

10/19/22

Week 43: Rescue LIFE

Sheila Walsh

Irene Rollins

SHEILA: Hi! Welcome to *LIFE Today*! I'm Sheila Walsh. And I have to tell you I'm excited about my guest today. Her book is called *Reframe Your Shame*. Even just knowing what the title was, I was like, please book her on the show! Because I think this is a word for the days we're living in. Her name is Irene Rollins and I just want to welcome you to the program.

IRENE: Thank you for having me!

SHEILA: When I saw the title of your book, I was reminded of a guy called Lewis Smedes who wrote a book called *Shame and Grace*. He wrote this one line that I underlined and he said, "I lugged around inside of me a dead weight of not-good-enoughness." I so related to that sense of not being enough. Tell us a little bit about what made you write this book at this time.

IRENE: At this time, wow! I had to share what the Lord has done in my life. I had to brag on Jesus for rescuing me from myself. I'm, to date, this November, actually, I'll be seven years sober from alcohol addiction.

SHEILA: Amazing! Well done you!

IRENE: The Lord rescued me, yes, from myself while I was leading a church. I'm a mom, I'm a wife. On the outside, it looked like I had it all together. I thought I had to have it all together; the thing is I decided to write this book because I got sober; rock bottom was the foundation that I built the rest of my life on. So I'm so grateful for rock

bottom. And what got me to rock bottom was not feeling enough. It was the shame.

So I want to share with the world and bring awareness to people that a lot of the time we focus on the addiction or the thing that got out of moderation but there is always a root issue. In my story, it happened to be shame. And just that not-enough, man. It can turn into mental health issues. Then the mental health issue turns to reaching for something to cope and that was my story.

SHEILA: What's fascinating about your story, Irene is that you started drinking at ten. How did that even happen?

IRENE: You know it sounds crazy; doesn't it? But like I'm biracial. My dad was Caucasian American, and my mom was African from Zambia. And I lived—

SHEILA: I love Zambia! Been there quite a bit. Yeah, I love it.

IRENE: Yes, so I lived a lot of my life overseas, and my dad would bring home cases of Guinness. And I asked him one day, "What is that?"

And he was like, "Oh, it's Guinness. It's vitamins, honey."

He was joking, I'm ten years old. I'm like oh, vitamins! I'm going to try some. Helped myself to it. I didn't tell my parents, I didn't know I had to. I didn't know what alcohol was. And so that whole lack of awareness is when something can creep up on you without you even seeing it coming. I had one a day but I was changing and altering my brain chemistry at a young age. And culturally, the norm anywhere I lived overseas, alcohol was a part of everything we did.

SHEILA: So you went to boarding school. Is that right? Was that in Switzerland?

IRENE: In Switzerland, yes.

SHEILA: So were you able to continue drinking? Did nobody think, oh, that's not a good idea?

IRENE: Everyone else was doing it.

SHEILA: Really? Even though they were young?

IRENE: Absolutely. We walked right into the little convenience stores and I bought a six-pack of Heineken. But see here's the difference, my roommates could drink one or half of one can of beer and be tipsy. I could drink four. So there was something different about me in my relationship with alcohol even from a young age. And we didn't drink just to drink, we abused it, which kind of pushes you down the scale of the addiction slope.

SHEILA: Where did your relationship with Christ begin?

IRENE: I was 19; I got saved actually over the phone. Yes! I grew up Catholic. I didn't know anything about anything. I had my first communion at 16 because I was so eager, I just wanted to be close to God. So I was finding any way that I could possibly know him, and in the Catholic way, it was first communion and then confirmation.

Well, my friend asks me, "Do you know Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior?"

I'm a receptionist. I'm on literally switchboard kind of action back in the day. And I said, "No."

And she started telling me about Jesus and I was bawling.

So I was 19 when I say came to know the freeing power of Jesus Christ but didn't have the framework of the church and how do I walk this out? So it took me about a two-year

journey before I found a really good church home and simultaneously met my husband.

