

12/02/19 Modified From: 9/26/19
Week 49: Fall Mission Feeding
Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh
Alice Marie Johnson

Randy: It's so good to have you. And oh my goodness! Sheila, what a story.

Sheila: Our guest today is phenomenal. How you go from being a mother of five, manager at FedEx to suddenly finding yourself given a sentence of -- a toe tag sentence basically, life without the possibility of parole.

Randy: Unbelievable! I saw this lady's story and I said, "We have to have her on *LIFE Today*." And she is now here. Would you welcome Alice Marie Johnson to *LIFE Today*?

Sheila: Miss Alice!

Randy: So good to have you. It's kind of a miracle just seeing you here because as far as society was concerned you were locked up for the rest of your life.

Alice: I was hidden away, given what is called an unexecuted sentence of death. I was told that the only way that I would leave prison would be as a corpse. That is the only way that I was told that I would ever rejoin my family.

Randy: How did you get to that point? Because you did make some mistakes.

Alice: I did. I take full responsibility for the mistakes, bad decisions, bad choices that I made in life. As she was saying, I was a manager with FedEx. I worked for them for ten years and I lost my job. My life started spiraling out of control. I got involved in gambling. My house was about

to be foreclosed on. I filed bankruptcy. I had five children and absolutely zero child support, me and my husband had divorced recently, and I was given an offer from hell, I can now say it was an offer from hell, to be involved in a drug conspiracy. My role was to be what is called the telephone mule; that means that I passed messages, telephone numbers from one party to the next party. They don't know me and I don't need to know them.

When everything came to an end and we were all arrested, the ones who literally brought me into this were the very ones who testified against me to receive lesser sentences. I made the decision, bad, bad decision to go to trial. I was offered a very low sentence. My attorney told me I was being offered three to five years. I chose to go to trial, a six-week trial. At the end I was found guilty of conspiracy.

Sheila: Was that a new word? When conspiracy was added into it because for you to be sent away for life for what you did is ridiculous.

Alice: Well, in conspiracy you're charged with every facet, everything anyone ever does in the conspiracy, you're charged with it. So because I went to trial, I was charged with everything. And conspiracy means my charges were attempted possession, never possession because it was mainly testimony and telephone records.

Randy: So just for clarity. You never actual sold any drugs. You never handled any drugs. When they came and raided your home there were no drugs. You literally weren't buying or selling or placing orders. You were passing information via telephone from one party to another, which understandably in the scheme of things is a crime.

Alice: It is a crime and it was wrong, but it did not deserve the sentence. The mandatory minimum sentencing guidelines...

Randy: There are drug dealers that have been in and out quicker than that.

Alice: The ones, the very ones who had long criminal records, they knew the system. I didn't

know the system. So they knew not to go to trial.

Sheila: What was that like when you received that sentence? What happened inside of you, Alice?

Alice: I couldn't believe it. Inside of me, I knew I had come to the very end. And how am I going to survive this? How am I going to live this? When I fell to my very lowest point, Sheila, I think that is a point that I needed to be at the lowest point where there was nothing left of myself. The only place I could look was up and that is exactly what God wanted me to do, is look up and depend totally upon him.

Sheila: One of the things I thought was beautiful is you end up in prison, which is crazy, and this sweet woman in a wheelchair gave you a piece of advice. What did she say to you, Alice?

Alice: She told me, "Bloom where you're planted. God knows where you are."

Sheila: That's huge!

Alice: God knows where you are. And as the scripture says in Romans 8:28 that all things work together for the good for those who love the Lord, for those who love God and are called according to his purpose. And it would be in prison that I would find my purpose.

Randy: So what was your relationship with Christ before, leading up and throughout your life?

Alice: Well, I grew up in a very strong Christian family. I know people might wonder, well, how in the world did you end up walking in this -- how did you end up on this path? When I was 14 years old, I turned my back on church. I literally, my heart was broken over something that I saw in church and I said that this is not -- in fact, I stood up in the middle of the church during revival and announced to the whole congregation, "There is more to God than this!"

Sheila: Woo! That was prophetic!

Alice: That's what I said, I was 14. I said, "I'll never raise my children in church." And I walked out. My mother -- now I came, I was born and raised in Mississippi. My mother was no-nonsense. So can you imagine that shock on my deacon father's face and my choir director mother's face? Mother in the church to hear their daughter, you look around and you wonder, they called me by my middle name, Marie. You could hear a pin drop. And then all the sudden, my mother is marching down through there as I leave the church and I'm headed outside to ask me, "What is wrong with you?" And so she brought me back into church.

