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Week 34: Christmas Shoes and Smiles

Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh

Craig T. Nelson

Randy: Welcome to *LIFE Today*! I'm Randy Robison. Sheila Walsh is with me as always. Good to have you.

Sheila: Thank you.

Randy: Today we have a real treat for you. If you've watched, I don't know a movie in the last 20, 30 years, maybe television once or twice, you will know today's guest because Craig T. Nelson is someone that we have seen in so many films. And of course, eight seasons of *Coach*, just a wonderful comedy.

Sheila, I'm just excited for several reasons. One because Craig has just such a wonderful heart we've seen and a story. I'm just thrilled to share it.

Sheila: I know! And I'm such a huge fan of *Young Sheldon*. So please welcome to *LIFE Today* Craig T. Nelson. It's so great to have you with us.

Craig: Thank you very much, Sheila and Randy. It's good to be here! Yeah!

Sheila: I was really moved. I watched an interview that you did at Gateway Church with Pastor Robert Morris. Parts of it made me laugh, parts of it made me cry. But I wondered, would you take us back and tell us a little bit about your own story, about your early childhood? Did you have -- was faith part of your journey at that point?

Craig: Yeah, it was when I was a kid. I was very -- I felt very close to God. In fact, my

earliest memory is that God... I had Saint John's Episcopal Church up in Spokane and it was a beautiful old stone gothic church. God lived in the ceiling of the church, in the rafters. I just felt really close and had a very close connection. And then at some point, something happened to that innocence and it dissolved, left, and I chose a much more worldly way of living. But I always felt like I had retained, God was a still small voice inside of me. But I did a lot of running for a lot of years. Tried to get away. For me, my journey was one of coming back to God again up in the mountains of Northern California. I'd gone up there to build a log cabin and I found God again and was baptized.

But I rescinded that when I came back to Los Angeles to make some money. I lost it. I went down. I like to say that my experience was that it was one that led to pitiful, incomprehensible demoralization. As a result, having been loved all through that by Jesus Christ, I was rescued and brought to an awareness and an epiphany and a clarity of mind that got me over that kind of addiction, and the problem I was having in life.

Through a journey I was able to re-find this healer, this power greater than myself, this wondrous, and occasionally surprising Jesus. So that's been my journey for the last 36 years, is rediscovering. I must say, for those people that perhaps are struggling with that or whatever, let me tell you, the Christian walk I found is a really difficult one. I find that to be for me really important because it requires discipline and I'm really undisciplined. So I've been able to build into my life patterns and time with God that allows me to find out that it is okay -- I'm okay. And all I have to do is trust him and he will take care of me. And surrender -- for me that's the hardest thing in the world. I just keep reclaiming right after right after right. It doesn't do me any good. So anyway, that's, in a nutshell, I guess that's pretty much what it is.

Randy: I heard you talk about your life. You described it as hell, saying you were in hell. And then not long after that you described being in heaven and we get that because everything we do either brings hell up or brings heaven down. What's the contrast there and what happened to take you from hell to heaven?

Craig: It was a miracle. Basically, I was pursued by the feeling that... first of all, I had dedicated myself to the fact that I was going to die behind what I was doing. We call it, "suicide in the installment plan." I just felt inside of me this still small voice that said, "This is not who you are. This is not who I want you to be. This is not what I've got planned for you."

You'll have to excuse me because I get choked up because to this day it is so meaningful. It was like, when he says, "It's a good thing that I go because I'll send a helper. And the helper will lead you into all truth." And it was like being lifted up from a place that I didn't belong but I found myself in it through choice. And then that choice became an addiction and I couldn't conquer it. I didn't have the capacity to stop.

But he took me and said, "Give me some time, give me some time and I'll speak to your heart." So he led me into a series of events, a group that I was able to understand and see transformation happen in other people; to go from being lost, forsaken, feeling unforgiven. They weren't capable of forgiving themselves. I was witnessing literally healing. But what I heard for me was a truth, "Give me a moment here to help you along and I can give you rest and peace."

Sheila: That's beautiful! I was wondering, you told a story, we have a mutual friend in Pastor Jack Hayford. But I love the story you told of you're going to have lunch with Pastor Jack in this nice restaurant and before you get a chance to order your garlic bread he does something... Would you tell us that story? I just love that.

Craig: We were just talking about it the other day. I've never been around anybody like Pastor Jack that was so spiritual. Every time I met him, every time I talked with him I was filled with the Holy Spirit. He's an extraordinary human being. He is a pastor's pastor as far as I'm concerned. I just love him so much. He's been so good to me.

