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**Week 34: Christmas Shoes and Smiles**

**Sheila Walsh**

**"Telling the Truth when Life is Overwhelming"**

**Sheila:** Welcome to *LIFE Today*! I'm Sheila Walsh. I'm so glad you're joining us. Have you ever found yourself in a place where if you're really honest you kind of think to the Lord, why did you let that happen? I'm doing everything in my life to try and honor you. I'm trying to make sure my children honor you. I'm doing everything I know to live in a way that I believe will be pleasing to you.

So Lord, why did you let this happen to me? Sometimes we're tempted to look at other people who are not even living slightly for the Lord and it seems as if everything is going well with them. You just want to know, well, what's up with that Lord?

I saw that in my son's relationship with my father-in-law, William, his Papa. William lived with us for the last two years of his life. When William died Christian was really -- I mean he was overwhelmed with sadness, as I expected. He cried for days. But then I watched that grief morph into anger one day. He pushed our cat, his beloved playmate, Lilly, off the sofa.

So I asked him to go for a walk with me. Outside we walked together down to the lake where we used to live. After a while I asked him to sit down beside me. I asked him this question. Maybe you wouldn't mind if I ask it of you. I said, "Are you angry?"

And he said, "Yes." When I asked him why he said this, "Mom, you told me that God answers prayers and I prayed that God wouldn't take my Papa but he did. So I'm not talking to God anymore."

Have you ever felt like that? You've prayed and you've prayed, and God did not answer in any way that made sense to you so you think, what's the point? Well, it was then that I told my son what honestly I wish someone had told me when I was a child, "It's okay to be angry. Sometimes it's absolutely right to be angry. God is big enough and he loves you enough to handle everything -- everything you're feeling." I put my arm around Christian's shoulders, and I told him this, "Tell God everything. He won't leave you."

I think I've maybe mentioned this before but I remember I bought some boxing gloves and a punching bag and I told my son to hit that thing until he had nothing left inside. He also, at that point, had an almost life-sized stuffed lion that some friends of mine had given him for a birthday. So I told him, "Christian, when you have poured out everything, you're feeling then you can bury your face in the mane of the Lion of Judah."

You might think, well, great advice but honestly it took me a long time to know how to do that myself. So many times I've stood on a platform and encouraged others to be brave and true, to pour out the contents of their hearts to their Father and yet, I've struggled with my own feelings. I can't tell you how often I've turned to the Psalmist David for help. The authentic cries of a shepherd boy and then a king have helped me give words to what has honestly at times been locked inside. Psalm 30 says this: "Hear me, Lord and have mercy on me. Help me, O Lord!"

There was something so intimate about David's words. "Help me, Lord" he prayed. Those three little words can be one of the most powerful prayers. Have you ever prayed that when you don't know what else to say? Just help me, Lord! Your pain and your honesty and prayer will not leave you alone. It will actually draw you close to the Father's heart.

Confession is a daily practice for me. Each morning, once I've grabbed my coffee, I begin my day with gratitude. Even if I don't feel grateful, honestly, because I know that God is amazing. So I thank God for his love that welcomes me to come as I am. But then I

confess what I know to be true no matter what might feel true. I don't always feel loved, but I know I am loved. I don't always feel God's presence, but I know he is with me. I confess my weakness and my fear. I bring everything I know to be true about me into the open arms of my Father God.

On this journey I developed such a hunger to return to the stories I've known since I was a wee girl growing up in Scotland. I've read them again but with fresh eyes unstopped ears. If you're in a place right now of loss, if you're suffering, you might want to sit with a brother of ours. His name is Job. Job was an absolute hero of the faith. He is the kind of man you'd want your daughter to marry, honestly. We read this about him: There once was a man named Job who lived in the land of Uz. He was blameless -- a man of complete integrity. He feared God and he stayed away from evil.

Well, despite that being true about this servant of God, God allowed Satan to basically ruin Job's life. His suffering was devastating. He lost everything. The most painful, he lost his children, then he lost his livelihood, and finally his own health. His acute suffering took him to the very edge of sanity. His depression was so dark that this is what he prayed: "Obliterate the day I was born. Blank out the night I was conceived. Let it be a black hole in space. May God above forget it ever happened. Erase it from the books! May the day of my birth be buried in deep darkness, shrouded by the fog, swallowed by the night."

