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Week 48: Fall Mission Feeding
Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh
Sara Hagerty

Sheila: Hi! Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm Sheila Walsh, here with Randy Robison. I have to say, we get the privilege of reading lots and lots of books, and lots of books come across our desks but every now and again, a book will land on my desk and just the title itself is arresting to me and that was certainly true of tonight's guest. The book is called *Unseen: The gift of being hidden in a world that loves to be noticed*. Wow!

So would you please help Randy and I welcome our guest Sara Hagerty. Welcome!

Sara: Thank you! Thanks for having me.

Randy: So good to see you again.

Sara: Yes! I'm thrilled to be here. Thank you.

Sheila: I think the thing that arrested me about this title, Sara, is that it's kind of the antithesis of the world we're living in at the moment where everyone is trying to be seen and everyone is, whether it is an Instagram posts or Face time, it is just... what drove you? Was there a point in your life that became the tipping point for living a different way?

Sara: Out of college I was in full time ministry and sort of had this fire in me to change the world for God. With that came a zeal to share the gospel, to tell people about Jesus; all the things that God calls us to. But in the midst of that I was finding myself in conversations going, I am talking to people about a Jesus that I'm not sure that when I'm behind closed doors I really know all that well. I found myself saying words about him that in private I don't know that I was actually really believing about him.

As my husband and I started to evaluate this stretch of our lives where I'm like, I don't feel like what I'm saying is what I'm really living and believing in private we took a break. I stepped away from full time ministry. I started working in a little boutique selling French and Italian pottery. It was in that store, in one given day I would maybe make like five transactions in a day.

It was in that store that I started to crack open my Bible at unconventional times, it wasn't just my morning quiet time. I started to read the word of God at 3:00 in the afternoon. I started to walk the store, walk circles in the store and ask God to see his face and to see these words that were on this page come alive in front of me and to see his eyes toward me when I wasn't being productive, when I wasn't making an impact.

Randy: What kind of brought this on? Was it like a crisis of faith or belief or was it something else?

Sara: There was no crisis of faith but what I think what I had assumed about Christianity was it was a treadmill that we just kept turning up. We would run harder and faster and stronger and wasn't that a life in God? That we would impact more people, that our reach would be greater, that we ourselves would feel stronger. And when the treadmill stopped, maybe the treadmill kept going but my legs got tired and I was finding that in my private time alone I was dry -- bone dry.

That's when I started to think, oh I know enough that the words on this page aren't boring, I'm actually approaching them in the wrong way. That's what led me to take a break.

Randy: Burn out -- we call it burn out.

Sheila: You said something interesting there, Sara. You said when you were working in that little boutique and your days were not productive. How had you previously defined being productive?

Sara: I think in lots of different ways. I think across the seasons of my life I've seen productivity different. In that particular season, it was ministry impact; it was how many lives I was changing for God. I was sharing the gospel with teenagers who didn't know Jesus and I was watching their lives get impacted and their family's lives get impacted. And in a sense I was sort of deriving some significance from that. And that was productive for me.

As a mom, I can define productivity by how clean my house is, by how well behaved my kids are, how long the task list that I'm checking off. But in that season, productivity was kingdom impact. I needed to step away and see, when I'm in this store selling Italian pottery God's eyes are on me. He has words to say to me there. He actually even likes me even when I'm not making an impact for him.

Sheila: So was that a gradual shift? Because I think of people watching right now who are maybe like moms who are doing the same load of laundry over and over again, people working in a restaurant and doing the same thing over and over again and feeling like they're not in "ministry." So how do they earn God's approval? I think what you're speaking to touches every

single one of us.

Sara: For sure. I remember one day in that store, one of my husband's college roommates' wives came in. I felt embarrassed. She caught me being insignificant. I felt even shame rising up in me like, oh, not only am I feeling hidden, but now I'm noticed by someone being insignificant. As she left the store, the dialogue I had with God was the beginning of a long process of asking him, how do you see me? What do you say about me? It was a process. It wasn't overnight. It was over a period of years, maybe even a full decade of saying, "What do you think about me when nobody's looking? What do you think about me when no one is applauding? When I'm hidden by the world, when I'm not making an impact, when I'm quite literally cleaning the grout in my bathroom, do you have thoughts about me here, God?"

