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Week 1: Fall Mission Feeding: Last week

Sheila Walsh

Kathie Lee Gifford

SHEILA: Welcome to *LIFE Today*! I'm Sheila Walsh, and I'm so glad you joined us. You're going to be very glad that you joined us too. I'm joined today by one of my favorite people, Kathie Lee Gifford. She has written this incredible new book called *The Jesus I Know*. Welcome, friend! Thank you for being with us.

KATHIE: You know I love you, Sheila Walsh!

SHEILA: It's very, very mutual.

KATHIE: I don't care what they say about you. Really, I don't believe any of it!

SHEILA: Half of it is true, the rest not. [Laughter] I wondered, this is so interesting, your conversations with people from all walks of life on their first encounter with God or with Jesus. And it made me wonder, what was your first encounter with Jesus?

KATHIE: Well, my first that I remember sensing that it was Jesus was, I was about maybe, I know we moved to Annapolis, Maryland when I was about five. So I was around five years old. It was fall; it was a leafy time, and we were outside of our house in Annapolis, and my Daddy and I were raking leaves and making piles. I looked up, and there was Jesus sitting cross-legged like an Indian on a cloud making a fire -- making a fire. I don't know what it means, but I know he looked down at me, and he went, "Kathie." He recognized me.

Now that I'm talking about it, it dawns on me that I was told growing up that my Daddy was half Jewish and half American Indian. I wonder if it is all wrapped up in how they called my daddy "Sitting Shiva" because he was part Jewish and part -- [Laughter]. It turns out he was Jewish but not American Indian. [Laughter] I don't know where the thought came from, though it is funny now to think of it.

But I love in the Bible, and I know you do, too, one of my favorite places is when Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb early in the morning. It's still dark out, and she asks "the gardener" where they have taken her Lord. All she hears in return is, "Mary!" I love how personal our God is. How he sees us, he knows our middle name and our last name, and all the hairs of our head, but all he has to say is, "Sheila." It is the familiar intimacy that we have with him, the comfort we have in his presence, although he is the God of all creation, too. He just makes us feel so loved. And so accepted and so at peace.

And so that was my first memory of oh, that's Jesus. I don't know why. I heard his voice when I was 12 years old, sitting in a movie theater watching a Billy Graham movie; the first one he had done called *The Restless Ones*, and believing that Jesus was calling me. He said, "Kathie, I love you, and if you'll trust me, I'll make something beautiful out of your life." That was a lot of years ago, and yeah, he's kept his end of the bargain.

SHEILA: I think you have, too. One of the things that are so clear is you're a crazy --

KATHIE: I was young; I needed the money. Okay?

SHEILA: You are a crazy busy person. I think when you stepped down from doing the Today Show, it wasn't to retire; it was to step into this new amazing platform. What was the genesis for this particular book? What made you want to record these conversations?

KATHIE: Well, you know, Sheila, that people come to you all the time to write books and do different projects. And you huddle with your literary; we all have agents. I don't cut my own deals and all that stuff, but I'm involved in the process.

So I was talking to my literary agent up in New York City, and he had been talking about the next potential book. And they know the marketplace; I don't even think about stuff like that. I just try to listen to the Holy Spirit and then be faithful to the calling, whatever it is. Then move on to the next thing, as you know. You're just like -- might as well.

So he was saying, "Kathie, what do you want to do next?"

I said, "I'm going to do the partner book to the movie I'm working on, *The Way*, which is the movie coming out based on more oratorios. I finished that now, wrapped that, thank the Lord. It will be out in the spring, I hope.

But we have a companion book coming that I just delivered last week called *The God of the Way*. So we were talking about that a little bit. He goes, "Yeah, but what's the next, another book you'd like to write? Because I have an idea for you. You don't have a particular leaning?"

I said, "No, I really don't." I said, "I'm kind of tired of writing books. They're lonely. I'd rather sit down and write four songs in a day than write a chapter in a book with someone else." I'd rather write a movie and be able to make stuff up. But I didn't know what I wanted to do writing-wise of a book.

