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Week 30: WFL

Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh

Clayton King

Randy: Welcome to *LIFE Today*! I'm Randy Robison. Sheila, how are you today?

Sheila: I'm great! Thanks. Good to be with you. And I'm excited about our guest.

Randy: I am too. Actually, this is someone that I talked to on my livecast online. If you follow *LIFE Today*, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, I talked to Clayton King who is our guest today and afterwards I was just excited because he really re-instilled how exciting it is when we encounter Christ and we are reborn, which is the title of his new book. I just love rekindling that faith and that first love.

Clayton, welcome to *LIFE Today*! How are you doing?

Clayton: I'm so good. It is good to be back with you guys. I think this is my third appearance with you. You both just keep getting younger.

[Laughter]

Sheila: We'll pay you later! The check is in the mail.

Randy: It is the Skype affect. It's the filters.

This book though, *Reborn*, it's good to get back to the roots of our faith. What was it

about this examination of what being reborn means that just made you say, I need to put into a book and get this message out?

Clayton: This has been a message that's been deep in my heart since I was a teenager. I started preaching when I was 14. So I met Christ. I was reborn as an eighth grader. My goal in life was to play football, get married, have a bunch of kids and Jesus sort of changed my plans. He has a way of doing that.

The night that I accepted Christ, I also felt called to ministry. So when I start preaching at small youth rallies and small churches and youth groups back in the 1900s, I would begin preaching and telling these stories about characters in the New Testament. I was always drawn to real people. I'm an extreme extrovert. I love people. So I would read these stories about people that met Jesus and I would see how Jesus would change them. So for three plus decades these stories became the sermons that I would preach over and over again as I would travel the world.

A couple of years ago I felt the Holy Spirit inspire me to let me know that my next book (this is my 17th book) needed to be a book about Jesus. Of course, thousands of books have been written about Jesus, but what I wanted to do was write a book that was unique. I wanted to write something that had never been done before. So I felt compelled to tell these stories of people that we've heard of from the Bible, Nicodemus, Zacchaeus, Lazarus, and Judas, and the woman at the well, and Mary, and the woman caught in adultery, and to show the background, to show what was really going on behind the scenes. To dig into the context and to show how Jesus treated them and how Jesus changed them. And then parallel that story with a real-life story of someone I have personally known who was very similar to that New Testament character. And show how Jesus not only changed the person we read about in the Bible, how Jesus changes people right here right now today.

So this is a really unique approach to the person of Jesus. We dig into what it really means to be reborn.

Sheila: That's what I think is fascinating about the way you have written because we tend to think of those... those are stories that happened 2,000 years ago. In fact, you start the book with Nicodemus, and you bring up a modern day Nicodemus. Tell us about that.

Clayton: So you know the story of Nicodemus has always fascinated me. It is only time in the New Testament where Jesus himself introduces this concept of being reborn. But there was a history to that in the Jewish faith. In the Jewish faith "being born again" was a concept they were familiar with. The thing about the Nicodemus's story is he was supposed to already be a good guy. He was a religious professional. He was a Pharisee. He knew the law. He knew the scripture. But he was drawn to Jesus because there was something special about Jesus that made Nicodemus want to lean in.

So when Nicodemus meets Jesus, he comes to him, John uses this phrase, "at night" when it was dark. And he's drawn by the warmth and the love and the curiosity of who Jesus is. And we know that Nicodemus does become a follower of Jesus because later on in John's gospel he helps prepare his body for burial. He defends him before that.

The story I tell in the book that's a parallel is about a young Malaysian man that I met in 2008 named Richie. Richie was a Hindu and Richie came to a conference that I was preaching at in Malaysia. We spent three hours together one afternoon debating Hindu faith and Christian faith. I was certain that I had convinced him to be a Christian. And he wasn't having it. He was not ready to be reborn. He told me he would never believe that Jesus was raised from the dead.

