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Week 35: Christmas Shoes and Smiles

Sheila Walsh

"What Does It Mean to be Redeemed"

Sheila: Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm Sheila Walsh. Years ago when I lived in London, in England, I hosted a program on the B.B.C. Network. It was the first time on British television that we'd had a show that featured Christian music. So I flew lots of different American artists over to be guests on the show and I would say to them, "This is a very unchurched culture. So try not to use kind of the language of the kingdom. You know words that make sense to us but to the vast viewing audience who had never been inside a church, they might not know."

I'll never forget one of my first guests, she was lovely, but when I interviewed her, I said, "Welcome to London! Is this your first time here?"

She said, "Yes. And I just want to say to all the viewing audience, are you redeemed?"

Well, I had to kind of retake that one because not everyone in Britain knew what it meant to be redeemed. So I wanted to look at that today. I wanted to ask you today what it means to be redeemed. If you just look it up in the dictionary, you'll come up with words like liberated, freed, rescued.

And then there's that beautiful scripture: "Do not fear for I have redeemed you. I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your savior... "

That whole chapter in Isaiah, Isaiah 43 is one of my favorites. What a promise! "I have redeemed you" -- such a personal promise! But you see tucked into it is also a preparation for the future. Here God is preparing his people for what will happen. You hear it, "When you pass through the waters... when you pass through the rivers... when you walk through the fire..."

Through the prophet Isaiah God was telling his people these things are going to happen in your future but don't be afraid. I've gone before you and I will be with you. Then we kind of hear the follow-up.

Psalms 66, verse 12, we get the fulfillment. It says this: We went through fire and flood, but you brought us to a place of great abundance.

If you're tempted to think, hang on a minute, Sheila. Isn't that simply an Old Testament promise for the Jewish people? But we read in Second Corinthians, chapter one, verse 20: For no matter how many promises God has made they are "yes" in Christ.

This was not just a promise to the people of Israel but to each one of us who have placed our trust in Christ.

In John 16, verse 33, I think, Jesus tries to prepare his disciples for what lies ahead just as in Isaiah. He says, "I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart because I have overcome the world."

I want you to hear that. There is nothing -- nothing that you will go through today, tomorrow, next week, next year where you'll ever, ever be alone. God is with you right now. And he will be with you tomorrow. And he is already prepared a way through.

Let's face this truth. It doesn't always feel that way; does it? Sometimes when we go

through devastating circumstances, we are tempted to ask, "Lord, do you see what's happening here? Why didn't you answer my prayer? If you are all powerful and all loving, why didn't you stop this?" Have you ever asked those questions and waited for an answer that didn't come?

Or do you struggle to tell God how you feel because it doesn't sound very spiritual? Or you worry that it is a lack of faith. If you're like me, I know you'll say, I want to love God more. I want to have a deeper faith. But we need to be honest with where we are not where we wish we were.

C.S. Lewis wrote in a letter to a friend, "Let us lay before him what is in us, not what ought to be in us."

Last year I wrote a book called, *It's Okay Not to Be Okay* talking about the way that God redeems our pain and moves us past our past. And one of the reasons I wrote it was because I hear this more often than almost anything else, "I can't get past what happened to me." Or, "I'm stuck. I'm struggling." So today I thought I would just briefly outline some of the steps that God's used in my own life to move me on in my relationship with him. I really pray they'll help you too.

So Step 1: Take the first step. Sounds simple but we have to make peace with this truth: Okay doesn't live here but Jesus does. I spent the first 30 something years of my Christian life trying so hard to be the perfect Christian. I believed that God's love for me was based on me getting everything right. I had a list inside my heart of all the things I believed I needed to get right so that God would keep loving me.

I wonder about you. Do you have a list? I wonder what your list looks like. It might be: I need to be the perfect wife, the perfect mom. I need to be a better dad. I need to never lose it with the kids again. I don't want to mess up. I don't want to be a disappointment. I want to read my Bible and pray every single day.

I called my book *It's Okay Not to Be Okay* because we were never designed to be perfect. Every one of us has problems. And those who say they don't are either in denial or hiding them. I'd love to suggest a third way. Dare to have a gut level, unedited conversation with God. To me this is the beginning of the process where the real you meets the real God who loves you and you discover how loved and known you really are. I believe to the level we're willing to be honest with God is an indication of how much we actually trust him. *It's Okay Not to Be Okay* because we're not home yet. *It's Okay Not to Be Okay* because God doesn't ask us to be. *It's Okay Not to Be Okay* because God is in control, because God is good and he is for you. So tell God the whole truth no matter how hard it is.

I love this, Psalm 62, verse eight says this: O my people, trust in him at all times. Pour out your heart to him for God is our refuge.

Take a moment, what would you say... In fact, let me ask you this. What would you say to God if you knew 100% that he was listening and that he loves you and no matter what you told him, he would keep on loving you?

Step 2: admit that you're stuck and struggling. Taking the next step can be as simple as this, acknowledging your struggle to God.