I still went to church every Sunday because going to church was not an option. I still went to church every Sunday but in my heart I was no longer a part of it.

Sheila: Until you find yourself behind those locked doors. What happened to your faith in there? Because one of the things that is amazing about your book is the way that God used you in prison. It was like you blossomed in prison. It's like God sent you to prison to set you free.

Alice: That's absolutely right. I never understood, I always loved Jesus all of my life. I grew up just -- I can't remember a time that I didn't love him. I wrote my very first poem at the age of ten years old and my teachers realized I had a gift, I could write, and it was about God. It was called, "Who is He?"

Randy: It's in the book.

Sheila: It's beautiful actually.

Alice: It is called, "Who is He?" And when I went to prison that gift that was lying dormant was stirred up and I picked up my pen. It's like the Lord asked Moses, "What is that in your hand?" It was a rod. And it was that question, what is that in your hand? It's a pen. Use it. And I started writing plays.

Sheila: For the prisoners?

Alice: For the prisoners. I wrote faith-based plays. I wrote all kind of plays but mainly faith-based plays. My first full production play, "The Life and Passion of Jesus Christ." A hundred cast members including artists -- artists, singers, dancers, women who had been told that they could do nothing all of their lives, all of the sudden were being applauded. And can you imagine what that means to someone who has never in their life been applauded for doing something? So they started blooming. And it started having a domino effect all over the prison. I can't tell you just not focusing on myself and focusing on other people.

Randy: I'm thinking that because you could have been writing plays about how the system is bad and people are evil and there is no justice. But yet there is that phrase, "No justice no peace." You didn't have any justice but you had peace.

Alice: I had peace. The first Bible I picked up in county jail that I understood was a N.I.V. Bible, free on the inside. I fell in love with the Word of God. That was the thing that was missing from my life. I knew Jesus, I loved Jesus but I didn't know his word for myself. I only knew what preachers preached from behind the pulpit. So I fell in love with the Word of God.

And when you know that you have been forgiven much, how in the world could I not forgive others? I released everyone, my ex-husband, the people who testified against me, the people, the system that put me there that I knew was unfair, but could I live my life in bitterness? I couldn't. I could not. Because as I've said, it makes -- you have a rottenness of the very soul.

So not only did I embrace forgiveness from Jesus Christ, I gave -- I gave forgiveness. Whether they ever knew I forgave them or not, I really didn't care because that's what set me free and put a skip in my step. And that was something that I minister to other women, let it go. Let it go because you're not destroying anyone. They've gone on with their lives. Do it for yourself.

Sheila: You start the book by telling this dream that you have while you're in prison. You have this dream that some beautiful woman is going to call you and somehow you're going to be free. You lived to see the fulfillment of that dream.

Alice: I lived to see the fulfillment of that dream. All during my time in prison, I'm not kidding, Sheila, Randy, the Lord would give me different dreams. When I'd feel down he'd show me again. But every single dream, all the time, even strangers would come up to me and tell me, "Miss Alice, we dreamed that you were set free. There was cameras everywhere. Media!"

I kept having these media dreams. But in that dream, I shared it with another friend of mine, Josett, when I came home, she shared it back to me the same thing I had journaled about. She said she could never forget me telling her that.

But there was a beautiful woman who I did know who would tell me, who would fight for me to be free, and in fact would tell me that could go home, a woman I had never seen before. And I now know that that was Kim Kardashian. I never knew who Kim Kardashian was.

Randy: How did she know who you were?

Alice: I did a video op-ed and it went viral. Someone who Kim follows tweeted it, retweeted it.

Sheila: Did you even know what a tweet was back then?

Alice: I really didn't. I'm going to tell you something. When they told me that the video op-ed had gone viral, I got scared. I thought I had introduced a virus into the internet.

[Laughter]

Sheila: That's amazing! Because the other thing, Alice that was amazing was clemency was on the line but you had so many disappointments. Reading the book is heartbreaking how many doors kept...

Alice: I didn't just sit around just waiting for clemency. I was fighting. I had exhausted every remedy, appeal after appeal, even a cert to the Supreme Court. Even when laws changed because

they were not retroactive, they didn't apply to me. Laws for people who were just coming into the system would never have gotten a life sentence like I received -- but they were not retroactive. And because there was no parole in the federal system no one would ever hear about what was called "extraordinary rehabilitation" that I had gained while I was in prison.

