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Week 46: Fall Mission Feeding

Sheila Walsh

Ruth Graham #2

Sheila: Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm Sheila Walsh. So glad you could join us. And I'm so glad that my guest today is with me. Ruth Graham, daughter of Billy Graham has written a phenomenal new book. It is called *Forgiving My Father, Forgiving Myself*.

Ruth, welcome! I actually wanted to ask you a question about the title. I've read all sorts of theological opinions on whether we're supposed to forgive ourselves. Talk to me about why you've titled the book that way.

Ruth: Well, I struggled to forgive myself, for repeated sins, over and over again like Samson. I even began to wonder if I was even saved. I thought, oh something is wrong with me. I'm missing a piece somewhere. So I knew I had to forgive myself.

Then I had to forgive my father for the many absences in my childhood. I was left with a sense of abandonment. I'm not blaming him. I knew he was called by God, I supported that. He's my hero. He will always be my hero. But it did have a profound effect on me. He writes in his own memoirs, that "his absences must have had repercussions in my children's life." I was one. Yes. There were repercussions in my life, severe ones. Don't blame him. They were my choices. So I had to learn to forgive him.

And also God. There is no theology for that either but so often we expect God to intervene, to change the course of history, to fix our needs and it doesn't happen and we get angry with him. After my first divorce I was very angry with God that he did not intervene, that he didn't stop it from happening. It really caused me to wonder, what is

God all about? I had claimed verses that the latter would be greater than the former and he would do a new thing in me. I didn't realize that he was doing a new thing in me, totally different. So I had to forgive God for lack of a better word.

And then it is an invitation to the miracle of forgiveness, and I've seen that miracle take place in my own family after some pretty bumpy roads but God brought us all together.

Sheila: I want to go back to that forgiving God, because I actually do think that is absolutely scripturally accurate. Because if you look at the book of Job, Job railed against God, and then his three well-meaning friends say all the right things. You just want to smack them. But at the end it's Job that God commends. He commends him for his... I think to the level you're willing to be honest with God is an indication of how deeply you've trust Him.

Ruth: Yes! I do too.

Sheila: I want to talk about -- you talk about confessing to one another, not just to kind of, Lord, I ask for forgiveness. I love the fact that you have what I like to call "safe sisters" but you have some people. How important is that, do you think?

Ruth: It is very important to me. I have a wonderful group of women in Charlottesville, Virginia who pray for me on a regular basis. And they're praying for us this afternoon.

But I just need a place where I can be honest and vulnerable and say, "I need help here. Would you pray for me?" And they have been lifesavers for me. And we all need community. We can't do this alone. We're supposed to be in community. As you know, when you travel and you're gone on weekends, you are isolated, so you do need a body around you. My prayer group and my Sunday school class are that for me and I'm very grateful.

Sheila: I just want to back up a tiny bit. You talk about forgiving yourself. I'm thinking

of a young woman I met last weekend and she's had two abortions. Her thing is, "How can I forgive myself for something that I can't undo?" What would you say to that?

Ruth: Well, so often we can't undo it. For instance, if we shared a confidence of somebody else, we can't take it back. So we can't undo it. God understands that and God offers healing and renewal. He will take those children, he's got them now, and she will meet them one day. All is forgiven. There is healing. There is welcoming. We don't need to be afraid of God.

Sheila: You're right about how Christ modeled taking our very real emotions to God in the garden. I found that a very powerful passage. Just speak to that.

Ruth: Well, my friend Dr. Terry Wardell is the one who shared that with me. I think, emotions as we've talked before is do knock us off our pins. We think, oh we're back here again. But those are emotions. What Jesus did in the garden, he was pouring out his emotions to God. And how do we know that? Because God overheard.

It was loud crying and sobbing and weeping. John heard that and so John recorded it for us, which is really powerful. We can follow Jesus' example. We don't have to tell everybody. And R.T. Kendall says once you've confessed it, stop talking about it. Just talk about it to the point you need to get healthy but that's it. Don't go around telling all the different people you need to tell and try to get back or whatever.

Be honest with God, he can handle it. He wants us to be honest with God. He knows it anyway. He made us to be emotional creatures. He doesn't condemn us for that. I love Joyce Meyer's book, *God's Not Mad at You* because so many of us think he's mad at us. He's just standing in heaven waiting to get us. But he's not.

Sheila: You contrast the way, the different ways that Peter and Judas, where they went to get help. That's very interesting to me. Would you talk a little bit about that?

