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Week 47: Fall Mission Feeding

Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh

Herman and Alexandra Mendoza

Sheila: Hi! I'm Sheila Walsh. Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm here with Randy Robison, my wonderful co-host. Do you ever wonder if God is able to redeem like the worst story? Can you ever be in a place where you're too far gone from the mercy of God? Well, my guests, our guest today will say absolutely not. It is a phenomenal story. So please, will you help Randy and I welcome Herman and Alexandra Mendoza. Welcome!

Herman: Thank you for having us.

Randy: So good to have you. Now I talked to Herman on the live stream several months ago so I got to preview sort of his story. But for those who haven't heard, we're talking straight out of a Hollywood movie drug lord crime story, some of the things you went through. Give us a little bit of the background just so we can establish how far you've come. It's amazing.

Herman: God has done some miraculous things in my life. I was involved in the distribution of cocaine, hundreds of kilos of cocaine, distributing from Columbia to the United States with a cartel. I was involved with my brothers and we had this big operation making millions of dollars passing through my hands. And I thought I was on top of the world. I had everything coming to me in terms of this lifestyle that I was living, possessions. Until one day my world came tumbling down and I was arrested.

This is a time where, the mayor of New York City was Giuliani and there was a major crackdown on drug distribution and possession when I got arrested with 31 kilos of

cocaine in the back of my trunk of my vehicle. The very next day, I picked up a newspaper and it was blasted on the newspaper, \$3.8 million of cocaine seized; and these two brothers were confronting 25 years of incarceration, in prison.

At that point, my wife and I had one child. Obviously, I was shaken, from what was taking place but still was trying to kind of figure out a plan and a way to get out of jail. I was remanded with no bail. I copped a plea, three to nine years of incarceration. We had some attorneys in place that was always there to help us if there were any illegal activities that we were doing; we would have these attorneys in place. So eventually, they got me a plea deal of three to nine years of incarceration, my brother four to twelve.

So I was sent over to Rikers Island, the notorious jail in Queens, New York. And um, my parents, they came from the Dominican Republic, they came to America looking for the American dream. I'm the youngest of five brothers. So two of us, at that particular time were involved in narcotics. So she was distraught, and she was really worried and concerned about our wellbeing.

And after that, I remember when I signed this plea deal there was an opportunity available for me to enter into a program called "Shock." It's a military camp style program where my time will be reduced substantially. So I accepted and I entered into this shock program not knowing what was going to happen. And ex-marines in my face, "Get in parade rest" and screaming at you and so forth.

And I remember going into a chapel and I wanted to negotiate with God. I didn't have a relationship with Christ. I'd never accepted Christ. I wasn't obviously following Jesus, but I went there to negotiate with God. I said, "If you are for real, help me out with my situation." So I was trying to negotiate. "You do what's right for me, getting out of this program and out of jail, I promise you, God, I will not consume alcohol for six months."

[Laughter]

Sheila: Wow!

Randy: I want to hear what happened in your negotiation and where it got you. But, Alexandra, I want to ask you since you were with Herman during this time, a couple of questions, one, were you aware that he was dealing drugs? And two, what kind of man was he during this time?

Alexandra: During that time, Herman and I got together at a very early age, we were together in high school. So we were just like two teenagers in love. And of course, us girls, we dream about one day getting married and having this beautiful family and all of this. When we finally did get together and decided to move out, my world was just so different from what I thought it was going to be. I was well aware of what he was doing. And for his first arrest, I was very supportive because I felt like I can change him. And think it is one of the problems that we have as moms and wives, we always think we can change our husband or our kids. So I had this hope that this can work. He can probably come out and be like this changed man and things are going to be different.

But at that moment we still didn't have Christ in our lives, and that was the main thing that was missing. So when he went in the first time, I was very supportive; but by the second time he went in, I rebelled against God, against him, against everything.

Sheila: It was fascinating reading your book, *Shifting Shadows*. It didn't seem like the shock program had the required impact on your life because it wasn't long after that when you got back into trouble again. Why do you think that was?

Herman: I thought since I'd--I thought I got away with it, in a way, three to nine years of incarceration which I was confronting 25 years of jail time. So when I was released eventually, and it was just stupidity on my part--making this prayer to God for six months without drinking alcohol. So when I was released again, I just felt that I'm invincible in a sense; that I can get away with my sins and crime.

So I waited that six months and went to celebrate. I'd been sober for six months. Sobriety--yeah, now I can go celebrate with my friends. I went to this restaurant to have a drink and I run into an old acquaintance. And now this individual was controlling over a ton of cocaine, distributing it from Columbia to the United States. And he approached me, salutations, greetings in Spanish. I already knew what he was up to. He said, "Look. I'm controlling this amount of drugs. If you're interested, you can get involved once again."

