

1/30/18
Week 5: WFL
Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh
Jo Saxton

[In the studio]

Randy: Welcome to *LIFE Today*! I'm Randy Robison.

Sheila: And I'm Sheila Walsh. I'm real excited about this program. I travel every weekend and I'm always from L.A. to New York but just recently I walked into a green room and I heard an accent that made me feel at home, a fellow Brit -- it's a glorious thing. I just fell in love with her and love this new book that's coming out. So please would you welcome our guest, Jo Saxton?

Jo: Thank you.

Sheila: Maybe we could just sit here and be quiet and just let you talk and let people hear your lovely voice.

Jo: That's very kind of you.

Sheila: The book is called *The Dream of You*: "Let go of broken identities and live the life you were made for." What prompted you to write this book, Jo?

Jo: Well, I think there were a number of things. As I was speaking and traveling I met lots and lots of wonderful people but who were really wrestling, wrestling with their identity or not being able to get past the past. I would ask them two questions -- two questions, well, lots but two. And the two questions were always: Who were you before anyone told you who you were supposed to be? And the second one was: When did you lose your voice?

Because there was this sense of all this potential and all these ideas and an insecurity that made them second guess it; that left them wondering and acting in ways they weren't even comfortable with, if they're honest. And they knew on paper that Jesus loved them and that their identity was in Christ and they sang the songs and read the books but the life was really challenging.

Sheila: It's actually a pretty profound question. Do you find that people are able to answer that?

Jo: Not immediately. I think it brings them to a journey. I think it starts people thinking of often

their childhood dreams or the thing they were going to do, the person they had always prayed to be, the prayer they prayed, the commitment they made once. And then often the sadness that we didn't even notice our dreams die.

Randy: I'm curious, you phrase the question interestingly, "When did you lose your voice?" Why that terminology?

Jo: Well, I did Latin at school which I still question why. I didn't really have a choice.

Randy: They don't teach that in Texas. **[Laughter]**

Jo: I'm not sure they should have taught it in London either. But the word *voice* comes from *vox*, and it is from the same root as the word *vocation* and a calling out, a calling forth. I think we understand that even intuitively in the culture when someone is talking about their voice, it is about what they're about, what's meaningful to them. But again, and their voice in practice and what they do because of their voice on the inside. So I think it made me ask, that idea that you've kept to yourself, that thing I saw flicker in your eyes, that idea that moment, that thing you were going to say, that to me is the voice that has been lost.

And often on the other side of that voice was an initiative, a ministry they wanted to start. Conversation they knew needed to be had, something that would have changed things. I think it is important we get those back.

Sheila: But for you, it was almost a literal thing, (when did you lose your voice,) because I didn't know until I read the book that you sing.

Jo: Yes!

Sheila: But then somebody intervened in your life and basically it shut you down.

Jo: Oh absolutely! I used to sing in the choir at school and I loved it. It was the one thing that felt really innocent. But I would lose myself when I sang. I'm not sure that everybody really loved that to be fair. Me and Whitney Houston, we were gone. **[Laughter]** Then I got asked to do a solo in the choir and it was like this is amazing. I got my chance -- my chance to be Whitney. I did have a voice that was slightly beyond my years in an adult kind of way. I remember the teachers being really moved and really liking it.

But some of the girls in my class who mocked it and mocked it, and they mocked the dress I was wearing, and the things that I'd sung and everything. I just began to shrink at that point. I remember making a decision to leave the choir and find a habit that was more socially

acceptable. And I was ten but as I'd gone through life I think there have been many times I've left the choir. There have been many times I found the more acceptable opportunity that other people approved of instead of what I was really about. So yes, whenever I'm wrestling, I do come back to the playground in that moment.

Sheila: It's funny because when I read that, it actually stirred a really painful memory in me because when I was 16 I got the lead role in *West Side Story* at school, Maria. We had a rehearsal in front of the whole school. And I sang, "I Feel Pretty." One of the senior boys in the back shouted out, "Well, you don't look it." And honestly, that was like a knife in my heart. For years, I just wanted to stay in the background.

