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Week 29: Summer WFL

Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh

John & Debbie Lindell

Randy: Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm Randy Robison. This is Sheila Walsh.

Sheila: Hey!

Randy: We talk a lot about grace in the church, but I've got to tell you there is a difference between talking about it and really getting it. That's why I'm excited about our guest today, Sheila. You know this couple here.

Sheila: I love them! I love their church, James River Church. I love the way that God has worked in both of their lives. But I'm very excited about John's new book. So, would you please help us welcome John and Debbie Lindell? Welcome!

John: Thank you!

Randy: Love the cover, I mentioned that to you. You just look good.

Debbie: He does! I love the cover!

Randy: But this message, I had the privilege of sitting down with you guys and getting to hear what you went through as a pastor who had preached about grace and taught it and understood it but then something happened. Give us an idea of what you're talking about in this book.

John: I think I was like a lot of people who think that because they can give a definition of grace, they understand grace. Or that they're walking in grace, they're living in grace. So really, several years back it just dawned on me that I did not grasp the enormity or the magnitude of God's grace and I could tell it within my own life. I could sense it.

Part of it was just understanding God's pleasure, not feeling that, and watching Debbie in her walk -- because I'm a very disciplined person but the discipline began to work against me, in some sense, and I'd watch her and she was having a lot better time doing this thing called Christianity. And I was doing way more -- honestly.

Debbie: I know!

[Laughter]

Sheila: What do you think made the switch because I was one of the people that was privileged to get an early copy of the manuscript to read and when I saw the title, *Soul Set Free* it just made me think, this is something really special. Because you're loved across the nation and across the world as a pastor. You have been an anointed teacher for so long but there was something that clicked in you that was new and fresh. Can you trace it to a moment or was it just a slow unwrapping?

John: I think it started when I was taking my kids to Mexico. The boys had just gotten married and one of them was reading, Johnny Cash had just recently passed away, and they were reading that biography. And as I read the story of Johnny Cash, and I didn't know everything about it, but his life had a lot of ups and downs but you had to conclude this, he was a man who loved God and God loved him and he finished well.

But it started me on this thought that whatever God's grace is it is a whole lot broader than I had thought and a whole lot wider. So that began to disturb me a little bit because I had preached a much narrower view of God's grace.

Randy: Let me ask you. What was that narrow view? What did you think it was?

John: I would say this. That essentially, the tools of discipleship became the rules of discipleship. So that the things that you would do to try to grow close to Christ became rules you had to keep in order to be close to Christ.

As a pastor, I look back and if I could take back 20 years of my preaching I would. Because you can tell it's very raw to me that I look at it and I say, to put that burden on people? Because invariably when that happens in a person's life then you become competitive, you become critical. Because when you've got a rules-based Christianity going on you're doing rules, you're doing things because you're trying to please God. And there is a failure then to realize on your part that you're already-pleasing Jesus did all that. Nothing I do is going to add to his pleasure in me. I don't think most people get that.

Randy: Did it make you feel like you weren't good enough because you weren't doing enough?

John: Well, there is no joy. If you feel like because how much more are you going to need to do? So, if I fast a day, well, three days would be better. And if I go three days, well then maybe a week. If I go a week then two weeks...

Sheila: It will never be enough.

John: It's never -- that's the problem when we're trying to please God with our own efforts, it is never enough.

Randy: So, what's the realization that that's not the way we should live?

John: Well, as I was teaching Romans, I think one of the things was just for me it is not enough to know that God accepts me the way I am, just to hear that, I had to know how can that be possible? And how did God -- what did he do to make that a reality? So, as

I'm preaching through Romans verse by verse and I'm wrestling with... a lot of times what people do is they'll take Romans and the difficult things, they just kind of move through them and "Hey, we've been justified. Now Romans eight, there is no condemnation." But there is a whole lot of material in-between there that really helps us understand the lengths to which God went to not only set us free but to work in us. And the fruit of that is the fruit of righteousness, sanctification, God's working in us. What happens is it becomes very liberating.

Sheila: I actually want you to read a bit because when I got to this place in the book I was like wow! This is going to shake up a lot of people and we need to be shaken. So do you mind reading that bit?

