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Week 12: Rescue LIFE

Sheila Walsh

Michael Anthony Curtis and Jay Johnson

SHEILA: Hey everybody! Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm Sheila Walsh. I wanted to start this very important program by reading scripture to you. This is from Psalm 27. This is what it says; this is verse 13: Yet I am confident I will see the Lord's goodness while I'm here in the land of the living.

The reason that scripture is important to me is when I was a patient in a psychiatric hospital, and on the nights that it was the darkest, I would feel the enemy say, "Sheila, your life is not worth anything. Why don't you just end it? You don't have to do this anymore." I would literally drag myself out of bed, plant my feet on the floor, and I would read the scripture over and over: I believe I will live to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

For those of you who have ever struggled with suicidal ideation or anything like that, I just want you to know that's what we're going to be talking about. If that's a subject that you're very sensitive to, I just want you to be aware.

But I have two guests today who are pretty amazing. First of all, I want to introduce you to someone called Michael Curtis. He's an incredible songwriter. I just want to say welcome, Michael. Thank you so much for being with us.

MICHAEL: Thank you for having me, Sheila.

SHEILA: Before we get into this particular song that you've written called "Live" tell

our viewers a little bit about your background in songwriting because you've got quite a list of credentials.

MICHAEL: Yeah, I've written for Randy Travis -- just several different artists over the years. But the Lord has always had his hand on me. This particular song here, I was working with the army and they have 18-25 soldiers a day that commits suicide. I was looking to write something for them, and I was at a church in February of 2019 and a pastor came in for two separate weeks. One time was a 14-year-old boy and the other time was a ten-year-old boy. I couldn't believe it. I looked at my wife and said, "Honey, ten years old! Our granddaughter just turned ten! What is a ten-year-old even thinking taking their life by their own hands?"

I knew I had to do something so I got with one of my good songwriting buddies, Doug Stokes, and we finished it in April of 2019 but COVID came along and different things and it sat around. But in August of 2021, the Lord said it is time to get it back out.

SHEILA: Yeah, it is an incredibly powerful song. I just want you all to know, in a little bit, you're going to get to watch this music video.

But let me introduce you to my other guest, Jay Johnson. Now, I'm familiar with you but from the fact that for 20 years you were the Dallas Cowboy's Cheerleading trainer. That's quite something.

JAY: Yes.

SHEILA: Was that something that... I'm kind of wondering how you go from that to suddenly becoming involved with Michael. How did you guys meet?

JAY: That's a great, long story where Bruce Jacobson --

SHEILA: Our executive vice president.

JAY: Yes. He came in the nick of time. I know it was the Lord that put him on my mind. I met him years ago, 15 years ago, maybe for two minutes -- two minutes. Yeah, it came to mind. I wasn't struggling with anything on that level but I was going through some things in my life. He kind of confirmed it by the conversation we had, and then just filming and meeting Michael and everyone else on the set, it changed my life.

SHEILA: You had this very casual meeting with Bruce years ago and then you're struggling with some issues in your own life and out of the blue, supposedly, Bruce just called you?

JAY: Yes, and it confirmed a lot of things that I was going through; a lot of questions I had for the Lord. When I picked up the phone, he said exactly what I was going through. He said --

SHEILA: Wow!

JAY: Yeah, it was really good. It's really good.

SHEILA: What did that do for you as a person?

JAY: It gave me hope. First of all, after the crying stopped...

[Laughter]

Because the spiritual, and there was a break, and you know it was the Lord. As a matter of fact, that's what he said. He said, "If I was a megachurch pastor, I would say God told me this." And that was the whole thing about it because I had a prophetic message about God telling me these certain things would happen, and it didn't happen. And so my belief was kind of shot. Then when he said that, I fell out.

SHEILA: When did you first get to hear the song that Michael has written?

JAY: They played it; Bruce played it on the phone. He played it on the phone.

SHEILA: How did that song hit you?

