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Week 38: Christmas Shoes and Smiles

Sheila Walsh

"God Loves Broken People"

Sheila: Hi! Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm Sheila Walsh. Thanks for tuning in.

A few years ago when our son was pretty small, I think he was probably about ten, we were going to the store to get... Oh, I had to get a new cellphone; that's what it was. He came in with me and gave me his opinion, which I listened to. But as we were coming out he said, "Mom! Look!" And he was pointing under the tire of a big truck that was in the parking lot. I looked and there was this tiny little bird. I said, "Well, don't touch it yet, Christian. Let's see if we can see where the nest is." So we looked all around, and we couldn't see a nest at all. I knew that if we didn't move the little bird it was going to be killed when the driver backed out.

So I said, "Okay, darling. We're going to take this little bird home and see if we can take care of it." So I very carefully picked the little bird up. I happened to have a shoe box in the car so we put the little bird in the shoe box until we got home. Then I had to think well, what does this little bird need? Because it was so little. So we went online, you know you can Google anything these days and discovered that really, we wanted like milk and then like eggs -- but scrambled eggs. Like really, really fine to be put in almost like a dropper.

It said that with a baby bird you have to feed it every three hours. I'm like, every three hours? I mean it was fine at 10:00 at night but I'm like at 1:00 and at 4:00? But I thought, I mean I better. I don't want the bird starving. So I set my alarm for one, and I was absolutely convinced the bird would be fast asleep. But no! The minute I showed up

it was sitting there with its mouth open waiting. As it was at 4:00 and at 7:00.

So then I called around and asked, is there a place where I can take a little baby bird? And they told me of this bird sanctuary that was about maybe an hour and a half away from where we live. So after Christian got out of school that day, we drove to the bird sanctuary. We took this little bird in and I looked around and I was just amazed by what I saw. There was an owl with a broken wing that was sitting beside a different kind of bird. And there were all these different birds that you would think that would ever be friends, if you call them friend, but be compatible, be able to sit all together in the same room.

I said to the girl who was helping us, I said, "I didn't know these kinds of birds would get along."

And she said, "Oh broken ones do."

And it just so resonated with me that sometimes the very thing that we think has disqualified us is the very thing that God uses to connect us to others.

A few years ago I wrote a book called, *God Loves Broken People and Those Who Pretend They're Not*. My book company did not like that title at first, but I was like, no, the truth is we're all broken in one way or another. We can choose to try and hide that, or we can offer that pain and that brokenness to Christ and see how he will use it for his glory. And not only that, to change us, to make us more compassionate, more human, more real. The truth is, none of us would choose suffering, but when it happens to us or those we love, we have a savior who understands.

One of my favorite pastors to listen to on podcast is pastor and author, Tim Keller. He said this, "If you believe in Christmas that God became a human being, we have an ability to face suffering; a resource for suffering that others don't have. We sometimes wonder why God just doesn't end suffering, but we know that whatever the reason, it isn't

one of indifference or remoteness. God so hates suffering and evil that he was willing to come into it and become enmeshed in it."

A couple years ago I interviewed my friend Michele Cushatt here on *LIFE Today*. I don't know if you caught that show. I knew Michele long before she had cancer. And now she sat with me in the studio after her third bout of mouth cancer. The first came when she was just 39 years old. She was told by her doctor right before Thanksgiving that she had squamous cell carcinoma of the tongue. Well, like me she had never even heard of such a thing. Apparently, it is something that heavy smokers can face but Michele had never even touched a cigarette. What followed for her were so many doctor's appointments, PET scans, and a painful surgery to remove a small section of her tongue.

Well, after the first surgery the doctors told her that this was the best scenario possible. They caught the cancer early. And then it came back twice. Three years later, and again, eight months after that. And that very last bout, I remember being with her was devastating and life-altering. A nine-hour operation followed by two months of chemotherapy and radiation.

I know she sat in our make-up chair in the studio before we began taping. Her eyes met mine and I can't -- I was trying to think of the right words to adequately express what I saw in her eyes. Was there victory? Absolutely. She is alive and with every breath Michele consciously gives glory to God. But there was more than that. What I saw was just a glimpse of what this experience continues to cost her.

Now that is not our favorite kind of story; is it? We'll accept a story with a difficult beginning and then a bit of a struggle in the middle, but we all want a happy ending where the pain is in the past. But that is not her story and it might not be yours either. So my question is how do you remain a fervently praying person, a woman or man or child when your prayers have not been answered as you wanted them to be?

As Michele sat opposite of me on the set, I knew that even the act of talking was very

difficult for her. She has only a third of her tongue left so speech is difficult and painful. But the authority at every hard one word was honestly astonishing to me. I remember her telling me when the show was over that she used to love Easter Sunday, as we all do, after all it is our glory day in the church where we celebrate the risen Christ. But she told me that now she finds great comfort on Good Friday as well knowing that Christ understands her suffering.

