

10/12/22

Week 42: Rescue LIFE

Sheila Walsh

Nona Jones

SHEILA: Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm Sheila Walsh. I'm so glad you're tuning in to this particular program. I have this book in my hand that you're going to want to have in your hands, and I'll tell you how to do that in a minute, it is called *Killing Comparison*: "Reject the lie you aren't good enough and live confident in who God made you to be." And it is by my guest, Nona Jones. Welcome, Nona!

NONA: Oh thank you. So glad to be here, Sheila.

SHEILA: I remember the first time I met you, we were both doing a *Better Together* program and I was so blown away by your story. I wonder why did you choose to write this book at this time?

NONA: So I've been so blessed in my life. Like right now I hold an executive role at a large tech company. The Lord has allowed me to pastor a local church with my husband in Florida and speak all over the world and all these things but at the same time, I've also wrestled with insecurity. And I wouldn't have known I was insecure unless there was a situation that happened early in the pandemic. You know, probably like all speakers, yourself included, all my speaking engagements got canceled. And I was on Instagram one day and I saw a friend make a post about this huge women's conference that she was going to be speaking at. It went virtual because of the pandemic. And the next post I saw was another friend who was speaking at this women's conference, and then there was another one and another one. And suddenly, I thought, why wasn't I invited?

SHEILA: I totally get that.

NONA: Like why wasn't I invited? Like why wasn't I invited? Why wasn't I good enough? Why was I overlooked? And all these thoughts began to run through my mind when the Holy Spirit asked me, Nona, why does it matter? Like you have all of these things going for you, why does it matter that you weren't invited to this thing? And that's what started my path to this question of what is it about comparison that makes me feel less than? And how does it show up in other people's lives?

SHEILA: Because if you follow Nona, and it is Nona not Nora, on Instagram, you would never guess that because you are so polished, so gifted. I remember listening to you the first time and thinking, Lord, what a great job you did with this woman! But take us back to your childhood. Because your childhood was incredibly hard and you're very honest about that.

NONA: Yeah. One of the things I talk about in the book is that words have power. And the words that people speak over us shape our understanding of who we are, whether that's for the better or the worst.

So when I was growing up my father passed away when I was young, I was almost two. My mother moved us to a whole other state, and she met a guy who became her live-in boyfriend. I was about five years old when he moved in, and shortly after he moved in, he became sexually abusive to me. And after the very first time he assaulted me, he even said to me, "You better not tell your mother because she never wanted you anyway."

And hearing that from him placed a question mark on my heart. So not only was I dealing with the physical pain of what happened but then I was also dealing with the psychological and emotional pain of now I'm not wanted by my mom. And she began to act in ways that corroborated it. She would call me names. She said I would never be anything. She called me fat. And then when I finally told her he was being abusive, I was about seven, and she had him locked up. But on the day of his release from jail, she took me with her to pick him up and brought him back home.

So that action really communicated to me that I'm just not good enough. I don't matter to the people who should love me and protect me. And I think those words, you think about the book of Proverbs, how it says, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue," that word power is the word *yad*, the Hebrew word *yad* which means the hand. And so the words that we speak shape, create. And so my mom's words broke me, broke my identity, and my understanding of my value.

SHEILA: What do you do with that kind of pain as a very young woman? Did that make you—I mean how did you feel toward your mom?

NONA: I didn't know how to process it because I didn't grow up in a Christian home. I didn't have any framework of God, Jesus, hope, the Bible, none of that, and so the way I dealt with it is at the age of nine I tried to end my life. I didn't even know what was on the other side of death, but I just knew that life was painful. I felt rejected by my mom, her boyfriend was hurting me, and she became physically abusive. It wasn't successful, thank God, but at the age of 11, I tried again because I could not see another path, another way.

But it was shortly after that second suicide attempt that my sixth-grade classmate invited me to church. And the very first sermon I ever heard, Sheila, this is how I know God is real, the very first sermon I ever heard, the pastor preached out of I think it was Psalm 68, where it says, "God is the father to the fatherless." I remember thinking I don't have my father so who is God? And that started me on my journey to understanding who is God and who is Jesus and who am I in relation to them? I think that's how I began to learn that there was hope after pain.

SHEILA: There was—I found when I was reading your book, you tell the story of something a boy said to you in high school but what you actually heard. Tell us about that.

NONA: So I, for the vast majority of my life, was morbidly obese, especially in my

childhood. You wouldn't know it now, I lost 100 pounds, and thank God for that! But in elementary, middle school, and high school, I was very overweight. So in the ninth grade, I went to a football game with some friends, and we were sitting in the bleachers. And one of my friends saw a guy friend of hers walking by and she said, "Hey, come sit with us!"

