

10/18/21

Week 43: Rescue LIFE

Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh

Erwin McManus

RANDY: Welcome to *LIFE Today*! I'm Randy Robison; Sheila Walsh is with me as always. It's a blessing to have you today. We think this is going to bless you. I'm excited because we have someone who has been on *LIFE Today* many times. And I have always just walked away feeling a little closer to God, Sheila.

SHEILA: Wow.

RANDY: Erwin McManus is back with us. Erwin, great to have you.

ERWIN: It is so good to be with you guys.

RANDY: I want to show the book here because it's got one of those titles that just gets your attention. It is *The Genius of Jesus*. And he's talking about "The man who changed everything." And so, we're thrilled to have you talk about this. Sheila, I know you have lots of questions for Erwin because this book just lit you up.

SHEILA: I loved it. First of all, thank you for writing this book. It is fantastic, very thought-provoking. My copy is underlined all over the place.

ERWIN: I love that!

SHEILA: But I have this memory of being on a panel with you lots of years ago, a very traditional, kind of evangelical situation. The audience was asking questions, and there

were lots of gentlemen in suits beside me. Every single answer they had came out of the same box; I kind of almost knew what they were going to say. And then you were the next one, and it was like, I was like, where did he get that box? That's a different box! It was such a fresh understanding. So I wondered, where did your faith journey begin? Have you always been somebody who questioned?

ERWIN: Well, I'm an immigrant from El Salvador, so English was my second language. So a lot of times, when people hear Erwin McManus, they don't realize that I'm actually Spanish, but my name is an alias. Which tells you I have a little bit of a colorful background. I think sometimes when you're an outsider and learning how to work your way into a new culture, into a new world, a new people, a new language, it already gives you a different perspective on things.

I didn't grow up in a religious home or anything like that. My grandfather was an atheist who taught me reincarnation. My grandmother was Roman Catholic but never went to mass and didn't trust institutional religion. My mom was kind of a searcher. She brought a Buddha home, and we were Buddhists for a season. Then she started studying Judaism, and she decided she was Jewish. But really, she was a deist. There was an earthquake in Managua, and she told me she couldn't believe in a personal god because why would he allow a tragedy like that?

So I just remember having some conversations as a kid about God, about spirituality, but really more from a searcher's perspective. So for some reason, I'm not sure why, but by the time I was in the 6th grade, I read every book of mythology in the library. I just started studying Greek, and Roman, and Norse, and Egyptian mythology. I wondered if all of these mythologies were a picture into the human story.

I was just trying to make sense of me. I ended up in a psychiatric chair by the time I was 12 years old. And some of it was I just didn't know who I was. I never met my real father. We kind of had a story that we were told. My stepfather, we were told, was our real father, and then later, we discovered he wasn't. So you don't know who you are. I have an

Irish last name, but I look Spanish. All these things didn't match. A lot of times, you don't realize that the human spirit is designed for truth. And when truth doesn't match up with the reality we're experiencing, something breaks inside of us.

So I knew early on, I was trying to make sense of my life, make sense of the world around me. I was told that I was a straight D student, 1st through 12th grade. I lived inside an imaginary world. I was pretty neurotic, to be honest with you. I'm still probably fairly neurotic.

SHEILA: You're in good company here, really.

ERWIN: So my family didn't know what to do with me. I was an underachiever in every public arena. And then, when I was young, they started giving me I.Q. Tests for different things. So what they told me is what I had the capacity for and what I was actually achieving did not match. I think I was like a lot of people, terrified that there was nothing unique inside of me, that there was nothing significant, that there was no genius, nothing special inside of me.

And so I spent my life, you oftentimes compensate. So I became a philosophy student and a psychology student. Psychology to understand me, philosophy to understand the meaning of life. So I started studying abnormal psychology. I started studying sociopathic and narcissistic behavior patterns -- abnormal psychology. And in that, I stumbled on the phenomenon of genius.