That night, in the dark, "at night" in a dream Jesus appeared to Richie. And he came the next day to the conference and he stood up on his feet and gave his life to Jesus. And we spent the next day together walking the streets of Kuala Lumpur and he told me how Jesus made him feel in the dream.

And here's the crazy part. I said, "Richie, what did Jesus tell you in the dream that made

you want to give your life to him and leave Hinduism and become a Christian?"

He said, "Jesus didn't say a word. He only smiled at me and I felt loved and safe. And that's when I knew -- you had already told me Clayton about Jesus and he came to me to verify that the gospel was true."

That's just the opening chapter.

Sheila: Woo!

Randy: Could be the closing chapter because that's good, brother. There is another story that I do want you to tell because this one is a little bit more personal though. You didn't -- you weren't there, this is a little older, but this is someone directly related to you. Tell us the whole Zacchaeus and Clayton King story.

Clayton: I grew up in Sunday school singing about Zacchaeus, he was a wee little man. You know?

Randy: Yep. "Wee little man was he."

Clayton: He climbed up in a sycamore tree and that's what the story is all about. It's about this thing with trees. So I tell the story of Zacchaeus. It's one of my favorites. Luke tells the story. Zacchaeus is a Jew, but he is also a tax collector, which means he works for the Romans but he steals money from the Jews. He is a Jew who steals money from the Jews and gives it to the Romans and the Romans protect him. He is rich but he is drawn to Jesus. And so he goes down to Jericho and he climbs up in a tree so he can get a view of Jesus because he is a really short man, that's what Luke tells us. There is a belief in that time that if you were really short you were cursed, that your parents had done something really terrible and God was punishing you by making you short. But we also know from Leviticus that the concept among the Jews was anyone who hangs from a tree is cursed. So there is symbolism; there is something going on here in the story of

Zacchaeus.

Well, if you're not familiar with the story, fast forward, Jesus notices Zacchaeus up in the tree. Jesus calls him down from the tree. So the first time Zacchaeus meets Jesus he is in a tree. Jesus is going to hang from a tree soon to save Zacchaeus from his sins. So Zacchaeus and Jesus go to his home, they have a meal. Zacchaeus puts his faith in Christ. He gives back all the money he's stolen. He gives back everything he's taken illegally, and he becomes a follower of Jesus Christ.

Well, the story I tell from my life, I'm adopted. I was born in 1972. And up until a year ago, I knew zero -- nothing about my biological family. And then about a year ago I met my biological family. My mom and dad have both passed away, but I found out that I'm not the first preacher in my biological family. In 1860 my great-great-grandfather, Hezekiah Fuhrman Martin was born, the year the Civil War started. When he was ten years old, around 1870, slaves had been emancipated, the war had been won, slavery was now illegal and there was an emancipated slave that lived on the property where my great-great-grandfather lived and his name was Plint Rogers. He could barely see. But he loved to pray these big bold prayers, really booming loud voice. He would pray early in the morning under an old oak tree.

So my great-great-grandfather apparently was a little punk. He decided he was going to play a joke on old Plint Rogers. So he goes out early one morning, ten-year old kid, climbs up to the top of this old tree. When Plint Rogers comes to pray and opens his mouth and says, "Dear God..." my great-great-grandfather, ten years old answered him and said, "Yes." He thought he was going to play a joke on old Plint. Well, Plint Rogers wasn't totally blind. At least he had spiritual eyes because he knew that my great-great-grandfather was up the tree. He began to pray for my great-great-grandfather to repent of his sins, to give his life to Jesus, and before my great-great-grandfather left that tree he fell under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, he gave his life to Jesus in the tree.

He went on to become a pastor, he graduated from Southern Seminary in 1891 and he

was on the board of trustees for the Virginia Children's Home for orphans. And when he would preach all over the Carolinas and Virginia, the stories that I've read say that people would flood the altar and give their lives to Jesus as he would tell the story about how he met Jesus up a tree in the same way Zacchaeus did.

