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Week 49: Fall Mission Feeding
Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh
Niki Hardy

Sheila: Welcome to *LIFE Today*! I'm Sheila Walsh here with Randy Robison.

Every now and again I get the opportunity, a book company will send a manuscript and they will say, "Do you want to read this? Would you think of endorsing it?" Sometimes I get a few of them and I have to think, gosh, can I do this? But when this book, *Breathe Again* landed on my desk and I began to read, it was an absolute, an absolute yes! Not just because she is a fellow Brit, but because it is such a good book.

So please help me welcome our guest, Niki Hardy. Welcome!

Niki: Thank you!

Sheila: The subtitle of your book is *Breathe Again*: How to live well when life falls apart. How did life fall apart for you?

Niki: Well, I think for so many people life can fall apart in an instant and life can unravel slowly over time. I think for me it was both/and. I lost my mom to cancer; she was diagnosed with small cell aggressive lung cancer, which if you know anything about cancer it is a pretty brutal one. She died in her early 60s. Before that she was fit, healthy, loved hiking, had moved to Vancouver, Canada when she remarried; so loved the Pacific Northwest. So she died far too young and far too suddenly.

And then just about six years later, my sister Jo got the same thing; small cell aggressive lung

cancer and like her mom, our mom only survived 14 months. So with both those two back to back, and when my mom had cancer I was in England, she was in Vancouver so we had that long distance relationship. I'm the youngest of three girls and we were all in England and she was in Canada. And then when Jo got cancer, I by then had moved to Charlotte, North Carolina and she was in the southwest of England, and so again, another long distance relationship.

So over time my life was -- I was going through grief and figuring out what this meant and how to deal with it with young children. And then just six after losing Jo on New Year's Eve 2011-12, when everyone else was celebrating we were with her as she passed away. Six weeks after that I was diagnosed.

Sheila: That's just devastating! That is so much loss piled upon each other. How did you discover that you had cancer?

Niki: I went to the doctor about something else. I was fit and I was healthy. I had just ran a marathon and I mentioned something and she was like, "Well, let's get you in for a colonoscopy now. Now insurance will pay for it."

So I went with a girlfriend because I didn't want to get my husband out of work. My girlfriend said she would take me. And rather ridiculously I thought it would be a nice girls' day out. But we ended up sitting in a small soulless room and being told that I had a five centimeter tumor, and I had rectal cancer. So as you can imagine my life fell apart.

Randy: How early did they catch it?

Niki: Well, I was Stage 3 so that meant it had made a bid for freedom and found its way to some lymph nodes but no further than that which was a blessing.

Sheila: What happened to you that day? I'm wondering, when I was reading your book I was trying to put myself in your shoes and finding it very difficult to do so. When you expect you're just going for a girls' day out and then you suddenly receive that kind of diagnosis, what did you

do?

Niki: Well, I often say that all I said when they told me was, "Oh! Is there a third option?" Because they said, "It's either cancer or lymphoma." I think I was half still loopy from the drugs and half in denial. I just said, "Oh! Is there a third option?" And my sweet friend had just lost her sister to cancer. And so I think she was more in tune with what was going on than I was. So the penny dropped slowly over time actually.

Sheila: One of the things that... I love this. You say, "The rubbish we believe when the poop hits the fan!" What is some of the rubbish that we, as believers, believe when something terrible happens?

Niki: Oh there is so much. I wish I could say that being a pastor's wife gave me a ticket of freedom from all this stuff that we believe. But I kind of lump it into two categories. I call it "God trash" and "self trash" because I think there's so much we believe about ourselves that is rubbish.

There's a psychologist called Martin Seligman who talks about the three beliefs that we hold that hold us back from getting through suffering and building resilience, and they are permanence, personalization, and pervasiveness. These beliefs that it's all my fault. My life will never be any different. And my whole life is now ruined.

And actually, when we look at things with perspective, those things aren't true. Even if we have just been diagnosed with something, even if we have lost a loved one or we're battling depression or whatever it might be, these beliefs, if we can put truth where these lies are, that's when we can start to move through. So that's the kind of self trash that I talk about.