And up until that point classmates had called me fat, sloppy, Miss Piggy, all these things about my body, but when he tried to walk by to get to the corner of the bleachers where there was a seat, he stumbled, and he fell like into me to where his pelvis rubbed up against my backside. And I just yelled. I was like "Aah!" And he looked around and he saw that people were staring at him and laughing at him.

And he turned to me and said, "What are you screaming for? Nobody wants you. With a body like that, you're not good for anything except sex with the lights off."

And I, again, that's ninth grade. But what I heard him say was not that nobody wants your body, I heard him say nobody wants you because I had equated my body with my identity, and that plagued me for so many years. So much so that I eventually became bulimic as a result of that.

SHEILA: There is something you mentioned in your book that I just thought this has got to be the most honest transparent woman. You know where I'm going! [Laughing] And I found it funny but it's not funny really because it was just—we all do things that we think will make us feel better. So I'll just say the name of the country, Brazil.

[Laughter]

NONA: So the story is because I had a really negative view of my body, and one of the concepts that I talk about in the book at length is: insecurity is not about self-esteem. A lot of times we think if I just say good things and affirmations if I just memorize the good scriptures then I'll have high self-esteem. But insecurity isn't about self-esteem. It is really

about, what is your identity secured to? And for me, for many years my identity was secured to my physical appearance. So as a black woman, we're known for our curves, we're known for having voluptuous bodies. And I got my dad's chest and my mom's butt; like just flat all the way around.

And so when I was old enough and I had enough resources, I decided I was going to buy a bootie. Listen. I worked hard at it. [Laughing] People, when they hear this story say, why don't you just go to the gym? I worked for ten years doing squats, donkey kicks, Bulgarian split squats, and all that. My legs got toned, my back got toned, but my butt didn't budge. So I was like I'm going to go ahead and get this procedure.

When I decided to do it, I prayed. I said Lord, protect me when I'm under anesthesia, all this. I heard the Lord say, Nona, if I wanted you to have a bootie, I would have given you one. I didn't give you a bootie to keep you humble. Now I heard the Lord say that. I still got on the plane to go get the procedure. Now while I was on the plane, I heard the Lord say again, Nona, if I wanted you to have a bootie, I would have given you one. I didn't give you a bootie to keep you humble. I said, Lord, I'm just going to be humble with a bootie. So I went, I got this procedure. I kid you not, Sheila, six months later the bootie was gone. Because it was fat transfer and I work out at high intensity.

SHEILA: You do, I watched.

NONA: So the fat burned and after that, God told me, Nona, you've secured your identity to something that I didn't even design you for which is why you're insecure.

SHEILA: I want to talk about the whole idea of *Killing Comparison* because honestly, I knew some of your story, but reading everything, I thought, you've gone through so much, and yet I know you now as this incredible, godly woman. What were some of the steps that the Lord used in your life to help you kill comparison?

NONA: First he had to humble me.

SHEILA: It's a bit of a gift though, don't you think?

NONA: It is a gift. It is a spiritual gift because we spend so much time denying insecurity. For many years, if somebody would have said to me, "Nona, I think you're insecure." I would have been like what are you talking about? I love the Lord! I'm so excited when he blesses people. What are you talking about? But I was truly insecure. So God had to help me see me the way he saw me. And that was step one. And once I was able to see myself and realize, wait a minute, I've secured my identity to some things that are unstable, that is subject to other people's approval and validation, and we all are, that was step one.

And then from there, I had to begin to study how to celebrate other people's success instead of feeling threatened by it. The story of Jonathan and David in the Bible is one that—

SHEILA: Yeah! I wanted to ask you why Jonathan was so significant in your life.

NONA: Let me first say that was a God revelation because I've read the story of Saul and David for years! And it wasn't until I was going through this journey to get free from toxic comparison that God said, focus on Jonathan. What I realized was, even though Saul and David get all the headlines because Saul's insecurity was triggered by David, the reality is David wasn't a threat to Saul because Saul was king, David was a threat to Jonathan because Jonathan was the heir to the kingdom. But Jonathan loved David and he celebrated David, and he protected David. I was like how is it that the one person that David threatened was the one who loved and celebrated him? That's when God began to show me, it is because Jonathan secured his identity to who God said he was.

SHEILA: I've never seen his story that way before. That is really powerful. I'm just thinking of people watching, and I know from the mail I get, and I know you're so in touch with what's going on, do you think that social media has impacted how we view

ourselves even though that's very much your world?

NONA: Yeah. It's absolutely my world. And one thing I do realize is social media gives us access to other people's lives. So we start to see things that we wouldn't normally see. On top of that, though, I think social media often gets blamed for causing insecurity when in fact, social media simply exposes insecurity.