And then even looking at his word and seeing the emotions of God's heart for his people that aren't necessarily tied to their productivity: He delivered me because he delighted in me.

Randy: Was there anyone thing, one truth, one moment that really turned your whole attitude away from being a human doing and letting God be God of the human being?

Sara: I wish there was one, it was several. Over years, times, I'm in the laundry room changing the laundry from wash to dry and thinking, I'm going to do this three more times today, and can I just get this done so I can really go do the real work of God? And I'm feeling like really, kind of frustrated and grumpy about this season that I'm in. And then I hear this voice from God, not audible but I hear it in my spirit, it is his word, Second Corinthians 12:9 says: My power is made perfect in weakness. I just hear in my heart, "I like it when you're weak." And all of the sudden changing the laundry feels different because I have God's eyes on me there. So it wasn't one moment, it was a series of moments like that, cultivating a private conversation with God when nobody saw it.

Randy: So is that what you mean when you talk about being hidden or unseen?

Sara: If we sliced it we might say that 80% of our day is where nobody is noticing, nobody is celebrating, nobody is liking. We can post stuff to social media and get sort of an immediate response but what about the 3:00 a.m. when you're feeding a baby or when you're taking care of a sick parent or you're tending to a marriage behind closed doors that you're not necessarily going to tell people about but it is private and it is before God's eyes.

Sheila: So those simple, everyday moments can become holy moments?

Sara: Exactly.

Sheila: There's something about that, Sara, that I find, it's like I want to dig, I want to dig and dig and dig because I think it is so easy to get caught up in this treadmill of performance. But do you think God purposely hides us at times for seasons?

Sara: Yes, I think he does. I think it is a gift. We see it in scripture, David in Ziklag. John the Baptist was an obscure. Paul, how many years? I do believe he intentionally hides us and takes us away to places where we actually bury our roots in the ground, where we dig our roots deep. I don't think we as humans by nature do that. I think it is his kindness.

Randy: There is also the story in Mark eight where there is a blind man brought to Jesus and he took him out of the town in order to heal him, out of the eyes of everyone else. Even after he healed him he said, "Don't go back into the town."

So I think you're onto something in that especially when people are doing, doing, doing, and we start to feel a bit of the burn out, I know it happens in ministry, but it happens everywhere, sometimes God will pull us back and get us out of town so he can heal us.

Sara: Matthew 6:6 says he is the Father who sees in secret.

Sheila: There's something too, in your book, *Unseen* you talk about -- there is a difference between like just the ego and the desire for significance. The desire to be noticed is not intrinsically wrong in itself; it might even be a God-given thing.

Sara: Yes. He made us to be great. We were made for greatness! And I think sometimes what gets muddy for us is we feel that and we go do it and yet there is a place of actually sowing into the secret of burying our roots in the ground and expecting then that God can produce a fruit through us. So I think -- John 15, he made us to produce fruit abundantly but it is through abiding and I don't think naturally, I just know myself, I don't naturally abide.

Sheila: No. I don't think most of us do in our culture. But I'm thinking, I got a letter the other day from somebody who watches the program. He is a truck driver and he said, "I'll catch it sometimes in hotels and things." He said, "I want my life to matter to God but most of the time I'm just in the cab of a truck."

But an understanding of what it means... you use interesting phrases like, "Wasting your time on God" or "wasting your love on God." What would that look like for somebody like that?

Sara: I think those -- I call those the middle minutes; the minutes that we might in our human eyes think that they don't matter. But his eyes are on us. Psalm 139:1 says: You search me and you know me. So he knows every one of our thoughts. If every one of those thoughts are

known by God they matter to God. And what if those thoughts are actually the ones that we can turn back towards him?

What if we find him when we're in the truck? What if we find him when we're doing the dishes? What if we find that as actually a place to dialogue with God? Paul invites us to pray without ceasing and we as Christians go, "I should pray more."

[Laughter]

But really, could the invitation be that it is that good to talk to God that we want to pray all the time?

