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Week 38: Christmas Shoes and Smiles

Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh

Susie Larson

Randy: Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm Randy Robison. This is Sheila Walsh.

Sheila: Hi!

Randy: And boy, do we have a special program for you! Some encouragement, something to lift your spirits, something to let you know that the victory is yours through our savior. And Sheila, I think she is a friend of yours.

Sheila: She is a darling friend of mine. One of my favorite people on the planet is my darling friend, Susie Larson. So welcome to *LIFE Today*, Susie!

Susie: So honored to be with you both. Thanks for having me.

Sheila: You have this new 365-day devotional called *Prevail*. And I'm thinking that probably when you were doing all the work on this was before the pandemic hit but it seems like there could not be a more perfect time for this book.

Susie: I just love how God is sovereign and he orchestrates things according to his purposes. Because there are times, as you know, Sheila, when you're working on a book and you're suffering behind the scenes, it feels like you're army, crawling through the valley fighting for every inch. Something the Lord has shown me is for every inch you gain in the natural you gain miles in the spiritual realm.

I had no idea what would be going on in our world but God did! I marvel because people are really responding just to the very word *Prevail* which means to prove more powerful than your opponent and to be the last one standing when it's all said and done.

Sheila: Wow! I love that.

Randy: I'm interested. So the title implies not just winning but it implies a battle. What have you, I know some of the things, but tell the audience some of the battles you've had to fight because the context of the idea of prevailing with what you've gone through really takes on some deeper significance.

Susie: Randy, that's true. And I appreciate you both so much because you have walked some of this journey with me over the years. But for those who don't know my story, I encountered some trauma as a child at the hands of some teenaged boys. Which right away, I always say the enemy sees your potential long before you ever do. So all you have to do is look at your childhood and that first awareness of when you had an enemy. You can kind of turn the tables and see that God's plan for you is very connected to the enemy's threat against you.

So when I came to Christ as a young middle schooler, I knew I was saved but I didn't know I was loved. So I really transferred all my high school performance into Christian performance; trying to just really earn God's love and be the best Christian I could be. And jump ahead a little bit, during one of my pregnancies I contracted Lyme disease and that was 30 years ago. I haven't gone a day in 30 years without a symptom to be honest. And I've had stretches that have been brutal, and had a pretty massive relapse about four or five years ago that I would say I'm about 80-85% of the way through.

One of the times when I was in the midst of the worst of it, I want to say three years ago, I was backstage at *LIFE Today* and Sheila is so perceptive. Your make-up people are fantastic because they had me all dolled up but she could see it in my eyes. And she came and sat next to me and held my hand. She said, "Are you okay?"

I said, "I'm not! I'm barely hanging on here."

She hugged me and prayed for me and I pulled it together and we did a show. I'll never forget that moment but all of that to say if you read any of my books you will see a theme of fighting, of contending for the promise of believing God when the promises don't feel true.

I just really believe as Sheila was saying, the timing of this book feels divine in that in some ways we've had Christianity easy, I think, in the west but we're in a day now where we need to know how to stand on the promises even when they don't feel true.

Sheila: One of the things you say in the book is, "Choose to be unoffendable." I cannot think of a time that I've known where people are more offended than they are at the moment. It is really disheartening. You see it through social media. But not just outside the church, within the church. What do you mean by, "Choose to be unoffendable."

Susie: You know when I first heard that phrase it was from a pastor in the Midwest, pastor Francis Frangipane is his name. He used that in an article and it grabbed me, I want to say, 20 years ago. It's been a core to my convictions and values ever since then. Because you know in the latter days the love of most will grow cold. I believe we are in the latter days. But even if we're not, we're at least in the beginning of the end. And all you have to do is look around at the measure of love.

Sheila and Randy, I know you probably agree with this, that years past the main divisions in the body of Christ, to me at least from my observation, were denominationally and racially. Those were two very strong distinct divisions in the body of Christ. Now it's those and it's political, it's social. The divisions are so multi-faceted right now. And more people are aligning with their politics than they are with their Christianity to the point it seems that we've pulled Christ out of our Christianity. If Christianity is being Christ-like, we have to maybe reconnect that again.

So I've been saying for a long time, for us to walk in love and to be anointed and powerful in our day, we've got to steward our perspective. I used to tell my boys when they were growing up, "If you have to let go of love to hang on to your cause you've lost your way." I feel like that's happened. So that's a hard word but I believe it's true. That we're all charged to steward our perspective and if we're not at the end of the day landing on a place of compassion for our enemies, broken heartedness for those who think differently than us, just being compelled to intercede because we have a God in heaven who hears our name, if we are more angry at the bad news than we are in awe of the good news, then we've lost our way. And I think for revival to come to our nation and to the church, capital C church, it starts with us as God's people. We need to search our own hearts.

