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**Week 12: Rescue LIFE**

**Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh**

**Connor and Mary Bales**

**RANDY:** Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm Randy Robison. Sheila is with me. We're going to have in some ways a difficult conversation today but a very important one. We're glad that you are with us. But this issue of suffering is something we all have to face at some point in life, and we have to deal with it. Maybe you've dealt with it; maybe you're dealing with it. If not, you probably will at some point. So this is going to be very helpful for you. We have a couple here who has had to face it head-on in a very personal and ongoing way. So I'm excited to have Connor and Mary Bales with us. Thank you for taking the time to come over and talk to our audience on *Life Today*.

**CONNOR:** Thank you for having us. We're thrilled to be here.

**SHEILA:** I feel really honored that you're here. Connor is a senior pastor at the north campus of Prestonwood, which is my church and I heard you speak. I think I met you for the first time, Mary, at Joni Eareckson's President's Retreat. You spoke that morning, the Sunday morning, Connor, and it was a phenomenal message. You told a story about cutting a key. Tell our audience about that.

**CONNOR:** I was speaking on the subject of suffering. I think that the illustration I used that day was sometimes suffering can be understood like key cutting. If you've ever seen the process of where a key is being made, a raw piece of metal is laid over the master key and the process itself is very messy. It is noisy, it is messy, it is dirty. But in the end, what has been fashioned looks exactly like the master and it unlocks something very specific. And because suffering is not the same in that your suffering, Randy, is different from ours, which is different from Sheila's, it is all shared. The reality of living life in a broken world is that people are going to navigate

suffering. But if you can recognize that suffering is never wasted with God, then you'll understand that you are the raw metal and Jesus is the master, and God uses that process to fashion us to look more like his son. And then he is doing something, he is unlocking something that without the key of suffering, we might not otherwise have known.

**RANDY:** That is an interesting analogy because we say you cut a key and suffering can be, it feels very cutting. Tell people what you guys have been through just so they can understand.

**CONNOR:** You want to start?

**MARY:** No. Go ahead.

**CONNOR:** Well, I would say our family is very busy. We have been very blessed. We have five incredible children. I describe our life early in our marriage as charmed. It was a wonderful life, very blessed. We have two older children that are 17 and 15 years old, very healthy. And Mary had totally typical pregnancies. And then when we got pregnant with our third, it was also a very traditional typical pregnancy. Mary had no complications in utero. But when our daughter Libby was born, our third born, immediately we knew something was wrong. It was one of those moments where in the delivery room, a lot of doctors and nurses rushed in. There was a lot of conversation amongst themselves but nobody was talking to us. Pretty quickly thereafter, they rushed Libby to the neonatal intensive care unit. Then it was a few hours later when I was able to see her for the first time and discover some of the medical complications that she had.

And so subsequently, our world was turned upside down, and our charmed life was immediately changed. So we then began to navigate a new normal for us in discovering Libby had a heart defect that was going to require substantial surgery to repair. And while she was in recovery from that, they did genetic testing and discovered she had a very rare chromosomal abnormality. It was just so unknown, the prognosis, we were told she would likely not outlive her infancy.

So immediately, we went from this one understanding of life with our family and what we thought things were going to be to this new understanding of life with Libby. We have written a

book and kind of dedicated a lot of our life in ministry to helping people navigate seasons of suffering because it is a reality everyone is going to endure. And what God did for us and continues to do through the life that he's entrusted to us is helped to show us how you hold intention, the goodness of God with what is sometimes the badness in life.

**SHEILA:** I wanted to ask you, Mary, as a mom, because I remember when Christian, my son was little, and we thought for a brief period he had leukemia. I remember the emotions I went through, the bargaining, the give it to me, he's too little. What was going on in your heart when you began to realize what a struggle life was going to be for Libby?

**MARY:** Well, I think initially I wasn't bargaining. I was just saying I don't want to do this. This isn't what we had signed up for. Connor had been called into ministry out of the business world during this time and was attending seminary at night. So I think that in my opinion, we were doing all the things that the Lord would want us to do and so maybe we should be exempt. So I think, just thankfully, the Lord was so gracious. And it's been such a journey, Libby is 13 years old now. But I think that he just took us through that. We just learned very quickly that he was going to be enough.