John: Sure! The heading is: "There is Grace." "No matter who you are or where you come from, no matter what you've done or how many times you've done it, there is grace for you. If you're laboring under constant sense of unworthiness, feeling like you'll never measure up, there is grace for you. If you struggle with legalism and judgment, always trying to earn God's approval or someone else's for that matter, there is grace for you. If you struggle to let go of the past, to let go of some hurt that was inflicted on you or to forgive the person who inflicted the damage, there is grace for you. If you're fighting with an addiction or some habitual besetting sin, there is grace for you. If you struggle to get out of your head and into your heart, if you feel that no matter what you might learn about God, you're never quite able to enter into a life of trust and freedom, there is grace for you."

That's really the message and understanding how that can be true is why I wanted to write this book to make it real for people.

Randy: What did you see when that clicked with him?

Debbie: Well, I watched him strive and try to live up to the expectations he had for himself or put on himself. We had a lot of conversations over the years about it. I guess

the last ten years just watching him grapple with the scriptures he was teaching, and to see almost like the light bulb go on in his heart -- just an obvious freedom. An obvious change in how he presents the Word, how he just shares the love of Christ with others. You can see it in him. It's very evident in just how he views God. It's a different view of God. It's a right view of the Father.

Sheila: Let me ask you about that because I struggled thinking of God as a father because of circumstances with my own father. What was your relationship like with your dad and did that impact how you viewed God?

John: My dad was an honorable and a very good man. He wasn't a believer for most of his life, got saved toward the end of his life. But he was old school. Anybody having an old school dad understands that. He wasn't unkind. In fact, he was very kind, but he was distant. He was busy, he had a lot on his plate, six kids, farming. So that did have an impact on me. I'm not in any way -- I want to honor my dad because he is an honorable man.

But I remember one day on the plane when Debbie and I were flying somewhere and I leaned over to her and I said, "You know what? I messed up." You know when a wife hears that, she's thinking, what do you mean you're messed up?

Debbie: What exactly does this mean?

Sheila: Be more specific.

John: I said to him, here I am pastoring a mega church and I have this conflicted view of the Father -- and I knew it. I said there's Jesus, he's the one who took the bullet for me. He's the one so I'm all in on Jesus. And the Holy Spirit, I sense his power in my life, I know that. But the Father, he was going to get me. If it hadn't been for Jesus where would I be? Which is totally wrong. It misses much of theology.

You know about the love of God but unless you really understand the grace of God you don't know the extreme lengths to which God not just in time, but in eternity before time began, went to love you and to love me. It's a stunning thing to think about that.

And that before I ever did anything he said, "I want you! And I want you to be wanted without having ever done anything to deserve it." And to be wanted when he knew all the things I would do that were not what he would have wanted.

Sheila: I'm wondering the impact. I read the book and we'll let you know how you can get a hold of it, you really need to. But I think of the impact this could have on pastors' hearts. Those who pour their lives out and perhaps haven't really tasted or been soaked to the skin themselves in the grace of God. How liberating this could be!

John: I pray for everybody. As I wept one morning, I was studying, and we were away, and I was working on some things. I was in a Starbucks parking lot, predawn. As I was reading, I just wept and I said, "Why has nobody ever told me this? Why has nobody...?" And I've been preaching, I've been reading, I've been studying, why has nobody ever explained this to me? Because this is the best news I never heard.

And that's the gospel. It's the best news! I'm convinced that a lot of people don't understand the magnitude of the great news of the gospel because they don't understand grace.

Randy: You mentioned earlier, and I know I grew up hearing this in a pretty traditional church is, you've got to be careful with grace. You've just got to be careful because people will think they can do whatever they want to do.

My pastor likes to say that after you become a believer you can sin all you want to. God just changes your want to. You see in that kind of dynamic where you don't have to worry about preaching too much grace because when you really get it, all of those sinful desires go away because you're overwhelmed by this love of God. Do you sense some of

that? Do you see that?

John: There's no question. It is an overwhelming thing to understand the love of the Lord in a new dimension in his Word and to rest. I think one of the things that surprised me in all of this was my interaction with people. When you understand how much God values you, what you do is you have a new value of people.

Sheila: That's true. It changes how you see everyone.

John: I think as a pastor I've loved people but it's different. I can only say it's different. I want people when I interact with them to have some sense of how much God loves them.

Sheila: Debbie, I want to ask you because I remember the very first time I met you. I came to do your incredible conference, it's so brilliant! And I remembered just the smile on your face. But then I learned about your battle with cancer. So, when you sit here and you talk about the grace of God, the favor of God, what did that do to you when you walked through a darker valley?

