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Week 30: WFL

Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh

Derwin Gray

**Sheila:** Hi! Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm Sheila Walsh here with Randy Robison. I'm excited about today's show. I have the privilege, as you probably know, of traveling usually, and speaking in different churches around the country, and I have a favorite one now, Transformation Church is just... I remember the first time I was there, Randy, thinking, this is the way the church should be. There is an intentional picture of the gospel.

So pastor, Dr. Derwin Gray is with us and I just want to say hi friend! It is greatly to have you on the show.

**Derwin:** It is so good to be with you. Also, our people still light up and just resonate with the truth and the beauty that you brought to us, your vulnerability, your transparency, and just your gifting to preach. Your fingerprints are still on the people at Transformation Church and we love you.

**Sheila:** I love that! Thank you. The thing that was beautiful to me was I looked out and I saw young, old, black, white. It was a picture of the body of Christ. I wondered, before we get into your incredible book, how intentional was that, Derwin?

**Derwin:** It was very intentional. I didn't grow up in the church and so when I started reading the Bible there were things that I saw immediately like the Apostle Paul planted churches that had Jewish people and Gentiles; and Gentiles were the rest of the world. So

it seemed like God's heartbeat was to not only forgive people of their sins but to bring together a family with different colored skins. And that family is a picture of what the new heavens and new earth will be. And so it is not just about being different people with ethnicities together, it's about learning to love each other, to teach the world, this is what love actually looks like. So I am blessed.

But it has been hard because it's still a foreign idea. Something that's so ancient and biblical and beautiful is still a foreign idea. But the beauty of what God is doing just takes my breath away. I'm so thankful.

**Sheila:** Now your new book, *the good life*: What Jesus teaches about finding true happiness. Why this book at this time?

**Derwin:** Well, I wish I was smart enough to say I was praying, and God told me that we would be in a pandemic. I had no idea. All I knew is this: that if I didn't write this book, I would be stealing blessings from my fellow human beings.

As people, we desire to be happy. But the reality is that we're looking for happiness in the wrong people, places and possessions. And through pastoral care, through counselling Christians, non-Christians, young, old, male, female, I was running into people who were just exhausted because they're trying to be happy. I said, "What does Jesus say about this?" And hiding in plain sight, in the beatitudes, Jesus gives eight characteristics of a blessed or a happy life. And the word *blessed* literally, makarios, literally means happy. And so Jesus is like, "I want to invite you into my kingdom and I want you to experience my kind of happiness, that it is available." And it is a happiness that is not so much about good things happening to you but it is about God making you good.

**Randy:** You're exactly right. When you look at the Greek, you realize blessed sounds really holy. Blessed are those who this... The scripture is saying, "Happy are those."

Here's one thing I found when addressing this, though, that puzzles me a little bit in the

church is they say things like, "Well, God doesn't want us to be happy." Or they offer the false choice of God doesn't want you to be happy, he wants you to be holy. I'm like, read... the scripture right there is describing something that just, it feels really happy to me. What did you see when you studied it?

**Derwin:** Yeah. What I like to say is happiness and holiness are two sides of the same coin. That when you look at the beatitudes they are a picture of Jesus and Jesus was a whole human being. He was wholly loving. And so as we allow the spirit of God to shape our hearts, and to mold us into these kind of people, our happiness will result in holiness, and our holiness will result in happiness. So one way to say it is this, the more delight I have in Jesus the more I will let him shape me. And as he shapes me, I begin to look like him which is a picture of holiness. So holiness and happiness are two sides of the same coin. That's what I want people to see is that our happiness doesn't have to be on temporary, fleeting moments but it can be in something deeper and more beautiful that isn't contingent upon circumstances but it's rooted in the God of love.

**Sheila:** You've got to live what a lot of people, a lot of guys would consider to be the American dream, the thing that would bring you such happiness. You played in the N.F.L. Was that disillusioning? Did that fulfill the dreams that you had?

**Derwin:** Yeah, my first year in the N.F.L. was incredible disillusionment. So I didn't grow up in the church. I grew up poor and I worked really hard and I just knew that once I made it to the N.F.L. and I had all the stuff I was supposed to have, I was really going to be happy. That first year was really disillusioning. I didn't have a lot of friends on the team. I didn't play very much. And man, there was just so much pressure.

But by my third year in the N.F.L. I was a team captain, I was doing really well, playing well, but yet and still the external accomplishments could not fix an internal reality. Like I could not forgive my dad who abandoned me. I couldn't forgive myself. I didn't have the capacity to love my wife the way she deserved. So one of the things that started weighing on me was I promised her father to love and to cherish and to protect. And I

didn't know how to love her because I realized I didn't even know how to love myself.

