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Week 38: Christmas Shoes and Smiles

Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh

Toby Slough

Randy: Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm Randy Robison. Sheila is here with me as always.

Sheila: Hello!

Randy: Ring the bell, win a prize.

Sheila: I know! Yes, that was a very exciting start.

Randy: We're excited that you guys are here with us. It's been a tough year and we get that! And that's why I think today's program is really going to help you. We have a guest with us who is a pastor celebrating 20 years this year in a fabulous church here in the Dallas/Fort Worth area. He has a new book out called, *Not Yet*. He is addressing the very real issues that we're facing, anxiety, for some people depression and some, his words, "And all the other crap that comes knocking at your door."

Would you welcome Toby Slough?

Toby: Thank you so much. It's great. I'm honored to be here with you today.

Randy: We appreciate this. Now this is a tough topic, the deeper issues here and I know it is one that, Sheila you've dealt with. Let's get right into this because a lot of people are feeling a lot of things they're having some difficulty with.

Sheila: One of the things I love, Toby about the way you write and about who you are

from people who know you is that you're always ready to shine the brightest light into the darkest corners of the church, to talk about the things that we don't talk about. But writing about anxiety or depression, it is not just a cerebral thing for you. It is something you have lived. How long has that been part of your journey?

Toby: Now over 25 years. People will say, "How long did it take you to write the book?" I say, "About 25 years." I believed when I first was diagnosed with panic disorder, which quite honestly, 25 years ago you never heard of. No one was talking about those kinds of things. I was just under the assumption I would write a book one day about how God had completely delivered me from that in my life. And little did I know that 26 years later on the 20th anniversary, Randy, as you said of our church family, we'd be releasing a book talking about being in that *Not Yet* of still having those battles on a regular basis in my life.

Randy: Tell us a little bit about the origins of this. Is this something that you have always dealt with or is there something that started it? Give us an idea where this all came from.

Toby: You know one of the questions I get, Randy is it spiritual, is it emotional, is it physical? And the answer is yes. It is all of those things, really. The best way it was ever described to me was if your house burned down and a couple weeks later a fire truck pulled up beside you at a light your heart would begin to race because it brought back that memory which would be what would be called being human.

But panic is different. Panic is - your heart begins to race for no reason at all. Now looking back at my childhood years I think I battled this, just had no box to put it in, kind of shoved it down for a while until that one fateful night when my heart started to race, my hands started to shake and I sat up straight in the bed and decided I would walk it off. That's the main thing, I'm just going to walk the hall. And seven hours later, no exaggeration of walking the hall, just as exhausted as I'd been the day when I laid down that night. I got in a pattern of I would feel it rising up in me and it was out of my control.

There was not an event that it happened, which is what makes panic such a challenging situation. Well, why are you panicked? Well, there is no reason. Your mind finds a reason to be panicked.

Randy: Well, did you see a doctor? Did you get any kind of medical diagnosis?

Toby: I did. I finally, the short version is I grew up in a very performance-based, not only religion, but a home. I had a father who was a high school coach. In the '60s you know how high school coaches were; more, better, faster. And somewhere along the way I decided that perfection was the goal and there was no other option. Come on. How many of us know that you come to a place in life where you, in your heart, in your head you know that's not reality; but your heart hasn't followed suit.

And so after 17 days of not being able to sleep, not being able to eat, not being able to function, I finally went to see a counselor. It was the third session there when he said, "You have an anxiety disorder." And gave me that diagnosis at that time. So I had a place, a box to put that in where now I could begin to discover and peel back the layers of what got me there in the first place.

Sheila: Did you experience any of the... I know in my early days of being diagnosed with clinical depression there was a lot of shame attached to that because it wasn't something we talked about. I remember even going to fill my prescription and hoping that nobody would see me because I didn't want to... Was that something you had to work through?

Toby: In a huge way! I would go to the counselor's office and he would say, "Well, here's a room for the pastors." "Well, why is there a room for the pastors?" "Well, so no one else will have to see you."

Again, you think of that kind of thinking; right? So I was convinced that if anybody ever found out what I was really battling I would lose my marriage, I would lose my church, I

would lose my life. You get in this, whether it's depression, whether it's depression -- which is by the way one of the reasons I was so excited to be here. Your book has helped me so much to just connect at a level of pain.

