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Week 47: Fall Mission Feeding

Sheila Walsh

Lysa TerKeurst

Sheila: Hi! I'm Sheila Walsh. Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm so glad that you're watching. And honestly, I think this is a show that you might just want to text a couple of friends and say, "Hey, you know what? You might want to tune into this."

I have the privilege of interviewing one of the women I admire most on this planet. I think part of my admiration for her is the depth of her walk with Christ and yet the way that she has walked through tremendous suffering and betrayal and come out with an offering for us. It is called *Forgiving What You Can't Forget*. Please welcome Lysa TerKeurst. It is so sweet to have you here.

Lysa: Thank you, friend. I admire you too. I could say the exact same introduction for you. I just love you and it is an honor to be with you.

Sheila: This book is almost like, it reads like a follow-up to *It's Not Supposed to Be This Way*. But for those who might not be as aware, can you talk to us a little bit about that time when your life, everything that was wonderful just kind of imploded?

Lysa: Yeah. And of course because of time, I'm going to tic right through the events that happened. But the depth of anguish and pain and how those events stretched out for a long period of time, it wasn't a short suffering. It was long. I think that the greatest trauma a person can suffer is when they feel like the suffering will never end and the pain is pointless. So one thing I was determined all through my story is to fight that this pain will not be pointless, and I've got to at some point figure out how to heal enough so that the suffering will end.

But basically, my husband and I were best friends. We're very close. We have a fun beautiful relationship. We've raised five kids. But he got wrapped up in some addictions and it sent him spiraling in ways that I just couldn't believe. And honestly, I was kind of overriding in my brain what I could see.

I think sometimes as Christian wives it's almost like we're conditioned on some level to believe the best, and that's a good thing, until what is standing in front of you is no longer able to be managed by believing the best. You have to, at that point, be honest with what you see. So he got wrapped up in an affair and when I found out about it, it was in early 2016, I was shocked. But I was also so confused about how to handle it, not only because I'm a public figure in ministry but also because three of our five kids were getting married that year. I found out about it the day of my oldest daughter's rehearsal dinner. So the timing just seemed like a brutal reality in the middle of what was supposed to be one of the greatest highlights of my family.

I wish, Sheila, that I could tell you that ours was one of devastating discovery but then quick repentance and the walk of forgiveness and then reconciliation after much healing. And I love that story but that was not our story. Nothing about it was quick. Five different times I thought we were crossing the finish line toward renewing our vows and really restoring our marriage and five different times I got devastated and completely caught off guard, disillusioned all over again.

So it's a story of not just heartbreak but a shattering, the shattering of a life that I very much loved. And I was so shocked by what happened.

Sheila: How did this impact your children? Because your daughter, it is her rehearsal. As you say, that should be one of the happiest times when all the family are there. How did your children respond to what was going on?

Lysa: I tried to keep private what was happening, but my girls are all very intuitive.

Sheila: They're their mom's daughters.

Lysa: Yes, they are. So they knew but they didn't want to know. I think it is really true, I've heard it before, secrets kill. And I think the secrets that they were being forced to pretend like they didn't know, I think that almost did more damage than when we finally brought it out into the light with counselors that could help us process it.

I would have told you that this event and this just terrible trauma in our family, I would have told you that it held such possibility to destroy our legacy but in reality it didn't. And yes, my kids have suffered, and yes, we've all had to go through counseling, and yes, it is not something that I would ever wish on any other family but I will say that because of the Lord healing is possible. Spiritual healing is possible. And because of good counselors emotional healing is possible. So I was very intentional. I knew my kids would need help and we got them the help that they needed.

Sheila: One of the things I remember, just because you're my friend, is that not only were you dealing with all this kind of devastation, but you were dealing with massive health issues as well in the midst of all of that. Do you think some of that was exacerbated by the stress you were living under?

Lysa: I definitely think so. And one of the devastating medical situations that happened to me, they had to do surgery and remove most of my colon because my colon ripped away from the abdominal wall, twisted around itself and cut off the blood flow. So when the surgeons cut me open, it was emergency surgery, it was very traumatic. I was in the intensive care unit for 14 days. So it was very touch and go on as well.

But when I came out of that and the doctors could talk to me, he asked me, "Have you been in a traumatic car accident?" And just not like, "Did you fall, or did something happen to you physically?"

I said, "No. I've just been going through a lot of emotional stress."

He said, "Your insides look like you've been hit by a bus."

