

11/18/20

Week 47: Fall Mission Feeding

Sheila Walsh

Jaci Velasquez

Sheila: Hi! I'm Sheila Walsh. Welcome to *LIFE Today*. We're so glad that you're joining us. I remember some time ago I was in Nashville and I was getting ready to do some event and somebody said to me, "Have you heard her?"

And I'm like, "Heard who?"

And they said, "This amazing new artist and she is like 16 or something."

And they played me a cut and I was like, "Oh my gosh! That's amazing!"

Well, I'm really happy to tell you that today she is here with us. So Jaci Velasquez, it's such a joy to have you here.

Jaci: Are you kidding me? I wouldn't miss it for the world! You're amazing. And you're just as beautiful as ever! Like the first time I saw your face on the cover of a cassette, you look exactly the same.

Sheila: At least it wasn't an eight track. Thank you, Jesus!

Jaci: You're not old enough for that.

Sheila: So take us back. Were your early days involved in music?

Jaci: Well, yes. My dad was a pastor up until I was nine years old. So then he became an

evangelist, which is basically a pastor who travels to different churches and preaches. So because I was a little girl, I was nine years old, I was the last kid left at home, they had to take me with them. So my mom and dad took me with them on the road. We traveled the country. I was homeschooled in the back seat of an '85 Honda Accord.

Sheila: Wow!

Jaci: With a TV VHS, AC/DC converter, little TV with videotapes that I would watch all of my classes and sit in the back and of course, I'd finish up the school. And I'd look forward to the six hours of traveling in a car watching school on tape and I would watch movies.

So I remember I used to have this beautiful picture of what life was like, like what ninth graders, what junior high school looked like, what high school looked like. So I'd watch movies and I'd get these concepts of what it would be like to go to prom, and really romanticize all of this stuff and kind of envision and dream about what my life would be like if I were in school or when I grew up and I wasn't in the back seat of a Honda Accord.

Sheila: That's a little different than most of us. But I'm just wondering, what happened? How did that big break come when you were so young? Did somebody hear you and think, oh my gosh! This girl is gifted by God!

Jaci: Because we were traveling so often. We were going from Sunday morning church to Sunday night church, and then going to a different state, do Wednesday night church. By the time I was 13, my parents were doing the adult services and I was doing like the youth services and like the youth group stuff.

So then I guess it was when I was 13 somebody heard me, sent a videotape back to Nashville to what would end up becoming my manager, and I was 13. So that was a crazy time. When I was 14, they flew my family up to Nashville. They flew me and my parents

up to Nashville and offered me a record deal. When I was 14, I started working on the first project which was *Heavenly Place*. That came out when I was 16. So that was a couple year artist development situation. So that was two years' worth; that came out when I was 16. I hit the road traveling again non-stop, 300 days a year--300 days in the first year, and there are only 365 days in a year.

Sheila: Usually.

Jaci: Some days, depending on COVID. 300 days that year and I just--it was a lot.

Sheila: Did you know at that point that this was going to be a huge deal. Did you have a sense of God is about to throw doors open.

Jaci: I think when you're 16 years old, maybe if I would have been more mature, I would have had that sense. But I was at this point just doing what I was told to do. Because like, "Hey! You have a flight at four AM." "Okay, I'll wake up." Just going about, my heart was in the right place because I loved...I loved the concept of being able to be a role model for young girls.

But I also had this kind of lack of understanding as to what I was really walking into because it all felt like a huge blur. Like there was so much happening so fast, so quick. Like there wasn't time to enjoy the success because you have to move on to the next thing. Because by the time I was 18 I'd just signed a record deal with Sony Discos. So I was making a record every year, one in English, one in Spanish, one in English, one in Spanish. And then one year I had to make two Christmas records, one in English one in Spanish. That was like a big timeframe.

What was interesting is that God is so good and so full of grace because that could have turned into so many other poor choices but because I was so busy there wasn't that option, if you will.

Sheila: Who has time for poor choices?

Jaci: It was just go--just go! But then when I was about 23, I accidentally got married.