But you get to this place where you have a desire to be fully loved and that's a high desire and you also have this high fear that if you're fully known you'll never be fully loved. And the problem is you're never fully loved until you're fully known. So that's, Randy, that's the vice grip you get in. I want so much to let somebody to know. I want somebody to know that I'm struggling but I'm worried that there will be some kind of break in our relationship, that I've somehow let you down if I'm "less than" in some area of my life.

Randy: It's interesting that you say that about her openness, and she's been tremendously open. I know it's helped a lot of people. It seems like there is this diabolical lie that says if you're not perfect you're not qualified to be in ministry or to help other people or be a father or be a wife or whatever. And that you just can't tell anybody. And yet the Bible says, "Confess your sins," but I think that covers our faults, our struggles to one another. Why? So you can be healed.

Being able to talk about it, has that been a really critical part of being able to even cope with it?

Toby: It's been the most critical part. I think the thing that has broken my heart the most is when I've shared and I've shared this literally all over this country and other countries, this story through the years. That by the way, in 2003 began on this stage, in this program when I began to talk about it in the early days.

What broke my heart, though was how many people were saying how courageous this was. There is no courage in me. It was survival. If my desire, again, I want to be fully loved, you have to be fully known. So the greatest weapon I have is the words of James that you quoted is to confess. This is an area I'm struggling in. I'm not where I ought to be. And that for me is a huge part of finding freedom even when you face that battle.

Sheila: What do you say to people who, because I know I've had this, "If you've had more faith," or "God wants to give you a miracle," how do you address that? Because I get so many heartbreaking letters from women saying... Well, I got one the other day, "My dad committed suicide. I've been told he is in hell." Which just drives me nuts! My dad committed suicide and I know that Christ carried him home. What do you say to that kind of ignorance in the truest sense?

Toby: Well, the first thing I would say is I tell them stories about people I have prayed for and that they have emailed me and said, "I felt something lifting." And would go, okay, let's think about this for a moment. I prayed for the vessel God used is one who is still in the middle of that battle. So God's ways are not our ways. The other thing I would say is you would never tell a diabetic that if you had more faith you just pray. This is an illness. And as long as we can begin to understand, this is an illness. Can God heal? Of course, he can heal. It is well within his power. I have come to the place, there is not a day goes by, Sheila, that I don't ask God to lift, especially in this season.

Sheila: Me too!

Toby: But I don't have to have him do it for me to believe that he is real.

Sheila: That's huge! That's huge right there.

Toby: Where I began to, I believe heal spiritually was when I came to a place to understand how ridiculous it was for me to put conditions on a relationship with a God that loved me unconditionally. Like God, you'll never believe what I'll do if you'll do this. You'll never believe what I'll do if you will do this. When you get into a place where I have to have this for you to be real, there's illness there. There's a self-perpetuating...

I believe God can heal me. I just don't need him to heal me for me to believe that he is real, that is he alive, that he is working in other people's lives.

Randy: This is very difficult for a lot of people, I know have had these discussions. The title of your book is *Not Yet*. So yeah, we affirm that God can. I think the hard part is why hasn't he? But yet, we also know that there are biblical examples where he let people stay in the struggle because he was working something that he wanted to work through the struggle. Where do you land on the, God, why haven't you? Will you ever? Those types of questions.

Toby: Here are two things I believe. One I believe that freedom is not the absence of depression or anxiety, it is the presence of Jesus. So when I began to redefine what it means to be free. Freedom doesn't mean you don't battle depression from time to time; that my heart doesn't race from time to time. Freedom is the presence of Christ in the midst of those situations -- the strength, the hope, the power. That's what freedom is.

Then you go to the life of Paul. I was able to go to Greece a couple of years ago, just the grace of the Lord through generous people and go on a trip following the footsteps of Paul. And they said, "We're going to see all the places he wrote these famous things." I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength. We never found the plaque that said, "I pleaded with the Lord and he said no, my grace is sufficient. My power is made perfect in weakness." Nobody puts that on a mug and sells it. No, I was begging God for this thorn in my flesh -- God said, "No, my grace is sufficient." The greatest church leader this side of the cross, God said no to the thing I wanted the most. Yet he lived in freedom.