Debbie: As far as just the grace of God, when you're walking through darkness you experience it in a deeper way. I would say, with regards to the cancer, I was diagnosed and had a double mastectomy, I had a lot of faith -- I had faith. I had faith that God could heal me in an instant. He didn't choose to do that. He chose to heal me in a different way. But watching or experiencing just the closeness of God when you walk through an experience like that or trial or dark time is it becomes so real. The Father's hand on you and his care for you just becomes just very real.

A verse in Isaiah, I was actually thinking about it today, where it says, "There is treasures in the darkness" I think it so reveals the love and care of the Lord when you experience something heavy. I had to just hold onto his hand because that's all I could see during that time. I didn't know what was ahead. And God's good.

Sheila: Think of the number of believers who, if they're honest, there is a lot of fear involved in their faith. They're grateful that Jesus died for them but there is still this fear that somehow they will mess up. I imagine somebody watching thinking, I'm sure God would show His grace to you, you're a pastor, you're a good guy. They're maybe thinking, I've done too much. I've gone too far. What would you say to that?

John: His grace is a whole lot bigger than they can possibly imagine, that any of us can imagine. I think there is a lot of people as well who are watching who feel they're trying but they're just a continual disappointment. When you feel you've disappointed God like that it is hard to get excited about the Lord.

Honestly, what happens is your eyes are off of him and on yourself. Romans 8:1, "There is therefore now no condemnation -- no condemnation." A lot of Christians think it says or treat it like it says, "There is therefore less condemnation." They feel like the gospel means there is less condemnation. There is no condemnation. No matter what you've done. This is the greatness of God.

Sheila: This is huge, people! This is huge!

John: No matter what sin you've committed there is no condemnation. That's almost unfathomable. It's hard to put your arms around it. That is the beginning of understanding this incredible grace of God, and the love of God for us. And he loves us not because of what we did or didn't do, he loves us because he made us, and he planned for our creation. And he purposed, before time began, to set his affection on us. That's how much he loves us. Whether we feel that or not, is not the issue, his love is still there.

Randy: But it does matter how we respond to that; doesn't it? Doesn't it make some kind of difference?

John: Well, our response is to receive the gospel. Unless we put our faith in Jesus Christ and say, "Jesus, I believe you died for my sin and I receive that saving work on the

cross," that revolutionizes, that's a miracle from the inside out that changes our heart and helps us to begin to walk with God and know God in a way we never imagined possible.

Randy: And there's that word that you mentioned that this all leads to -- freedom. What does that feel like? How would you define that freedom that's come?

John: The burden lifted. Not only the peace of God but peace with God in a whole new way, and peace with myself.

Sheila: And the delight God has. When I began to understand grace after many years of trying to be good enough, I know my husband thinks it's nuts, I get up in the morning and the first thing I do is "Ta-da!" Because I expect God to be thrilled I'm up. Because he loves us so much. He's so jazzed about every single one of us.

Debbie: That's a whole new level!

[Laughter]

John: That's grace upon grace!

Randy: You started this interview by mentioning a phrase. You said, "We don't understand God's pleasure." Is that what you're talking about?

John: God's delight! And the freedom and the joy that comes out of that. There is a joy. Peter talked about joy unspeakable, full of glory. When you understand grace, when your soul is really set free, it is automatic.

Randy: You're so right. Such a good word. I hope you'll consider picking up *A Soul Set Free*. It's a wonderful book. I tell you how you can get it. If you will have some grace today to look at some people in need and say, "We want to help you" then I think you can enter into that joy that we experience here at *LIFE Today* as we reach out and share life

with others. Would you watch this with us?

On the mission field:

Sheila: This water is filthy! I noticed the mom, she kind of tried to like clear it as if somehow that would get rid of the germs or get rid of the disease. But look at what she's pouring in here.

Open Captions: 421,000 worldwide deaths a year are due to unsafe drinking water.

Sheila: Some of the children that we met already in the village, they have brothers and sisters who died because after drinking this water they got diarrhea and they have no resistance. So they get even a little bit sick and they die. I mean, within two or three days they die. I can't imagine. I can't imagine as a mom that that's all that I've got to offer my daughters.

Open Captions: 800 children die each day from diseases caused by contaminated water.

Rick: Look at this! Look at what is in this water. That is just awful. And it is not just soil. This is where the cholera came from.

Jeanne: I can see things in there.

Rick: You can see tiny little worms in there. It is unbelievable!

Open Captions: 95,000 deaths around the world each year are due to cholera.

Sheila: Water for LIFE literally means that. When we put up a well in a village, we give life to the whole village for their whole life. And the need is urgent, and the need is now. Will you please stand with us? Will you help us to give life to children who otherwise are drinking this and dying? Water for LIFE -- it will change their lives forever.