Well, as his story grew worse and worse, I found myself praying, Lord, please send this poor man some help! Let his friends gather around him and carry him because he clearly can't even stand anymore. Well then you meet his friends and it just gets worse. I pray you don't have friends like this, but I think probably some of us do.

Friend number one, Eliphaz the Temanite. He looks at Job and this is what he says: "Stop and think! Do the innocent die? When have the upright been destroyed? My experience shows that those who plant trouble and cultivate evil will harvest the same."

In other words, he's saying to him, "You brought this on yourself Job." Eliphaz's logic reads a little like this: God is good, you are suffering, therefore you must have done something wrong. That kind of theology leaves no room for mystery or for grace and mercy. Instead, this kind of theology is punishing. If you've ever been a victim of that, I'm so sorry.

Well, then we meet friend two, Bildad the Shuhite. Knowing Job's children have all been killed in a tragic accident he brings this attempt at comfort: "Does God twist justice? Does the Almighty twist what is right? Your children must have sinned against him, so their punishment was well deserved."

I mean these words are the ancient equivalent of telling parents who just lost their children in a car wreck, "Well, they shouldn't have been drinking." Perhaps that's true but it doesn't make those words any less cruel.

Then comes friend number three and they are no kinder. Zophar says this: "Don't you realize that from the beginning of time ever since people were first placed on the earth the triumph of the wicked has been short lived and the joy of the godless has been only temporary? Though the pride of the godless reaches to the heavens and their heads touch the clouds, yet they will vanish forever, thrown away like their own dung."

The implication again, Job's family and Job himself must have been wicked. As I read through his story I was furious with these self-righteous friends whose words were many and whose comfort was nonexistent. They felt somehow compelled to explain God and suffering and pain and tie everything up with a nice little faith bow. They determined that if Job is suffering it must have been caused by something he's done, something his children have done or some hidden sin in his past. Back and forth they argue with this devastated man.

Well, Job cries out, but he cries out against God. Pretty strong words. This is what he says in one passage, "For he attacks me with a storm and repeatedly wounds me without

cause. He will not let me catch my breath but fills me instead with bitter sorrows."

Have you ever felt that way? Have you ever been in a place where it's just one thing after another after another and you just want to cry, "Lord enough!"

The last few chapters of the book of Job are staggering. Job is gut level honest with God. He expresses rage and terror peppered by moments of faith and hope. You know you will remember that he says, "I know that my redeemer liveth." He also says, "Yet though he slay me I will trust him." But the rest of the chapters are full of his anger and fear and wishing he had never been born.

But what I want you to see is this, how God responds to that very authentic confession. He gives Job his very presence. God reveals himself to Job. He doesn't actually answer any of Job's questions. Instead, he gives him a gift far more precious than mere answers. He gives Job himself. He pulls back the curtain a little and shows Job, there's a lot more going on than he can even begin to wrap his mind or his broken heart around. God reveals himself in greater depth and gives Job the gift of his own presence.

So was God offended by the raw outpouring of a broken heart? Far from it! It is interesting to note, the only ones that God was angry with were the friends who tried to shut him up. Scripture records this: After the Lord had finished speaking to Job, he turned to friend one, Eliphaz, the Temanite; "I am angry with you and your two friends, for you have not spoken accurately about me, as my servant Job has."

Wow! "You have not spoken accurately about me the way that Job has?" That is a game changer right there. Job was furious. He was bitter. He was broken. He hated his life. He prayed to die. And the raw authentic truth that poured out of his soul invited the very presence of God. Job spoke truth. Is not all human life a struggle? In fact, every time Job spoke up his friends tried to silence him, but he cried out even louder. And it was that truth, that pressing in into the presence of God that invited the love of God.

There's something so important here, raw honest pain offered to God brings us closer to his heart. God received everything Job said. He welcomed the brutal, real agony of one who believed God was big enough to hear him out and not silence him into shame and hiding. This truth for you and me, speaking our honest and raw pain draws God's presence. We can actually see this in the life of Jesus too.

