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Week 30: WFL

Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh

Max Lucado

Sheila: Hi! Welcome to *LIFE Today*! I'm Sheila Walsh. I'm here with Randy Robison and we're so glad that you're joining us today.

One of my favorite people on the planet is our guest today. I've noticed that any time that America has been in any sort of crisis the whole nation looks for his voice. And so I want to welcome Max Lucado to the show. Thanks so much for being with us.

Max: Oh thanks to both of you. I hope you're staying healthy and safe. It's just an honor to have a few minutes to chat with you.

Sheila: Thanks! Your books, Max, my bookshelf is full of them, my mother's bookshelf was full of them and you always seem to write to the pertinent felt need. It's like you've got your finger on the pulse of the nation. So you have a book that's going to come out. Tell us why you wrote this book called, *You Are Never Alone*.

Max: The Lord's providence on this one is very evident because of course, for a book to release this September I had to have it finished last September or at least a few months ago, way before we knew anything about COVID-19. But for many years I have sensed that there is this gnawing. What is it? Weight upon people -- that they just feel by themselves, even when they're surrounded by a crowd or even when they're in a happy relationship with someone, there is this sense of loneliness, loneliness to them. And their faith is not really connecting to the degree that it is giving them that vital relationship that God offers to us.

And so I thought for many years as a pastor, how could we address this? What could we do?

So really, this book emerged long before the pandemic, before we knew words like "self isolation" and "shelter in place" and "quarantine." But the pandemic only highlighted a sense that we already felt and that is loneliness is everywhere.

Randy: I'm curious, Max, is there anything that you wrote in the book before the pandemic that you went back and thought, oh my goodness, this had to be from God because it reaches right to where some people have been through, all that we went through last spring. Is anything that just jumped out at you?

Max: Yeah, thanks Randy. Even the opening story, I relate a conversation that I had some, by now I think it's probably been over a year with a lady at the hospital whose son was in I.C.U. who had been in a terrible car accident, who also battled opioid addiction. She herself was going through a divorce. So I went to check on her and I mean she just looked, she was just exhausted -- just exhausted -- utterly exhausted. And after she relayed all the struggles she was facing, she said, "You know what? It's just me and I ain't much."

I came to understand that phrase, "It's just me and I ain't much" that's a bumper sticker description for the way many people feel. Again, we felt it before the onslaught of the virus but then you feel this triple whammy of an attack against our globe, an attack against our physical selves, an attack against our pocketbooks and you have a lot of people right now saying, "Oh, it's just me and I ain't much."

Sheila: I wonder, I love the fact that you've gone to John's gospel to give a path through the wilderness. What was it about John's gospel and the way he told Jesus' story that you felt this is the way to go?

Max: What a great question, Sheila. You know, you've done a lot of writing in your life and you know that when you collect your ideas it's as important what you exclude as it is what you include. There's a lot of good stuff that ends up on the cutting room floor because a good book, we've come to see is not just written but it is edited.

So there we have John disclosing his self-editorial ability where there at the end of the gospel he said, "There were so many things that I saw, that all the books in the world could not have contained them." And maybe that's hyperbole but then again, maybe it's not. He's been in the presence of God for three years. Who knows how many things he has seen? And he said, "But I have selected these so that you might believe and in believing have life in his name." So he's self-edited. He went through all that process and said, "Okay, I can't write a book that's bigger than no library can contain so I'm going to select, I don't know 8 or 10 or 12 stories, miracles, signs, and I'm going to select the ones that are going to help people have life." And that's always intrigued me.

So I went into looking at these signs in the gospel of John asking the question, what is it about the water to wine story that gives me life? What is it but knowing how Jesus fed the 5,000 men plus women and children, that can give us life? What is it about the way Jesus walked out onto the stormy sea that can bring life, that can help us deal with this gnawing sense of isolation and loneliness? So I loved it. It was a faith refresher for me to look at those stories in the gospel of John from that perspective.

Randy: Pick one of those that really spoke to you and answer that question, what is it about that story that we can relate to even today?

Max: Okay! Just one of them? That's not fair!

Randy: One at a time.