Randy: Absolutely! You're so right to emphasize the battle being not against flesh and blood but against the principalities and powers.

I do want to circle back to something because I know Sheila doesn't want to focus on herself, but when you said that Sheila was right there for you to pray with you, to walk with you in a difficult time, I know she is so great at that, how important is it for us to prevail with others, with people holding us up, with people being there with us, with exposing our pain? How critical is it that as a body we act like a body?

Susie: I'll never forget that moment because I was barely hanging on and I wouldn't have asked her for help. Maybe in a different day if I wasn't about to go on a TV interview. But I'll never forget that because I feel like it speaks to a great level of discernment.

One of the devotionals in *Prevail* I write about Joseph. And here's a man with a call of God on his life and he experienced one setback, one injustice after another. He to me is a picture of how God prepares his saints to prevail and to be promoted, to be stewards of great things. You look at his story, people were jealous of him, they betrayed him, he was falsely accused. There is a little nuance in that story where he's in prison and the

Pharaoh's baker and cupbearer were thrown into prison. And Joseph was such a man of God, and obviously the favor was on him, but even the prison guard entrusted them to Joseph's care. I think that's interesting because if anybody had a reason to be bitter and full of self-pity it would have been Joseph. But he obviously stewarded his perspective in every situation to the point where favor surrounded him and he rose to the top as a leader in every situation.

There is this little nuance in this story where, in so many words Joseph asked these two guys, "Why the long face?" He's like, "Why are you so worried?" And I remember just jumping off the page going wait -- what? Why the long face? Why are you worried? Everybody who is in prison right now, a lot of you unjustly accused, have reasons to worry but to me it shows a picture of maturity and preparedness that in spite of what you're going through, and I know that Sheila was walking through her own battles at that point, and I feel like it is a sign of maturity and readiness to be able to see and discern what's going on in the stories of others.

I feel that what we've come through in this pandemic, God is doing a purifying work in the body of Christ. I think many, many Christians have stuffed their hurts, their losses, disappointments down into the basement of their soul and have numbed out. Or maybe, instead of dealing with it and joined a fifth committee at church or something like that, getting busy in the churchy stuff but they don't want to deal.

But you have to feel it to heal it. I believe God has used this quarantine time to bring things to the surface so God can deal with our hurts. Why? Because there are masses of people who don't know Jesus who have had losses, hurts, and disappointments. And when we mature in our faith, we can do what Sheila did for me, we can spot people and go, "What's going on there? There is something under the surface there." To me, that is the body of Christ being the body of Christ. And we must be in a position that we can do that but Randy, we can't get there if we're shaking our fists at the darkness, we're tweeting and hash tagging who we hate as believers, we can't get there. But I believe that to be the body of Christ we must.

Sheila: There are so many of these devotions, Susie. We could tape for five hours here because there is so much wealth in this. But I want you to speak to one that you wrote. It's called: "Release and trust." You're talking about Abraham and Lot. What is what happened between them speak to us and what we're living in now?

Susie: One of the things that I dealt with a lot because of fear, because some of the trauma that I walked through and the trauma of being sick for so long was self-preservation. Because even now, if I don't get a certain amount of sleep I have neurological symptoms. So the temptation is to grab for myself because I know what will happen if I don't get what I need. When you look at what's happened in this pandemic, self-preservation has kicked into a gear that almost makes no sense.

What the Lord showed me when he interrupted my fear one day years ago and said, "Susie, kingdom life and self-preservation are absolutely not compatible." When I look at that story between Abram and Lot, Abram was so generous and Lot actually grew wealthy under Abram's tutelage; right? And he became a very wealthy man thanks to Abram. And it got to the point where the herdsmen started to bicker. There was conflict. But once again, Abram being the peacemaker said, "Let's not let this conflict get between us as family members. You choose the land you want. You go right, I'll go left. You go left -- either way."

To me, just that not white-knuckling anything but saying, "I serve God in heaven." So he opens his hands and says, "You choose, Lot." Well Lot, it seems like had a habit of grabbing for himself and he grabbed the choicest land, even though he'd be camping among the ungodly. But he grabbed it and he went off on his way. Then it was God who said to Abraham, "Look to the left or the right, to the north to the south, and as far as you can see. This is the land I'm going to give to you and your descendants." And Abram's response was he bowed down and he built an altar.

My point in that devo is I think scarcity and abundance both reveal conditions of our

heart. If we're going to grab for ourselves in scarcity, we're going to grab for ourselves in times of abundance. I do believe this is a test of our hearts right now, Sheila, is God our provider or not? I think we've had an illusion of control, an illusion even of provision when we weren't being tested because we put our hope in a lot of the things that can't hold up. And so I say in that release and trust devo, what are you white knuckling today? Because that's the place where God's power wants to flow in and through you. So what can you release? How can you trust God so you can see his kingdom come to bear in your life?