Sheila: That's just brilliant that you got to hear that, that you know that story, that you know that's part of your history. But one of the characters in your book is a cautionary tale. You talk about Judas, and then someone that you met. Tell us about that Clayton.

Clayton: We don't think about Judas as being someone we can learn much from. When we think about Judas, we think about wasted opportunity. That's actually the title of the chapter because he had access to Jesus, he had access to greatness. He was face to face with the son of God and he missed it. So sadly, the life of Judas is a tale that none of us want to follow. He ends up depressed. He ends up with regret and shame. We know how his life ends. He takes his own life. He commits suicide.

In the story I tell in the book that parallels the story of Judas is about a very famous athlete who died 13 years ago. His name was Chris Benoit. He was a professional wrestler in the WWF. He is considered to be pound for pound the best wrestler that's ever worked in that industry, which is an entertainment industry but so many of those men get addicted. They did in previous years, it is better now, but because of injuries they would be addicted to pain killers and drugs and steroids and alcohol.

I met Chris Benoit in the airport in Atlanta Georgia just several months before his life ended tragically. At the end of Chris Benoit's life, whether it was road rage or prescription pill addiction or perhaps even C.T.E., they think he may have had C.T.E. from his injuries, I was with him for five minutes in the airport riding an escalator and we talked for five minutes. He was kind, he was gentle, he was friendly, and I felt the Holy Spirit prompt me to share with him how he could be reborn by the blood of Christ. And I chickened out. I didn't do it. I talked myself out of sharing the gospel with Chris Benoit.

And then not long after that conversation he sadly took his own life after he murdered his wife and his son in their home outside of Atlanta, Georgia in Peachtree City. And that story for me is a cautionary tale. It is a reminder that as a Christian I've been reborn and now I'm supposed to, every time I get an opportunity with joy and peace and love and passion, I want to tell people how they can be reborn too.

And I asked the question in the book, would it have changed my approach to this professional athlete, this world famous, world champion if I had known he would be dead less than a year after we talked? You bet it would have changed my approach. I would have shared the gospel with him.

Randy: I'm curious. As we go through these different stories, the cautionary tale, the one where you learn about your biological heritage, all of them, what does it do for you when you reexamine just the amazing act of spiritual birth?

Clayton: When I was writing this book it took me three years to finish it. It's my 17th book and it's never taken me that long. I some things in my life that were happening that delayed the process and I think that was God's grace. Because over and over, to answer your question, I would be sitting at this desk right here, where I sit and write. I've written almost a million words in print, I've written them all early in the morning before most people are awake. I can't tell you, maybe a dozen times right here at this very spot, I would feel the presence of Jesus in this office with me when I was writing the stories, when I was digging into the scriptures and the theology of salvation. And sometimes I would just weep. The hair on my arms would stand up. I would feel overcome with emotion. I would remember what it was like for me as a teenager, when I met Jesus and how Jesus changed me. I was going back through these stories and I was remembering what it was like when Richie got saved in Malaysia.

And I was remembering what it was like when I bumped into Shannon Forest in line at a sporting goods store. I thought his dad had died. This is another story. I thought his dad had died eight years earlier. We had literally just prayed for his dad in the waiting room

of a hospital. They were about to unplug him from life support because his father's organs had all shut down and he was brain dead. And Shannon and I, at midnight, prayed for his dad in the waiting room before Shannon goes back to the room to tell the doctors to unplug him from life support so he can die naturally.

He goes back to the room, his dad wakes up, comes back. Eight years later, I thought his dad was dead. I never saw him again until I bump into him in a store buying a pair of cleats for my son to play baseball in! And the guy taps me on the shoulder and says, "Clayton, it's me, Shannon Forest. Remember me?"

I was like, "Yeah, man, I haven't seen you in so long. I'm really sorry about your dad. My dad died in 2012, I know your dad died in 2008."