And then the God trash. There's so much. The stuff that I believed: God's angry at me. He's trying to teach me something. If I could just figure out what on earth it was, you know, then we'd get through this.

Or maybe he's not as good and as merciful as I thought he was. Maybe he's left and he's helping somebody more spiritual than me who annotates their Bible.

[Laughter]

Randy: So taking you back to that day of your diagnosis. You've just lost your sister six weeks prior, you knew there was possibly a history of it in your family, you're married, you're husband's... you started a church in Charlotte, yes? You have children?

Niki: Yes!

Randy: How old are they?

Niki: They were 14, 12, and 9, and so they were coming at this with the view that if you got cancer you died and died quickly. And so it was difficult to know how to talk to them about it.

Sheila: How did you make those kind of decisions as to what was appropriate and what was not?

Niki: We talked long and hard when I first got the diagnosis, when they weren't sure what it was and what the treatment program would be, and what my prognosis would be. I thought the heat-seeking missile of death that was obviously a family trait had locked in on me and my rear end. And so we had to decide, how much were we going to tell the kids? What were we going to tell the kids? When were we going to tell the kids? And given they were at that impressionable age, not quite old enough to have developed adult coping mechanisms and skills, but still not young enough that they wouldn't really know what was going on, we decided to keep them abreast of what we knew and tell them what we knew and not hold anything back. We decided we're "Team Hardy." We're not going to operate in half-truths or lies or keep anything from them. And so we sat around the table and told them.

Randy: What was their response?

Niki: You could see the blood draining from their faces. Once the word *cancer* and *mom* in the same sentence, anything else we tried to say, I think fell on deaf ears. And then it was our daughter Sophie who looked me in the eye and she said, "Mommy, are you going to die?" That's when I said, "Yes, at some point. But I hope not from this. And whatever happens God is with us and he is good." And to this day I say that that pep talk was just as much for me as it was for her.

Randy: Did you feel it? Did you feel that God was with you in that moment?

Niki: Yes! And interestingly, one of the things I learned over my journey was that it's possible to hold so called conflicting emotions in the palm of our hand at the same time. I'm a very logical person. I'm not terribly in tune with my emotions but I used to think there was happiness and joy and peace. And then over here was anxiety and fear and anger. But through this I learned that I could be lying on a scanning machine and feeling fear and peace at the same time. And I could feel comfort and alone at the same time. So that was a new experience for me.

Sheila: Why did you call the book *Breathe Again*?

Niki: Yes. It's about how when life falls apart we can either [gasps] hold our breath or we get to this place of merely surviving and we just can't take another breath. What I found was when I was diagnosed, you are called a survivor from the moment you're diagnosed. I thought you had to actually survive and get through it but no, the moment you're diagnosed you're called "a survivor."

So I was like, "I'm a brick with a stiff and perfectly waxed upper lip. I've got this. And I'm going to survive." I thought with my grit and determination and my faith in my God, I've got this. And for a while, I was good until I had chemo and radiation. I had surgery where they replumbed me and I had an ostomy bag. And then I had more chemo and a port, and got plugged into chemo each week.

Eventually, I was exhausted, I was nauseous, I had neuropathy, and surviving was all I was

doing. And really, we get into this survival mode of if I can just... and I can't take another breath. If I can just get through this. And so that's how *Breathe Again* came about. About even in the midst of what we're going through, not waiting for it to end, we can *Breathe Again* with God.

Randy: I've obviously not been through what you've been through, but I have experienced the loss of a loved one with cancer. And I know when that hits you feel like you can't breathe. You feel like you're drowning. And actually, that's an illustration you use about drowning because you can't always... You tell the story about the riptides because that meant a lot to me.

Niki: Yeah. So when I was a 20-something, young and carefree before I was married, I was able to do some traveling. And in Australia, I went swimming and swam between the flags in the safety zone where I was told -- I followed the rules but I got swept out to sea by a riptide. I realized how far out I was. I turned to swim back to the shore and I could not fight the riptide. And it's the same in life. We try and we turn and we fight what we're battling.