And I started wondering, why are there some people in history that just seem to have almost an aberrant level of intelligence or creativity or talent? And my bigger question was, is it possible to figure out how to obtain that? Is there genius inside all of us? Or are we just here to admire those who are geniuses? And then I crashed into Jesus.

SHEILA: That's an interesting quote right there! "I crashed into Jesus." How did that happen?

ERWIN: It was just unexpected. Frankly, I was in college, studying philosophy. I got a phone call from my mom, and she is 40 years old. She'd been through some painful divorces. She calls me up, and she said, "Honey, I want to tell you that I've become a Christian." I had no idea what that was. I didn't know it was even like a religious thing. She seemed happy, though. I was for her happiness. I was never against religion; I just never thought about it. And so when she said she was a Christian, I said, "I'm so happy for you." I thought she had joined the peace corp or just chosen some kind of humanitarian path.

And then I come home from college, and the next thing I know, she's all about this person named Jesus, and she is going to a church, and she's become religious. And my two younger sisters are now going; my brother, who was an atheist starts going to church. I was the most resistant one. My brother was going to church as an atheist, which I thought was so hypocritical. [Laughing] I kept telling him, "You're an atheist! What are you doing reading a Bible?"

He said, "You know, if I become a person of faith, it is going to be an intellectual decision, not an emotional one."

I remember telling him, "You're lying. You're about to crumble. You're just making an excuse."

I felt like they were crumbling to religion or submitting to this thing that I didn't even know what it was.

But I also knew that there was something missing inside of me. So I just desperately started trying to find some other way to fill this vacuum in my soul. I was hoping the answer wasn't God. I was hoping the answer wasn't Jesus. I was hoping that maybe my girlfriend could help me find the fulfillment I needed, or studying Socrates or Aristotle or Kahn's would fill the need in my soul -- or something else.

I remember just sitting in a parking lot one day. I just sat down on the curb, and I just started to cry. At that time, my girlfriend was standing there. She had never seen me cry; she had known me for four years. The reason I was crying is I realized she couldn't help me. Nothing that I was searching for was going to meet this longing inside of me, and I felt desperate. I felt this overwhelming fear that everything I searched for was on the other side of faith and trusting Jesus. But I didn't know who Jesus was, and it was terrifying to me.

How do you trust someone you don't know, you can't see, you've never had a conversation with that you know of? Right? And then, just to add to that, I loved the people who were a part of this church, and they were very beautiful people, but they were very different than me. I see the world very differently. I'm an unorthodox person. I'm a little more abstract and maybe creative, and the church seemed very standardized and more mainstream. But you know what? Love covers a multitude of irrelevance.

SHEILA: So true!

ERWIN: They were so different from me, but they loved me and didn't care that I was different. And so I remember the exact day, it was August 20th, 1978. I made this insane decision to entrust my life to a person I did not know. And I remember just praying and saying, "Jesus, I don't even know if you're out there, but if you are, I'm in."

And that's actually what drove me to write this book 40 years later. I'm sitting in my back house during the quarantine. I've always been a very, I guess, tormented soul. My inner world is always in shambles in some ways. I start having this conversation with myself, going, "I can't believe that my life has been completely transformed by a person who lived 2,000 years ago." I'm having this conversation with myself. Going, "How is it possible my whole life centers around this person named Jesus?" And then I talk to myself a lot, and that's why I'm never lonely. [Laughing]

And then my other person inside of me said, "What if he isn't God? What if Jesus isn't God? You've built your whole life on him."

And then the other voice came back and said, "Well, if he isn't God, you still can't deny that you've been changed."

And that's where the idea of the book came from. Wait a minute. Either I've been changed by the reality of who Jesus is, or I've been changed by the idea of Jesus. I thought, wow! That's the most powerful idea that a person could ever embrace.