At that point I was dealing with my conscience, my heart was screaming like don't do it! But then I thought about the money and the easy opportunity in which I was introduced many, many years ago when I got involved with this drug enterprise, which is when I first witnessed \$1.2 million in cash. So I thought about that once again. I said, "You know what? I'm smarter. I have my people in place. This time I'm not going to get arrested." And I went right back into it.

It reminds me of the scriptures in Proverbs 26:11, how a dog returns to his vomit, so fools repeat their folly. That's what happened. I accepted and I started to engage once again distributing cocaine all throughout the United States of America with now my second oldest brother.

We got rearrested. One of his contacts was working with the D.E.A. Drug Enforcement Agency and he gave information into the police and was arrested, now facing 25 years again, they confiscated nine kilos of cocaine and I'm back in the federal prison.

Sheila: So one of the things I found fascinating, and then I want to come back to you, Alexandra because I just think you're amazing.

[Laughter]

But one of the things on that second arrest when you realized how serious it is, you talk in the book about you'd rather not even live--you didn't even want to live. But something

unusual happened when you encountered your brother who was already incarcerated.

Herman: Exactly. At that point I was at a breaking point. I was drinking alcohol the whole night, intoxicated, and got rearrested because I jumped bail, so I was a fugitive. And when they arrested me, they were transporting me over to the Metropolitan detention center where the chappo, the notorious drug lord was housed. And as they were taking me to this facility, I told the marshals, "I want to end my life right here. Open the back door of this vehicle because I'm never going to come out of jail."

At that time we had three small children. I was thinking about them for the very first time because--I was just thinking about myself. My brother that got caught with me in the federal case, he surrendered his life to Jesus, and he was praying for me. I had no knowledge of his newfound Christianity. And so when they transported me there, he prayed to God. He said, "God, send my brother to the same facility so I can share this great gospel with him and lead him to Christ. Because if not, they're going to kill him out in society."

Lo and behold, God sends me to the same dormitory, same cell block and he extends his hands up in the air and he sees me and says, "Praise the Lord! Hallelujah!" And I look at him like...

[Laughter]

Sheila: Not the greeting you expected.

Herman: I'm like: we're in jail man! What are you talking about? I wasn't understanding this newfound conversion and Christianity. And so his countenance was different. He had this peace that I'd never witnessed before.

Little by little he started to share the gospel. But at that point, my wife had separated from me, my case took a turn for the worst. Until the day came where I was so depressed

and so down that he invited me to chapel, and it was run by inmates. So the preacher, the pastor of this particular unit in the day room was an inmate preaching. So as I was making my way to the Chapel, I remember having a conversation with God and I said, "All I want, God is for you to fill this void. And I'm so depressed. I need peace."

As I enter the chapel, I sat in the back skeptical of what was going on trying to evaluate what they were doing in this religious service. And the preacher said, "There is an individual here that's been chasing after things, possessions and all of those things have led him down a path of destruction and only Jesus can fill that void."

I knew it was for me. God was tugging in my heart. At the end he calls me to the front. He says, "You know who you are. Come to the front of the church."

And I just extended my hands and said, "Lord, forgive me! I'm a sinner."

And I felt that warmth envelope me. I felt convicted for the very first time. Never felt that before because I always wanted to get over with justice and always wanted to get a way out thinking about myself, not thinking about my family. But God would have it no other way. He saved me that day. I wanted to make amends for my wife and my kids, with the people that I harmed.

Sheila: But let me ask you, Alexandra, because as God's working in your husband's life, you've come to a place where you're just done. I'm sure for your own sake and for your children's sake. What happened to turn that around for you?

Alexandra: I had come to a place where I didn't want to put my kids through going to the prison again and having to see them crying and all that stuff. So his mom and my sister-in-law were constantly trying to reach out to me saying, "Herman has something really important he needs to tell you."

And of course, I was very angry, and I said, "Yeah. I have a lot of important things I need

to tell him." Because I was already looking into getting a divorce and I had spoken to a lawyer and was getting ready for that.

So one day I decided, okay, I'm going to go out there and just tell him the way I feel so that he stops bothering me. Because we need to--I need to put this to rest, the past. So I went there with those intentions to tell him. When I got to the visiting area he said to me, "Before you say anything," he said, "I just want to tell you that regardless, if you don't come back to me, I just want you to know the Lord and to have Jesus in your life."

And we began to speak to each other. And he began to talk to me. He seemed so different. There was something so different about him, this peace I had never seen before.

