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Week 34: Christmas Shoes and Smiles

James and Betty Robison

Rich Wilkerson

James: Thank you all. You're wonderful. Thank you for joining us to *LIFE Today*. I'm James Robison. Betty and I are thrilled to have one of our -- this is like a family of friends. This is the Wilkerson family. We have Rich Wilkerson, Sr. We had Rich, his son, Jr here. There's just so many Wilkersons, they're just everywhere. It's just amazing.

And most of you know, the Wilkerson name became I think very, very famous, beyond a household name with *The Cross and the Switchblade* with David Wilkerson. And all of this is family related and connected. And the big thing is not just that it is a Wilkerson family but they're a family of the Most High. They're God's family. They're part of that great host of believers who have been born into the body of Christ forever as part of the church.

But the Wilkerson family has just been interwoven through our lives from the time I knew his dad here when he was pastoring an Assembly Church. And it was quite a big deal for a Baptist to be going over to a see the Assembly of God pastor and preach there and be friends. It was almost like we risked our very lives to love each other. It was amazing.

Well, the Wilkerson family has just touched people all over the world with the love of Jesus, and I thank God for them. Would you welcome Rich Wilkerson, Sr. to *LIFE Today*? Rich, it is good to see you, buddy. I'm glad to see you, man. We can talk forever about all the beautiful things we've watched God do with his family but also the relationship we've enjoyed.

Rich: Well, we're going to get into some stuff, James. But before we do please, those of you that are watching, this is a prophet of God. Not everybody sees you that way because you're on a

talk show with your lovely wife Betty. But I'm going to tell you something, Brother James, you broke down some barriers 30 years ago that were God-ordained. You opened the door for a lot of Christian people to say it's okay to love these people. And that was your way of honoring many of us in the Pentecostal world.

I'll never forget 1980. You were preaching at a hotel here in Dallas. It was during the time that there was a big switch going from President Carter to President Reagan. And you preached a message, I told people forever that it was one of the three greatest messages I'd ever heard in my life. Still do! I can't say that I remember the other two but I always say "three" because you've got to throw it out there. You know what I'm saying? But I mean that lit me up. I was sitting there, about 28 years old and I was weeping while you preached. I said, "I've got to get to know this man."

Then you had me come and preach those great conferences at Tarrant County Convention Center and loved my dad. Then you had my son on the show. The Robisons are right next to Jesus. It's God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, Pastor James.

[Laughter]

Okay. Here we go. It's a blessing to be with you tonight, James and Betty.

James: I want you to talk about the title. Your church, I think we could sit here and talk about what's happening in Miami. And you've just planted another church recently that has exploded and you said now, what like 15,000 are attending your church in that area?

Rich: We started 20 years ago, James with about 300 Haitian people, the old Trinity Church in Miami. We just started growing, started loving people, started working with the homeless, those that needed food, those that were broken. Every avenue of poverty in Dade County we've been down through as a church over the past 20 years. God started blessing us in a great way and we started to grow.

And then our boy, Richie, who you had on several weeks ago, Rich came in 2007, joined us and was with us for seven years. We had the plan when he came from school that at the seven-year mark he and DawnChere would plant a church towards downtown. They are ten miles south of us. Then just -- and that happened three years ago. My youngest son, Taylor planted the same year in his living room in a little apartment in Harlem a church in Trinity Harlem in New York City. And three months ago, my oldest son got a church going in Tacoma, Washington in November. My spiritual son, Terrence Wilson who was with us for 13 years, African American, he planted out of our church three months ago. If you put all of our churches together for Easter Sunday...

James: Broward County, is where he is; right?

Rich: Yeah, in Broward county, ten miles west of us, Miramar, Florida. Then my nephew got our church in San Diego, Trinity San Diego. None of that was going 20 years ago. And on Easter Sunday we had 17,000 people when you put them all together. So God has blessed.

We have so many people that need Jesus though. We just feel like it is a drop in the bucket and we're not going to stop loving people. When we first went to Miami we went to the inner city, tough area of Miami, about 70 percent of the children that are born in our immediate neighborhood are born with the AIDS virus. It is a very difficult area.

We would get to the church on Monday morning through Friday, Rob and I, and there would be a line of people at the door for food. Rob and I would try to sneak through the people and get in the door and lock the door so we could build a great church. So then we were praying, God send us people, send us people. Then we got convicted. So we started buying food every morning and bringing it to people and we did that for two years until we were personally flat broke. And now we have no money and people are still wanting food. I said, "God, I'm trying to build a great church." God says, "Rich, you don't even have to go out of the church. I bring them to you every morning and you're stepping over them, placating them with a little bit of food like they're nothing."

