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Week 36: Christmas Shoes and Smiles

Sheila Walsh

“Forgiveness”

Sheila: Hi! I'm Sheila Walsh. I want to welcome you to *LIFE Today*. I was thinking the other day if somebody discovered a cure for cancer, for every kind of cancer, they would literally blast it from the mountaintops. Can you imagine? We would get the news out to every outlet, every hospital, and every doctor around the world. But there's a different kind of cancer that I want to talk to you about today. I believe that through Christ we have a lifesaving cure for cancer of the soul, of the spirit and that is unforgiveness.

I honestly don't quite know how to put into words just how important I believe this is. I think that so often we in the body of Christ are crippled by unforgiveness. Do you ever find yourself thinking, I don't feel like I have much power in my spiritual life. What if that is directly tied to unforgiveness?

Matthew records in his gospel a question that Peter asked Jesus. In Matthew 18, verses 21 and 22 we read this -- I'm sure you're familiar with this: Then Peter came to him and asked, "Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?" "No, not seven times," Jesus replied, "But seventy times seven!"

There's a couple of things I find interesting about Peter's question. This is the confident Peter before the crucifixion and the resurrection. This was the Peter who thought he would always get everything right. He was the one who spoke up first. He didn't ask how often he should be forgiven but rather how often he should forgive. After the resurrection, Peter was a humble man who understood his frailty and his need for Jesus.

But the other thing is that Peter thought that Jesus would commend him for offering to forgive seven times. I don't know if you know this, in those days the Jewish rabbis taught that you must forgive three times but no more than that because if someone sinned against you four times it was clear that they were not clearly repentant. So when Peter offered to go for seven he thought Jesus would be so impressed. Instead Jesus said, "No, seventy times seven." Not literally 490 times and so you just mark them all off. In other words, you don't stop. You forgive over and over and over. That would be shocking to those who listened to Jesus that day. How could anybody do that?

Jesus went on to tell a story to illustrate what he was teaching and how radical this message really is. If the disciples thought 70 times seven was outrageous, the story he was about to tell them took it to a whole new level. Now you can read it for yourself in Matthew 18, verses 23 through 35 but let me kind of paraphrase for you.

So this is his story. A king wants to close the books on those who owe him money. One servant according to the story owes him 10,000 talents. Now when I read that as a child that meant nothing to me but that is crazy money. Think about this, a day laborer would have to work for 20 years in those days to earn one talent. He owes 10,000 talents. So in our currency today he owes the king millions and millions of dollars. There is no way he can pay it back. So he throws himself on the mercy of the king. And in this outrageous act of grace the king forgives him, cancels the debt, and tells him he can go home.

Well, that very man who has been forgiven bumps into someone who owes him in our modern day currency a few hundred dollars and when that man begs for forgiveness, he refuses. Instead he has the man arrested and thrown into jail. When the king hears about it he is furious and he has that servant whom he forgave, he has him arrested, thrown into jail and tormented. Then Jesus goes on to say, "That's what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart."

Someone once asked me when I was teaching on this passage, "Is this about salvation? If you don't forgive you don't get to heaven?" No, it has nothing to do with that. Salvation

is between you and Jesus. That's when you accept Christ as your savior. This is about you and I living in obedience to Christ. When we refuse to forgive we live in a prison of our own making.

I have a commentary on the Old Testament and the New Testament by Warren Wiersbe and on this particular passage he writes, "The world's worst prison is the prison of an unforgiving heart."

I wish I could come through the screen and sit down beside you and help you understand that refusing to forgive, it's actually active rebellion against what Christ tells us to do. Unforgiveness can literally make us physically ill. It can eat at our bones. Do you remember what David said when he had been confronted after he'd had an affair with Bathsheba, and then sent her husband Uriah to the front line of a battle knowing absolutely that he would be killed? In Psalm 32, verse three this is what David said, "When I refused to confess my sin, my body wasted away and I groaned all day long."

When I was growing up in our little church on the West Coast of Scotland, there was a lady in our congregation and I always -- I hated if I bumped into her when I was coming into church or out because she just was so kind of mean. I would smile at her and say, "Good morning!" And she would never smile. As she got older I noticed that her hands became really gnarled up. Obviously, some of that was to do with rheumatism but I remember my mom's doctor saying, "Sometimes when people hold on to unforgiveness, to bitterness, it physically shows up in their body." It's as if they continue to drink a poison and they're poisoning their own system.