Randy: I'm curious about that because okay, someone gets caught in criminal activity, they go to jail and they "meet Jesus" all the sudden. We hear about these jail house conversions. But what you're saying is that this man that you knew very well was significantly different.

Alexandra: Totally different. Not from like the first time he had gone into prison and he was like, "Oh I'm sorry for what I did." It was something different about him because this time he wasn't just saying, "Come back to me." Whereas before I knew, you're doing this because you don't want me to leave you and that's why. But this time he was saying, "You don't need to come back to me. I totally understand if you don't. I just need you to know the Lord." That was really different from who I knew.

Sheila: So what happened in your life?

Alexandra: So during those times when he, for the second incarceration, I had drifted away. I was totally angry at God. I had spent so many years asking him to fix my marriage, to please help me. I felt like it was going on deaf ears and he wasn't listening to me. But little did I know that on the day of his second arrest, that was the beginning of our lives. It was what I thought was going to be the worst day of our lives ended up being

the best day of our lives. And God did a total turn around in our family.

So when I went to the visiting area and he started to share about Jesus, we kind of confessed to one another what we had done because during those times I was just out of control. I had no--I was so angry, so I was doing things that were not pleasing to myself, my family. I had begun to--I was drinking a lot. Just very depressed. So um, when we confessed our sins to one another and we talked about what he had done and then what I had done, he prayed for me and he led me to the Lord. It was incredible.

Sheila: Wow!

Herman: During that time I was just immersing myself in scripture. I had applied to a college, Biola University to learn more about the Lord and about God and about theology. And my brother and I became the pastors of this particular chapel. So we took over and we led those inmates. As an inmate would enter into our dormitory, we would call it Five North Church, we trained our deacons, inmates, how to approach folks that were coming into the jail to give them a Bible, a pair of slippers and say, "Hey, there is a service in the back. And the pastors are the Mendoza brothers. So if you need prayer, just check out the Mendoza brothers." And it just grew until today, that facility, that unit, they still have services, and it is run by inmates.

Randy: Wow! That's amazing. There is so much more to this story and you can pick up Herman's book, *Shifting Shadows* and there is a lot of details that we don't have time to really get to. But here's what I just want to ask you, the bottom line. So the people that are hearing this story, maybe someone who is struggling thinking, wow that's a great story but God can't do anything with my life, I've already made too many mistakes. What do you say to people who need that kind of transformation, that night and day transformation?

Herman: I say that if they put their trust in Jesus, God can do miracles. Because now my friends are law enforcement officers, judges that seek my counsel, I visit them at their

homes. God has done some remarkable things in my life. So if you trust in God--and it is a prayer away. That's what happened to me, it was a prayer away, God can really take a hold of that person's life, whether it be a son or a daughter that's dealing with addictions, dealing with these kinds of business.

Alexandra: Or even marital problems.

Herman: Yeah, God can change a life. If you put your trust in the Lord. The Bible says that God takes the foolish things of this world to confound the wise. And who would ever suspect that a person of my background would be now a spokesperson for God and to be able to bring healing through a movement called The 414 Window, which is basically reaching this demographic of children and youth from the ages of four to fourteen, to reach them for Christ. Where I was destroying them by spewing the drugs out in society and hurting these families but now, I'm bringing life and that--to the Word of God.

Randy: You are. And that peace that you've so desperately needed, you still have it today?

Herman: I still have it today.

Sheila: How can people get in touch with you and find out more about your ministry? Do you have a website?

Herman: Yes. They can reach me at HermanMendoza.com.

Randy: The amazing thing about this, it just goes to show you what God can do when we just reach out and we say you know what, God? I'm going to give it over to you. And no matter how bad the situation is, God can redeem, he can take the broken and make it beautiful. He can take the desperate situations and bring life into a desert. It's repeating scriptures over and over. That's why I think it is important for people to look beyond themselves sometimes, to look beyond our own world and look and say, where can I

partner with God and bring change that is lasting, that is meaningful? We have an opportunity to do that right now.

Sheila: Yeah! We want you to watch something and see the part that God might want you to play in this great adventure.

Begin video clip

Announcer: Every morning families in rural villages throughout Africa wake up wondering what will today bring--floods, civil unrest, a pandemic? Unfortunately, mothers in South Sudan and Angola live with these realities each and every day.

Isak: The conditions that we're seeing here in Africa at the moment are just devastating. Not only are we facing the issues of drought in certain of the countries where we're operating, and then in places like South Sudan now we're suddenly seeing the effects of flooding. We've literally have had to leave food in our warehouses. And our staff are bringing boats into the warehouses and filling the boats with food and then taking them out from there to get to other people.