So I started writing the book as if I did not believe in Jesus. I started writing the book putting aside all my faith in Jesus and treating it like mythology. And then asking the question, why isn't Jesus on a singular list of geniuses that have ever been recorded? How could he be missed by so many who study historic genius? And then does Jesus qualify as a genius? And he is a genius, then what exactly is his genius? And if he has a genius, what makes his genius different than Mozart or Picasso, or Einstein? Is that if I spend my life with Mozart, I will not become a composer. Or, if I spend my life with Picasso, I will not become a painter. Or with Einstein, will not become a physicist or mathematician. But if I spend my life with Jesus, his genius is transferable.

SHEILA: Wow! That's profound, right there.

ERWIN: Because it changed me. And that's where the idea of the book came from. I wanted people to see this genius that 2,000 years later still has the power to change a person's life and translate that genius into them.

RANDY: One thing I find fascinating about you and others that have taken sort of the path that you have, those of us who grew up in the church, our starting point is Jesus. I think that's wonderful. And then we learn about these other things and compare them. But for someone like you, it is almost like you went through everything to get to Jesus, and then you stayed there.

I'm curious. What are some of the specific things about Christ that you consider genius that were also the things that made you think, I made the right decision by trusting my life to someone that you didn't previously know?

ERWIN: Well, I think the first thing for me that happened was I actually wanted to be the best version of myself, even when no one was watching. That really confused me. [Laughing] To be honest with you. I understand the utilitarian need to be a good person or trust; you have to be trusted, just even economically, to be a good business person, to function in a marriage, or to be a good parent, you have to have levels of trust in a relationship. What was really odd to me was I actually wanted to be good, regardless of what anyone else thought about me.

So for myself in my inner world, I thought, what happened to me? I understand that humility is better than arrogance, but I didn't understand how suddenly I longed to be humble. I actually longed to be kind and to have compassion mark my life. So a huge part for me was my own internal world.

One of the things that you kind of hear in the space of human dynamics is people never change. That's actually a pretty common view. I've never had that view because I changed. I don't think I'm the singular exception in the world. Right? And so I believe people can change and that people do change, which makes you incredibly optimistic even in the worst-case scenarios. And so, a part of what I felt was a part of the genius of Jesus was the person that I actually longed to become. It's not just about right and wrong, what you do, what you can eliminate from your life, how other people think about you, and even your reputation. It is actually about the deepest motivation of your soul.

RANDY: You didn't say act good or act kind, you said, "Be good or be kind." Am I picking up on something here?

ERWIN: That's right. Because I think everyone can *do* a good thing. You can take a

moment and be generous, or take a moment and even be sacrificial or heroic. It's a different thing when that becomes a longing for who you want to become. You want to become the best version of yourself.

SHEILA: That's transformational. So let me just make it clear at this point. I have 73 questions and clearly are going to get to two of them. That is why you need this book for yourself because honestly, some of the things you talk about, I wanted to point out a couple. You talk about the genius of power. You actually reference one of my favorite movies, *Cool Hand Luke*, where the rules were changed and how Jesus changed the rules. How did that speak to you?

ERWIN: By the way, that's probably the most intellectual movie of my life. Because you guys, you grew up in faith, you grew up in church maybe. I didn't have that, so I had movies and books. And so when my son was maybe ten years old, I said, "I want to introduce you to the movies and books that shaped the way I think, shaped me as a person." *Cool Hand Luke* was one of those. It's because *Cool Hand Luke*, for me, became a study in how I could never lose my power, even when I felt powerless. It's a really strong Christ metaphor. In many ways, *Cool Hand Luke* prepared me for the gospel of John and how Jesus would be the one who reframes power.

To me, what's amazing is when you talk about things like social justice or reparations for past crimes against other peoples, whether it's the native Americans or the Maori in New Zealand or the Aboriginal in Australia, these conversations, we're going to realize are actually influenced by Jesus, by his genius. Before Jesus, no nation thought they should owe who they conquered anything. You just conquered the nations; that's just the way it was. You never had a conversation about slavery being unethical or immoral.

What we don't realize is that Jesus actually transformed our view of power, where now we expect nations to use power to empower, not to overpower. We expect nations to actually move toward justice and move toward social equality and move toward righteousness.