Randy: A lot of people are dealing with fear. Not just -- Sheila, can we say this? We've had in our families' positive COVID cases so we've been tested. I know there is this unknown thing around this, for our loved ones, for ourselves, there's concern, rightly so, but then there's also fear.

Then you've got people who have lost their jobs, they're financially in bad shape. There is just long-term ramifications that we haven't even seen yet. You have had to deal with fear personally and it is something you write about. What are some of the things, the relative things related to just handling the fear that's going on in so many people?

Susie: Wow, I appreciate that. I have written extensively about it because it is something I've had to wrestle to the ground over and over again. I might have mentioned this in one of our last interviews, I'm not sure if I did but I wrote about it in *Fully Alive*. But the idea is that when we allow fear in our lives we open the door in our bodies to a cascade of inflammation. So every time you have fear, you have an inflammatory response physiologically. You know the soil for sickness and disease grows? Is inflammation. So I say that if the enemy can't get you sick with COVID, he is going to try to get you sick with fear.

When people are grabbing for themselves because they want to keep themselves safe -- and you want to be wise, of course, you want to be a good steward. But when you're doing things motivated out of fear, it is not of God. Fear is a spirit and it is not

from God. The idea, if you want to build your immunities, really, I mean this, deal with your fear, deal with the disconnect between what you say you believe and what you actually believe in your heart. Because fear will wreak havoc on your health, on your spirit, and on your emotions. And there is a way to do this. There is a way to go, "I'm turning my back on fear. I'm putting my eyes on Christ, on Jesus because he promises to be there for me.

One of the devos towards the beginning of the book, its dealing with the disconnect, and it is Abraham and Sarah. God promised to bring the nations through them, bring generations through their seed. And the scripture says he bowed low, but he laughed on the inside. So did the Christian thing, got down on his knees but then he kind of whatever. I say we do the same thing.

When there is a disconnect, when you've waited long for the breakthrough or when you're faced with giants in your land and you feel like you're going through the motions because we all know our way. If you've been a follower you know your way around worship songs and your bibles, but if you're kind of parroting but your heart's no longer in it and not engaged and there is a gap, I say deal with the disconnect. Because as believers, if you're going through the motions you may look the part but you've disengaged your heart. And when you disengage your heart you disengage your faith. And when you disengage your faith nothing happens in the spiritual realm on your behalf, as far as you're concerned.

So if you're singing songs that they're just lip service but you are not getting your gut and your heart in it saying, I'm going to see a victory. The battle belongs to the Lord. If you're not engaged, you're singing words. But when you get your heart and you deal with the disconnect between what you say you believe and what you really believe, that's the stuff of miracles. That's when you start to see movement in the atmosphere.

I think fear is one of those things with which we must contend. And it is in our faces right now. But we're not to hunker down and cower, we're to rise up and stand firm and

we can do this, one moment at a time, we can do it.

Sheila: Susie, you are such a mother in the house of God. You have just this beautiful covering and wisdom. I was wondering is there a passage of scripture that has been especially alive for you during this season?

Susie: Thank you for asking that, Sheila. I've been hanging around in Hebrews 12 where scripture talks about that you've not come to Mount Sinai where there is trembling and fear and terror. You've come to Mount Zion and it is this place of a gathering of countless angels in a joyful assembly. You've come to all the first born children of God whose names are written in the book of life.

When we come to God, if he could remember we're more spiritual than physical, and when we get overwhelmed by what our eyes see, we need to fix our eyes on what we can't see because we come to this living, breathing kingdom. But then it says, "Therefore, when God speaks don't refuse him because our God is a consuming fire." In that same passage it says, "I've shaken the earth before but once more I will shake the heavens and the earth. So that which can't be shaken can be clearly seen."

I think we're being shaken right now. So instead of grabbing and trying to get life the way it was, I don't think we're going back to life the way it was. We need to look around and go what's not shaking right now? Well, I'm tethered to a good God. His promises are true and they're backed by the honor of his name. And "Greater is he that is in me than he who is in world." So who needs, Lord, what you've imparted to me?

So I've been hanging around in that passage thinking, my name is written in the book of life. There are countless of angels in a joyful assembly. I'm part of a story that's much bigger than I am.

Sheila: That is just beautiful. That is so powerful. Gosh, we could do this forever. Can you just give us a little thing on Elijah's prayer? You talk about the fact that, I think its

First Kings 18, that people are watching us right now.

Susie: Oh! That one I'm so passionate about. This is Elijah in the face off at Mt. Carmel. How audacious! He calls the king and says, "Gather all your prophets" and there are hundreds of them. And he has them build an altar. They called down fire and "See if your God likes the altar then he's God and if mine." And he orders that his setup is drenched with water; right? And then he gets this prayer and he says, "Answer me, O Lord so that they will know that you are the one true God and that you are drawing them back to yourself."