Randy: And many of the words that he wrote that we're encouraged by were written from prison.

Toby: Exactly!

Sheila: I would imagine when you sat down to write *Not Yet* it was before we were living in the biggest *Not Yet* that any of us have ever known. How were you... as a pastor

during this time, how were you being able to be there for your people and what do you see people experiencing? Because there seems to be so much despair -- genuine despair.

Toby: Yes, it is. I had no idea we'd live in this moment. But the book is about living in uncertainty. The book is about can you flourish, not just get by, but can you flourish when you're not sure what the end of the story is going to be?

In our church family there has been such a repetitive nature to this message of we believe God can do anything but we don't need God to do something to believe that he is real; that I think it's better equipped us. In other words, it's not a programmed Christianity. If you do this, God will do this. So we hang on to Romans 8:28, when everything is uncertain, what are we certain of? That God is working to bring good. That there is something God is doing amongst us, in us. It is not a lot of fun. It feels like crap but what he's going to bring out of that is going to be something powerful. I think that's what hope is.

Randy: There is a phrase, I want to get it right, in your book that I found was interesting. I think it was "Unforced rhythms of grace." It is an interesting phrase. What exactly do you mean by that?

Toby: I mean that because of this thorn in the flesh the Lord has given me, if I can use some Pauline theology, there are things that I have got to do, there has got to be a part of the rhythm of my life, for me to experience the fullness of God's presence and power no matter what's going on. I think this is what Jesus was saying when he said, "Are you tired, worn out, burned out on religion," as Eugene Petersen, "Come to me and you will recover your life. Let me teach you the unforced rhythms of grace." And for me, the unforced rhythms of grace is a perspective that when I practice these things in my life I'm going to be more open to God's presence that was always there. What is that for you? Well, I just think where we've made a mistake is this isn't a cookie cutter approach. That there are ways that you experience or are aware of God's presence that someone else is not.

Randy: Right. So when you say we practice, when you practice these things, your things may not be my things. What were some of your things though, I'm curious?

Toby: Well, for me there are things like the water is one of the things for me. There is something for me that connects with God on the water. So I live very close to the water. And I'm telling you, Randy, it's saved my life. It's literally saved my life in the midst of this pandemic it saved my life. I know that in the middle of all this, at the end of the day I'm going to go down by that water, I'm going to turn on a worship song, and me and God are going to do some business together. That I'm going to need as much the next day as I had that day. So for me, time at the water is important. For somebody else that's just water.

Randy: Right. That's the part of the beauty and uniqueness of God meeting us right where we're at.

Sheila: One of the things I've been doing because most mornings when I wake up at the moment I tend to feel pretty down. So I go out on my little balcony and I read a Psalm out loud because there is something about my ears hearing what my eyes are reading that reminds me of what's always true no matter what might be true at the moment. But you talk in here about the "I am list"? Talk to us a little about that.

Toby: I have a dear pastor friend in another state that I called him one day and just said, "I'm struggling." I broke down. He said, "I want you to go on the internet and I want you to Google the 40 'I ams.' I want you to take index cards and write them out and begin to say them out loud."

I still have those index cards now almost 20 years later where I wrote the 40 statements of who God says I am. And I have found that when I... Because our faith is verbal, so when I say these things out loud that there is a power that is released in my life. I have found, Sheila, that the ones that are the hardest for me to say are the very ones I need to

be declaring with conviction in that day. It's not like, oh, I need to fool myself into believing this. It's no, I'm going to agree with God. I'm going to agree that this is who I am even though I don't feel like I am. One of the ways my wife knows when I'm in a battle, is I'm sitting at that table and I'm throwing those cards. I'm going to push my way through this by declaring what God has said to be true.

Sheila: When I was in the hospital, because at nighttime it was the hardest for me, that's when I would feel the most hopeless. And I would literally drag myself out of the bed, plant my feet on the floor in my room and say, "I believe I will live to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." And I didn't always feel it but I knew it was true and I declared it to be true. That's why I'm so grateful you wrote this book. I think it is going to help so many people, Toby!

Randy: Before we wrap up, I want to give you an opportunity to just to speak to somebody who has been watching and clinging to this program thinking, is there hope for me? Is what they're saying possibly true? What would you say to that person who is just barely hanging on by a thread right now?