End of video

In the studio:

Sheila: When I was in Angola on that very trip it was devastating to me to walk with some of these moms. They're just like you and me. I had nothing to do with the fact that I was born in Scotland and that mom was born in Angola. My mom was able to give me fresh clean water every day even when I complained about drinking it. These moms have nothing to give their children. I didn't meet one mom on that trip who hasn't buried at least two children simply because the only water available to them is full of disease.

Now here's the deal as far as I'm concerned, we're the body of Christ on this planet at this moment not to just wait for Jesus to get us out of here but to make a difference. When Jesus said, "I was in prison and you visited me. I was hungry and you gave me something. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink." People will say, "Lord, when did we do that?" He said, "Whenever you did it for the least of these you did it for me."

I can never unsee what I've seen. I promised our partners on the ground that we will not forget them. And I've seen what happens in a village when a well goes in. It is absolutely -- they throw a party. Everybody in the village is jumping around and dancing because for the first time they can drink clean water.

So, will you help us? We have a goal this year to put 400 new wells in and I believe that together we can do it. If we all do just a bit, we can do this. I'm going to give them what we need to do to get this done.

Randy: So, to get to these 400 wells we need your help. Let me tell you the average cost to drill, install, and put in this well that is going to last a lifetime for most of these people, the average cost is \$4,800. That breaks down when you look at one well serving over

about 1,000 people on average, it varies around the world, but that breaks down to \$48, basically giving clean water to ten people for a lifetime. Now those are some numbers that we can kind of comprehend.

Here's the important thing. Will you do something, and will you do it today? Will you say, "God has blessed me and now I'm going to bless someone else." Here's a way you can do it. Now Sheila mentioned, he said, "Lord, when did we give you clean water? When did we give you something to drink?" He said, "When you did it to the least of these." Well, let me tell you, these are the least of these. These are the poorest people in the poorest areas on this planet. Why does God allow that to happen? So, we can give him glory by reaching out and saying we're here to help you.

As we give these people clean water to drink, we share that water of life. We share Christ with them. Will you share Christ? Will you pick up the phone, go online today, make the best gift you can so that we can reach out and show the love of Christ to these people? I pray you'll do it and do it right now.

Begin video clip

Announcer: Today, a mother living in extreme poverty will do the unthinkable, give her children dirty, diseased-filled water that she knows could kill them. With no other choice what else can she do?

With your help, clean water is on the way. Mission: Water for LIFE provides a way for parents to save the lives of their children to offer them a bright future free from the fear of death.

With your gift today, you can help drill and establish 400 water wells this year. Your gift of \$24 will help provide clean water for five children. A gift of \$48 will help provide for

ten. \$72 will provided for 15. And \$144 will help provide life-giving water for 30 people for a lifetime!

With your gift, we'll send you the "New Mercies Each Day" desk calendar. This 17-month calendar will not only help you keep track of important dates but also remind you of the Father's love and goodness with scripture quotes and encouragement from all the hosts on *LIFE Today*.

With your gift of \$100 or more, request the "Fruit of the Spirit" bowl. This beautiful and decorative ceramic bowl features scripture revealing the "Fruit of the Spirit," a lovely addition to your table or home.

Finally, please consider a gift of \$1200 to help provided water for 250 people or a gift of \$4800 to help sponsor a complete well. And you may request our "Safe in the Shepherd's Arms" bronze sculpture.

Please call, write, or make your gift online.

End of video

On the mission field

James: These are beautiful children, beautiful families that have come here to contaminated water sources where people are dying of diseases from contaminated water.

Well, we need every person watching to do your part in helping provide families like this and children like this water sources, non-contaminated water, clean water and every time we do it, we inspire others to join us. If you would help drill one well. Maybe you could drill a well or join one or two other people to drill one.

So, would you be that source of inspiration and help by making the best gift you can today?

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: Thank you so much. If the lines are busy, please keep calling. For any gift at all we would love to send you John's book, *Soul Set Free*. My suggestion is get one for yourself and get one for your pastor. I think that would be a beautiful, beautiful gift to be able to do that.

So, John and Debbie, I just want to say what a joy it is to see you again. Thank you so much for being with us on *LIFE Today*.

Randy: Thank you! Thank you, guys!

John: Thank you. We love you!

Randy: Thank you for watching.

Sheila: We'll see you next time on *LIFE Today*!