Ruth: Well, Judas, apparently became very disillusioned with Jesus; that he wasn't the conquering hero, he wasn't going to save them from Rome. And so he began to stand a little closer to the Pharisees and the people who were criticizing Jesus. And he began to listen to what they were saying. He decided that he would betray Jesus into their hands. He did so but he never dreamed, I don't think, that it would go as far as it did. As soon as he realized that Jesus was in fact going to be crucified for being an innocent man -- Judas must have been horrified. But where did he turn? He turned to the Pharisees and the scribes and they threw the money back at him and said, "We don't want your money!" He confessed to the wrong people.

Sheila: And then he went out and hung himself.

Ruth: Hung himself -- hopeless! Peter denied Jesus three times, not once but three times. And as he said the last one the cock crowed, and Jesus turned and looked at him. Can you imagine what that did to Peter? I just -- and he didn't know that Jesus was going to be raised again. He did not know he'd ever see Jesus again. But Jesus went to the cross and Peter thought that would be the last thing he would know about him. So he turned to the disciples and he was in the room when the women came back and said, "Jesus is not there! He's risen." And he ran, he had to go. And Peter being Peter just had to march right in and see what's going on.

But Peter confessed to the right people. He was in a community of people who understood God's grace -- and that's important for us. We need to be in a community that understands God's grace. We can't out-sin God's grace.

Sheila: And don't you love, and I think you mention in here the fact that angel said, "Go and tell the disciples -- and Peter." Because he was probably wondering, well, should I go? I was the one who denied him. That to me is one of the most grace-filled verses in all scripture.

In the book you have this kind of idea of going back to go forward. It reminded me of

one of my favorite quotations of all time. It is from T.S. Elliot's "Little Gidding" where it is like, "We shall not cease from exploration. And the end of all of our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time."

What do you mean by going back to go forward?

Ruth: Well, sometimes we're stuck in a sin or a bad memory or a resentment, a bitterness and we have to go back to that place. And I use Hagar as an illustration. Hagar was so badly treated by Sarah and it was Sarah's doing. And Sarah blamed Abraham, but he was only doing her bidding. And Hagar fled. She was in danger, so she fled. And she fled to the wilderness. The wilderness was not a safe place at all. And she fled to get away from Sarah. So she was willing to face the wilderness rather than be in Sarah's tent.

While she's there the Lord appears to her and says, "You need to go back to Sarah's house." [Gasps] That's the last place she wanted to go! The last place in the world. So often that's the last place we want to go. We don't want to go back to the place where we're stuck. We don't want to go back to that injury. We don't want to back and ask for forgiveness. We don't want to go back. Let's bury it. Let's cover it over and just keep on marching forward.

But God would have us go back to those places and deal with them honestly, then find healing for them and we're able to move forward. But if we just cover them over, they are buried alive, they will come back.

Sheila: What do you do if you go to someone and you ask for their forgiveness and they refuse to give it?

Ruth: You've done your work. You can't change them. God will have to work on their hearts. But you have done what God asked you to do. You're obedient and you have to leave it there. You can't convince them. You can't argue with them. You can't defend yourself. Just simply say, "Please forgive me." And if they can't, give them time. This

may be news to them. So you need to give them time too. But I think, by and large, people want to forgive.

Sheila: One of the issues that's very much talked about at the moment is sexual abuse that's been covered up in the church. There is a lot of writing about it at the moment. Someone asked me, she said, "My grandfather was the one who abused me, and he was an elder in our church. He's dead now so how can I forgive him when I can't go and talk to him?"

Ruth: You can always forgive. It doesn't depend on the other person. It depends on your heart and your obedience. God will take care of them, like with my first husband. I told God, "You take care of him. Tell him I'm sorry." But we don't have to do that. God can give us the peace and the sense of forgiveness even if that person is not there. Because a lot of times people are gone.

Sheila: One of the most intimate and revealing chapters, and I thought one of the most honest, and it would help other parents, is you talk about your relationship with your daughter, Windsor. That's been quite a journey in itself.

Ruth: Yes, it was! Yes, it was! Windsor had two babies out of wedlock when she was a teenager. The first one she released for adoption and 22 months later got pregnant again and had another baby. I thought something was wrong with her. I thought this kid, connections are not being met. I didn't know what was happening. She just refused to obey all the rules. She just was over the top. And I had had it with her.

I loved her. I knew she was not in rebellion. I think she was hurting. She released that baby. She was wanting to make the hurt go away. Her father was not that kind of father. And so she was looking for love in all the wrong places.

When she got pregnant again, she decided to keep that little boy, parent him. She really struggled -- really struggled. She did go on to college. She got her insurance license. She

got her Associates Degree with honors. I maintained a relationship with her because I did not think she was in rebellion. I just thought she was hurting. We would have her for dinner and have her for holidays and we would go to the beach with her, but it was always uneasy. She wasn't a safe place for me. I didn't want to get too close because she had really broken my heart.

Years later she married a wonderful man and they have two children of their own. One who had severe birth defects and was on life support for quite a while, and still has a feeding tube and he's nine years -- or ten years old now. You would not know he was disabled but he is.