I wonder how many people out there have had a moment where somebody has said no and that's louder than their hearing God's yes over their life.

Jo: Absolutely! I think people often hear that they're too much or not good enough. And either of those will cause you to put your life and your call and your voice on mute. But they will cause you to think unless I can be perfect, unless I can do it the best way, the right way, the perfect way I'm just not going to bother.

Randy: What was it that made you say wait a minute, that voice, that vocation, that calling, that is from God and I am going to go live it out.

Jo: I think it was a number of things over a number of years. My teachers -- I had amazing teachers who would take extra time with me. They would encourage me. Encouragement gives you courage; doesn't it? It makes you think things are possible. So they played a key role. My youth pastors -- I think the world is not worthy of our youth pastors and the things they say again and again and again and the opportunities they give you. I think it was a number of leaders around me who would say, "Just give it another try. Give it another try." And as I began to understand more of my own identity, as I began to understand God's dream for me, that gave me a bit more courage as well. It was tentative steps; it really was. Sometimes it was through the tears. I remember being asked to read the Bible at church and being physically sick. Physically sick because of the fear and the sense of shame and not wanting to be seen. It took a while.

Randy: Sheila can relate to that a bit. I think you had your own episode.

Sheila: Yeah. The very first time I spoke on the *Women of Faith* platform, two speakers went before me and I literally went to the bathroom and threw up because I thought, I can't do this, Lord.

Jo: You just look and see how amazing everything else is.

Randy: You compare yourself to others.

Jo: You compare!

Sheila: You know what I discovered, Jo, which I thought was interesting. Maybe a year down the road we were all sitting in the green room and my prayer that night was, Lord, I never feel like I'm worth this. And every single other woman, all these speakers I thought were so perfect, they said, "We feel exactly the same." So I think one of the things your book is going to do is to let people know they're not alone. You're not the only one who feels this way.

Jo: Yeah, that would be my prayer really. I start the book and I write the letters.

Sheila: I wanted to ask you about that. Who are the letters to?

Jo: They're for a number of my friends and some women I've mentored, maybe a woman I had a conversation with at a conference or over coffee and they often came to mind. Part of it was I wanted a book that didn't just give us our shoulds and things we ought to do. Though they're important, I wanted us to have a moment where we could stop and say, "Let's be honest about how it really is for us sometimes. And it doesn't mean you haven't got faith because you're struggling. It just means that life has happened to you too."

So I wanted to write the letters to give us a chance to say, "Look, this is where I'm at. Do you understand? I think you've been there too. And maybe together we can find out what the Lord would have to say and encourage each other to move forward."

Sheila: Are any of the letters to a young Jo?

Jo: Oh gosh! Yes! I think losing your voice one was. I think there was the sense of having these ideas and wanting to do so much more than your life felt you could do. I think there was one, the ones on the wilderness and there's a chapter on grief. That was to the Jo of her 30s. I'm 43 now and my 30s were wonderful but they were really hard. I experienced grief for the first time in a tangible, with someone close to me dying. I just didn't know if I would find my way through. I had young kids. I'd had postpartum depression after my second and there was just in year of crisis after crisis where I got up slower each time. And the world was gray for years and years and yet it was the life I'd dreamed of, having this young family and I felt called to the States. So I was living the answer to my prayers and yet something wasn't quite together. So definitely, that one was definitely to that era.

Sheila: That chapter that you call "The Wander Years" was one of the ones that really spoke to

me the most because sometimes you ask God for a certain thing or you feel like God said something and then it happens and you think, well, this isn't quite what I thought. Is that how it was for you?

Jo: Very much so. I'd hoped to -- I'd felt called to the States since I was 14. I tried to find my own ways. There are a couple of dates that probably shouldn't have gone much further than with one date just with the hope to get there. I was ridiculous.

Randy: We have better ways.