And then as a football player, you realize that football is not a career and eventually, it is going to come to an end. So who would I be when I couldn't play anymore? Because I was a compulsive stutterer. And so at this point I didn't know who Christ was but through a teammate he began to share with me who Jesus was. And the happiness and the love that I was looking for was something I didn't have to perform to get; that it was such a great gift I could only receive it.

So when that hit me, that transformed me and I began to see that happiness, the way I defined happiness in the book is this way. Happiness is not confidence but God-fidence that everything is going to be okay because Jesus' redemptive purposes stand and one day I will stand with the one who defeated sin and the grave.

And so all of life became pregnant with expectation and sacredness. And so the good life wasn't necessarily good circumstances, it was a good God meeting me in those circumstances and making me like his son.

**Randy:** Yeah. I think now you're getting to sort of the truth and sort of the difficulty people have with the idea of happiness. Because we can confuse it with pleasure. I think when you look at your career, and a lot of people are thinking, well, yeah, a successful career, that would bring happiness. And you're saying no, it didn't. I had to go to something different.

What did you experience as you went from okay, so here's the world's definition of why I should be happy versus here's God's definition and what really is happiness or joy?

**Derwin:** Yeah. You know it's one of these things when God blesses you with the grace of being stripped of everything and all you have is him. So back in 2004 when my wife was diagnosed with thyroid cancer, and she is cancer free and doing great, but that time when we were going through that process, *the good life* wasn't what we knew she was

going to be healed other than at the resurrection. *The good life* was that Jesus was with us every step of the way. That Jesus in His grace and his patience and his mercy was with us every step of the way. We became more sympathetic, we became compassionate, we became more patient, we became more kind. In other words, we began to reflect Jesus, not because of good circumstances but because our good God was with us.

So we began to see, wait a second, there is something more beautiful than just a good experience. What I've learned about good experiences is like going on vacation. And when you get on the airplane and the sand has fallen out of your shoes, that's the same way pleasure falls out of our life; that we've got to have something more purposeful and something more meaningful. I think that's what's really attractive to people who don't know who Christ is but it is good for us as human beings, that's our purpose -- is to find happiness in him.

**Sheila:** You talk about the fact that... so much of the book is based on the beatitudes but you talk about the way that many believers have misunderstood the beatitudes. In fact, honestly, I remember a young girl writing me a letter saying, "I think they're depressing." What is it about the beatitudes that we have missed the mark on?

**Derwin:** So for example, I think we miss the mark because we don't read them. For one, it's like the greatest sermon ever preached Jesus sits over the Sea of Galilee, Jewish people are gathered at his feet and it's like, "Hey! Sit down and listen to me. Let me teach you. Let me share with you. I want you to participate in my life and my happiness. I want you to tap into your purpose."

So I think a lot of times we don't read them. But then the other thing is we super impose a 21st century understanding on a first century Jewish world. And so my doctoral work is in the first century Jewish world. So I try to take people back so we can live in the present.

And so think about it like this. Jesus says, "Blessed are those who mourn for they will be

comforted." My chapters called on that are "Happy are the sad." Well, what sense does that make? Happy are the sad?

Well, when we learn how to lament, as American Christians, we're so busy that we don't have time to slow down and grieve -- and grieving is so important. If we dismiss grief we forfeit growth. And there is a reason why Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted." What happens is we begin to get solidarity with other people who are hurting and that expands our hearts to love. We get solidarity with Jesus who tasted death and brokenness for everyone. And what happens, as our hearts break for what breaks God's heart, God comforts us with his presence, his purpose, his power, and then that moves us into the world to be a comforting presence as well. So happy are the sad. We begin to hope and to pray, Lord, everything that is wrong, make it right one day but until that day, I want to walk with you in this good life.

**Randy:** That's good. You know, Dennis Prager famously said that we have a moral obligation to be happy. Do you think Christians have a spiritual responsibility to have joy in their lives?

**Derwin:** Absolutely! What I would say is that it is our birthright. That it is our birthright. Now, it is important for us to not confuse, well, does that mean that we as Christians won't experience depression? I have a slight bent towards depression. If I don't sleep well I could be depressed; right? But that doesn't mean that I still don't have purpose and I still don't have joy. Being happy doesn't mean I'm walking around smiling all the time. Being happy is understanding my birthright and my purpose and participation with Christ.