Max: That's not fair! I would start with what is actually the least dramatic, most pedestrian of them all and that's turning water into wine. Had I'd been in charge of the miracles that Jesus was going to perform on earth I don't think I would have started with water into wine. I would have done something with a little more razzle dazzle. I would have gone straight to raising Lazarus from the dead or feeding thousands and thousands of people. But turning water into wine? It's just so simple. Yet that in itself is one of the reasons that it deserves to be in the gospel. Because most of our struggles, we do have major struggles, nobody is going to ever doubt that

but also we need to know that we serve a God who cares that we, I don't know, get the tasks done today on time; that when we plan the wedding there is going to be guests that show up; that if we commit a social snafu, he is going to hear our prayer. It's not just the heavy-duty, heavy-weight prayer concerns, it is the day to day needs of being a mom, of being a grandpa, of being a worker that he wants to hear from.

So when Mary, the mother of Jesus came to him and said, "We've got a problem, they're out of wine," I know all the angels rolled their eyes and said, "Hey, that's minor league stuff for Jesus."

But Jesus said, "You know what? If it matters to you, it matters to me." And that tells me that what matters to me matters to God. And I think that what matters to God will eventually matter to me.

Sheila: I was wondering, Max, a lot of people, I've even said it myself when I was younger, "If I could just see a miracle then it would be so much easier to believe." But you talk about not so much the miracle but the miracle of the presence of God in your situation. Talk to us about that.

Max: Yeah, thank you. That's the miracle. For crying out loud, if Jesus wanted, if the gift of heaven were miracles from heaven Jesus would have performed many, many more. He would have spent more time on earth just going to every possible source, gathering of humanity, levitating, healing, calling... there would not be a grave occupied. There was so much more that could have been done when it came to miracles.

But the purpose of the miracle was never the miracle. The purpose of the miracle was the miracle worker; to draw us into a relationship with him. In a day and age in which people are often saying, "Oh, I need a miracle!" Yeah, we all do. But I tell you what. We need a miracle worker. We need a relationship with Jesus Christ. And if we ever get to the point where we think that Jesus exists to do our beck and call, where he is our butler, where any time we call, if we have the right level of faith or the right type of prayer then he is going to do what we say, then we've missed the point.

It's interesting to me that all the miracles are different -- all the miracles are different. Nobody could rub the genie bottle in the right way and expect a miracle to happen. One time Jesus is healing with mud, another time Jesus is healing with a declaration. Sometimes Jesus is all by himself and walking on the water. Another time he is telling the disciples to pass out the bread where there was no bread. It is all shades of application.

The key is not finding a particular recipe or formula, the key is connecting with Christ, believing with him. Because the greatest miracle is when we're finally face to face with him. All these between now and then, they're just small time stuff intended to strengthen our faith until we get home.

Randy: If I remember correctly, Max, I think it is in the book of John that tells the story of when Jesus crossed whatever sea it was, I don't recall, but when he arrived on the other side the people said, "Aah! Jesus! Come do a miracle. Come do a miracle." All they wanted was the miracle and he didn't do anything. Turned around and left.

Max: No doubt, Randy. No doubt. Even then or especially then, they were fascinated by the miracle itself. In fact, in the second miracle in the gospel of John when Jesus heals the son of an official who had travelled from Capernaum to Cana, when the man came and pleaded for Jesus to come back -- or pleaded for Jesus to heal the man's son, Jesus before he even responded said, "Are you not going to believe unless you see a sign?"

I don't know why he said that. We're not told exactly why he said that but I think he just knows human nature. Of course, he knows human nature. Maybe he saw something in the face of the people. Maybe a crowd of people had gathered because they had heard of the water to wine miracle. And so they said, "Oh boy! We get to see another miracle." And maybe that disheartened him and he said, "Are you not going to believe unless you have a sign?"

So Jesus never wants our faith to be contingent upon his performance. The ultimate miracle is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Outside of the empty tomb, there is no more miracle needed. Now we're surrounded by miracles, each one of us have enjoyed elaborate, dramatic, and

powerful answers to prayer but if we ever think that our faith is contingent upon Jesus doing what I want, in the way I want it, then he is going to look at us and say, "Do you mean you're not going to believe unless I give you a sign?"

Randy: Yeah, that story, maybe this is where you're going but that story on that road where Jesus told the man that his son was healed, he still had to walk home not really seeing it. That's in your book; we got a sneak peek at your book. And I thought, man, what a powerful truth! Just having to believe while on that lonely walk to see it.