I wrote to her afterwards and I told her, it is no accident that the enemy tried to take away her ability to speak. If you've ever heard her, she is a powerful communicator. But as always, the enemy always over places his slimy hand because let me tell you this, one-third of a tongue consecrated to Christ is a more powerful weapon than a thousand tongues without Jesus.

But when everything we used to depend on is stripped away and you're shaken to the very core of who you are, we have two choices. We can either walk away, walk away from our faith, walk away from a God we don't understand, or we are all in like we've never been before, totally devoted to our wounded savior. When Michele prays now, the battle lines are very clear. There is an enemy and there is Christ who wears the victor's crown. She has learned in that dark night of the soul to do fierce spiritual battle on the front lines of suffering. I saw so clearly in Michele's life a profound spiritual truth: Where your wounds are there lies your authority.

I'm wondering about your life today. I wonder what you've been through. What you might be in the middle of. What are the things that you never said "yes" to but they happened anyway? What are your losses? What are the struggles? How many tears have you shed that nobody else has ever seen? I love that the Psalmist, David lets us know that our tears never ever fall to the ground unnoticed. In Psalm 56, verse eight, we read one of my favorite verses: You O Lord, you keep track of all of my sorrows. You've collected all my tears in your bottle. You've recorded each one in your book.

When your eyes have shed so many tears, when you've processed your pain in the

presence of Jesus it can also... It's like your eyes have been washed again. It can clear your spiritual vision and you see your own life and you see other people differently. Suffering changes us. Suffering when we try to go through it on our own, when we're angry or bitter, changes us in a negative way. But when you invite Christ into the middle of your suffering, when you process that pain in his presence it changes you for the good.

I saw that happen in another friend, Darlene Zschech. I don't know if you know Darlene. You probably remember the worship song she wrote a few years ago, "Shout to the Lord." She wrote that while she was a worship leader at Hillsong Church in Sydney, Australia. Well, I knew and loved Darlene back then but after she was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2013, I think, I got to know an even more anointed Darlene.

This is her story. A week before Christmas she was out shopping with her husband Mark. She happened to pop into the Sydney Breast Clinic just to get the "all clear" on a tiny lump. Instead she was told she had cancer. She walked through... I mean I remember how hard that year was. She walked through a brutal year of chemotherapy. She lost that lovely blond hair. But something deep, something profound inside her shifted.

We were in an arena together not so long ago with about 5,000 women and Darlene asked them to stand if they had received a diagnosis of breast cancer. And I was overwhelmed to see how many women stood. Some of them were through the battle, some of them were halfway through the battle, and some of them were just at the starting post. Then she began to pray. It still gives me chill bumps to this day. It was one of the most anointed, powerful prayers I've ever experienced. She prayed as one with authority because she'd been there. I watched her reach through the pain of her experience and pray for other women. It was truly a holy moment.

These stories of Michele and Darlene, they're probably different from your own story because you have a story of your own. And where your wounds are, there lies your authority in Christ. We can either -- we get to choose. We can either back down in the midst of struggles or by God's grace... because that's the thing! We've not been asked to

do this by ourselves -- by God's grace. Remember what Paul was told? "My grace is enough for you because my strength is made perfect in your very weakness." So by God's grace we can stand up and pray through the pain.

Just let me stop here for a moment and acknowledge how black and white that might sound. Life is very rarely as clear cut as that. Right now you might be in the greatest pain of your life and you're struggling to pray through it. As I've searched my own heart and asked the Holy Spirit for understanding, I realize often we struggle when we're in a hard place not only because of our view of God, maybe you're tempted to think, God, if you love me, why are you not healing me? But perhaps also because of some of the lies we've believed of ourselves. Sometimes we think God isn't answering our prayers the way we want because of lies we believe about the love of God in ways that we don't feel we measure up. Like if your friend's been healed and you haven't, what's wrong with me, Lord? If your marriage is falling apart and your friend's marriage was restored, what are some of the lies that you've maybe believed about yourself? And what pain have they caused in your life? What choices have they made for you? It's time to face those lies in Jesus' name and replace them with truth.

Throughout the years, so many women have given me the privilege of sharing their stories and also uncovering the deep-seeded lies they've allowed to take root. The truth is the enemy doesn't want you to pray through your pain. He wants you to stay in it and not connect with God, so you'll never move on with Christ.

I was looking through some old mail that I used to receive when I worked for the group called *Women of Faith*. And I wrote down some of the most common lies: I'm not enough. I'm not worth loving. I'm not a good wife. I'm not a good mom. I'm not a good dad. I'll never change. I can't do this. I'll never get past my past. I don't belong. I'm always going to be alone. I'll never be able to move on. The number one lie that I hear more often than any other to this day is this first one: I'm not enough. It doesn't seem to matter whether we're rich or poor, successful in the world's eyes or not, that lie seems to be central -- the most primal lie of all, I'm just not enough.

