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Week 34: Christmas Shoes and Smiles

Sheila Walsh

Jack Graham

Sheila: Welcome to *LIFE Today*! I'm Sheila Walsh. I'm so glad you joined me. I'm particularly glad you'll get to see this episode which is a huge privilege for me because I'm getting to interview my pastor, Pastor Jack Graham. Thank you for doing this!

Jack: My pleasure! Always good to see you. And thankful to be your pastor, grateful. You're such a great ambassador for our church. We pray for you; and thankful for you and Barry so very much.

Sheila: Well, thank you. Well, this book, *Help!* This is your new book: "Facing life's challenges with confidence and hope." Now I remember, because last fall you made this, this was your sermon series. What led you to do it? Because you're very honest about subjects that you don't always hear talked about.

Jack: I just began to see so much brokenness in people's lives, more and more and more. And as a pastor, just realizing people need biblical answers to emotional, mental struggles. I'd preached on various topics over time whether it was depression or anxiety. If you deal with the Bible, you're dealing with those subjects but to bring it all together and to really attack it. In fact, in our church we actually began a Life Recovery ministry just addressing the emotional, spiritual needs of people. So the series developed. And as it happened, it became one of the most responded to series we've ever done.

Sheila: Very powerful.

Jack: So we said, we've got to put it on a book. It is now running on PowerPoint, our

television ministry and so that's how the book came about.

Sheila: It's interesting though because when you began this sermon series COVID-19 had not happened. Did you have any idea at the time of the impact this was going to have now?

Jack: Immediately, once the COVID hit, I knew the emotional struggle was going to be big, perhaps bigger than the physical side. And it's been true because all the data shows, all the numbers show whether it's anxiety, fear, the obvious ones, addiction, domestic violence, loneliness, people isolated, it is a big problem in the country. We have a mental health problem in the country right now. And frankly, I think some of the chaos, even that we're seeing in the streets right now, just the turmoil in the country is related to this.

Sheila: The first subject you tackle is fear. I think that's even greater now. What does God's word say about fear? Where do we find help for that?

Jack: Well, fear is a basic human emotion. I even read as I was studying along for this that; it's kind of the first human emotion is fear, a baby's cry. And a child learns to be afraid very early. So it's a natural emotion. So we battle it all our lives. Whether it is fear itself, or anxiety which is the twin sister of fear. But it is a problem for many people. Everyone deals with fear. And when you're afraid, when you're anxious, it damages your internal response to God, to people, to everyone.

Again, you've heard it said 365 times plus in the Bible it says fear not. So that's good that God knows that we're going to face fears. He knows it. So he gives us so many promises. One of my favorite verses is Isaiah 41:10. It was my father's favorite verse: Fear not for I am with you. Be not dismayed, (that is overwhelmed.) Be not dismayed for I uphold you with my strong right hand.

So there is just so many promises in God's word. And that's where I go, in the scripture. There are wonderful counselors and therapists who can help us but ultimately, the help

we need comes from God in his word. And fear, God has not given us a spirit of fear but of power, love, and a sound mind.

Sheila: I love the fact that in each chapter you share your own experiences as a pastor but then you just ground every single thing in the power of the Word of God. That was particularly clear to me in the second chapter; you talk about stress which is off the charts. But you see great comfort in a road map in Psalm 23.

Jack: Yeah, yeah. That's a Psalm for a stress-filled days if there ever is one. And so familiar, Psalm 23, to so many Christians that sometimes we look over -- we forget about it. But it's right there where it's always been in scripture: The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. I love the way the little girl misquoted it. She said, "The Lord is my shepherd and that's all I need" or "that's all I want" -- "that's all I want." He is all we need, and he is all we want.

But the ultimate fear, talking about fear, I was on this past Sunday in the message on Stephen who died fearless as the stones were hurled at him. I was just thinking about how the fact of fear in our lives can be overcome when we look to the Lord even in death. Because ultimately what people are afraid of is death. The main fear that people have in the COVID or anything else, it could be disease, but disease and death is the ultimate fear. So the Bible calls it a bondage; that Satan keeps people in bondage. It's really the only weapon he has right now over the believer is to try to keep... to doubt his promises. That somehow, he will not even see us even through death. So it says, "Yea though," in Psalm 23, "I walk through the valley of the shadow of death and on to the other side." It is a great passage.

Sheila: I remember reading something about John Knox who was a very kind of doer Scottish preacher. In his last moments of life some of his friends gathered around his bedside. And one of them said, "Will you let us know if you're afraid?" And with his last breath it's recorded that he looked up and lifted his hands toward heaven. And a smile came over this man who had been always a very stern preacher.