I don't think a lot of people ever get to have the insight of how damaging emotional trauma is to our physical body, but I have proof. And I could have that conversation with the surgeon where he said, "This trauma is severe."

And so yeah, it was definitely the emotional trauma affected me physically but not only that but also right after I'd healed from that I was diagnosed with breast cancer. So it was almost one of those situations that's just like I thought my name was Lysa but actually it might be Job. It seemed never ending.

Sheila: I know. I remember! And I remember how I and so many women across the nation were praying for you because it felt like, part of it, honestly, felt to me, obviously there is the human part and the physical part but part of it really felt like an all-out demonic attack on you because of the effectiveness of your ministry to try and bring you down.

But you write something in your book, I wrote it down to make sure I didn't misquote you. You say, "Forgiveness isn't something hard we have the option to do or not do. Forgiveness is something hard won, we have an opportunity to participate in." I had to read that a few times and really let that sink in. What do you mean by that?

Lysa: Well, when I first started this forgiveness journey, and I want to be very honest, I thought I'm going to write this book because I need this book.

[Laughter]

It was not something where it was like wow, I just know so much about forgiveness. I thought, forgiveness is a cornerstone of our Christian faith and I need to know a lot more

about forgiveness.

I had a very little girl understanding where if I got in trouble as a little girl, like I would hit my sister, the great judge my mother would appear and she would declare one person wrong, one person right. Then she would say, "You say you're sorry. You say you forgive. Hug, make up." Reconciliation always was a packaged deal with forgiveness. And that's what I understood about forgiveness.

And that was a good lesson for my mom to teach. But as I grew up, I carried that little girl understanding of forgiveness into some very adult situations. And one of the reasons I was so resistant to biblical forgiveness is that I felt like if reconciliation wasn't possible then forgiveness wasn't possible. And actually, in the Bible forgiveness is a command by God and reconciliation is very optional on many things. So those two things don't always have to go together. And also, I was resistant because I thought to myself, that other person is not even sorry.

Sheila: See that's really hard.

Lysa: It's so hard! Or they won't even admit what they did was wrong. Or I'm not sure that I'm done hurting yet. Or for the sake of all scales of justice everywhere, I've got to withhold my forgiveness because that's my only way to force them to act right or do right or make this right.

And in reality what I was really doing, Sheila is attaching my ability to heal to someone else's choices that I had no say so over. So what I started to realize is that if I just tried to muster up the grit or the determination that it would take to override my feelings and forgive somebody when I had all this resistance to forgiveness, then it wasn't going to work because my feelings weren't signing on for this process. I think hurt feelings don't often want to cooperate with holy instructions. And forgiveness, also what I started to realize is not based on my determination. It's based on my cooperation with what God is already doing.

When I say it's not a choice that we can forgive or not forgive but it is something we must participate in. It is a hard won already--it is a hard-won battle already fought. It is because Jesus dying on the cross, he won the victory for us to receive God's forgiveness. And as God's forgiveness flows to us we simply must cooperate with it and let it flow through us. And that's how God in his command to forgive is not dependent on us. It is truly cooperating with what God has provided for us through the hard won thought that fought for win of Jesus. And forgiveness is a cornerstone of our Christian faith, then I feel like more of us need to understand this. And if we really want to understand how to forgive, I think having this thought of as God's forgiveness flows to us, we must let it flow through us because if we don't the heavy weight of unforgiveness is debilitating.

Sheila: I had a note last night from a girl and it made me think about knowing I would see you today. She said, "I've been told my husband had an affair, not just once, he had an affair twice, two different women, and I've been told by our pastor that I have to forgive and forget. And she said, "How do you forget something that decimated your life?" What do you say to that?

Lysa: I think we have a lot of little sayings in the Christian world where people assume that it's a biblical principle because it sounds good, but it is not actually in the Bible, and "forgive and forget" is one of those. Only God has that ability.

In the Bible it does say that God will forgive us of our sins and cast them into the depths of the deepest sea and remember them no more. But I studied forgiveness in the Bible over 1,000 hours and with a theological team and we really wanted to find every single one of these nuances that keeps people from forgiving and say, is it actually in the Bible? And this is not. Nowhere in the Bible does it say that we have to forgive and forget.

