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Week 12: Rescue LIFE

Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh

Max Lucado

SHEILA: Welcome to *LIFE Today*! I'm Sheila Walsh here with Randy Robison, and I am excited about today's guest. One of my favorite people on the planet! And if we go to other planets, I'll still like him better most. Max Lucado has written so many phenomenal books, but 26 words can change the world. Welcome, Max! It's so good to have you with us.

MAX: Well, I'll just say you need to improve your standard if I'm one of your favorite people!

[Laughter]

You've got to jack it up a little higher there, Sheila. It's great to see you both.

RANDY: You're a favorite of a lot of people; one of the favorites, at least, of most people who like to read. You've written some really fabulous books that speak to people. Why this book on John 3:16?

MAX: Well, it's always been my favorite verse. Of course, I'm not alone. John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son so that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life." I don't think I've ever gotten tired of quoting that verse. I never have. I just love it! One reason is because I'm an old converted drunk. I'm the guy that you would not want your daughter to go out with. The college version of

me was just an utter mess. I never doubted if there was a God, but I certainly doubted that God could love someone like me. So John 3:16 changed my life.

And then I've just found such hope in the words through the years that I just feel like we need to go deep in each and every word, especially in these days, which so many people are so discouraged, so weary, so worn out.

SHEILA: Max, what would you say to people who say if God loves us so much, why is my life so hard?

MAX: Yeah, I think we don't get why we're on the earth. I think we quite... we need to go back to square one. We're on this earth to make a decision regarding the greatest invitation ever given. And that is, will we spend forever with God on a restored planet and renewed bodies and in a perfect relationship with him or will we turn our back on him? Will we walk away and he'll honor that request? So really, it comes down to that.

I think we've gotten all messed up. We think the reason we're on this earth is so we'll be happy, so we'll have six-pack abs, so we'll have a lot of money -- that's where we get off track. Because those things just don't happen. Some of them might but a lot of them don't. And consequently, the world just gets messed up -- the world just gets messed up, especially when you've got a young version of Max Lucado out there drinking a six-pack every night. He's going to create chaos wherever he goes. So multiply that by several billion and you're going to have a chaotic messed-up world.

So that's why we treasure John 3:16, for God so loved the world, even with its chaos, even with its screw-ups, even with its people who have turned their back on him. God so loved us that he gave his one and only son, no one else like him in all of history, his one, and only son, that whoever believes in him. If you're a "whoever," I'm a "whoever" -- whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life.

RANDY: You know that's a scripture that any of us who grew up in church we've heard,

we've seen it on the banners at football games. You've seen it in the background at movies sometimes; it's kind of funny. But I think we take a little bit for granted the power of the totality of the theology encapsulated in those 26 words, depending on the translation. How important is it that we understand the theological ramifications of that one scripture and how really it is the Cliff's Notes or whatever they call it these days.

MAX: You're hitting the nail on the head. I think it is in many ways each word is like a theological textbook: God, loved, world, gave, one and only, son. I mean you go right now down through every term, and you have a wealth, really a summary of the great Christian hope, all the way down to eternal life -- perish and eternal life. So yeah, the scripture is brilliantly brief -- it is brilliantly brief. It is small and brief enough that even a kid, a child can memorize it. And it's deep enough that the greatest theologian will never exhaust it.

SHEILA: It is interesting, Max when I was speaking at a conference a few weeks ago, and I was talking to a couple of young women who told me they were believers. But they said that they think that there's all sorts of ways to get to heaven. She said, "You were very dogmatic tonight about Christ being the only way." If you'd been there what would you have said to them?

MAX: I would say, I get it. That's the human nature in us; we want to say there are all kinds of ways to go to heaven. But Jesus is the one who makes the path narrow. He does this himself. He presents himself as the one and only son. What that means is "monogenes" in Greek. It is the only person who has the genetic makeup of God. I don't have the -- my daughters have my genetic makeup. I have the genetics of Jack and Thelma Lucado. But I don't have God's genetic makeup but Jesus did. So he presents himself as absolutely and utterly unique -- no one else like him in all of history. Consequently, he can do what no one else can do. He can present himself as the perfect sacrifice for an imperfect Max.