My son's senior year, and if I get emotional, please bear with me. But my son's senior year, he was playing in a state championship game, one of the best players in the country and he breaks his leg, tears ligaments up in his ankle. I go out to the field and the first thing I say to him, just like when he was a little boy, he had tears rolling down his eye, and I say, "Son, I'm so proud of you! I love you. Man, what a great way to go out. You

literally gave your all for this team."

So as we get back to the side line his ankle is about this big and I know he is in pain and my 18-year old son looks me in the eyes and he says, "Dad, God is so good!" I'm about to break up. I'm like falling apart on the inside. He goes, "Dad, God is so good!"

I said, "Son, what do you mean?"

He goes, "Dad, you know I could have been hurt in the first game. Man, I could have hurt my knee. It could be really bad."

I'm looking down like, dude, your ankle is this big! And he's going, "God is so good." And right there in that moment Jesus is with us, my 18-year old son is praising God, not when he scores a touchdown but when he breaks his leg that requires surgery and rehab. He's telling me how good God is. That's *the good life*! You can't buy that, you cannot manufacture it, you can only get that by sitting at the feet of King Jesus and letting him love us and mold us and shape us. He blessed me. He made me a better man that day, my son did.

**Sheila:** That is absolutely... There is nothing as a parent you would pray for more than that, the reality of Christ in the midst of your child's suffering.

One of the things I'm grieved by, is the way that on social media that we tear one another apart, even as the body of Christ. But you have this interesting sentence in the book where you talk about a process where we become unoffendable. What does that look like, Derwin?

**Derwin:** *The good life* in being happy is that we are so absorbed in the beauty and the grace of Jesus that the opinions of people cannot affect us. And that if Jesus declares me the righteousness of himself through his blood, that if the Father says there is no condemnation in Christ, what can someone really say that can bother me? Like when I

give somebody power to use words to hurt me, I've exchanged Jesus as my God for them as my God. And so I am greatly disturbed about the body of Christ and the things that we do on Facebook and how we talk about other followers of Jesus. I think a lot of that comes out of I'm so insecure and I don't know who I am so my insecurity and lostness affects others. Hurt people hurt people. And I think that as we are rooted in Jesus saying, "I've made you clean. I've made you pure. You belong to my father and everything that is true about me is true about you; not based on what you've done but based on everything that I've done."

What can someone really say? I was in Oklahoma speaking and after I got done, I was at a church planters conference and it was predominantly older white men there. I went to the restroom and on my way out an older white pastor stopped me and he said, "I need to apologize to you."

I said, "Why?"

He goes, "Well, I was reading your book, *Limitless Life* and I was enjoying it until I found out you were black." And so he said, "I want to apologize to you."

So what I did, is I embraced him and I brought him in and I said, "Because Jesus forgave me, how could I not forgive you?" And so I think that's what the power of the gospel is. An eye for an eye makes everybody blind.

**Randy:** Yeah. Interestingly, the tail end on that, offense is a two part transaction. The Bible tells us to not give offense and that we don't go out intentionally offending people, but it also tells us not to take offense because the world will give offense all day long.

Have you found that people that just say you know what? You can give offense but I'm not going to take it. I'm not going to carry it with me. Do you find that those people that refuse to take the offense are happier?

**Derwin:** Absolutely! When Jesus says, "Pray for those who persecute you and love your enemies" it's primarily for the person who forgives. That when we forgive it is like... when we forgive it is like taking off a heavy backpack and letting it go. It's like lightening the load. It is good for our souls to forgive and love because he didn't create us for that.

But to get to that place of becoming unoffendable, we have to get to a place of depth with Jesus beyond just functionality but to actual worship. That if Jesus only forgave me, that's enough. And I think a lot of times we want to use Jesus instead of worship him. What I mean by that is it's kind of like Sunday dinner at your grandmama's house. You go, you sit down, you eat the good food, you give her a kiss on the cheek and you leave but don't talk to her. A lot of times, that's what we do with Christ. We eat the good food, and he's saying, "Listen, the best meal at this table is me. I'm the bread of life."

**Sheila:** Wow! That's powerful.

I'm going to tell you how you can get a hold of Derwin's book. But one of the things when you're in love with Christ and you understand his overwhelming love for you is you want to make a difference in the lives of other people. One of the ways we want to do that here at *LIFE* is to bring clean water to situations where it doesn't exist and you can help us. Would you watch this?

**On the mission field:**

**Open Captions:**

>> Hundreds of children will die from preventable diseases caused by contaminated water... today.

**Isak:** So we're coming down here to the water source where these ladies have told us this is their only water source. This sort of river that flows through next to their village here. It's the only place they can get water from. You can see just how contaminated this water

is. You can see animals use this same water as what people do. People wash in this water. It is incredibly dirty. But this is their only water source.