JAY: Well, I understand the transition between soldiers when they're getting out, having done it myself, having done the self-isolation and the miscommunication with the civilians out here. Luckily, I transitioned straight into the cheerleaders, but a lot of those things are still with me where the disassociation for the civilian population is still there.

Like I told Bruce and Michael, I don't think I ever transitioned -- I don't think we ever transition. You're trained.

SHEILA: How many years did you serve?

JAY: Twenty years.

SHEILA: Thank you for your service.

JAY: They just paid me to grow up. But I'll take that.

[Laughter]

SHEILA: That's amazing.

JAY: I'll take that.

SHEILA: Michael, let me ask you, how did we go from you writing this really powerful song to this video that we're going to show our audience in a few moments?

MICHAEL: Well, Doug and I got together in August, and I told him, I believe the Lord told me it's time. We got with a buddy of mine, Jimmy Thrasher who owns the 501c3 that we're running our initiative through, Silent Witness, Inc. But he said, "Man, I want to help you guys." This man lost his wife to cancer. He almost grieved himself to death. He said, "I almost committed suicide by grief." So he said, "I want to help you with this."

So we got the song recorded and I sent it to Bruce, I think on a Friday. Bruce calls me Monday and says, "Michael, I cannot get this song out of my head."

I said, "I hope that affects millions of people that way, Bruce, because if we save one -- if we save one it was worth recording and doing."

Two days later, I was working doing some construction work and my phone rang and Bruce said, "Michael, do you trust me?"

I said, "Absolutely I trust you."

He said, "We were here last night working on a storyboard. I want to do a video for this song. Let me tell you the concept."

Sheila, I could hardly breathe when he got done telling me the concept. I was so emotionally moved. I was like wow! What a concept!

And then the next day he introduced me to Jay and we cried and had church on the phone. Just how God put it all together in that period of time, and Bruce Jacobson, and I know he does great work for you there at *Life Today*, but his brilliant concept and the whole team out there, how the *Life Today* team came together and worked on this -- amazing! I hope it wins like a video Oscar for you guys or something because it is amazing.

SHEILA: Well, I have to tell you, I remember Bruce calling me into his office and he

said, "Sheila, you have to listen to this song." Because my father died by suicide, and I've struggled with those thoughts myself and listening to this song it was, do you know what it felt like to me? It felt like heaven's answer to hell's lies. That's what it felt like to me. It is so, so powerful.

So what I want to do at this point is, I want people to get a chance to watch this video. And then we'll come out and we'll talk a little bit more. But if you know somebody who has struggled, whether it's a teenager, whoever, this is not just a song written for those in the military, this is a song written for our day, for our time. If you know anyone who you think, I think they need to watch this, then I just want to encourage you to watch this now, and then we'll talk a little more. Please watch.

["Live" by Curtis and Stokes]

I can't imagine what you've been through
And I won't pretend to ever understand
How this world pushed you back in a corner
And the only out you see is to see it end

You feel that you have no one
Given all that you can give
My friend, I found the secret
The only thing you have to do is live...

...for the life that you deserve
til you get beyond this hurt
Can't you see how much you have to give
For the ones that need you most

Live and don't give up the ghost

Don't die for a lie

No matter what you do...LIVE

I can see how hard you're fighting

But the battle's over; go lay down your gun

Look up, though you feel no one can love you

There's forgiveness no matter what's been done

At the point of no returning

You don't know what to do

You're blinded by the darkness

If you want to see the truth, you've got to...Live

...for the life that you deserve

til you get beyond this hurt

Can't you see how much that you have to give

To the ones that need you most

Live and don't give up the ghost

Don't die for a lie

No matter what you do...LIVE

Guitar solo (over chorus)

Live

For the ones who love you most

Live and don't give up the ghost

Don't die for a lie; no matter what you do

My friend, if you want to see the truth...you gotta live.