Sheila: Whoa, whoa! That is an interesting phrase, "Accidentally got married." What do you mean by that?

Jaci: It means that I had done a film called *Chasing Papi* that was basically a film that a lot of people were not very happy that I did. It was a P.G. Film. It was with 20th Century Fox Films. It was my first audition, and I got the part with Sofia Vergara, Roselyn Sanchez, and Eduardo Verastegui. It was a lot of--

Sheila: Wow! That was beautiful.

Jaci: Thank you. It was really difficult. So I got the part, and a lot of people didn't want me to do it. My whole life I'd always had "yes" people around me because I was always paying the bills. All the sudden I had some "no" people around me. So my manager was like, "I don't think you should do it." My mom said, "I don't think you should do it." My boyfriend at the time, well, he was easy to take care of because I could just break up with him, he told me not to do it. But I said that they were all wrong. That I needed to do it because it was an open door that God was walking me through. So I did.

It was kind of like somebody handing me the keys to a sports car that I didn't know how to drive. So I did the film. People started cancelling events. Radio stations started dropping my music. So in my D.I.Y. attempt to fix a poor choice on my part, what do you do? You make another poor choice. I accidentally got married, and intentionally divorced about a year and a few months later. He was a nice guy; just wasn't my guy.

Sheila: What did that do to your image within the industry when you're seen as this young, amazingly gifted girl and then "A," they don't like the motive, and then "B," they don't like the fact that you got married, and then "C," they don't like the fact that you got

divorced. But what did that do to you inside?

Jaci: I felt bad that I let people down. I felt like...I felt guilty that I let people down. The little girls that used to want to be like me when they grew up, I felt like that burden, that heaviness of yeah, I'm sorry. And I can't go to each and every one of you and tell you I'm sorry for the poor choices that I've made. Don't make the same ones. So what do you do in those situations? You run. So I ran.

Sheila: Didn't you go to London?

Jaci: Yeah! I moved to London, England and had a flat mate from Scotland.

Sheila: Eh! Nothing wrong with that!

Jaci: Dundee, she's from Dundee. She was crazy. She was fun though. She was funny. So I...

Sheila: Where were you with the Lord at that point, Jaci?

Jaci: You know, it's funny. During that time I kind of just...I was just ignoring. Because I was ignoring what people were saying about me, what people might be saying to me. I just wanted to not think about anything. Just to...I wanted to be normal. So I went to school out there. I went to school. I went to go to school to learn Spanish in England.

Sheila: Of course! Where else would one go?

Jaci: Just process that!

[Laughter]

So I went to school and I did, I got my Spanish, my Spanish got really pretty good. But

then I started missing my mom. So I got a flat downtown--well a "condo" in America, a condo downtown. And I got a phone call from a boy, the same boy that I had broken up with when I was making the movie, *Chasing Papi*, the one that told me to say no; that said do not make the movie because it was a poor choice. He called me and asked me out on a date. So I said okay. Yeah. So he happened to be the lead singer for the band called Salvador.

Sheila: I love that band.

Jaci: Me too! Who knew? So he asked me out. About four months later we got married. We got married in December 2006. Our first son was born November 3rd, 2007.

Sheila: Wow! That's a lot happening in a short amount of time.

Jaci: Yeah! Yeah, it was but I think because we had known before but because of my selfishness and my poor choices, not willing to listen to wisdom or yeah.

Sheila: Did you feel at that point as if--that career wise--that that was over? How did God begin to turn your heart around to realize, hey Jaci, you are not defined by this or that, you are mine.

Jaci: I think it took the realization, it took my husband. It took my husband.

Sheila: He's such a good guy.

Jaci: He's a good guy. It took me feeling so broken and feeling like I'm worthless, which we all know is not the case logically but sometimes it is hard to get this and this to connect; right? The fact that he would ask me out again after me basically being an embarrassment thing, and I'm divorcee, I mean I have nothing, no good reputation to bring to this awesome person. It is a unlikely story--that he would ever want to be with me.