It's that good to have the kind eyes of a gentle Father on us. I think so often we think of him as harsh. Me in that store, in that little boutique, I expected him to be frustrated with me that I wasn't producing more for him. But what I found was he was actually very kind and he actually really did delight in me there so all of the sudden conversation with God gets a little bit easier. If you like me, I think I might want to talk to you a little bit more.

Randy: Do you think that's where the depth comes from? You talk about the roots. My pastor likes to say, "When the roots are rotten, the fruits are rotten." But is that sort of the place where you think you really got the roots to be able to bear some fruit?

Sara: Yeah. I think as we start to dialogue with God more in the middle minutes, we invite him to produce more fruit in us. "Exceedingly, abundantly above all that we ask or imagine," that's the kind of fruit we're invited to participate in. We were made to be great! But I do think God is hiding us and saying, "Hey! Come talk to me here. Fall in love with me here and then you'll see what greatness is."

Sheila: How is your relationship with God as your Father different now than in the days when you were seeing great results of people coming into the kingdom? How has your relationship with him shifted?

Sara: I would say I talk to him a lot more. I think my first response and it didn't happen like I sat down and said, "I need to spend three hours in prayer" like we doers often do. I need to add a new discipline and it is now an hour a day of prayer. No! I actually have started to enjoy, you know what? He wants to talk to me for a minute while I'm walking out to the mailbox.

Sheila: You tell us a really lovely story toward the end of the book. I loved it where you were invited, (I guess you hadn't been speaking for awhile,) and you were invited to go speak to some women at a little retreat. Tell us a little bit about that story and what was significant and what

happened that night?

Sara: So I had been out of speaking for a long time, actually so this was my first kind of step back into ministry. It was a group of women at a lake house. They decided to actually have the first session down by the lake. Well, no one really factored in that the sun sets.

[Laughter]

As I'm speaking the women are all circled up and it's all different ages of life and backgrounds. And as I'm speaking the sun literally sets on my notes, on the women's faces, all around us. All I can hear are crickets and owls. Then I can't see my notes. Anyone who has done any sort of public speaking or even if you've done any sort of ministry you're looking for feedback from people to kind of continue -- can I get an amen? There was none of that. They could have all been asleep, it was that pitch black.

As this -- and I couldn't see my notes. So as the session ended and I'm kind of looking for my typical cues to evaluate like what were people's faces and how were they responding? It was like the Lord gave me this picture that night to say, "Hey! I'm your audience. I want you to know what I think about you. As you walk back up to your room, the question to ask is, 'God, what do you think about that?'"

Sheila: Why do you think it is so hard, Sara, to find that Godly hidden-ness in our culture?

Sara: We sort of have this toxic combination. We have our flesh that desires -- our flesh and our God-given being that desires greatness and we have such instant opportunity for greatness. So God in his way, he grows us over time, he feeds us on milk and then over time meat. But we have such an instant opportunity to get -- or at least it seems like, oh, I can just go and get and be great. I can just be seen. I have this desire to be seen. And there is an opportunity right now for me to post something; everybody can see it. I think it is this toxic combination.

Randy: I want to go back to something you said just a moment ago because I think it was very profound. You said that you liked to talk to God more. You have six children.

Sara: There's a lot of conversation in our house.

[Laughter]

But you're also, you also know that there are times when your children maybe don't want to be around you or don't want to tell mom certain things so they go through these phases. How would it make you feel if one of your kids said, "Do you know what mom? I really enjoy talking to

you more."

Sara: I have almost teenagers and the nights that they come in and want to lay across my bed and talk, everything stops. My world stops for that no matter what I was doing, that girl is the most important thing in my world right now.

Randy: Do you think maybe that's a glimpse of God in the way he desires us to just want to talk to him? Even with nobody else around, with no Facebook post or Instagram pictures going out? Just hang out with him.