He said, "Clayton, my dad didn't die! My dad's alive."

So today, before I came on the interview with you guys, I was watching the video that my church did where I got to meet Shannon's dad for the first time. And I tell that story in the book because I've seen Jesus miraculously heal people. I've seen Jesus raise a baby from the dead in the Himalayas. I've seen Jesus do things that only Jesus can do. And I can't -- like I can't even control myself. I actually want to preach right now I'm so excited.

This is what it does to me. When I start talking about Jesus and start remembering these stories, my emotions just -- it's almost like I'm 14 years old and I feel that same feeling again because being reborn is what happens the moment you meet Jesus but it is also the process of walking with Jesus for your entire life.

Sheila: Let me ask you about that, Clayton. Let me ask you about it. I'm thinking of somebody who might say, I wish I had that enthusiasm you have. I wish I had that passion. I've been a believer for a long, long time and honestly, I wish I could have a do-over. Is it ever too late to have a do-over?

Clayton: No, it's not! That's what the book is about. It's never too late to be reborn. If you have breath in your lungs there's time. If you're not dead, God's not done with you. So if you're still alive, if you're still breathing, there is hope for you. If you've never met Jesus, you can meet him right now. All you have to do is call on his name and ask him to save you. And if you know Jesus, and maybe you've drifted away or maybe you're not in church, or maybe you've had some pain, you've been abused, you've been neglected, you've gone through something painful like a divorce or the loss of a loved one, or a loss of a job or a loss of a career or a protracted health issue, hey! Jesus is always one step away. And the step that we take towards Jesus is simply prayer. Hey Jesus! I need you. I feel distant from you. I believe you're there. Can you help me? It is the simplest prayer we can pray. But it is the most powerful prayer to just say Jesus, I need you. Will you please help me? And the good thing about Jesus, he always comes where he is invited, every single time. Every time!

Randy: Well, you make it sound so simple, and yet I think that's the beauty of it. But yet there is a profound thing that happens when we just take that step of faith.

So Clayton, I appreciate you bringing this message. Thirty-four years you said you've been preaching, and I think that bears out what that true spiritual birth does when we hold on to that first love; it produces a lifetime of fruit. Thank you! Thank you for the encouragement and for just your enthusiasm for Christ. It's beautiful.

I want to take our viewers to something else. There is a situation where there is not a lot of rebirth necessarily, there is a lot of death. And it is really critical that we come together in a time where we've been focused so much on saving lives, rightly so! We need to not forget those who face this on an ongoing basis. So I want to show you something that you can do, that we can all do together that will save a life. Watch this. Will you?

On the mission field:

Announcer: We can all relate to washing dishes, but would you eat off dishes that were washed in this water? For Kunmou, who lives in Cambodia, this water shared with livestock is all she has to clean with. Even worse, it's all she has to drink.

We asked Kunmou to tell us about her water which caused visible anguish. But once she was able to speak this was her response.

Open Captions:

>> When I gather water, I know that it's not clean. But I have to bring it home for my children to drink. It's our only choice for them to live.

Announcer: Tragically, Kunmou's story is far from unique. Throughout the developing world, contaminated drinking water is a serious problem that kills millions. When we visited Kunmou she had already lost a three-year old son to waterborne illness.

In the past few years we've seen trending progress for clean water initiatives. But recent global events now threaten the compassion of support which has made these efforts possible. Because clean water saves lives and without clean water children die.

End of video**In the studio:**

Sheila: I wish I could take you with me. I wish I could take you to Cambodia, or to walk those dusty streets in Africa and meet some of these moms and their children. They're just lovely people. They're just like your sister, your mother, your aunt and they want exactly the same for their children as we do for ours.

It was heartbreaking to see the pain in that mother's life. Even to try and speak about it now is devastating for her. And the hard thing is she's still carrying a child. She has one more child that she knows potentially she could lose by giving the only water that's

available.