We had gone to lunch. We had made this commitment. Pastor Jack said, "I'd like to meet with you every month." It was like, because I'm not sure where you're going to be next

month. [Laughing] We really need to meet because I need to keep you stable. You know what I'm saying? He didn't say that but I... Anyway, so we'd meet. And we went to lunch and it was Italian restaurant. We sat down and we hadn't ordered yet and the waitress comes over. I'm looking at the appetizers and I'm going to have a great meal. And sure enough before I'd ordered anything, my garlic bread, which I was really looking forward to, he looks up at the waitress and says, "Can I ask you a question?"

And she said, "Sure!" Thinking he's going to ask something about the menu.

He says, "Do you know Jesus?"

And I thought, oh no! There are people in here. This is going to be like really... Oh gee, really?

And she says, "Well, no, I'm Jewish."

He says, "That's wonderful!" He said, again, he said, "Do you know Jesus?"

And she said, "No, but I've been thinking about reading something about..."

I'm going... About that time, there was a peace that descended on that table and a glow. It was literally just... It was the presence of God. And he talked to her for a while and he got her address and said, "I'll send you a book."

I thought, my gosh! So throughout the whole meal I was stunned.

About five years ago, I'm at an event and I get tapped on the shoulder and I turn around and this girl says, "Do you remember me?"

And I said, "No. I don't."

She says, "Well, I was your waitress at that lunch." And he had sent her the book and she said, "Would you tell him thank you?"

And I said... I was stunned. I was stunned. It was like a re-visitation. And I always used that for me because... meaning you never know. Pastor Jack has this clarity and this sense of spirit that he knows when to do that. I'm hesitant but you know what? I got courage from that. And I'll find out if I'm hearing that prompting saying, talk to that person. Ask them if they know Jesus. See where they're at. And I've been able to do that -- for the most part.

But yeah, that was -- he's extraordinary.

Sheila: He is.

Randy: I'm curious. You've got... you go on I.M.B.D. And look at your resume and your list, your accomplishments from a professional standpoint are just unparalleled. You're one of the best. But when you look back at your life and your future as well, what do you want to be known for?

Craig: Well, as a child of God, number one. I think as a father, I've been able to reinstitute my life, reconstitute, reenergize and revisit my life as a father. It's like... I wish, Randy, honestly, it's God's timing. If I can be of service and be of service to God I think that's all I can be. I have to stay true to that. I have to stay true to that -- living a truthful life. And the truth comes to me through the Word of God and that is the Bible.

So I'm pursuing a kind of program for me that gets me involved and gets me into the Bible and gets me uncovering, discovering God's letter to us. I'm finding just so much truth, especially now! Especially... I feel two ways about what's going on and one, I'm very, very encouraged because it's gotten people... it's given people time to think. It's all about a change of heart and that only comes from one place. God changes hearts and changes minds. I think that's beautiful. I think that's wonderful.

Then on the other side of it, I see this whole thing about being spiritual warfare, and that we're in a battle here. The only thing I can do, Randy and Sheila, I believe that I've learned is if I take care of myself and I'm a child of God and I stay there, then I'm okay -- and I'll be okay.

Sheila: That's beautiful! For the first three or four weeks of the lockdown, like I'm an introvert, I like quiet and peace and my husband is an extrovert and he likes to talk a lot and be around a lot of people. At first I thought, I'm not sure, I don't know whether it is technically legal to kind of smack your husband during COVID-19 because they're just talking too much but I wondered how has it been for you as a family? Because obviously we're living in a new normal, what's that been like for you and your wife?

Craig: It's been great for Doria and I. Our morning consists of okay, we get up. We check out Robert Morris's sermons online. We watch that. Make notes. Like today's note for me was "reckless abandon" which signifies to me, go for it. Let yourself go in Christ. We have discussions. We have a Sunday morning meeting at church, the zoom stuff and then we have a connect hour. And then I have a group of guys here at the house every Thursday; it's a men's group. It started out as three guys now it's like 15. But anyways, it's all around recovery. Most of the guys are Christian. A couple guys have been saved -- a couple of guys have come to Christ here. I've got to tell you, Sheila, it's been like enormous. It's so cool. It's so wonderful!

Overall I think it's been wonderful. It's given me the time to find out more about who he is and who I am and how do I fit in? But that's where I've been spending my time, and the two of us.

Randy: I'm curious, I've talked to people who struggled with addictions or ran from God and then they come back. Sometimes the hardest person to forgive can be yourself. And then understanding the concept of what redemption really means to where God can work everything he wants to work even if we feel like we've wasted time sometimes. What

have you seen in your own experience where sometimes the past can be hard to leave behind? But yet that's what you have to do to really find the full story of God in your life.