About four years ago I was challenged by this myself. I started getting really bad back pain. I was sent to a neurologist. I went through X-rays and M.R.I. and CAT scans and pain shots and nothing worked. It felt to me like nothing was okay. I was spending most of my time in bed in excruciating pain and I could hardly walk. I had just been invited to join James and Betty here at *LIFE* and most days I couldn't even get out of bed. I literally felt like someone who had lost her life.

Now you may not be in pain but are you stuck? Are you struggling? Does it feel as if a door has been slammed in your face? Does it feel as if you're just alone and God is not listening? Well, that's what it felt like when I could hardly walk. It was as if the door to

the future had been slammed in my face and I was left alone in the hallway. Have you ever been there? Maybe a relationship. A friend of mine, she went through a broken engagement and it was just like a door slammed to her future. Maybe you wanted to be a mom, maybe you lost a job, maybe you went through a divorce you didn't want, and you just feel as if, Lord, where are you?

Let me finish my back story because obviously I'm here. The neurosurgeon said that he was willing to try surgery. No guarantees but he would do what he could. And in the weeks leading up to the surgery, I poured my heart and my questions out to God. What if I lose my ability to walk? What if I won't ever be pain free again? What if my whole future is confined to the four walls of my home? I told God exactly what I was feeling, and I was struggling. And to each question, to each fear the answer was the same: I'll be there. I will be there.

What I discovered about myself was that when things were going well, I felt that God loved me. And when things were hard, I felt he had left me alone. I wonder if you've ever felt that way.

The morning of the surgery I was being wheeled in and the nurse who had on a mask so I couldn't see her face, she said, "What are you singing?" I didn't even realize I was. I was actually singing, "I surrender all." But here's the thing I want you to know. I had peace in the not knowing; when I didn't know what the result would be.

I read a quote by my friend Shauna Niequist and I love this. It says, "When things fall apart the broken pieces allow all sorts of things to enter and one of them is the presence of God."

Step 3: Change the way you think. If we want to change the way we act, we have to change the way we think.

I just wonder what are the tapes that play over and over in your head. We need to

remember that Satan is a liar and he is the accuser of God's children. What I've done for my own life is I've copied out verses that help me in any area that I struggle with. When I feel condemned or alone, I stand on those. Verses like Romans 8:1: So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. Or my favorite two verses at the end of that chapter: And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears about today or our worries about tomorrow -- not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or on the earth below -- indeed, nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord. What a promise!

Step 4: Face the what ifs even if you're afraid. I often wonder how many of us hold back and don't step into everything God has called us to because we're held back by the what ifs. What if I take that job and I'm not good enough? What if I offer to lead that Bible study and I can't do it? What if I invite my neighbor to church and I offend them? Don't let fear hold you back from stepping out in faith.

I've told my son since he was a wee little boy, don't ever be afraid of failing. Failure is actually a great teacher. So I want to say to you, if God has put something in your heart and fear is holding you back, step through your fear and see what God will do.

Step 5: Let go of what you can't control. This is a hard one, particularly for us girls, and especially as moms. When Christian went off to college I cried for about a week. Part of my concern was that I couldn't wait up now every night until I knew he was home or made sure he ate something before he headed off to class. And then he decided to get certified as a scuba diver. I remember saying, Lord, what will happen? To each fear again it was like, "Sheila you won't be there, but I'll be there. I'll be there."

I just wanted to remind you of who our God is. Just a few names: Elohim -- the strong creator God. Adonai -- Lord of all. El Shaddai -- God Almighty. Jehovah Shalom -- the God of peace. If you're hurting right now Jehovah Rapha -- the God who heals. I love

this: Jehovah Raah -- the Lord is my shepherd.

Well, Step 6: Rise above disappointment. I honestly think disappointment is one of the hardest things to deal with. Some disappointments are small things like if the Cowboys didn't make it to the Super Bowl last year but there is always another year. But other disappointments are huge. You hear that your cancer is back. Or someone you trusted betrayed that trust. Or you didn't get that job that you knew you were the one best qualified for it.

One of the things I've learned is to take my disappointment to Christ because we know the hope we have in him will never ever disappoint. Hope is an interesting word and usually it is only as strong as what your hope is in. I can say, "I hope I will lose five pounds before next summer" but really it depends on whether I'm willing to work the program. But hope in God, it's not wishful thinking. You can place your hope in God, and he will not disappoint.

Perhaps one of my favorite steps is this: Celebrate your scars as tattoos of triumph. Jesus could have chosen to rise from the dead without the marks of crucifixion. He could have left those wounds in the tomb, but he didn't. And if Christ has chosen to live eternally with his scars, why should we be ashamed of ours? Scars are proof that God heals. They're no longer open wounds, no image displays the love of God more perfectly than the scars of Jesus. You have a story and God can use your life to bring hope and healing to others.