And she struggled with her own pro-life issues. Obviously, chose life two times with the first two babies, and then this child, she chose life for that child. So one day we were invited to speak at Prince Edward Island, Canada and I thought, maybe this is a good opportunity for Windsor to get her feet wet.

Sheila: Had she spoken before?

Ruth: No. To talk about her own pro-life stand. And she also has a life-threatening disease which will require her to choose life for herself at some point -- or not. She is very honest about it. She said, "I may not be able to do that." But I wanted her to get her feet wet. She spoke with such poise, such grace, and I sat there with tears streaming down my face. She was so gracious and so engaged. Healing took place -- just healing took place.

I realized, God had done a miracle for us because at the same time, my fourth husband had been in a terrible automobile accident and he was on life support machines. And she came down to be with me. And she knew her way around hospital machines. She was able to say, "Mom, this means this, and this means that. You need to ask this question." I relied on her. She was wonderful. Healing took place. Can I tell you when or how? I do not know, but it took place and I'm so grateful. And she now lives four blocks from me,

and we thoroughly love one another.

Sheila: Oh, I love that, Ruth!

Ruth: But it's been a miracle. It's just a miracle.

Sheila: But again it was process; it took time.

Ruth: Yes! It took many, many years.

Sheila: One of the things you touch on in the book and really, I laughed when I read this, about how difficult it is within the Christian world, and particularly with women, to be able to express anger. It's just "not acceptable."

Ruth: No, it's not! I remember telling my mother I was angry one day. And she said, oh you can't be angry. Well, what was I to do with that? What was I to do with my anger? I was feeling it. And of course, I never saw my mother and daddy angry. And if they were, they hid it very well. I didn't know what to do with it.

One day after my husband's infidelities it just exploded. I mean the anger just roared out and it exploded over everybody. And I didn't care what I said, I didn't care who it hurt. I was just angry. Fortunately my pastor was with me and he herded the children back to their house. I went in to talk with Ted and my anger finally spent. That's the situation I want to ask his forgiveness for. When I get to heaven, I'll get the chance and God's taking care of it in the meantime. But the Bible says, "Be angry and do not sin." And I was angry, and I sinned at that point.

Sheila: But you'd never been taught how to be angry and not sin.

Ruth: No. But you have to be able to express verbally in an appropriate way. I hope I gave my children the opportunities to say whatever they wanted respectfully but say

whatever they wanted to me. And I think they have. And some things I didn't want to hear.

[Laughter]

And I said to someone this Christmas time, I said, "I've lived long enough to like my kids." And they laughed. But I was perfectly serious because there was a time I did not like my kids. They gave me a run for my money. But they've turned into wonderful, lovely, young people.

Sheila: When you finish this book, when you've done the final edits and you've released it to... I see you're with Baker Books. They're my publishing company; they're awesome. What did you feel in yourself? Was it fear? Was it excitement?

Ruth: It was fear! I thought maybe I should go hide in a cave somewhere. Because I thought, my father is revered around the world and I would never want anybody to think I was critical or harsh. And I had it vetted by two people I trusted to make sure there was no harshness or no excusing of myself. I didn't want to do that. I was nervous. When the editor got back to me and said it really helped her view of forgiveness, I went...

[Sighing]...like that.

Sheila: Your editor is my editor.

Ruth: Then you know how gracious and lovely she is.

Sheila: She is. But I have to say having read it and obviously, I like many, loved your parents, there is not a hint of... You honor them. But you help us see what life was like for you and for many of us in ministry or who have ministry families. So I just want to say yay you! Well done!

Ruth: Well, evangelicals have put ministry before family for many years and it is a

conversation evangelicals need to have because it is not right.

Sheila: Absolutely not. Well, I'm going to tell you how you can get a hold of this wonderful book of Ruth's. I could not recommend it more highly. But first of all, I want to share something with you. Ruth and I have both walked in some of the harshest places in Africa and watched children who are not looking for a great summer vacation, they would just like one bowl of food a day. You and I can make a difference. Would you watch this?

On the mission field:

Open Captions:

>> God, you have all authority over my family. I pray that you will provide all my needs, so that I can help my children. You are able.

Announcer: Like so many of us, Felicia prays earnestly over her home and her children. But in her world, life and death are at stake every day. The circumstances faced by the families in her village are overwhelming and they are forced to contend with a reality most of us can't imagine.

Open Captions:

>> We work but still don't have enough food. There are days we don't eat, and go to bed hungry. Our children used to cry to us, but we had to tell them that won't help. Now, they join us in crying out to God for help.

Announcer: Despite already losing one child to malnutrition, Felicia's faith remains strong. The danger is real, and she fears for the future for her children but her hope is anchored in a daily act of surrendering her family to God.