One of the things about the girls' genetic abnormality is that it is so rare. When Libby was diagnosed there were 30 reported cases in the world, and only 15 of them lived beyond their infancy. And so I think very quickly we realized doctors were not going to give us a peace about this. Doctors didn't have the information. We weren't going to find a support group or friends that were going to be able to pour into us and help us navigate this road.

So I think, just so graciously, the Lord said, you don't need to because I know everything about Libby Bales and I know everything about her sister who was to follow. So it hasn't been easy and I think very early on I would say that I was defiant, that I did not want to do this. But the Lord was gracious and patient and has allowed us to walk that journey and to get to the point that we can say we feel counted worthy.

**RANDY:** So this would be an incredible story of what you've learned with Libby, but the odds

of it happening again, I don't even -- can't even calculate those odds. Tell us about Hannah.

**CONNOR:** So it took us a while, obviously. We migrated into a new normal and one of the things Mary and I were committed to early was that as long as we were going to get to love on Libby and that God had entrusted her to us that we were going to give her every opportunity we could afford. So we jumped headfirst into therapies and seeing specialists and trying to give Libby a life of flourishing, whatever that was going to be.

So it took us a while. I want to be honest about that. We were derailed and devastated, and our theology was put to the test. Our faith was really shaken. And so it took us a while to navigate this season with our third.

After a few years, we prayed and believed God wanted to continue to grow our family and we were fortunate enough to get pregnant with our fourth, another girl, her name is Hannah. And Mary had a totally typical pregnancy again as she had every other time before but this time we saw a perinatal specialist because we had all the reasons with her sister to make sure we had all the extra care. So we had been counseled in the process that while Hannah was measuring perfectly and looking normally, that it would be a mathematical impossibility of ever having had another child with Trisomy 16P.

And so Mary carried Hannah to 36 weeks and then went into labor naturally and perfectly. Although when Hannah was born, her complications were not the same as her sister's, Mary and I had a check. We just never quite felt right and because of Libby's condition, we had the justification to have her tested. When she was about ten weeks old we discovered on a Friday, our pediatrician called and said, "I need you guys to come in. The lab results are here."

**SHEILA:** Oh my gosh! It gives me chills.

**CONNOR:** So we did. And our pediatrician was amazing and walked with us. And through tears, told us that they had the laboratory run the results twice because they were convinced that they were not correct. And yet, we had a genetic twin to her sister, and Hannah had the exact

same diagnosis as Libby.

**SHEILA:** Having walked through that once, I can't even put myself there. I can't imagine. When you discovered, when you were given that kind of news, how do you navigate that?

**MARY:** So I get asked that question a lot. How devastating was it to hear it again? And the way that I describe it is to any parent if I told you, Sheila, you're going to have another child just like Christian, you're going to say, I'm so crazy about him! I would love another child just like Christian. Some things are hard; maybe he is strong-willed, maybe he has some tantrums or some behaviors that are difficult that we're navigating but I love him so much. Why would I not be overjoyed to receive another child just like that? And honestly, that is how it felt. It was scary and my journals, my entire pregnancy with Hannah literally said, Lord, you can do anything but don't give me another child with special needs. I cannot do it. I don't have the capacity. I don't have the endurance, I don't have the strength. Whatever you do, just don't give me another child with special needs. And he did, and then to see that child, it was like, it's going to be okay. The Lord is enough. And why wouldn't we want another child just like Libby?

**SHEILA:** Talk about the night when Hannah crashed, health-wise and Mary is not home.

**CONNOR:** This was rare. Mary does not get away much. She is very busy with our five children and so I insisted that she get a weekend away with some girlfriends. And so we lived at the time in east Texas, and she went to Arkansas with some girlfriends just for a weekend getaway. I knew I could quarterback with the help of the babysitters the rest of the kids at home.

And so it's not abnormal for our girls, historically, to have had a respiratory illness, and sometimes, it manifests in the form of pneumonia and other things. And so that spring, my daughter Hannah, our fourth, had had a significant number of pneumonia repeated throughout the spring. And so on a Saturday morning, I got up and went in there and I wasn't surprised, necessarily, that her breathing seemed shallow. I worked to try to do some things at home, some therapies at home to see if I could help stimulate that and we could wake her up a little bit, and things might improve, and they didn't.

I called for one of the babysitters to come over because I knew I needed to rush her in. I had a friend of mine who was serving as an E.R. Physician and I called and asked him where to go.