But I loved your message on Stephen because you talked about him; rather than looking at those who were throwing rocks he looked up to Christ and found his strength there.

Jack: That message really... I've preached on Stephen before a number of times but that message, I thought of all the fears people are facing right now, it is the fact that I'm going to die. And so am I prepared to die? You're really not prepared to live until you're prepared to die. So Stephen was, and you are, and I am so we look to the Lord and that's why it is so important that you know Jesus in your life, the resurrection and the life.

Sheila: And you talk about addiction. I wondered, all your years of pastoring, do you think it is a greater issue now or are we just talking about it more now?

Jack: It is a greater issue. I think there is so much abuse of alcohol today. But I've changed in the way I view people who are addicted to alcohol or any other substance. This is how I've changed. When I was a young preacher, I remember people saying, "Well it is a disease." I would go with that. I'd say, "Well, it is a disease if you choose it." I was pretty stern about, "You're in this shape. Stop drinking!"

And now I know as a pastor that people who are addicted to alcohol it is a brain disease as well. Some people are able to stop -- just supernaturally stop. But what we talk about in this chapter is how to really get through alcoholism or addiction of any kind and it is more than just will power. Most people fail, whether that's a group or whether that's therapy or whether that's accountability. Let's just put it this way. I have much greater compassion today on people who are addicted to substance because it's more than -- I'm a pastor and I know sin is sin but on the other hand the consequences of sin and getting to recovery and getting renewed in your life is a process. That whole chapter on addiction maybe the favorite thing that I've done.

Now I'm a teetotaler. I've never dealt with addiction or even close to it but so many people I know have. And people that I love very much have dealt with this. So I just

have a different viewpoint. It is still the same answer, it is still the power of God. It is still the Holy Spirit. It is still the Bible but getting through addiction is a lot harder than people think it is. Or else everyone would do it.

Sheila: One of the things I love in that chapter is you talk about, you remove the condemnation which you talk about Paul in Romans seven talking about, and if he struggled... I think it's like you've opened a door for people to know that there is help and there is hope.

Jack: There is so much shame with addiction. I have a chapter in the book on shame as well. And especially if you're a Christian, and you're addicted to some substance, alcohol or otherwise, there's so much shame. So what happens is people run or hide or live under that condemnation. They can only get free when they start exchanging the lies of shame and the power and the bondage of that. It's ultimately a bondage. It is ultimately a spiritual, emotional bondage but it is also a physical addiction. So it is a multi-pronged solution for people who are living with addiction.

Sheila: The next issue you tackle to me is monumental and that is loneliness. I think I see that more now, even if I do a little Facebook lives, which I try to do, but the number of people who say, "I'm alone, I feel so alone." How do you define loneliness?

Jack: The sense of alienation of people, alienation from God, that no one cares, that I'm facing my problems alone, I'm facing my future alone, I'm living alone, I'm dying alone -- it is a tragedy. A lot of people can be lonely and can be a people person. You can be in a crowd and be the life of the party, but we've seen that with celebrities. I think of Robin Williams who ended up ending his life for example. He made everybody else laugh but was crying and he was lonely. I think that was the source of his problem. Again, we go back to the truth of God's word that in Christ there is a presence. I can't describe it, but you know it's true if you know the Lord.

But beyond the presence of Christ we also need to know that people care. That's where

the church comes in and Christians come in. I think one thing, we need to be -- one of the things this book is about is for people who know someone. Maybe you're not facing -- a person may not be facing depression or loneliness or stress, but I guarantee you, you know people who are and you love people who are. So people need to know they're loved. And ultimately, that's the problem with loneliness is feeling unloved and unwanted.

Sheila: You have three very helpful steps and you talk about God, church, and others. I got a lot of comments from younger people, millennials saying, "I don't need to be part of a church. I love the Lord and I'm fine." Why is it so important to be part of a community of faith?

Jack: Well, first of all, let's start with God commanded it. Let's go with obedience to God. We've had this tremendous insurgence online forced because of COVID-19 and we've been online. It's been good, it's been great, in fact, we've reached a lot of people and churches are going and staying together. But it is secondary and supplementary to church together. Because any time you read of church in the scripture it is people together. You look at those "one another" commandments in the Bible: Love one another, salute one another, greet one another, and so on, forgive one another, all those "one anothers." It's all about being together. So the accountability of church. And then just the responsibility of not being someone who is just watching church or on the fringes but that you're actually called to be engaged and be a part of life in the church. And not just be quote "a member" but we say at our church, "every member a minister" because we're all called to serve.