And so, it's not at all that heaven is trying to keep people out. In fact, heaven did

everything necessary to bring people in. Now, I think it is just a tool of the devil to say well, you've got a lot of different ways to do it. The fact is, only one person is the one and only son, only one person is that. And that one and only son did what only the one and only son could do. When we believe in him, then we receive eternal life.

RANDY: What I love about this is that it points out that all of us as believers have this encapsulated kind of entirety of the message of the gospel, at least enough to share with anyone. And if we understand the significance of each of these words and phrases that you're talking about, it allows us to get into a deeper conversation like we're doing right here. But this is such a great place for every Christian to just go back to. This is like a home base; start here and then you can share.

I like the first two words, "for God" because there is a personhood implication there. It is not a feeling, it is not some you've got your god, I've got mine. No, like this is a one-person -- this is God, which opens up the ideas that it is intentional, it is someone you can know, it is not weird, new agey kind of thing. No, this is a person of God. How important is it that we know that it starts with the person of one God?

MAX: I tell you what, Randy, you should have written this book. That is a great point because all 3:16 does is unpack the nature of God. It does! You could look at 3:16 and go down each word and say, now what does this tell us about God? For first God loved. And then we see the immensity of God's love. And then we see the sacrifice of God's devotion, that he gave his one and only son. But then we also see the justice of God in that there will be people who will spend their lives turning their back on God, telling God to leave them alone. Consequently, God honors their choice and they do not spend eternal life with him but they perish. So you could go through John 3:16 and just allow it to reveal all the different -- well, not all of them. But many of the manifestations of the character of God.

SHEILA: 3:16 unpacks God's unending love. We were just wondering while we were talking, who have you experienced that kind of love from in human flesh?

MAX: It would be my wife, Denalyn.

SHEILA: I love her!

MAX: She is a delight. Well, I'll just share with you a story. About ten years ago, our church bought iPhones. I don't know why we did but we bought iPhones for everybody on staff. I showed up at church one day and I had a new iPhone on my desk. I put filters on everything. I just don't trust myself. I don't trust myself to know that I'm two clicks away from seeing a picture of a naked woman. And so everything that I have has filters. Well, that phone did not have a filter. And so I thought, I wonder... and I clicked, clicked, clicked; and next thing I knew there she was. Well, I'm sitting in my church office. Can you -- just the utter humiliation. Lucado! Oh, I felt so terrible.

So later that day, I went home and I had the phone. I emptied my pocket and I put the phone on the island in the kitchen. And Denalyn, my wife picked it up and said, "Oh! You've got a new phone!" And guess what popped up?

SHEILA: Oh wow!

MAX: That picture. Well, I mean it was -- I was beyond words. I was so embarrassed, and she was beyond words. Mortified. Well, somehow we went to bed and when I woke up the next morning, I went into the bathroom and there on the mirror in lipstick, written like a Valentine-shaped heart on my side was the picture of a heart and the words, "I love you. I forgive you. Let's move on." Well, that's the love I've received all my life from -- not all of my life through Denalyn but for almost 41 years now. She has displayed to me that kind of love. I don't deserve it -- I don't deserve it but it's godly love. It is a divine love. I tell you what, I look at Denalyn and I say, "Honey, you're proof of grace because I don't deserve a wife like you."

RANDY: I might have had a different message on my mirror written in lipstick that

looked a little bit more like a horror movie.

[Laughter]

The hard part of that scripture does come at the end, and that is for those who reject the grace, this idea of perishing. We love the eternal life part and we should and we should urge everyone to go there but there is this hard reality of that choice. What do we need to know about that aspect of God's grace that if we reject it, it doesn't end well?

MAX: I think a conversation about hell should begin with understanding how many invitations, how many invitations God has issued to keep us out of hell. Every rainbow, every slap of a wave against a beach, every bird, every ministry, every conversation with a -- every time we've held a baby. Any time we've done anything beautiful, God is saying, this is how much I love you. This is how much I love you.