But that framework didn't exist in the Roman empire. That framework didn't exist with Genghis Khan. It didn't exist with Cleopatra or even with Alexander the Great. So what we need to realize is that framework of power has actually been changed by the life of Jesus. He changed the way we see power. He also teaches us how to use power. Probably the most powerful metaphor in the Bible is when it says that Jesus knew that all authority and all power had been given to him, and then what he does right after that is he puts a towel around his waist, and he washes his disciples' feet. So what the scripture is actually giving us is how Jesus uses power.

What you learn in scriptures is that God only trusts his power to those who are committed to serve. There is an old adage that says that absolute power corrupts absolutely. But it's not true. Because God has absolute power and he is incorruptible. And so I realize, no, absolute power doesn't corrupt absolutely. Absolute power reveals absolutely. See, absolute power reveals to you who you really are and to others. What happens so oftentimes is when we have that power, we don't have the character that actually navigates that power well, and Jesus reframes it. He says, "No, power is not to be used for your personal benefit. When you've been given power to stewardship, it's to serve others."

SHEILA: Wow! It's beautiful.

RANDY: Jeez! We've got just a very little bit of time left. But what do people need to know that they will walk away with when they -- this is a little bit heady stuff, and I like it for that, but there is a practical aspect to it. What are people going to get when they read the book?

ERWIN: It's heavy stuff, but the book is written from the heart. And so it's accessible to everyone.

SHEILA: That's a good distinction.

ERWIN: It's a very personal book. It carries a lot of my own personal journey. I would say that this book allows people who believe in Jesus to have a fresh and new perspective on the extraordinary nature of who Jesus is and how who he is changes us. How his genius can be translated into your life. But it is also a book that's written for a person that does not believe. If you have friends that don't believe in God or not yet willing to trust Jesus with their lives, this book will allow them to experience Jesus from an entirely different frequency, from a new narrative. It makes Jesus so compelling that people you thought were not open will become open for the first time.

RANDY: You're out in Hollywood. So you're preaching this in a place where a lot of people are like you. They didn't grow up with Jesus. What are you seeing in the lives of people when they start to get this?

ERWIN: What I find is that when people get a clear picture of Jesus, they're absolutely drawn to him. It's just that sometimes the lens of religion, the lens of even the church, the lens of Christianity has blurred for people the beauty of who Jesus is. I just want, in a sense, I want to clean the glass so the people can see through us to the extraordinary nature of who Jesus is.

SHEILA: So you're going to want to get the book for yourself. You'll find out which part of *Cool Hand Luke* spoke to Erwin so deeply, as it did to me. You'll also hear some really interesting stories and an encounter with Ben Affleck that is very, very revealing.

But first of all, we would love for you to help us with something that we feel passionately about. There is a lot of young girls at the moment who are being held captive, who has been taken into sex slavery. And we here at *LIFE* are determined to be part of the good news that comes to their lives. Would you watch this?

On the mission field:

Announcer: There are dangers in this world we see every day in the news that impact the lives of thousands of people. But there is a hidden danger rarely seen by most of us. It destroys the lives of innocent children and young girls by enslaving them in the hidden world of human trafficking.

Randy: A human trafficker came through here many months ago and promised this young lady's sister a better life, lured her away. They haven't heard from her. She is, as far as they know gone. They have her picture, and they have a prayer that she will come back, a hope that they will see her again.

This is the reality here and in places all over the world. That's why Rescue Life is critical. We must first reach into places like this with education so that they'll know what to look out for when these predators come through. We must rescue the girls that we can and get them out of the sex trade and we must restore them. We must give them a hope and a future.

We can do that. We can do it on a larger scale. But we have to have your help. I pray that you will help us as we try to help so many girls. We have to stop this abuse. It is not right. You can do something. Join with us as we Rescue Life.