...Please Choose to Live

SHEILA: Wow! It's hard to know what to say. Jay, even watching that again, how does that impact you? You don't look like you're acting in that.

JAY: No, I'm not acting. I'm not. Even just watching it right now, I have to turn away a little bit just so the full impact doesn't hit me. Yeah. Because I remember during that time filming how I was and just imagining someone else out there that's going through this to the point where they would actually arm themselves is just overwhelming -- it's overwhelming.

SHEILA: It's so interesting for those who say that God doesn't still speak today, which is absolutely not true, I asked Bruce, why did he call you? And he said that your face, it was as if the Holy Spirit brought your face up in front of him and he picked up the phone and called you. Don't tell me God is not still at work in this world.

JAY: You want to see me cry. Okay!

[Laughter]

SHEILA: But that's who our God is.

JAY: Yes! Yes!

SHEILA: Michael, when you saw the finished thing, I'm just wondering how it still hits you. You've seen tremendous success with your songs as a songwriter, this to me is like the next level. This is had like lifesaving; it's not just good music.

MICHAEL: Sheila, I mean, I still to this day get emotional. When you look at the C.D.C. numbers where 12 million people, this is 2019 numbers, the 2020 and 2021 numbers haven't even come out. But 12 million people in 2019 thought about suicide? 12

million! We're at 3.5 million people planned it; 1.4 attempted. Thank God less than 50,000 but still, that's one every 11 minutes. And to me, by God blessing Doug and I with this song and Jimmy Thrasher blessing him to help us record it, and *Life Today* and Bruce and the guys and Jay everybody that was involved in this video, if we can save one, and it's already saving and touching lives. To me, this is just a beacon of hope that can shut down the lies of the enemy. That's where those people, that's where I know that young Miss U.S.A., it just breaks my heart to think that that young lady still had so much life to live. I pray she'll be...

SHEILA: A beautiful 30-year-old woman -- 30 years of age! Beautiful -- everything to live for!

MICHAEL: I just wish that I could have played her this song or showed her this video. I pray to God that there's another 30-year-old or 13-year-old, whatever, whatever their age group, it is not just about the military. You know the second leading cause of death for 10 to 24-year-olds is suicide. Second above diabetes and heart disease -- suicide! It's a lie from the enemy and we don't need people dying for a lie.

SHEILA: I just want to talk to those of you who are watching right now. What you just heard is absolutely right. It is a lie from the pit of hell that your life is not worth living. Let me just read to you -- this is when Paul wrote to the church in Rome. This is 20 years after he was saved. He's gone through everything. He's been stoned and left for dead; he's been thrown in prison. His life has been an absolute wreck in so many ways. But this is what he writes to you and I today. He says this: And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love, neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today or our worries about tomorrow, not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above and the earth below. Indeed nothing -- nothing in all of creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

And if you find yourself in a place right now where you're thinking, you know what? I

can't do this anymore. I can't get through this. It's too hard. I don't know how to live. I don't know how to communicate with the people around me. Nobody knows I'm literally hanging by a thread. I want you to know we have a God who sees everything, who knows everything. He put that image into Bruce's mind, into our Executive Vice President to call Jay who was wondering, God, do you still speak to people today? And God was saying, yes, I do. And yes, I love you.

So I don't know where you're watching. I don't know what you've done in your life, but we all together as a family here at *LIFE*, Michael and Jay, we say to you in Jesus's name, live! Choose to live! The enemy would love to wipe your life out but we say in Jesus's name no! Absolutely not! We have a God in heaven who thought that your life was so worth saving that he sent his one and only son, Jesus, to die on the cross so that we could know the peace of knowing that we are loved by God.

So if you're struggling, please tell someone, reach out for help, call that number if you need to. We have lots of prayer partners here too at *LIFE*. But we're just asking you to choose to live. Because even as that video portrayed, this man who is thinking there is no point in me going on living, his very life was what saved the life of a child. You have no idea what God has planned for your life. Yes, you've walked through a dark valley, a valley of the shadow of death, but when you come through that other side with the power of God with you, God will use your life to make a difference.

