought okay, maybe she's gotten this thing underneath her belt. And so we sent her back to school a second time, back to O.R.U. with much different set of circumstances: No car, no extra money. Everything changed. And we thought, since her former youth pastor was there that she had the support system that she needed and that she was going to do really well.

**Randy:** And well, it is O.R.U, I graduated there too. The societal pressure is to not do those things.

**Danielle:** You sign an honor code to not do those things.

**Randy:** Yeah, I was supposed to sign that too but go ahead.

**Sheila:** So when you landed back at O.R.U. how long did it take before you fell right back off the wagon?

**Danielle:** So when I went back to O.R.U. I was dedicated. Like I was convinced I had a problem. I was excited to start over again. I felt like I was back on track with my life. I had one conversation, the first day I got back.

My friend took me to coffee, and she knew I was in recovery and she had just mentioned one small thing. All she said was, "It's going to suck that we can't drink together this year." She's like, "I'm happy for you but it is going to kind of suck."

And I was like, "Well, maybe one drink won't hurt."

And the insanity of addiction is that in one moment you can go from being gung ho recovery to done. So easily convinced. And yeah, that led me right back into my addiction.

**Rob:** So a couple of months went by and we were on the phone and she's in active addiction this whole time and her life is spiraling out of control. But part of the challenge sometimes with raising kids is she was a master manipulator. She was a fantastic liar. And we've always had a very close relationship and she kind of played off of that and knew exactly what buttons to push and what I needed to hear.

But I could tell in a phone conversation that we had right before I was going on a mission

trip to Uganda, my wife was right in the middle of a women's conference at our church, I could just tell that maybe everything wasn't right. I wasn't sure but when I got to Uganda I wrote her an email and said, "Danielle, we just had this incredible conversation on the phone and you shared your heart with us. I just am not sure whether you were telling us the truth. I'm not even sure I have the ability to discern when that's happening or not. But hear me out here for a second. I love you more than I could ever say with words. If I'm wrong, please just write it off as something that a concerned father is just wanting to explore. But if I'm right, just know there is no judgment, there is nothing that I'm going to say except we want to get you the help that you need and do everything in our power for you to become the person that God wants you to be."

**Danielle:** And at this point I was not even having fun anymore. I was just drinking in my room, not going to school. So I was just existing -- not even living. So when he sent me that letter it was my saving grace. And I was like, "Trust your gut on this one."

**Sheila:** So you end up in a rehab, yeah?

**Rob:** Yeah. So at that point, no more 90 days. This is serious business. She came home and she went straight into rehab.

**Sheila:** What was that like for you?

**Danielle:** Well, when you have numbed your emotions from 14 to 20, you experience all your emotions all at once. But I knew that I had to experience them if I was going to be serious about recovery, if I had any chance at sobriety, and long-term recovery. So I walked that out. I walked out every emotion, every rejection from a boy, every part of the pain that we experienced with Caleb. And it sucked.

**Randy:** You're saying it wasn't that fun at the time but what did it do to you?

**Danielle:** Worth it.

**Rob:** And one of the things that I think we both were able to wrap our understanding around, which I had never really considered this concept. When you think about drugs and you think about addiction you always think about it, well, it is a choice. You can do it, or you can't do it or whatever. And the whole idea of - is addiction a disease or is it a choice - kind of came into the forefront of our thinking, and some thoughts that I'd never had before.

And part of it was a recognition, I guess, because Danielle was talking in terms of, "This is a disease." That was being communicated quite forcefully within the environment that she was a part of. And I loved the wording that they used. It is a disease of choice. What starts as a choice then becomes something that becomes uncontrollable. There's a chemical transformation that takes place in your body that makes you crave and makes you spiral out of control.

The reason why, because I always thought, well, if you make it a disease then you've given somebody an out, you've given them an excuse that they're not necessarily going to own and take personal responsibility for their life. But what I learned is that when someone fully recognizes that there is an issue in their life that they can't control, it is very similar to someone who has a physical disease, they know they can't eat certain foods, they can't do certain things. For Danielle, she knew that she can't drink in moderation. She can't take this approach to life where it is socially acceptable. For her, there was a phrase that she brought to my attention...

**Danielle:** To drink is to die.

**Rob:** To drink is to die. For her, it is the way her body would respond to alcohol. So it was helpful, I think, for us to recognize the unique set of circumstances around Danielle's addiction.