I had completely clear conduct. I had letters from my warden, letters from my captain, and letters from the staff. Even the women in prison started writing letters to the pardoning attorney and to the president begging for my release because they wanted to see me free too.

Sheila: And that looked like that was going to happen. But on that final day, as President Barack Obama left office and walked up the steps onto that plane and turned around and said good-bye, you felt as if you'd been left behind. But God had another plan. He had a bigger plan.

Alice: I've said this over and over, I was denied, I was not delayed. I was destined for such a time as this.

Sheila: It gives me chill bumps.

Randy: So take us to that time.

Sheila: Kim Kardashian takes up your case, she goes to the White House; Ivanka gets involved.

Alice: Jerry gets involved. And she gets an audience with the president on my birthday, May the 30th. And for seven days, the number of completion, we were in limbo as to whether or not the president would grant my clemency. And on the day that it actually happened, I didn't really think it was real. People were telling me, "Watch the news." I'd gotten so many disappointments. I went in my room and I shut the door. I shut everything out. And it was a Wednesday. And on Wednesdays that's hamburger day.

Sheila: Well hey! You've got to love hamburgers.

Alice: We only had hamburgers every Wednesday. So I went to lunch.

Sheila: A woman after my own heart.

Alice: Yes. And as soon as I took a bite I heard my name being announced over the intercom to report back to my building. When I went back I thought it was an attorney call, my case manager told me I had an attorney call. But when I picked the phone up not only was it attorneys but it was Kim Kardashian on the other end.

Sheila: And what did she say to you?

Alice: She thought I knew. Yeah, she told me, she said, "We did it!"

I said, "What?"

I'm still... it's not registering to me that she's telling me that I'm free. When she told me that I could go home and the other attorneys told her, "She don't know."

She said, "No one's told her?"

She didn't know that I didn't know. And I'm telling you and I've said this, I broke you into a full Pentecostal holy dance in my room.

Randy: I guess so.

Sheila: And how long had you served at that point, Alice?

Alice: 21 years, 7 months and 6 days.

Sheila: I remember watching on the news the day you were released, and I remember only one car was allowed in and your family were waiting outside, and I remember... Tell us about that

moment because you gave glory to God.

Alice: Oh yes! When we pulled out my family was on the other side of the road. I saw all of those cameras and satellites. I couldn't believe it. But just at the minute my eyes were big as saucers passing by them. But when I saw my family, that all disappeared. I ran across the road with my hands up in the air. And as soon as they gave me that mike, I gave thanks and glory to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ because he is the one who is with me 24/7.

My family was with me, I was surrounded by friends but it was the Lord who did, who was with me, who I could call upon in the midnight hour. Who I could call upon when I was down and feeling hopeless. He would renew my hope.

Some other thing God would do to let me know that he was with me. When I got that last denial because I tried three times for clemency. On that day that I thought all hope was gone, as I was on my knees praying that morning, trying to figure out what more I could have done, I received a very strong distinct word from the Lord. I can't tell you I heard it audibly but I heard it because I jumped up with a smile on my face from prayer -- from tears to praise right there at my bunk bed on that concrete floor. The Lord said to me, "Jesus is the resurrection."

And so as everyone in the prison would ask me, including staff, "Are you okay, Miss Alice?"

My only response, I didn't even say I'm okay, I just said, "Jesus is the resurrection."

And he showed me that he is the resurrection. Even though it looked like a dead thing, that all of my hopes, everything was dead but in order for there to be a resurrection something has to die. And it seemed like every chance I had to be free was dead. And my sister said to me that the Lord is going to do this in such a way that everyone is going to know that it was him who did it. That it would not be man, it would be him.

Randy: There are many people who are watching right now. Yeah, right! They need that resurrection. I'm here to tell you, if you're that one that you're watching and you're saying, "You

know what? I feel like I'm in prison." Whatever that prison may be, literally, figuratively, spiritually, emotionally, psychologically, Jesus is that resurrection! If you didn't hear anything today, hear that. Jesus is your resurrection.

We want to send you this book right now, *After Life*, the story of Alice Marie Johnson. Because you heard a good portion of it today but you did not hear all of it. We want to send it to you as a gift when you make a gift right now to give life to someone else. Let me show you how to do that. You can be that hope in someone's life today. Watch this.

On the mission field:

Announcer: If you've ever missed a meal or two, you probably know the feeling of hunger pains and the relief that your next meal brings. But sadly, there are those who live with the pain of hunger every single day of their life.