Mark's gospel, if you ever start in the beginning of Mark's gospel it's got a definite rhythm to it. If you read it straight through you can feel the pace picking up as Christ finally sets his face toward Jerusalem and the cross. There's a clock ticking. But on the way to Jerusalem, on the way to Calvary Jesus tries once more to prepare his closest friends for what's ahead. "Listen," he says, "We're going up to Jerusalem where the Son of Man will be betrayed to the leading priests and the teachers of religious law. They will sentence him to die and hand him over to the Romans."

Focused. Jesus braces for the betrayal and agony that lies ahead but suddenly there is a cry. Christ heard above the noisy crowd. It arises from a blind beggar named Bartimaeus. This was his cry, "Jesus! Son of David, have mercy on me."

The people in the crowd yelled out, "Be quiet!"

But he only shouted louder, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

When Jesus hears Bartimaeus he stops. Ignoring those who told the poor beggar to stop crying out to the son of God, Jesus instructs Bartimaeus to come to him. Then he asks this beautiful question, "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asks. Bartimaeus responds, "I want to see." And Jesus responds by healing Bartimaeus.

Think about this. On his way to the cross Jesus paused to listen to one man. He was on his way to an execution, to the grave, to the resurrection but he stopped for one blind beggar. Bartimaeus followed Jesus after that. He was at the cross. He was there after the resurrection. Church history tells us Bartimaeus became part of the early church. But his

relationship began by crying out his need even when everyone around him told him to be quiet.

Whatever you're facing today, tell God the truth. He knows it. But you need to get it out. Your honest grief and pain draws the heart of our savior closer. Remember David's words, "O God, listen to my cry! Hear my prayer! From the ends of the earth, I cry to you for help when my heart is overwhelmed. Lead me to the towering rock of safety, for you are my safe refuge, a fortress where my enemies cannot reach me."

I don't know if you've encountered friends like Job's friends where people perhaps have told you that the situation you're in is because of something you did or something your children did. I want you to know that is never God.

Remember what Romans Chapter 8 verse one says? There is now therefore no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. I love the fact that Job's bitter harsh words are included in Holy Scripture. And then at the end we get this kind of life-altering truth that the only person that God considered told the truth was Job. In fact, he said to Job, "You better pray for your friends because otherwise I'm going to wipe them out."

There is such an invitation to live authentically with Jesus. Sometimes I think in the church we've got so "nice" about our faith and you know you've had an argument with your husband or your wife on the way to church; you called them things that are not in the New Testament. They may have been in the old but they didn't make it into the new. And you walk through the church doors and the greeter says, "Hey! How are you?"

And you're like, "Oh I'm so close to Jesus I'm nearly flying."

Pretending is not authentic faith. God invites transparency. You get to come as you are. But the amazing thing is when you come as you are, God doesn't leave you that way. Somehow his love changes everything.

One of the things that I'm most grateful for about being part of the family here at *LIFE Today* is that we get to reach out with that kind of good news to people that we might not every meet here on this earth but because of the love and mercy and grace of God and because of the way that so many of you have helped us, my prayer is that we'll see so many of them in heaven. But I have a wonderful project to share with you. Would you watch this?

**On the mission field:**

**Clint:** We're approaching the time of the year when *LIFE Outreach* does its Christmas Shoes and Smiles campaign. The smiles are for corrective surgery but what we're doing today is we're getting these young boys and young girls shoes for the very first time. You can actually see the importance of what we're doing because look at this little girl, Veronica. She's got these sores on her feet already. She's obviously never owned a pair of shoes. She's been walking around in bare feet.

**James:** Betty, they just tough it out and they play but we found out right here in this area that hookworms get in the skin, get in the bloodstream, ultimately into the intestines and cause very serious disease and sometimes death. We can turn it around by simply giving them shoes.

**Sheila:** Something as simple as a pair of shoes can really change a child's life. This is a happy place today. Look at this face! Who wouldn't want to give her a gift for Christmas? So thank you so much. On behalf of her family, those who love her, I think you put the biggest smile on her face that we've seen all day. So thank you. Thank you for the gift of shoes. Thank you for the gift of life!

**End of video**

**In the studio:**

**Sheila:** Nice to see so many smiling faces! So many of the stories that we bring you are heartbreaking so to be able to bring you a story where you see so many children laughing and smiling is awesome. But the reality is the reason those children are smiling is because we've been able to give them a pair of shoes. It is our commitment at *LIFE* to provide for 150,000 children a pair of shoes. Can you imagine your own children have never had shoes? The thing is because they walk barefoot and then they're in contaminated water with cuts, they end up with all sorts of terrible diseases, literally life-threatening diseases.