What do I mean by that? Two people can see the same post, one person can walk away inspired another person can walk away expired. Why is that? It's because of the posture of our heart and how we see ourselves and where our identity is secured. And so, once we recognize that, then when our insecurity is triggered, we're no longer blaming the other person or blaming Instagram. It is like Lord, what's happening in me and shows me me.

SHEILA: You talk about toxic comparison leads to—we wrestle with four things. You said bitterness, sadness, fear, and shame. For somebody who is watching thinking, that's my story, that is my life! How do you begin to secure your identity to who Christ sees you as?

NONA: Well, I think those emotions are indicators that there is insecurity in our life. When we see somebody else succeed and we start to feel that. Maybe we feel so with shame. We start to say, I could never be like that. I could never do that because I'm fundamentally broken as a person. That's an indicator that there is insecurity there. So we have to then go to God and say, Lord, help me to reclaim the ground of whatever this lie is that has made me believe that I'm anything less than who you have said I am.

One of the revelations God gave me was in Jeremiah 1:5. A lot of times we think oh, life begins at conception, it is in the womb. But if you read what Jeremiah 1:5 says, "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you." So that means before the sperm met the egg God knew you. There was purpose on your life before you were conceived, there was intentionality. So when you understand that you realize, wait a minute, I don't have to feel shame. I don't have to feel fear or anger or feel like I'm competing with somebody else

because there is purpose on my life. Now the question is how do I find that purpose and live it out? But the purpose is already there.

SHEILA: I think that's really powerful. I remember when I was struggling in my own life, and before the Lord began to bring healing, I realized that if you got to the very foundation stone of my soul, the message written on it was: You're too broken to be loved. I think that's one of the things that the Lord wants to do in his body. Because one of the things I find hard at the moment is the way that on social media we're going for one another. The body of Christ should be fragrance rather than noise but so often we're noise more than fragrance. Is that something you see in your line of work?

NONA: Absolutely. Yeah! And it is so sad because what we don't realize is the way that we show up in these spaces is a reflection of the God we claim to serve. So if we truly are not our own any longer, if we have been bought with a price, if we are ambassadors of Christ, everything we do, everything we say, everything we share is a reflection of him. So when we go after each other it makes people who don't know Jesus say, "Why would I want that? I don't want anything to do with that."

SHEILA: So let me ask you, do you still struggle, or are you at a place where you've like—because my pastor once said to me because I always say I've got like these 12-15 pounds that are homing pounds. I can lose them, but they find their way back home. And my pastor once said, "If you just carried all of your diet books up and down the stairs a few times it would be a done deal!" Have you come to a place where it is not an issue anymore?

NONA: It is always an issue. And the reason it's an issue is that we live inside of this. And so it is our flesh that gets triggered when we see someone else's success. The difference though is God has taught me how to address it through spiritual insight and wisdom.

I had a situation happen recently where a friend of mine who is an author released a book,

and it was a huge success. And the moment I saw it, I was like, uh! I've got a book coming out. And I saw it. But do you know what the Lord said? The Lord was like practice what you preach. So what I did is I went to Amazon, and I ordered their book. And I sent them a text and I said, "I just want you to know I'm praying for you and I'm excited for you. I can't wait to see what God does in your life." And immediately, Sheila, I'm not exaggerating, I felt that thing drop off of me. Because now I am a partner in their success, I'm not seeing them as competition.

SHEILA: Now not all comparison is toxic, is it?

NONA: Right. Yeah. There are two types. There are two ways that comparison shows up. So physiologically, when we inhale air in our lungs it is called inspiration. That's what the process is called. We feel invigorated. We feel inspired. When you see someone succeed at something that you want to do and it inspires you, you feel invigorated. You go, I'm going to go crush the world! This person has done it so I can do it too!

Well, on the opposite side physiologically, when you exhale air out of your lungs it is called expiration. That's why when a person takes their last breath it is called their expiration date. So you feel fatigued. You feel overwhelmed, you feel depressed, you feel discouraged. When you start to feel those things, those are just signs that toxic comparison is in your life as opposed to healthy comparison. Healthy comparison inspires. It's the toxic comparison that expires, and we have to be conscious of the two.

SHEILA: If people want to get in touch with you, Nona, how do they do that?

NONA: So across all of my social channels, my user's name is the same. You said it earlier, it is: Nona not Nora, because I was introduced in Sydney, Australia once as Nora Jones.

[Laughter]

I was introduced as a Grammy award-winning artist.

SHEILA: Please sing now. Yes!

NONA: I felt so bad. It was like I'm so sorry to disappoint you all. But it is Nona not Nora. You can also head to *Killing Comparison.com* to order the book.