But just the sheer emotional support. Everybody needs, back to the loneliness issue, everybody needs somebody. And it is always tragic to me as a pastor, and it happens fairly regularly, more than you would think, when we do a funeral for someone and they don't have a church, they don't have very many friends and they basically died alone and are buried alone. I see it all the time.

There is so much loneliness. So the church should be a place where you're loved, where you're wanted, where you're accepted, and where you can serve. Because the best way to get out of my struggles, my own things that I'm dealing with is to start focusing on somebody else and how I can serve somebody.

Sheila: One of the issues you talk about and I don't know if you even want to go here but it is anger. And there is so much like on social media at the moment, I'm scared to say I love my dogs in case the cat people come after me.

[Laughter]

Jack: I know, I'm saying nothing right now to be honest with you because everything you say is just more in the boiling pot that is our anger right now. Yeah, I deal with anger; how can you not if you're going to deal with emotional struggles? You know men in particular, I found out one of the manifestations in men of depression is anger. It expresses itself in anger. So there's just a lot of reasons for the anger. We talk about some of those, but it is not something that can be part of the believer's life. It is destructive, self-destructive, and destructive of others. I mean we can go on and on. There are some answers for anger.

Sheila: Great scriptures on that.

Jack: Yeah! And one is forgiveness. The bottom line is forgiveness because most people are angry because they've been insulted or slighted or offended. Everybody is so on edge. Everybody is offended now at everything that we say or do and that's just because there is this pent-up anger and this unwillingness to overlook an insult, to overlook an offense. We don't have to answer every offense that comes our way because you're just going to make yourself miserable. So to have a spirit that overlooks an offense and is willing to forgive.

But what I see and what I deal with on the anger part is just the whole bitterness thing.

Because anger is -- bitterness is anger turned inward -- so much bitterness in people's lives. I think it's maybe the biggest problem we have among Christians is just all this pent-up anger and bitterness that people have because of what's happened in their past and the unwillingness to forgive.

Sheila: In the chapter on depression you talk about your own dark night after surgery. I remember being part of the church before your cancer and then after. To me you came back a different man. I thought you were always amazing but there was something different after that.

Jack: Yeah sure. God always uses our own brokenness to bless us and to use it to bless others. Scripture says the God of all comfort, with the comfort that we are comforted, we comfort others. So I definitely came back after cancer. You're talking about a guy who never catches a cold. I've been careful during the COVID thing but I'm thinking, look, I don't catch the flu. I've never even had the flu that I know of. They say you'd know it if you've had it. But then all the sudden I'm looking at cancer and my mortality. It spun me out, and I spent a whole most of a year getting through that and battling sleeplessness and insomnia and anxiety. Which the anxiety, the fear is what creates the depression. That's what the scripture says.

So depression ultimately, is the result of your body just revving, revving, revving and you shut down. I couldn't figure why I wasn't coming back. Why I couldn't get going. Why I had no energy. And then I found out, well, your brain is telling you to slow down. So it was loss, it was anger -- I mean not anger but anxiety. A lot of different things. But once you go through that then you can help people because you understand.

I did have better sense than to know, way back we used to say if somebody was depressed, you'd think, well, snap out of it! Come on! Read your Bible, memorize a few verses and you'll be fine. Sing a song. So I was smart enough to know that there's clinical and there's types of depression that are chronic. But until I actually experienced it, to know that you have to wait on it. You have to wait on yourself to come back.

So I deal forthrightly and that's probably something I would have never talked about 20 years ago. I would have just choked it on down. That's the good thing about what's happening in churches now. You've been -- talk about John the Baptist, you've been a forerunner in this being open.

I tell you one of the things that really prompted me to do this series and do this book was when you came back and spoke in our church. You spoke about that conference, I believe in Missouri where you asked the women who had ever had suicidal thoughts to respond and to stand and ask for prayer. And you said how many?

Sheila: Four hundred -- over four hundred.

Jack: And I said, okay, we've got to address these issues in the church. That really was a prompter for me to do this series.

Sheila: This book is amazing. It is called *Help!* "Facing lives challenges with confidence and hope." It is full of wisdom and godly advice. I'm going to tell you how you can get a hold of this. But first would you watch this little video with me? I want to show you how you and I can be an answer to a lot of people's prayers.

On the mission field:

Announcer: The sounds of children running and playing and having a good time often give way to sounds of pain and suffering because they have never had a pair of shoes to protect their feet.

Janice: Is he saying something? It's pain -- it's paining. Oh my gosh!

I'm in a village in Angola and came upon this child. This little boy is Augusto, and this breaks my heart. His little feet are in some of the worse shape I've ever seen. There were

many in this village with horrible conditions on their feet.

