

12/14/17
Week 51: Fall Mission Feeding
Randy Robison/Sheila Walsh
Lisa Harper

Randy: Welcome to *LIFE Today*! I'm Randy Robison. This is Sheila Walsh and we're very excited to have you because we have a wonderful guest who has written a book about *The Sacrament of Happy*. We're going to talk about happiness. But I've got to say these ladies barely look over 30 but they have been close friends for over 30 years.

Sheila: Well, how nice are you!

Lisa: I slipped him a \$20 right before we went live.

Sheila: Actually, Lisa and I have been friends for how long?

Lisa: About 30 years.

Sheila: So we have a lot of stories on each other. Please help us welcome Lisa Harper!

[Cheers & Applause]

Randy: This is going to be fun. Now I have to admit that I wouldn't necessarily want some of my close friends coming on the show and telling stories about me because I happen to know that one of the better stories...

Lisa: We have a lot of stories we can't tell. Sheila has been like a sister to me all this time. She knows all the bad stories about me and she only tells the good ones. You need friends like that. But I have a bad one about Sheila. It's really about the both of us. You start and I'll finish.

Sheila: I don't know if you remember when Max Lucado had like a Christmas movie coming out. It's called *The Christmas Candle*; I think? Lisa, you and I were invited to the red carpet screening of the movie -- premier! And we picked you up at the airport.

Lisa: But it was not the main premier. It was like one of the side premiers.

Sheila: Yeah! It was more of a burgundy carpet than a red carpet; wasn't it?

Lisa: It was; kind of a polypropylene, indoor outdoor carpeting. Yeah!

Sheila: We both had on dresses and very high heels.

Lisa: And Barry insisted on driving his car which has no real back seat and I was in a fluffy season as I am now and it was very difficult to get in the back of your car in a dress with double Spanx.

Sheila: Plus, he always -- because it is a fairly new car he always insisted on parking like a mile away from any other car. So we ended up getting out where it was very muddy.

Lisa: Well, it had been raining and he pulled up next to a little grassy median. And Sheila, I'm always like the klutzy little sister. Sheila is always elegant. So Sheila gets out of the car. She is wearing this beautiful -- I can still remember the dress, this gorgeous jacket dress ensemble. She steps out and she wears like ten-inch heels. When she steps out what she didn't realize was that the grass, it had rained, and it was really, really wet and her heel pinned her in place.

Well, then she gets pinned in place by her heels and I think I'm going to get out of the back seat and help her. But it took a while to get out of the back seat.

[Laughter]

But I'm like, "I'm coming! I'm coming!" Barry is not helping at all. He is getting his camera. Because I think he knew --

Sheila: He's taking photographs.

Lisa: He knew comedy was going to ensue. When I get out I'm wearing really high -- I'm actually wearing high boots, I think but with heels. So I go to catch her and instead, because we can't, there is no leverage in the mud, I end up falling on top of her.

Sheila: You flattened me.

Lisa: Flattened her. And then we're both howling. We could not get up. Can I please say what you were saying? Because some people think we're like we fast and pray all the time. Sheila is underneath me in this elegant Scottish accent says, "I'm peeing! I'm peeing!"

Sheila: It was awful. But you know how it is when you're laughing so hard and I'm like Lisa,

"Stop it! Don't make me laugh any harder!" Yeah, I know I'm so sorry!

Lisa: So then we have to walk to this premier, Randy. We're being really gracious people are waiting for Sheila. She is going to be on camera.

Randy: I was actually there.

Lisa: You were there? I'm so sorry! You were probably scarred for life.

Sheila: Tony Romo was there! Like one of my heroes!

Lisa: Amazing people. While I'm walking by she turned and she's like, "Can you tell?" I'm like, "Yes! Yes! Yes, you can."

Sheila: So we had to go home. We didn't even go to the movie. We had to go home.

Lisa: It was hilarious, we laughed so hard. But we were retelling that story. It was actually kind of the impetus to this book; and I promise there's actually some stuff about Jesus in there too, not just trashy tawdry stuff.

But we were telling that story about a year and a half ago. We were at an event, we were having dinner with some people and we're telling that story and just hilarity ensued. People started telling funny stories. And the woman next to me said after we had told four or five funny stories. She went, "Oh! Those were happy times, weren't they?"