When I picked her up out of her crib, I knew something was wrong because she was limp. And so I rushed her to the hospital, and I took my older daughter with me because I needed someone to sit in the back seat because Hannah could not sit up on her own. So strapped her into her car seat, we rushed to the hospital and we get her in. Her oxygen levels were at a devastating low, devastatingly low, and they immediately told us that we would need to be care-flighted to Dallas.

I can remember the physician at the time, the attending was working to get her intubated over and over again. And they just could not get her intubated, and could not get her breathing under control. And I'm standing at the foot of her bed. Her older sister is standing a few feet behind and I'm weeping with worry and fear. And finally, the friend that I'd called a moment ago rushed into the room. He had been at one of his children's soccer games but he knew the urgency in my voice and he helped. After eight attempts to try to intubate he finally successfully got her intubated and got her breathing a little bit under control.

And I remember he walked down to the foot of the bed and he put his hand on my shoulder and he said, "We can get her to Dallas now." So what I knew in that moment was that they were not going to promise me that she would live but that she would have a chance. That began what was 31 days in the intensive care unit at a children's hospital here in Dallas.

Hannah had a stroke while she was in the hospital. I had to go one day back to east Texas to get my older kids out of school to tell them that we didn't think their sister was going to make it through the day. And it was through that season of suffering, really, where God did some of his greatest work through some of the worst things that we ever imagined having to endure.

**RANDY:** We could go on forever, but we can't so give us some of the big lessons that people need to hear in their suffering because you've been through it.

**CONNOR:** I think the biggest was, and Mary mentioned a moment ago, what it was like the day that the doctor gave us Hannah's diagnosis. So when we received Libby's news it was devastating and we were destroyed; all of our hopes and dreams were grieved in a moment and continued to be for all the subsequent losses of things along the way.

When we received Hannah's diagnosis, I was sad for her because I knew what her life was going to be. I wasn't sad for us. When we finally collected ourselves from crying with our doctor and we made our way to the car, we got in and began to head home. But before I turned the ignition over, the Spirit of God spoke to me very clearly and said, "I have counted you worthy to get to do this twice." And I turned to Mary and I told her, "You're not going to believe what God just said." And I told her and she said, "I feel it too."

And so the first thing I would say is, whatever suffering God has entrusted to you, whether that's the fear of leukemia or frustration with a mental health crisis or the loss of a loved one or two children with severe special needs, God has counted you worthy of it and he never wastes our suffering. And so God can always be understood as good, even when life is understood and should be recognized as bad.

**SHEILA:** One of the things I wanted to ask you, Mary, is what do people say? I can imagine when people see you with the girls, it's obvious there is something wrong, I'm sure people have said stupid things to you. What can we say to people? I'm thinking of our viewers thinking I don't know what to say and so sometimes people just stay away.

**MARY:** Well, my favorite is children because they just come up and start asking questions, which we have learned to just really welcome. And we've tried to teach our children the same. Our older children are very defensive of their sisters. They are very protective. So we've had to learn just some grace tactics of they're asking questions because they're interested and they want to know more. So my favorite thing is just when people just come up and talk to the girls because although they can't talk back, they love to hear people talk to them. They love to hear children laughing and teasing. They actually respond when you tell them they are pretty. They are such a typical female!

[Laughter]

I think anything that you would say to another child; just walking up acknowledging, we're so glad you're here, just attempting to have a conversation.

And at least for me, I can't speak for all parents that have a child with a disability but I welcome the questions. I would so much rather just answer your questions than have you wonder or assume. Because we have an incredible story and I feel like the Lord, that's how he uses our story to be woven in our day-to-day is we get to tell people about how God has done such a mighty work in our family through these girls that look so very different.

**RANDY:** How old are they now?

**MARY:** Yes. So, Libby is 13 and Hannah is ten.

**RANDY:** Last question, I have to ask. You say five children. After having two children with special needs, what in the world gave you the freedom to think let's have a fifth because I'd be terrified!

**CONNOR:** Well, so Campbell, my youngest is the greatest surprise of my life.

[Laughter]

It was the Lord's doing and that's the only way you can understand it. Here's the coolest part about our five children is that I think like many parents with our oldest two, when they were crawling we wanted them to begin to toddle, when they started toddling we wanted them to walk. So we just wanted to move from one milestone to the other. With Libby and Hannah, we grieved every one. They are 13 and 10 years old, cognitively, developmentally, about nine months of age; neither walk, neither talk. They require around-the-clock full-time personal care. With Campbell, it is like that passage in the scripture where the Lord says, "Everything the locusts

have eaten, I'm going to restore.” All the milestones we've just relished and celebrated, God has been so good to give that back to us. And again, our family is like this crazy circus, everywhere we go but I wouldn't want it any other way.