But here's the amazing news. These lovely little shoes, we can provide a pair for \$3.60. Which if you think about it that means that if you give a gift today of \$36 you will provide shoes for ten children! I remember when I had the last pair of shoes I had to buy for my son, he's in college now so he technically buys his own. For \$36 I could hardly get the laces. But we can put shoes on 150,000 children. That's our commitment for this Christmas.

You might think, well, you're starting a little early! Well, we have to because we want to know how many we've got. Our partners are on the ground, the children are waiting, their moms and dads and grandparents are waiting to see will this Christmas be the best one they've ever had? Now this campaign, some of our campaigns we need a lot. This campaign every single person can do something: \$36, 10 pairs of shoes, \$72, 20 pairs of shoes, and for \$180 you can provide shoes for 50 children!

Can you imagine the joy on their face this Christmas? I think Christmas, particularly here in America has become so self-indulgent and so much stuff that we don't need. Can you imagine the joy on Christmas morning if you know as a family that somewhere in a country that maybe you'll never get to visit but you've been able to give this gift for the first time to children?

Another thing that we're really committed to is a lot of children with cleft palate, cleft lip are looked on as somehow cursed in certain countries. We have a team of amazing doctors who will go in and for \$500 perform that life-altering surgery. So \$1,000 would

give 275 pairs of shoes or two surgeries.

Would you go to your phone? Let's make this a Christmas of giving. Let's make this a time when we think of other people. And we're told, "Blessed are those who am come in the shoes of peace." What a lovely way to express that. And some days when you give children a pair of shoes, they're able to go to school, they're able to grow up. Who knows in some of these nations, some of these children whose good news began with a little pair of shoes went on to become a significant Christian leader.

We can do this. So please go to your phone, make the very best gift possible. Thank you.

### **Begin video clip**

**Announcer:** Poverty is a killer and because of it children needlessly suffer, not only from a lack a food and clean water but also from a lack of things we often take for granted like a simple pair of shoes.

Far too many children living in extreme poverty have never owned a new pair of shoes. And while that may seem minor in light of all their needs, walking with bare feet puts them at risk of life-threatening infections and disease that could lead to crippling consequences and even death.

By responding today you can help immediately secure and begin shipping Christmas shoes to 150,000 children around the world just in time for the holidays. Your gift of \$36 will help provide ten pairs of shoes. A gift of \$72 will provide 20-pair and a gift of \$180 will help provide 50 pairs of Christmas shoes for children in need.

As a thank you for your gift of support, be sure to request this beautifully crafted green crystal shoe ornament, a treasure to display at each Christmas. With your gift of \$100 or more you may also request this keepsake boxed set of *LIFE*'s Christmas shoe ornaments. Finally, please consider a gift of \$1,000 or more to help provide over 275 pairs of shoes

or two children with corrective cleft palate surgeries. And you may request the beautiful "Safe in the Shepherd's Arms" bronze sculpture.

Please call, write, or make your gift online today!

**End of video**

**On the mission field:**

**Betty:** I'm standing here with these children and they're just a small example of children all over the world that deserve to be considered and loved and cared for. We have an opportunity to do that right now among these children and those around the world, to put some shoes on their feet, to give them a chance in life.

I ask you to help us do that. It is just a simple request but a very urgent and important one. Please join with us. You'll get such great joy out of it. I know you will. God bless you and thank you.

**End of video**

**In the studio:**

**Sheila:** Thank you so much. If the lines are busy, please keep calling. And for any gift at all, we're going to send you this lovely -- our shoe this year is green. It is beautiful! And you can hang that on your tree and your family can celebrate that. And for a gift of \$100 you're going to get this beautiful set which has the green shoe and the red shoe and the crystal shoe. So thank you.

This is something we can all do. So if you tried to get through and couldn't before, please keep calling. But make this -- I would love for you to make this a family thing. Sit down maybe at dinner with your family and say, here's what we're going to do and we're going to provide this number of shoes for children who never have any. And on Christmas

when you see these little shoes hanging in your tree you'll get a chance to celebrate.

So for *LIFE Today* I'm Sheila Walsh. God bless you! See you next time.