Max: It is the longest walk. And some of your listeners right now, I'm confident, are somewhere between prayer offered and prayer answered. And that's a long walk -- that's a long walk. But when I get to heaven I'm going to find that official and I'm going to thank him because the scripture says he took Jesus at his word. He took Jesus at his word and believed. So when Jesus says something that's all we need.

Now Jesus has said that there will be tribulation and difficulties in this world but be of good cheer because I have overcome the world. He said that! He said that he is coming back and he is preparing a home for us. He said that. So we can just hear all the words that Jesus has said and believe them, believe them! Now we haven't seen the answer to all of our prayers yet and we won't until we get home but that doesn't mean we can't head in the direction.

I always say it this way, walk in the direction of an answered prayer. Walk in the direction of an answered prayer. Just begin to behave like that prayer is going to be answered because in the right way at the right time it will.

Sheila: Max, 2020 will be remembered as the year where the world was put on hold because of this COVID-19. This is maybe an unfair question but what is God doing in the midst of this?

Max: We believe God is doing something; right. We do. And what we're witnessing is absolutely unprecedented. Thomas Frye is a futurist based in Denver. This 75-year old man who's made a career out of reading the tea leaves, so to speak of society and the world. I don't

know what kind of man he is when it comes to faith. But he said, "This is the most significant event in the history of humanity." Now I know that's a statement that makes us fall back on our heels.

But think about his argument. Number one it is global. I read that even the COVID virus has been found in the Amazon jungle among the tribes. There's no place you're safe from it. Number two, it is financial. It is financial. We're all feeling it. Some more than others -- some of your listeners severely. And then it is physical. It just gets us at our health. And no matter what we do, nobody is absolutely safe. Now whether it's been overblown or not, that's a conversation for another time, but every person is susceptible to the disease.

So what a great question, Sheila. What is God doing in what is potentially the most significant event in the history of humanity? Global, physical, emotional, I would even add that. Think of all the loneliness and depression has increased and hotline calls. So my hunch is he is preparing us for revival. My hunch he is pruning the church. He is causing us to not be so dependent upon buildings and personalities. He is calling us to have a deeper personal relationship with himself. He is separating us from our diversions and our entertainments. He is just separating us from them.

I thought it was interesting that this thing really got our attention when it caused cruise ships to be in trouble, for crying out loud! So I think that's part of it. I think he is just getting our attention, he is preparing us for something. It is out of my pay grade to say is he is preparing us for the end times? I know we're in the end times but is he preparing us for his return? Sure. Something is happening.

Randy: Let me ask it this way because revival, I know has been the prayer of many for generations now. How do we walk towards that prayer?

Max: Well, Jesus said that the world will know that he is who he is when we are one, when we come together. So I think ministries like yours are absolutely essential in this day and age to continue to unite the church. I think we've come a long way. Randy, you and I are old enough to

remember when denominations existed to argue with each other. We're not doing so much of that anymore. For that we can be very, very grateful.

But we're really in a situation now where we're seeing there is just one church -- there is just one church. And if you believe in God as your Father and Jesus is your Savior and the Spirit is your power, then we're in the same family -- we're in the same family. So I think let's continue to unify our hearts together and just -- revival is a supernatural work of God. We cannot orchestrate it or fabricate it but we can surely ask for it. So that would be the second thing. We come together as a family, we put aside all differences and we begin to pray, pray for revival.

Randy: That's so good! You know what? I can tell you a way right now, Max and I know you support us in this that we have been bringing Christians together for many years now and that is in our mission outreaches and reaching out.

It's kind of funny because we look back in the spring and we look at all of the things that we did as a nation, maybe as a world, to save a few lives. But there is an ongoing crisis, a crisis of contaminated water that's taking lives every day. But we can come together, we can be one in Christ as the church, despite our various differences and maybe disagreements, we can come together as one and say, you know what? We'll hear the words of Jesus. We'll act on them. We will take water to the least of these.

Will you watch this and then just pray and say, "Lord, can I be a part of that?" Watch this right now.

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: Do go to the phones, go online, give the best gift you can and know that when you join us in Water for LIFE you are saving lives. And Sheila, we've got something special just today for anyone who will join us.

Sheila: Yeah! When Max's new book comes out in September you can actually go on now to your favorite bookseller, preorder the book, make sure you get your copy. Max, thank you so much for being with us here. We love you.

Max: Oh, I love you both! Thanks! And God bless you and stay safe!

Sheila: See you next time on *LIFE Today*!