And James, I laid down on my office floor that day like a little baby and wept, and I repented before God. Shortly thereafter, Robin wrote a contract for the city of Miami. They were offering day camps. You had to compete for money so we were broke. She goes, "We're a church, why can't we compete?"

So she wrote this contract. She won \$175,000 and we had 500 inner city kids for eight weeks, Monday through Friday, 8 am to 5 pm for eight weeks. This year will be our 18th year in a row to have that day camp and God has revolutionized... Rich came in. Rich worked, all of our pastors have had to work the day camp. And that's where they learn the ministry. Those kids tell you what they think of you the first day. And it is not necessarily you're personal initials.

[Laughter]

But within about four days they're calling you Dad. Just to see the change.

So we've just seen miracle after miracle. And this is really where we cut our teeth on honor. That every -- I just finished five years of seminary, I just finished my dissertation. I wanted to jump off a cliff because I was writing this book at the same time I'm doing the dissertation going, dear God in heaven! Get a life, Rich. Please get organized.

[Laughter]

In the middle of all that, I've had five years of seminary. Every theological course I've taken in five years, every professor has talked about Imago Dei. And Imago Dei is a Latin term for "the image of God," Genesis 1:27. And every one of us have been made with the image of God in us. Bigger... I heard you talk to Pastor Ron a couple of days ago. What a show that was talking about his mom. And his mom, here she was at 14 years of age a prostitute but in her was the image of God already implanted. So for me to overlook one human, if they're Muslim, if they're whatever they are, I'm overlooking the image of God. When I started honoring the image of God in people who weren't like me, God started turning my life around first, and then started turning the lives of others around.

James: So what do you want people to hear when you choose honor? Explain what you hope people get from that when they read the book.

Rich: It gets mixed up with respect. You look in the dictionary, respect usually has something about honor in the definition. You look at honor, it usually has something about respect in the definition. But as I interpret it, respect is something I can do from a distance. I don't need to know you. I don't even have to agree with you but maybe you've done something that's remarkable, so I respect that. Honor is something you do up close. Honor is something that costs you something. It is an act of your will up close.

When I walk into a room -- the last 20 years, most of my days are spent with people that I didn't grow up around. In other words, they didn't look like me, not the same background, not the same ethnic background, not the same narrative of life. Usually, I do my best to go to someone I feel is just not going to buy me at all. They're not into anything I -- and I try to honor them at that point, James. I believe honor...

James: Noticing people even is a form of honor. You didn't overlook them. Because Jesus said the overlooked are the least of these. And I know the minute I started noticing the overlooked, there was a sense of honor right there.

Rich: When I text fellow ministers or people that are in different backgrounds, I always say, "I'm so proud of you. I can't believe you're doing what you're doing." And they respond immediately.

James: I called one of the most famous preachers in the country, everybody watching would know exactly who I'm talking about if I told you who it was, recently. I said, "My wife and I are watching you every week. You're in the late years of your life, you're a statesman." And I began to tell him what I saw. He said, "James, I don't think I've ever been -- I don't think anything has ever hit me quite so hard. I don't even know how to handle it. You've been so kind and paid me such honor that you took this time." He said, "I've got to tell you, this is probably

one of the greatest moments of my life."

I'm telling you, there's something about just noticing people. We're going to give shoes away to little kids and we notice their little feet, we notice their little lives, we want to bless them. And our viewers like to do that. Am I right? Is that touching what you're talking about with honor?

Rich: There is two Jesus components involving the act of our will: Humility and servant leadership. Jesus always led with humility and servant leadership. Think of him taking his clothes off, wrapping them around his waist and leaning down and washing the filthy stinky feet of those disciples who would all walk away from him in about 24 hours. I mean fungus toes. I mean Judas -- he washes their feet!

And in the Middle East that's, the feet are the lowest part. You remember President Bush a couple years ago, he got that Middle Eastern shoe thrown at him because that was the lowest form of dishonor the man could show him. And so that was the Jesus style: Humility, servant leadership. When you walk in the door humble in heart, serving, not wanting, not having a separate agenda.

