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Week 41: Rescue LIFE

Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh

Jeremy and Caleb Freeman

SHEILA: Hi! I'm Sheila Walsh. Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm here with Randy Robison. I'm real excited that they tuned in today, Randy because I'm thinking of a number of you right now who just feel hopeless, who have seen the things that have been happening in our country and around the world over the last couple of years and you think, life is out of control.

Well, our guests today would beg to differ. Their book is called *But God*. Please welcome Jeremy and Caleb Freeman. It is so good to have you here.

JEREMY: Thank you so much. It's good to be with you guys.

RANDY: Now this is not just a book title or a T-shirt slogan for you guys. Could you take us back to the time when life radically changed, and you had to figure out what the *But God* could do in your lives?

JEREMY: Absolutely. Caleb was 16 years old, driving down the road. It was a regular day in the Freeman household and lost control of his truck and a semi-truck hit him, 75,000 pounds. Fast-forward to the emergency room; they're not giving us any information on him. I pulled this nurse to the side, and I said, "Ma'am, can you tell me what's happening with our son?"

She said I don't know—she says, "Nobody's talked to you yet?"

I said, "No." She said, "I don't know how to tell you this, but your son needs a miracle."

We had already lost a son several years ago to cancer and the thought of losing another child was unbearable to us. So I got my phone out and I sent a message to my staff, my family, and my close friends and said here's what the doctors and nurses are saying. And I typed in two words, "But God." I had no idea that it would ever be on a T-shirt or much less a book. It was our desperate cry in that moment that God has the final say. No doctor, no nurse, God has the final say. So we were crying out to him. That's really what *But God* means to us.

SHEILA: You're a pastor, right?

JEREMY: Correct.

SHEILA: And you dedicate this book to your brother and your son, Trey. And I wondered how the tragedy in your family has impacted who you are as a pastor.

JEREMY: I would say that in my life God has used suffering in more ways than anything else; more than my education, more than even other ministry experiences. But suffering has kind of shaped us into the person I need to be, the father, the husband, the follower of Jesus, and of course, the pastor that I need to be. Suffering has a way of doing that. Our verse is Second Corinthians 4:18, "We fix our eyes not on what is seen but what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, what is unseen is eternal." So suffering has shaped me in more ways than I can even communicate.

RANDY: Now Caleb, after the accident, they didn't know if you would live. They said you might not ever walk or talk. What have the last several years been like for you?

CALEB: It's been amazing. God has just shown me what the true heart of God is by how much he cares because I had so many odds stacked against me, like "Caleb, you'll never walk, talk, or eat again." Whenever you're being told those things you feel pretty hopeless. But then you notice, after thousands, I've—love them to Jesus. He shares

things, all his miracles performed, and now I can tell you as a 21-year-old who is eating, walking, and talking, I can tell you, it doesn't matter what people say about your life because God will always have the final say.

SHEILA: I'm just wondering how you have changed as a person. Because I read in the book that you used to, of all the kids, that you were the shy one. That seems to have changed. Explain that process to me. What happened in you?

CALEB: That's out the window. Because when God uses you, he has to change you all the time first, and that's exactly what I'm seeing God do with me. Because I was terrified to talk in front of any people before the wreck. God knew he had a message he wanted me to share so he's given me a boldness and a desire to just talk to everyone I come in contact with because they treat me like, like everyone, they're worth it. Eternity is a very real next chapter in everyone's life. So I feel like he's given me this story so I cannot waste a moment, not waste an opportunity to share with every single person I come in contact with so that hopefully they can embrace the same hope I have.

RANDY: That was in 2017, the accident?

JEREMY: Uh-hmm.

RANDY: Now he still has some difficulty with some motor skills, his speech, right? But take us a little bit through the journey of the last several years.

CALEB: Wait! I'm kind of confused.

[Laughter]

Are you saying I have difficulty of speech?

Are you?

RANDY: That's what I heard from--

JEREMY: Actually she said it.

SHEILA: No! This is why I love you because you have this crazy sense of humor.

JEREMY: Yeah, he's quick-witted, isn't he?

RANDY: Yeah, yeah. So obviously, there is a lot that's happened from the wreck until now. I'd love to hear some of the progress he's made and continues to make.

JEREMY: Well, it is amazing. The doctors were pretty honest with us the first night. They didn't expect him to live through the night. They said, "If he does wake up, your son as you know him will never be the same again." They did not expect him—he was going to be on support for the rest of his life.

RANDY: They meant that as a negative.