Toby: I would say, I know how you feel. I know what it is like to feel less than. You have more power than you think you have. You have more authority than you think you have. I know what you're thinking, how am I going to take another step? You're going to take a step now like you took a step yesterday, one at a time. And God will give you enough strength for that moment. It is in the struggle that God does his best work. And you do not have to like the struggle to believe that God is doing something in you. You are not alone. He understands what you're facing.

That's my heart, really, about *Not Yet*. Is that people would not feel alone.

Sheila: We just want to remind you that we're always here for you. Never be afraid to reach out and say, "This is what's happening." We're here. We're here for you. You're not alone, God is with you.

One of the things that we love doing here, Toby is we love to have our eyes opened to the needs of other people too because sometimes in reaching out to someone else you find yourself smiling. So we have something we'd love to show you and then we'll tell you how you can get involved. Would you please watch this?

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: So we're coming close to the end of our Christmas Shoes and Smiles season. You're probably thinking isn't it a little early to be talking about Christmas? No, absolutely not because we want to get these shoes to these children in time for Christmas.

So often, Christmas has become commercialized in our country. It's all about what can I get? And we end up with a pile of stuff we don't need. So I want to invite you into this glorious adventure of giving and the impact that that makes on your own life. For just \$3.60 we can send a pair of shoes to a child. That's absolutely nothing! So I think as a family, why don't you take this on as a project? Encourage your little ones to give a little bit of their allowance; to think that they're going to impact a child's life in a country that's... you can show them where it is on a map and say, "Look at the difference you made!" So I'm just inviting you to join us.

Also we do Christmas smiles. Children born in some countries with cleft lip or cleft palate, they're almost looked on as cursed by God. Can you imagine as a mom or dad not being able to see your child smile? We can change that. \$500 and we're able to provide surgery and a new life to these children if we all do it together, Randy.

Randy: I know Toby's message has really impacted a lot of people and we want to offer you his book, *Not Yet* as some hope, as some encouragement as we head towards this Christmas season. I know that in itself can be difficult for a lot of people. So if you're one who just needs a little hope and encouragement or you know someone that needs it, request this book today. Today, I think is probably the only day you'll be able to get this on the program.

But when you do that, here's what I want you to hear, we're offering some hope and encouragement to you because you are offering some hope and encouragement to others around the world. That's what we're about here at *LIFE Today*. We want to bless you and we want you to bless others. So we invite you into this moment. And Sheila mentioned the low cost of the shoes. For \$180 we can put 50 pairs of shoes on 50 children and it will

change their lives. Something so simple -- it really does impact not just their health, but it just puts a smile on their face. And of course, the surgeries, they average about \$500 for a corrective surgery for the cleft lip, the cleft palate which literally puts a smile on a child's face.

But here's what I just want you to hear today. We as God's people, we are his hands, his feet. We are his expression of love and everything, every great quality that God has on this earth. We do it when we reach out and we meet people's practical needs. That's what I'm asking you today to do online, on the phones, and \$36 for ten pairs of shoes, \$1,000, there is a couple of surgeries or a surgery and some shoes. \$10,000 if that's what God has blessed you with and put on your heart. It's just answering the call to be the body of Christ and to offer that hope and encouragement around the world. Do it now.

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

Betty: I'm standing here with these children and they're just a small example of children all over the world that they deserve to be considered and loved and cared for. We have an opportunity to do that right now among these children and those around the world to put some shoes on their feet, to give them a chance in life.

I ask you to help us do that. It is just a simple request but a very urgent and important one. Please join with us! You'll get such great joy out of it. I know you will! God bless you and thank you!

End of video

In the studio:

Sheila: Thank you so much. Keep calling. And as Randy said, for any gift at all we'll be happy to send you Toby's book, *Not Yet*. We're all living in the *Not Yet, but Jesus wants to be very present in the Not Yet*. And we're so grateful to you. Thank you so much for being our guest.

Toby: Thank you. Great to be here!

Randy: Thank you for sharing your heart and just for encouraging so many people. Thank you, guys, for watching -- everyone out there watching *LIFE Today*. Join us again next time right here for more words of hope, more words of encouragement and more life!