Jo: Thankfully, in the end, found better ways and got here. And felt finally, this is what the Lord has for me. It's going to be amazing. It's going to be wonderful! And it was so hard. And culturally, they say England and America are two cultures divided by the same language. I think there's some truth in that sometimes. I just didn't understand. I'd prayed about this. I'd fasted. People had prayed for me, sent me. I'd left my family, my loved ones -- it was meant to be amazing and it was just tough and dry and sometimes dull. I just couldn't get my head around it. I remember being in a grocery store wanting some comfort and I wanted a tin of Heinz Baked Beans, which are glorious.

Sheila: Amen! Yes!

Jo: On a bad day when you feel sad, it's the healthy way to not go towards the donuts.

Sheila: Beans and toast, it's a British classic.

Jo: Glorious!

Randy: Literally beans.

Sheila: Yeah, baked beans. And it's made of sauce, tomato sauce, really in Britain.

Jo: And I went there because the store was called Safeway and they had Safeways in England. But they didn't have my beans. I remember breaking down and weeping and weeping in the grocery store. No. Everybody just kind of walked around me. **[Laughter]** Wide berth.

Sheila: It's a bean crisis.

Jo: Situation! But I think it was that sense of loss and longing and my dreams had come true and this is amazing so why do I feel so empty? And why do I feel like I'm wandering? And do I want to go back to my Egypt or do I want to keep walking forward towards maybe there is a

Promised Land somewhere. It just took a long time to get there.

Sheila: I didn't realize, I guess you and I met at a conference and so we didn't have that much time. But I didn't realize that you were raised for a good part of your life in a foster home, which was really a good experience for you but then in a moment it changed. What was that like for you?

Jo: Well, I was six years old; and just before my sixth birthday and we were going to London for the holidays, was my understanding, going further in. I didn't know -- I didn't know. So there was this strange unexpected homecoming where I was back with my family. My biological family and it was wonderful. But I had two homes.

Sheila: So for the first six years you'd been with your foster family?

Jo: Yeah. So I kept on thinking of my Christmas gifts under the tree and would I get them? And I was happy/sad. The only way I could describe it is I was happy/sad. I was happy because I was surrounded by my Nigerian aunts and uncles and my mum and yet I was sad, and achingly sad because I... What about my school friends? And I just felt lost.

I do remember that at that point, that was one of the moments where the identity broke for sure. Maybe it had broken long before and I didn't know but at that moment I thought nothing felt secure. You could leave any time, because even the people you love could leave you at any time so it was safer to hold back.

Randy: So what do you do during these times of wondering and wandering in these desert periods? What's the solution? How do we get through them?

Jo: I think community is an important part. There is an African proverb which says, "If you want to go fast go alone. If you want to far go together." I'd love to take credit but it really isn't me.

[Laughter] But I think there is something in us holding one another in that time and learning from people who have wandered before you. And maybe there is a trail that can guide your way.

I found worship was an incredibly powerful part of it for me because it took me beyond what I could understand in that moment, what my intellect could do. I think that it's good to have habits and it doesn't sound glamorous but you pick up the Bible and read it again because there was a time when it was on fire for me. If I stopped praying and if I stopped reading the Bible, and there were days I did for sure, but if I made that a habit then I'd never find that moment again. But if I stayed there, then maybe there would be a day when everything would connect. But I needed a community to help me too.

Sheila: One of the things that you said in the book I found really shocking and I probably shouldn't but you talk about being a young girl and your favorite aunt saying out loud in the room, "You're black, you're a woman; you're going to have to try twice as hard as anybody else." How did that impact you, Jo? Now what do you say to your daughters, because you have two girls?

Jo: It was a really challenging -- it wasn't a challenging conversation ironically. My aunts and my mom and many of the -- there's a large Nigerian community in England and they've moved over in the '60's and it was a difficult time. It was a really difficult time. There would be signs on doors saying, "No Irish, no dogs, no blacks." They couldn't rent because of these things. They had dreams that they didn't get to fulfill. People would talk to them slowly with a view to them not understanding and they understood every word. But they did it for their kids. They did it to give their kids a new opportunity and a new life.