And that so struck me because I thought, oftentimes believers, Christ followers, we talk about happiness as if it is either something that we're nostalgic about or something ethereal in the air that we can't really attain. Or we act like happiness is kind of the bad cousin of joy. Joy is spiritual: Jesus, others, yourselves. But happiness, like are we really allowed to belly laugh?

Randy: I hear, "God doesn't want us to be happy, he wants us to be holy." I'm like that a false choice I've ever heard of.

Lisa: I'd heard that my whole life. I always thought of God as kind of grumpy. Holy, absolutely holy but I didn't picture God smiling. And it was after Sheila and I were together I thought, I was actually studying Job at the time, and I thought I want to study happiness in scripture and see if it is actually in there and see if happy is even holy. That was actually the Genesis of writing this book.

Sheila: What's interesting about that Lisa is studying the book of Job. There is no book that

more digs deep into the well of human suffering than the book of Job. So why was that a connect point for you?

Lisa: Because I had -- and you and I have talked about this so many times. I, for so many years pretended to be happy. It wasn't biblical happy. It was I'll just slap a smiley face on but inside I'm dying. I thought if I admitted that I was struggling that I would hurt God's reputation and I did not think that happy and struggling with congruent. So I really wrestled with that.

And studying Job made me think, Job never lost his... there's a sense of contentment and fulfillment even as he is struggling. So I thought, I'm going to see if happiness can be congruent with just us living in a fallen world. It is. I was amazed that I think it is 85 times the word *happy*, not joy -- the word *happy* in Hebrew is *aser*, or close to that; in Greek it is *makarios*. But the Psalter, the Psalms actually starts with the word *happy*. We usually translate it as "blessed" in our English Bibles. But it is "Happy is the man who follows in the way of the Lord who doesn't walk in the counsel of the wicked."

Then when Jesus had his first public Sermon on the Mount he starts with "happy." It is *makarios* in the Greek. We usually translate it blessed but it is just as theologically sound when he said, "Happy" we usually say "Blessed are those who mourn or those who are poor in spirit."

I thought, good night! What really slayed me was Peter is really my favorite of the disciples because he is the one who was always putting his foot in his mouth so resonate with Pete the most. But of course, I love the letters of Paul. When Paul -- remember when Paul was discipling Timothy and he is kind of giving him the charge? And you know this because you've taught me, I think, more about Paul's letters than anybody else.

But he says this in First Timothy 1:11. He says, "Tim, here is what you're called to do." He says, "You're called to share the glorious story, the glorious gospel, the good news of the blessed (*makarios*) God." -- In other words, the happy God.

I thought, oh my goodness! God actually describes himself as happy. And our call, God's gift to us, his sacrament to us and our call is to actually share that and it's congruent. Happiness is not the absence of sadness.

Sheila: If you had to define happy, happiness, how would you unpack that? Is it a feeling?

Lisa: No. I don't believe scripture defines it like that. It's defined and it is defined in a lot of ways. To distill it, it would be the firm belief that God is good and God does good regardless of our circumstances or the world around us.

So there's this bedrock, there is a contentment and a delight. Certainly, sometimes happiness is expressed in laughter but sometimes happiness is a very quiet thing. It is not always belly laughing and getting caught in the mud and wetting on your friend. That's not always...

Sheila: You just had to go there one more time.

Lisa: I was feeling so naughty! No, there is a holiness to happiness and there is a delight. But that's what I love about happiness is not always "ha ha" happy. Because I was taught joy is spiritual, happiness is based on happenstance. I literally heard that from the pulpit. It is not good theology. That's not how scripture defines it.

Randy: I notice you talk about *The Sacrament of Happy*. That's a heavy word *sacrament*.

Lisa: It is. Usually we use sacrament to describe something that is marriage, taking the sacraments would be communion. But it's actually, it is God's blessing in an internal gift. So if you study the use of happy, aser and makarios in scripture, sacrament absolutely defines happiness. It is a gift from God that is expressed externally but it is deposited through a spirit.

Sheila: One of the things I love most about this book when I got my copy in the mail, I just grinned from ear to ear because on the cover is a picture of you and Missy.