Announcer: As our mission teams travel throughout the world, they see the unsanitary conditions that children like Augusto must cope with. Conditions that can lead to a lifetime of misery simply because their feet are not protected.

Janice: They're completely infected. He said there are insects that have gotten into his feet. I'll be surprised if he doesn't lose his toe. Disease comes in through their feet and just goes throughout their body. It can actually kill them.

Announcer: Augusto's condition is not unique. Thousands of children suffer every day from painful injuries or infestations such as hookworms that enter their bare feet. This can lead to diseases that cause chronic blood loss that leads to anemia, malnutrition, and sometimes, even death.

Janice: Please! Do what you can. Help bring shoes to little children like Augusto all over the world. You can be a part of something big and something even fun. But this is the reason we do it.

End of video

In the studio:

Sheila: I know that's hard to watch when you see a precious child like that with his feet in such bad condition. We're encountering that everywhere we go. I have to tell you, this mission is one of the ones I love the most: Christmas Shoes and Smiles. It's our commitment this year, we want to provide shoes for 150,000 children. It's something so simple. It is not like they're asking for something outrageous.

I was cleaning out my son's closet the other day because he's off at grad school now and I was coming across all these old pairs of sneakers and things that were too small for him now and I thought, we always took it for granted that we could do that. But these children

in Africa and all around the world, they have never had a pair of shoes in their life and they're walking over this rough terrain. But you and I are going to make a difference. If you wonder, why are you talking about Christmas this time of the year? We need to get all the finances in so that we can make sure that by Christmas we have 150,000 pairs of shoes sent to children.

And one of the things that I love that we do every year, we'll come out with a new ornament to hang on your tree and this is the 2020 ornament. They were telling me it was like royal blue crystal, I'm thinking it is more Dallas Cowboy's blue crystal. But for any gift at all we will send you that ornament. If you're able to give \$100 then we actually have the whole boxed set of different ones from different years. I've got them all over my Christmas tree every year.

But this is something that is huge! When I've walked in these places and I've watched children who have cuts on their feet walking over the most unsanitary ground, and they'll even go into the water and there is disease in the water, this is something that you and I can do something about. Wouldn't it be so much more enjoyable in the Christmas season to know that we have done something practical? These moms would love to be able to put a pair of shoes under a Christmas tree. They don't have shoes and they don't have a Christmas tree, but you and I can change that. We can make sure that this will be the first time in their lives that they've ever been able to run around and be happy simply because they got a pair of shoes.

So \$36, now that's nothing -- \$36 will provide shoes for ten children. When could you ever do that? \$72 will give shoes to 20 children. And they're pretty... I mean they're great! \$180 will give shoes to 50 children. So please, will you go to your phone? This is a great project. The other things we are doing is so many children who are born, who desperately need corrective surgeries, do you know that for \$500 we can provide that for a child? That will be some Christmas gift! If you can do that please go on ahead. Call in, give the best gift you can and then there will really be some smiles on some little faces.

Begin video clip

Announcer: Poverty is a killer and because of it children needlessly suffer, not only from a lack of food and clean water, but also from a lack of things we often take for granted like a simple pair of shoes. Far too many children living in extreme poverty have never owned a new pair of shoes. And while that may seem minor in light of all their needs, walking with bare feet puts them at risk of life-threatening infections and disease that could lead to crippling consequences and even death.

By responding today, you will help secure and make ready 150,000 Christmas shoes to be shipped and delivered to children around the world just in time for the holidays. Your gift of \$36 will help provide ten pairs of shoes. A gift of \$72 will help provide 20 pairs. And a gift of \$180 will help provide 50 pairs of Christmas shoes for children in need.

As a thank you for your gift of support, be sure to request this beautifully crafted blue crystal shoe ornament. A treasure to display at each Christmas. With your gift of \$100 or more, you may also request this keepsake boxed set of all *LIFE's* Christmas shoe ornaments. Finally, please consider a gift of \$1,000 or more to help provide 275 pairs of shoes or two children with corrective cleft lip or palate surgeries. And you may request the beautiful "A Mother's Strength" bronze sculpture. Please call, write, or make your gift online today!

End of video**In the studio:**

Sheila: Thank you so much! We're going to put some smiles on some faces this Christmas.

For any gift at all, we will be more than overjoyed to send you Help! By Jack Graham. It just could not be a better time for this book. So pastor, thank you so much. A, for being a

phenomenal pastor and B, for writing this wonderful book!

Jack: Well, thank you very much. I hope it helps a lot of people.

Sheila: I know it will. We'll see you next time on *LIFE Today*! Thanks for being with me.