**Sheila:** Let me ask you, Danielle, there is so much more in your story. But what is life

like for you now? And how did you gain trust again? Because trust is a big issue and you were very close and I know that part of the addiction is lying. What is your life like now?

**Danielle:** Well, my life is, in comparison, really good. Recovery is possible. That's what I would really want to say. I just got married. The girl that stood down the aisle three weeks ago is not a girl who could have gotten married three years ago. That's not the type of relationships I was capable of. I have friends now. I work in ministry. I work for the Landing Ministry at our church, which is the Youth Celebrate Recovery Program. Life is good.

But I also want to say that recovery is a journey. So life is still hard. The only sobriety I have is the day in front of me. I have 24 hours of sobriety, I have the hour that I'm in right now. So someone who is sober for one day, me and him have the same amount of sobriety.

**Sheila:** How are you different as a pastor because of what you've walked through with Danielle?

**Rob:** My whole life has been transformed in terms of the sensitivity that I have for people who are walking through really significant issues. I think that's part of the process. For Danielle, it was Adderall, and it was weed, and it was alcohol. But there are addictions that surface in people's lives in all kinds of different ways.

And so even as a church, as a pastor of a large congregation in our community, when I look out on Sunday morning and I see the thousands of people who gather there, I just recognize that there are real issues that people are facing in a whole host of different ways. So people are struggling with eating disorders, people are struggling with divorce issues, people are struggling with alcohol, obviously, drugs, pornography, sex addiction issues.

And to recognize that the pathway to healing is very similar for all of these different things, we need faith in God. We need good community, we need good friends, we need good support systems, we need good information. Actually, that's a part of what this book is. It's not just our story, it's a very practical guide for how you can walk through these kinds of challenges, especially for parents and children.

We wrote this book with my voice, as a father and Danielle's voice as someone going through the challenges. It's magnificently raw and real. It is not sugar-coated. It's just the way it is. And with all of our tears and with all of her struggles, and her sense of humor and her wit, it all comes through in this book. So we're really proud of it. We hope that it will be a source of inspiration.

**Randy:** There is one thing that you told me earlier that I want to bring out because yes, we need to address the physical and psychological aspects of addiction but yet most of the girls that went through, or people, I don't know if they're all girls, went through the program with you that didn't address it with a spiritual component, didn't quite have the same success. What exactly did you tell me earlier?

**Danielle:** I attribute my recovery to Christianity. Like I fought for my Christianity in rehab. I think...

**Randy:** How many of them relapsed?

**Danielle:** At least 98 percent of them.

**Rob:** So a number of the people that went through the program, and it was kind of interesting because we adopted them all. Danielle would...

**Danielle:** Reserve a section at church.

**Rob:** Reserve a section at church for all these people that she had kind of connected with

and they would actually come up to our office in-between services, after service, we would talk to them and hear their stories. They were just the cross-section of American life. They were raised in good families. They even had aspirations for college.

One of them was someone who was aspiring to be involved in athletics. But they were kind of sticking their toe into church life; it wasn't the way that they were approaching life. So we got a chance to actually meet them and talk with them. And it was so heartbreaking to hear story after story of people who relapsed and went back into their lifestyle; even with the pledges and hopes to remain faithful and true to their sobriety. They would often relapse.

So we even talk about that in the book, some of the danger signs, what you have to look for, and how you need to approach this process so that you remain firm and strong. But without faith in God, honestly...

**Danielle:** It wouldn't be possible.

**Sheila:** The book is phenomenal. It is called *Prodigal Daughter: A family's brave journey through addiction recovery*. It is a fantastic book! And we're going to tell you how you can get a hold of a copy. But first there are some other people who are really struggling right now and we can help them in a very practical way. So would you watch this?

#### **On the mission field:**

**Announcer:** Mountain villages like this in Southeast Asia are home to many poverty stricken families who struggle with the usual obstacles of life. And it is here that the ministry partners of *LIFE Outreach* are able to help some of these families who face a unique challenge.

This is Seuanine. He was born with a cleft lip and cleft palate. He struggles just to

swallow milk and oftentimes, his lungs will fill with fluid putting him in grave danger. But Seuanine's life would soon change.

After learning of his condition, *LIFE's* mission partners moved into action. These dedicated missionaries arranged for the long drive into the city and provided the corrective surgery that could save Seuanine's life.