But I think that it was beautiful to see what God does and how he redeems. He redeems us and our poor choices. Sometimes our dreams, we think that this is what I'm meant to do, this is my calling, but it is so easy to get confused with our dreams and God's calling. So the fact that God can redeem all these things and redeems poor choices, he can turn what you have intended for good but turned into evil, he can turn it for good. So it takes sometimes some pain in the pruning process.

Sheila: So true.

Jaci: So yes! It was my husband. And then of course, fast forward the baby being born.

Sheila: Yeah, Soren, the firstborn.

Jaci: No, Zealand is the firstborn.

Sheila: Oh Zealand is the firstborn?

Jaci: Yeah, ZZ, he's about to be 13 years old.

Sheila: Oh my gosh! How did that happen?

Jaci: I don't know. It's gross.

Sheila: So when you have your second child because I think one of the things I found so poignant about your story is when you've experienced pain yourself in your childhood, you do not want that for your child.

Jaci: Absolutely.

Sheila: So how old was Soren when you thought there might be something that I need to

be pay attention to here?

Jaci: Well, okay so for me as a child I wanted so much to be like everybody else. So I'd gone through my parents divorcing and all that, I was 19. But more than anything I wanted my kids to have like a normal life. Like a normal childhood, not to be homeschooled in the back seat of a car--FYI. But when Zealand was born and then the baby was born, Soren, being the youngest we start noticing that he wasn't hitting the same milestones. He was hitting milestones that his brother had not hit as quickly. So Zealand was, we just noticed that our oldest son was a little behind but we thought that maybe Soren, because they're only 14 and a half months apart, maybe Soren just had something to look towards in Zealand as like this is what I should be doing because that's my big brother.

But then when we realized that Zealand, being the older brother was just kind of really behind his peers in those situations I really like to bury my head in the sand but I couldn't because he was two and a half, or he was 19 months old, he was a baby still. So we had Tennessee Early Intervention come to the house and they did some tests with Zealand. And they said, "Well, Mr. And Mrs. Gonzales, Zealand is what is delayed. He has a pervasive developmental delay." Which I was fine with. I'm fine with it. That's fine! He'll catch up. He's my baby.

So time went on. Kindergarten year rolls around and little brother is still at preschool two days a week. Zealand starts kindergarten year and I learn a word that I've never heard before and it is called I.E.P. Individualized Educational Program. So I'm like, ooh! This is awesome. I.E.P. Like what does that mean? That means he's going to get help at school. They're going to remind him to get his work done. That means he's going to get extra attention. He's going to get speech therapy, occupational therapy. We're talking a red carpet of stuff, to help my son to get him caught up. That's kindergarten year.

Second grade year comes along. Now baby brother is in kindergarten and I'm telling you what, at this point I'm a room mom for both my kids. I'm on the board at my kids' school.

I'm in it to win it because these kids are going to have a normal life. Mom on the P.T.A. Their mom is going to be the room mom. I'm going to be like super cool, awesome, like normal cool mom. Well, it's probably not cool.

But anyway. So second grade they have a meeting with us. They call in a pediatrician, they call in the people from the school district, they call in the who's who of everybody. There were like 20 people in this board room. And this is the end of second grade. They tell us, "We have talked with the pediatrician, we've talked with the counselors, we've talked with the therapists. Zealand is autistic."

Sheila: Wow!

Jaci: I'm like, "You mean artistic."

"Well, no. He is autistic."

So I just remember thinking, hey, what do I do with this? Because that's not the dream I had for him. Because the dream for Zealand was going to be--I remember when I was pregnant with him people prayed, Max Lucado prayed for him and he said, "This boy is going to have a ministry."

How can he have a ministry if he can't communicate properly? So now you're telling me that my dreams, like all the movies that I watched as a kid, thinking what life would look like, because I wasn't living it, surely my kids are going to have this kind of life. Most popular guy in high school. Like he is going to be a football player. Date the most popular girl in school. The cheerleader, it is going to be just like what I pictured, just like everything...what I've always dreamed of for my life and for my children.

But he can't do that if he is autistic. And how is he going to teach his little brother how to be cool, how to shave? How to talk to a girl on the phone? How is he going to do that if he is autistic?