Actually, if we walk through this process of forgiveness then we are trading our proof of how wronged we were for healing perspectives, life wisdom, a testimony, we don't want to forget. But how you know that you're healing is when you tell the story. Instead of

focusing on all the ways that you were so hurt, when you shift that from telling about your proof of how wronged you were to perspectives that you've learned that's when it becomes a testimony and that's when it helps other people, and that's when you really, you don't want to forget that life wisdom. And so I think it is important--it was so important to us that we titled the book, *Forgiving What You Can't Forget*.

Sheila: You know you're replacing some of those trite little phrases that are not biblical with some interesting new ones. Talk to me about "The blessings of bitterness." Those don't sound like those would go together.

Lysa: Okay. So I had a feeling of all the people in the world that would bring this up it would be you.

Sheila: Well, it was just okay, this is deep. I need to get this.

Lysa: Okay. So stay with me for a little bit because I'm definitely not giving people permission, like be bitter and happy about it--that's not what I'm saying. What I am saying is sometimes we assume that bitterness is found in people with cold hard hearts and that's not true. When we feel bitterness creeping in, it is not evidence that we have a cold hard heart. It is evidence actually of the opposite; that we have a tender heart and when we love deep, we hurt deep. When we hurt deeply, we experience a depth of loss that is emptying. And wherever there is an emptiness because of loss, especially when it is because of rejection or an unfair wounding, someone that should have been there that suddenly walked away.

And we all have these stories. You don't have to have a story exactly like mine. We've all experienced it. That empty place can quickly get filled up with bitterness. And at first bitterness quickens our awareness, like, oh maybe this will help protect me because if I feel bitter against this person then I won't let them close enough to hurt me again.

Sheila: It's like a wall.

Lysa: But bitterness doesn't just want to be a feeling that gets into that empty place, bitterness wants to become our only feeling.

So the blessing of bitterness is not the bitterness itself. The blessing of bitterness is that it shows us great potential for future relationships where we could love deeply again. It shows that we have a tender heart. It shows that we deeply loved. And at the same time, we deserve to stop suffering because of what other people have done to us. And so while bitterness makes us aware of the potential of good deep connection with our heart we've got to make sure that we tend to the hurt inside of our heart because when humans experience hurt and that hurt sits too unattended for too long, it can quickly turn into versions of hate.

So bitterness should make us aware of our potential to love deeply but we've got to tend to it so that it doesn't consume us.

Sheila: Lysa has been kind enough to say that she will stay. We're going to do another program where we're going to dive a little deeper. But I wanted to ask this one question before we moved on. Did you ever feel as if God had failed you somehow?

Lysa: I did! I really did. And I wrestled so much through this because when you stand in church and you sing the songs about God is a good, good father but life doesn't feel good or seem good to you at all right then you can start to feel like yeah, but why isn't he being good to me right now? And so I wrote a whole chapter about forgiving God. And it is not because God sinned and it is not because God even needs to be forgiven but it is because I had to work through what I didn't understand about God. And it was hard but it was good.

I'm convinced God loves us too much to answer our prayers at any other time than the right time and in any other way than the right way. It's just sometimes we want to assume we know what a good God would do but he, only he is good at being God.

Sheila: Well, as you probably tell this is deep stuff. I'm going to tell you how you can get a hold of Lysa's book, *Forgiving What You Can't Forget*.

But first of all, I want to ask you to help us with something that's really, it kind of runs in our veins here at *LIFE Today*. And that's when our eyes are opened to those who are hurting in very real practical ways at the moment. But you and I can make a very real practical difference. Would you watch this?

On the mission field:

Announcer: What sort of choices could a child possibly make to go from looking like this--to looking like this? It's not even fair to call them choices but rather, it is the lack of choice. Starving children have little to no options for food. While we usually think of progress as a positive trend, for children like these, the progression of malnutrition is measured by ever-increasing despair.

Ralph: When I walked into the clinic today, I saw Pedro. My heart was just broken. It all goes back to that malnutrition. Where there is no food, there is no nutrition in this village for these children like Pedro.

Announcer: The pandemic of 2020 wreaked havoc on the world's economies and severely diminished the capacity of families in rural Africa to earn a living. Sadly, those most affected have been children who are beginning to show the unmistakable signs of malnutrition brought on by a lack of food.

Ralph: Without food these children will not survive. They're not wondering what they're going to eat tomorrow, they're wondering are they going to eat tomorrow. So mission feeding is so important. It gets their life back to living. It gets them going to school.

Announcer: Your gift of mission feeding today will reverse the course of malnutrition

in a child like Pedro and will be a gift of life for a special child who is desperate to live.