Sara: Four of our children are adopted and one of our children when we first brought her home I came up the stairs and I saw my husband tucking her in bed. And I hear him saying... every night around bedtime she would just evolve into giggles. It was very uncomfortable for her to do bedtime, daddy tucking her in. And I see my husband; he takes one arm and he puts it around his neck and another arm and he puts it around his neck. And he says to her, "This is what daddies and daughters do. You hug me and I look in your eyes and I say, 'Good night, I love you.'"

And as I was watching that I was thinking, that's me with God. I actually need to be taught how to look in the eyes of God. I'm not comfortable with that. His love is invasive for our flesh.

Sheila: I just think of people just kind of tuning in and this is almost like a different language to them because maybe they think, well, Christianity is just you go to church, you do this. It's like a list of things that you can tick off. But what you're describing is something far more powerful and intimate and yeah, invasive. And yet, I think absolutely glorious because I think it is what we're designed for, to have that.

One of the things I love is that my son is now almost 21 but when he was little and I would travel, particularly overseas and he would say, "Mom, I don't like you being by yourself." I would say, "Baby, I'm never by myself." Because to me, prayer has become this daily conversation with God knowing there is never a door I walk through that he's not with me, there's never a situation where I sit... and even if I'm at my worst, even if I'm struggling with depression or in my darkest days, that my Father is right there with me, and to be able to know that kind of intimacy.

Was it hard for you to maintain that kind of friendship with God becoming a mother of six children?

Sara: Well, it didn't happen overnight though we did grow our family really quickly. Yeah, initially it was because I was more familiar with longer stretches with God. It was almost like a different muscle to be exercised. That it wasn't that I was going to have an hour in the middle...

I had at that point cultivated, I could sit with God for an hour in the middle of the afternoon. It was really good for me to do that, for my heart. And I didn't necessarily have that kind of time so it required a different muscle which was I'm carrying laundry up the stairs and I'm feeling grumpy because I'm looking at the jeans and they were just in the laundry yesterday. How does this happen? They don't quite go back into the drawer. And I'm going up the stairs and I'm saying to myself and to the Lord, Psalm 139:1, "You've searched me and you know me, God. You know this moment right now. You see me. I feel very unseen because no one is going to know that I did this laundry and it might wind back up in the laundry tomorrow but you see it. You see the sacrifice, you see the love." And so it is those minutes. So it was hard. But I felt like when that muscle got exercised, a meeting with him in minutes, oh I just wanted more of it.

Sheila: Worship can occur in the most beautiful, ordinary, mundane moments.

Randy: Yep. I want you to get Sara's book, *Unseen*. I'm going to tell you how to get it when you do something that God will definitely see and will have a big impact when you partner with us as we reach around the world to put loving arms around children who need desperate help. When you help us today with that, we will send you Sara's book. But first of all, would you watch this?

On the mission field

Isak: We're in this village where they've really been suffering with bad drought. They've had no real rain here in the last year. You can just see how dry everything is. This is an area where they would normally plant crops but there are no crops being planted here. There is no food. There's also no life.

Announcer: In southern Africa drought and famine have deprived entire villages of food. For the mothers of children in these areas their only way of life is to plan for death.

Isak: Grave after grave after grave... for children who have a name, children who mean the world to their mothers and to their families, children who don't deserve to die simply because their village was ravaged by drought -- because they didn't have Mission Feeding. You see, we can stop children from filling these graves. We can bring the cycle of death to an end if we just act. You say, "But what do I do? How do I stop children from dying?"

This is how you do it. You open your heart, you give out of what you have, you give the best gift that you can give, you give Mission Feeding, you give life -- life in the form of a bowl of food that not only fills a stomach but empties a grave.

Please do it for the mother that doesn't want to lose another child. Do it for the children that don't deserve to die.

End of clip

In the studio

Randy: That shot of all those graves, it just breaks my heart. They say their only way of life is planning for death. That is not the heart of our Father, that's not what God wants. That's why he asks us to be his hands, his feet, to go to reach out. Sheila, we can change that.

Sheila: Yeah, I stood in that graveyard when I was there in Angola and the thing that was so moving to me were the little tributes that had been left on every single graveside by the parents, small things, just something. Like one little bootie. Something to say, "My child was on this earth and my child mattered."