JEREMY: They meant that as negative. That's right. Absolutely. And so we ended up finding this hospital in Denver, Colorado. We moved our whole family up there and we would spend five months, five long months there. But one day, he'd been in a coma for eight weeks, 2 months, and we asked him every day, hey, nod your head, blink your eyes, give us a thumbs up. No response. Then one day out of the blue his occupational therapist said, "Caleb, can you nod your head yes?" And what did you do, Bro?

CALEB: I just--

JEREMY: Nod the head. Boom! What took you so long? So he wakes up and God just begins to wake him up. He made some tremendous progress at Craig Hospital at that point. Then we went to Omaha, Nebraska, to another hospital for three months. He had to have his left ear reconstructed in Boise, Idaho.

So he's been through the gamut of treatment and therapy. Then we got back—and he was the number one cross country runner in his high school, varsity basketball team. He's having to relearn how to tie his shoes and just do all the normal things. So that first year was hard for us as a family. He was in a wheelchair, walker, and just slowly, steadily day by day, week by week, God just kept restoring him.

Caleb has a great motor, a great work ethic so we like to say God did it but God put in him also what was also needed because Caleb had to work hard too. He worked really hard. So here we are five years later. And they say you don't make any progress two years after the accident, but what do we say to that? Hashtag *But God!* God has the final say on that. Right?

SHEILA: Let me ask you, have you ever asked God why me?

CALEB: Um, early on I was like why am I still holding on to what I wanted for my life? I wanted to be a professional athlete so bad. But he tells me, that sometimes God's dream for your life is different from yours. Because my dream for my life was to get like a great big platform playing sports. I'd never share Jesus that way. But God showed me his plan was so much bigger and better because by taking sports away he's allowed a bigger platform than I ever thought possible—out of that. So they tell me, that was honestly easier to get than it would have been to get playing sports. So God's plan is something I would never trade.

RANDY: How has his journey impacted your church and your immediate family?

JEREMY: You know one of our big concerns when Caleb was in the coma was our other children; having had already lost a brother, just the idea of another one possibly being gone, as parents you realize, man, you try to protect and guard your family but at the end of the day, God loves them more than you do. So you have to release your kids to the Lord in so many different ways.

By God's grace, every one of our kids loves the Lord. Our two little ones, they're figuring out how to love the Lord. They're little. But our older kids, they've embraced our life. And I actually think suffering has helped them. They're very mature for their age, our children, and our church—

SHEILA: How many children do you have?

JEREMY: We have a total of seven. Trey is with the Lord, but six, and we adopted our last two. So here we are, Emily and I in our mid-40s and we're raising little ones again, right? It is like what are we doing?

SHEILA: I'm not worthy! I'm not worthy!

[Laughter]

JEREMY: But our church has been amazing, too. And I mean, you kind of grow through suffering together. Our church is strong. When you suffer together, you grow together, and then the Lord has just poured out his spirit upon our church and we're seeing God do amazing things in our church as well.

SHEILA: One of the things I love about the book is you've got excerpts from Emily's journal in here. Your mom started writing in this journal while you were in intensive care. I wondered how your marriage has been impacted. Because people often say that grief is a greater wedge than it is glue. But for you that doesn't seem to be the case.

JEREMY: Well, it is interesting because here we are in Dallas, we're filming this, and it is the anniversary of our son Trey going to be with the Lord nine years ago. I was thinking about this, where would I be today if I didn't have the Lord? Well, I'd probably be dead because I don't know if I could have handled the grief on my own. Or I'd be divorced because most people, most couples that have all the suffering, it doesn't push

them together, it pulls them apart.

But truly, by the grace of God, my wife and I, our marriage is stronger now than it's ever been. I think suffering has a way of doing that. If you let the Lord do with it what he wants to do it makes you stronger. We grieve differently, we've gone through things differently, but we've given each other space to grow and all those things. And our marriage is awesome. We serve the Lord together. Here we are today, instead of wallowing in our grief, we're letting God use our grief for his glory.

And so in some ways, we get strength by telling our story and by watching what God is doing through our suffering. Because it matters—all suffering matters. Nothing is wasted with God and we both believe that.

RANDY: What do y'all see, both of you, when you share your story because it is a family story, what do y'all see from the people that hear you?

JEREMY: What do we see Caleb?