Here's the truth. We were never meant to be enough. Jesus is enough. We get to come as we are. When Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, his second letter in chapter four, this is what he said about the reality of our life on this earth. We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we're not crushed. We're perplexed but we're not driven to despair. We're hunted down, but we're never abandoned by God. Yes, we get knocked down, but we are not destroyed. Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies.

I just want to ask you, what's your story? Where are your wounds? Where are your scars? What are the things that have caused you so much pain? Do you think you could offer those broken pieces to Christ?

My dear friend, Kay Warren sent me something the other day and it's a beautiful little piece of pottery but it's the... I'm not going to say the name because I'll get it wrong. It's something like kintsugi but -- you can look it up. It's where something has been broken and then repaired with gold. It is so beautiful.

She said, "I just want you to have this, Sheila to remember that the very thing where your life fell apart and you were broken and you felt like your life was over and you were told to your face your ministry is over, but because you gave those broken pieces to Christ and allowed him to do the repair work, the finished product is more beautiful than the original."

And I want you to know that too. I don't know what's going on in your life right now. Perhaps it's a broken relationship. Maybe your marriage is falling apart. Maybe you've been longing to be married and no one's come along and you're thinking, Lord, I've honored you and I've done all the things you've asked me to do and you're still not bringing anyone. Maybe you're desperate for a child and you hear some young girl in your church who went and got an abortion. And you're thinking, why couldn't I have had that child?

Whatever the greatest pain is, I want to ask you, would you offer those pieces to Christ? Because I believe -- it's not that I just believe, I know in my own life and in the lives of my friends, I've seen it in the Michele, I've seen it in Darlene, I know it in my own life, when you offer to the Lord all those broken pieces he does something beautiful. And where your wounds are, that's where your authority lies, and you can see God do amazing things that only he can do.

I want to share with you something that I'm really excited about. Every year at *LIFE*, as we're just a few months from Christmas we get to introduce something very special to you. So I want you, will you take a look at this right now and watch with me?

On the mission field

Clint: We're approaching a time of the year when *LIFE Outreach* does its Christmas Shoes & Smiles campaign. The smiles are for corrective surgery. But what we're doing today is we're getting these young boys' and girls' shoes for the very first time. You can actually see the importance of what we're doing because look at this little girl, Veronica, she's got these sores on her feet already. She's obviously never owned a pair of shoes. She's been walking around bare feet.

James: Betty, they just tough it out and they play. But we found out that right here in this area that hookworms get in the skin, get in the bloodstream, ultimately into the intestines and cause very serious disease and sometimes death. We can turn it around by simply giving them shoes.

Sheila: Something as simple as a pair of shoes can really change a child's life. This is a happy place today. [Laughing] Look at this face! Who wouldn't want to give her a gift at Christmas? So thank you so much on behalf of her family, those who love her. I think you've put the biggest smile on her face that we've seen all day. So thank you. Thank you

for the gift of shoes. Thank you for the gift of life!

[Children yelling]

End of clip

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, 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's not just oh they don't have shoes so it's 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, and 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 is cobalt blue -- absolutely beautiful! Do you know it is amazing, 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 its 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 to all the village and it causes... I mean you will hear laughter like you haven't heard in a long time. For \$180, if you were able to do that, perhaps you're a Sunday School class and you could determine, we're going to do this together. That will 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 and they have either cleft palate or cleft lip, they are, A, it is hard for them to take in proper nutrition and B, they're often shunned. It is looked on almost as if it is a curse from God. But for \$500 you can provide a 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've 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

In the studio:

Isak: I'm here with this mother and her child, Aralmundo, and you can see from what you're seeing on your screen how this little baby boy has been born with a cleft palate. So her child will grow up with this deformity and will ultimately end up having huge struggles in life. And yet it is so easy for us to be able to bring this solution to Aralmundo.

You've seen how we've given shoes and we put shoes on children that so desperately need them, and how that just changes their lives because their little feet are not breaking open and bleeding and getting sores and infection. Well, we want to do the same here. We want to bring shoes and smiles. Smiles to Aralmundo. And I want to ask you from the bottom of my heart to please be the person that says, "Yes, I'll bring that smile. I'll give a smile for a lifetime to this little baby boy." Please, do that for me today. Give the greatest gift, give the gift of a smile.

End of video

In the studio:

Sheila: Isn't that exciting! Don't you just love that we get to do this? And for any gift at all, we will send you this darling little blue shoe. Remember, if you send in a \$100, we will send you the set of four. But let's do something. And let's every one of us determine that this year we're going to respond and we're going to do something to put shoes on the feet of little ones that literally could save their lives.

So if you tried to get through and the line was busy, that's good news. Just persevere and keep calling. Let's make this the best Christmas that so many children around the world will have because we cared enough to do what we can.

So for James and Betty and all of us here at *LIFE*, we love you, God bless you, and we'll see you next time!