So it felt medicinal on one level. But it made me think. I remember my aunt looking at me and it wasn't a harsh conversation but she said in the climate we're in and there was a lot of racial tension in our community at the time. And you know we got called names and terrible, terrible things, terrible things! And she said, "Jo, it's not going to be easy for you. What your friends get away with, you can't get away with because of the stereotypes you live under."

I remember thinking, okay, I'm going to take -- this is my Auntie Bassie talking and she is the best person ever. So I'm going to take it on. But the dilemma was I applied it to everything. She meant mainly my academic career but in every situation I would have to be the best. I wasn't trying to be better than anybody else, I was trying to not get left behind. I was trying to have -- I was trying for my shot at what somebody else's equality was. It was hard. But it was necessary.

I don't know many people in our community who didn't have that conversation. Now as a mom of, and we're a multi-ethnic family. My husband was a Scott, is a Scott, born in Edinburgh. And so my girls are, we carry all the shades in our family. My girls are biracial. It's been challenging. It's been challenging. I would love to say it's a perfect world now and we're in a new place.

Randy: How so? I'm curious.

Jo: I think that the racial abuse our family has received and the abuse we've got -- I tend to get it the most. It tends to be directed at me the most passionately but my children have encountered it too. All I could say was, well, it was later than I thought. That was my level of expectation. The cruel things that have been said of their friends and it's like having to get a child to respond like an adult. So there's a real grief with that.

Randy: How do we purge that from our culture? How do we just get rid of that once and for all? Tell me please? Right?

Sheila: It's a long road.

Jo: It is a long road. I think it is a long road and I think it does require a perseverance. I would say there are a number of things that we as a church can do. I believe we are salt and light and salt is meant to impact the world around it. It preserves, it protects, it has a distinct flavor. So I would say to us as church, what flavor are we? Are we listening to those around us who may have a very different experience of life than ourselves? But can we hear their pain without taking it personally? Can we hold their hand and lament? Which we see throughout scripture; don't we? We see lament. And then will we speak on behalf of those who are vulnerable? I believe those are starting points to behaviors, to systems, to various things like that. And can we celebrate? We're all made in the image of God and I think there is a celebrating rather than a tolerating. Can we celebrate the beauty and the richness that God has made rather than say oh, let's just pretend it is the same. It's not the same but it is beautiful.

Sheila: I honestly think Jo's book is going to be one of those pieces that God places in the puzzle. We're going to tell you how you can get a hold of a copy of this book. But first of all, we would love to show you something and ask for you to respond. Would you watch this?

[On the mission field]

[Crying]

Jeanne: Give him hope. Give him hope in his heart, Lord. Restore his hope.

Announcer: These families may live on opposite sides of the world but they share a common pain, the pain of losing a child because they had no other choice but to drink from contaminated water sources.

Open Captions: The first child I lost was my son that died on my back when I was taking him to the clinic. And my second child died here because I could not get her to the clinic. Their symptoms were so bad their skin was peeling and their hair was falling out.

Announcer: As long as mothers like Fedez have no other choice but to collect water from contaminated sources, this common pain, this death cycle will continue.

Open Captions: My other children are scared about the dirty water, but they have no other choice. They pray they will have clean water soon and not die like their brother and sister did.

Announcer: But there is a solution that *LIFE Outreach* has provided to nearly 6,000 villages where there is no longer death but life. It is pure, clean drinking water flowing from a well that love has drilled. This is what we want to do for Fedez, her children, and mothers like her around the world.

[End of clip]

[In the studio]

Sheila: There's so much in that that I don't even know what to say about. As a mother, carrying your child on your back to try and get her to a clinic in time. Notice there is no car, there is no transportation; literally, a mom, weak herself and probably some kind of disease carrying her child on her back. But by the time she gets to the clinic that child is dead. And with the second child, she didn't even get the chance to even try and start out to the clinic because that child died so quickly.

I've been in their clinics and watched children with literally their skin peeling off. At one point I asked, "Why is their hair red?" And it was like because there's no protein in their system. It was just heartbreaking.