**SHEILA:** And she is adorable! Honestly, I cannot commend this book highly enough to you. If you're struggling with suffering, if you have a friend who is struggling, if you want to know how to move in and help, this book, *Counted Worthy* has had a real impact on my life and I want you to get a copy. So we'll make that available to you.

But first of all, I want to show you a different picture of what suffering can look like, and then I'll come back and tell you how you can get your own copy. Please watch this.

### **On the mission field**

**ANNOUNCER:** These are the faces of those who once were. Once were happy. Once were safe... loved... cared for. Now they are vanishing at the hands of predators... abducted... misled. To distant cities they are taken. In foreign lands they are held captive. Their childlike innocence is erased, freedom forgotten; their spirit and will broken under abuse -- under torture.

### **Open captions**

>> If the girls won't sleep with our clients, we beat them with a bat or electrocute them until they obey.

**ANNOUNCER:** Not only do these girls vanish, all that they were disappears too. Nowhere is there a darker evil than that perpetrated so viciously on the victims of sex trafficking. It may be the greatest evidence of Satan at work on this earth and it isn't going away without a fight.

Our Rescue Life partners are in place and ready to reach those who are most vulnerable, rescue those who have already been taken and restore the precious lives of those who have survived the wickedness of human trafficking.

**End of video**

**In the studio**

**SHEILA:** It's one of the most appalling things that I've witnessed in my life, sitting with some of these young girls in Southeast Asia and hearing their story. So many of them have no one who looks out for them. No church buses are coming to pick them up. They're left in the dark, darkest of darkness all the time.

Some people, one or two of you have written and said, "Why don't they just leave? Why don't they just escape?" It's so complicated. These little girls are told, hey, we'll get you a job in the city and you can send money home to your families. When they discover that's not the reality, they've been drugged and now they're trapped in this life, they're told if you try to escape, we know where you live and we know you've got younger sisters. So it's your choice, you stay here or we go get them. It is an absolute nightmare.

I've sat with these girls sobbing on my shoulder talking about what it is like to have to have sex with these older men over and over. And some of these girls are 12, 13, 14 years old. We've had the privilege of sitting there and praying with them as they give their lives to Christ but they need another kind of rescue.

Randy, we've been doing that for a long time and the need is greater now than it's ever been.

**RANDY:** It is. And a lot of them don't have any place to go. But for 15 years now we've been giving them a place to go. That's what we do when we reach, rescue, or restore these young children, mostly girls, but some boys too. This is so big in our hearts, Sheila, that we know we can't stop. The need is great.

Over the years we have averaged out the cost of this outreach and it boils down to about \$128 to reach, rescue, and restore one child. Now we have a great opportunity right now because someone, some of our faithful friends have stepped up and said, we're going to match the gifts during this campaign. So your gift today is doubled in its effectiveness and its power.

So for \$64 that will effectively reach, rescue, and restore one child. What does that mean? The

bottom line is it means whatever you can do today is going to make a difference in someone's life. You're going to give someone that place to go. You're going to give them hope and a future, which we know is the heart of God.

So whatever you can do today, if you can give a gift of \$1280, that will help reach 20 children; a gift of \$128 will reach two, rescue, restore. It will turn things around. It will give them an out because that's what they need is an out. And we always do this in the name of Jesus Christ. So we give them the ultimate hope.

So I am hoping now that you'll take action. Go online, go to the phones, give the best gift you can and join Sheila and I and all of those here at *LIFE Outreach* as we rescue these lives. 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**

**SHEILA:** Thank you so much! If the lines are busy, please keep calling. Let's be God's rescue vehicle for these children. Connor and Mary, thank you so much for being here. Thank you for this phenomenal book *Counted Worthy*. It's amazing.

**CONNOR:** Thank you.

**MARY:** Thank you for having us.

**RANDY:** Yeah. We appreciate you sharing and be sure when you make your best gift towards Rescue LIFE to request Connor and Mary Bales' book and we'll gladly send it to you.

Thank you for being with us. We'll see you next time here on *Life Today*.