And my point in that devotional is the idea that your trials aren't just about you. Your breakthrough isn't just about you. And when you walk intimately with God, when his word abides in you and you abide in him, scripture says, "Ask what you will," I would say if that is true about you and you're walking intimately with God and you're letting him deal with the character inconsistencies where his word is in you, you are on solid biblical ground to face your impossible situations and say, you know what, God? Answer me so that they will know there is a God in heaven. Because many are watching me and I want them to know you are the one true God. Show yourself strong on my behalf so that they know you are the God of true, awesome lasting power."

I think there is something powerful about that. I think we err on the side of cowering, of even dismissing our trials because we're not facing down evil kings and giants. Maybe you're not dealing with COVID. You see it out there but maybe you've got a different storm and it feels small but it is yours. It is easy to diminish that. But God doesn't want you to do that. He wants you to say, "Answer me so that they will know that there is a God in heaven." And God loves to answer prayers like that.

Sheila: People need this book, Randy!

Randy: I think so. You've just received a little taste of the enduring strength from God's word that Susie brings to let you know that you can make it through and you cannot just

survive but you can prevail.

I want to tell you how you can get this book. I think it will be a great gift for yourself, for others. It is a whole year's worth of encouragement and depth. You can see that Susie, she's lived it. She's been forced to get to the deeper things. We want to offer this to you when you participate in this very special outreach. Watch this.

On the mission field

Announcer: From your family to our family, your generosity has empowered *LIFE*'s mission efforts around the world -- and the look on these children's faces makes the impact obvious. It's in the smile of Mateo as he receives a bowl of food made possible by your giving or of Gabriella as she quenches her thirst from a clean water well that you helped drill. You could even say you make it your business to give children smiles.

Well, this Christmas we'd like to give a smile to someone who might not easily be able to smile otherwise. You see, all over the world there are children who have trouble smiling because they were born with a cleft lip or palate. But a simple surgery by loving doctors can radically transform the appearance of children like these and greatly improve their quality of life.

But they won't be the only ones smiling this Christmas because with your help we also want to give a brand-new pair of shoes to children who have never had them.

Tammy: You can see all of the little ones, honestly, the smiles on their faces, it's so exciting to be a part of it. You can look around at all of the children in this village and most of them are without shoes. They can lose their very lives because of an infection that they could get on their feet.

Announcer: Help make this Christmas special for a child like this. Help us provide Christmas shoes and smiles.

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: You might be tempted to think, well, that's a little early for talking about Christmas. But the reason we're coming to you today is because we want to be able to get 150,000 pairs of shoes to children who've never had a pair of shoes in their life.

I've watched these children as they walk over these rough rocky roads. Where they put their darling little unprotected feet into water that is not clean water. And it can actually, honestly, even cost them their lives.

But we can do so much for so little. These shoes are amazing. I've had the joy, Randy of putting them on little feet and seeing children literally dance for the first time because they've never had a pair of shoes.

Randy: Absolutely! I love all the outreaches of *LIFE* in the way that we put smiles on their faces with food and with water and the rescue. But this one is something special about the Christmas spirit, the Christmas season and giving them something that they may not expect. And even know it can be lifesaving, there is an element of just something special when we put the shoes on them. We are getting close to wrapping up this emphasis even though it is early in the year for us. We have to prepare. I'm not quite sure how close we are to our goal of 150,000 shoes, Sheila, but I feel like we're going to get there and we're only going to do it with your help.

When you think about the fact that \$180, your gift today of \$180 will purchase, deliver the 50 pairs of shoes. They aren't just shoes, those are children! Those are children who will dance, who will laugh and who will be better off just because you said, "You know what? I'm going to do something special this year." Sheila, I just hope everybody will jump in and make this one of the biggest, most successful shoes and smiles campaigns

ever!

Sheila: Yeah! Because this year could be marked by tragedy or we as the church could determine that this will be a year when we stopped just looking at what we might need for ourselves and began to look at the need for others. It is more blessed to give than to receive. And I honestly believe Christmas will be a sweeter time knowing that we've been able to put a smile on the face of a child who is otherwise an outcast, sometimes in their culture. \$500 can give a child literally a road to a new life. And \$36 provides ten pairs of shoes for children.

So please, would you go to your phone? Would you make a commitment that we together as the body of Christ are going to make an impact this Christmas because Christ came to us? Please go to your phone. Make the very best gift you can.

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: So thank you so much! Please, please, please keep calling! Let's give these children shoes. And for any gift, we will send you this amazing devotional by Susie. This is my copy and I'm taking it home. And I'm going to be strengthened and built up every day! Susie, we're so grateful for you!

Susie: Well, we sure love you, appreciate you so much. I really thank you for having me today!

Sheila: Loved it!

Randy: Absolutely. Thank you guys for watching. We'll see you again right here on *LIFE Today*!