James, this is one of the weirdest things. I hope you don't mind if I say it. It never happens to me. I was in the hotel room getting dressed to come over here a few minutes ago and the Lord spoke to me and said this. I've never done this. There is someone watching that you're on the brink of a million dollar deal. You'll get it if you'll change your approach. You're getting ready to go in to see the person you're selling to and you're going to tell them how great you are. You need to change your approach and go in, whatever it is, let them know what an honor it is to be in their presence. Thank you for the opportunity. They need what you have but it is going to be the honor that will make the sale. I think that's true in a lot of situations, James.

James: You mentioned something to me that just kind of knocked me out earlier before we came out here that your son was in a coma. How old was he? Six months?

Rich: Six months old.

James: What happened?

Rich: So I was in Cocoa Beach, Florida doing a -- back then they called them Summer Charismatic Conference Clinics. So it's about 300 people, we're on the beach. I get a call from Robin saying, "Rich, I've got bad news. Our six-month old, Graham, those ear infections he had when you left on Monday, well, I came back from the doctors and the doctor said he's fine just keep him on Tylenol. And Rich, mom came to the house and said, 'Take him to the doctor now. He's dying.' By the time I got him to the hospital, he was in grand mal seizures. Got him in the hospital. Died for ten minutes. They were screaming, yelling, did cut downs on his ankles, shunts -- everything. And somehow God brought him back after ten minutes."

The nurse told my wife -- the doctor told my wife that night as I was flying all night. They got me to the airport in Orlando, flew all the way back to Seattle. Said, "Please pray. I know that you're religious people." She didn't know how else to say it. "Please pray that your son dies. This boy will be deaf, blind, severely disabled, will lay in a crib at 40 years of age and drool." And we just didn't know how to pray death prayers.

I got home the next morning. My father-in-law picked me up at the airport. We started a 16-day vigil. It just so happens, James Robison, that you were in Tacoma, Washington doing a crusade at that time. I think it started about three nights later and I'd been to hell and back. My wife and I were broken but I wasn't going to miss that crusade. You'd been such a blessing to me and I was there with your associate. And he said, "Rich, James wants to talk to you." So I came in the back.

I said, "What is it?"

He goes, "I've got to come see Graham and pray for him, Rich."

So James Robison the next day came down to the hotel, it was a two or three-day meeting. He came to my little boy's bedroom in the I.C.U. and his hand is about bigger than my son's whole

body. Just laid that massive hand on Graham and prayed the prayer of faith.

I've got to tell you, we've been through a lot of stuff, but Graham is 32 years old today. And he sent me a... He sent me a picture because we've been redoing the backyard and there's something that he wanted me to see so he sent it to me. I looked at it and he said, "Dad, tell me. You like it? Yes or no?"

That's always the thing, "Yes or no?"

I texted him back and said, "Yes!"

So he's a blessing. He knows how to do the computer. He's even gotten his driver's license. We would never let him drive our car. I'm just saying, but he is just a miracle of God.

And this man, honored little peanut people and he came to pray for a little boy.

James: I want you to get this book. You can get it online. I tell you what, I'm going to ask you to touch some little kids' lives by touching their little feet and giving them some shoes for Christmas. Way ahead of time I'm asking you to do this.

I want us to pray for the viewers. You already talked to a man that you said has something going on you already spoke to.

Father, I pray for everyone watching right now. I don't know what's going on in their life but Lord, you know that I would drop down on my knees there in the room with them, lay my hand on their shoulder. I would want to touch the air of brokenness. And all I can do is pray and care. But through that prayer and through the supernatural reality of who you are you can touch them in that area of need. I'm asking you to just heal broken bodies, disease, damage, miraculously heal. Lord, I'm asking you to heal broken hearts and relationships. I'm asking you to work miracles in people's lives. Let them know how much you honor them by noticing them and sending your son to give his life that they might have life now and forever. So you meet their

need; in Jesus' name.

I pray many of you will call and say, you know what? God just touched us. He did something in my life. Call that prayer line that's paid for by love and just say, this is what happened. Or ask them to pray with you there in the prayer center.

Then I want to ask all of you to watch and look and listen to one of our missionaries, our overseer of the missions of the world. And we're seeking to give little children all over the world shoes for Christmas and smiles, cleft palate surgery, facial deformity. This is something that you, our viewers tell us that you really love to do. So today, I pray you'll respond. Watch prayerfully. Even as God touches you, you reach out and touch someone with love.

On the mission field:

***Announcer:** What if you could put a smile on a child's face by giving them something they have never had? What if with that gift you could save a child from getting parasites? And what if you could actually save the life of a child with that gift? You can do all these things by simply giving a pair of shoes to children around the world.*

Ralph: Today has been one of those special days because so many kids in this environment, they don't have any shoes -- haven't had. Many of them have never owned a pair of shoes. In the terrain they have to walk through and work in, it just tears up their little feet. Doesn't really make them sore but they get diseases in their feet, it climbs through their system in their bodies and even brings death.