CALEB: I love it. For me, it shows me that I feel like I'm a nobody of this earth. What I'm saying is that God doesn't need someone who is like Superman on this earth. When God wants something done, he is going bring it to pass through whatever means is necessary. Because I'm watching as I'm speaking and sharing about the suffering I felt like I had, I'm thinking it wasn't all about me because for this momentary time we're on this earth, if I have to live with a brain injury that is so worth it because I'm sharing about this wreck and seeing people change their eternities for all eternity. Like that's so worth it. That doesn't just affect them day to day, it affects them for all eternity.

SHEILA: And what a perspective! If every one of us had that perspective how it would change? You even went on and graduated from college. What was that first day like showing up?

CALEB: Well, it was pretty awesome. Honestly, because no more going to school—I had to think of how I was in elementary, middle school, and high school, I was a very shy kid for most of the time. So I thought about what would I do if I went to college as a shy kid? Probably one—like. Did my work without talking to people. But the fact that God's changed me so much to where I'm talking to every single kid in my class, I'm getting to know the professor, I'm thinking, this is such a more fun way to live. Like I love it!

JEREMY: Listen, when he walked across the stage at graduation he was like the most popular kid in this school. He'd only been there two years; this is a two-year degree because he got to know every single person. Hey, Jesus loves you. God loves you. He was always on a mission.

SHEILA: I watched that. It was amazing.

CALEB: And this is why I say curse you COVID because when I was in high school, I had a goal to learn every kid's name in my high school and would have gotten there I just needed time, but COVID shut the whole school down.

SHEILA: Well, I don't think anything will shut you down anymore. [Laughing]

CALEB: Thank you.

SHEILA: When you look forward to the next two or three years, what do you hope to see God do through your life?

CALEB: I just pray that more and more forgiveness all over the country can continue to come because that's what I love to see. I love getting to share and seeing kids as they respond to the gospel. That's what encourages me to keep on living and keep going because if God can use me, I feel like that's a God worth living for.

RANDY: It would be easy, it would be understandable if you guys just sort of retreated,

just took care of your own. But you guys have really made an effort to reach out to others. Why is that such an important part of who you are?

JEREMY: I think, like I mentioned earlier, it's a part of our healing, it is the way we heal. Caleb and I, it's not just about the stage. He loves to travel. We like to say we're father and son but we're like college roommates, I mean we're living together a lot.

RANDY: I'm sorry! I'm sorry!

JEREMY: Exactly!

CALEB: Thank you. It's much appreciated.

JEREMY: We get lots of road time together, but we've been in the smallest little church in Oklahoma, one of the biggest in Texas. But what I love is everywhere we go, people lock into Caleb, whether it is a child or an adult, God's hand is on his life. So we're seeing, like really, we're seeing people's lives changed. We also make a lot of hospital visits, and we pray for people. That's why we're excited about the book, we can give the book to people and say, man, this is our journey. This is what God did in our life.

And so, I think to answer that question it's we've seen people's lives changed is what keeps us going. To know that you only get one life, right? Only one life; it will soon be passed, only what's done for Christ will last. That's what C. T. Studd said, and it's like, that's our mission, right?

SHEILA: That's absolutely beautiful.

RANDY: What is the website if people want to contact you or preorder the book?

JEREMY: It is ButGodTheBook.com. You can go on there, get all the info, and contact us—ButGodTheBook.com. And it's got freebies, some of Emily's journal freebies are on

there. It's just really kind of a cool, cool thing.

RANDY: And they can ask you to come to their group, their church, or whatever?

JEREMY: Absolutely. That's right. We love to come. Again, there is no place, this guy will speak in a closet somewhere. So we go anywhere! It's a blessing.

CALEB: I would speak in a closet like with an audience of just two people all the way to an audience of like—.

JEREMY: A million!

CALEB: 47,000.

[Laughter]

RANDY: Is that the cap? Okay, we'll keep that in mind.

JEREMY: 47,000 is the cap.

RANDY: Seriously, if you're interested in contacting them, please do. You know their heart for reaching out to help others who need help and to restore them to our creator God, it's the heart of us here, Sheila. And I'm excited about what we get to do in that regard as well.

SHEILA: Yeah, one of the things that we care most about here at *LIFE* is that right now there are many young girls around the world who have been trafficked and who feel there is no hope, and we want to bring that *But God* message to them. So will you watch this?

On the mission field

SHEILA: This is the hardest trip I've been on with *LIFE*. The situation in Southeast Asia is getting so much darker. We have been out on the streets at night, and we've seen these little girls being forced into sex trafficking. And yet, to balance that I have seen real hope.