So I just want to say to you, Michael, to you, Jay, we don't have enough words to say thank you. Thank you for doing this. Think of the people that will watch this and say, you know what? He's right! He's right. I want to live! I want to live. So thank you to you, Michael.

And here at *LIFE*, we're pretty committed to people who are hanging by a thread. You know that one of my greatest passions here is seeing young girls rescued out of sex trafficking. That will never change as long as one child is being held against their will, that will never change. I want you to watch this video and I'll let you know how we can

help. And I'll also let you know how you can get in touch with Michael and find out what God is doing through his life. Please watch this.

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: When we moved into 2022, it just seems like the world has gone so crazy. Everybody is so mad about everybody else and so polarized. They're arguing about things that eternally don't make a difference. I've been asking God, Lord, what do I do with the rest of my life? And it is so clear, you do what Jesus did, you care for those who are hurting, who are broken.

And the thing that I've seen in all my trips to Southeast Asia, these are little girls. They're

not somebody who has chosen a certain kind of lifestyle. These are little girls. Sometimes they go out at night to gather the beer cans from the bar because they can sell them, and that's when they are kidnapped and drugged. They wake up the next morning and they're beside some old man and they're like 13, 14 years old.

Here's what I think. As long as you and I, as the body of Christ are on the earth, we have to say, this is not okay. Because the traffickers, it is a multibillion industry: Stealing and imprisoning children. We, as the body of Christ, have got to be stronger voices than the voices from the pit of hell. Because honestly, that's what it feels like to me. When I walk down some of those streets and they're just these bars and these young girls and they're made to look like they're 20 and they're 12. Everything inside of me screams this is from the pit of hell!

But we come in the name of Jesus. We come in the name of one who left heaven to rescue us. So that's our commitment here at LIFE to reach; that means we go into the villages and we warn these children. If a guy comes in and says, "Hey! I've got a great job for you in the village." Run as fast as you can and scream as loud as you can. Then rescue, we'll go to places where these children have already been captured. And so we will break through the doors at midnight, and literally, rescue them and make sure those pimps are arrested. And then restore; we will bring them to one of our beautiful places where they can learn that they are not a number to Jesus. They have a name. They have a future. They have a hope!

So what I'm asking is, will you join us in doing this? We have this phenomenal matching gift at the moment. Some of our partners have said, "We will put up \$320,000." Normally, it takes about \$128 to begin that process of reach, rescue, or restore, but now if you're able to give \$64 that will be matched by our partners and you'll be part of rescuing one child.

So if you can do \$128, then instead of rescuing one girl, it will be two. Some of you might be able to do \$1280; that will now rescue 20 children. We want to tell them that

Jesus loves them, but first of all, we have to get them out of the hell they're living in. So please, will you go to your phone? Make the very best gift you can. Let's rescue them just as Jesus rescued us.

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

SHEILA: Thank you so much for helping us help those who need it most. Michael, how can people get in touch with what you're doing?

MICHAEL: Well, they can contact SilentWitnessInc.org and they can find out all about the not-for-profit that's helping us with this living initiative. We also have a challenge coin.

SHEILA: Actually, Jay's holding this. Tell us about this, Jay. What is the significance in the military of a coin?

JAY: In the military, this is a drive-on piece, an appreciation of a job well done. Truth be told, you can also cash this in. You can always cash this in. It is like a get-out-of-jail-free card just to let everyone know, that a company or above, your commanders, your sergeant majors, they usually carry these and they exchange them.

SHEILA: They shake hands with you, you get the coin.

JAY: Yes.

SHEILA: But this one has got the word *live*. No matter how you turn the coin, no matter how you hold it, it says, "live."

So Jay, thank you! Michael, thank you so much! We pray God's anointing on this song. And thank you all for joining us on *Life Today*. We'll see you next time!