So he said, "What I love about your last book," which was called, *It's Never Too Late*, he said, "I loved your stories of talking to Al Pacino in your garden or Craig Ferguson on the movie set of *Then Came You*. Or talking to --. All these different people that you would think: *they talk about God*? You know?"

I never separated the spiritual from the secular in my life. I don't think well now I'm putting one foot into the secular world, and when I go home and worship at my church, and I'm going to -- no! The Bible says: In him, we live and move and have our being. It doesn't say in him we go visit once a week in a building, sing a couple songs, hear a good

sermon and go home until next week.

Unfortunately, that's what western churches have come to mean, and it could not be further from the truth. That's why the church is struggling so much in the western world today because we have gotten away from the true meaning of church.

It's a Greek word, as you know, I'm preaching to the choir, ecclesia, and it doesn't mean a building; it means a coming together of like-minded people for the purpose of worship. Because the first followers of "The Way," that's what it was called, never met in buildings. They met in their homes, or they met out in the fields, or they met, later under persecution, they met in the catacombs or wherever they could. But there were synagogues that existed then. But you couldn't just go and take up any subject in a synagogue. There was structure to it and ritual.

And so we have a miscommunication about what church means. I'm grateful to the churches that actually preach the word every week and disciple people and have their programs and their missionaries and all that. I'm not putting down the church. I'm talking about the -- what's happened in our world today -- oh, gosh, I want to be careful with my words. I don't want to hurt. Just how encased we've become in the church.

When Jesus said to go into all the world and tell everybody basically about me. Don't stay there right where you're -- and get your needs met. Go out and share it and take your bread and your fishes with you and multiply it everywhere and see the kingdom of God grow. It really means movement -- the church means movement and not static sitting there.

Look what happened when the Holy Spirit came. They were on the steps of the temple when it happened; they were in the inner room, but then they went out to the people. It was on the steps where they started to evangelize. They got out of the room they were in, and they went to the steps, and people were there for the Passover from all over the world speaking different languages. And what happened? All of a sudden, because of the

tongues of fires, they could speak their languages, too, and they said, "What are you drunk?"

"At 9:00 in the morning?" Peter said. "Not yet! No, we're not drunk." [Laughter] "No, we're not. This is just the comforter. This is the Holy Spirit Jesus said he would send. And he couldn't send it until he was gone."

So I get frustrated with our understanding of scripture in our western culture because it was written for Middle Easterners for Middle Easterners; you and I have talked about this so much. But unless we study it that way with the mind of a Middle Easterner, understanding the geopolitical things that were going at the time in the world then, and the context culturally of what was going on.

The best story is the story of the sycamore tree, the fig sycamore tree. And Jesus went up to it when he was hungry, and there was no fruit on it. I loved the humanity of Jesus. He got hungry. He said, "I'll go to that tree and get some fruit."

Well, I knew as a little ten-year-old girl sitting in Sunday School Jesus didn't curse that tree. Jesus wouldn't do that. My Jesus wouldn't do that. I almost got kicked out of Sunday School for it. I said, I just know he would never curse something he created and loves. He wouldn't curse me. He would not do that. Only I found out later, studying rabbinically, that the cultural meaning of a fig sycamore tree at that time represented the Pharisees and the Sadducees. So the people around Jesus would have known at that time, oh, he is talking about those guys. It was symbolic of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, just the way the olive tree was symbolic for the Jewish people.

So that's what you learn when you study the way I've been studying now for years. And it changes your whole understanding of scripture. It changes the way you look at people; because when you understand how Jesus confronted each person uniquely, individually, he didn't have the same sermon he preached every time. He met every single person right where they were, and you know he looked in their eyes, and you know whether they were

a leper or not he held them. He was not wearing a mask. He was not fearful of catching anything anybody had. I'm not putting down masks. That's not the way he went through his life and his ministry. He didn't separate the secular from the spiritual either. He was all God and all human being, and not half and half, as a lot of people like to say. He was all God. He didn't stop being God when he became a human being.