And then, when we look at the life of Jesus, the only picture of God ever taken, Jesus Christ, and the fact that he positioned himself on the cross as if to say if you want to go to hell you've got to go through me. This is how much I love you. And how he died, how he knew no sin became sin for us.

So I think if we're going to really talk about hell, we start by talking about God's love and everything he's done to keep us from there. But then, we also acknowledge the fact that God is a just God. And nobody in heaven is going to look up and say, boy, I didn't want to be here. Nobody in heaven!

As C.S. Lewis famously stated, the doors to hell are locked from the inside -- the doors to hell are locked from the inside because there are people who spend a lifetime saying, God, leave me alone. Leave me alone. I don't want to hear what you have to say. I don't care what you say about money, about love, about sexuality, about purity. I don't care! I don't care! Leave me alone. And a just God ultimately honors that request. So spend your life telling God to leave you alone and he will do just that.

It's a terrible thing! Anybody who has ever preached a sermon on hell and done so gleefully or glibly has not studied hell deeply. Because it is the greatest tragedy ever. But I believe that God is doing right now -- even right now -- through an old drunk like me, a converted drunk like me, he is trying to get people saying don't go there! Don't go there! But he is just. He is just and a just God must honor our request.

SHEILA: What would you say, Max to somebody watching and thinking, I've messed up too badly. Can you out-sin the love of God?

MAX: I said that -- I did. But the truth of the matter is, what's plan B? If you don't trust the grace of God, what is plan B? Tell me. Are you just going to live your life in misery, beat up? No! The great grace of God redeems us. It turns us into better people. It brings joy into our hearts; lets us live with that punch drunk awareness that we're loved by God, we're known by God. Yeah, we screwed up! Yes, we do screw up, but God has chosen to love the world. He doesn't just love the holy. He doesn't just love the pretty. But he loves the world. He loves us all. So let yourself be loved by God.

RANDY: And I want to end it with those last two words of John 3:16, and let you talk a little bit about that. Because the older I get, and the more difficulty I see, and of course, we've been through the COVID and everyone has lost someone along the way, the more I think about that everlasting life or eternal life depending upon the translation, do you think about eternal life a lot these days? And if you do, what do you think?

MAX: I love thinking about heaven. I really do. I find such joy. I believe heaven is the green vegetable or the vegetable on the Christian's diet. We need to lift up our eyes and look, set our minds on things to come. I get really excited. I'm one of these guys, too, who believes in a literal restoration of Jerusalem and Israel. And whether people agree or disagree with that, that's secondary. But it does get me excited to think about someday going to Jerusalem and walking through the gates and seeing the great city and all the *Saints* who have come and gone before, and enjoying fellowship with them and hearing

stories, living in a graveless world in a tireless body and a tearless existence.

Then to know that someday we'll see Jesus! I can't even get the plumber to call me back. But to think that someday I'll see Jesus? And I'll get to kneel before him, and I'll feel his hand on my chin. He'll lift me up, he'll wipe every tear from my eye! Yeah. I mean the hope of heaven is really the greatest hope of humanity.

SHEILA: I think it's much better than that. This is such a fantastic book, Max and we're going to tell our viewers in a minute how they can get a hold of their own copy. But when somebody finishes this book, what is your prayer for each person who reads this book?

MAX: Great question. I would pray that they would get God. That they would just kind of get -- they understand these core theological terms. And that maybe they've been put off by people like me, who even use the phrase "theology." "That's not for me!" But they'll see that they have access to the big ideas of God; that would be a better way of saying it. They'll attract to beautiful big ideas of God.

SHEILA: Beautiful!

RANDY: I love it! I love it! It's just good news and we appreciate you sharing that with us. We want to show our audience something because there is some good news that needs to be spoken in parts of the world where they only get bad news. But today, we can make a difference. And when you participate with us today, we would love to send you Max's book when you request it; it will bless you. But take a moment to watch this and see how you can be a blessing to someone else.

On the mission field

ANNOUNCER: The fact that children and young women are being kidnapped and held captive is intolerable. But what happens next to these innocent victims is unthinkable.