And the very last one, Step 8: Start again and again and again. If you fell today, you get to start again tomorrow. There's grace and mercy for us with each new hour, each new day. I want to just remind you of a few things of who you actually are. Sometimes we label ourselves with things like divorced dad or single mom or overweight. No! Let me remind you of who you actually are. You are chosen. You are forgiven. You are a new creation. You are loved. You are strong in the Lord. You are redeemed.

That word *redeemed*, it might be an old-fashioned word that we find in scripture, but the message is so powerful. God wants to redeem your story. So often we think, while some testimonies have greater curb appeal than others, perhaps what you've struggled with is something that you're ashamed of. I get several letters from people in prison and I know that many of you watch this show and I just want you to know that we as a staff pray for you and believe that God is just as present with you behind those prison bars as he is with us here in the studio. There is freedom in Christ. But no matter what your story, God is a redeemer. And when we offer the broken pieces of our life to Christ, he can make something incredibly beautiful.

We don't share when the wounds are raw, you need time to heal. But the only thing in heaven that will be there of earth's pain, the only thing will be the scars of Christ. And if he is not ashamed of his, don't be ashamed of yours. Offer up your wounds to Jesus. Let him touch, let him heal you where you're able to then offer that to other people. Let God redeem your story.

One of the things I want to show you is how we can help redeem stories in the lives of people who have some very definite practical needs that you and I can do something about right now. Would you watch this?

On the mission field

James: We want to give children like these, beautiful children shoes -- children all over the world. There goes another one! We want to give them shoes.

You know what Jesus said? "Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not."

You know what? We are the representative of Christ. We are his body, we're his family and we can share his love. We love these little children. We're going to give these little children shoes. Look at these beautiful little feet!

Betty: They have nothing, really but they can still play, they can still have fun. They're children! I think that's what they're supposed to be instead of having to worry about walking around without any shoes where they step on stuff and hurt their feet and also get diseases through that too.

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, maybe where they have a little tear in the skin, get in the bloodstream, ultimately into the intestines and cause very serious disease and sometimes death.

Just look here! This boy has had a blowout in his tennis shoe! He has played so hard and gotten so dirty.

You need to wash your shirt, man!

Isn't it great to see? The kids, they want to have fun. We're going to love them with your help. We're going to give them good new shoes. We -- not me -- all of us together! Let's put shoes on all these beautiful children's beautiful feet! It would just be such a wonderful gift to make at this time and I hope you will do all you can. Just give as many pairs as you can to bless as many children and their families as you can.

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: As James and Betty just showed you, we've had the joy in Central America of putting water wells in, of setting up feeding programs but now we want to give shoes to children. Who could think that \$3.60 could change the life of a child? But it literally can. We were able to give these children these lovely little shoes that will keep them safe.

And so we've made a commitment this year that for 150,000 children we want to be able to give them a gift of their very first pair of shoes. This is so doable. Do you know that for \$36 you can put shoes on the feet of ten children? \$36! For \$72 you can provide

shoes for 20 children. And for \$180, 50 children! Can you imagine the sight of 50 children running around protected from all those terrible diseases that James and Betty talked about?

The other thing we're really committed to is in so many countries where children are born with cleft palate, cleft lip, they're shunned in society. So often their parents keep them away from school and keep them home because they're some superstitions that a child born like that is cursed. No child is cursed.

What we have at our disposal are amazing doctors who have said, listen, we will go into these countries and for \$500 we will repair that for a child. Give them their face back. Not just give them their face back, give them their life back.

I want this to be our best campaign for these shoes; 150,000 children right now, that's our commitment. They've never had a pair of shoes in their life. We can do this. Would you go to your phone? Would you give the very best gift possible? I think it would be lovely if you did it, as maybe as a family. You could decide how much you're going to do, and the children could put in a little of their allowance. If your children chipped in \$3.60, they've actually put shoes on the feet of one little boy or one little girl!

This is not something that is hard. I love that scripture when Jesus said, "I was hungry, I was thirsty, I was naked, and you clothed me." What a joy to be able to put shoes on a child in Jesus' name. So often I think when we care for the very practical needs then we have the right to share the good news of Jesus. It's amazing the number of children and parents who give their lives to Christ simply because somebody cared enough for their child to make a difference.

So will you join with us? Together we can do this. So please call that number on your screen. Make the best gift possible. Let's change the life of 150,000 children. It starts with just one child -- it starts with 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**In the studio:**

Sheila: If you've been with us for some time you know that one of the things we love to do this time of the year is to give you this lovely little shoe ornament and this year's is

green. So for any gift at all, you will get this little shoe. Or if you're able to give \$100 then you'll get the box with three shoes. You have the green, the red, and crystal. I know you don't give to get gifts but it's our way of saying thank you. But I think these are even more significant when you have these hanging on your Christmas tree later this year it will be a reminder that you've reached out in Jesus' name and made the difference in lives of so many children.

So if you weren't able to get through, please keep calling and make the best gift possible. So for James and Betty, I'm Sheila Walsh saying thank you so much. We'll see you next time on *LIFE Today*.