Lisa: My daughter!

Sheila: Your daughter. A little girl you fought for, for a long, long time.

Lisa: Who you helped pray here. I have to tell you, friendship is one of the expressions of happiness. And Sheila, the day I brought Missy home from Haiti, I'm an adoptive mom, and was just dumb as a rock when I was younger. Never got married, my husband was lost, won't stop to ask for directions, and didn't think I'd ever have kids because by the time I got a little smarter my ovaries were raisins. We might as well go there since we've been naughty. But he's a redeemer.

Randy, I'm sorry! I just have to because your face is please, please, please don't say anymore trashy things. He is such a redeemer and he restored the years of my life that I just served up to locusts on a platter. But Sheila is one who walked that whole adoption journey with me. And I brought my little girl home April 14th, 2014. And she booked a flight to Nashville so that she could be right at the end of the gate, not on the other side of security; there was Aunt Sheila when we walked off the plane. So it was really incredible.

Sheila: What has mothering Missy taught you about happy?

Lisa: Oh my goodness!

Sheila: Which by the way, can I just say this? You're an incredible mom. I knew you would be but you are incredible mom!

Lisa: I didn't know I would be an incredible -- because I was old and there were places that were so broken in my life. What makes me a good mom because I also have made every mistake known to motherhood in three and a half years -- I'm so grateful. I wake up every morning grateful and that's really the key to happiness. It's taken me a long time but I've figured out that gratitude flows from happiness, so it is a fruit of happiness, but it's also the road to happiness, it fertilizes happiness. I think I'm so grateful for her.

Sheila, I have never -- she is not my hope. Jesus is my hope but being a mom to this amazing kid. And Randy, she was supposed to die. Her mama died of AIDS, her first mom in Haiti. My little girl had H.I.V. and tuberculosis and cholera and was malnourished.

I called Sheila, the very first time I visited her, remember, I called you from the Miami airport and I just said, "Sheila, this is going to be harder than I thought." I remember you just praying with me and saying, "You just walk one step at a time. God will be faithful." She makes me laugh every day.

Sheila: She is beautiful! And smart!

Lisa: She is smart. She is a trip. She is funny.

Sheila: She is so joyful. Because often when you adopt sometimes you wonder if a child is going to go through a period of... detached. But she is genuinely the most joyful little girl I've ever met in my life!

Lisa: We laugh all the time. We have dance parties. It is interesting because I've heard more in the last three and a half years from people saying, "Hearing you laugh with Missy has helped me spiritually."

I'm like, "You mean the Bible studies I do? You don't remember the exegesis I fought so hard to learn in seminary?"

"No! It is your laughter and it is her smiling."

That's where I go, biblical happiness, not pretend, because I was a happy doppelganger for years. But contentment and delight that is based in the faithfulness of God, the goodness of God, that

actually can change the world.

Randy: I was going to go there because your daughter has taken you places where you have changed the world.

Lisa: Yeah. Well, her story, we've gotten to go back to Haiti to the village she is from. At first I didn't want to go. God was like, "I want you to take Missy back to Haiti." I was like, "No, sir. That's not a good idea." I don't know if you've learned this, but when God tells me to do something, if I don't do it, I usually get hives. And he just keeps on, keeps on.

[Laughter]

But I sensed through his spirit him say, "Lisa, the whole point is for you to take life back to a place where death often reigns."

And we went back to her village. Now we're going back multiple times a year but the first time we went back was just this past January. And when we stepped off the bus, there's only 2,000 people in the village she grew up in, women began to shriek, "It is a miracle! It's a miracle!" Because they thought Missy had died because they hadn't seen her in four and a half years. The last time they saw her she was so sick.

So I was like, "Baby, just go and invite all these people."

We were going to have a women's conference. We were just hoping women would come to this little community center. And if you try to exploit my kid, I'll cut you but I can exploit her for the gospel. So I sent her out into the village. And women came the next day to hear about Jesus because they were like, "We just can't get over this vibrant, happy kid who we thought had died." And we've had all these women now come to know Jesus in her village and it is really through Missy's joy. It is through her happiness.

Randy: Tell us about the garden though that's there. That's just too cool to skip over.