SHEILA: And we're going to pray for God's blessing and favor on this book. And I'm going to tell you how you can get a hold of your copy of Nona's book.

But first of all, one of the things that we care about deeply at *LIFE* is the fact that there are so many girls at the moment where comparison would take a whole different meaning. It would mean looking at somebody who is free and thinking, I wonder what that would be like. But you and I can make a difference in their lives. So watch this and I'll tell you how you can get your copy of Nona's book.

On the mission field

SHEILA: There are some things you can't unsee or stories you can't unhear, and honestly, you would not want to. I've seen things on this trip that are worse than anything I could imagine.

I just spent some time with a little girl who is now 11, and she's been forced to have sex with men, with strangers, sometimes four a night since she was nine years old.

Open Captions: I was born into a poor family. I have a stepmother who makes me go out begging for money... I beg until late at night. There are men who rape me and take me to a bad place.

SHEILA: I'm so, so sorry! Do you have to go with men every night?

Open Captions: Yes. I'm scared when I have to go out at night. I just want a good home with food to eat and a place to sleep.

SHEILA: The scripture says the Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. I've seen what it looks like to be crushed in spirit when you're 11 years old.

So this is our moment to be Christ in the flesh to those who are broken.

End of video

In the studio

SHEILA: That trip changed me. For some reason, I had it in mind that girls who were sex workers were older. There was maybe sometimes a choice; I thought well, maybe some of these girls are struggling financially and that seems like the choice, or maybe they're supporting a drug habit.

But those girls that we're working with in Southeast Asia, that is not their story. She was nine years old, and it was her mom, the one who should be covering her and making sure she is safe. It is her mom that would send her out at night. And that's what they do because so many of these children are born into incredible poverty. But if they go out to the clubs round about midnight and they pick up all these beer cans, they get like a quarter for eight beer cans, and so often that's when they're snatched, and that's when they're drugged, and that's when a precious little girl wakes up next to an older man and this nightmare begins.

I asked one or two of the girls, do you ever think of running away? And one girl who was 11 said to me, "My traffickers told me, 'I know where you live, and I know you have a younger sister. And I just want you to understand clearly, if you run away, I will go and I will get your sister.'" And so often they're having to make this devastating choice at an

age where they should be in school and they should be laughing and playing with their dolls.

When you look at the made-up faces in some of our pieces, you think, well, they look sophisticated. You scrape that makeup off, they're just little girls. So what we're asking you to do is would you help us? Whenever I'm there, whenever I spend time with these girls I promise them A, that I'll not forget, and B, that I'll come home and tell their stories because they can't.

So we have some of our friends here at *LIFE* who have put up a \$320,000 matching gift. Usually, to begin the process of reaching, rescuing, and restoring a child costs about \$128. That might be way too much for you, for your budget but if you could do \$64 that will be matched, and then one girl will be given the opportunity to live a very, very different life. If you're able to do \$128 that will be matched, and two children will be able to have an opportunity to live differently.

What does it mean to be a follower of Christ on the earth at this time? For me, it means that we have our eyes open, we have our ears open, we listen to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, and when they're struggling, when there are people crying out for help, in fact, let me read you one of my favorite verses from the Psalms. And it talks about that very thing. This is Psalm 18: He reached down from heaven and rescued me. He drew me out of deep waters. He rescued me from my powerful enemies.

That's our commitment. This is one of the most evil things on earth at this time. It is a work of hell. But we want to come in Jesus' name and see these little ones set free. So please, call now. Just give the very best gift that you can and together let's make a difference.

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

SHEILA: Thank you so much! And remember for any gift, request Nona's book. Nona, I know you've served on a task force addressing human trafficking. Why is that important to you?

NONA: Well, first of all, I just have chills feeling so sad for the young girls and boys

whose childhood and whose innocence is just so viciously ripped from their lives. I think that this issue is one of those that people don't think of because it is hidden. It is in the dark. It is one of those things that you know, if you don't think about it it's not there. But it is happening all the time.

When I used to serve on the Georgia statewide human trafficking task force, we would hear stories all the time about young people who were trafficked in and out of Atlanta for football games, major football games, and the N.F.L. games, and basketball games. You can see these young girls walking around in these high heels and you would think, oh, she's just trying to be grown. No! She is being trafficked.

And so I think as Christians, we have to care more than condemning. We have to care enough to restore. And that's why I'm so grateful for this effort.

SHEILA: That's powerful. If you would like to get your copy of Nona's book, *Killing Comparison*, we need this book, then just let us know for any gift at all. Nona, thank you so much for being on *Life Today*.

NONA: Thank you for having me! I appreciate you.

SHEILA: And we'll see you next time on *Life Today*!