And so there are just misconceptions and myths that are perpetuated. And bad, you know me, with the bad translations of the Bible, I just want to whaaa! Because I want so much more for people. I want them to know what I know now because somebody cared enough to teach me. And it changed my life. I want people to have that fire in their gut again for the Word of God.

So when I go to Israel, the last few times, I would say to the Lord, instead of, oh, that person has always wanted to go to Israel, they're believers, let's go, and we'll take them to Israel. They can get there on their own, is what I really came to understand. What I asked the Lord to do is show me the people you want me to invite. Show me, Lord, the people that don't know you yet, that don't know how much you love them. But will go if they're asked for a trip of a lifetime.

And so I made a list of the people that he put on my heart. And a lot of their stories are in this book. They were Sikhs, they were Hindus, they were brokenhearted Catholics, they were agnostics, they were atheists, they were Scientologists. They came from all kinds of different backgrounds and faiths and worlds and opinions and politics and everything. They could not have a more disparate group -- a "motley crew" my mother used to call them. "That's a motley crew!" She wasn't talking about the rock band. [Laughter]

SHEILA: Now you cannot drop something like *The Way* movie coming out next year without unpacking that for us. That is very exciting.

KATHIE: It is, sweetie. Thank you. You've been on that journey with me. It all started with the first oratorio that I wrote with Nicole C. Mullen called *The God Who Sees*,

which millions and millions of people have watched on YouTube and still can if they're interested. It started out as a simple three-minute song we were writing for Danny Gokey; hopefully, to record about Hagar.

And so I started writing about Ruth after I finished writing about Hagar. Then I started writing about David in En Gedi. And then I finished it up with Mary Magdalene at the tomb. And it became a film. It started out with our loaves and fishes like we were talking about. I love when we do this to you, Lord. Take it. Make it what you want it to be. Do you want a miracle out of this? I gladly give it to you, Lord. With outstretched hands, I just wait for the blessing of it. Because whatever we offer to him, he will receive, and he will multiply for us if our hearts long to serve him and make it a love offering from us to him.

So that was a love offering that David became a very, very successful piece of theater. I used the \$500,000 I made on *The Rock, the Road, and the Rabbi* because that was a surprise.

SHEILA: Fantastic book! Fantastic book!

KATHIE: Had it all sitting in a kingdom account and the Lord said take that money, hire the best symphonic players in the world, here at the National Symphony Orchestra and then take Nicole, who is one of the most beautiful women in the world God ever made, and film her singing it in the Holy Land. And that's what I did.

Because of the success of it, Sheila, you'll love this story, when I came home from doing that in Nashville, there is a young woman at the Today Show, she's still there, I call her Donadorable, and she's of Persian background. Her parents were Iranian. She is a secular girl in that she wasn't raised in a religious home. She is as American as hip and beautiful as she can be. But she was always fascinated by what I did away from the Today Show as well. She said, "Kathie, can I hear what you" -- and this was when it was just in its audio form. "Can I hear what you've been doing down in Nashville this weekend?"

I said, "Yeah! I just recorded it."

So I took her into my dressing room, put on my big Bose headphones, and watched this beautiful 28-year-old girl watch it, listen to it at the time, just listening. I watched her face through the whole thing. I'm trained to do that because you watch audiences when you're writing for theater or movies. And at the end, she is shaking, sobbing, sobbing! She takes off the headphones, and she looks at me. Sheila, she said words, now out of a mouth of a non-believer. She says, "Kathie, can you make it longer? Can you make it longer? Can you add more stories? I don't know these stories. Where did you get these stories?"