But today has been a good day. We're able to bring shoes to their lives. These light shoes that are provided by so many of our generous donors. Today, little Tewin here, he is going to get a pair of shoes and now he'll never have to go barefooted again. He can always run. See, he loves this stuff. He can run through the woods, wherever he goes now, with a good pair of shoes and not have to worry about infection.

So I want to say thank you again to all of our partners for giving so generously. But this Christmas season, please, I just want to ask you to give again so that you can bring change to little children's lives like Tewin. God bless you and may you have a merry Christmas.

End of video

In the studio:

James: Ralph, I just want to say I love you. I know you just had to fly to Houston to get another visa to go back to Angola. And Ralph is spending Christmas without his sweetheart, his wife. He lost his wife. And it's a tough deal for dad. Yet there he is, right back with a broken heart but a love of God for these precious children.

This is the kind of people you support. You support Ralph. You support missionaries like that and Ralph is our overseer for *LIFE* all over the world. What a wonderful expression of God's love. Betty, don't you want to see all these little children have a big surprise for Christmas? We're asking God to give us 150,000 pairs of shoes for children. Isn't it fun to do this?

Betty: I love this special thing that we do at Christmas time. How precious are the precious feet of these children? We've been there. We've been able to see the excitement in their little faces and in their hearts. They just dance up and down. First time they've had something to put on their feet to not only be comfortable with but to be safe with, to protect their little feet from the disease that can come from all the cuts and scrapes and the diseases that get into their little bodies.

I hope you'll join with us and let's put smiles on their faces because they've got shoes on their feet. But also, let's put smiles on the faces of those little ones that haven't been able to smile because of a disfiguration, James. That blesses me too. So please join with us and help us!

James: You know when you see children smiling and then you see some that don't; I'll never forget one little child. A lot of the children we saw in Africa had never seen themselves in a clear picture like a reflection. We saw children running up to see their image in a camera monitor as

the camera pointed at them.

This little boy came up and he saw himself and he had a horrible cleft palate. And he screamed and threw his hands over his face and turned and ran away.

It so touched my heart I immediately looked to the viewers who saw that, and I said, "Why don't we give that little child a miracle?" And did you know you gave the resources to take that little child from Angola all the way to Johannesburg and do the surgery and send him back home with a smile? Our missionaries were blown away. They said there were no surgeons there that could do this. We had to take him from all the way from Angola to Johannesburg, South Africa to get the surgeons and love did it.

Betty, our viewers love to help. You're going to love giving these shoes. Now think about this: \$36 will give ten children a pair of shoes -- ten pairs. And for \$180, and oh how I wish many would do this, we could give 50 children a pair of shoes.

Would you do that? Would you right now go and get your bankcard? Go online or dial that number and say here's the gift God's put on my heart. And then remember like Betty said, we can give those smiles, that cleft palate surgery, where there is a deformity in their face, we can correct that. The average cost is \$500; \$1,000 two surgeries. Would you provide that?

Father, I pray everyone who can help will right now.

It's way early for Christmas, of course. You say, "Why are you doing it now? It's a long way..." Hey! Because we have to raise the money, get the shoes, get them ready to ship, and get them into all the different locations in third world countries primarily, and be the miracle gift for Christmas.

So please, get your bankcard, or write a check, make it to *LIFE*, dial the number or go online and make the gift. We have some gifts to send you that are going to put a smile on your face to say thank you. Thanks for what you're doing. Thanks for your gift.

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.

Please call, write, or make your gift online today!

End of video**In the studio:**

James: Well, Betty and I have really enjoyed reminiscing, family memories because we really are family. And we're family with you. We want to thank you for really being family to so many

people like those that will receive these beautiful little shoes and the smiles, the surgeries.

If you'd like to have Rich Wilkerson's book, *I Choose Honor*, here's a man who has chosen that. What a beautiful family. Such an honor to know them and all that they've done as a family, and a part of that great family.

If you'd like to have this book you say, "James, if I help give some of those shoes, would you send me the book Rich wrote?" Sure will! Just to say thank you, along with the other gifts.

Join us in saying thanks to Rich for being a blessing. Rich, God bless you. Thank God for you. Love you. In the bookstores, too. Thanks for watching *LIFE Today*. Thanks for sharing!