>> I would scream and cry and say I didn't want to do that work, but the lady would beat me with a big stick. I still have the scars on my arm from her beatings. One girl that was in there with me had her throat slit. Another had her breasts cut off. After seeing all that torture, I was terrified I would get murdered too, so I did the work they forced me to do.

ANNOUNCER: Angolie's story ended well because she was rescued from her captors, and she has started the healing process. But there are thousands of other victims and children at risk who are not so fortunate. They are still waiting to be rescued.

>> I pray that before more girls die in there, we can get them out so they can have hope and a new life like me.

End of video

In the studio

SHEILA: A child! Can you even imagine the horror of -- these are little children! And for them to be taken into this devastating world where they're used and abused! I actually got to speak to somebody who used to be a trafficker. He had become a Christian, given his life to Christ, and changed his ways when we were in Southeast Asia the last time.

He told me the terrible things they do. They'll tell these little girls, "Come to the city and we'll get you a good job and you'll have lots to eat. You'll be able to care for your family." But usually, if they're given a meal the meal is drugged. And then they'll wake up in some horrible little room with some man that's probably 40 years older than they are and they're crying out for help.

And honestly, this is one of the things that I feel so passionately about. As long as you and I, as long as the body of Christ is on this earth, then the mandate is that we come in Jesus's name and rescue these girls.

Think about, if you just look at social media, think about the things we're arguing about and the things that are polarizing us: Do you believe this or do you believe that? One thing I believe is if you love Jesus you want to make a difference in the lives of those who are hurting. And Randy, we have found a way over the last 15 years to do this very thing.

RANDY: Absolutely. Really, what they're living in is a hell on earth. We come in and we say, "Here's the hope of heaven." That's really what we're giving these children. And it's up to you to join us with that. As we reach and rescue or restore the lives of these children, we're reminded this is the essence of the gospel to show love in word and in deed.

We have some partners right now that have stepped up and said we have \$320,000 to offer -- \$320,000 to offer as a matching gift. What does that mean? That means the gift you give today will be doubled in its impact; \$128 is normally the average cost of the operations because we have people on the ground who are committed to doing this. They're out there in the field. You don't have to go but we need to support them. And \$128 is the average cost of the operation to reach, rescue, or restore one child. But now, today, that gift will reach, rescue, or restore two. Your gift of \$64 will now be doubled to reach, rescue, or restore one child. Your gift of \$1280, if you can make that will reach, rescue, or restore 20.

Whatever it is that you can do, we are asking, Sheila, my parents, all of us at *LIFE*, the missionaries in the field, we're saying will you undergird us, support us, enable us to do this work of heaven?

I pray that you will go online or go to the phone right now and make the best gift you can. And know that we are pulling these children out of their hell and giving them, showing them, the love of heaven. Do it now.

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 warn children who are at risk for sex trafficking, rescue those already enslaved, restore young lives and give them a future.

We have 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 the *Prayers For Life* Journal, a perfect book to write down your prayers as you reflect on your relationship with Christ. With your gift of \$128 or more, you'll also receive the N.I.V. Thinline Bible, along with 365 days of *Prayer For Life*, a beautiful devotional filled with scriptures and key thoughts for each day of the year. Keep all three resources close by for your daily prayer time as you meditate on God's Word.

Finally, please consider a gift of \$1280, which will now help save 20 children. And you may request our inspiring bronze sculpture, "Let the Children Come."

Please call, write, or make your gift online.

End of video**In the studio**

RANDY: I hope you are going online or going to the phones and making the best gift you can. We have great news to share with these people. We want to reach out and we rely on you to help us do it.

Today, when you do, Sheila, I want them to request Max's book.

SHEILA: Yes! I love -- love, love, love this book, 3:16, "The Numbers of Hope." In a world that is so angry and lost and polarized, this is some of the best news you'll ever hear in your life.

Max, thank you so much for sharing this with us; sharing this with our audience. We're going to pray that God will take this as far as it could possibly go. Thank you.

MAX: Thank you. It's a great joy to be with you and to see you both.

SHEILA: We will see you next time on *Life Today*! God bless you.