Sheila: I don't know if you know this but proceeds from the book go to Missy's garden in Haiti.

Lisa: Yeah, we started a garden. I really wanted to buy more stretchy pants but the Lord said, "No, use the proceeds from this book to go to build a garden in Haiti."

Randy: I'm glad you listened!

Lisa: Yeah, I know I was trying to get you again, Randy, on private girl stuff. We lease three acres in her village and now all the vegetables in that garden are feeding the kids in her village. And it is been unbelievable. I didn't know how much eggplant three acres could produce. But they're all kinds -- because a lot of kids in her village, even though it is a tropical island had scurvy and a lot of other issues because they weren't getting the nutrients they needed.

So they wanted to name it Missy's Garden. I was like, "No she is eight. No, we're not going to name things after her." So it's called the Happy Grove. It's been the coolest thing the way it is supporting life and all these people are going, "Oh my goodness! Life can come from near death."

[Applause]

Randy: And what's interesting about that kind of coming full circle is how obedience increases happiness.

Sheila: That's good, Randy! Yeah!

Lisa: It does. I know we were going to stay on trashy stories but we'll go there too.

[Laughter]

I started digging when I was really studying the analogy of scripture, trying to go from cover to cover and go, what does it say about happiness? I thought after I found that it's actually in there, it's holy, God says he is happy. He says he makes us happy where so much --.

I thought, how do you get happy? Is there a secret to it? Is there a one, two, three? And it is pretty simple. It is focus on God and focus on others. It is obedience.

Randy: It is! These things I have told you for your benefit. Abide in me and I'll abide in you; your joy will be full.

Lisa: It is amazing. Missy and I were at the doctor recently. She has to get blood taken on a pretty regular basis. And she cries. The needles are huge, she hates it. And I was going, "Baby, I want you to just look at me. Don't look at the needle. Look at me. Look at me. Focus on me."

And she was starting to cry and then she looked at me and she goes, "Mama, you have a big hair on your chin."

I was like, well, yeah. But I was like, that's it. That's it. You just focus on... you focus on God,

you focus on each other. There is great joy in that -- delight, contentment.

Sheila: You know what I love? -- When you post Instagram, which you post a lot.

Lisa: Yes! Missy and Jesus -- Missy and Jesus.

Sheila: But it is so beautiful when you post ones where she is worshipping. I think I remember the first photograph that you got of Missy.

Lisa: Oh do you really?

Sheila: Yeah, yeah! This little girl who was clearly dying and I watched this beautiful girl now with her hands raised in worship, it is just -- if it doesn't make you happy then check your pulse.

Lisa: It is unbelievable. Just the other day she said and again, this goes right back to happy. We were in a hotel and she said, "Mama, I don't want to take a nap."

I said, "Baby, you don't have to nap." I said, "Let's just have a conversation."

She said, "Are God and Jesus in heaven?"

I said, "Yeah baby, they're in heaven."

She said, "What are they doing in heaven?"

I've learned in my short tenure as a mother that when they ask hard questions just to pose it back to them. I said, "What do you think they're doing in heaven?"

She said, "I think they're talking."

I said, "I think that's a good guess, baby, because it says that Jesus and intercedes to God the Father for us; that means he talks to him about us."

She said, "What do you think they're talking about, mama?"

I said, "Well, what do you think they're talking about, baby?"

[Laughter]

She said, "I think they're talking about me."

I said, "You do? What do you think they're saying about you?"

And she paused for I don't know maybe two or three seconds, and then she just got this ear to ear grin and she said, "I think Jesus is saying, 'I love that Missy!'"

I thought that's Gospel 101. He delights in us. And that's one of the things that studying happiness in scripture has done for me. All too often I picture God as punitive, even though we talk about grace, grace for me sometimes is wet soap. It's a slippery concept. And this is what I see through Missy. Sheila, everything she does I think is brilliant. She just slays me. Yesterday she was running around in a Cat Boy costume; just silly -- running around in a costume. I think she is just a walking, talking miracle.

Over and over again God will say, "The way you love Missy, I love you so much more than that." I don't think I believed it until I became a mom.