**Tony:** You know we were able to say yes to that distraught mother and help Seuanine only because of the *LIFE Outreach family*. It was *LIFE Outreach's* prayer and financial support that saved that little boy.

Seuanine's disfigurement became a beautiful smile matched only by the smile of his loving mother. With tears in her eyes she says, "Thank you for helping my son."

A big thank you to the *LIFE Outreach* family and to you, Sheila and Randy. It is a privilege to serve with you as we share the gospel of Christ and as we provide life-changing cleft palate surgeries in our part of the world.

**End of video**

**In the studio:**

**Sheila:** You have no idea the difference it makes. So many of you, you're so faithful, and you sit at home and you give and you give. Randy and I often get the opportunity to go on the field and to actually see with our own eyes the difference it makes.

When a little one is born with cleft lip and cleft palate in so many of those countries, there's a lot of superstition and they're seen as cursed by God. They're not allowed to go to school. They're just rejected in society. We are the people of God on the planet at this moment and it is our joy to be able to reach out and help those moms and dads and those precious little children.

So my husband Barry and I made a commitment this Christmas because this is our last week of Christmas Shoes and Smiles, and you might think, you're a little early! But we want to get all the shoes in we can and to get them.

So let me tell you about both things. For one of those surgeries, we can do it for \$500. The doctors are amazing. They work with us to say, "We will do this." So for \$500 you can give a surgery to a child! What a perfect Christmas gift. You don't need one more sweater. Trust me!

But also with Christmas shoes, these are beautiful little shoes that cost \$3.60. Kids who have never had shoes and they live in countries where their feet get cut, they get diseases, they can even die. This is our last week. Would you join us?

**Randy:** Yeah. And you know, Sheila, you've been there, I've been there. It doesn't seem like a big thing when you think about shoes but when you realize that it is not just a special gift but a gift that keeps on giving because it protects them. I would never have thought, if I don't have any shoes I could die! Which I know sounds extreme, but it is actually the case because of the cuts that children get on their feet when they don't have shoes and the places that they walk, sometimes they're not exactly clean. Hook worm is a common problem.

This is a wonderful, kind of feel-good gift that I love this time of the year to do this. But it is also really important! When you give shoes, you give life! That's something that doesn't quite register when you first say it. But when you give shoes, you give life. That's why, Sheila, I'm just so excited.

If you could do a special thing this Christmas, would you give shoes to, I don't know, ten children for \$36? To 50 children for \$180? Or maybe as Sheila mentioned, give them that smile? I really think it is important we do something.

**Sheila:** Yeah! Let's reclaim Christmas that it is not a big spend Fest for all of us to buy

more things we do not need but to be able to reach out in the name of Jesus. Christmas is all about God giving us what we could not earn ourselves, the gift of his son. So what a joy that we get to reach out to other mothers and fathers, and children around the world to say, you know what? This is just a pair of shoes but let me tell you about the God who came and walked in shoes to redeem each one of us.

So please, go to your phone. Make the best gift possible. Just whatever you can do, it will literally change a child's life.

**Randy:** Yes! Thank you!

### **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 could 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 just in time for the holidays. Your gift of \$36 will help provide ten pairs of shoes. A gift of \$72 will 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 green crystal shoe ornament, a treasure to display at each Christmas. With your gift of \$100 or more you may also request this keepsake boxed set of *LIFE*'s Christmas shoe ornaments.

Finally, please consider a gift of \$1,000 or more to help provide over 275 pairs of shoes or two children with corrective cleft palate surgeries. And you may request the beautiful "Safe in the Shepherd's Arms" bronze sculpture.

This is the last week. Please call, write, or make your gift on line today.

**End of video**

**In the studio:**

**Sheila:** Thank you so much. And for any gift at all, we will send you *Prodigal Daughter*.

Is there anything else you would like to share with our audience?

**Danielle:** Yeah. I would just like to say that whoever you are, you are not alone.

**Sheila:** That's huge!

**Rob:** And that's a huge part of this process. To recognize that there's hope -- there's hope for victory, there's hope for your future, and recovery is absolutely possible.

**Randy:** What a wonderful word! Thank you for sharing that hope with us. Would you thank Rob and Danielle for being here on *LIFE Today*?

We thank you for being with us on *LIFE Today*.

**Sheila:** See you next time on *LIFE Today*.