I went over to her, Sheila, and I held her, and I said, "Donadorable, you have no idea how God just used you in my life. I'm going to spend the rest of my life taking these epic biblical stories that people think never really happened, or they think they're dead now and have no relevance in today's world, but in reality, they're ripped from the headlines today. And I'm going to spend the rest of my life, God willing, writing those stories in a brand-new way with narration and symphonic music that is the quality of such that you'd think you were in the Carnegie Hall."

It's got to be excellent. There's too much done in the name of the Lord that is just sloppy and cheap. That doesn't honor our Lord. You might have made it with the best of intentions but Lord, help us do work that is worthy of you, worthy of you.

A lot of people think they can make movies, they can't. A lot of people think they can write great songs, they can't. It's not their gift. They have gifts, but -- you know what I'm saying.

SHEILA: Of course, I do.

KATHIE: Everything God intended you to be because it is going to take all you've got to

do it right anyway. So I knew that I had a gift to do those kinds of things because I've done it for years and years and years with great success. And so I said, "I'm going to do this for the rest of my life." So I wrote three new oratorios with three different composers that we worked together on them, and the result is a one-and-a-half-hour movie called *The Way*, telling the story from creation to when Jesus says to his disciples, "Get in the boat and go to the other side. Meet me on the other side."

Well, we, in the western world, think that he is saying, oh, I'm going to go pray for a while, and I'll meet you over on the other side of the sea of the Galilee. What they don't realize is that Jesus was telling them to meet him in a specific spot called "The Other Side" by the Jewish people. And it was forbidden for any ritually pure Jew to go there. It was where the pagans lived. It's where the temple of Dionysus was, where they had fertility rites and all kinds of bestiality and pornography and reveling. That's not where a good Jewish disciple would go. He would be thrown out of the synagogue, thrown out of the community, ritually impure for the rest of his life. And Jesus is saying, "You're going to follow me? All right, we're going over there." What's the first thing they find when they get over there? A naked, bleeding guy filled with a legion of demons screaming at Jesus. You notice Jesus is the only one that got out of the boat. [Laughter]

SHEILA: Wow!

KATHIE: So it ends with what's "The Other Side" now for us as followers of our Yeshua, our rabbi? Where is "The Other Side" now? It's yes, it's in your own neighborhood where people are lost. It's in the places, in the homeless encampments. Yes, it's in the mental illness wards. It's everywhere. And as the darkness gets deeper and steeper, his light shines ever brighter in us because we are the light of the world because the light of the world lives in us.

SHEILA: Okay, you can probably tell people that Kathie has a lot on her heart. She has a lot that God has anointed her for. Her book is called *The Jesus I Know*. So I want to put one of those in every one of your hands. But first of all, I want to let you see something

that we're part of at the moment in Africa, where we're literally putting food in a bowl for children who have no food. So please watch this, and then I'll tell you how you can get a hold of Kathie's book.

On the mission field:

Announcer: Perhaps the greatest fear of parents concerns the health of their children. It is especially true in Africa. Adriano is a godly father in Angola who once took pride in his ability to provide for his family. But tragedy has changed that.

Open Captions:

>> We lost our two children and it's like we lost part of us. That's why we're working, but not with full power.

Announcer: Adriano told us food and health are two critical issues in his community. You see when parents take care of sick children, there is little time to farm and produce food. But without food children's immune systems become weak and more susceptible to disease. It's a vicious cycle.

Sheila: When you look at a little one like this. This little one's name is Balvine Natula. This color of hair, this red hair means that the body has stopped sending nutrients to the hair. So there is no protein. These are terrible sights. And it's why mission feeding is absolutely vital for us. We want to be able to get to where help is needed now, and help is needed now in these villages to feed their bodies so that they have strength that we can feed their souls and spirits. You can't hear that Jesus loves you when you are starving to death.