Sheila: It couldn't be a more perfect segue, actually to talk about something that we're very committed to. Not because we have to, because God has made us really happy and we want to extend that to others. Would you watch this?

On the mission field

Open caption: Reality of the worst drought since 1945 peaking in parts of Africa -- africanews.com.

Announcer: It's hard to wrap your mind around something like drought. The devastating impact it has on young and old alike is heartbreaking. And when there is no rain, there are no crops for food. Families resort to doing everything they can just to survive, even eating seed pods from trees.

LIFE's mission team listened as one man named Gabriel shared his story.

Isak: This man's story breaks my heart. It amazes me. His dedication to his family is applaudable, it is incredible and yet it breaks my heart at the same time because what you'll learn from Gabriel is that they lose their children because despite their best efforts they are unable to give them enough food.

Gabriel here works so hard making firewood. He goes and chops trees down. He burns it, he prepares it, he bags it. He walks for more than three hours to get to the closest market to hopefully sell his bag of charcoal. And if he sells it, he gets enough money to buy one, maybe two meals for his family.

Gabriel has a wife and two children. He had a wife and four children just a year ago. But unfortunately, he wasn't able to provide enough food for two of those children who starved to death.

You see, Gabriel doesn't only know what it is to work hard, Gabriel understands the devastating pain of losing a child, of burying not one but two of his own children. You see what Gabriel needs is Gabriel needs Mission Feeding to come to his village. Gabriel needs his children to get that bowl of food each and every day -- that bowl of life! Gabriel needs your help. Please give the gift of life to Gabriel, to his children, and to his village today.

End of clip

In the studio

Randy: I think Isak is so right on when he talks about how we can actually do something. That's not how it's supposed to be -- people are not supposed to be starving in this world. They aren't supposed to be walking miles and miles and miles just to provide a meal that may or may not get their children through another day.

God wants us to reach out and do something. He has given us the means to do it. \$30, \$50, \$100 will feed three, five or ten children for three months. Those are just numbers. We're talking about lives. So what I'm asking you to do is just say a quick prayer and say, "God, would you have me do something? How much would you have me do?" And then just obey. That's what he requires of us. He doesn't want you to sacrifice. He wants you to be obedient.

If you'll be obedient and join with us in reaching around the world, you cannot just share the gospel in word but in deed as we go into these dark places and share God's light and give them a bowl of food.

Sheila, I know you've seen this firsthand. What have you seen out there?

Sheila: I was just thinking, Randy, our son is almost 21 and when he was a young boy and a teenager, we had what we called this pantry full of boy food, just because I would feed him regular meals and then he would always be hungry so we had all these boy snacks. I look into the eyes of that man, Gabriel and I think of how hard he works, chopping down trees, burning it, turning it into charcoal, walking for three hours -- which means he has to walk three hours back -- in the hopes of selling that so he can provide the two children that he has left one or two meals.

God has left you and I on this planet at this moment. It is not a mistake. We are here for a time like this. We are called to be the hands and feet of Jesus. Not just by going to our churches and worshipping and studying God's word. Yes, we do that but out of that flows the love and the care and the mercy of God. One of us can't change it all but together we can make a huge difference.

I have held mothers in malnutrition clinics as their babies took their last breaths. And then I have gone to the villages where Mission Feeding is in place and it's death to life. That's what we are about -- *LIFE Outreach International*, we offer life in the form of food and then once we have earned their trust then we share life in the person of Jesus Christ.

So if you and I do something, maybe you can only do \$30, that's fantastic! Maybe you can give \$1,000 as an additional gift to help with our food factory upgrade. Our factory needs an upgrade; it is getting old and if we upgrade it we will get 50% more food. So please, please go to your phone, call the number on your screen and make the very best gift possible.

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

In the studio

Sheila: Thank you so much. If the phones are busy, please keep calling. We can change the world one child at a time. For any donations you send in if you would like to get *The Sacrament of Happy* by Lisa Harper, we would love to send it to you.

Randy: Yes, yes! Please ask for that and please make the best gift you can. As always we appreciate you being with us. Would you thank Lisa Harper for being with us?

[Cheers & Applause]

Don't miss *LIFE Today*! Join us every day. Join us online. We'll see you next time.