Now I can imagine some of you saying to me, "But listen, Sheila. You don't understand what was done to me. It was unforgivable." And I'm so aware of that. I'm not trying to make light of anything that happened to you. When I think of those of you who were sexually abused as children, I have no words for that kind of crime. Or perhaps you were abandoned by your husband or wife. There is so many things that apart from Christ we could never forgive. But that's the thing, "apart from Christ." It is significant.

In what we call the Lord's Prayer, it's actually the disciples' prayer. They said, "Lord, teach us to pray." We are only asked to do one thing. Now depending on what Bible you grew up with, you might hear this slightly differently but you'll remember it: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. And let us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one." Everything else in that prayer that Christ gave to his closest friends were asking God for. The one thing in the whole prayer that you and I are asked to do is forgive as we have been forgiven.

I know that can feel impossible. And not only that, it can feel desperately unfair. So let me share just a silly little family story to help illustrate how hard it can be to forgive when it feels so unfair. My son, Christian, ever since he was a little boy, I can tell by just looking in his face, looking in his eyes what kind of day he's had. Because of the school he went to when he was younger, the school bus didn't come to our neighborhood so I had the joy, and sometimes Barry would do it, of taking Christian to school every single day and then picking him up again. I used to love going to pick him up. I would try and get there before any other mom. So I would be right in the first car in line in car pool. And I'd watch to see his little face. I would put up on my, what do you call that rearview -- anyway, the thing you look at backwards. I would hang up his number on it and then when the teacher saw the number they would call the number at the gym and he would come trotting out.

Now if he'd had a good day, he had a big smile on his face. If he'd had a bad day on the other hand, he wore it well. Well, this one day I saw him coming out and it was like, oh gosh! Bless your heart, darling! It was the perfect storm heading right for me. So as you probably know if you have boys in your family, boys don't just unload. Girls from the minute they sit down are going to tell you everything. Boys not so much.

So I took Christian that day to a place that we think of is kind of a -- a kind of healing

place, the ice cream parlor. So we sat down and we both had ice cream. And then he said to me, "Mom! Do you want to know what happened to me today?"

I was like, "Yeah, I do!"

He said his best friend, we'll call him "Charles" for now, had knocked over Christian's desk and all the pencils fell off as well. When the teacher turned around she said, "Christian, pick up your desk and pick up all of your pencils."

And he said, "I didn't do it. Charles did it!" And he said, "Mom, I got into trouble twice. Once for knocking over my desk, which I didn't do and two for tattling. So at lunchtime I said to Charles, "You need to go in and tell the teacher that you did it." "Do you know what he said mom? He said no. So here's the deal. We're no longer friends and he is off my prayer list." I was like yeah, I totally get that. I totally get that. That's terrible.

So that night after he'd had his bath and he was in his pajamas, I think Barry was upstairs working in the study maybe, I said to Christian, "Would you like to go on an adventure?"

He said, "In my pajamas?"

I said, "Yes! In your pajamas."

He said, "I'd love it!"

I said, "Okay. If you'll go to the closet and get that big bag of flour that I got from Cosco we're going to need that."

He said, "I've got it, mom."

So he gets the big bag of flour and he's like, six or seven. He's just a little boy. So we went out the back door. We used to live on a golf course outside Nashville. So we're

marching along and he's holding this bag of flour.

He's like, "Are we nearly there yet, mom?"

I'm like, "No, no. Just a little bit further. But you're going to need that."

And eventually he just sits down on the grass and he says, "Mom, I can't do this. It is too heavy."

I sat down beside him and I said, "Baby, that's what it looks like when you won't forgive. Charles is probably been asleep for 30 minutes. You're the one out here carrying the load." I said to him, "I know that what happened to you was not fair but forgiveness is God's gift to us to live in a world that is not fair. Fair doesn't live here but Jesus does."

And it was just one of those -- it was a silly illustration but I think it helped my son understand that forgiving his friend didn't mean that what happened didn't matter. It didn't negate how much it hurt him but it just was a way of putting the weight down and not picking it up again.

Paul wrote in Colossians three, verse 13: Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone, forgive as the Lord forgave you.