And so I gave up drinking, I gave up everything; gave up for lack of a better word, but I was more interested in my relationship with Christ from 21 to about 32. I was just popping out babies, serving God, loving life.

SHEILA: What I think is interesting though in your book, you talk about the fact that you have this marriage, children, pastor, everything is great. But inside of you, there was this not-enough. Is that what led you back into drinking?

IRENE: So about 32, we go on vacation. Again, my dysfunction was my normal, so not being able to communicate well with my husband, just being so emotionally unaware of what was happening internally inside of me. I didn't know how to articulate it. I didn't know people talked about shameful things. Like, who says these things out loud dealing with—I didn't realize I had P.T.S.D., sexually abused in my childhood. Flashbacks were just starting to come up in those early 30 days. So I didn't know what to do with all of this that was happening inside of me.

So when we went on vacation and I just had a glass of wine with dinner because we thought it was not a big deal. You know? But the Bible says don't conform to the things of this world. And there is a reason why because we can so easily slip down the slippery slope. And we did. That little moment was a fateful decision because it woke up something in my brain; that little alcoholic that started at age ten woke up. And it was medicating the pain of the dysfunction of my life, just things I hadn't dealt with yet.

So like I had the kids, everything I prayed for, kids, family, but I was stressed, emotionally unaware, and I didn't know how to handle it all. I felt like I had to be superwoman. You know what I mean? Like so many women we have to be able to work full time, I served at the church, I had three kids, all the doctor appointments, everything, I was the coordinator, and nobody was supposed to see me sweat. I was falling apart.

SHEILA: Was it more comfortable for you to drink in private?

IRENE: Oh, yeah. I never drank in public.

SHEILA: Were you family—when did it begin to impact your family, maybe even your children?

IRENE: Sure. That was the toughest part. Shame—because shame, I knew what I read in the word of God. I got saved, I knew what the word said. I knew that the word said anything out of moderation to watch out for. I had the freedom to do anything but not everything is beneficial for me. So I knew that. But by the time I realized that alcohol had hijacked my brain, it was too late.

So shame had me hiding it so I wouldn't drink in public because I'm a pastor, I'm a leader. But I drank at home to take the edge off because that was the social norm. It is okay, whether it is food for my husband and that impacted his weight, he gained 420 pounds before he turned his own life around. But for me, it was alcohol and I was hiding it, how much I was drinking, how often. And the kids began to feel unsafe.

And I think back, that was the most—that's the thing that tortured me the most is like God gave me these beautiful children and I'm hurting them, and I can't stop. But I won't admit I can't stop because admitting that would mean that it's true, I'm not enough, it's true I'm broken, it's true like these lies that I believed that God's grace didn't apply to me and that I was—fundamentally flawed. That's what shame says.

SHEILA: I know! I know that! I remember I was hospitalized for a month in a psychiatric hospital. And every morning we had to stand in a circle and we'd go around the circle and they would say, Hi, my name is so-and-so and I'm struggling with mental illness. It took me ten days to be able to say, hello, my name is Sheila Walsh, and I have a mental illness. Did you come to that place yourself?

IRENE: Yes! It took me 38 days though. I would do everything they asked me to do, trauma treatment, learned about alcohol and addiction, emotional intelligence, became so aware of all of the dysfunction and was trying to become a functional adult. But it took me 38 days because I could not accept saying that I had a problem with alcohol because to me that was the final thing—final straw. It was the thing I was holding on to and I wouldn't give up.

But it was the thing that my husband needed for our marriage to continue. He had given me the ultimatum which got me to rehab. I remember sitting there and I realized in AA that I'm listening to all these people's stories and I relate to them, I hide my alcohol, I binge drank, and I needed it to take me somewhere emotionally. I now have thrown out all of my values and my love for God and my children and my husband for this substance. It is me. And when I admitted it on day 38, it is like a weight lifted off of me and I know you can probably attest to—

SHEILA: Oh, I totally relate.