So I got angry with God. I was very angry with God. For about six months I yelled at him and I just, I said, "How could you? How could you?" He didn't say anything to me during the six months. I kept asking why me? I kept asking why me? Why me? And it took this. It took me changing my posture and asking the right questions, why not me? Why not me? And it's only then that I started asking that question that I could hear the voice of God again. Because he wasn't mad at me. He didn't chastise me even when I was angry at him. He was just waiting for me to ask the right question, why not me? And it was at that point that I could feel him pick me up, dust me off, and say, "Jaci, now it's time to fight. It's time to fight for your son."

Because you see God can see something in me that I couldn't see in myself and that is strength and bravery. I could not see that in myself. So now Zealand is going to be 13 and little brother has taken on the role of something so incredibly beautiful. God prepared his heart long before we knew he was going to need to. He's prepared his heart with such a soft goodness. He's the kid who looks for the outcast. He's the one that looks for the new kid in class. But God prepared him by way of Zealand because he knows that one day his little brother might have to take care of him, and you can't take care of somebody if you don't have a soft good heart.

Sheila: As you can probably imagine there is way, way, way more to this story than we're able to get into and that's why Jaci has a book called, *When God Rescripts Your Life*. That will tell the whole story and it is--there is so much in it that will help. If you feel like, you know what? I wish I could rewrite this, you can turn to God and he will rewrite your story.

First, I want to ask you to do something. We want to rewrite the stories of some children in Africa who right now at this very minute as we, sitting here in the studio, are struggling for the next breath simply because they don't have enough to eat. So would you watch this with me?

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: We just love him here at *LIFE*. That's Isak Pretorius; you probably remember his dad, Peter Pretorius. He was the one that James and Betty first met with and began to understand the profound need there is in Africa. As you think about your own life and your own children at this moment there's all sorts of things that go through our head. Will my child get this virus? Will my child be able to go back to school? Has their normal been shifted to such an extent that it will never be the way it was?

And the truth is we don't know the answers to all of that but the thing is I want you to know that at this very moment there are children and mothers and the only thought of that mother isn't will my child get this virus? It's like--will my child live 'til tomorrow because I have no food to give them?

That is one of our main passions here at *LIFE*. We have made a commitment to our people in the ground and Isak is one of those, that we will provide enough food for 350,000 children this year. I remember hearing this from Betty's own heart and also seeing it on one of our pieces that her prayer was never let the line of children waiting for one meal a day be longer than the food we have. You've helped us with that and we're profoundly grateful but we're coming again and we're asking again because the need at the moment is even worse.

When children have nothing to eat their immune system is so compromised. They have no strength to fight off anything. So the least we can do is make sure that they have food. And I'm asking you today to join us. \$30 will provide food for three children for three whole months. What can you do with \$30 these days? The fact that you could feed three children for three whole months; and believe me that turns that child from death to life. From that first bowl of food and those little orange bowls the children begin to get the nourishment they need to be able to grow up, to be able to fight off viruses. All we're asking is: will you give them a fighting chance? So please join with us. \$50, if you're able

to do that will feed five children for three months. \$100 feeds ten children.

We have sat with these moms. We have wept with these moms. We have prayed with these moms. But we've told these moms that we're coming home and we're going to share their need with our partners and that we know in your heart that you will respond.

If you've given before, would you consider giving a little bit more this year? The need is great. They've been brought to their knees just as we have in this nation with this virus. But their knees are not strong enough to hold them. They need us to hold them up. Please make the best gift you can and do it now in Jesus' name.

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:

Sheila: Thank you for that. Keep calling. Jaci's book is called *When God Rescripts Your Life*: "Seeing value, beauty and purpose when life is interrupted." Jaci, thank you for sharing some of your story.

Jaci: Thank you! Thank you for having me.

Sheila: It is a wonderful story. And if you ever feel like your life has been interrupted, most of us are going to face that at some point, but God will meet you at that intersection and rescript your life.

So from all of us here at *LIFE*, God bless. We love you!