Now forgiveness does not mean always restoration. Perhaps you, maybe your wife had an affair, maybe your husband had an affair and the desire to be forgiven could come quickly but it doesn't mean that you have to automatically be restored. Trust has to be rebuilt.

Also, if it was in a case of someone who has abused you in some way, you may want to forgive simply to line your life up with the Word of God but it doesn't mean that you have to still be in a relationship with that person. Forgiveness does not mean that what happened to you doesn't matter. Honestly to me, it just means we're dragging our

reluctant hearts in line with God's will and leaving it with Christ.

It was interesting, maybe about, gosh, over 20 years now, when I was hospitalized for clinical depression, one of my... some people were kind of skeptical about why is Sheila Walsh going to a psych hospital? And there was a lot of questions and I understood. Some of it is just... I think there is a lot of ignorance when it comes to mental illness. Some people think, well, you're a Christian, just pull yourself together. Which would kind of would be as ridiculous to someone who cannot see without their glasses, well, just take your glasses off and have faith. They're going to bump into a wall probably.

But one of my dearest friends, in fact, I would have included them in my two closest friends at that time wrote me a letter while I was still in the hospital and said, "I just want you to know how disappointed I am in you. I expect more out of you. You're a Christian leader, and we've done events together. What is wrong with you?" It really grieved me.

And while I was in the hospital I honestly didn't have the emotional whatever to write back. But I determined, because I cared about this person that once I got out of this hospital I would get together with them and hear them out. I think sometimes that's a gift that we can give. Sometimes we don't like confrontation but I think if I care about you and we're in a relationship, I want to at least hear you out. And so once I got out of the hospital I went and I met with this person and I said, "I have to be honest with you, your letter really hurt me."

And they said, "Well, I only have one question for you."

I said, "Okay. Ask it away."

And this person said, "Are you on medication?"

I said, "Yes. I'm on medication."

And they said, "Then you and I are no longer friends."

I can't even tell you what that did to me. This was somebody I'd loved for a long, long time. It was such a deep wound. At first I was just wounded but then I discovered something else in me. Like when I would see that person's name come up, that maybe they were speaking somewhere, singing somewhere or doing something, I found myself kind of... It's like the wound had begun to be something much closer to anger. I found myself thinking, like who do you think you are standing up there doing all this when you're so mean? If people really knew! And I don't have to act like that for more than five minutes before the Holy Spirit starts to confront me with what's going on inside of me. And I knew without a shadow of a doubt that the Lord was asking me to forgive. Bottom line, honestly, I didn't want to.

So this part's not going to be very inspiring but let me just tell you exactly how I started. My very first prayer was this: Lord, I forgive (the person's name) but you know I don't mean it. That literally was my first prayer. But I made a commitment to line my will up with the will of God, to drag my emotions in line with... See, emotions don't have brains but the Word of God has life. So I just every single day, I prayed and I forgave them. The interesting thing was after the first few weeks I found myself really, really meaning it. And as the weeks turned into months because they still wouldn't respond to any of my correspondence I found myself praying for that person with tears rolling down my face and saying, "Father, I don't know what's going on but I know this is a good person and there must be something going on. So please, Holy Spirit, will you comfort, will you help?"

And I cannot tell you the weight roll that off of my back. Even when I saw that person's name, I would be like, "Lord, bless their event. Make it an incredible success, more than they could ever hope for."

And then one day, probably about six or seven years later, I'm walking through a mall and there they are. And I wonder what they're going to do because our eyes meet about

the same time. And this person dropped her head and I walked up and said, "Hey! It's great to see you." And I realized that their eyes were filled with tears that began to roll down their face.

They said, "I'm so sorry! I couldn't tell you that what you were going through was beginning to happen in my own life and I thought if I punished you maybe I would feel better."

But here's what I want you to know. If you've been held in a prison of unforgiveness, it could be for 40 years, it could be for four hours, and I'm asking you in the powerful name of Jesus, will you drag your will in line with his? Will you begin to forgive that person and do it as many times as you need to? Let it go. Put that bag of flour down so that you can be free.

One of the things that I love about this time of year is we get to share with you something that's a tremendous joy where we get to give to people who are not asking necessarily at this moment for food or for clean water but they're asking for something that you and I take for granted. And you and I can answer their prayer. Would you watch this?