IRENE: Yes! Second Corinthians 12:9. When I admitted my weakness, the grace of God—

SHEILA: It gives me chills.

IRENE: And let me tell you, it's like the blinders come off and a freedom to just be comfortable in my own skin and my humanity and my brokenness, in my need for a Savior. Like that's why Jesus came and died. For that! And it applied to me too!

SHEILA: I wonder if you can relate to another moment I had. Initially, I was terrified of being in a psych hospital because my father committed suicide in a psych hospital. So I thought it was the end of my story too. But eventually, I grew very comfortable within those walls until the day they handed me my keys back and suddenly I'm outside and I'm like what am I supposed to do now?

What was it like for you, after you finished that, to try and go back to a normal life or a new normal?

IRENE: The new normal, creating the new normal was a journey in and of itself. Because you're fragile—it is like a new baby, like a brand-new baby. I had to figure out and confront every first time I was around alcohol. Every first time I was going to be this sober woman in front of people. The first time I saw my kids and had to receive their forgiveness. The first time I heard them say, "Mommy, what you did hurt me." Like binge drinking, being passed out at home, and Jimmy's out of town, that hurt my kids. Every first I had to look at and face it. And guess what? And accept if it was true. I did hurt my kids.

SHEILA: That's hard, isn't it?

IRENE: But because I listened, I heard them out, I admitted that yes, what I did was not okay. And I was able to ask for their forgiveness; they forgave me and came on the journey with me. And we went to counseling together, grew as a family together, and got healed together because it's a family disease. I think that that whole first time at church where I got to see through these new lenses of freedom that I don't have to hide. I got to like even in prayer and worship, I used to be jealous of other people with their hands in the air worshipping and wishing I had the same freedom, and I got to be a part of that because I no longer was hiding behind my sin.

SHEILA: One of the things that was clear to me when I read your book, which is so good, is that I felt like a lot of people will think, I've never dealt with that. I've never dealt with alcohol and I've never dealt with mental illness. But this is a book that speaks to every single one of us because unless we have found our true identity in Christ we'll make anything an idol.

What would you say to someone who thinks—where do you even begin to reframe

shame? I mean if they feel it's—because I always think guilt tells me I've done something wrong, but shame tells me I am something wrong. What would you say to somebody who doesn't even know where to start the journey?

IRENE: I would say listen to your life and get honest. So what is shame? Right? Shame causes us to hide but it is an emotion God created so it could tell our brains that we need to survive something. So it is a survival mechanism. So what is shame telling you? Shame is trying to tell you to do something different. So if you're feeling embarrassed, change your behavior. So are you doing something out of moderation that could potentially become an addiction? Are you hurt about something? Maybe it is a divorce, maybe it is a betrayal. Are you grieving a loss and you're stuck in that, in the emotions around it? It is causing you to—it is becoming a hang-up because you can't move forward. Maybe you're not wanting to tell people about something shameful that happened in your past. You're not allowing yourself to get past it.

So I'm saying, listen to your life. Is there something you need to get honest with yourself about? And get real. Get honest. I didn't know how to do that until I got sober. I thought I was being honest but I wasn't. And when you can get honest with yourself and examine what's going on in your life, what are the patterns? Am I stuck in a cycle of something? Why does this repeat situation keep happening? It could be that it is not serving you well and it is time to address it and do the work to get free from it.

SHEILA: One of the things I love about the Psalms is that—somebody wrote that the Psalms gives us a language of prayer. In Psalm 34, when David is at one of the worst points in his life, he's pretending to have a mental illness. I mean this is somebody who has been anointed to be king and he's drooling on himself and scratching at walls, runs away, and is in a cave. But he writes: Those who look to him for help will be radiant with joy; no shadow of shame will touch their faces. I sometimes think rock bottom is one of the greatest gifts we can get. That's certainly been my story. Because I felt like I had to perform so that God would love me. If my own father could hate me God could too, so I had to get it all right. But when you suddenly realize what Christ did on the cross was

more than enough, it is finished, done!