That's why I believe! You and I are the body of Christ. We are that link between God in heaven and those who are desperate. We get to be the answer to their prayers. And what we want to do... we made a commitment this year to drill 350 water wells. And honestly, you help us go beyond that goal, we will drill more. But the need is real, and the need is now, Randy.

Randy: It is. You know, Sheila, I know you've seen this but when we go to these villages, wherever they're at around the world, we see them trying to sometimes clean the water. I've seen them put them in big barrels and just let it sit. Some of them will try to boil it but most of them don't have anything to boil it in or try to come up and build their own filtering system. They do whatever they can because they care about their children.

I'm asking you to do whatever you can because you care about these children. We have done this for years. We have people in place. The water is underground. God has already put it there. We just need to go in and drill that well. We do this over and over because it changes people's lives. It gives people Water for LIFE for a lifetime! 70 years on average.

Here's what you can do. If you'll go to the phone or go online right now you can join us at whatever level God has enabled you to join us. That's what we ask. Just to do what you can. Some of you could drill an entire well for \$4800, I would ask you to do it. Maybe you can drill two. Do that. Most of us, if you're like me, that's a bit much but you know what? \$48 will provide water for ten people for a lifetime. \$144 will provide water for 30 people for a lifetime. See, there is something we can do. That's all I ask.

Just pause for a moment, ask the Lord, what would you have me do? And then when he puts it on your heart, do what you can. Know that when you do, you are saving a life. So join us in Water for LIFE. Do it today.

Begin video clip

Announcer: Dirty, diseased filled water! How desperate would a mother need to be to consider giving this contaminated substance to her child? For many mothers and their families living in extreme poverties, this is their only choice.

With your help, they won't have to make this choice ever again. Mission Water for Life provides clean disease-free water for thousands of children and their families, giving them a life free from the fear of death.

With your gift today, you can help drill and establish the final 150 water wells this year. Your gift of \$48 will help provide water for ten people. \$72 will provide for 15. \$144 will help provide life-giving water for 30 people for a lifetime. And a gift of \$4,800 will help sponsor a complete well, serving up to 1,000 people.

With your gift we'll send you Today is a Good Day, seasonal devotional sets, broken out into the four seasons of the year. This beautiful set features a daily scripture, inspirational thoughts, and a place for you to journal your own thoughts, prayers and insights from God's word.

With your gift of \$100 or more, request the leather-bound life-giving Proverbs Journal, filled with wisdom and daily encouragement from Proverbs, including lined pages for your personal notes.

Finally, please consider a gift of \$1,200 to help provide water for 250 people or a gift of \$4,800 to help sponsor a complete well. And you may request "A Mother's Strength" bronze sculpture.

Please call, write, or make your gift online!

End of video

[On the Mission Field]

Randy: Many of these precious children behind me have lost siblings, playmates to waterborne illnesses. We can stop that cycle of death. It's as simple as giving them a cup of clean drinking water. Do you know each water well will serve about an average of 1,000 people? Look at all of these kids behind me. We can reach into areas – this area and so many more just like it and save thousands of lives just by giving them clean drinking water. I pray you'll do what you can right now. Go to the phone. Go online. Make the best gift you can. And when you do, know that you'll be saving precious lives all around the world with water for life!

In the studio

Randy: Please do go to the phone or go online. Give the best gift you can. When you join us in water for *LIFE*, you really are saving lives. So I just pray you'll do it -- do it today.

Sheila, what an encouraging time to just bring us back to our first love.

Sheila: Yeah! And the book is called *Reborn*: "How encountering Jesus changes everything." So Clayton, we just want to thank you so much for a very unique, a very special book that I think will make huge changes in anybody's life who reads it. Thank you.

Clayton: Thank you guys for having me. I love your ministry! I love being a part of it.

Randy: Well, it's an honor that you could be with us today. An honor that you could be with us every day on *LIFE Today*. Join us again next time!