ANNOUNCER: *Human trafficking is one of the darkest evils in this world. The depravity it takes to kidnap, to sell, and to rape a child is matched only by the virtue and strength needed to oppose it. Fighting such systemic evil requires a prayerful strategy.*

Our teams on the ground work alongside local law enforcement to rescue girls who have been trafficked into the sex slave trade by conducting raids and arresting the criminals involved. Survivors of sex trafficking have often spent years in captivity and their minds and personalities have been altered. To restore these girls, we provide them with shelter and offer them the hope and healing only found in Christ's love. It's been said an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

SHEILA: As I watched these kids today, I thought, this actually could be the most important day in their life. This could be the day they learn what human trafficking is all about. This is the day that they get equipped to know what to look out for, and what to say no to.

ANNOUNCER: *In another part of the world there is a girl entirely unaware she is about to be kidnapped and sold. But if we can reach her before the predators, we'll save her from a horrific future and completely shut the traffickers down. Reach, rescue, restore, more than words, this is a fight against hell itself.*

SHEILA: God is moving in the darkness and saving lives one life at a time. Please keep helping us! It's changing the world.

End of video

In the studio

SHEILA: I will never forget my first trip. I thought I understood a little bit about sex trafficking, I knew nothing! So many of these girls that I was spending time with are 12 and 13. And they're just young innocents. Some guy will go to their village and say, hey, would you like to come and see? We've got some little puppies in the van. Or if you come to our village, we can feed you a really good meal. And they're innocent! They're like, yeah, thank you! What happens is they drug their meal, and that child wakes up hours later with some man beside her who has raped her. And she's just a child.

And honestly, after my first night, my first day and night there in Southeast Asia, I remember going back to the little hotel where we were staying and literally laying on the floor and just sobbing because it felt so overwhelming, it felt so hopeless. But I felt the Lord say to me, Sheila, get up and dry your eyes and do something. And that's our commitment. It's a three-part thing, reach, where we go into the villages and we teach these children what to avoid, what to run away for. And then we literally are Christ's boots on the ground. We will go in at midnight and kick down those doors and bring these young girls to this place. We've got a beautiful place. One of them is called "House of Destiny" where they're told you are not a number to God. You have a hope and you have a future.

But we're asking you to help us. Randy, if we all do our bit, we can change the world for these people.

RANDY: Oh, yeah. And for those of you who are wondering, yes, we do also have operations here in the United States where we go in and break up these rings. We have safe houses for women. This is a global effort on our part because we think it is that important.

But we can't do it without you. And you guys, so many of our viewers have been so faithful. In fact, many have stepped up in this campaign and said we want to provide a \$320,000 matching gift which means, normally the average cost of all of our operations and the results, it costs an average of \$128 to reach or rescue or restore one child, one

young adult. But through this matching gift that means a gift today of \$64 will achieve that. Your gift of \$128 would help reach, rescue, or restore two children. Maybe you have the means to do that for 20 children, a gift of \$1280.

Whatever it is that God has enabled you to do and puts on your heart to do, we just ask that we all join together. You with us, our partners in the field, and let's make a difference; let's go into these dark places all over the world, shine the light and the love of Jesus, and shut down this evil.

Will you go online or go to the phone today? Make the best gift you can and know that we will be rescuing and reaching and restoring lives with your help today.

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, and restore young lives and give 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 "I Hear His Whisper." Each entry in this beautiful 365-day devotional will encourage you with words of comfort, joy, and love as you encounter God's heart and hear his gentle voice.

With a gift of \$128 or more, you'll receive "What Does Your Jesus Look Like?" This

captivating book by sculptor, Scott Stearman shares compelling stories and beautiful images revealing how we can be the image of Christ to a watching world.

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 giving us a call right now. Make the best gift you can. And thank you for your continued support. Sheila, I have been so blessed by today's guests.

SHEILA: Yeah! The book is fantastic. I just want to sort of ask Caleb, any final thoughts?

CALEB: I feel like—works for me. Like depression is so easy to fall into. I feel like I would have fallen into it so easily, as hard it is to focus on the things I lost in my wreck, which were any hope of becoming a professional athlete, because that was always a dream I had in my heart for myself. Mom saying that God has also left me on this earth with a lot of new things that I didn't have before the wreck like this platform, this influence, this boldness, this is all new. And once I began to—one time—I've seen God use me in ways he never could before.

SHEILA: Look out world! Caleb is on the way! Check out their website and thank you so much for being with us. We've loved it and we'll see you next time on *Life Today*. God bless.