Open Captions:

>> I can only depend on God and trust him with our future. I ask him to give me wisdom

so I can find a way to feed my children.

Announcer: Like Felicia so many families in this corner of the world feel the weight of malnutrition bearing down on them and threatening their survival. They can't collapse under the burden or give in to despair. They can only pray. And you could be the answer to those prayers.

End of video

In the studio:

Sheila: Kneeling on that rough ground, head on a piece of wood asking God for help. You know what I think when I see that picture? Felicia isn't a convert, she is a disciple. It's not she made some decision at some point to trust Jesus and hoped everything in life would work out well. She is daily trusting him for literally the next bowl of food she can give her children. You've seen that Ruth. You have been there. What does that do to your heart as a mom?

Ruth: Oh it just tugs at my heart. I remember being in Angola and watching a family with a skeleton of a fish just sucking the bones, that's all they had -- sucking the bones. Oh, it just breaks your heart! As a mother, if you didn't have enough to feed your children and you saw the results of malnutrition, and to bury your children because they were hungry? Oh I cannot imagine. And her faith! Her faith, it just puts me to shame all to pieces.

Sheila: I feel exactly the same. On my last trip in Angola, we walked to where it was a graveyard simply for children. And even as we were looking at the little markers left we realized there was another family approaching with their little one and so we all moved aside out of respect.

But here's the thing that's good news. That all sounds like devastating news and it is but the good news is we can change it. I've seen with my own eyes, I've walked into a

malnutrition clinic and seen these babies with red hair and skin peeling and distended bellies. Literally, they can't laugh anymore because it takes every ounce of energy just to take the next breath.

But then I've gone to the village where we've set up mission feeding, and I've watched these children laugh and stand in life. They come to school because that's where we feed them. So not only do they get a meal, it breaks that cycle of poverty because they get an education. Who knows if one of those children is going to become the president of one of these African nations?

You and I, ordinary people like you and I can change this. So we're asking you here, will you please help us? Just \$30 will feed three little ones for three months. That's amazing to me. \$50 will feed five children. \$100 will feed ten. And if you're able to give more, \$1,000 will feed 100 children for three months.

Now for any gift at all today, I want to send you Ruth's amazing book, *Forgiving My Father, Forgiving Myself*. I believe that this book will bless you but what I'm asking you to do is will you reach out and be the answer to these -- I mean right now, all over Africa mothers are on their knees praying, "God, please answer my prayer!" We want to be able to say, "God heard you and he sent us." So please go to your phone. Give the very best gift possible and we'll be able to bring you some footage back and show you the answers that you've helped provide.

Begin video clip

Announcer: Mission feeding began with a promise to be there in times of crisis for thousands of hurting and hungry children in their time of need.

Now more than ever we need your help to save lives by feeding and caring for children across the continent of Africa. With food reserves gone and many areas experiencing

severe famine, we urgently need to replenish our supplies to reach the 400,000 children who are counting on us. Your gift of love can be the miracle answer to a desperate mother's prayer.

Call now with your lifesaving gift of \$30, \$50 or \$100 that will help feed and care for three, five or ten children for three full months. With your gift, we'll send you the authored worship CD by Anthony Evans. This powerful full-length album includes unique versions of some of today's most cherished worship songs that are sure to uplift and inspire you.

With your gift of \$100 or more please request the "Filled with Faith" and "...Joy" travel mug set. These 12-ounce mugs are crafted with large handles, double-layered insulation and vacuum sealed lids to prevent spills. Each mug includes a message to remind you of God's blessings and faithfulness.

Finally, with your gift of \$1,000 or more to help feed and care for 100 children, be sure to request our commemorative bronze sculpture, "Safe in the Shepherd's Arms."

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

End of video

In the studio:

Sheila: Can you hear them coughing? Can you hear that deep chest cough? Because their resistance is so low that the least little thing becomes a serious life or death issue for these children. And I don't know if you realize but every time that you pick up the phone and you call, or every time you go online, these are the people whose lives that you are changing and our prayer is that we can save this little one.

But my prayer is that we can save hundreds of other children before they get to this stage. No child should ever get to this stage. No mom should ever have to watch this. So if we

do something now, we can stop this from happening.

End of video

In the studio:

Sheila: Thank you so much. Please keep calling. We want to continue to be able to meet our commitment to feed thousands of children in Africa. Ruth, I want to thank you so much for being our guest here at *LIFE*.

Ruth: Thank you for something me. It's been a joy.

Sheila: I want to thank you too for this incredible book. We just look forward to sending it to you. So for James and Betty, from all of us here at *LIFE Outreach*, I just want to say thank you so much for being with us and we'll see you next time on *LIFE Today*.