As a mom, I can't even imagine what that's like. How do you even go to sleep at night when you don't know what tomorrow is going to bring for your child?

But the amazing thing and why I'm so grateful, so profoundly grateful to be part of this ministry is that we work with people in these countries and we've worked out this system of how we can go into a village, we can for \$4800, we can drill a well; that well will last 70 years. It literally is Water for LIFE. You saw the difference. When you see their faces the first time that clean water shoots up in the air, they've never seen clean water in their lives. This is a desperate situation but it can be changed if you and I decide we're on the earth at this point; it is not an accident! And it is our privilege -- it is not something we have to do, because we're believers -- it's a holy privilege that we get to reach out and say, "You know what? We're going to change this."

Really, it doesn't take that much, Randy. Even \$48 will give clean water.

Randy: Yeah, for ten people for life! It's almost ridiculous how simple it is to solve this problem. I've got to tell you, if we didn't have a solution for this, it would be very hard to cope

with because Sheila, you've been there, I've been there, I have stood over graves of children because they had one water source and it was polluted. It's tough stuff. It's rough out there.

But the good news is it is a very easy problem to fix and you're the solution. That's why we want to invite you to join us in giving Water for LIFE -- for a lifetime in most cases and definitely for a better life in all cases -- a healthier life. And we always give it in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; so you're not just giving water that they'll drink and they'll be well but you're helping to share that living water who can make them well for eternity. So go to the phones, go online, give the best gift you can and join us as we share Water for LIFE around the world.

[Begin video clip]

Announcer: Every day children living in extreme poverty are forced to make a dreadful choice, drink dirty polluted water filled with deadly disease or die from thirst. No child should ever be faced with this decision.

The good news is there is a solution -- Mission: Water for LIFE is one of the most proven and viable demonstrations of God's love in the world today. You can help end the suffering because clean water changes everything.

With your gift today, you can help drill 400 water wells in remote villages in over 15 nations. Your gift of \$24 will help provide clean water for five people, a gift of \$48 will help provide for ten, \$72 will provide for 15 people and \$144 will help provide fresh, life-giving water for 30 people for a lifetime!

With your gift we'll send you *The Riches of Christ*, what true prosperity looks like filled with wisdom, prayers and scripture. James Robison adds insight from what God has shown him about finding contentment in the Father's provision for your life.

With your gift of \$100 or more please request the *Children of the World Storybook Bible*. This easy to read Bible features colorful art by children from nearly 50 countries around the world.

Finally, please consider a gift of \$1200 to help provide water for 250 people or a gift of \$4800 to help sponsor a complete well. And you may request the "Bridge of Faith" framed canvas print by Thomas Kinkade.

Please call, write, or make your gift online.

[End of clip]

[On the mission field]

James: This mother has four children. Last summer a year ago, they had an outbreak of intestinal disease from contaminated water. Two of her children got very, very sick.

Now she's got a little baby just a few months old and this baby is living on her mother's milk, this baby is nursing. Betty, pretty soon this little baby is going to be drinking that water and oftentimes it takes their lives.

Betty: It really does, James. And they can't do anything about it because it's all the water they have. I can't even imagine! This little baby is so precious, so beautiful! Do you know that there is 10,000 people a day that die from the waterborne diseases, and most of them are children five and under? We can stop that. We can make the difference by doing the water wells and giving them a fresh cup of water.

James: I'd like you to be one of the hands to reach out and dial the telephone number and take your bankcard and use it like a check or write a check and make it to *LIFE* and say "I want to give life to children like this and keep them healthy."

[End of clip]

[In the studio]

Sheila: Thank you so much. Please go to your phones. We have a goal here. We want to put 400 new wells in 15 new countries. And for any gift at all, we will send you Jo's book, *The Dream of You* and I know it will really, really bless you. Jo, thank you so much for being here, you little British wonder!

Jo: Thank you very much. It's good to be here.

Sheila: Thank you all for being with us too.

Randy: Yes. Absolutely. We want to see you again here on *LIFE Today*. If you miss any episode

you can always go to our website and check out LifeToday.org.