Craig: Right. The real phenomenal change is when we make amends to those people that we've harmed. Through the program I was involved in, that's one of the steps that you do. I was led by a guy who was spiritual and ended his program and then through it. And in the amends step, and it isn't necessarily true that they forgive you. But you are making amends, you're confessing, you're repenting. But the thing about... Randy, the thing about it is it is so beautiful. As broken and as discouraged and as phenomenally disquieted as I was, because of those things and because of my personality, my dependence on his forgiveness, my dependency on his miracle in my life, a day at a time keeps me glued and keeps me in there because I know my fragility. So that dependence that I have, my personality, my emotions, all of the stuff and all of the... I heard... I'll just say this real quickly. All of the things I took in Randy, that I shouldn't have seen, the things I shouldn't have done, the things that I was involved in that I shouldn't have been a part of, all opened me up to a whole range of things I should not have endured but I did. And God has removed those things. He's removed the penalty that I think I should pay.

Sheila: That is so powerful! It is amazing what God will do with a broken life when you give him all the pieces.

We're going to ask our audience now to take a look at something. We have a real heart to reach out and be the hands and feet of Jesus to some people who need some help. So I'm going to ask our viewers to watch this right now and then we'll be back to say good-bye.

On the mission field:

James: I love you!

Announcer: For a child living in poverty in a developing country their smile may be the most valuable thing they own. But imagine if that child was born without a big beautiful smile.

People told me not to dream
To live in their reality
But I am walking through those doors
Because I am sure
There's something more
Than what I've been told
Oh, I know I found my way
Oh, tomorrow is a brand-new day
And the whole world is going know my name

Announcer: More than a decade ago, *LIFE Outreach* started an annual mission campaign called, "Christmas Shoes and Smiles." In addition to providing over two million children with a new pair of shoes, *LIFE* and its mission partners have also changed the lives of over 2,000 children born with a cleft lip or cleft palate by providing the surgery needed to give them their very own brand-new smile.

Tony: A big thank you to the *LIFE Outreach* family. It's a privilege to serve with you as we share the gospel of Christ and as we provide life-changing surgeries in our part of the world. Our partnership has resulted in children's lives being transformed; from disfigured faces to faces beaming with smiles all because of your generosity in providing these surgeries.

Our world is going to know my name.

End of video

In the studio:

Sheila: A smile, it's something you just take for granted. I remember watching my son when he was born waiting for that first smile that was actually a smile. But for so many of these children around the world, when they're born with cleft lip, cleft palate, there is so much superstition in many of the villages and many of the countries. And sometimes, a child born like that is looked on as cursed. That they will never have doors thrown open to them that they can walk through.

I can remember my very first trip when I got to see the results when these surgeries are performed and we worked with some amazing medical teams on the ground. Can you imagine the gift that you give to a mother when you say, not only do you see her, but you see her child and you see a need and you're stepping up? And the difference it makes is night and day. You've literally given that child a whole new life.

It's something Randy, that when we do it together its miracles can happen all around the world.

Randy: Oh yeah. And you know I like that piece because a picture they say is worth a thousand words. And as we looked at those pictures, the before and the after, you see both the desperate need for the shoes, and for the surgeries, as well as the joy of providing it. You know that sort of exponential power is what we do when we partner together with all the people that support us every year for this Christmas outreach.

So I just want to let you know that we want to provide 150,000 pairs of shoes. That means 150,000 children will have a Christmas gift this year of shoes that they will -- they love them! You see them running around. You see the smiles on their faces when they get the shoes. But it also has an actual health value. It's preventative, and actually can be the difference between definitely sickness but between life and death. So it's both fun and useful.

So I want you to help us provide the smiles with the shoes. And I also think there are

some of you out there that can help provide that smile that's only possible through the corrective surgery; those run about \$500 on average. But I think some of you can do that. And if you can, I just ask that you would just pause and say, "Lord, what would you have me do?" And then do it!

But with the shoes, \$36 provides ten pairs of shoes. So this is not a large thing. Whatever you can do, you can provide 50 pairs of shoes for \$180. My hope, Sheila is that people will just say, "You know what? I'm going to do something this year to put a smile on a child's face through the shoes, through the surgeries."

We're going to come together. We're going to meet our goal. We're maybe going to exceed our goal. We can only do it with your help. This Christmas will only be as big as it can be when you partner with us. So go to phones, go online, do what you can and just be a part of the joy of Christmas this year with the shoes and the smiles. Thank you so much.

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 will help secure and make ready 150,000 Christmas shoes to be shipped and delivered to 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 help provide 20 pairs. 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 blue 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 all *LIFE*'s Christmas shoe ornaments.

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

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

End of video

In the studio:

Randy: I do hope you'll give the best gift you can. We really can make this Christmas special for so many. You know, Sheila, today's program was special for me.

Sheila: Oh I just absolutely loved it. You are just the most beautiful brother in Christ. I just want to thank you, Craig, so much for joining Randy and I today. It was amazing!

Craig: Well, thank you. Thank you. It was really great to be here. It's great to be able to talk about the experience of God in your life.

Sheila: Amen! Well, we'll see you next time, folks. Thanks for joining Randy and I on *LIFE Today*. We'll see you next time!