IRENE: One hundred percent it is finished. And he reframed shame. Like he did! He's sitting in a place of honor. And what he's showing us is not only can we endure shame the way he did, he identified with it, he experienced it, and he reframed it. He's on the other side and we can do the same.

SHEILA: You and your husband have this phenomenal new ministry and I just wanted you to tell people if they want to get—if they want to find out more about what you and Jimmy are doing, where would they find out that information?

IRENE: Two Equals One; we believe in marriage because we've been married 23 years now, and it's been the best seven years ever! [Laughing] And that's a true story. We believe that a lot of couples are walking around really just not happy in their marriages and living in dysfunction. How do you know you're in dysfunction? You have to see functional. You have to see health. So we just like to get real and raw and talk about our journey, and how God has redeemed our marriage. And we have—like a relationship and an intimacy that we didn't even know existed until I hit rock bottom. Until he hit rock bottom for himself, and like I said, 420 pounds. The man lost 150 pounds and he's just—it's hard to keep my hands off of him now. Do you know what I mean? Like this honeymoon phase is something that can come back again and be better than anything we ever imagined.

SHEILA: So it is TwoEqualsOne.com?

IRENE: Yes. Two equals one, spelled out .com. Yes!

SHEILA: And this book is amazing. Honestly, I found it so helpful. It is called *Reframe Your Shame*: "Experience freedom from what holds you back. You can be free too."

But there are some people right now that we are very concerned about who can't

experience freedom because they're literally being held in a place that makes it impossible for them to experience freedom. But you and I have this outrageous privilege of doing something about it. Watch this.

On the mission field

SHEILA: I just wanted to explain why with this particular little girl we're not showing her face. She's 11 years old so we want to do everything we can to protect her.

So when you were just nine years old, something terrible happened to you one night. Why don't you tell us about that?

Open Captions: My dad is in prison and my mom ran away with some man. So I collect cans for food money to feed me and my brothers and sisters. Then one night... [Weeping] a guy on a motor vehicle grabbed me and took me to a bar. I was locked in a room and many different men would come in. If I refused to be with the men, I was beaten.

After a year, they let me out of the room, and I ran away. Right now I'm free but I still have to go out at night to pick up cans. I still have to buy all the food for my family. I'm scared that I will be taken again and made to go back into that room.

SHEILA: I'm horrified by her story. And tragically, she is not the only one—there are so many girls. And here's what I think. If we don't defend her, if we don't say no to those vicious predators, and trust me, they are very well organized, and they're very well-funded so we've got to get organized, we've got to get funded. It is time to let our righteous anger rise to the surface. There are some things that we can say well that's not good, but this is evil. This is absolute evil from the pit of hell, and we cannot abandon these beautiful children who are longing to know that there is at least one person on this planet who cares for them. I want her to know it's you and it's me and we're going to fight for them, in Jesus' name.

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: Thanks so much. Please keep calling. We have this wonderful matching gift. And whatever you can give, Jesus didn't ask us to give what we don't have, but if you give what you have and I give what I have, and then he does what only he can do, it will change everything. For any gift at all, please just say I want a copy of Irene's book, *Reframe Your Shame*.

I just want to thank you, honestly, Irene for writing such an honest book. You have redeemed your pain in a way that is so honoring to the Lord.

IRENE: Yes. I just want to encourage listeners and anybody who is listening to this segment or reading the book like, it doesn't matter what you've been through, nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. He will chase us down. He wants us to turn our pain into purpose, and he loves us so much. I just want to share that with the world.

SHEILA: It is a beautiful, beautiful book, *Reframe Your Shame*. Thank you so much.
And we'll see you next time on *Life Today*! God bless you.