But actually, the way to survive a riptide, in fact, the way to thrive in a riptide, and people actually go swimming in riptides when they know what they're doing, is to turn and swim parallel to the shore. So that feeling of I can't breathe because the waves were crashing over me and you know you get tumbled and I'd pull up and the next one would come. Eventually, I got rescued by a girl on a surfboard.

But I didn't learn about how to swim in a riptide until I had a few choice words with the life guard because I was like, "I followed the rules!" And don't we feel like that in life? I followed the rules, God! I'm a good Christian, I brought up my family well. For me, I move my family to America with my husband and we planted a church and this? Are you kidding me? And so that's...

Randy: Yeah, but when those waves hit and you barely get your head back up and they hit again, you don't know what to do really. We have to turn.

Niki: Exactly. And that's where the life is.

Sheila: But I love some of the steps that you gave. I found them so helpful. I'm just going to throw out a couple. What do you mean by "choose brave"?

Niki: Yes! Well, I don't think brave is something we are or aren't by nature of the genes we've been handed down. It's a choice we can make. It's like when we told the children, it didn't feel brave but it was a step towards life, a step towards honesty with our children.

And so when we choose brave that's the step that will lead to more life and more freedom. It doesn't have to be big but it does have to be intentional. And for many, it can be getting up in the morning when depression hits. Or having a difficult conversation with a friend. Or going to work when your boss is a nightmare. These things.

Sheila: What about the role of community? Because sometimes when trouble hits it can be instinctive almost to draw back. You just almost want to self protect.

Randy: Especially if you're a pastor's wife and you're having some questions about why God is letting these things happen to you; right?

Sheila: So how important was community to you?

Niki: Well, community was really important and at the same time I shunned community. So I very much hunkered down. It was as if I had my people, I had my family and my close friends and we had the church -- our church was amazing. And we're a church that leads with vulnerability from the front so people knew what was going on but it was still, I had rectal cancer and when your husband says "rectal cancer" from the front of church you think, oh my goodness. Everyone is thinking about it and it is mine!

Sheila: Couldn't it have just been a nicer cancer?

Niki: Yes! But at the same time it was the cancer community that I kind of was like, no, thank you. I didn't want to do all that. I was encouraged to time and time again but I was like... And if I'm honest, I was in denial, I'm not one of them. I was arrogant, I don't need them; nothing that Google and my doctor can't tell me.

And also, I was frightened because these people had cancer and if I got close to them, they were more likely to die than other people and I wasn't sure I could handle that. So there was part of me that said thanks but no thanks.

And then I met people actually in an online cancer community and these were people who were able to offer empathy and not just sympathy. My family and friends were wonderful but they didn't know what it was like to sit in a chemo chair or for an ostomy bag to leak in Target but these people did. And so it was a different relationship.

I talk a lot in the book about thriving and not just surviving life. And thriving is a team sport and we need community around us.

Sheila: You talk also about the importance of gratitude. That's got to be tough. When you've just been given the worst diagnosis you could imagine, how do you practice gratitude in the middle of that rather than at the end of it?

Niki: Yes. It's not easy. I talk about how it's important to not just give thanks for the shiny glassy lovely things but even the hard difficult things. I talk about the game that we played with the kids one time when we had a flight that was delayed and delayed and delayed. We ended up sleeping on the airport floor and we decided let's play the let's give thanks in all things game. And it was less about teaching our children biblical truths and more about keeping them happy. But we ended up finding all sorts of reasons to give thanks. And out of that we realized that you don't need to see things differently in order to be grateful but be grateful in order to see things differently.

Sheila: Say that one more time; would you? That's really great!

Niki: I might get it around the wrong way! But you don't need to see things differently to be grateful; rather be grateful to see things differently. And every chapter I share the story of not just a little bit of my story but an often forgotten woman of the Bible story and another thriver as I call them.

And in the chapter on practicing gratitude I share the story of a woman called Kristen who after getting septic shock became a triple amputee. She has five children and she is one of the most dynamic people I know. She talks about flipping the script. Changing the "I have to's" to "I get to." So she says I have to do laundry -- I get to do laundry! Because I have healthy children who have enough clothes and I have clean water. And flipping the script on so many things can change the way we see things and our levels of gratitude and practicing it. Three things I'm grateful for today actually increases our well-being, lowers our heart rate, and increases our happiness.