On the mission field:

Announcer: Every year friends of *LIFE Outreach International* have been bringing joy to thousands of children around the world during the Christmas season.

>> This is like Christmas!

>> Yes!

>> Show me your smile! Let me see!

[Laughter]

Look at that happy face.

[Children laughing]

>> God bless everybody who provides these shoes because you're putting a big smile on momma's face today.

>> This is going to change your life. I'm so happy for you! You ready?

Announcer: The joy goes way beyond just receiving a new pair of shiny shoes. It is knowing their feet are protected from injuries or infestations such as hookworms that enter their bare feet and can cause severe and sometimes fatal consequences.

>> We're asking you to help give as many pair as you can to may these kids happy. This is going to be something so special to them.

[Laughter]

Announcer: Won't you join us in providing joy to children around the world?
Christmas Shoes and Smiles!

End of video

In the studio:

Sheila: Don't you love that? Something so simple. This is one of my favorite things that we do every year. If you're thinking, well, that seems a little early to be talking about Christmas, it is very intentional because we want to get shoes to 150,000 children this Christmas. So we need to get all the funds in so we can make sure that they get there in time.

It is not just, oh, they don't have shoes so it is not so comfortable. Not having shoes in so many of these countries where we work around the world, the children are walking on garbage dumps, they're walking over rough terrain. They're going into water where if they've got cuts in their feet, when hookworm gets into a child's system, it literally drains all the nutrition out of their system. It can even potentially kill that child.

So we're asking you right now, let's make the best Christmas ever for these children. For any gift at all we're going to send you, this is our shoe for this year. It's cobalt blue. Absolutely beautiful! And do you know for \$36 you can provide shoes for ten children. Think of the money that we waste every Christmas time. Think of the money that we even waste buying wrapping paper. Why don't we all just decide that we'll not, if it is little kids, you have to wrap them but you know cut back on some of those things so that we can make such a simple request possible.

For \$72 you can provide shoes for 20 children. I've been in a village where giving out shoes for all the village and it causes, I mean you will hear laughter like you haven't heard in a long time. And for \$180, if you're able to do that, perhaps you're a Sunday School class and you could determine we're going to do this together, that would provide shoes for 50 children.

The other thing that we do, the reason we call it "Shoes and Smiles" is that when children are born in many countries around the world, they have either cleft palate or cleft lip. A, it is hard for them to take in proper nutrition. And B, they're often shunned, it's looked on almost as if it's a curse from God. But for \$500 you can provide corrective surgery for a child.

So please, will you call that number on your screen? Will you give the very best gift possible? This is one of our appeals where I feel like every single one of us, whether you're 15 watching this or 95, we can all jump in at some level. \$36 will provide shoes for ten children!

And for any gift at all, we will send you this lovely little cobalt blue shoe to put on your Christmas tree to remind you to pray for these children. I promise you, Christmas for you and I will be so much happier this year when we know we made it so much happier for children that we might never meet down here but perhaps we'll meet them in heaven and they'll get to say to you face to face, "Thank you for my shoes!" Please call!

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

On the mission field

James: Betty what do you think about all these beautiful feet and these beautiful children?

Betty: I think they deserve some pretty little shoes on their feet: Don't you? It's not just to give them shoes -- it is to bless them, we want to bless them! But the shoes have a real important use too, James. They can protect their feet from getting cuts and bruises and also from disease.

James: We found out that hookworms actually get in the skin of their feet just sometimes walking in dirt or sand and then it actually ends up in their intestines and it can be deadly. Let's put shoes on all these beautiful children's beautiful feet! It would just be such a wonderful gift to make at this time. I hope you'll do all you can. Just give as many pairs as you can to bless as many children and their families as you can.

In the studio

Sheila: Thank you. And if the lines are busy, please keep calling.

I wanted to show you one more thing. For a gift of \$100 you will get this little boxed set, which is shoes from this year and the previous three years. I have these on my tree and I just love to look at them and be reminded of the fact that you and I, in a season that is so much about receiving, that you and I can become givers just like God did on that Christmas day when he gave the greatest gift of all, his son Jesus. You and I, because of Jesus can reach out and give to moms who are praying to be able to put their very first pair of shoes on their child's feet.

So for all of here at *LIFE Today*, thanks for being with us. I'm Sheila Walsh and I'll see you next time!