And then there are children who do not survive once they beyond the pain of hunger. Veronica is reminded of her little brother dying from the lack of food every day that she has to go without food.

Interpreter: I remember when my brother died. We were hungry and he was so thin. My mom took him to a clinic that was very far away, and he died on the way there.

Announcer: Veronica's story is all too common in villages throughout Southern Africa and that's what makes this so urgent that we do something now.

Sheila: Some of these moms had to walk 10 or 15 kilometers with a seriously malnourished baby just to try and get some help. And if they can get here in time, then there is some hope. But time is everything here as you can see. But my prayer is that we can save hundreds of other children before they get to this stage. No child should ever get to this stage. No mom should ever have to watch this. So if we do something now, we can stop this from happening.

End of video

In the studio:

Randy: It breaks my heart, Sheila. It has to just break your heart when you're sitting there and seeing that.

Sheila: As a mom, just being there with these moms in this clinic was just absolutely devastating. It was the first time that I began to understand what malnutrition actually does to a child. I noticed that their hair was kind of red and I asked about that and they said well, that's one of the results of malnutrition. I noticed that their skin was starting to peel. I cannot tell you what an impact it's had on my life for the rest of my life. The thing is, this is something we can do something about. There is some crises in the world and there's really very little that you and a can do. This is not one of them. We can make a difference because I went from a malnutrition clinic to a village where we were able to provide food for the children night and day -- night and day difference!

Randy, this is something I feel that as godly men and women on this earth at this time, this should not be happening. As long as we're here, as long as the church of Jesus Christ is still here, that should not be happening.

Randy: I think that's what we're here for. I think this is part of the good works that Christ has preordained for us to do. To reach into places like that and be an expression of love, to be his hands and feet. It is so easy. Every single one of us can do something. \$30 feeds three children for three months; \$50 feeds five; \$100 feeds ten; \$1,000 -- some of you can feed 100 children for three months with a simple gift today. But whatever you can do it will have an impact. That's the beauty of it. We can all do something right now today that will save a life.

I'm asking you to join us in doing that right now. We do have a couple of things I want to mention. We would love to send you Anthony Evans CD. He's got a beautiful voice and what a way to just put you in that worship mood. These songs are songs that helped him through very, very difficult times and I know they'll bless you.

But the important thing is that we save that life for that child, those children. I can't tell you how much it means when we reach out in the name of Jesus Christ to save lives. So please do what you can. Go online, pick up the phone, however you prefer to give.

I also want to mention our guest, Alice Marie Johnson, what a blessing she has been and her book is really good. If you want that with any gift -- we want to bless you. But most of all, we want our viewers to be a part of the blessing that God has given to us, that ability to reach out and change a life.

Sheila: I just want to say to you as a mom, as a mom, if you were able to sit down with these children and make a difference, you would do it. So let's do it now.

Begin video clip

Announcer: Mission feeding began with a promise to be there in times of crisis for thousands of hurting and hungry children in their time of need.

Now more than ever we need your help to save lives by feeding and caring for children across the continent of Africa. With food reserves gone and many areas experiencing severe famine, we urgently need to replenish our supplies to reach the 400,000 children who are counting on us. Your gift of love can be the miracle answer to a desperate mother's prayer.

Call now with your lifesaving gift of \$30, \$50 or \$100 that will help feed and care for three, five or ten children for three full months. With your gift, we'll send you the authored worship CD by Anthony Evans. This powerful full-length album includes unique versions of some of today's most cherished worship songs that are sure to uplift and inspire you.

With your gift of \$100 or more please request the "Filled with Faith" and "...Joy" travel mug set. These 12-ounce mugs are crafted with large handles, double-layered insulation and vacuum

sealed lids to prevent spills. Each mug includes a message to remind you of God's blessings and faithfulness.

Finally, with your gift of \$1,000 or more to help feed and care for 100 children, be sure to request our commemorative bronze sculpture, "Safe in the Shepherd's Arms."

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

End of video

In the studio:

Sheila: Thank you so much! Please make your best gift possible. This is a phenomenal book, *After Life*: The story of Miss Alice Marie Johnson.

I just want to thank you, our dear sister. May God bless you and continue your ministry.
Phenomenal! Absolutely phenomenal!

Randy: Thank you so much for being here. And thank all of you for being with us on *LIFE Today*. We'll see you again next time.

Sheila: Remember Jesus is the resurrection!

Alice: Amen!