Because sometimes we get used to pictures like that and we think well, mothers in Africa, they get used to losing their children. No, they don't. No mother ever gets use to burying a child. It would be overwhelming if it wasn't that we can make a difference because I've seen the difference it makes. The food that we provide, it looks like a bowl of oatmeal but it has everything that children in that area of the world need to thrive, vitamins, all the minerals they need. And literally, one bowl of food changes from death to life.

I've gone to the malnutrition clinics and held babies that look as if they have just moments left to live. But I've been in the villages where our feeding program is already in place and I've seen the difference. They look like our kids. They're running around. This is something that we can all do, Randy.

Randy: Absolutely! It's very cost efficient: \$30, \$50, or \$100 will help feed three, five or ten children for three months.

We've been doing this for awhile. My parents started doing this many, many years ago with Peter and Ann Pretorius, Isak's parents, who you saw earlier. One of the things, Sheila that we can do in addition to giving the food, we have food factories in country and the food factory changes everything. It allows us to reach more people, it allows us to be more efficient and we actually teach them a trade to take care of themselves long-term.

But we're at a point now where I've probably upgraded my phone five times since we upgraded that food factory. If we upgrade the food factory this year we can increase the production by 50% and that's huge! That means more food in emergency areas. That means more of that

turnaround you're talking about, Sheila, where we see that child go from death's doorstep to running and playing. It's taking them life.

That's what we want you to do. We want you to join us in giving life to these children all across Southern Africa we can turn around the bad situations, we can give them life instead of just preparing for death. But we need you to join us so go to the phone, call us, keep calling if you don't get through immediately or go online and make the best gift you can. Together we can make a difference.

Begin video clip

Announcer: In impoverished and famine-stricken areas of Africa, children are suffering. The need is great. And without food, they face death by starvation. With your support, you will help feed and care for children in crisis areas of Sudan, Angola, and Mozambique.

With Africa facing ongoing food shortages and drought, we urgently need to replenish supplies and come to the aid of 400,000 children counting on us. Your lifesaving gift of \$30, \$50, or \$100 will help feed and care for three, five or ten children for the next three months. Please also consider an additional gift to help provide critically needed upgrades to our food factory that will increase overall production by a staggering 50%. This is a \$216,000 challenge above our normal feeding budget that could help save even more lives.

With your gift of any amount we'll send you *In the Middle of the Mess*. In her new book, Sheila Walsh brings insight to knowing the peace and presence of Christ in the midst of life's inevitable messes.

With your gift of \$100 or more to help feed and care for ten children, we will send you Sheila's book, plus the "Arise" coffee mug. This heat-activated mug reveals Isaiah 61 each time you fill it with a warm beverage; a wonderful way to begin your day.

And finally, with your gift of \$1,000 or more to help feed and care for 100 children, be sure to request our "Determined Eagle" bronze sculpture. Please call, write, or make your gift online.

End of clip

On the mission field

James: Just remember we are able to feed, the missionaries are able to be here because of the love of God, not just in their hearts but in your heart, those of you who support *LIFE Outreach*

and respond to *LIFE Today*.

Why don't you go right now to the phone or go online and make the best gift you can. Help us feed three, five or ten of these children? If you can help feed 100, well, do that. I don't know at what level you're led to participate but for the three children or the five or the ten children, it's important what you do today.

We are feeding kids because of the love of God expressed through people; really, a lot of them -- nothing wrong with you going and doing what you enjoy. We just don't need to forget the others. It's very important that you pray that everyone who can will respond. Don't just pray, be the answer to a prayer. Respond and make the best gift you can.

End of clip

In the studio

Randy: I hope you will make the best gift you can and remember that \$216,000 goal to upgrade that food factory will make a huge difference. Go to the phones, do what you can. We appreciate you joining with us.

Sheila: And I just want to let you know that Sara's book, *Unseen* is available. We would love to send that to you so just ask for it.

Sara, I want to thank you for the way you've just very vulnerably and openly share your life with us. Thank you so much for being with us here.

Sara: Thank you for having me!

Sheila: Loved it! Thank you so much. We'll see you again next time on *LIFE Today*. God bless you all. See you soon!