Randy: I love that, Sheila, the idea of flipping the script.

Sheila: And how it would impact every one of us!

Randy: Yeah, but we see this also when we go into places where children are dying and they're starving and they're malnourished. We flip the script and we say, okay, here's a bad situation but we've got a great opportunity because we're not only going to show them God's love in word, we're going to show them God's love in deed. Would you watch this and you'll see what I mean.

Open Captions:

>> You have kept track of my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book.

Randy: In this hut right here, right now they're mourning the loss of a seven-year old girl. When you look around, you understand how desperate the situation is because some of these

children we've seen around this village are showing some of the early signs of malnutrition, the bloated stomachs, the reddening hair.

We're so far from the clinic and from anyplace where they can get help that if a child does get sick, they could be gone within a day, maybe two. That's how desperate the situation is here. Death comes quickly.

Announcer: Just as a brokenhearted mother sits with her precious child, God marks every groan of sorrow and pain. No matter how much anguish and heartache a mother is going through now, it doesn't go unnoticed by God.

Randy: I know God hears them. He hears them and you know what? He sent us and he sends you to answer that cry. This doesn't have to be a place of mourning. It can be a place where the suffering is alleviated.

Will you answer the cry of these children? Will you stand with us as we give them life?

End of video

In the studio:

Randy: It is amazing -- it is disturbing to see how quickly death can come upon a child, but it is a process to get there. It's a process of not having food, not having the right kinds of nutrition. It wears over a fairly short period of time, but it does wear children down to where if some kind of illness happens, some kind of sickness comes on then that's when death comes quickly.

But we can intervene because this is not the type of thing that should happen anywhere. And it really, it just crushes our spirits and our hearts when we see those mothers holding their children, fearing for their life because they know that they've lost another child.

Sheila, I look at that sometimes and I think, I don't know how these women bear it!

Sheila: I know because they are just -- the reality is they are moms like you and me. So often, we think, well, they've gone through that before so it's different. It is not different! There is never a time when a mother gets used to burying a child.

Sometimes you watch these things on television, and it is like a million miles away. Well, I can get back on a plane and I can be back there in 24 hours and sit with these moms because this is happening right now. There is such an urgent need. Not for a new iPhone -- for a simple bowl of food. That's all they're asking for. And so many of these moms are women of faith! They are praying and crying out to God saying, "Please, will you send somebody to hear my prayer?"

You know what? We're it. We've heard their cries and we want to respond. And we want you to help. Randy, it is very doable. It is not like it takes a ton of money. If we all do something, we can change this.

Randy: That's the key. A lot of people will say to us, and it is a good thing to say that I'll just pray that God will provide for all those children that you want to help. But I kind of want to go, he is providing because he gave us you. We need to do this together. This is the body of Christ, not just one organization or one individual. When we come together it makes a huge, huge impact.

Just to give you an idea, \$30 will feed three children for three months. Now you're going that doesn't work out. Well, not in our country, it doesn't work out but it works because we have a process in place to bring the food into these countries, process it so that it has the right kind of nutrition, and then take it to these villages. And the villages change according to the need; it's not the same children every single month for years and years on end. It is a developmental process.

Bottom line is you can do something now. \$50 will take care of five children; \$100, 10 children; \$1,000 -- 100 children! Whatever you can do, go to the phone, go online because together we can give life to these children. I hope you'll do it today. I hope you'll do it right now.

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**On the mission field**

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.

I don't know if you realize that every time you pick up the phone and call, or every time you go online, these are the people whose lives you are changing. 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 clip

In the studio

Sheila: Thank you. And for any gift at all we're going to send Niki's book. And you can also get some free stuff on her website, N-i-k-i-Hardy.com. Honestly, it really is a brilliant book. It will really help you.

Randy: Yeah! And we appreciate you being here. But before we end this, how are you today?

Niki: I'm really well, thank you. I am, no evidence of disease as they say in the medical field which is really awesome.

Randy: Yes! Thank you for sharing with us. Thank you for being with us. Don't miss another episode of *LIFE Today* as we continue to offer you real hope!

Sheila: See you next time!