End of video

In the studio:

SHEILA: You can't hear that Jesus loves you when you're starving to death. That was one of the things that was so clear to me on my first trip to Southern Africa. As much as you want to share the life and the light and the hope in Jesus, there is such an emergency that is right in front of you. These mothers had walked for so many miles to bring their children to the malnutrition clinic. And so often, by the time they get there, it's too late. Mothers and fathers are doing everything they can to keep their children alive. Scraping through the dirt, I watched one woman, she was scraping through the dirt for pods for anything at all that she could put into her children's stomachs so it would stop the pain and the growling, but there was no nutrition. It was heartbreaking.

That's why I love -- I love what we do through Mission Feeding. The issues are really clear. In some parts of Africa, like South Sudan, there are devastating floods. And sometimes, the malnutrition clinics get washed away. But the irony is that you go just a few hundred miles south, and there's drought; there hasn't been rain, so there are no crops. It just seems like both problems are exacerbating the situation and these darling children.

So we have made a commitment, and this is our last week of Mission Feeding for this year. We've made a commitment to our partners who are on the ground right now, ready to go, that we would be able to feed 350,000 children. Do you know that \$30 will feed three children for three months? What could you do with \$30 nowadays? It's gone so quickly. But investing that into the lives of three children, and that that will feed them for three months? I like to call these "a bowl of hope" because that is what it is. We have factories on the ground that are able to produce exactly what these children need, the proper nutrients and protein that will give them strength to be able to grow up, to have hope, and a future.

And the other thing that I think is marvelous is to get a bowl; you saw me there in that food line. The children come to school to get their bowl of food, and they get an education. And they have hope.

Wouldn't this be a wonderful way to invest whatever God has entrusted us with to be able to make a difference in the lives of others? As I've said, this is our last week, and I don't want -- Betty once said that she prays the line of children will never be longer than the number of bowls of food that we have. Would you fill a few bowls today?

For any gift at all, you can ask for Kathie Lee's book, *The Jesus I Know*. Would you go online or call that number on your screen? \$30 feeds three children. If you can give \$100, that feeds ten children. \$1,000 will feed 100 children for three months. So please, please call now. Give the very best gift you can. Thank you.

Begin video clip

ANNOUNCER: Across the continent of Africa, children are suffering, facing severe malnutrition and even death. With food reserves gone and many areas experiencing severe famine, we urgently need to replenish supplies to keep feeding the 350,000 children who are counting on us.

Call now with your lifesaving gift of \$30, \$50, or \$100 to help feed and care for three, five, or ten children for three full months. Also, please consider an extra gift to help immediately rebuild malnutrition clinics destroyed by record flooding in South Sudan. This urgent need is \$392,000 above our normal feeding budget and is critical to help save the lives of those suffering most.

With your gift of any amount, we will send you *Christmas Grace*. This eye-opening, new 31-day devotional will give you a fresh perspective on the greatest gift ever given and the life-transforming hope found in Christ's birth.

With your gift of \$100 or more, request the "Love and Thanks" tumbler set with scriptures reminding us that "God's love never fails" and to always "Give thanks." These

tumblers will keep drinks hot or cold wherever you go.

Finally, with your gift of \$1,000 or more to help feed and care for 100 children, be sure to request our inspiring bronze sculpture, "Divine Servant."

This is the last week! Please call, write, or make your gift online.

End of video

In the studio

SHEILA: Thank you so much. And remember, with whatever gift at all that you give, request Kathie Lee's book, it's called *The Jesus I Know*: "Honest conversations and diverse opinions about who he is." It is a beautiful book! And Kathie Lee, thank you for joining us again.

KATHIE: I love you, Sheila!

SHEILA: I love you too. You radiate the love of God.

KATHIE: I hear you've got a pretty fantastic one out right now that is doing great!

SHEILA: Yeah, it's doing pretty well. [Laughing]

KATHIE: Okay, let's not forget that.

SHEILA: Thank you. We will see you next time here on *LIFE Today*. God bless you all.

SHEILA: And don't forget, as we get close to the end of the year, don't forget to get in those year-end gifts. Let's make a difference, in Jesus' name.