In Angola right now we're seeing our malnutrition clinics fuller than they've ever been. And yet, on top of all of that, we now have this COVID pandemic that is caused such a significant additional impact on the children who we're so desperately trying to keep alive and to serve.

Announcer: No matter what a mother faces, her overriding concern remains, will I be able to feed my child today? Now, even in the midst of a pandemic our mission teams bravely risk their lives to provide that answer. People might say, "Well, how is COVID effecting? Are the people getting the virus? Are they dying from the virus? Yes! That's happening to an extent but the reality is far more children will die as a result of food insecurity. Far more children will die from malnutrition, from poverty related issues around food and access to food than what will even die from the pandemic. Way more!

And that is the reality of what we're facing on the ground here. We cannot save the lives in these clinics. We cannot protect these families and we cannot be a lifeline to these children unless you open your hearts today, partner with us. Give the best gift that you can give--give the gift of life by giving the gift of food.

End of video

In the studio:

Sheila: I have watched these programs before, long before I was part of the *LIFE Today* family. I would watch programs like that, or I would watch documentaries of things that are happening in Africa and be moved. But it is a completely different thing when you take like two plane rides and you step out onto the ground and you suddenly feel the heat and the smells and the noise. And then you sit down with moms, moms who love their children every bit as much as I love my son. I literally, I would die for my son. I would do anything I could to protect him. But the thing is, with so many of these moms at the moment with the devastation, with the malnutrition that is absolutely rampant, there is nothing they can do.

One of the moms I talked to said, "I literally wish there was a ladder up to heaven. I would go there now because I've got more children there than I do here."

The thing is, I've seen with my own eyes, you and I can change this. We have the most amazing, efficient partners on the ground who know how to put nutritious food into one of those little orange bowls that has all the nutrients these children need to literally, Randy, move them from death to life.

Randy: Sheila, it's been a tough year; 2020 has been rough for a lot of people and understandably so. I've heard so many tragic stories with this pandemic. I remember when we crossed 200,000 deaths in the United States and you thought, oh my goodness! It is heartbreaking. It's really devastated economies and people's lives.

Do you realize that almost 200,000 children die every month right now in Africa from things related to malnutrition, either directly attributed to it or the weakened state that they're in? Malaria will come in or something on top of it, but that underlying condition is malnutrition.

I look at what we've done in the United States and Canada and every country, really, to try to stave off this COVID. And wonderful! I've been a part of that. Right? None of us want to get it. What are we doing to stave off the malnutrition? Because the answer is actually a lot simpler in many regards than what we face with COVID. The answer is: get some food in these areas where they don't have any food.

We've been doing this for 30 years now. We have people in place. We have the supply lines. We've had some disruptions this year, but we have the supply lines. We know how to get into the villages. We know where to go. We're hitting the areas where sometimes people are fleeing from war and persecution.

We are ready to go. Will you send us? I don't mean Sheila and I, literally, the two of us. I mean all of us together as we partner and we say, "We are going to reach these people about the life and love of Jesus through mission feeding." Your gift right now of \$30, \$50, \$100, even \$1,000 will feed three, five, 10 or 100 children for the next three months. Go to the phones. Go online. Give the best gift you can.

Begin video clip

Announcer: Today on top of the daily fight for life and food, families and children across Africa are now forced to deal with the challenges of a global health crisis. Because of COVID-19 food scarcity has increased drastically and the fear of dying from lack of food is far greater than the virus itself.

Even in these unprecedented times, mission feeding won't stop. With your help, mission feeding will continue to be a daily source of food, encouragement, and health for the 350,000 children counting on us.

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 *40 Days of Healing Promises*. This beautiful hardcover devotional will encourage you in your faith as you dive deep into the healing promises that are yours in Jesus' name.

With your gift of \$100 or more please request the "Blessings for your Home" bowls and tea towel set. This set of bowls and two beautifully designed tea towels will make a wonderful addition to your home and serve as a reminder of your help in blessing others as a friend of *LIFE*.

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, "A Mother's Strength." Please call, write, or make your gift online today.

End of video

In the studio:

Randy: I hope you are going to the phone or going online right now and making the best gift you can. You can make a difference today.

Sheila, what a great story we heard today of Jesus making a difference in people's lives.

Sheila: And there is so much more. You have to read the book. It is called *Shifting Shadows*: "How a New York drug lord found freedom in the last place he expected." I just want to thank you Herman and Alexandra, thanks for being our guests.

Herman: Thank you for having us!

Sheila: It's just been awesome, amazing! And remember, you can go to HermanMendoza.com, find out a lot more about the ministry.

So for Randy and me, I just want to say thanks for being with us. We love you and we will see you next time on *LIFE Today*.