I think you might be watching this as a mother and you're saying how can those mothers give their children that water? I would never give my child water like that. Yeah, you wouldn't unless that water was the only water that your child could have. It's not that they don't know. They know this water is not clean. They know it's not healthy for their children but they come and they collect it every day, arduous journey, carry those heavy buckets of water back to their children to give their children diseased-filled water in the hopes that it will give them the hydration they need but not take their lives. Yet, all too often that is exactly what happens. They get waterborne diseases, cholera, dysentery, things like that, and it literally comes and steals away the lives of these young children.

But it's so easy for us to change that. See if we bring Mission: Water for LIFE to this village and we drill a water well, we have got drilling rigs in the area. We have the ability to put water wells in. What we can do is instantly change the condition in this village and save the lives of children that will be contracting waterborne diseases, stop mothers from having to come down and take dirty disease-filled water back to their families. We're here. We're able to do it but not without you.

**End of video**

**In the studio:**

**Randy:** It's so much in the heart of Christ to save the one. But for us, we can save so many today. And Sheila, it's so easy!

**Sheila:** It absolutely is. Those images -- just watching those images, somehow that one of that water bottle filled with that dirty water shocked me as I saw it, even though I've seen it actually in Africa on the ground. Because I think of when my son comes home from college and I have water bottles like that because he drinks a lot of water, and they're just there for him to just pick one up and take. And to think that's all that mother

has to give that child is devastating.

I know the very fact that you partner with us on this show, the very fact that you tune in every day, I know that you care. And sometimes it seems overwhelming, but this is so fixable. All we have to do is determine that together we are going to do our part. I just can't imagine what it is like for a mother knowing what I'm about to give you could potentially kill you, but I have nothing else to give you. But I've seen what happens when a well is drilled and it is literally, Randy, life-changing.

**Randy:** It is! The beautiful thing about it is that the water is there. God has provided but there is a gap. The water can be anywhere from a few meters down to several meters down, but the water is there. God has provided for them, but he needs, I think he wants us to bridge that gap between the water he's given and the people in need.

How do we do that? It's very simple. Each well costs about \$4800 to drill so when we look at that, we break it down we say, okay, \$48 will provide water for a lifetime for ten people. That's your part of the gap that you can bridge. You can help us draw that life-giving water out of the earth to give life to people. \$144 will provide water for a lifetime for 30 people. If you can provide an entire well do it! Please do it today. Or maybe partner with two, three, four other people and give a well. Here's the point. We are on this earth as God's representatives to give life to others. We do it in word, we do it in deed, and we do it by giving living water, figuratively in Christ, and literally through this Water for LIFE outreach. I pray you'll go to the phones or go online right now and join us in bridging that gap between life and death as we give Water for LIFE.

### **Begin video clip**

**Announcer:** Dirty, diseased filled water! How desperate would a mother need to be to consider giving this contaminated substance to her child? For many mothers and their families living in extreme poverties, this is their only choice.

With your help, they won't have to make this choice ever again. Mission Water for Life provides clean disease-free water for thousands of children and their families, giving them a life free from the fear of death.

With your gift today, you can help drill and establish the final 150 water wells this year. Your gift of \$48 will help provide water for ten people. \$72 will provide for 15. \$144 will help provide life-giving water for 30 people for a lifetime. And a gift of \$4,800 will help sponsor a complete well, serving up to 1,000 people.

With your gift we'll send you Today is a Good Day, seasonal devotional sets, broken out into the four seasons of the year. This beautiful set features a daily scripture, inspirational thoughts, and a place for you to journal your own thoughts, prayers and insights from God's word.

With your gift of \$100 or more, request the leather-bound life-giving Proverbs Journal, filled with wisdom and daily encouragement from Proverbs, including lined pages for your personal notes.

Finally, please consider a gift of \$1,200 to help provide water for 250 people or a gift of \$4,800 to help sponsor a complete well. And you may request "A Mother's Strength" bronze sculpture.

Please call, write, or make your gift online!

**End of video**

**In the studio:**

**Randy:** I do pray you'll go online, pick up the phone, if that's what you want to do but whatever you do, just do something because when we join together and give water to those in need Jesus says we do it to him. So what a blessing! I just want you to

experience that.

And Sheila, I want all of our viewers to experience *the good life*.

**Sheila:** Yeah. Derwin, thank you so much for being with us on *LIFE Today*.

**Derwin:** Thank you. It was my honor and privilege.

**Sheila:** And thank you for being with us every day, every week, and we'll see you next time!  
God bless!