End of clip

In the studio

SHEILA: I remember some of those faces really, really well on one of our trips to Southeast Asia. Through partners on the ground, three young girls had agreed; they said they wanted to talk to us. There was this one moment, not long before we were going, where I had stopped in at a gas station and got a packet of Oreos. I remember sitting in the dirt with these three young girls, all eating Oreos like little girls are supposed to do, with the knowledge that that night they would be back in that same brothel and that we hadn't been able to reach them yet.

I remember going back to my hotel room and just lying on the carpet and just sobbing. I felt so powerless. I felt like they're out there right now, and they could be my daughter! But yet, I felt the Holy Spirit say to me, Sheila, get up and dry your face and do something!

And so that's why we're bringing these stories to you because this is going on right now. So often, it feels like it's another world, and it's not like our family. If you could sit with these little girls and look in their eyes and talk to them and have a normal moment with them, you'd see they're just like your daughter; they're just like my sister.

So we have this commitment. We have some amazing people who have said during this season they want to step up and help us. They're actually putting up like \$320,000 to match gifts. Honestly, Randy, the figures, it is very doable for each one of us. If we all do something, then we can change everything.

RANDY: Absolutely! It is actually not that hard because, as you mentioned, we have the people in place. You know, the thing that bothers me as the father of daughters is the powerlessness that we feel in a situation where you're almost like, God, can you walk right in and just rid the world of this stain? I hear the Father saying, that's why I've sent you.

Now we can't all go and thank goodness we don't have to because it is very difficult. But you can go when you join us. Normally, it costs \$128 to reach just one child or to restore or rescue a child, but now through this wonderful, beautiful, generous matching grant of some of our top donors, your gift of \$64 will reach that child. Many of you can do much more. There are some of you that can reach right now 20 children -- 20 children -- a gift of \$1280.

We have gifts. I do want to mention, by the way, Sheila's wonderful book, *Holding on When You Want to Let Go*. What this is about, this is about giving you hope as you reach

out and give hope to others. This is what we're called to do. This is how we represent Christ to the world. We reach those who seem unreachable and restore them with the love of Christ. I hope you'll join us today. Do what you can. Nothing is too small; nothing is too large. Go to the phone or go online right now and help us as we rescue these precious children.

Begin video clip:

ANNOUNCER: Innocent children and young people, longing to be loved and cared for, are being abducted and sold at the hands of violent predators, forced into the evil industry of human trafficking.

Through Mission: Rescue *LIFE*, you can reach out to educate children at risk of being trafficked, rescue those already enslaved, and restore young lives giving them a future.

With a generous \$320,000 matching gift, now your gift of \$128 to help reach, rescue, or restore one child can be doubled to help two children. Your \$64 gift will be matched to help save one child from the horrors of human trafficking. And a \$32 mission rescue gift will be doubled to \$64.

With your gift today, we'll send you Sheila Walsh's brand-new book, *Holding on When You Want to Let Go*; "A lifeline of hope for those who feel their life is falling apart."

With your gift of \$128 or more, you'll receive the *Beauty Out of Ashes* puzzle set featuring an image taken by our team while on a trip to the mission field. This 500-piece puzzle forms a beautiful portrait of hope in the midst of despair. Included is a 24-piece puzzle for your children and grandchildren.

Finally, please consider a gift of \$1280, which will now help rescue 20 children. And you may request our inspiring bronze sculpture, "Divine Servant." Please call, write, or make

your gift online.

End of video

In the studio:

RANDY: Do go online or go to the phones right now and give the best gift you can. We covet your support for the kingdom of God. Sheila, I'd love for people to pick up Erwin's book.

SHEILA: Yeah! And just remember, for any gift at all, request Erwin's book, *The Genius of Jesus*. We will be thrilled to send it to you.

I just want to say how grateful I am for you. I'm grateful for your questions, for your wrestling, for your endless pursuit. And we are the ones that get to receive from that. So thank you, Erwin.

ERWIN: Thank you so much!

SHEILA: We love you, and we'll see you next time on *LIFE Today*. God bless you.