End of video

In the studio:

Sheila: I'll never forget that first trip. I remember getting off the plane in Angola and kind of saying to the Lord, "Open my eyes to see what you want me to see. Help me to notice the things that I might miss apart from you." There is no way that I even needed to pray that prayer because the needs are so there.

That first day that we walked into the malnutrition clinic, one of the things that surprised me that I did not anticipate was the silence of the broken. You expect that the child is in pain or the child is suffering then there would be noise. But so many of these little ones who are laying in these beds in the malnutrition clinic, there was no noise at all. If anything, it was the mothers who are crying. And the children are just simply using all the energy they had just to take one more breath.

And it was just horrifying to me because you know what I thought? I thought half of us, I mean if you think of us in America, most of us are on diets because we eat too much. And then you look at these children who are dying literally because they don't have one bowl of food a day.

But then I got to go and meet our workers on the ground. You saw a shot there of me being able to hand out the food. I thought before I hand it out to these children, I want to taste it myself because it looked like oatmeal. And it's not, it's a very special recipe that kind of gives all the nutrients and vitamins that children in that part of the world need.

And the contrast between the malnutrition clinic on one day, where I literally went back to, actually we were staying in tents, and laid on my face and said, "Lord, I don't know what to do here." And felt the Lord say, "Sheila, get up! We're not done here."

And then the next day going to a village where we already have set up mission feeding and looking at the children the way you would look at children playing at school. Happy, their bright faces, just interacting with one another. And all because of mission feeding.

We have some amazing partners on the ground who are waiting right now because the commitment that we have made to them is that we will provide enough food for 350,000 children this year. That sounds like a lot but it is so doable because \$30 will feed three children for three months. I mean you couldn't get one meal for three children for \$30 now but in Africa, that's how far it goes. \$50 feeds five children. \$100 feeds ten children.

Honestly, for any gift you give today, we will send you Lysa's amazing new book, *Forgiving What You Can't Forget*. This will dive deep into your soul as you dive deep and reach out to those who desperately need your help.

So please, will you call now? Will you give the very best gift you can and let's get the help out to those children now in Jesus' name? Thank you!

Begin video clip

Announcer: Today on top of the daily fight for life and food, families and children across Africa are now forced to deal with the challenges of a global health crisis. Because of COVID-19 food scarcity has increased drastically and the fear of dying from lack of food is far greater than the virus itself.

Even in these unprecedented times, mission feeding won't stop. With your help, mission feeding will continue to be a daily source of food, encouragement, and health for the 350,000 children counting on us.

Call now with your lifesaving gift of \$30, \$50, or \$100 that will help feed and care for three, five or ten children for three full months. With your gift we'll send you *40 Days of*

Healing Promises. This beautiful hardcover devotional will encourage you in your faith as you dive deep into the healing promises that are yours in Jesus' name.

With your gift of \$100 or more please request the "Blessings for your Home" bowls and tea towel set. This set of bowls and two beautifully designed tea towels will make a wonderful addition to your home and serve as a reminder of your help in blessing others as a friend of *LIFE*.

Finally, with your gift of \$1,000 or more to help feed and care for 100 children be sure to request our commemorative bronze sculpture, "A Mother's Strength." Please call, write, or make your gift online today.

End of video

On the mission field:

Isak: I so clearly remember when I first came to South Sudan many, many years ago. I remember walking through some of the villages here, a lot like this village I'm in today, just being shocked--shocked by the fact that there could be a place on earth where mothers bury their children every month, every week, some places like this village every day.

That's why I just come to you today as I talk about what we saw then and what we're seeing now. The fact that over these years we've been able to save so many millions of lives, we've had such a huge impact here in South Sudan, and yet today we're come into a village that we've just started working in. And we've talked to mothers, mother after mother who tell us their devastating stories.

Please, we have to continue what we're doing in this village and we have to reach the villages next door to here that we're not getting to yet where children are literally starving to death. This is a crisis, and it is a crisis that only we can solve because we're here. And

with the gifts of the friends of LIFE we can bring life to these villages.

End of video

In the studio:

Sheila: Thanks so much. If the lines are busy keep calling because you and I can do this. And remember, for any gift at all we will send you Lysa's book. And Lysa, I'm so grateful that you've agreed to do another program with us because there is so much in this book. So thank you for being our guest and for writing out of the pain and brought some beauty to all of us.

Lysa: Thank you, Sheila.

Sheila: We'll see you next time on *LIFE Today*. God bless! I'm Sheila Walsh.